JEROME ROTHENBERG:
TECHNICIAN OF THE SACRED

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an examination of some of the interrelations in the works of Jerome Rothenberg. Rothenberg's departure from Anglo-American Modernism is examined with reference to a Romantic, visionary tradition, and to ethnicism, and his poetics are seen to parallel developments in the hermeneutics of science, particularly as these reflect a post-relativistic world-view. Rothenberg's Poland poems, and especially "Cokboy," are treated as culminative works for which the poetics of deep image and the conception of ethnopoetics served as preparation.

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Contents

Introduction

Jacob Bronowski, in "The Logic of Nature," proposes that the scientist's "most remote finding may change the world."[1] The natural world itself may change very little or not at all, but as science discovers what that nature is or hypothesizes what it may be, our conception of the world must necessarily change.[2] According to Bronowski, a new scientific theory always subsumes "more effects than the old. But the remarkable thing is that when it is discovered, it also wholly changes our conception of how the world works."[3]

[1] Jacob Bronowski, "The Logic of Nature," in A Sense of the Future: Essays in Natural Philosophy, selected and ed., Piero Ariotti and Rita Bronowski (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), p. 32.

[2] According to Bertrand Russell in History of Western Philosophy (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), p. 547, Descartes argued that the first principle of philosophy is that the mind is "more certain than matter." A logical extension of the Cogito is that "true knowledge" depends on "interior meditation," a belief Descartes held, according to his biographer Baillet, as reported by Lawrence E. Harvey in Samuel Beckett Poet & Critic (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 141. According to Harvey (p. 37), interior meditation and the wisdom gained from experience are opposed by Descartes to empty erudition. Harvey therefore maintains (p. 38), that Descartes was in favour of intuition over logic, and that although the Cogito has given rise to clever casuistry, Descartes himself saw "the seriousness of the Cartesian enterprise. . ." not in abstract speculation but in engagement.

[3] Jacob Bronowski, "Knowledge as Algorithm and as Metaphor," in The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978), p. 57.

The combination of new theories and new information can change the world because a new idea can change not only our beliefs but the way we think about the real, physical world which surrounds us. Galileo's insistence on a "new" cosmology is an example of how an idea can affect our perception of reality so that our reality itself is changed.[4] In literature as well as in other arts, we find a variety of perspectives on and perceptions of the world which may change our perceptions of reality in much the way that new scientific theories may change them. Such changes in our world-view, either wrought by science or by literature, may produce effects which are not only similar but parallel.[5]

[4]Bronowski, in "Knowledge as Algorithm and as Metaphor," p. 57, refers to a major change in science of this sort in relation to gravitation. Max Planck's discoveries have made it necessary to revise our understanding of the world and of the universe. Einstein's theory of relativity has changed our own "real" world dramatically in this century.

[5]Bronowski argues, in The Ascent of Man (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1976), p. 412, and in other books and essays, that science and art are merely two faces of the same human creativity. He suggests that Isaac Newton and William Blake are "two aspects of the one mind." Geoffrey Hartman, in Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), supports the use of the parallel between science and literature. He makes reference for instance (p. 12), to a change in structuralist theory, by referring to it as a change "from particle to field theory." Paul Christenson, In Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1979), makes frequent use of such analogies. An example of the interchange between creative transformations in literature and in science is Hans Eichner's remark in Four German Writers (Toronto: CBC, 1964), p. 73, that it was not until the news reached Brecht in "1938, that Otto Hahn in Germany . . . had succeeded in splitting the uranium atom," that "Brecht began writing The Life of Galileo." The French Surrealists in particular stressed the relationships and parallels between the "new sciences" and

The parallels between science and art, or between the creation of scientific theory and literature, can be further extended. Ron Sukenik notes that rather "than serving as a mirror or redoubling on itself, fiction adds itself to the world, creating a meaningful 'reality' that did not previously exist."[6] Larry McCaffery comments that this "important notion that it is the function of art to add itself to the world and not merely to mirror or reproduce the world has been at the center of much of the innovative art of this century."[7] In fulfilling this function of adding itself to

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the arts. See André Breton's What is Surrealism? tr., David Gascoyne (London: Faber, 1936). Breton refers to non-Euclidean, non-Newtonian, and non-Maxwellian scholars, and points out parallels between such "post-relativistic" thinkers and their "open rationalism" and the concepts and constructs of what he calls the "open realism" of the surrealists. Also see William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem: the Autobiography of the Works of a Poet, reported and ed., Edith Heal (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 82. Paul Christenson (p. 73), reports that in 1948, when Williams gave his talk, "The Poem as a Field of Action" at the University of Washington, "he expressed his sense of a new prosody about to transform contemporary poetics." In Williams' words, his feeling was "similar to what must have been the early feelings of Einstein towards the laws of Isaac Newton in physics. Thus from being fixed, our prosodic values should rightly be seen as only relatively true." The quotation is taken from William Carlos Williams, Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 286.

[6] Larry McCaffery, "Literary Disruptions: Fiction in a "Post-Contemporary Age," Boundary 2, 5, 1 (Fall 1976), 147. The idea that art adds itself to the world is a common theme in the works of Jorge Luis Borghes, a writer whose influence has been widely felt. See, for instance, "The Yellow Rose," in Borghes's Dreamtigers, (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1964), p. 38.

[7] McCaffery, loc. cit.

the world, literature produces new constructs and visions of reality which, like Galileo's discoveries, change our perceptions of the "real" world by changing what we think, the way we think about it, or what we think about. As William Carlos Williams pointed out in Book II of Paterson, the mind must change, for, "unless there is/a new mind there cannot be a new/line, the old will go on/repeating itself with recurring/deadliness. . . ."[8]

Against such "deadliness," Jerome Rothenberg has made a statement which serves as the centre of a variety of writing, editing, and publishing activities. One of Rothenberg's core statements is: "I will change your mind."[9] In this statement Rothenberg defines the job, the role, and the function of the poet/scholar/critic.

An assumption which underlies the statement is that major changes in human life and behavior can be forged in the mind. To change a mind, is to change not only the logical process but, by extension, the life of the person whose mind has been changed. To change a mind is to change more than a particular decision or the outcome of a particular argument. Rothenberg's meaning goes further; he wants to change not only logical process, but the assumptions which underlie

[8]William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 65.

[9]Jerome Rothenberg, Poems for the Game of Silence:1960-1970 (New York: Dial, 1971), p. 53.

those processes. He has said that in "our own time especially, when our knowledge of the past . . . is constantly expanding, it would be selling ourselves cheap to slip back into an idolatrization of the sources as fixed or the 'tradition' as absolute and static. So by contrast to the 'literal' view that repeats the past by rote, the alternative tradition makes-it-new at every step--and in this sense 'tradition' and 'experiment' or 'change' come very naturally together."[10]

Rothenberg directs his core statement to the conceptual framework which underlies the reality we believe we perceive. He claims for poetry a power to change reality, a power associated more usually with the history of science. In the attempt to "change your mind," language becomes "a key" to "finding the center," and poesis "a way of determining where we are, of invigorating our relation to the world."[11]

At the heart of Rothenberg's ideology is the conviction that man is a thinking animal, and that in changing what or how he thinks one makes real changes.[12] This moves literature out of the classroom and into the social and political arena.

[10]Jerome Rothenberg, "A Dialogue on Oral Poetry with William Spanos," Boundary 2, 3, 3 (Spring 1975), 525. Hereinafter cited as "Dialogue."

[11]Jerome Rothenberg, "Conversation with Kevin Power," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 144.

[12]Rothenberg, in "Dialogue" (p. 525), refers to a "tradition (or poetry) of changes," which he claims is a truly "modern" strategy which underlies "the poetic process back to its beginnings: the root idea of metamorphosis and the poet's freedom to reconsider and review the common sources."

In "The Reach of Imagination," Bronowski explains at some length what can be seen to be at the basis of Rothenberg's belief: "'To imagine' means to make images and to move them about inside one's head in new arrangements," Bronowski tells us. It is thus that we "recall the past" or "spell out the future." We are able, with a "symbolic vocabulary" to imagine "not one but many futures, which we weigh one against another." We are able, by manipulating images, to create whole worlds, whole scripts of past and future in our minds; and, Bronowski tells us, "the most important images for human beings are simply words, which are abstract symbols."[13]

It is our ability to imagine, to make images, that differentiates us from other animals. Images "play out for us events which are not present to our senses, and thereby guard the past and create the future. . . . By contrast, the lack of symbolic ideas, or their rudimentary poverty . . . imprisons us in the present."[14]

Rothenberg can be placed among the believers in the primacy of the human imagination. He speaks of an "effort to draw things from myself, to draw from things that I've experienced including the images in my mind . . . objects

[13]Bronowski, "The Reach of Imagination," in A Sense of the Future, p. 24.

[14]Bronowski, "The Reach of Imagination," p. 25.

that have a real meaning for me at the deepest level I can reach."[15] He makes reference to "language charged with meaning to the utmost degree . . ." as a primary expression of human imagination and cites as a product of the human imagination which serves as a "Declaration of Independence" works and conceptions as different as Leaves of Grass, Charles Olson's theories about "projective verse," and Allen Ginsberg's Howl. In Rothenberg's words: "All these developments share the sense of poetry as an act of vision, charged with the immediate energies of authentic speech and shaped by its moment in history."[16]

In Bronowski's view, a belief in the primacy of the imagination and of vision is a belief supportable by scientific evidence. It is "precisely right: the human gift is the gift of imagination--and that is not just a literary phrase." Biology and other sciences support the realities of literature and the reality of literature, for "everything we do . . . is done in the first place in the mind's eye. . . . Literature is alive to us because we live its images."[17]

[15]David Ossman, ed., The Sullen Art: Interviews by David Ossman with Modern American Poets (New York: Corinth, 1963), p. 31.

[16]Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha, eds., America a Prophecy: A New Reading of American Poetry from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. xxix.

[17]Bronowski, "The Reach of Imagination," p. 25.

Chapter 1

Continuities and Discontinuities

Jacob Bronowski, in "The Logic of Nature," reports that there has been a scientific revolution since the turn of the century, and that this revolution has changed our reality. The beginning of this revolution is to be found in the discovery "of radioactivity and the electron."[1] Larry McCaffery, in "Literary Disruptions: Fiction in a 'Post-Contemporary' Age," points out that while "Michelson and Morley were conducting an experiment which would eventually lead to Einstein's complete overthrow of our view of the universe as a static, mechanistic entity," there were "parallel developments in practically every field of human investigation. . . ."[2]

[1]Jacob Bronowski, "The Logic of Nature," in A Sense of the Future: Essays in Natural Philosophy, selected and ed., Piero Ariotti and Rita Bronowski (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), p. 32. Hereinafter cited as "Logic."

[2]Larry McCaffery, "Literary Disruptions: Fiction in a 'Post-Contemporary' Age," Boundary 2, 5, 1 (Fall 1976), 141. Hereinafter cited as "Disruptions." McCaffery points out that by "the mid-nineteenth century science assumed that it was very close to completely solving the puzzle of the physical universe; a similar sort of ontological optimism is evident in the philosophies of John Stuart Mill . . . of Hegel . . . [and] can also be found in the historiographic approaches of Ranke, Taine, and Comte, in the linguistic investigations of Humboldt and Schleicher, in Freudian psychoanalysis and in the theory and practice of the great nineteenth-century realistic novelists. . . . But the nineteenth century also sees the development of the reverse process--the demolition of the faith in rational, empirical investigation, the frank acknowledgement of the subjective nature of our mental operations and their relationship to the world, and the injection of the concept of 'relativity' into the very fabric of the universe itself. At the heart of this process

Bronowski argues that there is a gap between "the new view of the world which science has been forming, and the view ossified in vernacular speech and thought." While historians

> are only just learning to speak easily of the first scientific revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and to recognize it as an event which, in Professor Butterfield's phrase, "outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes . . ." the second scientific revolution is already long on the move, and is making over both our lives and our thoughts as powerfully as did the first.[3]

Science, according to Rothenberg, is now beginning

> the reconsideration of human continuities . . . [and] supplies the information about ourselves as a species and part of a biological continuum . . . that the poets will then transform from the idea of something to be superseded to the idea of something to be accepted & extended . . . willing to stand with Blake's continuous demystification, or Whitman's contradictions, Olson's "will to change," . . . those modernist proposals for a present poetry of changes.[4]

Bronowski postulates that the language of the laboratory

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was the Kantian overthrow of traditional metaphysics; Kant suggested that subjective elements entered into all human operations."

[3] Bronowski, "Logic," p. 33.

[4] Jerome Rothenberg, "A Dialogue on Oral Poetry with William Spanos," Boundary 2 3, 3 (Spring 1975), 516. Hereinafter cited as "Dialogue." McCaffery, in "Disruptions" (p. 141) points out that the "romantics' early emphasis on the creative imagination and its constitutive powers was in

and of science and scientific thought has "no bridging metaphors" to our everyday language. "Between the personal discovery and the public use of a mechanism, a principle, or a concept, there must be translation of thought: and the years since 1900 have opened a gap across which at present, translation is almost impossible. . . . The public still pictures nature as the first scientific revolution did, as an engine." This is a problem not simply of language but of concept. Not only do the language of science and the language of everyday speech lack a sameness of vocabulary and a sameness of constructs, but the very conceptualization of the world on and in which they are built differs. This is true to the point that the "scientist's language shares no imagery with the vernacular. . . ."[5]

This discontinuity of language, of thought, and of world-model occurs both in literature and in science.[6] Post-Modernism finds its discontinuity with Modernism at just the point that science fails to find its world paradigm mirrored in the vernacular and in the popular imagination.[7] The pro-

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many respects an extension of . . . Kantian principles."

[5]Bronowski, "Logic," p. 33.

[6]According to Bronowski, there is a direct parallel between the failure of contemporary science and the failure of contemporary art to communicate to a broad audience the transformations in reality that have occurred since the discovery of relativity.

[7]Paul Bové, in "Introduction: Nietzsche's Use and Abuse of History and the Problems of Revision," Boundary 2, 7, 2 (Winter 1979), 2, suggests a tentative definition of Post-modern: "'Postmodern' should perhaps be construed as describing critical practice and theory which has self-consciously,

blem of science Bronowski delineates is a mirror of the problem of Modern literature,[8] Modern literature fails to communicate a paradigm of the contemporary world. The paradigm of the universe which is mirrored in Modernism is the paradigm of the first scientific revolution.[9]

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unavoidably, and variously adapted the semiotic, phenomenological, Marxist, structuralist, and post-structuralist epistemological problematic of language to literary interpretation, literary history, and literary speculation . . . the point of departure must be uncertain and . . . the results can not be anticipated." Bové (p. 3), refers to "modern representations" of the Anglo-American tradition "found in, for example, T.S. Eliot's "The Metaphysical Poets," Cleanth Brooks's Modern Poetry and the Tradition, and M.H. Abrams' Natural Supernaturalism. McCaffery, in "Disruptions" (p. 142), points out that "the enormously influential modernist movement, turned to art as a last refuge of order in a chaotic world suddenly empty of inherent values."

[8]In "Dialogue" (p. 513), Rothenberg remarks that "earlier scientific language had attempted to evade the individual experience. . . ." From Blake and Whitman on, "poetry has assumed an accumulation of selves--of poets writing out of their own experience--that will together make up a total image of the world." This work in poetry "has gradually abandoned generality . . . while going doggedly after its objects as science after its. But its particulars are the particulars of this immediate experience, and (or because) the experiencing "self" is itself in a continuous process of change . . . the poet's clear physical eye . . . must be the instrument which brings 'rays of the object . . . to a focus'/'thinking with the things as they exist.'" Rothenberg here quotes Zukofsky for an example of how his own remarks are applicable to the "Objectivists." Rothenberg quotes George Oppen to extend his own argument: the "virtue of the mind is that emotion which causes to see." This return to the object "also implies a 'seer'--an I through which subject and object are joined."

[9]Paul Christenson, in Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1979), p. 51, points out that Olson in Human Universe and Other Essays (1965) declared as fundamental that "man shall continue to distort reality and not have access to it so long as he imagines himself to be the controlling center of even his own phenomenal field." For, according to Olson, "the harmony of the universe, and I include man, is not logical, or better, is postlogical, as is the order of any created thing." The majority

Larry McCaffery points out that:

> as the twentieth century wore on, more and more of the systems relied on by man were revealed to be "infected" by subjective, ideological operations. The importance of this idea can be found with impressive regularity, for example, in fields such as the sociology of religion, historiography, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, and in practically all of the meta-sciences. More importantly for our purposes, it has also helped shape many of the most important structural and thematic implications of what we have come to term "postmodern" literature.[10]

Modern literature, however, was based on an "empiricist view which assumed the existence of a deterministic universe which believed in the ability of man to uncover the mechanisms of its operations."[11]

William Carlos Williams clearly saw the implications of relativity for art and for poetry in particular. In discussing his concept of "variable foot" he stated that, because he "always wanted a verse that was ordered," it came to him that "the concept of the foot itself would have to be altered in our new relativistic world." The conception of the variable foot has implications beyond prosody, for: "If the foot itself

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of modern writers "can only make a form . . . by selecting from the full content some face of it, or place, some part . . . . It comes out a demonstration, a separating out, an act of classification, and so, a stopping."

[10] McCaffery, "Disruptions," p. 142.

[11] McCaffery, "Disruptions," p. 142.

is variable it allows order in so-called free verse. Thus the verse becomes not free at all but just simply variable, as all things in life properly are."[12]

This application of relativity to art and the whole vision of what Williams described as a "relativistic universe" is in direct opposition to the epistemology which underlies the tradition of Anglo-American Modernism.[13] According to McCaffery, in "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination," William Spanos "supplied a useful metaphor for this world view and the type of literature based upon it." Spanos explained that "until the rise of postmodernism most literature was based on a sort of 'detective novel' premise which assumed that man could solve the 'puzzle' of nature (and of literature) if he examined the 'clues' carefully enough."[14]

This "detective novel premise" underlies Anglo-American

[12]William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem: the Autobiography of the Works of a Poet, reported and ed., Edith Heal (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 82.

[13]In "Dialogue" p. 529, Spanos sums up the Modernism that is academically acceptable and against which Rothenberg and others have reacted. "The 'tradition' of the 'school' of Eliot was given establishment status in the American universities in the fifties, and in the process also established an educational methodology based on the kind of tightly constructed paradoxical 'metaphysical' poetry they admired. I'm referring, of course, to the ultra-close reading, the explication de texte, of Brooks and Warren's Understanding Poetry, that implies a hermeneutics that begins from the end."

[14]McCaffery, "Disruptions," p. 140. See also William V. Spanos, "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination," Boundary 2, 5, 1 (Fall 1972), 147-68.

Modernist criticism. This critical system establishes a "tradition" which also implies a cultural value system.[15] It is against this "tradition" and the value system it implies that Rothenberg and many other contemporary writers have reacted.[16]

William Spanos cites T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, W.H Auden, John Crowe Ransom, Allan Tate, Randall Jarrel, and

[15]Karl Shapiro, in In Defense of Ignorance (New York: Vintage, n.d.), argues that Modernism is not only a system of literary criticism but also a cultural value system in which white-anglo-protestant values are paramount. The growth of Modernism, New Criticism, and Modern approaches to literature encouraged the white-anglo-protestant elitism that had already existed in America in various forms. M.A. Rockland in his "Introduction," to Julian Marias's America in the Fifties and Sixties: Julian Marias on the United States, tr. Blanche De Puy and Harold C. Raley, ed., Michael Aaron Rockland (Univ. Park: Penn. State Univ. Press, 1972), p. 9, argues that the meaning of the term "melting pot", which was the dominant American metaphor of the 1950s and 1960s was "not so much a blending together into one of all civilizations which make up the country, but a melting or absorption of the other civilizations by the predominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant one. The melting pot offered full citizenship only to those who accepted White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant values. One had to melt to join the melting pot." Morris Dickstein, in The Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 154, argues that America had "fostered an ideology of assimilation that devalued ethnic origins and worked to dissolve foreign influences," and that there existed a real emphasis on social conformity in America which "reached its apogee in the repressive climate of the 1950s." In Waiting for the End (New York: Delta, 1965), Leslie Fiedler delineates the rise of ethnicism and the integration of ethnic perceptions and cultures into the white Protestant mainstream. For some interesting sidelights on this development see Alfred Kazin, New York Jew (New York: Vintage, 1979).

[16]Rothenberg in "Dialogue," p. 526, remarks that tradition cannot be restricted to "a monolineal inheritance," but must be used "in a new sense as 'discovery' or 'map': a mapping of those times & places, simply those works in which envisioning occurred. These can include the 'western' classics, but should in no sense be taken as culminating in them."

Robert Lowell as the "Early Moderns and their critical counterparts the New Critics."[17] For Rothenberg, those writers do not constitute an acceptable selection because they were "working for the most part within very conventional limitations as to form and content and with varying degrees of hostility to modern poetry."[18]

Against the "Anglo-American Modernism" of Auden, Ransom, Tate, Jarrell, and Lowell, Rothenberg defines an alternative

[17]"Dialogue," p. 520. See also Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha, eds., America a Prophecy: A New Reading of American Poetry from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present (New York: Vintage, 1974). In the "Introduction" (p. xxxvi), the editors note that there is "no doubt in our minds that T.S. Eliot belongs among those who 'fathered' a radical approach to poetic practice." Eliot is left out, as are Auden, Frost, Aiken, Ransom, Lowell, and Jarrell, "to name the most obvious," because the editors "decided to omit those securely established poets . . . who we felt had been of slight importance in developing the structural side of the tradition of changes." In "Conversation with Kevin Power," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 147, Rothenberg remarked that: "Auden's poetry makes nothing happen." Christenson (p. 162), points out that in "the complex ferment that generated the imagistic poetic, the work of Eliot came to represent the achievements of the whole modernist movement . . . Eliot's domination of the literary scene was so broad that to launch a new movement required, almost of necessity, the rejection of all that Eliot stood for."

[18]"Dialogue," p. 521. Christenson (p. 71), reports that for several months prior to the appearance of "Projective Verse" (Poetry New York, 1950), Charles Olson carried on "a correspondence with Creeley on the nature of poetry. One of the fruits of their letters is the principle that form is never more than an extension of content. . . ." Form thus "arises partly from the accidental juxtapositions of consciousness as much as from the more direct manipulation of materials. . . . Olson refers to this principle in the essay only to suggest that traditional forms are imposed by conventions which preserve the separations of self and world: the poet is asked to change the shape of his feelings to conform to certain uniform expectations of poetic response. Hence, by the act of freeing the words of the poem to assume their own particular configuration, semantic and typographical, the poet is discovering his own uniqueness."

"early" modern poetics. He uses the term "early modern poetry" as it "came into use around the First World War, not only in America and England but throughout the so-called western world: a poetry of changes, experiment, destruction and creation, questioning old structures & inventing new ones, blurring fixed distinctions, opening the domain, and so on."[19]

What Rothenberg has found "disturbing" about the poets to whom Spanos referred is that "they raised an opposition that tried to halt the modernist ferment, to pull back to a conventional poetics somewhat modified by the modernist turn of events but fundamentally conservative in outlook: a familiar anglo-saxon & class-oriented view of language and high culture." What the Anglo-American Modernists and the New Critics had "asserted was that 'modern poetry' . . . had established itself, & that the next step was a return to standard metrics & a beefed-up 'great tradition.'"

Rothenberg points out that even as late as the 1950s, Delmore Schwartz could take a position in defense of the New Critics and New Criticism. Rothenberg perceives this position and New Criticism as

[19]"Dialogue," p. 521.

> a middle-ground strategy: a rear-guard response (by Eliot, Tate and others) to the "anarchistic" thrust of modern poetry & art (free verse, free thought, free love, etc.) which shows up also in that "suspicion" or "disdain" of Blake and Whitman. . . . It was with a clear awareness of this that Williams spoke of The Waste Land as "the great catastrophe to our letters," because he saw that beneath the cover of an actual structural innovation . . . was an impulse to pull up stakes & get back to the narrow & comfortable limits of the inherited past.[20]

Rothenberg maintains that "all that tasteful, middle-ground retrenchment is almost wholly opposed," to what he sees as early modernism. Echoing Olson, he further suggests that "Eliot's criticism and that of the New Critics," leads to "a dead end." He argues that "they affect a purity of stance that breaks them into warring camps with manifestos, -isms, and the rest; that they're elitist and defensive."[21] In opposition to this tradition of Anglo-American Modernism, which he sees as being, at root, an academic rather than a live tradition, Rothenberg offers an "other" modernism, which stresses, "whatever continuity of intentions is possible in a

[20] "Dialogue," p. 521.

[21] "Dialogue," p. 521. Christenson (p. 163), reports that the direction of Eliot's later verse, "and his turn to orthodoxy in religion and politics ran contrary to the aims of new American poets." Rothenberg points out in "Dialogue" (p. 521), that "if there were only Eliot's criticism & that of the New Critics to define the "classic" modern poem, I would write off modernism . . . [But] I would see as early modernism (Stein, Williams, Cummings, Pound, Duchamp, the Dadaists, Surrealists, Objectivists, & so on) -- work that stands in a germinal relationship to the poetry that's been developed in my own generation."

poetics of change . . . where we don't get bound by polemical stances."[22]

The poetics of change actively changes "our idea of what the present and the past are, both together."[23] There is a "need to incorporate diverse chronologies simultaneously ('non-linearly' if you want to use McLuhan)." This attitude of non-linearity, simultaneity, and acceptances of diverse chronologies produces an experimental condition which constitutes an "essentially 'modern'" situation.[24] This quality,

[22]"Dialogue," p. 522.

[23]"Dialogue," p. 523. In the "Introduction," to America a Prophecy (p. xxix), Rothenberg wrote that: "Every important change in poetry opens the way for new work in the future and for a redefinition of the past."

[24]"Dialogue," p. 524. Edward B. Germain, ed., English and American Surrealist Poetry (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 39, points out that Edouard Roditi, in "The New Reality," (Oxford Outlook, 1935) found "that one attitude common to" what I have referred to as the Anglo-American Modernists, "is precision, an obsession with 'exactly where to place each word.' To be more than just an imitator, he reasons, the young poet can challenge this dominant attitude. . . . That year David Gascoyne published A Short Survey of Surrealism, which related the [surrealist] movement to its vatic forbears and established it as heir of nineteenth-century English Romanticism. . . ." In a discussion of the work of William Carlos Williams (p. 43), Germain makes a point which, whether it is well taken or not with reference to Williams, is certainly applicable to Rothenberg. Germain writes that taken as a whole, Williams's "work falls short of surrealism on its romantic side. But taken one poem at a time, it reflects an American handling of essentially surrealistic themes: the impulse to awaken the citizenry who were 'locked and forgot in their desires . . . unroused'; the need to connect daily life with deep mythic roots; the desire to revolutionize consciousness." According to Germain's analysis (p. 44), Williams "joined the European surrealists," in his belief that poetry "could be a means of awakening perception . . . that would reveal deep layers of self . . . [and], in Williams's work and in American art in general until the Second World War, surrealism remains latent within romanticism and fantasy." However, WWII "ended the age of American

Rothenberg claims, is "missing or badly compromised in Eliot's criticism, although the yearning for the near past is clearly very strong." It is the "nostalgia" for, in Eliade's words, (from Cosmos and History) "the myth of the eternal repetition," and, in Rothenberg's words the "accompanying despair about other possibilities, both 'primitive' and 'modern'" that is "an essentially conservative position, pushing history or poetry back a little in the name of, let's say, 'law & order'."[25]

D.H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound "survive" not "the reaction to modernism but to the attenuation of modernism: the resort to 'church' and 'monarchy' & 'picking up the meters'." Their relation to the past "maintains a sense of the continuum with the 'pagan' & the 'primitive' (Snyder's 'great subculture' or Olson's 'paleolithic')." This continuum is the source of the "mainstream of poetry that goes back to the old tribes and has been carried forward by the great subterranean culture."[26]

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isolation and innocence. America's essentially puritanical naiveté was torn open." (p. 45) There was a great influx of European surrealists into America and particularly into New York during the war, and although when the war ended, "most European artists left New York, . . . surrealism remained . . ." (p. 46). "Surrealism itself survives, but not as dogma; it survives as a strategy of mind." Surrealism as a movement and a "strategy of mind" was related to and often combined with social consciousness and protest, particularly among American painters such as Peter Blume, Phillip Evergood, and Louis Guglielmi. See Dickran Tashjian, William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920-1940 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), pp. 134-36.

[25]"Dialogue," p. 524.

[26]"Dialogue," p. 523-24. In Waiting for the End, p. 82,

Rothenberg's "modernism" has been a political as well as a literary statement. He has remarked that in America, "for years we've internalized . . . a sense of our traditions on this continent and of ourselves as makers and inheritors of a poetry in conflict with the accepted orders."[27] In his mixing of what constitutes a political ideology with a poetics or a way of "doing" poetry, he is kin to the Beats, the Surrealists, and other writers involved in a rebellion against the theories of Anglo-American Modernism. His literary theories and poetics are deeply rooted in his political approach, to the point that the two are almost inseparable. This is a departure from Anglo-American Modernism. Modernists envision the poem as an autonomous, ironic, and isolated structure, despite that such a stance has in and of itself political and socio-cultural implications.[28]

Leslie Fiedler reviews a whole series of connections: "When Americans have grown tired of the neo-gentility, the selective ancestor worship and high-church piety of Eliot, and when they are equally sick of the white self-hatred and the adulation of blood sports and ignorance, but especially when they are sick and tired of the oscillation between the two, they can find . . . a new kind of link with Europe in place of the old paleface connection--a link not with the Europe of decaying castles and the Archbishop of Canterbury, nor with that of the Provençal poets and Dante and John Donne, nor with that of the French symbolistes and the deadly polite Action Française--for these are all Christian Europes; but with the post-Christian Europe of Marx and Freud, which is to say, of secularized Judaism, as well as the Europe of surrealism and existentialism, Kafka, [and] neo-Chassidism. . . ."

[27]"Dialogue," p. 528. See also Fiedler, Waiting for the End, for a delineation of the American tradition as a tradition of conflict.

[28]Shyamal Bagchee, "On Modernism and Modernist Scholars: Prolegomenon to a Re-evaluation of T.S. Eliot," Open Letter 3, 7 (1977), 5-9. See also "Dialogue," p. 524. Bové (p. 10),

Rothenberg sees the poem as a social, political, and philosophical statement. Like the Beats and against the Anglo-American Modernists, Rothenberg has sought to rehabilitate sensibility. While Anglo-American Modernism has held the poem as a model of disengagement, Rothenberg has been involved with a poetics of engagement.[29]

There has been no real separation in Rothenberg's work between the political and the literary. For him, poetry is "a way of being in the world, and so the poet time and again in the history of civilization comes into conflict with established authority."[30] Rothenberg's "modernism" is not only a rebellion against and a radical departure from a vision of the poem as an autonomous artifact, but also a rebellion against the political and socio-cultural implica-

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points out that "Modern American literary criticism, despite appearances has repeatedly displayed an aggressive attitude toward literature which has reduced it to the position of slave to the explicator's or the historian's sovereignty. . . . A great deal of Modern and Postmodern criticism can only be understood in terms of power relations--gaining 'competence' in mastering texts and providing 'competent' or authoritative readings." Bové presents the argument more fully in "The Poetics of Coercion: An Interpretation of Literary Competence," Boundary 2, 5, 1 (Fall 1976), 263-84.

[29] "Dialogue," p. 511. Rothenberg cites William Carlos Williams as an early "modernist" and claims him also for his own "early" modernism. Williams called for "a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, re-affirmed in the new mode. There has to be new poetry. But the thing is that the change, the greater material, the altered structure of the inevitable revolution must be in the poem, in it." Rothenberg also cites Pound (p. 524), for a contribution to his own kind of modernism. Pound is responsible for "the sense of history as vortex, the transmission of an actual alternative tradition."

[30] "Dialogue," p. 528.

tions of Anglo-American Modernist theories.[31]

In this rebellion, Rothenberg is very much a writer of his time and place. The work he produced in the Sixties and Seventies is firmly rooted in the kinds of problems and debates that surfaced in America in those years. Eric Mottram suggests that Rothenberg's "work combats both the narrowness of academic definitions of poetry and the stale imperialism of the 1954-1974 decades."[32] Some of the problems and debates which occur in Rothenberg's poetics and ethnopoetics are rooted in the history of America.[33] Rothenberg has called for a re-vision of that history, and in so calling

[31]David Ossman, ed., The Sullen Art: Interviews by David Ossman with Modern American Poets (New York: Corinth Books, 1963), p. 31. See also America a Prophecy, pp. xxix-xxxv.

[32]Eric Mottram, "Where the Real Song Begins: The Poetry of Jerome Rothenberg," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 163.

[33]Julian Marias, in America in the Fifties and Sixties theorizes that there was a body of truths which Americans held in common during the '50s and '60s and during their entire previous history which underlay not only social intercourse but the social structure of America. (pp. 28-34, 134-35). These underlying cultural assumptions are related to the idea that each person is entitled to the freedom to pursue happiness. The major conflicts in American life and in American history are related to this belief. On the one hand, the social and economic system ought to be just and equitable, and on the other each person must be allowed to work out his own destiny without interference from a paternalistic government. According to Marias, individualism and social conscience are in opposition, and it is this opposition that is at the root of the American socio-cultural process. Conditions in America from the turn of the century and into the Fifties exacerbated this opposition. Karl Popper, in The Open Society and Its Enemies, I (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 99-119, argues that, while "the problem of individualism and collectivism is closely related to that of equality and inequality . . ." (p. 99), the first opposition is actually false (p. 100).

has suggested a re-envisioning of the literary history of America.[34] His argument is based on the idea that

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The situation Marias delineates demonstrates the evolution of the false dichotomy and its applications in American political and theoretical practice. Popper argues that collectivism, "is not opposed to egoism, nor is it identical with altruism or unselfishness. Collective or group egoism, for instance class egoism, is a very common thing . . . and this shows clearly enough that collectivism as such is not opposed to selfishness. On the other hand, an anti-collectivist, i.e. an individualist, can, at the same time, be an altruist; he can be ready to make sacrifices in order to help other individuals. . . ." Popper cites Dickens as an example of a writer who combines a "passionate hatred of selfishness," and a "passionate interest in individuals," with a "dislike, not only of what we now call collective bodies, but even of a genuinely devoted altruism, if directed towards anonymous groups rather than concrete individuals. . . ." Popper points out that, "for Plato, and for most Platonists, an altruistic individualism . . . cannot exist. According to Plato, the only alternative to collectivism is egoism; he simply identifies all altruism with collectivism and all individualism with egoism. . . ." Popper not only defines the fallacy of the Platonic argument but demonstrates its implications for social theory and for government. His argument is applicable to and interesting with a view to Rothenberg's ethnopoetics, insofar as the antitheses Marias identified as underlying American cultural and political process are based not on any irrevocable truths about government or human existence but on reasoning from faulty assumptions or incorrect paradoxes. Marias argues that the social and governmental approaches to the economic conditions which prevailed during the Depression were contrary to the basic political philosophy of most Americans. He further argues that in the statements and debates about social change, social structures, and possibilities, and about the forms and shapes of the economic system, the positive aspects of American individualism, which are opposed to government interference, were mainly forgotten (pp. 104-12). By extension, for Marias, McCarthyism was not only un-American, but an expression of that which was most anti-American. McCarthyism was directed against the kind of individualism Marias felt was at the basis of and enshrined in the American constitution; such individualism was an underlying axiom of the American historical process.

[34] See America a Prophecy, "Introduction," particularly p. xxiv.

the literary history of America has been controlled by the "accepted" socio-political history so that much that is interesting and valuable has been ignored or lost.[35] Rothenberg has applied this theory not only to American history but to world history. He claims that a "basic thrust" of his work "has been to re-explore the past on the basis of information that has become available to us since the 19th Century." He says he doesn't "understand how a 'view of history' that clings to a limited, linear image of the past along Hellenic-Hebraic, western, even Indo-European lines can be said to be historically oriented."[36] Rothenberg's translations, collections, and anthologies of "ethnopoetic" materials have been aimed at supporting this political historical theory.

Rothenberg's "modernism" is a statement against a white anglo-protestant American interpretation of history which ignores or devalues that which is "ethnic" in literature, in history, in sensibility, and in voice.[37] The basis of Rothenberg's poetics is inclusive rather than exclusive. His work is meant to "assert the continuity of poetry, culture, and human values."[38] Rothenberg claims "the development of

[35] America a Prophecy, pp. xxix-xxxvii, and particularly pp. xxii-iii.

[36] "Dialogue," p. 537.

[37] Jerome Rothenberg, "Preface to a Symposium on Ethnopoetics," alcheringa: ethnopoetics, NS2, 2, 6-13.

[38] D.M. Thomas, "The Weaponry of Poets," Times Literary Supplement, Feb. 1978, 186. See also alcheringa, NS1, 2,

a continuous movement toward the exploration of consciousness, language and poetic structure . . ." from WWI forward.[39] He stresses the "numinous and mystical," the visionary, "the anti-puritanical thrust first mapped by Williams, the new poets & transcendentalists of the 19th century . . . --the essential presence of Whitman . . . the continuing input of European poets from Blake & the Romantics to Rimbaud and the Surrealists . . . the exploration of consciousness, language, and poetic structure--what we can see & say & make."[40] He claims for his version of "modernism":

> THE TRADITION WHICH TAKES VISION AND CONFLICT AS THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF POETRY; SEES THESE AS BOUND TO THE STRUCTURE OF THE POEM AND THE DYNAMICS OF ACTUAL SPEECH; AND TRACES A "LINE" FROM THE INNOVATORS OF OUR OWN TIME AND THE CENTURIES IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING, BACK BY WHATEVER ROUTES, TO REACH THE FIRST MYTHOLOGIZED SHAMANS OF THE LATER PALEOLITHIC CULTURES.[41]

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especially Michel Benamou's "Post-face: In Praise of Marginality," 133-42.

[39] "Dialogue," p. 528. See also Fiedler and Germain.

[40] "Dialogue," p. 528.

[41] "Dialogue," p. 529. See also Gary Snyder, "The Politics of Ethnopoetics," alcheringa NS 2, 2, 13-22, and "Interview," River Styx No. 4 (1979), pp. 35-60.

Chapter 2

Deep Image

During the Sixties Jerome Rothenberg evolved a concept of "deep image" which is central to his work. In statements about poetry, in his own poems, and in dialogues with other poets, Rothenberg explored the meaning of "deep image", a term which encompassed his poetics and contained within itself the seeds of ethnopoetics.

The rhetoric of deep image borders on the mystical and borrows as much from religious language as it does from literature. In "Why deep image?" Rothenberg draws a connection between deep image and vision, for deep image is intimately connected with visionary language.[1] Rothenberg demands that "poets get at the reality of things by turning inward. . . ."[2] Echoing the framework of Martin Buber and earlier Jewish mystics,[3] Rothenberg defines the purpose of

[1]Jerome Rothenberg, "Why deep image?" Trobar No. 3 (1961).

[2]Eric Mottram, "Where the Real Song Begins: The Poetry of Jerome Rothenberg," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 168. Hereinafter cited as "Song."

[3]For an excellent elucidation of Buber's frame of reference see R.G. Smith, Martin Buber (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1966), especially pp. 11-37. A simplification of Buber's concept of I and Thou to which Rothenberg refers is that there are in reality two modes of relation, the I-It and the I-Thou. The Thou is the Eternal Presence and the

turning inward as the union of "the process of self-perception . . . with our means of perceiving the world around us." Poets are to break the "habit of the eye" and are to seek "a penetration of the self" which would allow them to obtain a new perspective on the world, and thus on poems and the materials of poems.[4] Octavio Paz expressed a similar concept when he reminded us that: "Looking at something is not a neutral experience, it is a confession of complicity."[5]

The purpose of this new kind of vision, which is based on seeing with the integrated self, is to produce a greater ability to discern the possibilities of reverberation, "a heightened sense of the emotional contours of objects." The poet is to penetrate his material "in a manner that would be impossible to descriptive or logical thought . . ." and could create a new vision from his materials by exploring "their free re-association." To follow such a process allows the poet to achieve in his work "a heightened relevance, a

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Eternal Present which dwells in each of us and in which we each dwell. This manifests itself in us when we are in relation to another who we recognize as a particular manifestation of the Eternal Thou. The everyday relationships of non-recognition of the Eternal Present in the "other" is the I-It relationship, which is exemplified by our normal or normative relations with acquaintances such as the milkman to whom we relate because of their functions rather than because we choose to truly experience the totalities of their realities. The major sourcebook for Buber's explanations of the I and the Thou is I and Thou, 2nd ed. and tr. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribners, 1958).

[4]Mottram, "Song ," p. 168.

[5]Octavio Paz, Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde, tr. Rachel Phillips (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), p. 57.

quickened sense of life."[6] Such a conception of the poet is parallel to Paz's idea that the Romantic poets "conceive poetry as a vital experience involving the totality of the human being."[7] The concept also borrows heavily from mysticism, and in the diction one can hear the reverberations of Blake and Buber, both important sources for Rothenberg.

Rothenberg makes use of Martin Buber's concept of "husk and kernel" to clarify his meaning. There are, in effect, two realities, the empirical world of so-called objective reality which "Buber and the Hasidim call 'shell' or 'husk' . . ." and another "hidden" world which we sometimes perceive, which Buber called the "kernel" or "sparks".[8] "The first world both hides and leads into the second, so as Buber says: 'one cannot reach the kernel of the fruit except through the shell.'"[9] As Octavio Paz has pointed out, poetry "produces fusion",[10] and that is really the point of Rothenberg's use of the Buberian analogy: poetic vision is based in the acceptance of the possibility of the I-Thou relationship with all things.

[6] Mottram, "Song," p. 168.

[7] Paz, p. 60.

[8] Jerome Rothenberg and Robert Creeley, "An Exchange: Deep Image & Mode," kulchur No. 6 (Summer 1962), p. 29. Hereinafter cited as "Exchange."

[9] Op. cit. p. 28.

[10] Paz, p. 6.

To transpose the material from religion to poetics, when we "read" the phenomenal world, what we perceive at the profane or phenomenal level is the husk. The husk itself is the key to the sacred, the fruit which exists inside the husk; thus the husk is itself "the key to the buried image."[11] The deep image "is at once the husk and kernel," the mediating and integrating factor which unifies "perception and vision" and allows the profane to suggest and reverberate with the sacred, so that in the body of the poem the deep image, like the symbol, is both itself and contains and points to something beyond and deeper than itself.

Between raw perception of image and sacred vision, the deep image functions as a moving force, so that it is "at once husk and kernel, perception and vision, and the poem is the movement between them." Thus in the work of a poet who uses deep image the deep image functions as a force towards the visionary, and is connected with "perception as an instrument of vision."[12] It is through the exploration of deep image that the poet may achieve "a visionary consciousness" which is won via sense perception and self-exploration rather than via the logical or empirical process. Octavio Paz tells us that this is an attempt to dissolve "the logic of discourse in the logic of image."[13] As can be seen from the

[11] Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 29.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Paz, p. 59.

Buberian analogies and the diction of the deep image argument, the idea of a poetry springing from or forcing access to sources common to mysticism is not new, but, Paz pointed out about the Romantics: "what was new was not so much that poets were speculating in prose about poetry, but that this speculation overflowed the limits of the old poetics, proclaiming that the new poetry was also a new way of feeling and living."[14] Paz makes the situation clear when he asserts that in "a poet like Blake," by which he means the visionary romantic, "the poetic image is inseparable from speculative thinking, and the frontier between prose and poetry cannot be distinguished."[15]

Rothenberg claims that in "grasping the phenomenal world not only from its outward form," the poet will be able to win "from a compassionate comprehension of that world a more acute, more agonizing view of reality than by rational interpretation."[16] The aim is again to change your mind;

[14]Paz, p. 59. Cf. Rothenberg, Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of American Avant Garde Poetry 1914-1945. (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), p. xvi, where Rothenberg speaks of a "counterpoetics that presents . . . a fundamental new view of the relationship between consciousness, language & poetic structure."

[15]Paz, p. 60. See also David Antin, "Talking at the Boundaries," and Jerome Rothenberg, "Re Four Books by David Antin," both in Vort No. 7 (1975), pp. 34-55 and 57-63 respectively.

[16]Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 29. Cf. Edward B. Germain, ed., English and American Surrealist Poetry (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 34. "To borrow a metaphor from scores of surrealist poems and paintings, the result is like the opening of doors in the mind. Or it can be. Reason is accessible, with its limits clearly felt. Unconscious desire,

to change first the mind of the poet who must surrender the empirical in his search for the "sparks" that will enliven the poem, and thus to change the mind of the reader who, in assimilating the material in a poem, will catch not only the logical structures but the reverberations of the "sparks". A parallel process is explained by Octavio Paz, whose language is not burdened by the same kind of mysticism that makes Rothenberg's explanations sometimes difficult to follow. According to Paz, each "poem is a reading of reality,"[17] and "poetry is not only self-knowledge but self-creation. The reader repeats the poet's experience of self-creation. . . ." Thus art "ceases to be exclusively representation and contemplation; it becomes also an intervention in reality. If art mirrors the world, then the mirror is magical, it changes the world."[18] As Freeman Dyson argues: "Scientists are not the only people who play with intellectual toys that suddenly explode and cause the crash of empires. Philosophers,

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manifesting itself in the symbolic images, fills the conscious mind with wonder, or perhaps dread. Not clinging to either, perception watches the images surfacing, aware suddenly of the primal processes evolving effortlessly beneath it. Standing there, with all the doors open, is surreal." Rothenberg was aware of the surrealist influence on his own work and on that of other American writers. See especially Revolution of the Word, pp. xv and xxii.

[17] Paz, p. 72.

[18] Paz, p. 60. Cf. Larry McCaffery, "Literary Disruptions: Fiction in a 'Post-Contemporary' Age," Boundary 2, 5, 1 (Fall 1976), 137-53, and Rothenberg, Revolution of the Word, p. xv, where he refers to an avant-garde for whom "Poetry was transformative."

prophets and poets do it too."[19] Dyson, a physicist, argues that "qualitative changes always outweigh quantitative ones." This is another way of saying what Rothenberg has maintained about the nature and function of poetry. Dyson continues his argument by explaining that "quantitative predictions are meaningless. The only certainty in that remote future is that radically new things will be happening. The only way to explore it is to use our imagination."[20] It is therefore in the interests of all of us "to listen to poets more than to economists."[21] Poets, by paying attention to deep image and to the recovery of "sparks", will recover for us all the "lost meanings" of our world, a world that has become, as Rothenberg's early work portrays it, a merely "externalized world without resonances: a mechanized world whose lost resonances the poem, the activity of making the poem, both discover[s] and create[s]."[22]

Lest the reader find the husk and kernel metaphor too burdened with the weight of Jewish mysticism, Rothenberg

[19]Freeman Dyson, Disturbing the Universe (New York: Harper, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Series, 1979), p. 7. See also Jacob Bronowski, The Ascent of Man (London: BBC, 1976), passim.

[20]Dyson, p. 192. Cf. Bronowski, "The Reach of Imagination," in A Sense of the Future (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), particularly pp. 24-28.

[21]Dyson, p. 6.

[22]Kevin Power, "Conversation with Jerome Rothenberg," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 140. Hereinafter cited as "Conversation."

offers a simile from contemporary linguistics. He points out that Chomsky's descriptions of "deep structures" offer a parallel to his own Buberian descriptions of deep image.

> Chomsky argues a similar thing in linguistic terms when he talks of deep structures in grammar which act as unifying principles over & against the surface structure which is a differentiating principle. Thus even if what goes on at the surface--the grasp of the external world--is different & varies with individual experiences that are different in time & place, there still remains at bottom something translatable which comes through.[23]

It is the "something translatable which comes through" which is the key to deep image. What comes through is the spark that humanizes, the underlying felt perception which is brought to the surface by the reverberations set up by deep image which allows the poet and the reader to grasp the human, the integrated reality rather than the empirical, logical, or mechanized one.

In a 1961 essay, "The Deep Image Is the Threatened Image,"[24] Rothenberg points to the deep image as, in Eric Mottram's words, "the penetrative image" which "emerges from the search in deep darkness for the central creative rhythm." In that essay Rothenberg points to poetry as "a passage & an

[23] "Conversation," pp. 140-41.

[24] Rothenberg, "The Deep Image is the Threatened Image," Floating World No. 4 (1962).

act of desperation."[25] This is a parallel of Paz's idea that the critical statements of Romantic poets "were true revolutionary manifestos and established a tradition which continues today."[26] Paz further points out that a "poem is not only a verbal reality; it is also an act. The poet speaks, and as he speaks, he makes."[27] The speaking and making, in Eric Mottram's words, is "in both metaphysical and political senses, a courageous act against surrender to personal and social chaos."[28]

The poet writes to survive, according to Rothenberg. To survive the poet moves and shapes reality. In this process the deep image becomes "the poetic image struggling with the darkness." The darkness is the unresonant, mechanized world of the "lie of the unthreatened."[29]

In order to shape reality, to communicate the "something translatable," the something human, the poet uses a "combination of images" which together constitute the deep image.[30] "The assumption was that if the poet worked with resonant images & if the reader opened himself to them, then something would already have happened before meaning in any rational

[25] Mottram, "Song," p. 166.

[26] Paz, p. 60. Cf. Rothenberg, Revolution of the Word, p. xii, "For we are all, in different ways & from our individual perspectives, talking about a virtual revolution in consciousness."

[27] Paz, p. 59. Cf. McCaffery, op. cit.

[28] Mottram, "Song," p. 166.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

sense was discernible. In other words the experience would have transmitted itself even before there was any kind of clarification."[31]

Robert Kelly, in an essay in Trobar, tried, according to Rothenberg, to "bring projective verse & deep image together."[32] Neither Kelly nor Rothenberg saw any contradictions between the theories of projectivism and the theories of deep image, however the emphases of the two were different. Deep image could be the meeting ground, the point of confluence, for a variety of poetic theories. Projective verse, according to Kelly, "offers a method of resolving breath and line," for the deep image poet.[33]

Kelly asserted that "the fundamental rhythm of the poem is the rhythm of the images; their textures, their contents, offer supplementary rhythms." He suggested that the concern of the deep image poet is to "substitute the centrality of the image for the centrality of syllable and line as a way of access to the happening of a poem."[34] Although Rothenberg was willing to concede the possibility for "a play of image &

[31] "Conversation," p. 141. Cf. Germain, op.cit. pp. 33-4, 37.

[32] "Conversation," p. 141.

[33] Stephan Stepanchev, American Poetry Since 1945: A Critical Survey (New York: Harper, 1965), p. 177. The quotation is from Kelly's essay, "Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image," Trobar No. 2 (1961).

[34] Stepanchev, p. 177. Cf. Germain, op. cit. p. 33 "The process is incremental. . . . The poem's full meaning is that state of mind, synchronistic, vividly aware of the images and the sound of their meeting. . . ."

breath with or even against each other," he felt that for himself and other deep image poets the proposition of the experiments "was to let the image lead, direct our energies, but clearly not isolated from sound or breath, more like a counterpoint of powers." It was clear to Rothenberg that although "theoretically one might talk of image as a discrete entity . . . the image always appeared verbally, in a language using sounded words." Although Kelly "made the comparison of image technique to montage in film," the poet still had to use as his tools of communication "words & therefore took the sound factor into account, since not to do so would be to move in ignorance of other powers of poetry, of language."[35]

In 1962, kulchur published "An Exchange: Deep Image & Mode," a selection of letters between Robert Creeley and Rothenberg. In that exchange the two poets attempted to clarify for themselves and for each other, the meaning of the term "deep image". According to Rothenberg's introductory statement in kulchur, the letters "are conclusive without reaching any conclusions." In his introduction Rothenberg gives an insight into the process of poetics that he values. Of the letters, he says that they "begin and end with two divergent positions which are, in the process, juxtaposed, placed one upon the other, so that from the overlay--as in some well-known color process in photography--a third, per-

[35]"Conversation," p. 142.

haps richer view emerges." Where, Rothenberg asks, "is the 'truth' in them?" He suggests that it will "finally be found in some poem, in the poems that are made or put into motion by, among other things, just such encounters . . ." as the one between himself and Creeley which began in the Spring of 1959 after the two had met in San Francisco.[36]

In the first of the published letters Creeley points out that the "imagists" "had in mind a sharp registration of an objective substance, be it tree or woman's mouth, an avoidance of general words."[37] He suggests that such a "quick picture" has "proved dull once accomplished, i.e., the poems get awfully quick and then glib and finally banal in their laconic method. . . ." Creeley suggests, however, that the "structure in which rhythm may operate fully over image [is] too generalized a percept. . . ."[38]

In replying to Creeley, Rothenberg explained the connection he felt between deep image and "perception as an instrument of vision." To make his meaning clear, Rothenberg quotes from Plate 14 of Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

> If the doors of perception were cleansed
> every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.
> For man has closed himself up, till he sees
> all things thru narrow chinks of his cavern.[39]

[36] Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 25.

[37] Ibid., p. 28.

[38] Ibid., p. 25.

[39] Ibid., p. 29. Cf. Germain, p. 34 (n. 16, pp. 30-31 above).

Creeley's concern with image as picture leading to the use of bizarre images to shock and his feelings that "image" may be glib and finally banal Rothenberg answers in relation to form. What underlies the whole concept of deep image is vision, and form "then, must be considered . . . as emerging from the act of vision: completely organic. . . ."[40] The poem becomes like a map which guides the reader through the maze the writer has explored. Octavio Paz described the process well:

> Each poem is a reading of reality; this reading is a translation; this translation is a writing, a new code for the reality which is being unravelled. The poem is the universe's double: a secret writing, a space covered with hieroglyphics. To write a poem is to decipher the universe. . . . The reader repeats the poet's act; to read the poem is to translate it and, inevitably, to convert it into another poem.[41]

The form of each poem, because of the organic connection of form to content, of form to image, must be determined by the material of the poem. Form "is the pattern of the movement from perception to vision: it arises as the poem arises and has no life outside the movement of the poem."[42]

[40]Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 30. One might also look at and compare Charles Olson, "Letter to Elaine Feinstein, May, 1959," rpt. in The New American Poetry, ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove, 1960), p. 397, and Denise Levertov's "Statement on Poetics," op. cit., p. 412: "I believe every space and comma is a living part of the poems and has its function, just as every muscle and pore of the body has its function."

[41]Paz, p. 72.

[42]Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 30.

Each poem thus becomes an individual and not-to-be repeated act of vision, and a poetic for itself.

In a Blakean passage, Rothenberg offers five "principles" on which he stands:

> The poem is the record of a movement from perception to vision.
> Poetic form is the pattern of that movement through space and time.
> The deep image is the content of vision emerging in the poem.
> The vehicle of movement is imagination.
> The condition of movement is freedom.[43]

In penetrating his own being with his imagination, the poet achieves freedom of movement. He is not bound by forms, either old or new, or theories or poetics which might limit his journey. "The genius of the new poetry [is] in its power to create rather than imitate." This understanding means that each poem becomes "a new creation, not a copy of nature or of other poems . . . [and places] a maximum value on the unique differences between poets, as all have different eyes and minds." The deep image therefore cannot be confused with a search for archetypes or a desire to make pictures. Each poem is different because each poet is different and will therefore create unique visions which will emerge in and as the poem. Rothenberg insists, here as else-

[43] Ibid., p. 31. Cf. Robert Creeley, "Olson & Others: Some Orts for the Sports," in Allen, op. cit., pp. 409-10. Creeley refers to Olson's "Projective Verse," (Poetry New York No. 3, 1950), and to the principle that "form is never more than an extension of content," and to the "process" in which "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. . . ."

where, that "the important thing is not to make a school, but to hope for a refocusing of concern towards a 'deeper view'."[44] As he remarked several years after the publication of the correspondence from which the above quotations are taken: "With much of the 'deep image' discussion . . . you must remember that we were being deliberately evasive, leaving our options open so to speak. The idea was for the poem, the work, to signal the event. . . ."[45]

In the correspondence with Creeley, Rothenberg reiterated his critical/theoretical stance, and expressed a fear of being "trapped in a (theoretical) limitation too easily arrived at." Rothenberg was not concerned with formal or final definitions but was concerned to make statements that would suggest an insight into deep image to poets writing poems. To do this he chose a method in which he explained "by example (in the selection of the poems) and suggestion (in the appended prose-statements. . . ."[46] This is a technique to which he returned in later work, especially in the anthologies of ethnopoetic materials. The use of this technique demonstrates a commitment to poems rather

[44]Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 31. Rothenberg is insistent in his warnings against making "a school." In Revolution of the Word, p. xvii, he stipulates "that the function of poetry isn't to impose a single vision or consciousness but to liberate. . . ." He also remarks that even the making of anthologies can be "dangerous," and that he sees "anthologies as a device for signalling what's possible in poetry, not as an authoritarian guide to poems or poets" (p. xxv).

[45]"Conversation," p. 140.

[46]Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 29.

than to theory. The core of Rothenberg's poetics is that definition and critical argument are validated by the poems which grow out of them, and that, regardless of poetics, the poems must speak for themselves. The test of a theory is not its logic but what may "emerge" in the "poem--i.e., the movement (action) of the poem."[47]

For A Controversy of Poets Rothenberg wrote of the development of the concept of deep image, its roots, and the relation of his own poems and poetics to the work of other poets and poems.[48] In that statement he sets the material into a historical frame and shows the relation of deep image to his later work in both translation and ethnopoetics.

In the language of the statement one can see how Rothenberg has incorporated earlier ideas into the very diction he uses. The visioning and envisioning of early statements give way to "sighting", a word Rothenberg used later as a title for a series of poems. In his summary for Leary and Kelly Rothenberg traced the history of his concern with image "as a power (among several) by which the poem is sighted and brought close . . ." to about 1952. After 1958 this concern "developed quickly in close workings" with other poets including Kelly, Antin, Schwerner, and Bly. Other influences included Blake, Rimbaud, Neruda, Whitman, and contemporary poets of America and Europe, particularly those writing in

[47]Rothenberg and Creeley, "Exchange," p. 27.

[48]A Controversy of Poets, eds., Leary and Kelly (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1965), p. 549.

German, as well as what Rothenberg called "ancient texts" which, he claimed, lead him, in "a world cut-off from vision & thereby incomplete" to a "reconsideration of the poem's roots" in, for instance, "shamanism & to a growing sense of powers, new & old, of word & song & image still here as keys."[49]

In an interview with David Ossman published in The Sullen Art in 1963, Rothenberg explained that he was "looking for a kind of poetry that will probe deep, in terms of statements and through images, without being untransmittable."[50] What deep image poets, and those who began to explore the power of image, the precursors of deep image poets (Rothenberg claims Rimbaud and Whitman) "hit on was not a poetry which obscures communication, but a poetry of the most direct communication possible."[51] In using deep image to set up echoes and reverberation, the deep image poet explores the unconscious "in such a way that the unconscious is speaking to the unconscious." This movement of deep image from unconscious to unconscious will produce poetry that will "communicate itself in the most direct

[49] Loc. cit.

[50] David Ossman, ed., The Sullen Art: Interviews by David Ossman with Modern American Poets (New York: Corinth Books, 1963), p. 30.

[51] Ossman, pp. 30, 31. Cf. Germain, English and American Surrealist Poetry, p. 26.

terms imaginable."[52] This is again the language of mysticism and religion, in tone closer to Buber than to technical theorists.

In the first magazine Rothenberg edited, Floating World, he had scope to explore deep image in the way he had explained to Creeley was the best way to understand it, by particular choice and arrangement of poems, and in the editorial statements, comments, and introductions to the work. In Floating World, Rothenberg tried "to show the interrelation between poetry written by some young poets in America . . . and some of the major aspects of European poetry--that poetry, in some sense is transnational and transtemporal."[53] By 1963, the year of the Ossman interview, Rothenberg had identified the act of writing a poem with the act of "seeing", so that he could speak of "poetry of other times and places" becoming accessible and contemporaneous. The key to what is "transnational and transtemporal" is particular "ways of poetic 'seeing'" which Rothenberg equates with the search for deep image. Deep image thus becomes the key to "the poetry of other times and places, as well as source of power in our own."[54] Octavio Paz gives support to ideas similar

[52]Ossman, pp. 30-31. Buber speaks of "directness" of communication between people (R.G. Smith, p. 27), and uses expressions such as "[people] communicate themselves to one another as what they are." Buber also uses terms such as "vital dialogic" and "transforming meeting" (Smith, pp. 24, 25).

[53]Ossman, p. 28.

[54]Loc. cit.

to Rothenberg's in a discussion of our perception of time: "If years, months, and days actually do not pass more quickly now, at least more things happen in them. And more things happen at the same time--not in succession, but simultaneously. Such acceleration produces fusion: all times and all spaces flow together in one here and now."[55]

Paz, in speaking of the Romantics and the romantic impulse, explains what Rothenberg called the transtemporal in poetry. "The poetic process inverts and converts the passage of time; the poem does not stop time--it contradicts and transfigures it. . . . Within its confines time passes differently from time in history or in what we call real life."[56]

These statements sum up what was to become the basis of ethnopoetics. The concern for other times and places, for that which is transnational and transtemporal, and the insistence on the relation of the poem to a vision of reality leads directly to the evolution of ethnopoetics. Rothenberg's belief in the technique of arranging materials and allowing the juxtapositions to give the reader further experiences of reverberations than might be experienced from works printed singly, and the suggestion that contemporary work can be read side by side with early work to convey "vision", goes back to Floating World. Eric Mottram pointed out that the "practical theory of the diverse procedures in

[55]Paz, p. 6.

[56]Paz, p. 1

Floating World is clear in certain passages printed in support of the poems. The ambitious and accurately gauged requirement was clearly freedom from the century's darkness, a movement out from the ambivalent darkness and light within the human soul itself. . . ."[57]

The "century's darkness" had been clearly delineated in the "Introduction" to New Young German Poets,[58] and "the ambivalent darkness and light within the human soul itself" is the direct subject of White Sun Black Sun, in which the darknesses of the human soul and of this particular century overlap in image and deep image.[59]

In New Young German Poets, Rothenberg's vision of the poem can be sensed; his remarks about the poems and the poets themselves function as keys to the evolution of his own poesis, the framework of which begins to appear in White Sun Black Sun, the first volume of his own poems to be printed.

In New Young German Poets Rothenberg recognized what were to become the foundations of his later writings. His identification with the poets he translated is clear from his remarks about them as individuals and as a group. His literary allegiances and alliances are also reflected in his remarks, which constitute a beginning of the statements which

[57] Mottram, "Song," p. 165.

[58] Jerome Rothenberg, ed. and tr., New Young German Poets (San Francisco: City Lights Pocket Poet Series No. 11, 1959). Hereinafter cited as NYGP.

[59] Jerome Rothenberg, White Sun Black Sun (New York: Hawk's Well Press, 1960). Hereinafter cited as WSBS.

together make up Rothenberg's vision of the poem. It is also clear from the contents of the two books that Rothenberg could see "the darkness behind the current slogans" as being alive in and applicable, as an image, to America and Europe equally.[60]

Rothenberg's work in New Young German Poets constitutes more than a translation, more than an introduction of the European avant garde to an American audience. It is also an early statement of Rothenberg's personal and poetic manifesto. This manifesto is rooted in a vision of the poem in history and as history. New Young German Poets is a record of the beginning of Rothenberg's exploration of that vision, which constitutes, in Paz's words, "the other coherence."[61] This vision of the poem is directed against ignorance, parochialism, ahistoricism, and materialism. The beginnings of that vision and that exploration, which appear in New Young German Poets and in White Sun Black Sun, serve as an early introduction to Rothenberg's statements about poetry which eventually culminate in ethnopoetics and which are predicated on the assumption that "poetry is the world of nonsequential time."[62]

In his "Introduction" to New Young German Poets Rothenberg explained that the poets he had chosen to translate

[60] NYGP, p. 1.
[61] Paz, p. 57.
[62] Loc. cit.

> are part of a generation that's come of age over the ruins of Hitler's psychotic Reich. Their emergence as a new avant garde (opposing the inherited dead world with a modern, visionary language) is a miracle beyond the economic hoaxes of a hundred Erhards. No set style or manifesto brings them together . . . only some sense of having come through and of having to come through again and again. And because they've seen it in the open, they're quick to sense the darkness behind the current slogans. . . . In a nation that buries the past from its children, the pain of their song is a triumph.[63]

The stress in the brief "Introduction" is on the decadence of the "old world" and on the enlivening of the post-War world via "visionary language". It is from the triumph of "visionary language" that the new world will be born. This emphasis on "visionary language" is at the centre of Rothenberg's work. It is what Rothenberg seeks as poet, as translator, as editor, as aesthetician, and as ethnopoeticist.

Rothenberg's notes about the poets he translated for New Young German Poets give some indications of his concerns at that time and introduce some of the ideas with which he continued to work. Rothenberg began an evolution towards Poland/1931 in his remarks about the poets who survived Hitler.[64] He presents Paul Celan as a poet who, because of his Jewish background, "grew up apart from the German world whose language he shared. Surviving, he has transformed that language into a unique personal instrument for assault-

[63] NYGP, p. 1.

[64] Jerome Rothenberg, Poland/1931 (New York: New Directions, 1974).

ing a reality that has wounded him but that he still desires to address as 'Thou'."[65] Here Rothenberg demonstrates an awareness of Celan's kinship (and his own) to Kafka, his own understanding and adoption of Buber's I-Thou terminology and frame of reference, and an involvement with the contradictions of Jewish background in a non-Jewish culture, a theme which emerges fully in Poland/1931.[66] Rothenberg, like Celan, is determined to transform "language into a unique personal instrument for assaulting a reality that has wounded him but that he still desires to address as 'Thou'." The body of the work that Rothenberg produced up to and including the Poland poems can be seen as a variety of attempts to transform language into a unique personal instrument at the same time that it is an attempt to locate, recognize, and express the "Thou".

In the notes about the poets Rothenberg points out that the work of Helmut Heissenbuttel is "full of contemporary reference . . . as well as a sure sense of the momentary visual image." Heinz Piontek is "at his best with a modern image of poetry that hovers on the edge of the irrational." Ingeborg Bachman is notable because of the violence of her imagery, "her prophetic tone," and the "strong elements of

[65] NYGP, p. 1.

[66] Kafka also "grew up apart from the German world whose language he shared" and "transformed that language into a unique personal instrument for assaulting a reality . . . that wounded him." The parallels between Kafka and Celan are less important to this essay than Rothenberg's recognition that parallels exist.

religious questing" visible in her poems. In Enzensberger's work Rothenberg values "the use of a direct colloquial line" and points to that poet's "sense of everyday evil." Rothenberg describes Günter Grass as "a master of realistic fantasy" and explains that his "beautifully inconsequential poem, Nana the Doll, . . . brought loud protests from readers who felt it marked the end of high German culture, decline of the west, etc. No such luck."[67] In this statement, Rothenberg clearly demonstrates his alignment with the "revision" which pressed towards the final collapse of what he saw as a disintegrating and moribund culture.

Rothenberg's concerns in New Young German Poets appear in his own early poems. What many of those poems have in common is an imagery of paradoxes, of light and dark, black and white, sound and silence. This imagery appears not only in the translations but in the poems in White Sun Black Sun, the very title of which points towards paradox which is central to Rothenberg's poetics. The confluence of vision common to the poets Rothenberg translated can be felt in the poems in White Sun Black Sun, a work full of "contemporary reference . . . as well as a sure sense of the momentary visual image" in which the image often "hovers on the edge of the irrational." Rothenberg's debt to Blake and his identification with a Blakean/Romantic vision, are also evident in White Sun Black Sun.[68] The poems in the book delineate

[67] NYGP, pp. 2, 3.

[68] See Paz, Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from

Rothenberg's "sense of everyday evil" and approach a vision of a Thou-inspired reality which springs from an attempt to expand past that evil. Rothenberg himself becomes "a master of realistic fantasy" whose "imagery is violent" and whose tone is "prophetic" in White Sun Black Sun.

The parallels between the poems in New Young German Poets and in White Sun Black Sun are considerable. There are similarities in tone, in feeling, in subject matter, and in vision. There are also striking similarities in sound patterns and image, for instance in the first poem in New Young German Poets, Karl Krolow's "Love Poem,"[69] and the dedicatory poem in White Sun Black Sun, "For Diane."[70] Krolow speaks of flesh "painted with the chalk of sleeplessness,/Painted white with the death of time, which/is dying at this hour./ Painted with mortar that crumbles on your face,/Painted with night-watches."[71] "For Diane" is a poem which speaks of "the shadow of life" as a "journey from darkness to darkness" in which the speaker trails his deaths behind him through "a night that has swallowed the ocean," a kind of timeless and time-consuming death-watch in which the images of crumbling faces and the insistence of shadows, lights, echoes, disin-

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Romanticism to the Avant-Garde, for an exploration of the relation of Romanticism to the avant-garde and especially Blake's influence on the romantic vision and through it on contemporary writers.

[69] NYGP, p. 11.

[70] WSBS, p. 5.

[71] NYGP, p. 11.

tegrating bodies creates a tone and feeling similar to those in Krolow's poem. "For Diane," however, for all its images of decay, is also a love poem which begins with the "other side of your voice is the echo of love:" and ends with the wish that "soon may all sides of our sight be met in the/ silence of love."[72]

The opening stanzas of Celan's "A Death Fugue" introduce a sound pattern which arises frequently in Rothenberg's work, a partial repetition which allows the reader to assimilate the image, and to cope with its expansion:

> Black milk of morning we drink you at dusktime
> we drink you at noontime and dawntime we drink
> you at night
> we drink and drink
> we scoop out a grave in the sky where it's roomy
> to lie[73]

As Walter Hollerer says in "The Words Behind the Slogans," about the work of another poet writing in German, Gunter Eich, the "point of contact with early expressionism is the enumerative style."[74] This enumerative style, which Rothenberg uses frequently, especially in his early poems, is meant to point out according to Hollerer that the "whole list of enumerated things becomes a poem by virtue of the rhythm and

[72] WSBS, p. 5.

[73] NYGP, p. 16.

[74] Walter Hollerer, "The Words Behind the Slogans," tr. Glender, Krell, Hollerer, Evergreen Review 5, 21 (Nov., Dec. 1961), 122.

the power of sincere expression, without any affected symbolism." What is important about the enumerative style is that it achieves "more than an enumeration, because the reader enters and moves within a definite moment - a lyric moment. The moment captured here is an exact and compelling particle of the present which takes on its coloring through immutable individual objects." Hollerer points out that Joyce called such moments "epiphanies".[75] Rothenberg refers to them as envisionings of deep image.

In Rothenberg's "Please Tell Love for Me," the repetition of the enumerative style and of the word "who" at the beginning of the lines and of "tell" throughout the poem is reminiscent of Enzensberger's use of "who" in "hotel fraternite."[76] A similar use of repetition and enumeration is visible in Rothenberg's "A Country Dark Without Ghosts," and in "The Stationmaster's Lament."[77]

The poems in White Sun Black Sun introduce some of the themes and images with which Rothenberg continued to work. "For Diane," "The Sorrowing Clown,"[78] and the "The Stationmaster's Lament" demonstrate the beginnings of Rothenberg's "voice" as a poet and the beginnings of the personae he would assume, as well as his attention to prosody, especially

[75]Hollerer, pp. 122-23.

[76]WSBS, pp. 36, 37 and NYGP, p. 55.

[77]WSBS, pp. 12, 13 and 27.

[78]WSBS, p. 26.

as it is related to "enumerative style". Rothenberg's careful attention to line-break and his use of a breath-line and the breaking of it for emphasis are in a sense the precursors of the later and more experimental poems in which he pushes "line" and "image" to their limits.[79] In White Sun Black Sun one also discovers the flirtation with surrealistic imagery which led to "deep image" and the use of what Rothenberg himself described, in speaking of Heissenbuttel, as "the momentary visual image . . . that hovers at the edge of the irrational."[80]

The epigraph for White Sun Black Sun is taken from Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.[81] It delineates a vision of an "infinite Abyss, fiery as the smoke of a burning city" from which a sun, "black but shining," is visible "at an immense distance."[82] The image is paradigmatic for Rothenberg: the interplay of smokey and fiery, which implies a "live" center inside an obscuring screen, and of "black but shining," which again introduces the mirror quality and the black center which appears to give light, gives the reader an early taste of deep imagery and the interaction and interpenetration of images which Rothenberg employs not

[79] See particularly, Sightings, Further Sightings, and A Steinbook & More, in Rothenberg, Poems for the Game of Silence: 1960-1970 (New York: Dial, 1971), pp. 56-89.

[80] NYGP, p. 4.

[81] William Blake, "A Memorable Fancy," Plates 17-20, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in BLAKE Complete Writings, ed., Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 155-57.

[82] WSBS, p. 8.

only in simple or extended metaphor, but in the very diction and structure of his poems.

Vast spiders, "terrific shapes of animals sprung from corruption," crawl after their prey as they revolve around the "fiery tracks" of the black sun. From the immense distance from which the speaker perceives the scene, he attempts to locate himself, the meaning of his own existence, among the images. He asks: "which was my eternal lot?" The answer provides further levels of ambiguity: "Between the black & white spiders".[83]

Rothenberg's "A Little Boy Lost," establishes the poet as the speaker in the epigraph and makes the parallel with Blake's vision explicit.[84] The speaker, a "city boy lost in the country," is wounded by the sights, the sounds, the very textures of nature. He has been taken "from the white sun and . . . left . . . in the black sun. . . ." Placed in the world, he is the lost child, the fatherless child of Blake's vision struggling towards identity with the cry, "I/have no way of turning now, no door", and is caught in the human condition between white and black suns.[85]

[83] WSBS, p. 8.

[84] WSBS, p. 9. See Blake's, "The Little Boy Lost," and "The Little Boy Found," in Songs of Innocence (BLAKE Complete Writings, pp. 120-21).

[85] Although Rothenberg in the poems in White Sun Black Sun makes repeated reference to Blake's vision, especially as it is expressed in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, the persona in WSBS is as disturbed by questions as comforted by faith. Blake's god/father does not appear in Rothenberg's poems. Rather the speaker struggles to achieve a perception

"Invincible Flowers," the poem which follows "A Little Boy Lost," ends with the statement that the "light is enclosed on each side by the darkness of/flowers."[86] In "A Country Dark Without Ghosts," we are reminded that again "we must come from the crossroads," and, the poet asks: "Does the shadow have nothing behind it?"[87]

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of the "Thou" in the "Other." In the poems in WSBS Rothenberg is still tentative, questing. He senses the "Thou" in the "Other" but is assaulted by the "It" at every turn. Rothenberg's exploration of "deep image" and his commitment to it and to "visionary language" constitute a resolution of the quest, a determination to seek the "Thou" which implies a faith similar to Blake's and which finds its parallels in mysticism and religion, and is perhaps expressed as parallel best by Buber on the one hand and the Hindu concept of Karma on the other. The Hindu concept of Karma includes the idea that each of us is born and re-born to work out certain problems, and that each of us must live out what we carry with us from previous incarnations. The path to unification with the life-spirit of the universe is different for each of us, but in each incarnation we must accept what we are and live it through in order to be rid of it rather than fighting against it, for each incarnation is a manifestation of the universal life-spirit, and through the full living through of each incarnation we approach it more closely. Thus what Buber called the "It" is not to be despised or overcome, as it is in Buddhism, but is to be valued and examined to see how it is a manifestation of the life-spirit. Buber's concept of the "Thou-in-every-living-thing" is parallel to the Hindu concept, and Rothenberg adopts this view of reality and uses it as one of the bases of deep image which is more a philosophy than it is a technical term. Paz has pointed out that "in poetry a personal, religious vision of the world and of man manifests itself" (p. 108), and that there is a belief in "correspondences between all beings and worlds," which "is the true religion of modern poetry, from Romanticism to Surrealism" (p. 55). What is more, this "poetic image shapes a reality which rivals the vision of the revolutionary and that of the religious" (p. 56).

[86] WSBS, p. 11.

[87] WSBS, p. 12.

We ourselves are mirrors of mirrors, an image which appears repeatedly in these poems. The poems are full of eyes, of cries, of images of images, of white suns and black suns, spiders and moons. The landscapes are barren, as they are in "Seeing Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will," where "the eye of some Jew my mother's brother and son/glares without end in the whiteness covering Poland," or so rich with images that the richness itself suggests a barrenness.[88] Even the sun becomes "something pale," "a cinder/dropped down a well,/like a sea-egg,/like something that's lost/,"[89] an image of post-War Germany that is reminiscent of Celan's "A Death Fugue."

The dreams in the book, and there are many, are bad dreams, and "the rain can't stop falling."[90] The moon is dark; the sun is black. In "The Sorrowing Clown," mirrors "cover a field where the moon is crying" and cities are "black-bordered".[91] What communication is possible from such cities comes from "silences heavy with winter," a winter of "clowns and despair!"[92]

The poems in White Sun Black Sun introduce the reader to this world of claustrophobic images where there is "no way of

[88] WSBS, p. 25.

[89] WSBS, p. 26.

[90] WSBS, p. 17.

[91] WSBS, p. 19.

[92] WSBS, p. 26.

turning now, no door." One can see that the imagery is cumulative, that the face of the dedicatory poem appears and reappears through the book as one face or another, one love or another, one echo or another, one death or another, showing one side or another. The mirrors we are and the mirrors we see present no pleasant vistas, and the sun is black, perhaps blackened by Celan's "black milk of morning," the ashes of the concentration camps; and the moon is a spider which weaves a web of light to catch its prey, as we hover over the "infinite Abyss", which is not some mythical Hell but our reality itself. The face in these poems is often "the profile of death,"[93] a coffin where "sorrow is housed".[94] Only in the far side of the voice do we discern an "echo of love."[95] All else is "days without hope"[96] in "black-bordered cities," and the speaker can only "battle the streets with mirrors and chalk/and the night with dark kisses."[97]

"The Stationmaster's Lament," a poem which demonstrates some of Rothenberg's techniques of this period, combines a lyrical quality with "realistic fantasies" and "irrational images".[98] It introduces a scene which is European in both

[93] WSBS, p. 5

[94] WSBS, p. 26.

[95] WSBS, p. 31.

[96] WSBS, p. 31.

[97] WSBS, pp. 27, 28.

[98] WSBS, pp. 27, 28.

conception and design while it includes "Busterkeaton-like heads" and a cello-playing workmen's circle of brakemen. The location of the poem is "transnational," the images particular to post-War Europe. The trains which "have been constant" are redolent of Mussolini's promises, and those trains which have been "constant in death" are the cattle cars of the Third Reich. The poem depends for its effectiveness not only on the enumerative technique and on the repetition of sounds and images which produce echoes, but also on the power of the lines to reverberate in the consciousness of the reader among the other heard, seen, perceived or half-perceived concepts and images in the mind.[99] The poem is, in a sense, a narrative which depends for its "plot" on the reader's ability to "see" or "envision" the interconnections

[99]The enumerative technique can be seen as one of the bases of the theory of deep image. As Hollerer pointed out, the reader is forced to take cognizance of each "exact and compelling particle of the present," because of the confrontation with "immutable individual objects" (p. 123). Hollerer also points out that this technique is a link with German expressionism. It is also reminiscent of the style of Gertrude Stein, a writer Rothenberg has claimed as an early and important influence. Stein's insistence on the noun as the basis of writing and on the use of words for their associations and sound, as well as the use of repetition which led to a confrontation with the concrete physical object which is made present by such techniques, can also be seen as contributing to Rothenberg's development of the concept of deep image. Of interest also is the fact that enumeration as a basis for both style and structure is prevalent in the Bible and is particularly noticeable in the Old Testament prophets as well as in Genesis. Rothenberg uses the technique most effectively in The Seven Hells of the Jigoku Zoshi (New York: Trobar, 1962), rpt., Between: poems 1960/63 (London:Fulcrum, 1967), pp. 23-42, a series of poems structured around a Buddhist theme. The poems themselves are fraught with Biblical reverberations which are carried in line and image and especially in the prophetic tone which is coupled with the enumerative style, a technique Rothenberg began to explore in White Sun Black Sun.

of seemingly disparate images. The poem is complex, the referents many and varied.

True to the title, the stationmaster laments what he has buried. The chairs in his station, his constant companions, lament with him, as do other inanimate objects such as plants, telegraph keys, as well as do brakemen and conductors. This station is no whistle-stop. It contains three hundred chairs, dreamed or real. Although the colloquialisms, rhythms, and language are American, the images are at once transnational and transtemporal.

"The grey form in the grass," which appears in the first stanza becomes central to the meaning as the poem moves towards a conclusion in which where "grey forms were rising commuters/climb ramps through the night/They throw in their fistfulls of earth and bad dreams." The location is Germany, where "grey forms rise" and the "trains have been constant in death." Although the cellos are now in the hands of blonde brakemen who have perhaps inherited or rescued them from the final solution, they are also the cellos of the death camps, of final farewells, lamentations said under the gaze of the eagles visible as Hitler's symbols, the imperial symbols of mundane wealth and power. Now, after the war, "where the grey forms were rising commuters/climb ramps through the night." They climb through the darkness of their consciousness of history, through perhaps dimly remembered visions of what has become "a nation that buries the past from its

children."[100] Rothenberg has already told us that there are "no tears where there are no memories."[101]

In their very climbing, the commuters "throw fistfulls of earth" as one does into an open grave. By climbing onto the "innocent" commuter train, they surrender their bad dreams, the memories which litter the train tracks and are discarded like the fistfulls of earth in the grave. On their ahistorical commuter trains, "they run to the edge of the night where no one will follow/Past lakes of blue darkness where furnaces holler like bulls."

The poem will yield another meaning too. The images can be read as American, the nation which buries the past from its children can be read as America during the McCarthy period. The eagle is an American symbol as well as a German one, although it is meant to convey the similar symbolic meanings in both cases. New York City, to which Rothenberg makes other references in other poems in the book, is also the centre of commuter trains. The bad dreams of America and of Americans, newly melted and newly minted, may be the bad dreams of the European experiences they fled, the threat of the myth of "progress" they face. The furnaces which appear at the end of the poem are both the furnaces of the concentration camps and the furnaces of post-war technological production.

Rothenberg served in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Germany between 1953 and 1955. As a Jew trying to understand

[100] NYGP, p. 1.

[101] WSBS, p. 24.

the remains of the war years, Rothenberg was haunted by the landscape and its spectres. His poems continue the exploration of the disintegration of Western European and particularly German "High Culture." In later volumes he explores the relation of crimes to punishments, of actions to judgments, of moral imperatives to survival in the face of the loss of a whole generation.

The work in New Young German Poets is an admitted attempt to rescue and display that which survived Hitler not only physically but spiritually. White Sun Black Sun is a similar attempt at rescue, partly the rescue of a Blakean vision of America, even though the poems are full of images of rot and disintegration. In the poems in White Sun Black Sun are visible not only images of death, dis-integration, and disintegration, but also images of growth, of light overlaid on darkness, of life arising from the images. Even in "The Stationmaster's Lament," there is a gentleness which suggests that even the stationmaster is human, is entitled to grieve, is, whatever else he may have been, just like us in his everyday needs and reactions. In this way "deep image" functions in these poems. Out of the oppositions and contradictions, the interpenetrations of darknesses and lights, good and evil, shadows and stars, life and destruction, while "the other side of your face is the profile of death:/it mirrors the stars that enter my room to fill it with ashes," a voice, the echo of love, is audible.[102]

[102]WSBS, p. 5. The technique Rothenberg uses here is

Although White Sun Black Sun is European in many respects, in the tone, imagery, and settings of many poems, there is no lack of American references. The plastic flowers of "young girls in lofts in the Bronx" appear in "Invincible Flowers." "A Poem for a Small Manufacturer," with its king of dresses is certainly American in its smallest detail, chiding America in its intention.[103] Even "Seeing Leni Reifenstahl's Triumph of the Will," is dated, "San Francisco, 1959."

"A Poem for the President," is a macabre fantasy set "in the second darkness of Brooklyn" where there is "death in the tenements."[104] Blizzards drive "their wagons down Broadway," in "The Sorrowing Clown,"[105] and the "face of America buried under/a stone" begins, "The Real Revolution is Tragic."[106] What is demonstrated by the intermingling of these American poems with those so determinedly related to Europe, and the introduction of the American image in the European situation or vice versa, is that the "revision" which Rothenberg called for in his "Introduction," to New Young German

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particularly apparent in "The Counter-Dances of Darkness," (Between, pp. 18-23), in which the process of the making of the deep image is visible, and in The Seven Hells of the Jigoku Zoshi, in which the interplay of images provides an excellent example of the working of deep image.

[103] WSBS, p. 14.

[104] WSBS, p. 20.

[105] WSBS, pp. 20, 21.

[106] WSBS, p. 30

Poets is called for equally in Europe and in America.

Eric Mottram claims that the statements Rothenberg made in the "Introduction" to New Young German Poets can be applied to Rothenberg's own cultural actions. According to Mottram, the beginnings of Rothenberg's "internalized actions lie in his research into 'deep image' [and] the beginnings of externalized action" are manifested in Rothenberg's first translations. Rothenberg since "has moved from self-engaged inner poetry to a social poetry in a classic development, . . .[and] Rothenberg's career in fact now shows as a fine demonstration of the essential process of poetry--the translation performance of private into public and of one culture into another."[107] In Rothenberg's own language, poesis is "transnational" and "transtemporal."

Mottram quotes from Ritual: A Book of Primitive Rites and Events, and points to a "rare" biographical note in which Rothenberg described himself as a "populist in politics, atheist in religion, sacralist in art."[108] Mottram looks at the broad contours of the evolution of Rothenberg's poems and poetics and maintains that by the mid-1960s, when Rothenberg was involved in the performance of rituals and "events" in New York City, the

[107] Mottram, "Song," p. 163.

[108] Ibid., p. 171. The quotation is from Rothenberg's Ritual: A Book of Primitive Rites and Events (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), p. 15.

> event or ritual or happening can still be a lone performance, but more generally, from now on, much of Rothenberg's work will be a translation of group action. Already, here then he is moving out from the self into the social, finding a way of doing so in accordance with his non-ideological politics and faith, and in accordance with being a "sacralist."[109]

Although Rothenberg has published no overtly political diatribe, or propaganda for any particular cause, his work is demonstrably political. It shows a deep commitment to change, and the kinds of changes Rothenberg recommends to us are not changes in simple political allegiances but a rending and rebuilding, based on a romantic vision, of America. Octavio Paz wrote of an "ambivalence of poets who see in magic and revolution two parallel but not mutually exclusive methods of changing the world."[110] This is an apt description of Rothenberg's development into ethnopoetics, the content of which is both magic and revolution, a combination aimed at changing the world via visionary language. Rothenberg stresses both the magic and the revolution in later poetics. Paz has pointed out that "the magic of modern poetry from Blake to our own time is only the other side, the dark side, of its revolutionary vocation."[111] In New Young German Poets and in White Sun Black Sun Rothenberg calls for revolution and for visionary language. In later works he couples this

[109] Mottram, "Song," pp. 171-72.

[110] Paz, p. 107.

[111] Paz, p. 107.

demand with a demand for attentiveness to "magic", the roots of which can be seen in the almost Surrealist imagery of the early works.

Although it is possible to see the roots of a theory of deep image in the early poems, Rothenberg himself insists repeatedly that theory has little meaning or use unless it is accompanied by poems which demonstrate the use of theory. The Modern critical stance is to apply a theory to poems as an aid to understanding or evaluation. Rothenberg sees poems rather as the defining force of theory in which the "kernel" is contained. One defines by "selection, through juxtaposition, through presentation of types of poems . . . by pointing at something. The presentation of examples is a kind of definition."[112]

[112]Barry Alpert, "Jerome Rothenberg--An Interview Conducted by Barry Alpert with Charles Morrow Sitting In, New York City, January 2, 1974," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 101. As Rothenberg points out, the effectiveness of images and especially of deep image, is cumulative. To abstract a few lines or even a stanza from a poem, or a poem from a suite or series, is to surrender a part of the effectiveness of the work. The "placement of an image within a progression of images would alter the effect of the images before & after--& condition the rhythm of the work as a whole . . . a question of the play of images through time, a disposition of images whose progression & intersection made certain things happen." ("Conversation," p. 142.) The resonances and reverberations of images, patterns of images, and the echoes and re-echoes of sounds and sound patterns throughout a poem or a series of poems or throughout a volume, serve to re-enforce and expand the meaning of each single image. (Cf. Olson, Creeley, Germain above.) For instance, in "The Fifth Hell," of The Seven Hells of the Jigoku Zoshi (Between, pp. 35,36) the "paws of a cat" appear, just after the image of flowers and roots in a window, as a frame for "slow rivers" of blood. They reappear as the butcher's "soft paws brushing earth," echo again in "and the bones will tell us that life eats life & grows fat/that we claw each other." This line pulls

For Rothenberg, theory is an almost empty "husk", as are explanations of deep image; the theory and the poems complete each other to produce a unity of form and content, inner and outer, husk and kernel. One can perhaps grasp the kernel itself at times, but the same is not true for the husk, which, without the kernel, is meaningless,

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together various images into a central image which expands the deep image. The "flowers and roots" of the first stanza reappear in "I feel the soft grass part," in a seemingly quite different reference and context, and then in "rows of sweet flesh," which echoes the rows in which we usually find flowers, and then in "marigolds stuffed into jars in the sun/the flesh caving in, the warm center." In this image the butcher's window is brought back in a further image of glass jars in the sun which are stuffed with marigolds rather than with meat, however the next line reminds us of the meat with "the flesh caving in," and the image moves to yet another level and in another direction with "the warm center." Then, coming back to the flower image, the image of a center, "the butcher prods young leaves" and the poem moves to a conclusion in which the images reverberate and expand yet again to include other, further images. "And if sometimes/we should pass a window/strewn with flowers & flesh/the old memory of the old wounds should begin/& the sweet smell stick to our throats:/We will know again/that image of a dark bull/bathed in its entrails/a shroud of wild heavy flowers/that draws us to worship in silence/the sorrow of all this poor meat." Thus the flowers and flesh are defined as essentially one substance, that which grows from the earth, from the darkness of the earth/womb, and that which is clawed, torn apart, rots, and returns to feed the earth again. As in other poems, the flesh of animals and the flesh of people who eat animal flesh are seen as one substance, and the bones of the cat, of the butcher, of the speaker, of the bull, and of the meat which hangs in the butcher's window are shown as substantially the same, which suggests that they are essentially the same. The layering of the images and the juxtapositions present the concept of common substantiality as a powerful and gut-rending feeling. In the reader's unconscious perception of the interaction of the images and their accumulation, "feeling precedes and masters statement." (WSBS, p. 1) The images come full circle so that by the end of the poem the reader is himself included in "the sorrow of all this poor meat." The sorrow and the meat are defined by the multiple images which interact throughout the poem.

empty. As Kevin Power put it:

> The "deep image" as it emerges is a definition of that sensed awareness we all share. It belongs to the category of vision because it reveals what is there. Its field is that of the permanent present. It depends on the cumulative effect of the build-up of images, their cutting edge, their suggestive capacity, their penetration, & the flash of recognition. The action & interaction of the images move the poem towards revelation, & the keys to such movement are found in tension and reverberation. The image is not, therefore, a static picture or an object to be viewed but the active constituent of vision.[113]

Out of such vision comes the poem, which "will contain, at one and the same time, the object and the subject, the external world and the artist himself."[114]

[113] "Conversation," p. 155.

[114] Mottram, "Song," p. 168. Mottram quotes Rothenberg who quotes Baudelaire.

Chapter 3

Ethnopoetics

Ethnopoetics is an ideology which takes as a main point of reference a Romantic view of the nature, purpose, and function of poetry.[1] Rothenberg, who coined the term, defines it in reference to Robert Duncan's articulation of what Rothenberg describes as "a healing and unifying vision that . . . we still pursue, evade & have to face again in our very complex rush into whatever future lies before us." This is a vision, to quote Duncan, of an

> ideal of vital being, [which] rises not in our identification in a hierarchy of higher forms but in our identification with the universe. To compose such a symposium of the whole, such a totality, all the old excluded orders must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown; the criminal and failure--all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are.[2]

[1] Rothenberg, in "Pre-Face To A Symposium on Ethnopoetics," Alcheringa New Series 2, 2, 7, (hereinafter cited as Symposium) points out that if "the present search began, say, with the Romantics, it was only that they called, recalled, our attention to a late European version of a crisis felt already in the first civilizations, the first organized states--not only in the West but everywhere. . . ." Octavio Paz delineates the evolution of the Romantic perspective from Blake to contemporary poets in Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant Garde, tr. Rachel Phillips, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974).

[2] "Symposium," p. 6.

For Rothenberg, the "term that distinguishes our part of that total effort, . . . that symposium of the whole, is ethnos."

> Ethnos wasn't always what we would now take it to be, not an expression of what we are as groups in isolation, centering, orbiting around ourselves, but an expression instead of otherness, a sign that points from what we are or may become to what we aren't, haven't thought ourselves to be, may fear or scorn (as in that older "hierarchy of higher forms"), . . . At that earlier time then ethnos meant nation, people, group, or race, not as this nation ("us") but as those nations ("them" or "others"). It was the Greek equivalent for gentiles, goyim, pagan, heathen--that last word (not ethnos itself but a word mistaken for it) meaning people of the heath, the countryside, the wilderness, the unclaimed land, the ones in nature, natural, the lower foreign orders set apart from us, apart from cities, blocks to human progress, ancients, primitives, the fathers or mothers we must kill, the poets (Plato said) whom we must drive out of our cities, out of our bodies & minds, in point of fact, those who scorn the new god, the abstraction, unity, the unconflicted single truth we worship. . . . Ethnopoetics is not a new construction, then, but the reminder of an older truth or linkage: that poetry itself is this, the very language of the ethnoi, in the equation Plato makes. As poets we are them.

Having defined ethnos, Rothenberg goes on to delineate what he means by poetics: "Poetry, the process of." He takes that "as a process of cognition, of creation in that sense: knowing, coming into knowing where we are. To say, articulate,

our sense of being in the world, however changeful, dangerous, & slippery."[3] The process to be "uncovered and learned" is not "our identification in a hierarchy of higher forms," but Duncan's "identification with the universe." "In that process, of which ethnopoetics forms a part, we break with the immediate, inherited past & find resources for our search, our meeting with the future, in something vastly older: the 'nature-related cultures,' as Snyder calls them."[4]

The basis of ethnopoetics is the belief that poetry is a significant event at the centre of and centred in a vision of the universe which admits of the possibility of the sacrality of every thing;[5] and this point of view is believed to be shared with or parallel to that world-view

[3]"Symposium," p. 6.

[4]"Symposium," p. 7.

[5]See Rothenberg, Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia & Oceania (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. xix-xxiv. In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, tr. J.W. Swain (New York: Collier, 1961), Emile Durkheim divided experience into two categories, the sacred and the profane. The profane is the uninspired objectified world of normal life. The sacred is that which is other than the profane. The sacred has a recognizable power or force. It is non-utilitarian and non-empirical, that is, it is divorced from the profane world in that it has no "practical use" outside its own sphere of reference, and it is not open to empirical investigation because the perceptions which arise from it cannot be proven or disproven by empirical methods. The experience of the sacred makes a demand on the one who experiences, not only at the moment of experience, but further, extending into the profane world a moral obligation or an ethical imperative. In Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1955, pp. 12, 13), Paul Tillich, echoing Buber whose student he had been, wrote of the "mysterium tremendum et fascinosum," which he described as the "wholly other."

common to "archaic" cultures or those which still retain tribal roots and rituals.[6] The contemporary poet shares with the shaman the role of both visionary and invocator.[7]

Tillich divided "objects of a cognitive approach," from "elements of an encounter, namely an encounter with the holy." Cognitive or objective elements are "parts of this encounter, not as things or values, but as bearers of something beyond themselves. This something beyond themselves is the holy, the numinous presence of that which concerns us ultimately." Buber's "every pure act and deed" is an expression of a similar concept. See R.G. Smith, Martin Buber (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1966), p. 7.

[6]Rothenberg, Technicians, pp. xix-xxiv, 385-87, 397-98, 417, 419, 423-25, 429, 474, 490. Rothenberg defines "archaic" in Technicians, p. xxiv, to mean, "(1) the early phases of the so-called 'higher' civilizations, where poetry & voice still hadn't separated or where the new writing was used for setting down what the voice had already made; (2) contemporary 'remnant' cultures in which acculturation has significantly disrupted the 'primitive modes'; & (3) a cover-all term for 'primitive,' 'early high,' & 'remnant.'" Rothenberg quotes Ernst Cassirer's conception of the primitive world-view in Technicians, p. 417. "Primitive man by no means lacks the ability to grasp the empirical differences of things. But in his conception of nature & life these differences are obliterated by a stronger feeling: the deep conviction of a fundamental and indelible solidarity of life that bridges over the multiplicity and variety of its single forms. . . . Life is felt as an unbroken and continuous whole. . . . The limits between [its] different spheres are not insurmountable barriers; they are fluent and fluctuating." Rothenberg, Technicians, p. 425, also makes the point that the "central image . . . of all 'primitive' thought, [is] the intuition . . . of a connected & fluid universe, as alive as a man is--just that much alive." He further points out that such a perception of the universe gives rise to "a unifying vision that brings with it the power of song & image, seen in its own terms as power to heal-the-soul & all disease viewed as disorder-of-the-soul, as disconnection & rigidity." Cf. Durkheim, op. cit., p. 14, "primitive religions . . . hold to reality and express it."

[7]Rothenberg quotes Eliade's definition of "shaman" as, "in the strict sense . . . pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia & Central Asia." (Technicians, p. 423.) He uses the word, however, in the way Eliade does after the concept is broadened: "Eliade treats shamanism in the-

Poetry is seen by both to be connected to the sacred centre, but whereas the shaman speaks for and to a like-minded participating audience within a ritual, the meaning and function

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broader-sense as a specialized technique of ecstasy & the shaman as 'technician-of-the-sacred.' In this sense, too, the shaman can be seen as a protopoet, for almost always his technique hinges on the creation of special linguistic circumstances, i.e., of song & invocation. In 1870 Rimbaud first used the term voyant (seer) to identify the new breed of poet . . . & the Copper Eskimos called the shaman-songman 'elik, i.e., one who has eyes.'" (Technicians, p. 424) Rothenberg explained to Kevin Power in "Conversation with Kevin Power," Vort No. 7, p. 146, hereinafter cited as "Conversation," that his "concern with Shamanism . . . was also part of an attempt to put a new stress on the function of poetry. In David Ossman's The Sullen Art (New York: Corinth, 1963), p. 31, Rothenberg had pointed out that the function of the poet is similar to that of the shaman, whose poetry "had significance in his society; his poetry had an integral function. . . . The shaman could do something which on its face was very simple but which was viewed as having tremendous resonance or the power to make certain things happen. . . . [He] worked to change a condition of sickness to one of health, a condition of disintegration to one of integration. . . . Without this sense of poetry as an active, functioning process . . . " what is left is "feeble in the world," causing nothing to happen. In "Conversation" (p. 147), Rothenberg makes clear that the shaman's poetry "makes everything happen." Rothenberg also explained to Ossman (p. 31), that he had realized through his "working with early or archaic poetry," that "the poet is, to begin with, one with the priest and the shaman, not only 'making' but 'seeing'." Both shaman and poet are 'seers' and it is only in "societies where the poet's experience has become separated from the total experience of the community [that] making, in the purely craft sense," arises. (Cf. Durkheim, op. cit., p. 29: "Collective representations are the result of an immense cooperation. . . .") In the "Conversation" (p. 146), Rothenberg makes clear that there is a direct relation between the role of the poet and the role of the shaman. "It seemed to me that they were going through basic processes that I was initially familiar with through modern poetry. Here, then, was an example from an early culture of an individual functioning in very much the way that the modern poet sometimes asserts himself to be functioning. . . . There is a clear relationship between the Shaman & the poet; the shaman after all is typically also the singer whose songs are related to the process of vision. So he's also the 'seer' to whom Rimbaud called our attention . . . a poet renewing his vision in each instance. The modern poet seems to want to take over something like the shaman's role--either for himself or to spread it through society."

of which are understood by the participants, the contemporary poet is cut off from such procedures by the nature of Western culture, and it is his job to revitalize that culture by reminding us of the existence of the numinous and of the necessity of admitting the existence of the sacred.[8]

In practical terms, for the contemporary poet this means an awareness of "the sense of poetry as an act of vision, charged with the immediate energies of authentic speech and shaped by its moment in history."[9]

[8] In Assays (New York: 1966), pp. 56, 57, Kenneth Rexroth gives an example from American Indian culture. Rexroth's idea can serve as a summation of the tribal situation in a more general sense. He explains that songs, "like other things which we call works of art, occupy in American Indian society a position somewhat like the sacraments and sacramentals of the so-called higher religions. That is, the Indian poet is not only a prophet. Poetry or song does not only play a vatic role in the society, but is itself a numinous thing. The work of art is holy, in Rudolf Otto's sense--an object of supernatural awe, & as such, an important instrument in the control of reality on the highest plane." (Otto's use of "holy" and "numinous" correspond generally to Tillich's and bear a close relation to Durkheim's definition of the sacred. Rothenberg admits that one of the major distinctions between the shaman and the contemporary poet is that, in Kevin Power's words, "the shaman's role was socially integrated at its centre, whereas the modern poet finds himself essentially outside of his society. . . ." Rothenberg sees this as being "a reflection of the difference between . . . cultures." ("Conversation," p. 146.)

[9] Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha, eds., America a Prophecy: A New Reading of North American Poetry from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1973), p. xxix. Rothenberg refers, in America a Prophecy, p. xxxiv, to Pound's definition of an epic as "a poem including history." He quotes Charles Olson's definition of history in the same paragraph: "history is the function of any one of us. . . . Frequently I employ the expression history promiscuously with life. That's my point. A function is how a thing acts. . . ." Rothenberg's insistence on the centrality of the act of vision is supported by

"So the poet, the artist, is into our own time the one who is 'perpetually recovering his primitivism,' as Stanley Diamond describes him: his ability to see, to think concretely, to sustain contradictions."[10] In this, the poet is

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information from science and by the philosophy of science. In "The Mind as an Instrument of Understanding," in The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination, pp. 4, 5, Jacob Bronowski asserts that, "we need to review the whole of our natural philosophy in the light of scientific knowledge that has arisen in the last fifty years. . . . And we become more and more aware that what we think about the world is not what the world is but what the human animal sees of the world." As has been pointed out earlier, Bronowski maintains that what distinguishes man from other animals is imagination. He maintains that there is a physiological basis for this belief. Bronowski, p. 10, connects the words visual, vision, and visionary, with the words image, imagery, and imagination. He points out that almost "all the words that we use about experiences of the kind that go into visions or images are words connected with the eye or the sense of sight." Although sound plays an important part in our knowledge of ourselves and others, "the intellectual activities of man are eye-conditioned," and the "place of the sense of sight in human evolution is cardinal" (p. 11). He attaches "so much importance to the sense of vision, because we have become almost wholly dependent on it, and its emergence as the major mode of perception of the outside world has undoubtedly been the great culturally formative ability for human beings" (p. 13). George Santayana in "Understanding and Imagination," in Interpretations of Poetry and Religion (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 5, reasons that the "eventual distinction between intelligence and imagination is ideal; it arises when we discriminate various functions in a life that is dynamically one. Those conceptions which, after they have spontaneously arisen, prove serviceable in practice, and capable of verification in sense, we call ideas of the understanding. The others remain ideas of the imagination." Later in the same essay he remarks (p. 7), in language quite similar to Bronowski's that "the intuitions which science could not use remain the inspiration of poetry and religion." For a parallel to Rothenberg's concept and expression see Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, tr. R.G. Smith, (1947; rpt. Boston: Beacon, 1955), p. 33. "True address . . . directs man into the place of lived speech."

[10] Rothenberg, "Symposium," p. 7.

not alone; ethnographers, anthropologists, and other scholars have been exploring the "primitive" and the "archaic." In Charles Olson's words, we live "in an age in which inherited literature is being hit from two sides, from contemporary writers who are laying bases of new discourse at the same time that . . . scholars are making available . . . texts which are themselves eye-openers."[11] Such texts, and the

> spread of information about the past and the culturally remote has made the present generation, in Gary Snyder's words, "the first human beings in history to have all of man's culture available to our study" and to be "free enough of the weight of traditional cultures to seek out a larger identity." But for these acquired meanings to be more than a burden of information, we must put them to active use--must employ them, that is, to bring about an actual change in our modes of perception. In this process, present and past will continue to shape each other through a contemporary poetry that creates new means of reawakening and refining our attentions.[12]

The "keys to a tradition of individual vision" are to be found in Romanticism which lately "has been recognized (as

[11]Rothenberg, "Symposium," p. 7. Some of the writers whose texts Olson mentioned as "eye-openers" include Carl O. Sauer, Edgar Anderson, Victor Berard, Robert Hayward Barlow, and Jane Harrison. Olson was also aware of the growing availability of Mayan, Toltec, Indian, and other "archaic" materials; see his A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1964), and the Sauer/Olson correspondence printed in New World Journal 1, 4 (Spring 1979), 136-38.

[12]Rothenberg and Quasha, America a Prophecy, p. xxx.

it wasn't earlier in this century) . . . [as] a permanent step forward in the evolution of consciousness."[13] This visionary and "prophetic sense . . . [affirms] the oldest function of poetry, which is to interrupt the habits of ordinary consciousness by means of more precise and highly charged uses of language and to provide new tools for discovering the underlying relatedness of all life."[14]

For the American poet, the realization of the Romantic tradition is of particular importance. Rothenberg reads "American poetry as containing a 'prophecy', an 'inner truth' linked to the process of change," which is related to a "special concern for the interplay of myth and history [which] runs through the whole of American literature."[15] Rothenberg sees this concern in the works of Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman, who, he claims, "saw the poet's function in part as revealing the visionary meaning of our lives in relation to the time and place in which we live."[16] Rothenberg draws direct parallels "between the mythos of Blake's America," and his own theories, and takes this, with the work of Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman, as constituting an

[13] Rothenberg and Quasha, America a Prophecy, p. xxxi.

[14] Op. cit., p. xxxi, xxxii. Buber's parallel is to say that it is our task "to affirm" the world and ourselves "and by this very means to transform both." The Way of Man, (London: Routledge, 1950, p. 6) We can realize our true humanity in relation, in "all that is lived in its possibility of dialogue." (Between Man and Man, p. 31.)

[15] Rothenberg and Quasha, America a Prophecy, p. xxxi.

[16] Ibid., p. xxxiv.

"American emphasis on the relationship of myth and history, of poetry and life, as the central meaning of a 'prophetic native tradition.'"[17]

Rothenberg maintains that "poetry is less literature than a process of thought & feeling & the arrangement of that into affective utterances."[18] That process "treats words--all words--as substantive, measurable, having each a certain weight & extension, roots of words holding them firmly to earth, . . . And since the words are "real" (being measurable by weight & extension), they may be called forth. . . ."[19] What happens

> is that something has been sighted & stated & set apart (by name or by description) . . . fixed, held fast in all this vanishing experience. It is this double sense of sighted/sited that represents the basic poetic function (a setting-apart-by-the-creation-of-special-circumstances that . . . [Rothenberg] calls "sacralism") from which the rest follows---toward the building of more complicated structures & visions.[20]

The particulars of these "complicated structures & visions," for Rothenberg are the relation of image to vision, and the relation of vision to myth and history, in particular the

[17] Ibid., pp. xxxiv-v.

[18] Rothenberg, Technicians, p. 405.

[19] Ibid., p. 392.

[20] Ibid., p. 397.

relation of "poetic" vision to American and America's history. Rothenberg's manifesto is clear:

> 1) I will change your mind;
> 2) any means (=method) to this end;
> 3) to oppose the "devourers" = bureaucrats, system-makers, priests, etc. (W. Blake);
> 4) "& if thou wdst understand that wch is me, know this: all that I have sd I have uttered playfully--& I was by no means ashamed of it" (J.C. to his disciples, (The Acts of St. John)[21]

The manifesto can be understood, in Eric Mottram's words, "as part of that preponderance of the social fruitful action everywhere being rediscovered in America in the 1960s, to counter the cruel disasters of American colonial and domestic imperialism."[22]

In a "Craft Interview" conducted and published by The New York Quarterly in 1971, Rothenberg made his position explicit.

[21] Jerome Rothenberg, Manifestos (New York: Something Else Press, Great Bear Pamphlets Series, 1966), rpt. in Poems for the Game of Silence: 1960-1970 (New York: Dial Press, 1971), p. 53.

[22] Eric Mottram, "Where the Real Song Begins: The Poetry of Jerome Rothenberg," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 172. Hereinafter cited as "Song." Mottram's interpretation, although it was made with hindsight, is supported by a number of comments Rothenberg has made, particularly those in reference to the Poland poems (see Poland/1931 [New York: New Directions, 1974]), and his reasons for writing them. See also Morris Dickstein, The Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties (New York: Basic Books, 1977), and Chapter 4 of this thesis, particularly p. 93 below.

> Poetry, it seems clear to me, grew out of a tribal and communal situation. . . . Poetry in a certain sense is a non-civilized thing. It is primitive in the sense that it is one of the first high developments in cultures that have not developed a political state. I don't think it ever really in any significant sense goes beyond that development. It always remembers its roots back in that primitive culture. It is a way of being in the world, and so the poet time and again in the history of civilization comes into conflict with established authority.[23]

The established authority with whom the poet comes into conflict is represented by the "devourers," the "bureaucrats, system-makers, priests."

Rothenberg arrived at this position partly via his work with "tribal" poetries. His interest in tribal poetries had begun while he was a graduate student at the University of Michigan and had continued into the 60s.[24] His main interest had been in the tribal use of image, and to find parallels to his own ideas about deep image.[25] His involvement with the tribal and ritualistic grew when he began, in 1964, to do readings of primitive poetry in New York City.[26] As a poet-performer he became involved in "the sort of literary

[23]"Craft Interview with Jerome Rothenberg," New York Quarterly No. 5 (Winter 1971), p. 9. Hereinafter cited as NYQ.

[24]NYQ, p. 9.

[25]Barry Alpert, "Jerome Rothenberg--An Interview Conducted by Barry Alpert with Charles Morrow Sitting In, New York City, January 2, 1974," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 104. Hereinafter cited as "Interview."

[26]NYQ, p. 19.

text that emerged when the happenings people had to get it down on paper." He began to see similarities of structure in tribal rituals and in happenings and that he could "pull out, from the fragments of a ritual, a scenario that resembled the scenario of a happening."[27] He found that the exploration of the "historically tribal" situation suggested "possibilities for things here and now: to work out certain kinds of relationships, and to pick up from the primitive song/poetry/ritual/chant the possibilities of new forms and ideologies."[28]

One of the new forms at which Rothenberg arrived is "total translation," a process of translation in which "words, sounds, voice, melody, gesture, event, etc.," are all accounted for "in the reconstitution of a unity that would be shattered by approaching each element in isolation."[29] Translation becomes "performance of total circumstances of composition . . ."[30] because, especially in the translation of tribal or "archaic" materials, a "full and total experience begins it, which only a total translation can fully bring across."[31]

[27]"Interview," p. 104.

[28]"Interview," p. 104.

[29]Jerome Rothenberg, "Total Translation: an experiment in the presentation of american indian poetry," Stony Brook No. 3/4 (1969), p. 301.

[30]Mottram, "Song," p. 171.

[31]Rothenberg, "Total Translation," p. 301.

Rothenberg had approached the translation of tribal materials as a poet rather than as a cultural historian,[32] and realized that "the primary concern has to be, as with one's own work, the creation of poems--not a slavishness to the cultural boundaries of another person's language." Because people in different cultures think differently, there "are things which literally won't stand up when presented literally, without re-creation. . . ."[33]

Because the material with which he was working was often "an oral performance for which there was no written text," Rothenberg decided that "something that was inherently sung . . . chanted, could finally define its form in English only through an equivalent to that: through something that was also sung."[34] He had learned in trying to translate Seneca and Navajo chants, "that there must also be a way of translating the word distortions, the nonverbal sounds." There was something Rothenberg "wanted to do with poetry that had dimensions other than the verbal. Obviously all poetry has other than verbal dimensions. But poetry that comes out of . . . chanting, poetry that can't be separated from its performance, would finally call for a more intensive effort at translation."[35]

[32] NYQ, p. 19.

[33] Ossman, p. 30.

[34] "Interview," pp. 105-6.

[35] Ibid., p. 108.

> As with most Indian poetry, the voice carried many sounds that weren't, strictly speaking, "words." These tended to disappear, to be attenuated in translation, as if they weren't really there. But they were there & were at least as important as the words themselves. In both Navajo & Seneca many songs consisted of nothing but those "meaningless" vocables (not free "scat" either but fixed sounds recurring from performance to performance). Most other songs had both meaningful & non-meaningful elements, & . . . were often spoken of, qua title, by their meaningless burdens.

These "meaningless vocables", Rothenberg learned, "might in fact be keys to the songs' structures: something usually disregarded, the refrain or so-called 'nonsense syllables' . . . in fact of fundamental importance . . . [as] both structural clue & microcosm."[36]

It is necessary to translate "totally" because "a poem in another language . . . takes the place of an immediate inspiration out of a life experience." To make a poem, either one's own, or a translation, is to "'translate' things and experiences into words, to apprehend them in a sense no longer foreign but accessible as something of one's own."[37] This understanding of the poem provides the theoretical link between total translation and the making of "original" poems.

The work in Sightings, for instance, attempts to expand

[36]"Total Translation," p. 292. George Santayana in Interpretations of Poetry and Religion (New York: Harper, 1957), p. viii, made a parallel remark: "Mythology cannot become science by being reduced in bulk, but it may cease, as mythology, to be worth having."

[37]Ossman, p. 29.

"image" to carry a variety of possible visions via the interplay of speech and silence.[38] The images are to be read so that "an equivalent area-of-silence" is created "around each phrase or succession of phrases" so that "the spaces between the phrases . . . represent a silence equal or proportional to the duration of each succeeding phrase."[39] Sightings attempts to "condition the rhythm of the work as a whole . . . [so that] the play of images through time" and the disposition of those images, their "progression & intersection," achieve an event which is "like carefully timed explosions or releases of energy."[40] Sightings was, according to Rothenberg, "a final step in the process of deep image," which allowed him to explore "which alterations in language brought with them alterations in consciousness." Rothenberg was trying to achieve "a structure . . . sans further comment."[41] In such a performance, as in the

[38]Jerome Rothenberg, Sightings, (New York: Hawk's Well Press, 1964) rpt. in Poems for the Game of Silence: 1960-1970, (New York: Dial Press, 1971) pp. 56-69.

[39]Eric Mottram in "Song," p. 170, makes an important point about the difference between hearing the Sightings and reading them: "In public or on tape the separated phrases gather tension, since the hearer feels that he has to milk the aphoristic information as well as feel the time as space. The distance combines the pressure on the immediate phrase with a sense of the phrase to come, as well as a listening to silence. . . . In private, the next phrase is visible, the tensions relax, and the poems appear more as a meditation sheet of objects for the reader's own resourcefulness."

[40]Jerome Rothenberg, Poems 1964-1967 (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1968), p. 12.

[41]"Conversation," p. 142.

tribal situation, Jackson MacLow points out that the poet is "pre-eminently the maker of the plot, the framework - not necessarily of everything that takes place within that framework! The poet creates a situation wherein he invites other persons & the world in general to be co-creators with him!"[42]

Rothenberg makes the parallels clear in a commentary to the I Ching in Technicians, when he discusses the I Ching in terms of the possibilities of "a kind of tension, energy, etc.', generated by the joining of disparate, even arbitrary images." Echoing the description of the Sightings as a "progression & intersection" of images to achieve "carefully timed explosions or releases of energy," Rothenberg speaks of correspondences in the I Ching which interact to create changes; "every change a measurable burst of energy." He senses that such "series of 'correspondences' [are] a handy ancient manual of poetic process (of all those levels of vision Blake spoke of). . . ."[43] Like the Sightings, the "manner in which the I Ching tends to look upon reality seems to disfavour our [Western] causalistic procedures." The "configuration formed by chance events in the moment of observation" is of more interest than "hypothetical" coincidences.[44] Thought "of this kind, when applied to the

[42] Technicians, p. 419.

[43] Technicians, p. 401.

[44] "Technicians," p. 490. The incomplete reference for the quotation is given as: "C.G. Jung, Foreward to Wilhelm's I Ching, p. 111."

field-of-the poem, defines that field both in primitive/ archaic & in much modern poetry." "Synchronicity" thus becomes "a principle of composition" which links many "modes" of poetry with "the whole world of non-sequential & non-causal thought." Rothenberg remarks on the parallel between our awareness of these possibilities in both archaic and in contemporary work with our awareness of the contemporary developments in physics, in "which anything-can-happen."[45]

Many of the works which are collected in Poems 1964-1967 are of an experimental nature. Further Sightings (1967) demonstrates the broadening of Rothenberg's conception of the poem to include the possibilities of "concrete" materials, and particularly the possibilities of distortions of word and line that he had explored in his translation experiments.[46] This is carried through in A Steinbook & More, in which Gertrude Stein's longstanding influence on Rothenberg and her "games with logic and aphorism are present."[47]

To Eric Mottram, the "space-time-silence diagrammatic forms, and the dedication of the second set of Sightings to Ian Hamilton Finlay suggests the shifts in procedure towards the concrete poem."[48] This move, and its relation to

[45] Technicians, p. 490.

[46] Ibid. See also pp. 398, 407, 408.

[47] Mottram, "Song," p. 170. Cf. "Interview," p. 111, Technicians, p. 385. See also Jerome Rothenberg, Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of the American Avant Garde Poetry, 1914- 45 (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), "Preface," for a delineation of Rothenberg's idea of Stein's importance.

[48] Mottram, "Song," p. 170.

Rothenberg's awareness of pictograph, and hieroglyph, is clarified in the "Pre-Face" to his translation of Eugen Gomringer's collection of "concrete" poems, The Book of Hours & Constellations. In the "Pre-Face" Rothenberg prints an excerpt from a letter to Gomringer in which he makes the connections clear.

> You speak of constellations, Finlay speaks of corners, I speak elsewhere of combinations--but always it's a question of making the words cohere in a given space, the poem's force or strength related to the weight & value of the words within it, the way they pull & act on each other. The poetry shows this beautifully; the problem of translation is related to it also & throws its own clear light on how & why we translate.[49]

Rothenberg's interest in doing the Gomringer translation may have been related, as Eric Mottram claims, to Gomringer's "use of words as particles in rituals, a procedure Rothenberg had already discovered in ethnic poetries . . ." and to the forms of the poems, in which "diagrammatic statements [are] surrounded by space-silence." Although Gomringer's works are "completely contemporary, they are related to archaic and ethnic procedures"[50] in a way that is similar to the multi-media effects of song/chant/movement/picture in tribal rituals. By extrapolation from the

[49]Eugen Gomringer, The Book of Hours and Constellations: Poems of Eugen Gomringer Presented by Jerome Rothenberg (New York: Something Else Press, 1968), p. iii.

[50]Mottram, "Song," p. 170.

experiences of the tribal situation Rothenberg had learned that, to quote Hugo Ball, "The word & the image are one. Painting & composing poetry belong together."[51]

The concern with the visual had occurred early in Rothenberg's work. In 1962 he had published The Gorky Poems which Eric Mottram saw as, above all other work, "the seminal and connective book for Rothenberg's development at this stage. . . ." Rothenberg's concern with Gorky's paintings was "their metaphoric movement between representation of the object and abstraction in terms of over-all development of design and colour."[52] Rothenberg believed that the "structure of suspension in time & space" in his poems "isn't unrelated to Gorky's own workings."[53] What interested Rothenberg "was Gorky's obviously transitional relationship to abstract painting; i.e. that while the paintings were clearly abstract there was a residue of quasi-identifiable, quasi-semantic shape . . ." which is paralleled by the word distortions and image/line distortions in "archaic" materials.[54] In the Sightings and in The Gorky Poems Rothenberg was approaching the mixed media work he did in the

[51] Technicians, p. 408. The quotation is from The Dada Painters & Poets, ed. Robert Motherwell, p. 52.

[52] Mottram, "Song," p. 140. See also Jerome Rothenberg, The Gorky Poems (El Corno Emplumado, 1966) rpt. Poems for the Game of Silence, pp. 96-115, or Poems 1964-1967, pp. 75-101.

[53] Rothenberg, Poems 1964-1967, p. 101.

[54] Jerome Rothenberg, "Ian Tyson: A Homage," Open Letter Fourth Series No. 1 & 2 (Summer 1978), p. 127.

1960s with various artists, particularly Ian Tyson, and the whole series of mixed media performances associated with the Poland poems.[55] In Rothenberg's words, Tyson's work in the 1960s was "abstract in appearance, but with a curious sense of semantic reference that drew him to a kind of en face translation of existing verbal texts. . . . An abstract art that kept a base in language . . . a hard-edge art that sought its roots in mythic 'dream-time'."[56] Through the late 60s Rothenberg and Tyson collaborated on a number of mixed media "texts" which culminated in their work on Songs for the Society of the Mystic Animals which Rothenberg "had already translated . . . as essentially concrete poems (translated them into concrete poems, since the originals are purely oral) . . ." in an attempt to create "a meditative visual field: as the tantrist yantra is the classic visualization of the oral mantra. The intention here was to make the words and image one . . . and to make their later contemplation into an actual performance, a meditative action on the viewer's part. And that in itself I took as an actual commentary on the nature of American Indian song and vision."[57]

[55]Rothenberg, "Ian Tyson: A Homage," p. 128, and Poland/1931 (New York: New Directions, 1974).

[56]Rothenberg, "Tyson," p. 128.

[57]Rothenberg, "Tyson," p. 131. See also "Shaking the Pumpkin: Songs & Other Circumstances from the Society of the Mystic Animals (Seneca)," English versions by Jerome Rothenberg and Richard Johnny John, in Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas, ed., with commentaries, Jerome Rothenberg (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1972), pp. 15-42.

Mystic Animals as a performance piece and as a collaboration is the epitome of what Rothenberg had looked for when he began his exploration of the "historically tribal," the "possibility of an interchange between the forms . . ." and the possibilities of trying "to work out certain kinds of relationships, and to pick up from the primitive song/poetry/ritual/chant the possibilities of new forms and ideologies."[58]

The ideological content of the interchange is expressed in ethnopoetics, a movement away from "conventional poetics" and the implications of conventional poetics and towards "a poetry of utterance" which is transnational, transcultural, and transtemporal, and in which the "irrational" and the "sacred" are no longer ignored. Joachim Wach's definition of religious experience presents a summation of an ideology which is, in a sense, embodied in ethnopoetics.[59] In Wach's words, the experience

[58]"Interview," p. 104.

[59]Such parallels are made frequently in discussions of both poetry and religion. For instance, Gary Snyder, in "Poetry and the Primitive: Notes on Poetry as an Ecological Survival Technique," in Earth House Hold (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 118, makes the point that: "Music, dance, religion, and philosophy of course have archaic roots--a shared origin with poetry." George Santayana, in Interpretations of Poetry and Religion (p. v.), maintained that "religion and poetry are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry."

> is a response to what is experienced as ultimate reality; that is . . . we react not to any single or finite phenomenon, material or otherwise, but to what we realize as undergirding and conditioning all that constitutes our world of experience . . . a total response of the total being to what is apprehended as ultimate reality. That is, we are involved not exclusively with our mind, our affections or our will, but as integral persons . . . [in] the most intense experience of which man is capable.

Such integrated experience, as Rothenberg has pointed out in the anthologies of ethnopoetic materials, involves, in Wach's words, "an imperative, a commitment which impels man to act."[60]

That action, for Rothenberg, is the presentation of a unifying vision which will allow the re-integration of the experience of the sacred and of "the symposium of the whole" into contemporary American life. Part of that vision is the integration of the "archaic" and the "Romantic" into the Anglo-Protestant vision of America. Such an integration is one level at which the ethnopoet "comes into conflict with established authority." What distinguishes the ethnopoet from the Romantic visionary is his attempt to integrate the "authentic speech" of the "ethnoi" into the Anglo-American "tradition" in all ways & at all levels, thus bringing contemporary American consciousness and self-consciousness into closer correspondence with the "prophetic native

[60]Joachim Wach, Types of Religious Experience, Christian and non-Christian (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 32-33.

tradition." Such an act requires a reinterpretation of the past for it is only such reinterpretation that will enable us to make a new vision of the present and thence the future. Rothenberg's vision, like the shaman's, is designed to heal and integrate. It is an attempt to "change your mind," and in thus changing, or attempting to change the mind of the reader/participant, the poet, like the shaman, "makes everything happen."

Chapter 4

Poland

Rothenberg's work is a fine illustration of the concept, which underlies ethnopoetics, that everything is related to everything else. This is particularly true of the Poland poems which incorporate earlier work.[1]

The Poland poems were begun in the mid-Sixties. Rothenberg dates his realization that he should have been "possibly going in that direction" to a conversation "around 1959 or 60," in which Robert Duncan pointed out to him the possibilities of dealing with his own tradition and of using

[1] Jerome Rothenberg, Poland/1931 (New York: New Directions, 1974). The Poland poems are a group of poems collected in the New Directions edition but which appeared at various times in other works or as separate books (see bibliography.) For instance, "Satan in Goray: A Homage to Isaac Bashevis Singer," appeared first in A Steinbook & More, then in the first instalment of Poland/1931 (Unicorn, 1969), is reprinted in Poems for the Game of Silence (Dial, 1971), and is then reprinted in the New Directions edition of Poland/1931 which is both a collection of the Poland poems and an expanded version of the materials. If Rothenberg's thesis that the positioning and juxtapositioning of a poem in relation to a variety of surrounding materials makes a difference to our reading of the poem, then "Satan in Goray" ought to be amenable to different readings when it appears in A Steinbook, when it appears in the Unicorn Poland, and when it appears in the New Directions collection.

Jewish materials.[2] He had so far ignored that tradition and those materials, and it was only after he had completed a large amount of work on the tribal and ethnic materials that he could come to his own ethnicity as material for his work.

Rothenberg has also insisted, in both the New York Quarterly "Craft Interview," and in conversation with Barry Alpert, that the desire to write the "ancestral" poems was related to the Viet Nam War, in that he felt that America had developed into something "repulsive," and that he had "a desire violently to disassociate myself from any kind of naive American identification."[3] A revealing autobiographical and socio-cultural perception arises in the Alpert interview when Rothenberg explains that: "At that point, after having denied in some ways the ancestry, I wanted very much to take hold of it, as if what it was that pushed one toward those denials in America no longer made sense."[4]

Another important stimulus towards Poland was a meeting with Paul Celan in Paris. The possibility of doing a book of translations of Celan's work had arisen. Celan questioned Rothenberg repeatedly about his "credentials to work on his [Celan's] poetry . . . a specifically Jewish

[2]"Jerome Rothenberg--An Interview Conducted by Barry Alpert With Charles Morrow Sitting In, New York City, January 2, 1974," Vort No. 7 (1975), 114. Hereinafter cited as "Interview."

[3]"Interview," p. 114. See also the "Craft Interview with Jerome Rothenberg," New York Quarterly No. 5 (Winter 1971), p. 18. Hereinafter cited as NYQ.

[4]"Interview," p. 114.

challenge: was I 'Jewish' enough to do them?" Rothenberg had already "started on the Poland poems by then," and "partly from the confrontation with Celan . . . it began to take form as a kind of ongoing work."[5]

Rothenberg "had been working on the presumably exotic primitive poetries and there were . . . challenges: as somebody asked Olson . . . why do you go to another culture to get your myths?" For Rothenberg there was a whole Jewish "reservoir of myth and poetry."[6] Finally, partly because of the Viet Nam War, it seemed to Rothenberg "no longer worth very specifically not being Jewish or not being what I was ancestrally to have a share in the American present."[7] There is also an understated but central question which underlies the impetus towards "ancestral" poems: "if the Jewish poetry in this century had developed instead of being cut short, what would the Jewish poetry be?" Rothenberg's answer, in part, was to "create the imagined, the desired, poetry, and with that, an image-of-the-world. . . ."[8]

The Poland poems incorporate a great deal of what Rothenberg learned in the technical experiments such as Sightings and A Steinbook, in the translation and total translation work, and in the experience of massing together a great

[5]"Interview," p. 115.

[6]"Interview," p. 114.

[7]NYQ, p. 18.

[8]"Interview," p. 115.

variety of ethnic materials. By the time he came to write the Poland poems he had a sense of his own poetics and a sure feeling for the possibilities of persona and voice, of which he makes great use in this series.

The Poland poems are a conscious attempt to incorporate varied and various source materials. In a sense the work is purely autobiographical although Rothenberg is firm in his denial of autobiography.[9] The autobiography is that of a cultural experience filtered through the perceptions of a particular poet. Rothenberg told Barry Alpert that "Poland is the self as much as possible in terms of ethnos: a kind of participation mystique in something very old. It's all extremely specific to what I am, but it's not what you think of as autobiography."[10]

Poland/1931 is Rothenberg's vision of the transplanting of Polish shtetl culture to America, its evolution there, and its meeting in America with other cultures. In Harris Lenowitz's words, the Poland poems "deal with the new facts of Jewish life in America, movement to this new life from Eastern Europe and existence in Eastern Europe, the mythologised ancestral beginning, viewed as continuous with the new life."[11] The series is a work of Rothenberg's imagination; the details are those which are meaningful to Rothenberg for

[9] NYQ, p. 10.

[10] "Interview," p. 115.

[11] Harris Lenowitz, "Rothenberg--The Blood" Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 180. Lenowitz is a sometime collaborator of Rothenberg's as with "Gematria 27."

reasons the reader may intuit but cannot know because the links of the "narrative" are often omitted. It is, however, Rothenberg's experience of the New York Jewish community from 1931, the year of his birth, onward, that informs the work, and Rothenberg's imagination which invents details and particulars of a Poland which existed more in the imagination of the new Americans exiled from it than it did as a physical place.

The poems are also autobiographical in the sense that they are Rothenberg's most openly self-revealing poems. They "make present" not only Poland but Rothenberg in a way that few of the earlier works do. It is not that Rothenberg's earlier works are less honest but that they are more obscure, more involved with existing mythologies or other people's myths and symbols, and more involved with technical experiment, as in the works collected in Poems 1964-1967, than the Poland poems seem to be. That is not to say that the Poland poems are not heavily "worked" and well-crafted, or that they do not make use of existing myths and symbols. They are, however, less an illustration of Rothenberg's technical facility and more a revelation of his own imagination and myth-making abilities than many of the early works.

Although in the Poland poems Rothenberg chooses to speak through a variety of personae, the voice which speaks through those personae is clearly his own. He allows the reader access to his dreams, his imagination, his fantasy world. He makes these present without apology or embarrass-

ment. What the poems lack in elegance they make up for in clear and "authentic speech."

There is a unity to the work in the series too, a unity of voice and of vision which is lacking in the middle, experimental pieces, where the thread which binds them is technical and experimental. It is as if in the experimental works Rothenberg had been serving an apprenticeship and in the Poland poems he has learned to trust his own voice, to be less concerned about illustrating his theories or testing them, and rather to trust that he has mastered technique adequately so that he can simply say what he wants to say.

In relation to trusting his own voice, the Poland poems are closer to the work in White Sun Black Sun than to many of the intervening works. Both books are highly structured formal statements but their structure and formality are quite different. The poems in White Sun Black Sun are often elegant at the expense of narrative clues. They are well-wrought and demonstrate what Rothenberg had learned from his readings. The Poland poems are perhaps more formal, in that the whole series constitutes a formal conceived structure, but the excruciating experiment with form of the Sightings is gone; in the Poland poems the technique is incorporated, taken for granted as a tool rather than functioning as a central reference point for the work. The poems provide, with modification, an illustration of Olson's idea that form is an extension of content, although in Rothenberg's case it is impossible to say, as Olson said, that "form is never any

more than an extension of content."[12]

The content of the Poland poems is Rothenberg's personal vision of the personal and public/private experiences of a group of characters who straddle half the world, one foot in an eighteenth-century mystical tradition lived out in material poverty, the other foot planted firmly in America, an America almost mystical for them, an America almost unknown to them beyond the confines of New York, but an America in which they believed nevertheless with a fervour perhaps transferred from their frequently abandoned religious mysticism, in a way they had never believed in Poland while they lived there. Having once arrived in America, they proceeded to mythologize Poland in much the way they had mythologized America when they had lived in Poland. Many of them, confined to New York City, or even to the Lower East Side, held onto both myths with a fervour once reserved for yet another mythical city, Jerusalem. Rothenberg's Poland shares in the reality of all three myths, combines and confuses them.

In the Poland poems, as in Rothenberg's imagination, America is given a reality by being named and called forth. The space and place embody both a mythical America and a mythical Poland and become more "real" in being portrayed and called forth than either place can be for the inhabitants who know only small corners of the actuality except insofar

[12]Charles Olson, "Letter to Elaine Feinstein, May, 1959," rpt. in Donald M. Allen, ed., The New American Poetry (New York: Grove, 1960), p. 397.

as they are able to imagine. Thus Poland/1931 is a full-blown mythical structure, and it is a myth of America in which the ethnoi are fully incorporated, as it is a myth of a community which has ceased to exist in Europe or in America in this century. Rothenberg described this creation. "I'm trying to reconstruct for myself a world to which I am both closely connected . . . and from which I am at a great distance, with no possibility of returning. Therefore something to be reconstructed by the imagination."[13] What Rothenberg has been "trying to do in various ways is to create through those poems an analogue, a presentation of the Eastern European Jewish world from which . . . [he] had been cut off by birth, place and circumstance," and to which he no longer has "any way of returning because it doesn't exist in that place any longer."[14]

The keys to the Poland poems individually and as a series are given in "Poland/1931: 'The Wedding,'" which opens both the Unicorn and the New Directions editions of Poland/1931. The poem opens:

[13]"Interview," p. 116.

[14]"Interview," p. 116

my mind is stuffed with tablecloths
& with rings but my mind
is dreaming of poland stuffed with poland
brought in the imagination
to a black wedding
a naked bridegroom hovering above
his naked bride mad poland
how terrible thy jews at weddings
thy synagogues with camphor smells & almonds
thy thermos bottles thy electric fogs
thy braided armpits

Poland is stuffed with Poland, a surfeit in the imagination, for this is a mythical Poland which inhabits the actualities of Poland, and both exist in the imagination. In the imagination a black wedding occurs, occurs again and again like a mythic event. The event is ritualized doubly, for the wedding is black. From the third poem in the New Directions collection, "The Key of Solomon," the reader finds out that Rothenberg is using classical symbolism to equate black with Saturn. The black wedding is a saturnalia at which the naked bride and bridegroom are visible. The absurdity of this doubly imagined situation becomes obvious in the lines which follow, "mad poland/how terrible thy jews at weddings." The idea of a Jewish wedding in Poland as a saturnalia is an obvious inversion, and this inversion is carried through the whole idea of saturnalian chaos. If there is an orgy, it is an orgy of tablecloths, except in the imagination, for the Polish Jews were the most religious in Europe, and males and females were strictly separated at weddings, as they still are among the Chassidim. There is yet another level of saturnalia, to which Rothenberg may be referring obliquely: this is the celebrations of the Chassidim who sang and danced towards

mystical vision in what, to an uninvolved observer, might well appear to be an orgiastic celebration.

The obvious irony and absurdity being witnessed in the poem become clear in the ensuing lines, and with "braided armpits," the poem comes gasping to the ridiculous, the ironic, the fantastic, the conception of the imagination. The ironic intent is clear in later references in the poem, for example in the line, "thy silks are linens merely," and in "let thy oxen's dung be sugar to thy dying jews. . . ." Poland is envisioned as a mythical centre of the universe on a par with Jerusalem, a sacred centre where, however, the "saints unbuttoned," repeat "endlessly the triple names of mary . . ." and where the "grooms shall work ferociously upon their looming brides/shall bring forth executioners. . . ."[15] The Poland of these poems is the Poland of the imagination, among which are scattered bits and pieces of material gathered from "reality" such as "true" stories, "factual" narratives, details of people's lives, family

[15]Kevin Power, "Conversation with Jerome Rothenberg," Vort No. 7 (1975), 149. Rothenberg quotes from a poem which speaks "of the Seneca view of the world & of an old hebrew (sic) version of it:"

a city on
a turtle's back
a long house

was like Jerusalem
's temple resting
on a whale

The poem appears in Rothenberg's A Seneca Journal (New York: New Directions, 1978), p. i, where it appears under the title "Salamanca A Prophecy."

reminiscences, ideas and details from old Yiddish novels, "letters, histories, pictures, images coming out of pictures, old family postcards, other pictures of Jewish Poland. . . ."[16]

"Cokboy," a poem which appeared in Poetry Review (London: Spring, 1972) and in America in Caterpillar (1973), has been described by Eric Mottram as one of Rothenberg's "major culminative poems," in which "an inherited mythological reality," coheres,[17] and in which Rothenberg celebrates "the interactions of Jewish and other cultures towards a prophetic 'America;'. . . ."[18] "Cokboy" appears as the final poem in the New Directions edition of Poland/1931 and brings into clear focus the myths and realities to which many of the other poems in the "ancestral" group refer. "Cokboy," is a full example of the upside-down world of the saturnalia which is explored in the Poland poems, and in it the myths and symbols which are common to many of the other poems in the group are subsumed.[19] As an instance of upside-

[16]"Interview," p. 116.

[17]Eric Mottram, "Where the Real Song Begins: The poetry of Jerome Rothenberg," Vort No. 7 (1975), p. 178. Hereinafter cited as "Song."

[18]Mottram, "Song," p. 178.

[19]Rothenberg has explained, in this instance to Kevin Power and in reference to Sightings ("Conversation," 145-46), that, "if the mind is trapped by certain structures & ideas that act against its own desires & necessities it's often forced to overthrow them in order to begin again meaningfully on the task of reconsidering what one is & what one can do. The Iroquoian term, turning-the-mind-upside-down, is used in an old ritual that involves the guessing & acting out of

down-ness, true to the overall theme of Saturnalia, "Cokboy" demonstrates

> the tendency to "confuse forms" by means of the inversion of the social pattern, the juxtaposition of opposites and the unleashing of the passions--even in their destructive capacity. All this is a means not so much towards pleasure as to bring about the dissolution of the world in a momentary disruption . . . of the reality principle, alongside the corresponding restoration of the primigenial illud tempus.[20]

In "Cokboy," as Eric Mottram says, "the Jew, that fantastic recipient and generator, has become a cowboy among Indians, an American enjoying this amalgamation endlessly surprised by the intersection at which he lives. . . ."[21]

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dreams. Dream represents the wishes & desires of the soul & the dreamed reality is viewed as the mind in the state of being upside down. In other words things happen in dream contrary to the waking reality. Then, having dreamed, one enters into a ceremony of acting out the dream. In other words, the condition of being upside down is brought from the dream life into the waking life, so that instead of being at odds with the dream & the desires of the soul, one becomes at one with them. . . . The best modern formulations I know of have always involved vision & structure (or the breaking down & building up of structures). And the one simple idea that connects the two--turning things upside down, turning the world upside down--provides a term that's inclusive & certainly more useful than talking about image on the one hand & the movement of the line on the other. All of this, ultimately, looks towards a single process of transformation & change, which is directly relevant (as it was for the Iroquois) in the larger context of changing & transforming our experience of the world."

[20] J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols tr. Jack Sage, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 233. The reference is to Mircea Eliade's Tratado de historia de las religiones (Madrid: 1954).

[21] Mottram, "Song," p. 179.

In "Cokboy," as in the entire series of poems, Harris Lenowitz tells us that the "overall thrust . . . is towards acceptance of fluidity, sex, violence, etc., with all its felt dangers. (The Baal Shem becomes 'Cokboy' though he suffers the becoming in a still hostile gentile world, in which he shares the death of native Americans and other tribal people.)"[22]

Mottram points out that in the Poland poems, the

> "deep images" are drawn from a rich soil of personal experience, ancestral memory, and an historical bank of located mythological objects, characters, customs, and rites. . . . And most especially [in] "Cokboy" . . . Rothenberg really strides into his confidence with long compositions which gather momentum, climax rhythmically and materially, and conclude, in true ceremonial style.

Mottram also notes that this material, which combines Rothenberg's "Indian and Jewish work is a profoundly American celebration. . . ."[23] In it, Harris Lenowitz points out that "the oldest Poland-of-the Jews and the newest America-of-the Jews are linked through adherence to 'The Code of Jewish Law,' which is both Rothenberg's poem on this, and the title of the book from which he gathered the

[22]Lenowitz, "The Blood," p. 184. Lenowitz continues: "This thrust in Rothenberg begins to appear much earlier, in the Gorky poems. . . . Then becomes located in the Jewish experience."

[23]Mottram, "Song," p. 178. Cf. "The Dreamers," in A Seneca Journal, pp. 83-9, particularly parts 3 and 4.

fragments." And, as Lenowitz perspicaciously points out: "so you shouldn't think that all these adhering Jews, Polish and American, observe the restrictions of the Code, I should say that for all of us awareness of the system presented in the Code is adherence, whether we follow the rules as given, re-interpret them or choose to oppose them altogether."[24]

There is truth in what Lenowitz says and this truth reflects the upside-down quality of the American Jews who fled Europe in search of religious freedom. As well, it adds a further dimension of irony to the Poland poems in that Rothenberg may be speaking to and for the last generation of Ashkenazim for whom such a statement is true. Such observation in the breach however is central to Rothenberg's Poland in the same way that the inversion of the law and order of the actual world is central to "Cokboy" and to other poems in the group.

The inversion is clearly established in "Cokboy" in the repetition of the complaint that "dis place . . . /has all the letters going backwards . . ." an obvious pun on the relation of Hebrew to English orthography and a key too to the problems the messiah/Baal Shem/Indian/Christian encounters in trying to "read the signboards/to the desert. . . ."[25]

[24]Lenowitz, "The Blood," p. 180.

[25]Jerome Rothenberg, Poland/1931 (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 144. All subsequent references to "Cokboy" are to this edition, pp. 143-51.

Rothenberg tells us that

> when the Baal Shem visited America
> he wore a shtreiml
> the locals thought he was a cowboy
> maybe from Mexico[26]

and then proceeds, with puns, wit, and irony, to confuse the Baal Shem with the Indians, Christians, captains, commanders, delicious madmen, and a whole host of American characters in an American landscape in an American world in which Cokboy, an American Moses/messiah/progenitor, echoes the vision of the final poem of the Seven Hells in which myth, symbol, and reality intersect, interact, and interpenetrate to integrate diverse cultures in a unifying vision. "Cokboy" thus echoes Rothenberg's early works as well as serving as a bridge to the Seneca materials which follow the ancestral poems.[27]

When, in "Cokboy," Rothenberg asks the rhetorical question, "vot em i doink here?" he echoes the questing of "A Little Boy Lost," in White Sun Black Sun, and the Blakean image of "I have no way of turning now, no door." The difference is that the persona who speaks the lines has changed considerably in the intervening years. The persona in White Sun Black Sun is earnest and almost fully Romantic. "Cokboy" presents us with the trickster, the character who turns things upside down.

[26]A "shtreiml" is a large broadbrimmed hat favored by male Chassidic Jews.

[27]See Rothenberg, A Seneca Journal (New York: New Directions, 1978), and The Notebooks (Milwaukee: Membrane Press, 1976).

The trickster is a figure of great complexity and appears in a number and variety of North American Indian legends in a great number and variety of guises and disguises. Ruth M. Underhill describes the trickster as "a fantastic figure who was the very focus of the mythical age . . . the man-animal whose power rose sometimes to the height of creation. In some tales he transformed the world from wilderness to a fit habitation. In others, he plays clownish tricks."[28]

Karl Kroeber, in "Deconstructionist Criticism and American Indian Literature," analyses the figure he calls "Trickster-Transformer" in a number of Indian legends. Kroeber has ascertained that

> Trickster-Transformer appears in a multitude of roles between creator and clown. And the mythical age for which he is focus is a timeless time intervening between an original creation and the appearance of man as we now know him in the world as we now know it. Thus in all ways Trickster-Transformer is "between," even as he is principal among those like but unlike men, man-animals. He may be said to serve, above all, transformations of mythical into historical reality. Among American Indians, Trickster-Transformer emerges in diverse guises--spider, raven, bluejay, mink, coyote, the hero . . . and perhaps even disguised as a woman for homicidal purposes.[29]

[28]Ruth M. Underhill, Red Man's Religion (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 35.

[29]Karl Kroeber, "Deconstructionist Criticism and American Indian Literature," Boundary 2, 7, 3 (Spring 1979), 74. Hereinafter cited as Deconstruction.

In one of his better-known guises, the Trickster-Transformer figure is known as Coyote. One cannot say, as Kroeber points out, that Coyote "means 'so and so' because he always also means something else: in his meaning one thing the power to mean another is implicated. He is too tricky to be abstractly identified. He transforms . . . any definition of him even as he provokes one into making a definition."[30] Coyote "embodies capacities to change from one reality into another, demonstrating the power which makes possible transforming of one actuality into another, as when one passes from dreaming to waking. This capability binds him to essential cultural processes, which are specific fashions of defining and evaluating modes of reality and their interrelations."[31]

In the words of one teller of the legend, "Through stories everything is made possible." Kroeber comments that this is "specific, not a vague generalization: through stories everything of the Navajo way of life is established. Through its stories the subtlest dynamics of a culture are realized, affirmed, taught."[32]

In European culture, "The Fool" in the Tarot pack is perhaps the closest parallel to the figure of the trickster. The Fool is the "final enigma of the Tarot, distinguished from the others because it is un-numbered . . . the significance of this is that the Fool is to be found on the fringe

[30] Kroeber, "Deconstruction," p. 74.

[31] Op. cit., p. 78.

[32] Op. cit., p. 83.

of all orders and systems." In order to "try to invert the prevailing evil order . . . to regain health and goodness it becomes necessary to turn to the dangerous, the unconscious and the abnormal. . . . Further, the Fool and the clown, . . . play the part of 'scapegoats' in the ritual sacrifice of humans."[33]

The parallel figure in Jewish legend is the "chochem," an inverted use of the Hebrew word for a wise man. The word is used ironically and the meaning is usually clear from context. In North American Jewish culture, this figure has been reduced in stature to that of the "schlemiel," a bumbling incompetent who occasionally, like "The Fool," has moments of insight.

The stress on these figures and particularly on the significance and meaning of the Trickster-Transformer is due to the use that Rothenberg makes of the particulars and the structures of such myths in "Cokboy." Cokboy is the Trickster-Transformer. He appears initially as the almost schlemiel, the Jewish immigrant who can barely pronounce English. Cokboy gets "lost tzu get here" and yet he <u>is</u> here, is at once "a hundred men/a hundred fifty different shadows" who, like the Trickster-Transformer, is every one, no one, culture hero and clown, able to be in one and many places like the Fool or the Trickster, in various guises at once. Neither the place he got lost to arrive at nor his identity can be pinned down: he is legend, legendary, myth, and myth-maker,

[33]Cirlot, pp. 106-07.

me my grandfather
men with letters carrying the mail
lithuanian pony-express riders
the financially crazed Buffalo Bill
still riding in the lead
hours before avenging the death of Custer
making the first 3-D movie of those wars
or years before it
the numbers vanishing in kabbalistic time
that brings all men together

In short, he is "the very focus of the mythical age," and in coming to "bring the Law to Wilderness," he transforms "the world from wilderness to a fit habitation." But "the mythical age for which he is a focus is a timeless time . . ." and the mythical/mystical "kabbalistic time," in which events are telescoped by the creative and transforming magic powers of the storyteller who, in Navajo culture, makes everything "possible," and in Rothenberg's language, "makes everything happen."

In making everything happen Cokboy is at once the Baal Shem and a Mexican cowboy, a Jewish shaman and a trickster who, in the intersection of cultures will

search for my brother Esau among these Redmen
their nocturnal fires I will share
piss strained from my holy cock
will bear seed of Adonai
& feed them visions
I will fill full a clamshell
will pass it around from mouth to mouth
we will watch the moonrise
through each other's eyes
the distances vanishing in kabbalistic time. . . .

Thus the distances between those

> who threaten my beard your hair
> but patronize me
> & will make our kind the Senator from Arizona
> the champion of their Law
> who hates us both

and the Baal Shem and the Indian and the Mexican and the cowboy will all be resolved in "kabbalistic time" wherein such transformation "of one actuality into another," are possible.

In this time of transformations

> the vision of the Cuna nele
> the vision of my grandfather
> vision of the Baal Shem in America
> the slaves in steerage

all coalesce in one common vision, as time reverses and all the letters go backwards, "a reverse in time/towards wilderness. . . ." The Jew, the broken-lettered immigrant, is transformed as he becomes shaman, and "his spirit rushes up the mountainside/& meets an eagle . . ." that symbol of power, of reason and lucidity, symbol too of America, and perhaps of the soaring imagination. The eagle, now "Yiddified" as an "iggle,"

> . . . lifts him
> like an elevator
> to a safe place above the sunrise
> there gives a song to him
> the Baal Shem's song
> repeated without words for centuries. . . .

The transformation is complete in the transfer of the song, for it is language which makes "everything happen." The Indian chant, "hey heya heya" is translated into the

Baal Shem's "yuh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-bum," and the mythical America of the yearning Polish shtetl dwellers for Jerusalem/America is joined to the myth of the North American Indians. This transfer of songs implies the transfer of powers: the power of one kind of learning, of exegesis and mystical knowledge and prayer, is joined to the power of another kind of learning, to survival skills, and to the mystical knowledge of a different culture and the kinds of shamanistic powers of that culture.

From Poland or the steppes of Russia to the "Wyoming steppes," as in a dream, Cokboy has travelled through "kabbalistic forests" until he meets "an old indian," and "the prophesies of both join at this point. . . ." Thus the one/two or the "one hundred men/a hundred fifty different shadows," each bring remnants from his own culture, the peace pipe from one and the walnuts cracked against a rock in a handkerchief from the other. This part of the myth and "Cokboy: Part One," ends as "the fire crackles in the pri-pitchok/in a large tent somewhere in America/the story of the coming-forth begins."[34]

Like Coyote-Trickster-Transformer, Cokboy, in "Part

[34]"The fire crackles in the pripitchok," is an English variation of a line from a Yiddish song which is usually sung to children. The lyrics describe with nostalgia the "old country style" of instruction in the alphabet. The refrain calls for the repetition of "aleph, beth," the first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, thus the beginning of the "coming forth." The "aleph" and the ordering of letters and numbers has particular importance in "kabbalah."

Two," remains his indefinable self and everyone else. He appears at first to disguise himself as a woman, not for "homicidal purposes," but for the bringing forth of "a little Moses" who is also himself and the child of the Cacique's daughter. Cokboy is all of them, the mother, the father, the little Moses, the doctor at the delivery. It is a hard birth, "so hard the Baal Shem dreams about it. . . ." The Baal Shem, we are reminded, "was in correspondence with Wm. Blake/ appeared on Peckham Rye" and out of Blake's vision of America and out of the Baal Shem's vision and out of the Indian's vision, "America is born," hard, and Rothenberg provides the details of the new, transformed creation myth.

In this new made-in-America and made in imagination vision, Cokboy subsumes the culture of the ethnoi and presents it larger than life. He is still Coyote/Trickster, cowboy, and the Baal Shem Tov, but he has become, in addition, the biggest prick in America, COKBOY, symbolically the progenitor of mythic proportions. He is at once "like the great cock of the primal beings" and "myself my grandfather/(he sings) my name is Cokboy/---COKBOY, understand?" As COKBOY, creator, trickster, progenitor, culminative symbol, he "will be the Great Deliverer someday yuh-buh-bum. . ." of every thing and every one in America, even though America is now a "disaster" for his visions.

As it turns out, in trying to "invert the prevailing evil order," the disaster America has become, Cokboy, like the Fool, must "play the part of" the scapegoat. At the end,

no matter what his guise or disguise, he is silent, "silent in America" for, having spoken his vision, he's "got nothing left to say. . . ."

In Cokboy Rothenberg has created a persona from a variety of cultures and has synthesized a variety of myths to produce a new mythical progenitor, one who is at once the bringer of Law to the Wilderness and a part of the Wilderness. Rothenberg's theories and his conceptions of ethnopoetics, his vision of American history and his ideas about the interaction and intersection of image come alive in "Cokboy." In "Cokboy," the "despised," the "alien," the "ethnoi," are represented and presented not only singly but together, joined in one persona as father/inseminator of America. This is a vision and a personification of American history and a vision Rothenberg offers for the future. In "Cokboy" Rothenberg tries to re-mythologize America, to present the "other" face of history. The "stories" Cokboy tells are meant to present an alternative vision of America and of American history. The poem tells us that we are dealing with an admitted inversion. We are in that place of myth and legend where everything reads backwards, and thus the tales the poet tells are no less "true" than the "objective truths" the historians would have us believe.

Cokboy is no more unlikely than the Anglo-Protestant white vision of a white America. He may in fact be rather more likely a progenitor. The absurdity of his claims demonstrates the absurdity of the claims he is created to counter.

Cokboy's claims for himself are so far outside the accepted version of American history that they must, in their very absurdity, be taken seriously. The irony is that the myth of America as being an almost uniformly Anglo-Protestant white culture has been built in part on claims which, through Cokboy's eyes, we see as equally absurd. The American myth of black sexual power has been used to spread real fear, to provoke terror. The same idea, presented by Cokboy as a claim and a boast, is patently silly. Once we have recognized that such an idea is silly, can we ever again fail to recognize its silliness when it is presented in a different context? If we do recognize the absurdity of an idea, whatever its legendary status and proportions, when it has been transposed to another context, then Rothenberg has succeeded in following his program. He has changed our minds.

The power and complexity of "Cokboy" and of the other Poland poems is related to this mind-changing. Rothenberg, true to the poetics of deep image, works at several levels simultaneously, and via juxtaposition of concepts and images changes our vision with his suggestions for alternative readings of reality. This is exactly the technique he used in the anthologies of ethnopoetic materials in which context in part determines content. It is a technique Rothenberg also used in the Unicorn edition of Poland/1931, in which poems were printed on separate leaves of paper which could be moved around, interposed, and juxtaposed. This technique

of juxtaposition is also an extension of the image/silence/line experiments of the Sightings. "Cokboy" is thus a major work for Rothenberg because in it he brings together his theories and demonstrates how they work in practice.

Cokboy is a major character for Rothenberg because in Cokboy Rothenberg brings together the various personae he had explored and lets them speak through one culminative persona. It is not only the mythical elements which find a point of confluence in Cokboy. It is also Rothenberg as Jew, Rothenberg as ethnopoeticist, Rothenberg as "alien poet," Rothenberg as shaman, and Rothenberg as visionary. The "I" in "Cokboy" is all the "I"s of Rothenberg's preceding poems. To Cokboy Rothenberg commits the "eye" of all those other poems, the vision and visions contained in and made present by them.

Yet while Cokboy is a mythical figure of mythical proportions, he is not an archetypical figure in the Jungian sense; rather he is stereotypical, and this, as Rothenberg has claimed all along, is the basis of his mythical proportions. The idea of archetype forces us to look into the private unconscious of the individual for the bases of myths. The idea of stereotype forces us to look at a culture, a collectivity of individuals, for the bases of myths. Such an idea echoes Buber's idea of "community" and "dialogue."

Buber saw the roots of reality in "man with man." Metalanguage and metastructure are irrelevant in such a conception of reality. Out of dialogue and community, reality is

born, and myth and poetry are the keys to that vision of reality, for they are forms of communication between people. The poet thus functions as myth-maker and myth-keeper, as an inventor of reality, and this is obviously Rothenberg's understanding. The shaman or myth-keeper functions within a tribe however, and for the tribe the myth is "true." Stereotype means recognizable "sets" of images, key words, names or phrases which clue in an attentive audience. In the case of North American Indian tribes, even "non-sense vocables" may serve. The attentive and participating audience recognize the meaning and the content of the stereotype because they have been taught to recognize it.

Archetype, on the other hand, implies a personal autonomous consciousness against which Buber offers community, a concept Rothenberg translates into tribal myth and ritual, in other words, stereotype. Rothenberg's argument then is against the "personal" or the "archetypal" interpretation of how reality is made.[35] Like Buber, he sees reality as function of learning or socialization, and of group or community, with emphasis on learned vision and myth which, according to both Kroeber and his sources, is how, via story, "culture is made possible."[36] Rothenberg's vision may be partially determined by his ethnicism, by the self-perceived "otherness." This appears to Rothenberg even in

[35] NYQ, p. 10.

[36] Kroeber, "Deconstruction," p. 74.

the banding together of poets who, as "alien\," defy their alienation by defining themselves as a community.[37]

It is to the ethnoi, and for them, that Rothenberg/Cokboy addresses himself. Like the shaman, he speaks both to and for them, perhaps "with" them, within a community of like-minded. Thus in Cokboy Rothenberg defines his constituency and integrates the ideal of shaman with poet by speaking within, to, and for, his self-defined community. In "Cokboy," Rothenberg is trying to produce the integrated persona and the integrator of stereotypes who, like the shaman, can "turn a condition of sickness to one of health," by constituting a corrective to the "white" view of American history by providing a new and healing vision for the ethnoi. Cokboy re-envisions history, and in re-envisioning, he revises it, revises the perspective from which we can see the future too.

As Rothenberg said in another context: "Imagine, to have a dozen powerful disease-curing stabilizers that have been dreamed by you."[38]

[37]Jerome Rothenberg, "Pre-Face to a Symposium on Ethnopoetics," Alcheringa New Series 2, 2, 6-9.

[38]NYQ, p. 36.

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