

Warlords of Atlantis: Chasing the Demon of Analogy in the America(s) of Lawrence, Artaud and Olson.¹

Mexico, as the modern site of revolution and the ancient site of blood sacrifice, is the gateway by which the North American continent opens onto a vision of the world in the works of D. H. Lawrence, Antonin Artaud and Charles Olson. Looking to the Mesoamerican history of human sacrifice that reaches its peak with the Aztecs, these 20th-century writers argue that in the post-World War era of Western civilization, as in the post-Conquest past of Mexico, the “new world” contains an “old world” that is systematically bent on human carnage. The common interest of these three writers in the history and archaeology of Ancient Mexico has as its larger literary-historical context the growing impact of the Ancient World—notably, of Classical and Biblical Antiquity—on the work of many influential writers in 20th-century literature (e.g. Joyce’s Ulysses, Pound’s Cantos, Kazantzakis’s The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, Broch’s The Death of Virgil, the short stories of Borges, etc.) at a time of spectacular expansion in the field of archaeology itself.

Of particular interest is the way in which the analogical arguments of Lawrence, Artaud and Olson, arguments that delve into Mexico’s past to shed light on a present moment in history, make reference to Atlantis. First appearing in Plato’s Critias and

¹ I would like to thank the Editors of CRCL/RCLC, and Anne Rosēn, for their contributions to the revision of my manuscript.

Timaeus, the image of Atlantis serves a twofold function in the works of these writers.² On one hand, Atlantis evokes a heterogeneous archaic panorama that extends beyond the confines of Ancient Greek culture; according to Plato, the tale of Atlantis, as recounted to Solon by the priests of Sais, stands already recorded in the annals of Egyptian civilization. Atlantis is a metaphor for the rich and diverse spectacle that is the Ancient World, and represents the archaic itself as a new literary technē and historiographic tool. Specifically, the Atlantean stratum in Mexico's past represents a particular subset within a global "archaeologicistic" field that underlies post-romantic, and especially modernist, literature.³ On the other hand, Atlantis also refers to the Ancient Greek world implicit in the archaic's etymological origin in the Greek word archē--a word whose earliest use is associated with the oldest extant fragment in Greek philosophy, the so-called "Anaximander fragment."⁴ Given archē's two meanings--"beginning" (first in time) and "rule" (foremost in authority)--at issue in the Atlantean terrain of Mexico is the setting into historical context of a present-day, hegemonic Greek inheritance. The three writers perceive this inheritance as defective, and hold it accountable for the mass killing that traumatized the 20th century.

² Hart Crane's The Bridge (1930) is another example of a poetic project that explores archaic (North) America and opens onto Atlantis. That Crane spent the last year of his life in Mexico (before committing suicide) is an indication of the Mesoamerican implications that his work had yet to examine.

³ For a discussion of the interrelation of literature and archaeology in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Spears.

⁴ Anaximander, the first Greek writer of prose, is also the maker of the first map, or mappa mundi. See Barnes, 19-37.

The image of Atlantis also presents the unique feature of referring to a “lost continent.” As a result, Atlantis invariably points to a global, or planetary, perspective that not only encompasses geological and natural history, but that also allows for the expanded vista by which human history includes prehistory, and becomes the history of the species. Thus, as a continental landmass that contains Mexico, and that invites speculation on the “lost continent” of Atlantis, the image of North America, for Lawrence, Artaud and Olson, gives rise to the notion of a global discursive field that spans human society since the late Pleistocene, and onto which can be projected the general terms of an economy of sacrifice, as epitomized by the Aztecs. By the same token, moreover, the planetary frame of reference that Mexico introduces identifies the North American continent as a rhetorical site that provides access to the global territory overseen by post-Socratic discourse--which territory is the sphere of influence for a hegemonic Western civilization centered in/on the United States during its 20th-century ascent to power. The North American perspective achieved on the archaic site of Mexico is primarily intended to give rhetorical force to the articulation of a present moment’s historical, paradigmatic significance. Lawrence, Artaud and Olson see humanity “migrating” towards a new historical reality: ultimately, for all three writers, the setting-into-place of a global American paradigm in the present preserves as arch-corollary an archetypal American paradigm in the past--beyond Revolutionary Independence in the late 1700s, beyond Renaissance Conquest in the late 1400s (and beyond the “Greek miracle” of the 5th-century B.C. implicit in both)--that evokes the Bering Straits of the Ice Age, and that stages the primal encounter between a nomadic, migrational homo sapiens sapiens and the spectacle of nature as “new world.”

The rhetorical forces brought together by the Atlantean conjunction of pre-Columbian Mexico with a contemporary Americanized world are first harnessed by Lawrence.⁵ His project looks back to the unprecedented success (for a coal miner's son) of Sons and Lovers (1913), and to the crowning accomplishment of The Rainbow (1915) and Women in Love (1920), and completes the work of the so-called "leadership" novels, Aaron's Rod (1922) and Kangaroo (1923). Lawrence's thoughts about Atlantis are introduced in 1918, as part of the introductory essay "The Spirit of Place" in an earlier edition of his 1923 Studies in Classic American Literature (Arnold 15-31). A revised version of this essay subsequently (re)appears as the foreword to Fantasia of the Unconscious (1922), the companion piece to Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (1921). From the beginning, Atlantis and the United States are mutually incorporated in Lawrence's critique of a contemporary mindset: the value attributed to an Atlantean "old wisdom" and "forgotten knowledge" (Study 13-14) remains linked to a post-"Classic" vision that sees the United States as the site of both dysfunction--"a false dawn," "the negative ideal of democracy" (14)--and of potential fulfillment ("IT, the American whole soul"). Subsequently, in light of his foreword to Fantasia and his essays on the unconscious, Lawrence turns to Mexico, past and present. The result is an American phase in Lawrence's fiction (1922-1926) that includes the stories "The Woman who Rode Away," "St. Mawr" and "The Princess," and that culminates in the novel The Plumed Serpent (1926), a roman à thèse in which the Mexican Revolution is re-envisioned in terms of a new

⁵ Lawrence made two trips to the United States and Mexico: the first from September 1922 to November 1923, the second from March 1924 to July 1925; cf. Ellis, 100-121, 204-240.

religion and theocratic state, both of which are promoted by central characters who act as the living incarnations of Aztec gods.

In his approach to Mexico's archaic past, Lawrence, unlike Artaud and Olson, conceives of Atlantis as a pre-diluvian nexus of human migration in the Ice Age. Citing Thomas Belt's The Naturalist in Nicaragua (1874), in the foreword to Fantasia of the Unconscious (12-13), he works his vision of Atlantis into the narrative of The Plumed Serpent:

[Kate] had a strange feeling, in Mexico... [of] the days, perhaps, before the Glacial period... When great plains stretched away to the oceans and countries rose above the oceans, like Atlantis... so that the seas were only great lakes, and the soft, dark-eyed people of that world could walk around the globe... Till the glaciers melted, and drove the peoples to the high places, like the lofty plateau of Mexico... Sometimes, in America, the shadow of that old pre-Flood world was so strong, that... [she] would begin to approximate the old mode of consciousness. (Serpent 414-15)

Lawrence's theory of Atlantis as a submerged continent in the mid-Atlantic (a theory since discredited) reflects the still largely speculative nature of the archaeology of the Americas during his time. Indeed, an air of illegitimacy and pseudo-science hovers over this branch of archaeology from the time of John Lloyd Stephens's travelogue illustrated by Frederick Catherwood, Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan (1841), up until the first large-scale excavations in Central America after the turn of the century, under the auspices of Harvard's Peabody Museum (viz. at Copan, in Honduras). Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was not uncommon for archaeologists working in Mexico to link Mesoamerican civilization not only with the Lost Tribes of Israel or the ancient

civilizations of India and China, but most notably with the legend of Atlantis. This latter trend serves as the basis for Ignatius Donnelly's Atlantis: The Antediluvian World (1882), a popular best-seller in its day (reprinted some fifty times since), which retraces all Mesoamerican civilization to the southward migration of Atlantean refugees chased out of North America by "natives."

The speculative nature of the archaeology of the Americas is a telling indication of its marginal status in the field of archaeology, during Lawrence's time and after. As Glyn Daniel observes, over the thirty-year editorship of its founder, O. G. S. Crawford (from 1927 to 1957), the journal Antiquity contains "very few articles or news about America" (187); and despite early 20th-century excavations at Chichen Itzá and at Teotihuacán's Pyramid of the Sun--and also at the Inca site of Machu Picchu in Peru--there remains a general perception among archaeologists that pre-Columbian America is "outside the mainstream of history" (Gordon Childe), "peripheral and of no interest to anyone," "barbaric" (Mortimer Wheeler). As with the archaeologists of his day, in other words, an issue in Lawrence would be a certain resistance to the cultural, pre-Contact otherness that is always already America. Although Lawrence's intention, in turning to Mexico, is to impart archaeological authority to his understanding of the "old mode of consciousness," the larger background of his work remains the archaeological spectacle that is the Old World's rediscovery of itself--a public spectacle that reaches its high point with the excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922, two months after Lawrence's arrival in America. Embedded in Lawrence's "Atlantis"--as a link between continents--is a received Atlantic connection to the Eurocentric idea that America remains the cultural off-shoot of

Europe's Graeco-Roman, Judaeo-Christian tradition, a tradition originating at the ur-site of civilization in the Fertile Crescent.

Lawrence's Atlantean re-invention of the Mexican Revolution in The Plumed Serpent is the culmination of a project that suppresses the otherness of Mexico's pre-European societies in order to address the suppressed otherness of an "old mode of consciousness" within Western society. Of interest, in this respect, is the way in which Lawrence's project mirrors the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Like the Laurentian project, the Mexican Revolution presents itself not only in opposition to the scientism and "positivism" of an inherited Western legacy, but also as the aspiration to a cultural rebirth based on the return to an archaic heritage.⁶ Lawrence wants to import the energies of the Mexican Revolution into the Western world as a whole: just as the Mexican Revolution aims to re-integrate the otherness of Mexico's indigenous cultures into a new national identity--at a time when archaeology is beginning to reevaluate the historical import of Mexico's pre-Columbian civilizations--so does Lawrence's fictional re-imagining of the Mexican Revolution intend to revive within Western consciousness the otherness of a pre-diluvian sensibility still discernible in Mexico. What both projects have in common, then, is not only the recovery of a suppressed archaic otherness, but also the perception that it is the same Western tradition, going back to the Renaissance and to Classical Antiquity, that is responsible for this suppression and its consequences.

How the historiographic mis-recognition of archaic otherness is also at issue in the Mexican Revolution itself is highlighted by the Mexican poet and critic Octavio Paz, in the

⁶ See Krauze, 239-403.

postscript that he appends some twenty years later, in The Other Mexico (Postdata, 1970), to his own narrative of Mexican history in The Labyrinth of Solitude (El laberinto de la soledad, 1950). In the latter, Paz articulates an analogy between “the Mesoamerican world at the beginning of the sixteenth century,” and “the Hellenic world at the moment when Rome began its career of universal domination” (90). He then argues that, beginning with the Conquest, the “double violence, imperial and unifying... of the Aztecs and the Spaniards” (100) gives rise to recurrent twin phases of “solitude and communion, reunion and separation” (147) in a “dialectic of solitude” that shapes the course of Mexican history --from Conquest to Independence to Dictatorship to the fiesta that is the Mexican Revolution, and up to the present. By contrast, in the concluding section of The Other Mexico, “Critique of the Pyramid,” written in response to the 1968 massacre by police of hundreds of rioting students in the Plaza of Tlatelolco, the analogy between the Aztec and Roman empires serves as vehicle for the more salient issue of the violence done to “otherness” in order to achieve “oneness” (287-289). The “dialectic of solitude” becomes the “implacable dialectic of the pyramid” (320), which Paz criticizes as “the secret domination of the Aztec model” at the heart of a “petrified” National Revolutionary Party. Paz’s contention is that the mis-recognition of the archaic “other”--an “other” that precedes a present sense of cultural or political “oneness”--will always threaten the societies of the world with destruction and self-mutilation.

Lawrence’s American project anticipates Paz’s view of the Mexican Revolution’s historical significance, while at the same time illustrating the error that Paz subsequently addresses. Clearly, when Paz states that 20th-century Western civilization finds its closest analog in the stepped pyramids and sacrificial platforms of México-Tenochtitlán (307-08),

he is working on the very ground that Lawrence was first to break.⁷ For Lawrence, as for Paz, the model and inspiration for the Mexican Revolution remains the European Renaissance's recuperative move beyond Christianity to Imperial Rome and Rome's Greek archē. Just as the Renaissance establishes a Classical Graeco-Roman model of Antiquity as the basis for Western identity, so Mexico, in its bid to rediscover a Mexican archē, establishes its own cultural and political continuity with pre-Colombian Mesoamerica. For Paz, however, that continuity rests on a fundamental Mexican misidentification with the "original" Mexicas (i.e. the Aztecs), and represents the "thread of domination" of the Aztec model in Mexican political life; referring to the earlier, pre-Nahua cultures of the Mayas, the Zapotecs, the peoples of Teotihuacan and El Tajín, among others, Paz asserts that "in no way do the Aztecs represent the culmination of the diverse cultures that precede theirs" (323). In parallel terms, the same argument applies for Lawrence to the Classicized Greece of Plato and Aristotle, relative to the diverse civilizations of the past. To emulate and conform to the Graeco-Roman cohesion of a Classical tradition, without heed to the presence of other archaic traditions, and to the "thread of domination" that this cohesion preserves, is tantamount to worshipping a false Aztec idol.

The issue on which Paz contradicts Lawrence concerns the pervasiveness of human sacrifice in pre-Columbian societies. Criticizing the "ingenuousness" of certain contemporary archaeologists, Paz dismisses the notion that the theocratic city-states of pre-Nahua Mesoamerica lived "in an epoch of universal peace" (302). While blood sacrifice, by its scope and intensity, ultimately marks Aztec society as "one of history's aberrations"

⁷ Paz refers to Lawrence as "one of the profoundest and most violent critics of the modern world" (Labyrinth 66-7).

(307), there is no historical basis to support a Mexican-inspired “return to the golden age... located in a remote past” (Labyrinth 206-07). Lawrence’s age of Atlantis represents an originary “oneness” that is premised on the erasure of Mesoamerica’s history of sacrifice. By this erasure, Atlantis becomes the pre-diluvian site that simultaneously enables/disables the historical coherence of the “old mode of consciousness.”

While Lawrence’s two treatises on the unconscious are intended as a polemical response to scientism in general, and to Freud in particular, their redeployment within the Mexican context of The Plumed Serpent advances Lawrence’s model of the unconscious as a contemporary approximation of the Atlantean “old mode of consciousness” (cf. Serpent 126-27). In keeping with both Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious, in which Lawrence explains his system of the “chakras” (Psychoanalysis 234) that constitute the “fourfold polarity” (233) of the unconscious, and with Fantasia of the Unconscious, which elaborates what could be called a more elaborate “eightfold” model of the unconscious, Lawrence subordinates the mythopoetic world of The Plumed Serpent to an archetypal (Atlantean) rule of balance and order from which the modern world stands removed. Without detailing Lawrence’s model, it seems clear that the problems that his “eightfold” unconscious presents stem from the feminization of the “solar plexus” and of the “sympathetic” axis, and the corresponding masculinization of the “lumbar ganglion” and of the “volitional” axis (Psychoanalysis 97).⁸ By assigning gender values to the basic polarity informing his model Lawrence arrives at the socio-political imperatives of “wife-submission” (Fantasia 127) and “supreme leader” (“society tapering like a pyramid,” 182), the two guiding

⁸ Lawrence’s model follows the 18th-century neuroanatomic theories of Marie-François Bichat and Marshall Hall. See Haywood.

concepts that mark his American fiction at every turn. The feminization of the “solar plexus,” and the subordination of “wife” to “husband,” suppress the constitutive primacy of the “solar plexus” in favor of a symmetrical, sexually bipolar model whose working order and social viability are assigned phallic authority from the onset. Rather than compensating for “wife submission” and counter-acting the suppression of the “solar plexus” constitutive status (as Lawrence would have it), “supreme leader” compounds that suppression in the formal closure of his model.

Premised on the twin principles of “wife-submission” and “supreme leader,” The Plumed Serpent sets out to correct a psychic imbalance in contemporary society that would stand at the opposite extreme from the psychic imbalance manifest in Aztec society. The novel presents Kate, the protagonist, as the incarnation of the “solar plexus” (“the apple of the belly, with its deep core,” 126) in her subordination to the “eightfold” unconscious as a whole, embodied by the “historian and archaeologist” (58) Don Ramón as the “Living Quetzalcoatl” (the Plumed Serpent), and to the “lumbar ganglion” in particular (“loins,” 127), embodied by her husband, the general Don Cipriano, as the “Living Huitzipolochtli” (God of War). Thus calibrated, the narrative of The Plumed Serpent re-imagines a Mexican revolution in which the religious return to an archaic identity advances the Atlantean proposition that “only the Natural Aristocrats of the World can be international, or cosmopolitan, or cosmic” (248). In Lawrence’s intended magnum opus (“My most important novel so far”),⁹ the threatened sovereignty of the archaic as phallic origin defensively adds a supremacist, fascist strain to a fictional project that is fundamentally sexist.

⁹ Introduction, Serpent, xix.

The final impact of Lawrence's theory or philosophy of the unconscious on the art of The Plumed Serpent is a foreclosed resolution that is literally anti-climactic--Kate's renunciation of the "satisfaction" that is orgasm ("Succeeding the first moment of disappointment, when this sort of 'satisfaction' was denied her, came the knowledge that she did not really want it," 422). The ancient, Atlantean nature of the sexual "knowledge" that Kate finally comes to possess is suggested by the pelagic references to sea foam and Aphrodite. Similar imagery attends to the description, earlier in the novel, of Kate's spiritual awakening in the course of a ritual dance for the new Quetzalcoatl.

If Kate has "her sex and her womanhood caught up and identified" (131), it is only insofar as the "pure sliding conjunction" between Lawrence's theory and the action of his novel suppresses the frictional, contradictory forces that beset his model.¹⁰ Given her decision to stay in Mexico and be part of a revolutionary, neo-archaic government, the ironic contortion of Kate's closing thoughts--"You don't really want me" (443); "What a fraud I am! I know all the time it is I who don't altogether want them;" "You won't let me go!" (444)--replays the return of the repressed as anti-climax in Lawrence's American unconscious.

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Just as both the limitations and the innovations of the Laurentian project that culminates in The Plumed Serpent can be traced, on one hand, to the revolutionary climate

¹⁰ An image for the violence that mars the workings of The Plumed Serpent is the description of the body of a land manager, whose sexual organs have been "cut off" and "put into" the man's own mouth by "the peons" (101). The man's nose has been "split and pinned back, the two halves, to his cheeks, with long cactus spines." Encrypted in both of these images, taken together, is the figure of Lawrence's own "disabled mouth" and his failure to speak for the "vulva," represented by the bisected nose.

that still prevailed in Mexico (and that was compounded by events in Russia), and, on the other hand, to the burgeoning state of the archaeology of the Americas, so also do Artaud's and Olson's American projects reflect historic developments on both the political and archaeological fronts. Manifestly, the central upheaval accounting for the orientation and particularities of these three writers' respective projects is World War II and the perverseness of the "return to the archaic" that was Nazism: after Lawrence's text, during Artaud's, and prior to Olson's. After Lawrence, against the rise and fall of Nazism, what Mexico continues to offer as the possibility for art and revolution is the American image of an archaic past that still speaks to the present--a past that survives in the Tarahumaras for Artaud, in the Mayas for Olson. For the one writer as for the other, the context in which Mexico can still serve as the ground for the revolutionary work of writing necessarily addresses all history in something like the extreme terms of Olson's 1946 poem "La Préface:" "My name is NO RACE' address/ Buchenwald new Altamira cave" (Collected Poems 46). In its reference to the graffiti left by Buchenwald's prisoners ("With a nail they drew the object of the hunt"), "La Préface" not only announces the start of Olson's own career as a poet, but also, in line with Artaud's continued work on the Tarahumaras, the poem views humanity's radical, archaic commitment to the creative impulse as the most immediate means for contending with the midden of history.

When Artaud arrived in Mexico in 1936, the relative progress and stability of post-revolutionary Mexico stood in sharp contrast to the bleakness of the political situation in

Europe and the Soviet Union.¹¹ In “Le Rite des Rois de l’Atlantide,” chronologically the last piece--after “La Montagne des Signes”, “Le Pays des Rois Mages” and “Une Race-Principe”--from an initial group of articles in Les Tarahumaras written in Mexico during that year, the energies that Artaud begins to unleash by connecting Tarahumara society with the image of Atlantis are as much the expression of his association with surrealism as they are, concurrently, the result of his break with surrealism over the issue of its commitment to communism:

Le 16 Septembre, jour de fête de l’Indépendance du Mexique, j’ai vu à Norogachic, au fond de la Sierra Tarahumara, le rite des rois de l’Atlantide tel que Platon le décrit dans les pages du Critias. (OC 9:88)

Where Lawrence traces Atlantis back to the Ice Age, Artaud finds Atlantis in Plato’s Critias, at the very beginning(s) of the Western tradition, because it is that same tradition that he (like Lawrence) wants to target. As an early member of the surrealist group, Artaud participates in the larger movement of an avant-garde assault on language itself, i.e. language as the strategic ground overtaken and controlled by the Western discourse of reason. The reference to Plato points to language’s radical deficiency, to its incapacity as the vehicle for his innermost thought—a lifelong predicament that Artaud stresses at the onset of his career in his 1923-1924 correspondence with the editor Jacques Rivière (OC 1:23-46). More importantly, over and above the discrepancy between language and the objective order to which it lays claim, the problem for Artaud--and the source of his originality as a writer and actor--is the unrelenting physical pain that he suffers (“ma

¹¹ Artaud lived in Mexico for nine months (mostly in Mexico City), from February to October 1936, including a reported five-week stay with the Tarahumaras; cf. Barber, 73-86; Dumoulié, 77-88.

pression... ma congénitale tension ... mon exorbitante et aride oppression” OC 1:9) under the imposition of a discursive order that denies that discrepancy.

The surrealists’ dismissal of Artaud, starting with the 1927 tract “Au Grand Jour” and brought to term with André Breton’s Second Manifeste du Surréalisme (1930), belongs to the sequence of events that saw surrealism join the communist cause (Nadeau 261 ff). In his response to the first tract, “A la grande nuit, ou Le bluff surréaliste” (1927), Artaud reaffirms his artistic commitment to the cause of revolution, while at the same time pursuing his struggle with the limits of language by invoking a more pressing reality beyond the presumed “superior logic” (“telle logique supérieure,” Nadeau 279) of ideological constructs such as Marxism and its revolutionary enterprise. By and large, it is in the wake of this rupture with the politics of surrealism that Artaud set his sights on Mexico--beginning with the attention that he gives to the Aztecs in “La conquête du Mexique” (1933, OC 5:18-24) and “Le théâtre de la cruauté (Second Manifeste)” (1933, in Le Theatre et son Double, OC 4:118-124). A few years later, Artaud actually traveled to Mexico, where he visited the Tarahumaras Indians of Northwest Mexico and participated in their peyote rite. During his trip to Mexico, Artaud wrote the articles and lectures collected under the title Messages Révolutionnaires. More significantly, Artaud’s experience with the Tarahumaras remains the inspiration for a series of some seven supplementary texts included in Les Tarahumaras; they are written over the course of the remaining years of Artaud’s life (1936-1948), the first nine years of which (shortly after his return from Mexico) he spent in mental institutions. As a whole, the pieces that comprise Les Tarahumaras work toward a final statement of the importance assigned by Artaud to his experience of the peyote rite in “Tutuguri,” a text that re-appears, after a first version

included in Les Tarahumaras, as part of the 1948 radio play Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu (OC 13:65-104). As the expression of archaic America's global contemporary implications, the play opens with a satiric sequence concerning the U.S. war machine, and its newest feature: the government's establishment of sperm banks in American high schools (OC 13:71).

For Artaud, the will to revolutionary change that leads to Mexico operates on much the same premise as it does for Lawrence. At stake is a vision of social "progress" and of physical resilience that are lost to an Americanized Western world beholden to Platonic tradition, but that remain attainable by virtue of archaic traditions that have survived in Mexico:

...L'unique progrès réalisable consiste à conserver la forme et la force de ces [vraies] traditions. A travers les siècles, les Tarahumaras ont su apprendre à conserver leur virilité. (OC 9:89)

Moreover, for Artaud as for Lawrence, the survival and viability of these archaic traditions are confirmed by their genealogical tie to Atlantis: "Les Tarahumaras... sont pour moi les descendants directs des Atlantes" (9:88). The difference, for Artaud ("Lawrence a eu son idée, rien ne nous empêche d'avancer la nôtre," OC 8:129), is that language and the systemic order that it enables--be it Marxist doctrine for the surrealists or the "eightfold" unconscious for Lawrence--remain impossibly at odds with the "virility" and the corresponding body of knowledge that the Tarahumaras represent. Indeed, while the texts of Messages Révolutionnaires, as background to Artaud's writings on the Tarahumaras, underscore Mexico's potential for restoring lost "magic" to the world (OC 8:127, 131), their aspiration to cultural revolution remains haunted by a void ("vide"--143, 167, 226,

242). Artaud's "revolutionary messages" can only point to the archaic truth incarnate in the Tarahumaras by delimiting a concept or abstraction of the Tarahumaras (i.e. the Tarahumaras as "Race-Principe," OC 9:83-7), which in its discursive engagement with Western Platonic tradition does violence to their culture and archaic heritage; and this violence invariably has a void as its mark, as the site or the place of its passage.

Artaud's predicament consists in wanting to use language, despite its radical deficiency, as a means of conveying archaic truth. An indication of how pre-Columbian Mexico, and the Aztecs in particular, offer an historical image for the counter-hegemonic model of writing that Artaud deploys is suggested by the sacrificial violence that links Plato's kings of Atlantis to the matachín dancers of the Tarahumaras--"vétus comme des rois et avec une couronne de miroirs sur la tête" (OC 9:90). In both cases, the ritual violence involves the sacrifice and butchering of a bull, and the drinking of its blood. For the kings of Atlantis according to Plato, as for the Tarahumaras according to Artaud, not only is the bull's head at the end of the rite left lying on the ground in cosmic correspondence with the setting sun, but in parallel terms (i.e. Atlantean/Tarahumara) the rite itself is the occasion for "une mélodie lugubre" (89/91-92), sung in a spirit of remorse ("la forme d'un remords"/"une mélodie de remords") and contrition ("une contrition publique"/"contrition religieuse"). In keeping with a sacrificial logic to which the kings of Atlantis and the Tarahumaras both adhere, a sense of remorse is expiated through a sacrifice that marks the restoration of a natural "solar" order and that reestablishes ("mirrors") society's integrity as a reflection of that order. The ensuing Tarahumara dances reenact the original oneness that binds the Tarahumaras to their environment: "danses de libellules, d'oiseaux, de vent, de choses, de fleurs" (90).

The counter-logic of the sacrificial “solar” economy exemplified by the analogous rites of the kings of Atlantis and the Tarahumara dancers is examined within the special context of Aztec civilization by Artaud’s contemporary George Bataille, notably in his work The Accursed Share (La Part Maudite, 1949).¹² With respect to Artaud, the significance of Bataille’s concept of “general economy”--or “solar economy” (OC 2:10)--is twofold. First, the attention that Bataille calls to the close affinity between his own solar theory of “general economy” and the helio-centrism of Aztec society (Share 46-49) seems pertinent to the congruence that Artaud highlights between the Atlanteans and the Tarahumaras. In addition, the contradiction within Aztec society that Bataille discusses can serve as a point of contrast to the Tarahumaras as seen by Artaud.

For both Artaud and Bataille, at issue in a general or solar economy of sacrifice is a constitutive impossibility (or blindness) that has social and political implications. Bataille describes this impossibility as the one-way, superabundant flow of the sun’s energy over the earth: “The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy--wealth--without any return” (28-29). A “general economy” considers all production necessarily beholden to, and overcome by, surplus energy (“an excess of resources over needs” 45), and is consistent with archaic sensibility because it valorizes unproductive glory and favors the expenditure of energy; in contrast, a prevailing or hegemonic “restrictive economy” measures value in terms of production and gives

¹² Bataille wrote of Artaud’s committal: “J’avais le sentiment que l’on battait ou que l’on écrasait mon ombre” (Surya 98).

precedence to the acquisition of energy (29).¹³ Referring to the Aztec creation myth—where Nanauatzin, before an assembly of the gods at Teotihuacan, hurls himself into a brazier, to subsequently reappear as the rising Sun (followed by Tecuciztecatl, reborn as the rising Moon)—Bataille identifies the underpinnings of a “general economy” by which Aztec civilization maintained the sun as the supreme emblem of sacrifice. Sacrifice, for Bataille, thus coincides with its etymological roots (L. sacer + facere, “to make sacred”), in that it compensates a sacred world for the cosmic energy that servile use has degraded: it restores “lost intimacy” (57)—i.e. a sense of oneness and interdependence with the natural environment—to the profane social economy initiated by the utilitarian logic and future-oriented operation of human labor.

Likewise for Artaud: against the “restrictive economy” encrusted in language that he finds insufferable, he valorizes the solar economy exemplified by the kings of Atlantis and the Tarahumara dancers. No doubt, Artaud’s initial fascination with the Aztecs as the subject matter for his proposed “theater of cruelty” can be attributed to the spectacular pageantry with which they put the violence of sacrifice on display. At the same time, however, it is the “cruel” inescapable rigor with which that violence folds back, precipitating the collapse of Aztec civilization under the Conquest, that makes the Aztec downfall an exemplary “double” of the self-destruction that Artaud would like to catalyze within a contemporary power structure. In keeping with the intensity of Aztec blood sacrifice, the Aztec downfall can be traced to an increasingly violent state of socio-economic contradiction in which the mutual interdependence of “general economy” and “restrictive

¹³ A measure of the theoretical difference between Bataille and Lawrence is suggested by the title of Bataille’s early text, “The Solar Anus” (1927, OC 1:81-6), versus the “solar plexus.”

economy” is at play. In his examination of the historical link between sacrifice and warfare among the Aztecs, Bataille describes the Aztec obsession with blood sacrifice as the mark of a society at odds with itself--an Aztec warrior society, religious and given to uncalculated violence and ostentatious forms of combat, versus an Aztec military society, driven by the logic of conquest and the organization of empire (54-55). Through a “sacrifice of substitution” whereby the risk of a ruling monarch’s death befalls a sacrificial victim, the rationality of enterprise continues to haunt, with mounting horror, the religiosity of Aztec life. What the Conquest would then represent is the ultimate triumph of military society over warrior society, “restrictive economy” over “general economy.”

In contrast to the Aztecs, Tarahumara society for Artaud is a model of survival: not only do the Tarahumaras never succumb to the Conquest, but they remain true to the solar nature of their culture, and as such can be seen as genuine “descendants” of the Atlanteans. The larger point, as confirmed in “Le Rite des Rois de l’Atlantide,” is that the integrity of Tarahumara society is attributable to the unique nature of their environment (88). The Tarahumara landscape functions as a text in which all nature—the cosmos itself—speaks to humankind. Indeed, from the beginning of his writings on the Tarahumaras, in “La Montagne des Signes,” Artaud highlights the unique topography of Sierra Tarahumara, where the cosmic discourse contained in the earth’s natural formations depicts scenes of human torture and violence (“formes pathétiques... homme qu’on torture...thème de mort,” 43-45). It follows that the distinctive feature of Tarahumara culture is the sign system that Artaud finds marked onto the rock formations of the Tarahumara landscape in response to nature’s “cruel” discourse (e.g. “la croix ansée... la Double Croix... les deux triangles,” 79). By counter-signing the language in nature with a language of their own, the

Tarahumaras delineate the theme that organizes the natural images of tortured human forms, as these images appear in the arch-text that is the Tarahumara environment. Nature in the Sierra Tarahumara gives an image of the human suffering that ensues from the misrecognition of the structural binds that attend to language's representation of truth.¹⁴

Historically and politically, for Artaud, the Western philosophical tradition stigmatizes the language/landscape of contemporary discourse with the same figures of torture, massacre and war as are found in the Sierra Tarahumara. In response, Artaud does to language what the Tarahumaras do to the natural hieroglyphs in their environment: he marks them with his own sign system. Specifically, Artaud re-stigmatizes the language of his text by producing the gap of a discontinuous moment, a more or less momentous stop in which the reportorial flow of the narrative is temporarily jolted by a form of non-sequitur. Artaud "sacrifices" the language of argument in the very process of advancing his argument. In "Le Rite des Rois de l'Atlantide" this impact of the writing on the writing follows from the description of the sacrificial dance. The metaphors become increasingly disruptive ("fourmis planétaires," "chien malade," "chacal étranglé," 91-93). Other, more glaring instances of rupture in Artaud's early Mexican texts include the description of the uncanny discovery of giant human skeletons (79-80), and the use of a tabloid-like headline announcing the Tarahumaras' possession of "une Science à laquelle L'INTERVENTION DES ROIS MAGES EST LIÉE!!!!" (78). Above all, the most notorious textual jolts are those polyphonic, polyrhythmic elements of glossolalia (or glossopoesis) that characterize virtually all of Artaud's later writings (from the asylum at

¹⁴ In Derridean terms, Tarahumara culture is a discourse on khōra, in which nature functions as khōra. Cf. "Khōra," Derrida's commentary on Timaeus, Plato's other "Atlantean" text.

Rodez and after) and that appear in the closing section of Les Tarahumaras, “Une Note sur le Peyotl,” (“**sana tafan tana / tanaf tamafis bai**,” 118). These eruptions of glossolalia could be perceived as sacrificial moments in which the argument of the text is re-dispersed, re-disseminated across the topographical site of Tarahumara culture and its Atlantean tradition. Through an eruptive textual process that bursts into and out of glossolalia, in keeping with times of war and holocaust, madness and electro-shock, Artaud finds his measure and punctuation in blows of a-signification, on the chopping blocks of an American “theater of cruelty.”¹⁵

Artaud’s last texts on the Tarahumaras, the twin versions of “Tutuguri,” appear within roughly the same year as Olson’s first published collection of (five) poems, Y & X (1948). This collection, like Olson’s first major volume In Cold Hell, In Thicket (1953), opens with “La Préface” (“Buchenwald new Altamira cave”), the poem that stands as the clearest instance of his writing’s ideological rootedness in the moral collapse of Western civilization after World War II, the same cruel spectacle to which Artaud’s later writings on the Tarahumaras bear witness. In addition, “La Préface” is the most succinct exposition of the archaeological scale by which Olson proposes to elaborate an enduring poetic response to the trauma of global warfare. “La Préface” is complemented (in both collections) by “The K”--the poem in which Olson, after taking leave of the Roosevelt administration and abandoning his career in politics for the vocation of poet, sets his sights on an archetypal horizon that recalls the American frontier: “a man/ a bridge, a horse, the gun, a grave” (Poems 14). Significantly, Olson can also be credited at the early stage of his

¹⁵ For photographs of Artaud’s “chopping blocks” at Rodez, cf. Dessins et Portraits, 78.

poetic career for coining the term “post-modern,” an epithet that he uses throughout his work to denote the changed conditions that post-World War II writing must address, and for which a previous modern approach to writing--as exemplified by the work of Joyce and Eliot, Pound and Williams--remains inadequate.¹⁶ It is with the intention of becoming a self-styled “post-modern” poet that Olson turns his back on a career in politics, later assumes the rectorship of Black Mountain College, and subsequently sees his 1950 poem “The Kingfishers” open Don Allen’s seminal anthology, The New American Poetry: 1945-1960. As an archaic/post-modern project announced by “La Préface” and “The K,” a project that finds its constitutive bearings in the archaic terrain of America as “new world,” Olson’s body of work can be considered the culmination of both Lawrence’s and Artaud’s earlier (American) initiatives.

Olson follows Lawrence’s lead in identifying Mexico as the site of a rich archaic analog by which to target a dominant technological discourse that obstructs access to the sacred, but, like Artaud, he refuses the logic of any closed or overarching system such as the Laurentian “eightfold” unconscious. For Olson, as for Artaud, what archaic America offers is a sacrificial model of writing that expends--or “sacrifices”--the rational language of argument in order to advance an (anti-rationalist) argument. Compared to both Lawrence and Artaud, moreover, Olson benefits from significant developments in the field of archaeology (including the 1949 discovery of carbon dating), developments that allow him to impart new momentum to the breakthroughs of his predecessors.¹⁷ As an

¹⁶ For Olson’s notion of the “post-modern,” see Butterick’s Complete Correspondence (7:75, 115); also, Introduction, viii.

¹⁷ Cf. Daniel, 178-211; also, Willey and Sabloff, 152-242.

"archaeologist of morning" (Collected Prose 206-07), Olson is positioned to bring to his poetry the globalism and "post-modernism" of a Pleistocene perspective on history, from which he looks as far back as the discovery of fire and the invention of language to relocate humanity in the present.

Just as Atlantis figures at the beginning of Artaud's writings on the Tarahumaras, it also appears toward the end of Olson's Maximus poems, in the image of the Geological Society of America's 1957 map of the ocean floor:

Between Cruiser & Plato sea mountains and
just south of Atlantis Gloucester (M 3:205)¹⁸

The map marks the American culmination of Western technological discourse, that has "mapped" the world, as well as the final, posthumous unwinding of a twenty-year poetic project that would also assemble its own map of the world. The above map appears in a New Year poem dated "Wednesday, January 1st, 1969," and, as the mark of a new beginning, looks back to two beginnings: the beginning of the Maximus poems (the mapping of Gloucester), which is chronologically linked to Olson's trip to Yucatan and his investigations into pre-Columbian Mexico;¹⁹ and the cosmic/planetary perspective that opens up at the beginning of Maximus IV, V, VI (2:1), the "LEAP onto/ the LAND, the AQUARIAN/ TIME" (2:10).

¹⁸ The definitive edition of The Maximus Poems (M) includes: The Maximus Poems (1960), Maximus Poems IV, V, VI (1968), and The Maximus Poems: Volume Three (posthumous, 1975).

¹⁹ Olson stayed in Lerma, Yucatan, from February to July 1951; cf. Clark, 190-202; Maud, Charles Olson's Reading, 87-95.

In their engagement with archaic America, both the poem “The Kingfishers” (1950) and Mayan Letters (1953), a collection of excerpted letters written to Robert Creeley from Yucatan,²⁰ represent a convergence between the archaeological and American lines of force expressed by “La Préface” and “The K.” “The Kingfishers” stands as the expression of Olson’s poetic tenets on the eve of his departure for Mexico, and as the matrix from which the epic Maximus project comes to life. Olson’s purpose in “The Kingfishers” is to assemble a wide variety of source materials--e.g. from Heraclitus, Plutarch, Pound, the Encyclopedia Britannica, Nobert Wiener, Rimbaud²¹--under the sign of change (political and personal), as this sign comes to include references to William H. Prescott’s History of the Conquest of Mexico: notably, references to Montezuma’s encounter with Cortés (“the priests/...rush in among the people, calling on them/ to protect their gods,” Poems 89), to ancient Mexican burial ceremonies, to the Mother Goddess “Cioa-coatl” (90) and to human sacrifice (“what was slain in the sun,” 93). Olson’s projected global, prehistoric “hunt among stones,” in the poem’s final line, and his Mesoamerican focus on “what was slain in the sun” recall Lawrence. Indeed, both “The Kingfishers” and Mayan Letters remain deeply influenced by Lawrence’s work--by the foreword to Fantasia of the Unconscious, in particular,²² and by later texts such as The Escaped Cock (1929), Apocalypse (1931), and Etruscan Places (1932). Not only is Olson drawn to the “Laurentian act... [as] a combination both archaic and prospective” (Prose 136), but it is in light of the later

²⁰ For the full version of these letters, cf. Butterick, Complete Correspondence, vols. 4 (115-142), 5 and 6 (15-107).

²¹ See Maud, What Does Not Change.

²² “This book--as much as anything--got Olson to Mexico.” Maud, Reading, 87.

Lawrence that Olson aims to overcome the fascist strain in the poetic project of Ezra Pound.²³

Olson finds in the Mayan hieroglyphs historical validation for his poetics. As “abstract and formal” as they are “intimate,” the Mayan glyphs “[obey] the same laws that, the coming into existence, the persisting of verse does” (Mayan Letters 84). They are “worth remembering” (57) because they are consistent with the human will to “get it down” before the spectacle of a heterogeneous universe: “What continues to hold me, [sic] is the tremendous levy on all objects as they present themselves to human sense, in this glyph-world” (66). More importantly, in a post-Poundian context where “history is prime, even now” (30), the Mayan glyphs stand for the marshaling of a communal force toward social coherence, a coherence still manifest--despite their oppression--in the present-day Mayas (“the flesh is worn as a daily thing, like the sun... [and] the individual peering out from that flesh is precisely himself,” 40-41).

Olson elaborates on the Mayan glyph’s potential as a model for verse in his letter to Creeley of March 8, 1951, where he not only sets forth, contra Pound, his requirement for an “ALTERNATIVE TO THE EGO-POSITION” (“the EGO AS BEAK is bent and busted,” 27-28), but also discusses the figure of Kukulcan--the Mayan name for the Toltec priest-king Quetzalcoatl--an important and recurring presence throughout Mayan Letters:

...Are not the Maya the most important characters in the whole panorama... simply because the TOP CLASS in their society, the bosses, were a class whose daily business was KNOWLEDGE, & its OFF-SHOOT, culture?

²³ For a chronicle of Olson’s visits to Pound during the latter’s internment at St. Elizabeths, see Seelye.

that thus a man of K's temper & interest
could become Big Boss, & then, God? (32)

For Olson, Kukulcan ("K") is a euhemerist figure larger than life, a hero become Mayan god by virtue of a social and political afterlife. Significantly, as Olson first explains in his letter of February 19th, the central fact of "The Kingfishers" concerns Kukulcan's erasure, his absence: "KuKulCan [sic]—abandoned such, as part of THE K's and THE PRAISES, discovering this man's death, April 5, 1208 AD, who 'rose' with Venus, 8 days later, was sufficient unto itself..." (17). The reference is to the deletion of Kukulcan from a longer projected poem, "Proteus," and the resulting completion of two shorter works: "The Kingfishers," on one hand, and, on the other, "The Praises," a companion piece that takes Greek Antiquity and Renaissance Italy as its focal points. For Olson, Kukulcan—who is assimilated after death to the movement(s) of the planet Venus, and apotheosized for the Mayas within the larger workings of nature—is already spoken for in the social and cultural terms that Olson's poetics wants to re-imagine. In effect, if the spirit or afterimage of Kukulcan as "Big Boss, & then, God" can be described as presiding over "The Kingfishers," it is because his "temper and interest" remain the inspiration for a poetic stance that produces "KNOWLEDGE, & its OFF-SHOOT, culture" in a receptive community.

At the same time, however, the Mesoamerican environment that gives rise to Kukulcan remains historically indissociable from violence: "VIOLENCE--killing, the heart out, etc: those sons of bitches, those `scholars'[i.e. the 'Peabody-Carnegie gang']--how they've cut that story out, to make the Mayan palatable..." (23). In this respect, Kukulcan's excision from Olson's poem(s) also retains as its afterimage the spectacle of

Mesoamerican violence --i.e. “the heart out, etc.” The mark of Kukulcan’s absence remains violence, and it is this absence/violence that Olson explores in his subversive bid to circumvent the “EGO-POSITION.” The deletion of Kukulcan represents the removal of a personal “ego” as poetic authority, while giving rise to a larger-than-life narrative voice premised on the euhemerist stature of the Kukulcan figure.²⁴ This new voice provides the occasion for bringing a variety of perspectives--“dispositions, to reality” (ML 88)--together into the larger social unit that is the poem. Similarly, and in closer keeping with the epic sweep of Pound’s Cantos, by negating his authoritative presence through the agency of the 2nd-century figure Maximus of Tyre--doing “VIOLENCE” to his own “EGO-POSITION”--Olson brings Maximus of Gloucester to life in the archaic/post-modern guise of Kukulcan reincarnate.

Besides his letters to Creeley, Olson’s writing in the Yucatan consists of the second poem in The Maximus Poems and a second draft of the essay “The Gate and the Center” (1951). These works look back to “The Kingfishers,” as well as to the opening poem of the Maximus project, “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You,” and to Olson’s exposition of his poetics in the essay “Projective Verse” (1950). As the expression of the ideas set forth in “Projective Verse” regarding “the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego” (Prose 247), and the poet’s “projective act,” that will lead to “dimensions larger than the man,” the opening lines of “I, Maximus of Gloucester, To You,” recall Olson’s focus on

²⁴ In Mayan Letters (17, 19-20, 32-36, 42-47), Olson theorizes that the Toltec figure Quetzalcoatl represented part of a larger migration by sea from Tula to the Yucatan. The excision of the (imported) Mayan Kukulcan figure points concomitantly to the larger issues of sea travel and migration (ML 34) that Olson later pursues in Maximus. The Toltecs were ultimately glorified as “ancestors” by their Aztec conquerors, for whom Quetzalcoatl became the (vanquished) Aztec god who would return by sea as the harbinger of their final destruction. See Baldwin.

Melville and the American whaling industry in Call Me Ishmael (1947):

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

In the same way that the word “off-shore” signals a methodological self-disposition premised in opposition to a (surgically) removed “EGO-POSITION,” and “by islands” evokes the parallel between ancient Tyre and present-day Gloucester, the image of “a metal hot from boiling,” the “lance”--while suggesting a scalpel (Butterick, Guide 10)—also suggests a harpoon. Transiting from “The Kingfishers” to The Maximus Poems, Olson draws upon Melville in addition to Lawrence (“the matter here is to isolate the work of these two men,” ML 88). Indeed, Melville becomes something of a guiding spirit for The Maximus Poems’ investigation into the rise of American power (“of 900 whaling vessels of all nations in 1846, 735 were American,” Ishmael 19) and the progress of Western “economic history” (117) chronicled by Moby Dick.

In sum, both the Mexican orientation of “The Kingfishers” and the American orientation of the poems that begin to constitute Maximus are predicated on a poetic voice that would bring a plurality of voices together into a whole greater than the sum of its parts. While essays like “The Gate and the Center” or “Human Universe” (1951) present arguments reminiscent of Lawrence and Artaud in their valorization of the archaic, and in their criticism of a present-day post-Classical, post-Renaissance—or, post-Mediterranean, post-Atlantic (Ishmael 117-19)--“universe of discourse,” the originality of the Maximus

poems proceeds from the way they amass information in order to situate humanity within an ever-expanding vision of the world. The larger-than-life “ego”-less figure of Maximus gives voice to a (post-Homeric) text that becomes rhapsodic,²⁵ a form of patchwork (Gr. rháptein, “to stitch” + ōidē, “song”). Olson later discovered an apt description of his own methodology in the term parataxis (“words and actions... set down side by side in the order of their occurrence in nature, instead of by an order of discourse or ‘grammar,’” Prose 355-56). Through the accumulation and stitching together of detail, the Maximus poems open onto wider horizons that establish Gloucester as the geo-historical site from which Olson/Maximus surveys and addresses the Heraclitean disorder of his time: “I stood estranged/ from that which was most familiar” (1:52). Correspondingly, the contemporary state of estrangement decried in the Maximus poems underscores the importance of “the proximate” and leads to the “topological law” by which the proximate is remade familiar: “we require mapping” (Prose 356). Tracing the history of Gloucester back to its foundation in 1623, and chronicling Gloucester’s rise (and demise) as “once the largest fishing port in the world” (Muthologos 2:10), the first volume of the Maximus poems, and the decision to “start all over” (M 1: 150), culminate in a series of “maps” in “Letter, May 2, 1959” (“125 paces Grove Street/ Fr E end of Oak Grove cemetery/ to major turn NW of/ road...”). The maps are assembled as part of a larger effort to gain an historical overview of Gloucester’s present significance in an American world order.

²⁵ Cf. “Maximus, to Gloucester: Letter 15: “--I sd, ‘Rhapsodia’” (1:68); also Butterick, Correspondence, 3:135.

The movement from the “maps” of Gloucester, at the end of the first volume, to the map referred to in the posthumous The Maximus Poems: Volume 3 (3:205),²⁶ that ascribes the topographical name “Atlantis” to a seamount in the North Atlantic, makes manifest another distinctive feature of Olson’s method, by which his paratactic text becomes telescopic. Olson’s pursuit of America as geo-historical subject matter conforms with Melville’s “unique ability to reveal the very large (such a thing as his whale...) by the small” (Prose 123). Olson’s Melvillean concern is central to his poetics, notably in the attention to “the smallest particle of all, the syllable” (Prose 241) and to the “place of the elements and minims of language” described in “Projective Verse.” The earlier Maximus poems’ preoccupation with minutiae and detail ultimately arrives, through a sort of quantum leap, at the planetary, cosmological vista of the later volumes. Maximus’s “leap .../ off the porch.../ into the snow” (2:1), at the onset of Maximus IV, V, VI, thus coincides with a “LEAP onto/ the LAND, the AQUARIAN/ TIME” (2:10)--by which “leap” the later Maximus poems enter (via Whitehead’s Process and Reality) the Jungian dimension of homo maximus, or “Homo Anthropos” (2:146).

Within the expanded context of Maximus IV, V, VI and The Maximus Poems: Volume Three, Atlantis holds climactic significance as a critical site at the juncture of both human and natural history. Specifically, Olson’s understanding of the Atlantis myth (“ashes from/ Santorin,” 3:144), as this myth follows from Plato’s Timaeus and Critias (“Egyptians said/... speaking to Solon... of Greeks,” 3:225), reflects the Santorini theory advanced by archaeologists Spyridon Marinatos and Angelos Ganalopoulos, and elaborated by the oceanographer James Mavor. This theory traces the source of Plato’s

²⁶ Cf. Butterick, Guide, 730-731; also, Clark, 349.

Atlantis to the cataclysmic demise of Minoan civilization after the volcanic eruption on the island of Santorini toward the middle of the second millennium B. C. E. (The same theory was recently reexamined in an interesting study by Richard Ellis).²⁷ By locating Atlantis relative to a geological cataclysm, Olson is able to describe the dispersion of an arch coherence that began with the rise of the first Sumerian cities--“a coherence which, for the first time since the ice, gave man the chance to join knowledge to culture” (Prose 170).

Appearing in the Maximus poem “ESSAY ON QUEEN TIY,” Atlantis qua “Santorin” highlights a question of historiographic bearings. Dating the Phoenician occupation of Crete and the beginning of the westward migration from Tyre, as these are mythologized in the abduction and rape of Europe by Zeus, to the year 1540 B.C.E. (M 3:140), and dating the volcanic explosion on Santorini and the consequent demise of Minoan civilization to the year 1400 B.C.E. (3:144), Olson situates the Herculean prefiguration of Western Man “60 years later,” circa 1340 B.C.E., on the eve of the Trojan War. In the second and third volumes of the Maximus poems, the “lineage” of a Sumerian ur-civilization that informs the historical foundations of Tyre gets “buried” at the birth of Hercules; yet, that lineage retains Gloucester as the archaeological ground that Olson continues to excavate and map: as if Maximus's leap (after the first volume) has folded the map, to superimpose Maximus's present-day Gloucester onto the second-century Tyre of the historical Maximus, and 17th-century Colonial America onto the Eastern Mediterranean in the second millennium B.C.E. The result of this folding, which attempts to bring into proximity with the present the post-Sumerian ground of a Herculean,

²⁷ Ellis argues that Plato's Atlantis story was inspired by the earthquake at Helice in the Gulf of Corinth in 373 B. C. E.

Western, proto-Socratic tradition ("Socrates as the progenitor," Prose 168) is the unfolding of an historical vista that recedes to include the Pleistocene era, and simultaneously extends to a post-modern threshold marked by video ("Video to 'look,'" 3:84) and the computer ("faster than.../ computer is/ sight," 3:85).

Furthermore, not only does the reference to the Atlantean explosion on Santorini serve to highlight an historiographic "control date," but it also underscores the geographical and geological context of the process by which Maximus IV, V, VI opens access, on the site of Gloucester, to a global overview of cultures and civilizations across time. The map of the arch-continent Gondwanaland and the primal sea Oceanus on the cover page, and the explanatory note dated "September 1968," both inscribe the mapping of Gloucester under the sign of geological theories of continental drift (taken from Alfred Wegener and Tuzo Wilson). What emerges in the manifest exorbitance of the Maximus poems is the central drama of humanity's intimate relation to a living, "migrating" earth: "in successive waves basically NW/ as in fact the earth's crust once.../ ...migrations/ turn out to be/ as large as/ bodies of earth..." (3:141-42). Human migration, for Olson, finds its archetype in the tectonic life of earth itself. Accordingly, Maximus IV, V, VI's opening "LEAP" onto/ the LAND, the AQUARIAN/ TIME," which eventually lands Maximus on the sea-floor site(s) of Atlantis, occurs in a geological time that is also the epochal time of "enantiodromia," heralding the astronomical approach of the earth's two-thousand year passage through the astrological sign of Aquarius.²⁸ Against a zodiacal grid of the universe, the narrative drive of the Maximus poems--"the end of Pisces/could be the end of species" (M 452)--culminates in a vision of planet Earth in which the North-Western migration of

²⁸ The term "enantiodromia" is from Jung. See Stein, 20-24.

Western civilization parallels the movement of continental drift, and functions as the representation of a gravitational or magnetic pull toward the arctic fulcrum about which the continents continue to rotate. This teleological locus, in turn, is the site of the periodic glaciations--literally, the "ice" in the Ice Ages--that shape the course of human evolution.

When Olson likens his own interest in the "Pleistocene" to Jung's use of "Alchemy" (Pleistocene Man 3), it is largely in view of the Upper Paleolithic period. Not only does "Pleistocene" serve as a frame of reference within which the archaic migration of homo sapiens from Asia, over the Bering Straits and onto the American continent, can be seen as a climactic event in pre-historic human migration, but the Pleistocene epoch, considered from the same evolutionary and geological perspective, can also be said to culminate in the (Paleolithic) birth of art. Olson's "LEAP" opens with a preliminary interrogation of Paleolithic art --"Rock picture/ of a beast? Lausel woman, holding out a ladle?" (2:13)--in view of counterposing the birth of art against the Herculean birth of the West in general, and of Greek civilization in particular. The subsequent reference to prehistoric graffiti--"from the painted cave of Castillo/ at Biscay" (M 3:189)--(which appears in a poem that speculates on a North Atlantic Pleistocene migration into America) points to the Maximus project itself as the response to its own interrogation of art. In keeping with the "projective size" of "projective verse," the Paleolithic birth of art, on one hand, and homo sapiens' Pleistocene passage into the New World of the American continent, on the other, act as controlling images for a new American "turning point" (Muthologos 2: 26-7) that the Maximus poems anticipate --a "turning point" that would be the threshold to an

archaic/post-modern Age of Graffiti (“Charles the/ Vision... (,” 3:84),²⁹ and to the healing ground of Olson’s American Dream.

As a means for overcoming a perceived disorder in the realm of contemporary discourse, Olson uses Atlantis as the legend in own map(s) of the world. By so doing, he brings to light the inherent project common to both Lawrence and Artaud. In the case of Lawrence, it is only after his preoccupation with America, and a turn toward the Eastern Mediterranean, that his work aims to subvert a global discursive order by focusing on key strategic sites within that order (notably, on the New Testament). In America, what Lawrence discovers is a spatio-temporal framework in accordance with which issues of human migration and the passage of the Ice Ages become figurative elements of poetic discourse. North America thus serves as a poetic stage that re-presents the ruin of Biblical chronologies regarding natural and human history (during the later 18th and 19th centuries, respectively). The generally perceived pre-“modernist” strain in Lawrence’s writing can be read as a nostalgic longing for the monarchic society embodied by a “supreme leader:” Lawrence’s “eightfold” unconscious would express a sort of reactionary devolution to the simple machines of a pre-industrial time--to the mechanical, repetitive motion of levers, pulleys, clocks, etc. Nevertheless, the Atlantean premise of Lawrence’s “eightfold” unconscious also anticipates Olson’s maximal, panoramic perspective, from which that same figure appears reconstituted in the deathbed text “The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum”,³⁰ and the image of Buddhism’s Noble Eightfold Path (“[Buddha’s]/... 8

²⁹ The spiral “signature” proceeds from C(harles) O(lson)’s initials. Cf. also the “eyes” in *Mayan Letters*, 69 (April 1st).

³⁰ In Stein, Appendix I, 166-96. See also Clark, 348.

Some things of the 4-Fold Path,” Secret 173). Consistent with a modern age, the experimental design of Lawrence’s American fiction, however flawed, functions as an early, remedial response to the projected impact of a changed symptomatological “universe.”

The therapeutic intent of Atlantean texts that would link pre-Contact Mexico and an emergent American world order continues with Artaud, and becomes most explicit in Olson. A basic similarity between Artaud and Olson is underscored by their common reference to Apollonius of Tyana and Paracelsus--forerunners of a certain alternative tradition in Western science and medicine.³¹ Where Olson proceeds by means of patchwork, methodically eschewing the “ego-position” of a master narrative, Artaud reproduces the simulacrum of a master narrative, in order to dispel it all the more intently. By blocking their own access to archaic authority, and by accelerating the rhythm of that blockage, Artaud’s texts obstruct and retard the diseased--and, for him, insufferable--modes of perception and conceptualization promoted through society’s preordained channels. Interrupting discourse with the image of discourse interrupted, Artaud’s writing, literally, gives pause. The underlying concern, as expressed from the onset in Artaud’s correspondence with Rivière, can be described as the belief or faith in a vital force that infuses humanity and Creation alike: “Il ne faut pas trop se hâter de juger les hommes, il

³¹ Olson is the author of the dance-play “Apollonius of Tyana” (1951), and Artaud dedicates *Héliogabale, ou l’Anarchiste couronné* to Apollonius of Tyana (OC 7:9). Similarly, as discussed by Byrd (57), Olson’s Jungian notion of “homo maximus” is taken from Paracelsus. For Artaud, Paracelsus is associated with “la médecine spagirique d’où est sortie l’homéopathie” (*Messages Révolutionnaires*, OC 8:158). As noted by Maud (*Reading*, 96, 285), Olson was familiar with Artaud’s writing, and helped publish an excerpt from *The Theatre and its Double* in the magazine *Origin*.

faut leur faire crédit jusqu'à l'absurde, jusqu'à la lie" (OC 1:43). True to a vision of "l'Homme grand comme la nature" (OC 8:162), writing becomes the means for stimulating a healing energy always already present in human society.

The therapeutic, "homeopathic" intent in Artaud can also be attributed to Olson. As part of the momentous opening of Maximus IV, V, VI, Olson makes his first reference to Mexico—specifically, to Mayauel, the Aztec Goddess of the maguey plant and its derivative, pulque: "she is the goddess/ of the earth... she has/ four hundred breasts..." (2:4). This reference to Mexico is one of three in the Maximus poems; the other two also identify a theogen, teonanacatl, the hallucinogenic mushroom named "God's food" (3:78) or "God's body" (3:130) by the Aztecs. While these allusions to pre-Columbian (Aztec) Mexico are meant to rejoin larger historical and mythological constellations, they also indicate, through the image that they propose of a sacred remedy (with Mexican roots), a metaphor for the Maximus poems as a whole. In "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum," the medicinal, theogenic intention of the Maximus poems is further suggested when Olson distills his "Meaning" in the alchemical image of "the Golden Pill:" "that which exists through itself/ is what is called Meaning. This is the Golden Pill" (Secret 169). Later in the same text, Olson's "Meaning" evokes a reference to "the application of analogy/ in the delicious alchemical reference of like to like," Secret 183-85). As with Artaud, in other words, Olson's "homeopathic" text would attack the illness, or dysfunction, affecting the vital force of Western discourse by being introduced (projected) therein, where it produces similar "symptoms," and where it would precipitate a counter-action to overwhelm and eliminate the targeted illness.

Just as the experiment that is writing, for Artaud or Olson, maintains Western discourse as the sacrificial object of its operation--the object that it lays to waste, yet preserves--so does the particularity of Artaud's "theater of cruelty" consist in recalling the text as an expression of disempowerment. As emphasized by Artaud, "cruel" and/or "projective" writing represents a paradox, in that its engagement with hegemonic discourse systematically relies on the authority of that same discourse. At once "Golden Pill" and placebo, the text derives its effectiveness from the very marginality to which it adheres.

In conclusion, then, it may be suggested that Olson's argument regarding an impending historical shift, following on the works of Lawrence and Artaud, opposes an advancing pax americana that in our own day shows signs of having settled over the globe. By the same token, if the social and political impact of a poetic discourse such as Olson's seems minimal at present, it remains no less possible to discover in a predominant "universe of discourse"--as if in the "theater of cruelty"--the counter-effect of persistent, still-active agents in the postdiluvian soil of the American way.

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