

NEWS FROM NOW/HERE: ED DORN, LAWRENCE, KANSAS, & THE
POETICS OF MIGRATION – 1965-1970

BY

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Abstract

The stylistic variety of Edward Dorn's poetic career, from the 1950s through the 1990s, has been criticized as lacking cohesion, and deemed his work's fundamental shortcoming. The earlier poetry's somber lyricism has been pitted against the caustic epigrams of the later writing, and these modes are set on either side of *Gunslinger*, Dorn's mock-epic of the "sicksties," which has received disproportionate scholarly attention, to the detriment of Dorn's manifold, contemporaneous work. While formal experimentation and the development of a multi-voiced perspective might provide a context for approaching Dorn's stylistic diversity, instead those objectives have been critically cemented to an embittered tendentiousness, a *resistance*, insufficient to address either the biography or the writing. Due to the fragmentary displacements of these assumptions, this thesis seeks an integrated reading that celebrates, rather than condemns, discrepancies in Dorn's unmoored political/poetic identity. Through unpublished archival materials, it reexamines the *Gunslinger* era—part of which Dorn spent among the countercultural tumult in Lawrence, Kansas—when Dorn's interest in geography expanded to address both "the landscape of the imagination," and the inevitable constraints of an ideologically-infused language.

Author's Acknowledgements

The idea for this project came during a research seminar at the University of Kansas with Bill Tuttle in 2005. As an American Studies graduate student at the time, I was looking for something that would integrate my interests in poetry, geography and local history, and nationalism. In a seminar with Tony Clark I had the opportunity of studying violence in the context of nation-building and national identity, particularly during the 1960s, and matched with Professor Tuttle's area of expertise in African-American history, especially in race riots, a continuum was established running through my graduate career, along which I might locate the intersection of each of these interests. The greatest influence on my work, however, and the most essential component of this project, is Kenneth Irby, with whom I've read, written, studied, and generally explored the world of ideas in literature, geography, and beyond, for almost a decade. Therefore, Professor Irby sits at the epicenter of this project in more ways than one, and it was from him that I first learned of Edward Dorn.

The first person to *show* me Dorn's work, however, who first suggested its clarity and exactitude at a resonant moment in my own life, was my longtime and very close friend, Jeff Bergfalk. With the light luggage of another friend who was to visit me in Italy, in 1999, Jeff sent a tattered copy of Dorn's *Selected Poems*, along with Stanley Lombardo's lucid translations of Hesiod, with a brief note: "Kyle— / Europe is the rope... / I'm writing this on the way / to get Dubinsky, from the / NJ turnpike— / Know that I shook every boot, / looked under everyone's hats / till I found these books, / and some others, / for your birthday. / That one will be good in Greece. / Read 'Idaho Out,' by Dorn. / Anyway, it's all prefatory... / I'll write you a real opus, / presently. / You guys have fun." I read "Idaho Out" over and over again, traveling through Sardegna, the Czech Republic, and elsewhere, anywhere I was, and was enthralled, and eventually I returned home for the new millennium with a refreshed sense of what a poem could register, and what its "totality" might mean.

Thus, I owe my initial gratitude for the birth of this project to Professor Irby and to Jeff Bergfalk, and wish to extend those thanks to the high school teachers in Kansas City, and the professors in Lawrence who have encouraged and developed my interest in reading and writing through the years. First and foremost, I wish to thank the other members of my committee (aside from Professor Irby)—Cheryl Lester and Mike Valk—for their generous patience and valuable guidance over the long haul of this project, as well as to give special thanks to William J. Harris, who unfortunately could not sit on that committee, but offered

me his intelligence and infectious ebullience throughout this process. And among those other teachers, I want especially to acknowledge the faculty of the American Studies department at KU, under whom I've worked for my Masters—specifically, Tony Clark, Ann Schofield, Sherrie Tucker, and Bill Tuttle—and to acknowledge the erudition and assistance of Susan Harris, in the English department, with whom I had the distinct privilege (more than once) of unpacking integral moments in American literature and culture over the course of my graduate career.

With regard to the specific materials of the project itself, I am indebted to a number of Dorn's friends and family, and to a slew of research and special collections libraries around the country. Most of all, Melissa Watterworth, at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, at the University of Connecticut, provided me with invaluable assistance while I compiled the archive for this manuscript, often bringing to my attention the materials of other collections—such as the Tom Raworth Papers, or the Joel Oppenheimer Papers—available at her library. And to the staff at the Dodd Center, I also owe many thanks for photocopying, organizing, and shipping much-needed documents. Those thanks I would extend to the directors and staff of the Spencer Library at the University of Kansas, the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana, and the Center for Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico. From each of these libraries, and due to the kindnesses of their employees, I was able to obtain, swiftly and at minimum cost, many of the documents that shape this project.

At an early stage in the project, Jennifer Dunbar Dorn was gracious enough to invite me into her Denver home for a long discussion over her life with Ed at the turn of the century—in Lawrence and elsewhere—and where she generously gifted to me copies of a number of Dorn's books from the time. It's my hope that this project respectfully addresses the compassionate intensity of her relationship with Dorn, and at the same time, exhibits my deep feelings for his work. As for Dorn's friends, I am indebted to a number of current and former Lawrence residents for pleasant discussions and enriching illuminations of his life and work: the late John Moritz, Jim McCrary, Roy and Marilyn Gridley, George Kimball, and Lee Chapman, who all provided the aspects of the foundation upon which I've built what follows. And James Elmborg, who completed a doctorate on *Gunslinger* while at KU over a decade ago, supplied me with critical information regarding Dorn's involvement in the 1968 Democratic National Convention, and though we've never had the chance to meet, offered warm encouragement and a refreshing sense of confraternity based solely on our shared

interest. I also want to specially thank Gerrit Lansing (whom Dorn calls, “the Scholiast,” in his short story, “A Narrative with Scattered Nouns”) for his careful, piercing, and provocative insights about geomancy (and so much else), and for the general inspiration I draw from his unflagging vivacity, and from his unabashed enthusiasm in this project.

Finally, I owe whatever’s left of my mind to my friends and family, who gave their support and strength to me, and to this process. Without imposing biases or passing judgment on the directions of my work my parents have consistently opened doors, and left them open for my scrutiny and curiosity to wander in and out of. For many years, my uncle, Curt Waugh, has selflessly provided me with rare and hard-to-find books, and many of the obscure books mined for this project came to me through his hands. Cyrus Console, for whom I have the highest regard as a writer, talked me back from many a precipitous, nihilistic ledge of critical self-scrutiny, and over and over again, helped me—sometimes in subtle, but always potent ways—to reframe my positions and tighten my prose. Likewise, I appreciate the sharpness of my conversations with Ben Lerner, from whom I’ve learned an enormous amount over the last five years about poetics, writing, reading, and wading through the “dumbassification” of American culture. And last—so that it lingers—I wish to send my gratitude and my love to Jacquelin Zammuto, who has been my dedicated partner for the past three years, and who struggled through every nook and cranny of this endeavor with me. For you and from you, I feel an insurmountable gush of respect, admiration, and love. Let this project project that potency, of what I feel, over the arc of all our lives.

– Kyle Skully Waugh
Lawrence, Kansas
July 2008

News from Now/here

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If I only had a wild chauffeur to drive me to Albuquerque to see you, then to drive on say to Mexico City to see Lamantia, or to Frisco to see Whalen, or to wherever Dorn is ...

– Jack Kerouac, in a letter to Robert Creeley, February 16, 1962

...this plain of our green heart

...this center of our true richness

This manuscript is dedicated to Fath, Hank, Walker, and Cy. We walk our leys together.

And to Jacquelin, for everything.

The beginning is the end.

– Heraclitus¹

*Poetry! Would Poetry have sustained us? It's love
—and no more than a wave— to have rise
out of the debris, the stink and threat
—even to life— of daily speech, the road
of the giants we begin from
primordial Strife, blind Opposition,
a current that sweeps all stagnant things up
into a torrent of confidence beyond thought.*

– Robert Duncan²

The Heretical Faith and the Orthodoxy of Comfort

I sit here, at 645 Michigan Street, Lawrence, Kansas, writing this—a red farmhouse awkwardly situated on a Zoning-mess-of-a-block built up around it. From where I sit I can look at the roof of my house by moving my fingers the same way that I'm writing to access the virtual globe, through Google Earth. More than 350 million people scattered across the *terra firma* have downloaded this program, in thirteen different languages, looking to find “home” among a series of high resolution images that currently simulate more than a third of the world's land surface.³ Here, in Kansas, this aerial/areal perspective requires only slight adjustment; though my view is high above the virtual earth, its orientation is fixed a few blocks northwest from the red house where I sit: at 38°57'33.84” North, 95°15'55.44” West. Mysteriously, that's the default orientation of Google Earth.⁴

Almost forty years ago, this was called the *Vortex* house: home to George Kimball, one-eyed leader of the Lawrence Liberation Front, and to the militant, political magazine of the same name, which printed market rates for illicit drugs in town, and called for insurrection against “pig Amerika.”⁵ Not surprisingly, for a period of unknown duration the

¹ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Brooks Haxton (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 45.

² Robert Duncan, *Ground Work: Before the War* (New York: New Directions, 1984), 36.

³ Ohazama, Chikai, “Truly Global” *Lat Long Blog: News and notes by the Google Earth and Maps team*, 11 Feb. 2008, <<http://google-latlong.blogspot.com/2008/02/truly-global.html>> (22 May 2008).

⁴ Joel Mathis, “Lawrence Pinpointed as center of Google Earth: City's prominent location on map ‘intentional’” *Lawrence.com*, 21 Dec. 2005, <www.lawrence.com/news/2005/dec/21/lawrence_pinpointed_center_google_earth/> (22 May 2008). See also: <http://earth.google.com/>

⁵ Rusty Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”: *The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 143.

Vortex house was under FBI surveillance.⁶ In the present digital light of Lawrence's placement—according to the world's most frequently visited earth imaging database—at the *center* of the world, “vortex” and “surveillance” resurface as relevant concepts with which to qualify my “home,” but are utterly changed. Now, the whole world is watching. Then again, that was the thunderous chant of demonstrators outside the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, as a phalanx of riot police uniformly advanced, and the press stood by.⁷ And then again, Kansas has consistently ranked among the lowest of the fifty states in tourism in recent years—though a modest industry has recently grown up around the spring ritual of burning the prairie, an event that some scholars argue predates human habitation of the land, when the fires were ignited by lightening.⁸ So, I have a sense in this house, writing this, and looking down, intermittently, at the house, and the town around it, of strange fluctuations, of recrudescence and drift. I imagine those bolts of electricity denuding the rolling, rain-eroded hills that the national imagination still refuses Kansas, as all those daily, indeterminate millions of beams of vision, ogling, largely oblivious to the axis of their sight, each momentarily gazing here, and yet not here, at what appears to be nowhere on the virtual globe, a state without natural bodies of water, and more cattle than people: what does the pressure of that international gaze effect, what vortex? Does it also *flatten* the land?

On a small scale, armed rebellion came to Lawrence around the same time student revolt spread across the world—from Paris to Rio de Janeiro—in 1968. A small Kansas town of about 45,000 people seemed an unlikely candidate for insurrection, no doubt, even Frank Zappa said so.⁹ But due to the Lawrence's central geography, itinerant hippies, bikers, and myriad, self-proclaimed “freaks,” traveling coast to coast in the 1960s, stopped in on the Rock Chalk Café, the Gaslight Tavern, and the communes of the Oread, a “freak” and student run neighborhood on top of the university hill. Many wayward visitors sampled the Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers' bounty of locally grown “ditchweed”—hemp that was originally

⁶ I learned this from James Dunn, longtime property owner of 645 Michigan Street, and currently my landlord, in conversation on Feb. 1, 2007; and George Kimball confirmed, in conversation, in New York City, on 11 April 2007, at a St. Mark's Place reading for the posthumous release of *Way More West*, a selection of Dorn's work published in early 2007 by Penguin.

⁷ Tariq Ali and Susan Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1998), 153.

⁸ Thomas R. Vale. “The Pre-European Landscape of the United States.” *Fire, Native Peoples, and the Natural Landscape*, ed., Thomas R. Vale (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2002), 27.

⁹ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”, 139; David Ohle, Roger Martin and Susan Brusseau, ed. and comp., *Cows Are Freaky When They Look at You: An Oral History of the Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers* (Wichita: Watermark Press, Inc., 1991), unpaginated preface.

planted for rope during the Second World War, and grew wild and rampant in a majority of Kansas counties. Lawrence quickly earned a reputation as some kind of Edenic, heartland “hippie haven.”¹⁰ As the youth population continued to expand—adding more than 11,000 residents over the course of the decade—a motley cross-section of the counterculture saturated the town with drugs, and amplified local anxieties with an imported set of movements. Black Power, which until that point had been mostly confined to urban areas, was the most disturbing among these foreign imports: “‘Black Pride’ hits KU,” ran a student newspaper headline in February 1969.¹¹ By the spring of that year, campus buildings linked to the military-industrial complex were regularly on fire, and weapons were pouring into the Oread community. By the end of the decade, local police “walked the streets ‘hoping nobody’s going to shoot you,’” and Lawrence, “full of mad dogs and crazies,” looked like the set of a cabalistic hallucination circus drawn up by Sam Peckinpah and Norman Rockwell.¹²

Race tensions left over from a century before—when Lawrence was the epicenter of “Bleeding Kansas,” and murderous raids on the town were frequent—were exacerbated by the rise of Black Power, and the hiring of radical, black professors to university teaching positions. Increasingly aggressive anti-war demonstrations, frequent displays of militancy, and regular explosions of violence—such as firebombings and acts of arson—severed “town and gown” relations and overextended the local police, and by 1970, National Guardsmen were a regular fixture on the streets. But among the armed and serious dissidents, in Black Student Union, for example, a campus organization that adopted the Black Panther Party’s “Ten Point Program,” the Oread included a large group of “street guerilla theatre fun folks,” and others, who “saw the engagements with the police and the National Guard as a kind of game.”¹³ Either way, Lawrence was a strange, fractious microcosm of the national environment, and it absorbed the violent displacements of the crises in Vietnam, over Civil Rights, over a burgeoning drug culture, and over the exaltation of individual identity. Once again, war had put Lawrence on the map, had brought it up from the seas of the nowhere prairie, into the riven heartland. And it was amidst this frightening, invigorating, and bizarre atmosphere, first in the spring of 1968, then again in the spring of 1969, that American poet Ed Dorn arrived in town.

¹⁰ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”, 140.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹² *Ibid.*, 141, 156.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

* * * * *

Dorn was born in dark times, “in the spring of the year of the very terminal October 29th,” reads the dust jacket of his 1967 collection of poems, *The North Atlantic Turbine*.¹⁴ And into working-class circumstances—“our poverty was public,” Dorn wrote in a 1968 prose piece about his Illinois hometown.¹⁵ “Not to be descriptive,” began Robert Creeley’s introduction of Dorn at the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference, but “this is the condition of the depression years, and his relation to that time and content is very specific.”¹⁶ Specific and persistent: in 1999, Dorn died in Denver in the first house he had ever owned, having spent over five decades migrating throughout North and Central America, and much of Europe in pursuit, after the early ‘60s, of spare university teaching positions—“‘causal labor’,” he termed it, “where there’s a job you show up.”¹⁷ With vouchers gifted from his railroading, French Quebecois grandfather, Dorn and his mother traveled the American West together in the early 1940s—trips that would mystify and inform the territorial epicenter of Dorn’s attentions as a writer. In fact, until the mid-‘50s, Dorn worked as an itinerant laborer on the West Coast and throughout the Intermontane Region—“an experience that closely parallels that of many men at this time, following the war” Creeley notes—until he ended up at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, at the suggestion of a teacher and friend in Illinois, an artist named Ray Obermayr.¹⁸ It was in North Carolina, where Dorn encountered “the generous and enthusiastic guidance of my teacher at Black Mountain College, Charles Olson,” that his role as a poet was refined.¹⁹

¹⁴ Edward Dorn, promotional pamphlet for *North Atlantic Turbine*. Dorn correspondence Folder, Joel Oppenheimer Papers. Archives and Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries (hereafter cited as Dodd Mss.)

¹⁵ Edward Dorn. “Driving Across the Prairie.” *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World* (West Newbury: Frontier Press, 1971), 60.

¹⁶ Robert Creeley, introduction to *The Poet, the People, the Spirit*, lecture given by Edward Dorn, New American Poetry Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas (hereafter cited as Spencer Mss.), compact disc.

¹⁷ Tom Clark, *Edward Dorn: A World of Difference* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2002), 12.

¹⁸ Creeley, introduction to *The Poet, the People, the Spirit*, Spencer Mss., compact disc; Ed Dorn, acknowledgements to *Way West: Stories, Essays & Verse Accounts: 1963-1993* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), 7. See also *Ed Dorn Interviews*, ed. Donald Allen (Bolinias: Four Seasons Foundation, 1980).

¹⁹ *Way West* 7

Under Olson's tutelage Dorn studied the American West through an overwhelmingly wide variety of source materials and methods. He adopted the experimental methodologies of the "istorian," a concept somewhat abstractly delineated in his teacher's *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*. For the "istorian" knowledge of history and place are experiential facts, the point is "to find out for yourself," through close attention to the particulars of first-hand information.²⁰ Dorn also adopted the kinetic knowledge principles laid out in other prose works of his goliath teacher—principles organized around a poetic *objectism*—the poet as an object among an empowered environment of objects—and a proprioceptive awareness and transmission of the energies and materials that compose one's *locus of experience*—as Creeley's 1969 book *Pieces* defines the first-person pronoun antecedent.²¹ "Sensibility within the organism by movement of its own tissues," Olson declares, heralding *movement* as integral to the cultural process of "re-centering" knowledge, and to the arrangement of a poem's active totality—the poem composed to *enact*, not sit-back in passive description.²² In his introduction to Dorn's recent *Selected Poems* (published by Penguin), Dale Smith identifies the ways in which Olson's influence on Dorn expanded beyond the page: "[Dorn] also made himself accountable to his experience of the American West, relating it through his public and private uses of the poem. . . . He does not offer solutions for poverty; he does not seek retribution for offenders of public faith. Instead he makes poetry that speaks through the present, praising those people who are rooted to the particulars of their experience."²³ In the same way, Smith sees the consolidation of "poet and laborer" in Dorn's work similarly related to Olson's proposals, those which, "led [Dorn] to use the poem as a tool for discovery and judgment that is not based on aesthetic principles but on the organization of a field."²⁴

²⁰ Charles Olson, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1964), 10.

²¹ *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley: 1945-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 435.

²² *Collected Prose of Charles Olson*, Donald Allen, and Benjamin Friedlander, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). And see also 170: "...until date 1200BC or thereabouts, civilization had ONE CENTER, Sumer, in all directions, that this one people held such exact and superior force that all peoples around them were sustained by it, nourished, increased, advanced, that a city was a coherence which, for the first time since the ice, gave man the chance to join knowledge to culture, and, with this weapon, shape dignities of economics and value sufficient to make daily life itself a dignity and a sufficiency."

²³ Dale Smith, introduction to *Way More West: New and Selected Poems of Edward Dorn*, ed. Michael Rothenberg (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), xiii.

²⁴ Smith, introduction to *Way More West*, xiv.

Thus, Dorn's early work combines a "love for the formation of the landscape," informed by Carl Sauer's writings in cultural geography, for example, with a "lyrical lightness," identified by Donald Wesling in his introduction to *Internal Resistances*, the only book-length collection of essays over Dorn's writing.²⁵ The "lyrical" was sign of Dorn's "commitment to the New American writing of the 1960s, where social interrogation and self-scrutiny were related through a renewed lyric sensitivity," Smith writes; whereas the "lightness," the fluvial grace, was something Olson had also praised—Dorn's "*Elizabethan* care for the sound of syllables"—Creeley tells us in his introduction to an earlier edition of Dorn's *Selected Poems*.²⁶ Each of Dorn's early collections, *The Newly Fallen*, *Hands Up!*, and *Geography*, emphasizes the motions of close attention in its explorations of chorological relation between landforms and the "self." "What validates Dorn's lyric voice," writes Donald Davie, "is its humility, the instruction it looks for and gets from people and places and happenings. It reflects upon them, it moralizes on them; but the reflection and the moral are drawn not from some previously accumulated stock of wisdom, but (so the writing persuades us) immediately out of the shock of confronting each of them as it comes, unpredictably."²⁷ It was Davie's irrepressible desire to hire Dorn that first took the latter to England in 1965, as a Fulbright Professor of American Literature in Davie's newly designed department at the University of Essex. And while at Essex for three years, Dorn's work and personal life underwent what he later called, "an odyssey of upheaval and exile."²⁸

By the time Dorn arrived to Lawrence from Essex in April 1968 for a three week residency at the university, his fifteen-year marriage with Helene Buck was broken, and she had moved to Spain with their son, Paul; in England, Dorn had recently moved in with his former student, Jennifer Dunbar, whom he would marry at the end of the year; and the University of Essex was being overtaken by radical factions of students and faculty, who would soon fire Davie. In early 1969, when Dorn again moved to Lawrence, this time for a full-semester visiting professorship, Dunbar was pregnant, and the success and popularity of his recent work, *Gunslinger*, had stretched beyond poetry circuits, and had made him mildly famous. "The Kansas excitement," Dorn writes in his unpublished poem "Osawatomie," "is

²⁵ Dorn, interview by Barry Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 22; Donald Wesling, ed., *Internal Resistances: The Poetry of Edward Dorn* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), 10.

²⁶ Smith, introduction to *Way More West*, xiv; Robert Creeley, preface to *Edward Dorn: Selected Poems*, ed. Donald Allen (Bollinas: Grey Fox, 1978), vii.

²⁷ Quoted in Clark, *World of Difference*, 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

our infancy.”²⁹ Some combination of forces harmonized for the couple that spring, and Dorn would seek a permanent position at Kansas for many years afterward.

But the mock epic, drug-addled, metaphysical Western of the late 1960s and early 1970s, called *Gunslinger*, what Dorn labels, “a pageant of its time,” marked a transition in Dorn’s poetics, as well, or a major station along their ceaseless stylistic migrations.³⁰ When Creeley introduced Dorn in Berkeley in 1965, he “land[ed] him in the predicament of a comparison,” with the poet Leroi Jones, whose place Dorn had taken at the conference because Jones was deeply involved in Civil Rights and black nationalist activities: “They take the context of politics as the *real* life in which they don’t *choose* to engage themselves,” Creeley said, “but are absolutely and adamantly engaged. There’s no alternative.”³¹ And yet, *Gunslinger*, for instance, refuses to directly reference the Vietnam War, turns away from the violent struggles over Civil Rights, and away from the “very dogmatic and insistent, adamant, concerned... kind of responsibility to say how you feel about things,” Dorn told Barry Alpert, in 1972, “which I hope has gone entirely from my writing.”³² Dorn wanted to achieve “a spiritual address,” he wrote in 1967, “an altogether direct plane of intensity.”³³ The adjusted capacity of this “plane of intensity” accommodated for two important forces to enter Dorn’s work in a more overt and self-conscious way: the language of the public sphere, and the “landscape of the imagination”—the chance “to make things up,” as Tom Clark puts it.³⁴ While Dorn was in Kansas, both of these forces opened new discursive spaces in his writing, spaces that, in the future, became the sites of bitter critical and personal dispute.

Appropriately, among the badinage, the puns and language-play that *Gunslinger* Book II (written in Lawrence) blends into a “pre-Socratic revision of the Western psyche,” a central character named “I” dies, and the reader’s narrative stability, like through a trapdoor, suddenly disappears. Thus, Robert Duncan praises Dorn’s “screen-narrative voice that takes off as a movie scenario,” and blends genre through “masque” and comedy, and Marjorie Perloff praises *Gunslinger*’s “amalgam of ‘theory’ and lyric, of prose narrative and sound-

²⁹ Original mss, “Osawatomie,” Folder 609, Edward Dorn Papers. Dodd Mss.

³⁰ Edward Dorn, “An Interview with Edward Dorn,” interview by John Wright, *Chicago Review* 49:3/4 & 50:1 (2004): 204.

³¹ Creeley, introduction to *The Poet, the People, the Spirit*, Spencer Mss., compact disc.

³² Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 19.

³³ Dorn, promotional pamphlet for *North Atlantic Turbine*. Dorn correspondence Folder, Joel Oppenheimer Papers. Dodd Mss.

³⁴ Clark, *World of Difference*, 24.

text, and especially of citation embedded in or superimposed upon the speech of a particular self.”³⁵ This last point, in the scope of Dorn’s full career, seems the most significant to me.

The death of “I,” and his lysergic and haptic resurrection as the “Secretary to Parmenides,” is more than an event in Dorn’s poem, but is a signal moment along the trajectory of his work.³⁶ As Dorn wrestled his way through abstractions and tensions within his own poetic voice in his early books, his concern for the language of geography chiastically shifted into a reflexive, fractured, and polluted geography of language, in which Dorn, as Creeley had earlier suggested, did not “choose to engage,” but was “absolutely and adamantly engaged.” From Idaho, in the mid-’60s, Dorn wrote to Tom Clark of his poetic objective for applying the “self as ‘Medium’.” Like any responsible application, this medium must be self-conscious, dynamically and vocally aware of its own limitations, its mediated facticity.³⁷ In this way, the “self,” like its constitutive language, also adopts a geo-location, becomes *locus of experience*: the site for gathering materials that are both of, and *outside of*, itself. When Dorn, in his early prose work, “What I See in the *Maximus Poems*,” asserts his desire for the ego’s “centrality,” that is, the strength of the poet’s abilities to transfer this *locus*’s accumulated stock of energy “across,” into a poem, a poem that *enacts*, he connects the fluidity of this proprioceptive process back to Olson’s fundamental demand to “recenter” knowledge.³⁸ And he presupposes language as an essentially decentered system, or a kind of Borgesian network comprised of multiple, “agglomerated” *loci* scattered about an infinite periphery, “like blood clots at the sites of trauma.”³⁹ For Dorn, the “self” is realized through a set of accumulations peculiar to its own migrations, internal and external—“the locus is where you’re at and when you move, the locus moves,” Dorn told an interviewer, “you are your space.”⁴⁰

Consequently, with the initiation of *Gunslinger*, and in the decades following, the linguistic interface between poet and external world—Dorn’s proprioceptive “I”—garnered

³⁵ Ibid., 24.

³⁶ Edward Dorn, *Gunslinger* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 57, 141.

³⁷ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, undated (early 1965), MS 55A: Db, Special Collections, Spencer Mss.

³⁸ Edward Dorn. “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*.” *Views* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1980), 38.

³⁹ Charles Bernstein, “Censors of the Unknown—Margins, Dissent, and the Poetic Horizon,” interview by Tom Beckett, *A Poetics* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 188.

⁴⁰ Edward Dorn, “Waying the West,” interview by Matthew Cooperman, Joseph Richey, and Peter Michelson, *Ed Dorn Live: Lectures, Interviews, and Outtakes*, ed., Joseph Richey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 95.

and integrated multiple lexicons—from academic and scientific jargon, to press conference euphemism, to truck stop talk—and grew to paradoxical extremes: at once epigrammatic and periphrastic, farcical and shockingly sad, invigorating and disgusting:

Since all the stats
are quoted as saying
Rape, Mutilation & Murder
and violent seduction
of every kind
are carried out against you, overwhelmingly,
by close friends, mere friends
and relatives,
“saying no to strangers”
should be revised
to “saying no to everyone you know.”⁴¹

I’m suddenly struck that the specific qualities of my last observation (“epigrammatic . . .”) so effortlessly accommodate an interpretation of, say, our current presidential election, and that turns me right back to the book, where I find, “A time to buy and a time to cry”:

These are the official symptoms
of cocaine use:
weight loss, insomnia,
nausea, anxiety,
radical alcohol
and tobacco intake,
chronic irritation,
helpless involuntary verbalism,
possibly leading
to fulminant dementia –

Wait a minute!
except for weight loss,
those are just the pathologies
of an afternoon spent at the shopping mall.⁴²

These works, from *Abhorrences*, and this general period in Dorn’s career have drawn harsh criticism: “Dorn has sacrificed so much of his poetics for this muddle of pissed-off agitprop,” writes Language poet and theorist, Ron Silliman.⁴³ Poet Anselm Hollo noted that his friend’s writing had become “more and more Apache-like, in that it was as anti-

⁴¹ Edward Dorn, *Abhorrences* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1990), 87.

⁴² Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 111.

⁴³ Ron Silliman. Review of *Way More West*. [Silliman’s Blog](http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com). 30 March 2007. <<http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com>> (31 March 2007).

conciliatory as he could make it.”⁴⁴ But I wonder who Silliman means by “Dorn”—cutting off “Dorn,” as he does, from “his poetics.” And what an utterly bizarre criticism from a Language poet—that this “authorial presence” that has “sacrificed so much” should be stabilized in any way beyond the practice of writing—to which Dorn dedicated his life *on a daily basis*, long before there were blogs. Naturally, Silliman’s reading involves tensions and disagreements in Dorn’s personal life, but oddly, it uses them to hedge what the poems are capable of.

The rhetorical environment of the above works (as my observation’s observation suggests) is too slick to stick to any surface for long, or to stay in any single person’s mouth. For instance, if one reads Silliman’s identification of Dorn’s “macho attitude toward violence that comes across... as quite shallow,” against the first of the two works above, one immediately recognizes that the poem—as one “kind” of “violent seduction”—advises us *not* to trust it.⁴⁵ It even provides its date of composition (“March 15, 1986”) so we can check its facts. Shallow, perhaps, like a mirage is shallow, then not there at all: “*Wait a minute!*” Indeed, who is waking up to the poem’s mischief there? Is it “Dorn”? Is it “his poetics”? And who, then, was speaking before? The more mysterious and disturbing “violent seduction” of these poems is the fact that their paradoxes are as unavoidable as they are unpleasant. One is troubled, perhaps only privately (which emphatically punctuates the necessity of such publicly driven work), by the degree to which one *is* seduced, even against the poem’s better judgment: “One of the things about political poetry,” Dorn said in an early ‘90s interview, “is that you have to sort of imply to the reader that this is a rather intimate situation in which I’m going to say something that’s rather stiff to you, and you’re going to like it, because actually you agree when it comes right down to it.”⁴⁶

In other words, in its own perverse way, this poetry empowers the reader, irritating ideological contradictions otherwise ignored, and re-situating the action of reading in an interactive process of making meaning—i.e. the reader not merely receiving it, and the author not simply bestowing it. “My disease is the exercise of power *with* feeling for the person,”

⁴⁴ Anselm Hollo, introduction to *Edward Dorn: Satirical Voices* (Boulder, Colorado: Alternative Radio Broadcast), 11 April 2000. Audiocassette.

⁴⁵ Silliman, review of *Way More West*, [Silliman’s Blog](#).

⁴⁶ Dorn, “From Imperial Chicago,” interview by Effie Mihopoulos, *Ed Dorn Live*, 68. See also 74: “I don’t think there’s anything in *Abhorrences* that couldn’t be verified by observation. It’s quite empirical. In that sense, it’s scientific. I don’t think that anything in this book is peculiar to me. The statemental quality is obviously peculiar to me, the way I tend to project and couch things. I also like to think that this is a national book. I don’t think it’s regional.”

writes British poet (and one of Dorn's closest friends), Tom Raworth, in *A Serial Biography*—one of Dorn's favorite books of the late '60s, and from which he selects the above quote around which to structure his own praise of it, at the time.⁴⁷ So, although the death of "I" in *Gunslinger* establishes a broader, discursive lens for his work, Dorn, as Wesling notes, "is very much an original, a self-reflexive poet not satisfied with the dissolved fictive self of Wallace Stevens or John Ashbery, a lyric poet who cannot take for granted the solipsism of Robert Bly or Galway Kinnell, an ironic poet who nevertheless avoids falling into an empty metaphysical abyss."⁴⁸

One way perhaps, to refashion Silliman's critique, and something I have attempted to emphasize in the study that follows, is to conceptualize Dorn's work in terms of *style*—a word whose roots (in *stylus*) directly relate it to the act of writing, and whose evolution invokes divergent trends whose manifold implications complicate Dorn's poetics. Olson himself once claimed, "style is soul," but let's take our etymology from Umberto Eco, in his book, *On Literature*:

...in the early years of its usage, the term indicates literary genres that are highly codified (the sublime, middle, low style... style is a way of writing dictated by rules, usually very prescriptive rules; and it was accompanied by the idea of precepts, imitation, and close adherence to models. Usually we think that it is only with mannerism and the baroque that the idea of originality and genius becomes associated with the notion of style—and not only in the arts, but also in life, since with the Renaissance idea of "*sprezzata disinvoltura*" (effortless nonchalance) the man of style will be he who has the wit, courage (and social standing) to behave in violation of the rules—or to show that he has the privilege to break them. ...with Goethe style will emerge when the work acquires an original, complete, inimitable harmony of its own. Finally we arrive at the Romantic notion of genius (Leopardi himself will say that style is the particular manner or facility that is called originality.) So much so that by the end of the nineteenth century, with the advent of the dandy and Decadence, the concept has turned 360 degrees, to the point where style is identical with bizarre originality, the contempt for all models; and it is from this source that the aesthetics of the historical avant-garde movements will emerge.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Tom Raworth, *A Serial Biography* (London: Fulcrum Press, 1969), 51-52.

⁴⁸ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 7.

⁴⁹ Umberto Eco, *On Literature*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2002), 161-162. Stan Brakhage refers to Olson's comment in "A Conversation with Stan Brakhage," interviewed by

A bit further on, Eco adds to this catalogue one more notion of *style*—“as a ‘way of giving form’”—and certainly (and paradoxically), this final proposal is as essential to modernist and post-modernist poetics as is the “contempt for all models.”⁵⁰ The latter is the foundation of Silliman’s criticism—Dorn’s emasculating resentment—but every bit as ferociously “original” as Wesling and Silliman argue “his poetics” are, so much more is “Dorn” obsessed with method, “dictated by rules, ...imitation, and close adherence to models.” The meticulous daily practice of *Abhorrences*, or the sharpened skill of writing while driving, out of which much of *Hello, la Jolla* comes, or the songs, genres, and archaic modes that enter into *Gunslinger*, all are the “workings out of possible poetic moods and voices that are themselves historically inscribed”; they all self-consciously call into question the wherewithal of their own creation, and test the limits of *style* in multiple and competing directions.⁵¹ Dorn himself celebrated a personal “absolutism of style” in the West, he told Tom Clark, which is nothing short of ritual. And in this sense, *style* becomes a kind of incantation for Dorn, an arrangement of language-material or gesture, to access and body forth greater powers.

Therefore, while some, like Silliman, have underestimated the dedication and depth of Dorn’s poetic experimentation with style, plurality, mask, and appropriation, others have overemphasized *Gunslinger* as a rupture in Dorn’s career, a break from Olson’s influence and the Black Mountain context (whatever that is). Both of these perspectives, in each their own way, have contributed to a harmful fragmentation of the total body of work. One notes these divisions in the rigid categorization of William McPherson’s critical study, *Ed Dorn*, in Tom Clark’s downtrodden, inexplicably incomplete biography, *World of Difference* (which leaves off Dorn’s biography where the following study picks it up), and numerous critical essays that concentrate on “the early work,” or “the late work,” or *Gunslinger*, by itself.⁵² (My study, too, falls into many of these predicaments, but I’ve tried to learn from the successes and failures of these previous efforts.) And here, I part with Wesling, et al, in their choice of structural metaphor for Dorn’s body of work. For even as Wesling attempts to address the “unresolved issue” of a “committed rhetoric” for Dorn’s poetics, and to “challenge the claim

Philip Taaffe, orig. published in *Composite Nature* (New York: Peter Blum Edition, 1998). I accessed it through the latter’s website: <www.philiptaaffe.info/index.php> (10 June 2008).

⁵⁰ Eco, *On Literature*, 162.

⁵¹ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 6.

⁵² Three of the six essays in *Internal Resistances* focus on *Gunslinger* alone, and the remaining three discuss specific genres or themes across multiple, but strictly categorized periods of work.

that little of Dorn's work beside *Slinger* has poetic merit," *resistance*, as a trope, forecloses on this possibility.⁵³ For *resistance* is itself one of the many subsets of *style*, and *style* is always at least one-part assimilation, and grants *resistance* a flipside hip-ness, like Ernesto "Che" Guevara, or Billy the Kid. But this isn't altogether obvious in the term *resistance*, all by itself; and when we must refer to that assimilative, or popular, or *stylish* streak in Dorn's work, what reasonable boundaries around *resistance* can we claim to maintain? The ambiguous force of *resistance* in Dorn's epigrams is seduced by the elegance and wit of its own insurgence, enamored by its very enunciation, and must therefore, to some degree, betray its task—that is, if *resistance* was its task in the first place. Instead, I argue that the divergent trends of Dorn's work, and its apparent defiance of a "committed rhetoric" are precisely *the point* of his poetics; therefore, they are less infringed upon by the multiphasic, elastic context of *internal migration*—the predominant tradition on the North American continent for over ten thousand years. But not just crossing land, Dorn's dialectical and multi-voiced poems follow the model of *internal migration* through "the many languages of English," and through its topical, extravagant characters as "a constellation of one body"—for "even in the mind of a lone traveler there's a multitude of dialogue."⁵⁴

But there is a deeper conflict with the trope of *resistance*. Etymologically *resistance* implies "holding back," a kind of stasis that surrenders Dorn's essential objective, "the possibility for everyone to be able to live in the world," to the catch-phrase, inflated tenets of neo-liberalism and multiculturalism—much the same way that Wesling timidly appeals to the vapid and pathological addiction to symmetry in scholarly inquiry, and its implacable, institutionalized demand for a "committed rhetoric" in Dorn's work (*or else*, I hear in between those lines). Instead, this "holding back" should be viewed as the mode of those systems that manufacture our complaisance with an indebted, pixelated, consumption-throttled life. In his seminal and beautiful critical study, "Gassire's Lute: Robert Duncan's Vietnam War Poems," poet and critic Nathaniel Mackey discusses the backward ethical

⁵³ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 5.

⁵⁴ Edward Dorn, *Collected Poems* (Bollinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1975), 214; Dorn, "The Poetic Line," interview by Robert Bertholf, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 61-62. On the subject of migration in Dorn's work, see also Christopher Beach's essay, "Migrating Voices in the Poetry of Edward Dorn," *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 1991), 211-228. Beach argues: "Dorn shares with [Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley] the basic Poundian mode of an engaged stance and a diverse and noncanonical use of sources; however, his characteristic style of digression and semantic slippage implies a very different structural principle—one that denies the clear and hierarchical presentation of values found in works by Pound, Williams, Olson, and Duncan."(211)

assumptions implicit in the jargon of *resistance*: “Here it serves to assert that ‘the real’ is a human concoction, bounded by limits imposed by commonly held assumptions and reinforced by artificial conventions. As such, ‘the real’ is at odds with the universe, which is boundless....”⁵⁵ Indeed, “only celebrations concur,” Dorn writes near the opening of *Gunslinger*, Book II, “and we concur To See / The Universe.”⁵⁶ This “recentering” of “the real” becomes the task of *Gunslinger*’s phenomenological repartee, and in Dorn’s concurrent and subsequent work, particularly work inspired by his time in Lawrence, *cosmology*, as a field in which to reorder and harmonize “the real” with “the universe,” plays an ever more overt role. But Wesling, et al., obliterate that cosmological project beforehand, by taking “the real” for *real*. Likewise, on many occasions, Dorn has been labeled a “heretic” to the aristocracy of a “committed rhetoric,” and to “the real” as a “human concoction,” and maybe he is. But even that “heresy” ironically exhibits this deep misconception of “what is” (as Parmenides, the pre-Socratic philosopher seated behind *Gunslinger*’s mantle of “the real,” would say): from the Greek word meaning, “to choose,” the heretic, Dorn says, “gets flayed because the heretic *believes more* than anybody else.”⁵⁷ In light of this overwhelming paradox, one recalls the last lines of Dorn’s baldly autobiographical, and virulently anti-imperialist poem, “Tribe,” written shortly before his death in 1999: “it would take more paper / Than I’ll ever have to express how justified I feel.” Here, one is reminded of Pound’s admission at the end of his own life, in “Canto CXVI,” regarding the *Cantos*, themselves: “...I am not a demigod / I cannot make it cohere.” Though Pound must have been pained by his inability to make it so, and Dorn was crying as he finished reading “Tribe” for an Alternative Radio broadcast in Boulder a month before he died, in light of both poets’ work, that lack of closure is a fitting circumstance, and keeps open multiple avenues into their writing. Perhaps our criteria for a “committed rhetoric” needs adjusting.

With regard to that latter group, those who have overemphasized *Gunslinger* as a break from the past modes of Dorn’s work, I have suggested the ways in which certain theoretical, philosophical, and methodical principles that Olson proposed for the poetic

⁵⁵ Nathaniel Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute: Robert Duncan’s Vietnam War Poems,” part II in *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 146.

⁵⁶ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 46.

⁵⁷ Dorn, “Waying the West,” interview by Cooperman, et al., *Ed Dorn Live*, 101 (my itals). And see page 102, when, sounding a lot like Pound (who enters the main text in a moment), Dorn declares: “I was maligned because I am a true poet, and I love the literature of the past thirty centuries! That’s heresy.” *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “heretic.”

process of “discovery” and “attention” were carried over from Dorn’s attention to the language of geography to an attention to the geography of language, and to the “landscape of the imagination.” Here I defer to James Elmborg, and his historical exegesis on *Gunslinger*, titled, “*A Pageant of It’s Time*: *Ed Dorn’s Slinger and the Sixties*: “Dorn’s *Gunslinger* completely changed the idea of the ‘local,’” Elmborg writes, “however, without abandoning the centering concept of place.”⁵⁸ This assertion flies in the face Perloff’s *Gunslinger* introduction, in which she declares that “place... is itself a simulacrum,” for the inevitable fact that Elmborg’s historical inquiry, as he admits, would not be possible otherwise.⁵⁹ Because the following study orbits around Dorn’s experience of a particular place at a particular time, Elmborg’s “centering concept of place,” as a geographical moment, is integral to my purposes as well. At the same time, this central necessity bolsters my attempt to chart Dorn’s persistent application of Olson’s ideas through alternative territory. Nonetheless, I take it that, in *Gunslinger*, “geography,” this is Perloff speaking, “imperceptibly becomes history,” because that merger isn’t too far outside of my own sense of Lawrence, as an arena of Dorn’s *locus of experience*.⁶⁰

Dorn is interested in “place” as confluence—an embattled confluence, of historical, economic, geological, geographical, and mystic, celestial forces, and was especially interested in places that sat at the crossroads of multiple, overlapping migration routes, and paths of early exploration. For instance, here’s how Dorn catalogued Kansas when discussing a line from *Gunslinger*, Book I, with students at Naropa University, in 1977:

I was assigned the West when I was a student. So this is almost an inside reference. It could easily be a footnote. “The mission bells are ringing / in Kansas” meant to summarize for me everything I know or everything I know as a student of that condition, and everything you might know either as a student or, if not as a student, as an auditor of your culture about the Kansas railheads, the Spanish flirtation, *para donde va Coronado*, wheat, the Swedenborgian communities, Kansas mysticism, whatever.⁶¹

⁵⁸ James K. Elmborg, “A Pageant of its time: Edward Dorn’s *Gunslinger* and the 1960’s” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1994), 3. Though I read it in dissertation form, Elmborg’s book was published in 1998, by the Peter Land Publishing Group, under the same title.

⁵⁹ Marjorie Perloff, introduction to *Gunslinger* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), vii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁶¹ Dorn, “On the Authority of Root Meanings, the External, and the Making of *Gunslinger*, circa 1967,” lecture at Naropa University, June 1977, *Ed Dorn Live*, 15.

Six months before Dorn and Dunbar moved to Lawrence, they visited Glastonbury and Stonehenge, in the midsummer of 1968. As sites that facilitated ancient ceremonies and negotiated relations between the terrestrial and the astral, and as destination points for long-distance journeyers over the stretch of five millennia, those English locales each represent a mysterious nexus of geomantic intensity. Glastonbury, for instance, sits at the intersection of a number of “ley lines,” a network of magnetic forces and pathways interlocking and flowing over the English plains, along which telluric energies, bygone trading routes, and a host of other strange influences are said to travel.⁶² Thus, as Dorn’s work shifted its earlier devotions to the cultural landscape, to chorological relation, and to the organization of the poem’s elements in a “field,” and began to concentrate on the ways in which “citation [is] embedded in or superimposed upon the speech of a particular self,” his move toward a “spiritual address” retained a “center[ed] concept of place” but which transformed chorological relation into geomantic *elevation*, and the poem’s “field” into a “henge” capable summoning cosmological orders.⁶³ Dorn’s *Gunslinger*, for example, the poem’s namesake, who traverses “the enormous space / between here and formerly,” is sun-worshipper, cowboy-sorcerer, and weathered traveler, all in one—we meet him near sunset, and hear of his grand, mythic relations: “so there is a longhorn bull half mad / half deity / who awaits an account from me /

⁶² John Michell. “Stonehenge and Glastonbury.” *The View Over Atlantis* (London: Sago Press, 1969), 131-152. For further information regarding “ley lines,” see: David Cowan and Chris Arnold, *Ley Lines and Earth Energies: A Groundbreaking Exploration of the Earth’s Natural Energy and How It Affects Our Health* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2003).

⁶³ As in, “This is the way I hear the momentum,” or “Notice how a vaster Crystal of Lives comes around,” or “The Cosmology of Finding Your Place,” all three written at this time. “Henge” is defined by English Heritage (the British government’s “statutory adviser on the historic environment,” and “[o]fficially known as the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England...”) as follows: “A henge is a roughly circular or oval-shaped flat area over 20m in diameter which is enclosed and delimited by a boundary earthwork that usually comprises a ditch with an external bank. Access to the interior is obtained by way of one, two, or four entrances through the earthwork. Internal components may include portal settings, timber circles, post rings, stone circles, four-stone settings, monoliths, standing posts, pits, coves, post alignments, stone alignments, burials, central mounds, and stakeholes. ... Henges can sometimes be confused with other kinds of circular monuments, especially when levelled by ploughing. The main sources of confusion are with: ring cairns, enclosed cemeteries, fancy barrows, various classes of later prehistoric enclosed settlements, Roman signal stations, Roman amphitheatres, and windmill mounds. In all cases close attention to the position and extent of the bank and the entranceways is important when distinguishing henges from these other classes. Care must also be taken not to confuse henges with sites where some of the components of henges exist as single monuments in their own right, for example timber circles and stone circles. ... Henges are generally of late Neolithic date and are currently interpreted as ritual or ceremonial monuments, perhaps meeting places, trading centres, or sacred areas of some sort.” English Heritage – Stonehenge & the History of England, n.d., < <http://www.eng-h.gov.uk/mpp/mcd/sub/henges1.htm>> (2 March 2008).

back of the sun you nearly disturbed / just then. / Lets have that drink.”⁶⁴ “For a native poetic, to be a poetic at all,” Hugh Kenner writes in his essay, “Magics and Spells (about curses, charms, and riddles),” “must rely on certain continuities: on the List, on the Curse and the Blessing, on the deep tradition of efficacious words.”⁶⁵ Thus, Dorn’s “landscape of the imagination,” like cultural geographer, Carl Sauer’s “natural landscape,” would come to be known, “through the totality of its forms”—and the “totality” of its *styles*, for which “efficacious words” (“words [that] accrete disquieting power,” Kenner writes, “not least their power to make you hear you own voice saying them”) and disquieting, historical “continuities” were paramount.⁶⁶

This study interrogates the migrations of Dorn’s “I,” his *locus of experience*, both on and off the page, that is, in both text and life, over the latter half of the 1960s, but focuses primarily on the time that he, and later Dunbar, were living and working in Lawrence, Kansas—a time during which Dorn’s relationship both to his work, and to those he loved, underwent profound structural changes. Extremely productive while in Kansas, Dorn explored the infinite degrees of disappearance between the death of “I,” as a rhetorical condition in his own work, and “the dissolved, fictive self,” of John Ashbery, or “the writer not there” of William Burroughs (“where is *he*?”), or the “use of the *I*” by Jean Genet, which Dorn detests and luridly depicts: “...the *I* is not directly self-assertive except as it is a necessary presence. Otherwise it operates as a sponge, utterly undistinguishing, utterly at the mercy of external bombardment, engorging itself to bursting. It does not constitute a self. It is a limp, ever changing basin into which can run the fluids given off by all contact, by all touch, by all sense excitement. It is the ideal ego-condition envisioned by any power-authority.”⁶⁷ At the same time, Dorn always encouraged a confident and specific relation to the self, albeit compromised and “adulterated,” for the purposes of writing of poetry: as he argued in one of his writing classes in Lawrence in 1969, which one of his students recorded: “Ed Dorn remarked that contemporary poets have turned to a ‘visceral’ poetry of experience

⁶⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 5, 7, 31.

⁶⁵ Hugh Kenner, *Magic and Spells (about curses, charms and riddles)*, The Bennington Chapbooks in Literature, no. 10 (Bennington: Bennington College, 1988), 27-28.

⁶⁶ I borrow the phrase “landscape of the imagination” from Roy K. Okada, in an interview with Dorn, 2 May 1973, in Madison, Wisconsin, published in *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 44. Carl Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” in *Land & Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 337; Kenner, *Magic and Spells*, 16.

⁶⁷ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 6; Edward Dorn, “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” *Kulchur* 7 (Autumn 1962): 11, 7.

and have learned that before they try to go to the river for water, they have to learn to urinate in their own bucket. The way to a poetry that speaks with authority is through a poetry that understands the self and speaks with one's own voice."⁶⁸ This study traces the development of Dorn's "own voice" in the late 1960s, and its relationship to his work overall.

For a poet whose life and work form a single stem of commitment and, therefore, one whose austere working-class background, contentious reputation ("as dialectical as they come," Hollo recalls), public disputes, and eccentric behavior and dress, have each been woven into, and repeatedly thrust upon, the material of his writing, my focus on this hinge of "pronomial multiplicity" (a term Dorn assigned Raworth's prose), weaving in and out of work and life, seems reasonable.⁶⁹ I propose *internal migration* as Dorn's mode of writing and being, and as it operates on authorial presence, his work evolves into a pluralistic, polysemous force, which exalts in the sacrosanct openness and negativity of the poem's territory, where "[t]he voice ... is thrown out into an interspace where what's possible is more interesting than what's established."⁷⁰

But if my concern is also to provide an overarching context under which Dorn's scattered dispatches from hermeneutical frontiers might be comfortably gathered, without being detained, why does this study focus on such a brief period of Dorn's life? First, I take the agglomeration of critical attention to the *Gunslinger* era, but to very little of the era's work besides it, as a fruitful occasion for re-plotting the coordinates of Dorn's work on a more open and discursive plain. The few years spanning the turn of the decade represent Dorn's most intense and erratic period of experimentation. During this time, his work traverses, very quickly in some cases, nearly all of the formal categories and *stylistic* modes that his remaining career would achieve—narrative, epigram, epithalamium, sonnet, etc. This is not to say that these forms and modes are necessarily best exemplified by the writing from this period, though I'd argue some of them are, but to signal the period for Dorn as one of amplified capacity in his *locus of experience*, and of diligent spiritual renewal.

Second, this study is not, in fact, limited to those two years at the end of the decade. In part one, for example, I provide a loose biographical sketch up to the point of his "exile" in England, and I lay out the theoretical and methodological precepts, as I see them, that Dorn

⁶⁸ James F. Mersmann, *Out of the Vietnam Vortex* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1974), 25.

⁶⁹ Hollo quoted in Clark, *World of Difference*, 21; Edward Dorn, "On Tom Raworth," *Vort* 1 (Fall 1972): 56.

⁷⁰ Dorn, "On Tom Raworth," 56.

preserved from Olson, from his relatively short time at Black Mountain, and, aside from the three years in the early 1960s that he and Helene spent in Pocatello, Idaho, on the Obermayr ranch (a year of which they lived in a “converted” chicken coup), from a life always on the move.⁷¹ In addition to that foundation, the chapters of the latter two sections regularly attempt to position their observations to receive the work’s overall trajectory, and from those observations, to thread comparisons and associations through the work lying on each side of this “mid-life” of the career. At times, this attempt to integrate through critical *migration* involves digression, turning back to register the investment of earlier work, or lunging ahead to chart the incipient arc of what’s at hand. When Silliman isolates Dorn’s *Abhorrences*—a six word, three line poem, say—it’s no wonder they lose their specific accumulative power, but that dismembered weakness ironically annexes the central trope of American democracy to the book’s “national” poems: that divided we fall—but how to know what divides us, without articulating the *anti*-substance of our divisions? And those divisions sink to depths we can’t readily know, so we must all the time move our efforts around. When Silliman snipes at Dorn’s “pissed-off agitprop” he overlooks the fact that he’s transferring the project of *Abhorrences* to a later stage. Politics is a game of power relations, and Dorn’s poems are political poems—so if you’re “pissed-off” by a “pissed-off” poem, aren’t we getting somewhere, Mr. Silliman?

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⁷¹ Clark, *World of Difference*, 35-36: “The first two winters in Ray’s studio, “were pretty basic, no inside john, we went down to the college to take showers, but we all loved it there, and I was certainly used to cooking on a wood stove. . . . The wood cook-stove we installed was a Garland, which delighted Ed, and we always referred to it as our Red Garland. It was a happy time and no so ‘basic’ that Bob & Bobbie [Creeley] & the kids didn’t spend an Easter weekend with us one time—I guess the kids must have bunked up together, can’t remember, but I do remember making Easter baskets to the annoyance of all the males. [The filmmaker] Stan Brakhage came too, at some point. He was then doing those 8mm profiles of writers.” And Creeley, quoted on the same page: “What I’ll remember forever is the extraordinary way Ed and Helene were able to turn the hen house (one of those large houses for laying hens, egg producers, etc.) into such a warm and affectionate home, floored with bricks, a great wood stove—and it worked. I recall visiting there a couple of times and loving the vibes.”

Two decades before nuclear annihilation was a household threat, James Joyce suggested that, if Dublin were destroyed, *Ulysses*, “would supply the evidence for its reconstruction.”⁷² One could make the same argument for *The Maximus Poems*, Charles Olson’s life-long work, which seeks a transcendent *polis*, a “glowing,” mythologized embodiment of Gloucester, Massachusetts.⁷³ Had Whitman a more modernist and mechanistic notion of the poem’s rhetorical force, and of its service to democracy, than he did an organic, incantatory one, he might have made a comparable claim about his own work’s relation to New York City, or even to the Civil War, as an embattled poetic moment reenacted through his *Drum Taps*. Or maybe scholarship has made that claim for Whitman, old father artificer of the open American line. Even Pound forgave and hailed Whitman. In any case, for the work to make the city (in Joyce’s equation at least), the city must be destroyed. Along those lines, if one can imagine the annihilation of postwar American democracy—that is, democracy as a set of behavioral, rhetorical, and psychological patterns—I would propose Dorn’s work (all of it) as the necessary blueprints for that pageant. Poetry, Dorn said, is “my way of voting early and often.”⁷⁴

Over the course of a stylistically diverse career spanning the latter half of the 20th century, Dorn published widely and primarily with independent presses—Harvey Brown’s Frontier Press, John Martin’s Black Sparrow Press, the British presses Fulcrum, and Cape Goliard, etc. With his second wife, Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, he edited his own newspaper, *Rolling Stock*, in Colorado in the 1980s—one of two decades (along with the 1970s) which he spent tirelessly tracking news media and producing daily, sometimes “outrageously” specific, topical poems, in *Hello, La Jolla, Yellow Lola, Abhorrences*, and the unpublished *Day Report*. Dorn’s deep studies of the American West were registered through the rich lyrical sonority of his early work, but the “direct onslaught in that sober sense of the political poem,” became tiresome, and by the late ‘60s, those studies were registered through a poetry that “no longer insists on the sanctity of [the] ego,” writes Marjorie Perloff, in her introduction to Dorn’s complete *Gunslinger*—published in five separate installments (four books and one interlude book, called “The Cycle”), over the period of 1968 to 1975, and collected by first by

⁷² Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1971), 45.

⁷³ Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁷⁴ Dorn, “From Imperial Chicago,” interviewed by Mihopoulos, *Ed Dorn Live*, 68.

Wingbow Press, and then by Duke University in 1989.⁷⁵ That work focuses on “dismantling and deconstructing our linguistic and poetic habits,” and deploying modes of address, “in which meaning is endless deferred, endlessly called into question”—for example, we meet a trenchant, dope-smoking, whiskey-bombed Horse; a character named Taco Desoxin (Desoxin is a brand of amphetamine); and a wise-cracking Barrel, who bitterly rejects the contents he’s prescribed (“I ain’t no drum”; and “you know more about crackers / than I do!”).⁷⁶ And while Dorn’s work migrated from voice to voice, and style to style, so he traveled incessantly in his personal life, observing, lecturing, critiquing, *writing*—off the top of my head I can think of twelve U.S. states in which Dorn taught, at one point or another.

That Dorn—a writer whose primary interests in paradox, interference, transmutation, and the negative capacities of same, produced a body of poetry and prose over the latter half of the 20th century that interrogated American public life, from air bags to Ed Meese, with every temperament available to private and/or public discourse—that he lived long enough to die of cancer, at the age of 70, that is, unlike a number of the Latin American “guerilla” poets he translated in the late 1960s, that fact must signify something, many might argue, about the progress and success of the very democracy that Dorn relentlessly and viciously (those same would argue) interrogates. To some degree, I suppose it does. But in the end, that fact reveals much less about our system of governance than the election of someone like Richard Nixon, say, to the office of president, in early 1969—the year Dorn and Dunbar, just married, moved to Lawrence, Kansas. “Democracy,” Dorn once insisted, “literally needs to be cracked on the head *all the time* to keep it in good condition.”⁷⁷ But cracks on the head take their toll; isn’t “our current democracy” *already* democracy annihilated, or sliced off before it came to be—a polished and element-proof, linguistic veneer of *just like home* lathered over the mindscape to cover a frightfully barren, *unhomely* landscape? And if so, what does this mean for the relationship between the poet, the poem, the culture, and the language?

Let me trace that first question through some critical territory. In his lodestone work on the development of modern nationalism, Benedict Anderson argues the nation is an “imagined community,” imagined as both *limited*—for the members of vast national populations will never know those with whom they are in allegiance, and yet will remain

⁷⁵ Dorn, interviewed by Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 26; Perloff, introduction to *Gunslinger*, xi.

⁷⁶ Perloff, introduction to *Gunslinger*, xv-xvi; Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 187, 189.

⁷⁷ Quoted in William McPheron, *Edward Dorn*, Western Writers Series, no. 85 (Boise: Boise State University, 1988), 5.

strictly so—and *sovereign*—because the nation was born “in an age which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.”⁷⁸ According to Anderson, the “gauge and emblem of freedom” for the individual, is now firmly tied to the sovereignty of a state.⁷⁹ Anderson’s nation is a public reality, but one that is privately formulated, interpreted, and maintained. In the attempt to fasten individual imagination to the security of its state, that is, in order to fix the parameters of the otherwise unruly imaginations of the citizenry, the site of domination is shifted to the mind, to the material of language. Print capitalism, especially the newspaper and the novel, is essential to establishing the *kind* of nation that we “imagine.”⁸⁰

Regarding the phenomenon of “imagining” the nation through what is written, Geoff Ward’s assorted study of American cultural identity, as produced by the literary text, titled *The Writing of America*, proposes a thesis that fundamentally parallels Anderson’s, but emphasizes the unpredictable by-products of the process of “imagining” the nation—its unaccountable gaps and fissures, its broken promises. For Ward, “America has to be thought in order to be lived,” and as a nation of immigrants, consequently, “America must always be partly elsewhere for American experience to be itself.”⁸¹ In the friction of these discrepant ideations, the American cultural landscape is invested with some disconcerting realities: an histrionic casing of cultural identity, and an horrific otherness interpenetrating the horrifically familiar. The latter is rooted in the *democratic* nation that America “imagined” for itself: “The profound thrill of democratic uniformity is at once America’s Eden and its dangerous fruit,” Ward writes. “Once tasted and accepted, that uniformity changes the perceptions, producing both America’s *unheimlich* sameness and the individual’s baffled sense of being somehow outside, no longer contentedly inside the Garden.”⁸² The mass production of democratic ideals eclipses their objective, then makes it scary—an underlying sense of exile and alienation is exacerbated by the very slogans of democratic unity and hurrahs for the cult of individualism that are pasted over it. The blessed privilege of “thinking” America, *for yourself*, before “living it” extends to the nervous construction of distinct identities—entangled in desires antithetical to democratic ethics—to separate the individual from the

⁷⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

⁷⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25; see also chapter 2, “Cultural Roots,” 9-36.

⁸¹ Geoff Ward, *The Writing of America: Literature and Cultural Identity from the Puritans to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 13.

⁸² Ward, *The Writing of America*, 161.

lowly milieu: “The performance of identity as intrinsic to American society is its carnival truth,” Ward writes.⁸³ And yet this “performance of identity” is a contingency of the domination it announces itself to be free of, and at the same time, stands in an uneasy contradiction with the homogenizing pressures of democracy.

In post-war America, democracy (as a *sameness*) and annihilation, and *nuclear* annihilation, are inextricably bound together. However, in a nation made anxious by imagining the plausibility of its own man-made, politically-mandated apocalypse, the essential components of democracy—free information and choice, liberty and mobility, etc.—are difficult to maintain; or worse, they’re criminal. It seems that, in order to conceal this fretful impasse in postwar America, and the degree to which it compromises democracy, furious and hedonistic rituals of mass consumption have been inserted both as a shield to defend against the obliteration of the self (“I buy, therefore I am”), and as an enchanting sheen by which to distract the population from its democratic ideals—or rather, the civilian responsibilities necessary to preserve them, since the ideals hold steadfast. This “superstructure of filth Americans call their way of life,” as poet (and close friend to Dorn), Amiri Baraka defined it, makes mass apoplexy.⁸⁴ In the aftermath of September 11th, the president publicly encouraged Americans to go *shopping*—a suggestion that intended to make commercial consumption (which, no doubt, already was, for many citizens) synonymous with daily life.

Scanning back a bit further, say, over the era the following study covers, one notes the alarming supremacy of *lifestyle* concerns. Style changes in the automobile industry, for example, have cost an annual \$4 billion since 1949; and while the burgeoning gross national product in 1971 (almost a thousand billion dollars) mostly fed big business, it also packed the rapidly expanding suburbs full of the necessary trappings of the *good* life—refrigerators, televisions, vacuum cleaners, etc.—all of which caused a 30 percent surge in household energy consumption in the 1960s.⁸⁵ Inevitably, that consumption blighted and sundered the already bulldozed natural landscape, just as those material, class accoutrements disguised deep societal fissures on the home front: the National Bureau of Economic Research

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸⁴ Amiri Baraka. “An Explanation of the Work.” In *Black Magic: Sabotage, Target Study, Black Art; Collected Poetry, 1961-67* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

⁸⁵ Howard Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), 104, 101; Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

condemned, in 1970, “the failure of 20 years of unprecedented prosperity and rapid economic growth to produce any significant change in the distribution of income, at least at the lower end.”⁸⁶ Ironically, the suburban attempt to seal off an ideal “home,” actually expedited that home as a site of production for the very horrific, lethal, and *unhomely* effects suburbia meant to flee in the first place. Likewise, amidst the frenzied overproduction of the free market, and bolstered by the well-advertised imperatives of national security during a Cold War (or a War on Terror, or a War on Drugs), the U.S. economy’s most thriving and most horrific transactions were accepted as standard operating procedure by a national community that was itself in desperate need of federal funds for education, for instance, or to improve social welfare programs.

A thousand billion dollars were put toward U.S. military purposes between the end of World War II and 1970—a period in which the armed forces built more than three thousand bases spread throughout thirty foreign countries.⁸⁷ And beneath the buzzing of buying and selling heaved the grim continuum of warfare itself. “On August 6, 1970, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Hiroshima,” writes American historian, Howard Zinn, “American planes, after dropping three million tons of bombs on Vietnam—more than had been dropped on Germany and Japan in World War II—were still flying over Vietnamese rice fields and destroying peasant villages. Israelis and Egyptians were still dropping bombs on each other. Russians and Americans were still increasing their stockpiles of atomic weapons, which now equaled about fifty tons of TNT for each inhabitant of the earth.”⁸⁸ Alas, the “deathurge of this twisted society,” Amiri Baraka decries, needs little elaboration.⁸⁹ “Now, we’ve simply got

⁸⁶ Zinn, *Postwar America*, 96; and see Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 84: “The use of electricity to heat and cool homes was especially destructive. The strip mining of coal to provide fuel for generators scarred thousands of acres of land. The emissions from power plants polluted the air, caused acid rain to fall on lakes and forests and contributed to the prospect of global warming. Though the United States so far has had only one disastrous reactor accident, the use of nuclear generating technology routinely produced a host of environmental hazards, from uranium tailings to radioactive waste. The nation’s utilities also created a new threat to aquatic life – the thermal pollution that resulted when the hot water produced during electricity generation was dumped into rivers.” And more recently, Rome explains: “The sprawl of suburbia consumes more land now than ever before. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the nation lost almost 1.4 million acres a year to development from 1982 to 1992. In the mid-1990s, the rate more than doubled, to nearly 3.2 million acres a year. The rush of development in the top five growth states alone accounted for the loss of more than 1 million acres a year. That is roughly the total for the entire nation in the 1950s, when the first critics of the bulldozed landscape began to call for land-saving methods of building.”(265)

⁸⁷ Zinn, *Postwar America*, 73.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁸⁹ Baraka, “An Explanation of the Work.” In *Black Magic*.

too much,” Dorn told an interviewer way back in 1978, the year I was born, “*our habits are showing* to all the world, and they’re bad habits, and they’re gargantuan habits.”⁹⁰

Democracy then, is a paradox: demonstrably unavailable, and ideologically unimpeachable—it represents an instance of its own alienation, its “programmed ignorance.”⁹¹ And the senselessness of this paradox, and the astonishingly dissociated public mind, evokes the frenetic meaninglessness of post-war existence ever perched the verge nuclear annihilation. And thus our language, as Orwell warned us, in the delirium just after the Second World War, becomes meaninglessly detached, distended, slack—note the following excerpt from a discussion between Joe Richey, Dorn, and Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, in 1998:

- Dorn: ... If you want a faceless, rubbed-out, characterless breed of people who are totally conformist, and do what they’re told, and have this sort of boring social construct, sure then democracy can do it for you. It certainly will. And it will do it cruelly, precisely because democracy depends even more on a ruthless elite than fascism does.
With fascism, it’s built in. It’s not even a question. With democracy, you create the elite contrary to everything you don’t like. ...
- Richey: Fascism, and nationalist fascism, may be effective over the short term, and in that way be seen as a viable form of government for the quick change that’s never easy. But the nature of the institutions that sustain it become the problem. The nature of the institutions that a true democracy will breed is more benign, to say the least.
- Dorn: That’s just because you think that Dow Chemical is not as bad as Luftwaffe. And that the history of their genocide is not as bad as the Luftwaffe. That’s how you could say that. A lot of people share that view. ... Nobody has any proof on that. ... But we don’t talk about those things as terrible things because what we’ve been programmed to receive [—] democracy as the only legitimacy, and not just democracy, but *our* democracy specifically.
- Richey: But there is an idea of democracy that predates all the current argument.
- Dorn: Yes, there is the democracy based on slavery. That’s the Greek model. That works pretty well too.
- ...
- Jennifer Dorn: Surely Ed, you have to admit that the idealism behind

⁹⁰ Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Harold Tuckett, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 116.

⁹¹ Dorn, “Waying the West,” interview by Matthew Cooperman, et al., *Ed Dorn Live*, 93.

democracy is much better than the idealism behind fascism.
Dorn: Well, one of fascism's facilities is that it doesn't have ideals. It has models, like the perfect guy and the perfect woman, and the perfect baby and all that. But hell, any advertising agency buys that package or they wouldn't even be in business. That's the whole machinery with which Proctor and Gamble operates.

...
Jennifer Dorn: Let's make this clear. You're not advocating fascism.

Dorn: I've never advocated anything. I'm just saying that I wouldn't advocate fascism any more than I would the kind of democracy that most people seem to believe is blameless.⁹²

Dorn's dissent is not dissent *per se*, it's a preservation of the *possibility* of dissent, and here again we reenter the dizzying contradiction of *resistance*, in a society where oppressor and oppressed share their slogans, where we all want the *same thing* (is that where our democracy has taken us, to that *sameness*?): "I'm not against anything," Dorn insists: "In fact, I'm against being against anything, if I'm against anything."⁹³ As consumer-citizens attempt to vault the weight of their conscience on the leverage of their credit, the public consciousness undergoes a stagnating transformation, fearfully harnessing itself to what poet and biographer, Tom Clark, labels, "the orthodoxy of comfort in America"—that is, to specific and exclusive categories of belonging, behavior, and identity, the I-beams of the *status quo*.⁹⁴

For the poet, who labors in the field of language, this condition is complex and troubling. In a recent interview, poet Ben Lerner addresses this paradox as it relates to the recent anthology, *Poets Against the War*: "Poetasters who proudly assert that they are apolitical and armchair poet-radicals have at least one thing in common: they share the idea that poetry could somehow be free not to reflect the iniquities of its cultural moment. Criticizing *Poets Against the War* for sharing some of the 'social and linguistic norms' of the

⁹² Ibid., 105-106.

⁹³ Dorn, "Through the Rearview Mirror," interview by Paul Dresman, *Ed Dorn Live*, 151; and see pg. 73: "In a way, the majority deserves these stupid little minorities that have selfish little programs, one-issue enclaves of people who don't have any vision, their one focus of opposition is toward this majority—because the only time the majority gets together is under Reagan."

⁹⁴ This point is in debt to, and better expressed by Cyrus Console, in his vigorously precise comment about Ben Lerner's sonnet sequence, *The Lichtenberg Figures*: "Violence is not so much the subject of these poems as it is the behavior they exhibit, a series of reenactments precise and unaffected as those of troubled children. Modeling that violence is the image, now reflected unto perpetuity, of a civilization who value the spotlessness of their records over that of their consciences, whose stock phrases have long outdistanced their founding sentiments, whose individual voices have been rendered inaudible by the deafening cliché of computer mice on brightly colored type, cutting, pasting, issuing consent." Cyrus Console, "Sustained Elegy" *Jacket Magazine*, no. 28 (October 2005), <<http://jacketmagazine.com/28/cons-lerner.html>>

American war machine implies that there is a way of using language that doesn't."⁹⁵ If the dominant ideology is embedded in language, and language is the material with which we "imagine" the community and our place in it (our identities as references to it), and that this relationship, in turn, serves as the "gage and emblem of freedom," then the language is itself the mark of dominance, the mark of exile, and to use it is to be dominated. In 1965, as a white, male, American *poet*, Dorn found himself amidst the crisis of these frictions when he visited the Shoshone Indians of the Basin Plateau, with African American photographer, Leroy Lucas. Dorn discussed the event in a lecture at the Berkeley Poetry Conference that year, but excised most of what follows when the talk was later published:

[I]t's awfully hard to talk to Indians by the way, because they don't speak English, except, you know, in the most casual sense. And you don't speak Shoshoni, at all. [...] So there we were, and there they were. And every time I go out, to do anything like that, I always question what I am – and who I am, where I am, what is America? I don't really believe in America. I certainly don't believe in citizenship. I have no allegiance to the flag, or... I certainly have no allegiance to such an idiot as Lyndon Johnson. I never would – it's not in my nature to respect such a creature, *ever*. So, where... who am I? What do I do with a country like this? I'm out *in* it. Supposedly, it's *mine*. I would insist that I'm a citizen. I was—I *really* was, born here... Okay. So there you are, right there with the first, with the natives, with the first people, the first human beings . . . on this continent. And you don't know what to say to them.⁹⁶

Here Dorn not only asserts a moral integrity fundamentally at odds with national policy, but also suggests a root exile ("where am I? ... who am I?"), which infects the context for a "democratic" identity that is institutionally established to stabilize these kinds of precarious cultural interactions in the first place, and to concretize their power dynamics. Dorn's questions over his own identity, over "if a poet exists," are tied up in the culturally and ideologically constrained concepts of language, behavior, and geography, which makes this quote a good place to start for what his poetry seeks to do. In this decentered, *unhomely*, exilic space, between the America that's "thought" and the America that's "lived," power and consent are jointly, if unwittingly, manufactured at the site of the individual citizen, through a

⁹⁵ Ben Lerner, interview by Kent Johnson, *Jacket Magazine*, no. 26 (October 2004), <<http://jacketmagazine.com/26/john-lern.html>>

⁹⁶ Dorn, *The Poet, the People, the Spirit*, Spencer Mss., compact disc; and see: Dorn, "The Poet, the People, the Spirit." In *Views*, ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1980), 93-117.

normalized set of expectations and behaviors *within* the language. To this notion of a “normative, conventional... power we’ve grown accustomed to,” poet and critic, Charles Bernstein assigns the term “centrality”; in “mass culture,” Bernstein writes, dominance is “based on centrality, at an epistemological level.”⁹⁷ And dominance itself is, for Bernstein, a “fashionable” contest that produces *resistance* as its mechanism for determining *who’s in*, and *who’s out*. How then, to refashion the language of dominance already planted in one’s mouth? How to break Blake’s “mind-forg’d manacles,” to stop “that lineage, that crippled stem of this country... made with the mind”?⁹⁸ How to reclaim the “centrality” of one’s ego, one’s identity, among an imprisoned “landscape of the imagination”?

* * * * *

These are the questions this study takes up, as it also takes up the environment—cultural, historical, literary, and human—in which Dorn was immersed. These questions increasingly led to a self-awareness of the infinitely mediated condition of language and identity, and to ceaseless transgressions and disruptions in the work.⁹⁹ Dorn’s primary concern is for the health of the public mind, what he calls the “shared mind”—of which the poet is necessarily a *part*, not *above* (where so many “social protest” writers think they are)—and for the ideological tendencies that comically, tragically, and acrobatically administer and coerce that mind *with a denigrated language*.

“We’re all sinners and we’ve all done wrong and we all came from somewhere else, including everybody,” Dorn claims, and as his writing moves—and movement is central to its processes—through the various, divergent discourses of the American democratic pageant, it deliriously imbibes, assuming the manifold contradictions, comedies, and linguistic flourishes

⁹⁷ Bernstein, “Censors of the Unknown,” interview by Beckett, 188.

⁹⁸ *Selected Poems of William Blake*, ed. Peter Butler (London: Everyman, 1993), 31; Dorn, “Driving Across the Prairie,” *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 65.

⁹⁹ In his incomparable introduction to his own *Bending the Bow*, Robert Duncan writes: “The poet of the event senses the play of its moralities belongs to the configuration he cannot see but feels in terms of fittings that fix and fittings that release the design out of itself as he works to bring the necessary image to sight.” (New York: New Directions, 1968), iv.

of that ideological, “imagined” landscape.¹⁰⁰ Elaborating this fact, in his introduction to *Internal Resistances*, Wesling argues:

Dorn is a profoundly moral poet in a time when some poets opt entirely for the subjective or for the infinite regressivity of semiotic systems. And Dorn is moral without being prescriptive. Rather, he understands how difficult it is to exist ethically in a society in which all systems are severely mediated. He provides a poetic methodology that, while rejecting absolute categories of genre, person, rhetoric, and point of view, understands how to make use of them, lovingly and ironically at the same time.¹⁰¹

As I’ve said, among the most striking and misinterpreted aspects of Dorn’s poetics is this *acceptance* (again Wesling’s title moving against his claim) that, “all systems are severely mediated”—the fact that people *are* and *will be* ruled, that they exploit themselves as eagerly as they do one another, that they denigrate their principles and plunder their environment. Asked in a 1984 interview how “does one maintain a legitimate political stance as a North American poet,” Dorn’s response illustrates his primary interest in *enunciation*, not *denunciation*:

Well, I assume everybody’s going to be dead in the morning. You see, the point for me here is the simplest fact that sensibility is no substitute for consciousness. . . . Most of us know all the time that politics in poetry really amounts to enunciation. Politics in politics amounts to subterfuge, obscurantism, and hiding all you can. But that’s politics in politics, not politics in writing. Because there’s no power in politics in writing, except enunciation. The registration is there and that’s all there is to it.¹⁰²

Enunciation isn’t necessarily anti-war, it’s not even, in a strictest sense of the term, poetic (which denotatively rests on two concepts Dorn spurns, *emotion* and *expression*), and in fact, for Dorn, *enunciation* definitely does involve “subterfuge” and “obscurantism”—at least insofar as those conditions pertain to authorial presence, to *style* and *voice*, both of which are exceedingly complex categories for Dorn’s poetics beginning in the late 1960s. However, in Dorn’s hands, these methods are subjected to an awareness of their own mediation; with them Dorn clears a negative space, like the Duke of Ferrara’s famous monologue, wherein

¹⁰⁰ Dorn, “From Imperial Chicago,” interview by Mihopoulos, *Ed Dorn Live*, 151-152.

¹⁰¹ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 7.

¹⁰² Dorn, “Interview at Madison,” interview by Sturgeon, *Ed Dorn Live*, 47.

embedded contradictions are irritated, or unwittingly exposed. And there, magnanimously, Dorn's "audience is often left to fend for themselves."¹⁰³

And here we come to a response to the second question I proposed above: what do the failings of democracy mean for the relationship between Dorn as a poet, his poetry, his culture, and his language? Let's take it from the man himself, in a 1978 interview:

The fact is that this society needs to be examined by other methods than are ordinarily available through the sociometrics, the usual procedure, which yields a kind of data system which is then mainly converted *not* to intelligent reflection about the society, but to simply a way to get at its potential for *buying*, for instance, or to understand how it's redistributed itself—in other words, to *track* it. But that doesn't tell you much about its *being*; that just attempts to say what it might or might not *do*, which I translate to mean what it might or might not buy.

Now, a poet or anyone who writes and therefore has care of the instrumentation of language is attempting to make it as fine as possible, and as sharp. ... There are some people who have power and a certain kind of means at their disposal who are trying to get the society to think a certain way, to do a certain set of things, and so forth. I think any responsible writer is never that. No writer is ever trying to get anybody to *do* something; what they're trying to create is a cognizance in the society of itself, to furnish the means—through clarity of language—for a self-appraisal and self-evaluation.¹⁰⁴

Dorn is an architect of disassembly; his poem is a site of inalienable and endless negativity, weathered by an atmosphere of uncertainty, paradox, and imminent destruction. The fear of annihilation presents an exhilarating occasion to refashion an ego, an ego that has "disintegrated" in mass society into "something cheap and commercial and psychiatric." Dorn envisions the aporia in American democracy (that "lineage, that result, that crippled stem of this country is made with the mind") and the thwarted, "rigged" operations of capitalism ("venal and lying and immoral ... that's not ideological... just empirical"), as linguistic opportunities—exigencies rather (in light of the impending doom)—and interstices through which to shuttle and rerender the ideologically, "crippled stem" of public discourse, and from its ossified, tendentious slab of language, to fashion a poetic "henge" for his body of work to roam in.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Smith, introduction to *Way More West*, xvi.

¹⁰⁴ Dorn, "The Flint Interview," interview by Harold Tuckett, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Dorn, "An Interview with Edward Dorn," interview by John Wright, *Chicago Review*, 195.

The first imperative of Dorn's work is that we accept its supremacy of the discursive and dialectical.¹⁰⁶ In the brief preface to his *Collected Poems: 1956-1974*, Dorn acknowledges the small readership that has accepted this: "From near the beginning I have known my work to be theoretical in nature and poetic by virtue of its inherent tone. My true readers have known exactly what I have assumed. I am privileged to take this occasion to thank you for that exactitude, and to acknowledge the pleasure of such a relationship."¹⁰⁷ And to remain certain, also, that those who have not "known exactly what I have assumed," must still work it out for themselves. Dorn's assumption about the openness of the poem and the poet is essential to understanding the overall context in which I read the work and the life.

On this point, I turn to Nathaniel Mackey's thoroughly intense, critical essay, "Gassire's Lute: Robert Duncan Vietnam War Poems," and to the ideas of Duncan himself. "The poet's role," Duncan wrote to Denise Levertov, in October 1971, "is not to oppose evil, but to imagine it. ... Is it a disease of our generation that we offer symptoms and diagnoses of what we are in the place of imaginations and creations of what we are."¹⁰⁸ This double-jointed, ambidextrous concept of the poet who is dialectically aware of the manifold, primordial inheritance of good *and* evil forces in, and acting on and from, the *self*, and thus who weaves creative acts out of destructive impulses, ties Dorn's work to Duncan's. For example, Michael Davidson's contribution to *Internal Resistances* explores these tensions between Dorn's "rich scorn for Howard Hughes and for the idiom of technological jargon, even while [he] takes these as subject and medium, respectively."¹⁰⁹ Mackey's brilliant essay, which focuses on the same historical period as the following study, elaborates this embattled consistency with specific regard to annihilation and apocalypse.

In Duncan's poetry, as in the world of which it's a part, the war is ongoing, and the "best we can do, it seems, would be to awaken *to* it, to acknowledge it, thus coming to a fuller

¹⁰⁷ Edward Dorn, preface to *Collected Poems of Edward Dorn: 1956-1974* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1975), v.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Duncan to Denise Levertov, San Francisco, 19 October 1971. In *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, ed. Robert Bertholf and Albert Gelpi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 669. And note Duncan's critique (à la John Keats' *negative capability* letter) of Levertov, in a letter of 16 October 1971: "...one of the troubles you have as a poet is that even the flickering moments in which the grand vision of apocalypse might arise and some outpouring of the *content* of world-anger come, you cannot give it free imaginative expression, cannot 'identify' with the anger, but must moralize and humanize."(663)

¹⁰⁹ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 5. See Michael Davidson, "'To eliminate the draw': Narrative and Language in *Slinger*," in *Internal Resistances*, 113-149.

knowledge of ourselves.”¹¹⁰ For instance, Duncan saw in the power of the war and of the state that was waging it, “not only a power over me but also a power related to my own creative power but turned to purposes of domination, exploitation, and destruction.”¹¹¹ Facing this rupture, poetry’s ability to oppose the war stretches far beyond the “dialectical,” Mackey argues, into “an inverse function in which war feeds the poet’s imagination by giving rise to the need for an alternative vision.”¹¹² The imagination, or invocation of this “alternative vision,” however, is a delicate and dangerous business; it requires strict attention to one’s methods and their implications, for “‘old evils arisen anew,’ again and again conspire with and confirm the imagination’s judgment, adding fuel to its apocalyptic fires, alerting us to the brink on which we live.”¹¹³ Thus, Mackey asserts that the “apocalyptic in Duncan’s work is not so much a prophetic or historical claim as an eternally present possibility, the ‘eternal sentence’ given birth to and kept alive by imagining an other world.”¹¹⁴

Yet the “other world” the poem is comes to be by recasting and realigning the materials of this one—the concocted “real” is, after all, within “the universe” it eclipses. In this scenario, the “eternally present” apocalypse—the poetic “virtue” of which “has not to do with the embodiment of realities so different from those at work in politics, but with the fact that it confines itself to the medium of language, not making use of people”—is simultaneously an ever-emergent cosmogenesis.¹¹⁵ While Dorn’s notion of *enunciation* in political poetry smoothly parallels this Donne-ian, transcendent “confinement” Mackey mentions, it also grants it its rhetorical power. And through *enunciation*, the Heraclitean juncture of cosmology and apocalypse in the poem acts on the author as well, and that

¹¹⁰ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” *Paracritical Hinge*, 116.

¹¹¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 130; Originally published in Robert Duncan, *The Years as Catches: First Poems (1939-1946)* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1966), vii-viii.

¹¹² Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” *Paracritical Hinge*, 152.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 167; and see pg. 118: “When the dominant order—in the name of reason, commodity worship, and the material comforts of the few—depresses, diminishes, and trivializes life on all fronts, the poet’s invocation of a numinous realm is suspect and associated with fantasies better left unexplored.” And see Kenner, *Magic and Spells*, also on this point: “The job of the poet is to speak efficacious words,” he writes, and of the Victorian fright at what fearful ambiguities the efficacy of specifics might summon: “Again we may be in the domain of the blessing and the curse: since you didn’t know what powers you might be wielding when you specified, it was general safest not to.” (16) This seems to contextualize Silliman’s (and others’) reaction to Dorn’s epigrams. For instance, the simple, terrifying, empirically-verifiable truth—“one bullet / is worth / a thousand bulletins”—is maddening, as Silliman acts out, in its specifics (“one,” “a thousand”) detached from any commanding ideology, any “orthodoxy of comfort.” (Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 15).

¹¹⁴ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” *Paracritical Hinge*, 167.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

activity directly links Mackey's (and/or Duncan's) "eternally present" apocalypse, "as a trope for the art experience, being taken out of oneself by way of art," to Dorn's work in the late '60s—his death not "of the author," as Roland Barthes' smugly announced in 1969, but of "I".¹¹⁶ Thus, if we reconsider Dorn's work in the play of these paradoxical realities, *resistance* becomes *migration*, resentment is transmuted into a compassionate awareness of the horrific otherness and uncertainty nesting at the core of our experience (if we allow ourselves to admit it), and our "abhorrences" become, as Dorn said of his book with the same name, "an act of love, actually."¹¹⁷ Dorn's discords are felt like Duncan's, when the latter writes of his work in *Bending the Bow*:

For these discords, these imperatives of the poem that exceed our properties, these interferences—as if the real voice of the poet might render unrecognizable to our sympathies the voice we wanted to be real, these even artful, willful or, it seems to us, affected, psychopathologies of daily life, touch upon the living center where there is no composure but a life-spring of dissatisfaction in all orders from which the restless ordering of our poetry comes.¹¹⁸

* * * * *

Earlier I discussed the organization of what follows in terms of my interest in harmonizing the extraordinary diversity of Dorn's career. Let me now provide a brief outline of this work's parts. As a whole, the study moves chronologically, though at times its chapters shift and lap over one another for discursive purposes I've already explained. Just as the work has three large parts—(1) before England; (2) England, Lawrence, New England, 1968; (3) Lawrence, 1969—there are three components to its narrative and analysis: the biographical, the literary/critical, and the historical. I mean these categories to represent my source materials as well. That is, as a biography, the work covers the latter half of the 1960s, and particularly the years 1968 and 1969, and to do so, it relies upon mostly unpublished correspondence between Dorn, his family, and friends; interviews (both personal and

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 163; Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

¹¹⁷ Dorn, "Waying the West," interview by Cooperman, et al., *Ed Dorn Live*, 93.

¹¹⁸ Duncan, introduction to *Bending the Bow*, x.

secondary); excerpts from unpublished notebooks; memoirs of those close to Dorn; audio and video recordings; photographs (personal and archival); sketches posted on websites; and generally anything else I could find.¹¹⁹ As a critical study, the work moves, as I said, over Dorn's entire career, but focuses primarily on the writing of the late '60s. I gathered these writings from published sources (journals and books, both in and out of print), private sources (Dorn's friends and family), audio recordings, broadsides, and a number archives containing unpublished work in notebooks, on loose-leaf sheets and scraps of paper, on receipts, on toilet paper, whatever. I have retained all redacted elements in the archival materials—poems and else—from which I've quoted. Unless otherwise noted, I have been faithful to misspellings and, obviously, to the spacing of the words on the page (though in some cases this was rather difficult—Dorn's spelling is idiosyncratic to say the least; Olson's handwriting, glyphic as ever, is a series of wavy, diagonal lines, his letters resemble a failed attempt to draw water); and in the case of works of which there are multiple drafts, I have either noted changes in the body of my own text, in footnotes, or in single-line redacted passages. As for the work by outside writers that I've included in my discussion and analysis, there is a twofold rationale. In the majority of cases, these outside works were either subjects of discussion or debate in Dorn's letters—as is the case with Michael McClure's poem, "Poisoned Wheat"—or they are the subjects of Dorn's critical prose—as is again the case with McClure, or Robert Duncan; however, I have also made an effort to focus, as much as possible, on writers from Kansas, or at least those with specific relationships with Kansas, writers whom Dorn read, and with whom he corresponded. Oddly enough, this particular undercurrent of Kansas throughout the work was not an imposition I placed on the material, I was compelled to this effort simply by the available materials—from the Spencer Research Museum here in Lawrence, Kansas, to the Dodd Research Library, where Dorn's papers are collected, in Storrs, Connecticut.

As a history, this study relies, for the most part, on secondary sources. For the history of Lawrence, specifically, I turned to Rusty L. Monhollon's comprehensive study, *"This Is America?": The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas*; to the Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers Association's book of memoirs, *Cows Are Freaky When They Look at You*, and to the interdisciplinary collection of essays, *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict & Community*, from

¹¹⁹ For example, though I don't mention it otherwise, I learned from wikipedia that Dorn, while a visiting professor at Kent State, was mentor to Gerald Casale and Bob Lewis of Devo, which was confirmed in conversations with Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, and Kenneth Irby.

which I have also taken that moniker, “embattled Lawrence,” in my analysis throughout.¹²⁰ I have embellished these secondary sources with newspaper articles from *The New York Times* and *The University Daily Kansan*, the student paper at KU, as well as with personal interviews with residents of the town and with friends of Dorn, and with my own personal experience of having lived here for nearly a decade. But these categories, inevitably, run together like thoughts do. My interview with George Kimball, for example, provided me information about Lawrence’s drug scene in 1969, as well as offering the character background for the poem, “The Cosmology of Finding Your Place”; and it was Dorn’s short prose piece, “Greene Arrives on the Set,” for instance, that led me into the *Daily Kansan* archives, where I discovered Lorenzo Greene, a former history professor at KU.

Following a more detailed overview of the primary concerns of this study, part one orients Dorn’s epistolary relationships primarily with Tom Clark, Ken Irby, Leroi Jones, and Tom Raworth. Here I explore work preceding, for the most part, Dorn’s time in England, and read it against a number of Olson’s principles outlined in his dense essays on methodology, indigenous cultures, and poetics. These readings examine the function of a few central concepts in Dorn’s poetics—*internal migration*; *locus of experience*; and *centrality*, *dominance*, and *fashion* (Berstein’s constellation of ideological power in mass culture)—as well as they interrogate the paronomastic linkage between the “eye” and the “I” in Dorn’s work. I discuss how these earlier poems develop themes of homelessness, immobility, and a corruption of natural cycles, and I offer historical background of the post-war surge in American production of household goods and of households themselves, and of the toxins and contamination produced by that “homemaking” desire. I also briefly discuss past measures—legal and illegal, federal and private—enacted to privatize, enclose, and acculturate the land. Throughout the first part of the study, I tie these historical trends into the main themes of Dorn’s work, and into the work of those around him, and near the close of this section, I provide a brief overview of the main ideas in the following two sections.

Part two concentrates primarily on Dorn’s time in England, but also includes a section covering his 1968 three-week residency in Kansas. This section begins with a thorough discussion of the concept of a “root exile,” which I trace through Ward’s book and likewise couch in the terminology of Nathaniel Tarn, whose critical collection, *The Embattled*

¹²⁰ Dennis Domer and Barbara Watkins, eds., *Embattled Lawrence: Conflict & Community* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001).

Lyric: Essays and Conversations in Poetics and Anthropology, informs my thinking about both “exile” and “voice” in Dorn’s work.¹²¹ After a discussion that situates this “exile that is,” in which Dorn’s “I” wanders, on a continuum of modern American poetry, I turn to Dorn’s variegated responses to other “political” poems written at the time, and elaborate my argument against *resistance* as an organizing principle for his work. Meanwhile, I swiftly move the biographical narrative to late 1967, when the split between Dorn and Helene was deepening at Essex. At this point, over the next two years, I’ve traced the life as intricately as I could with the resources available.

While I follow Dorn to Lawrence, in April 1968, I also contrast his experience that spring with Dunbar’s, who wrote to him in the U.S. nearly everyday for three weeks. I’ve included a selection of Dunbar’s letters with minimal interruption, and very little commentary (unless of factual necessity), in an attempt to balance the lop-sided inadequacy of the biography’s very nature—that so much concentration on a single subject is bound to distort that subject’s capacities. To what degree must the biographer know about those surrounding his subject? I intend these letters to establish Dunbar’s complexity of character in a way that description and cursory analysis cannot. After this short interlude, over the last few sections of part two, I discuss Dorn’s and Dunbar’s trip to Paris from Essex, in May 1968, and the influence this “embraceable revolution” had on Dorn’s self-presentations and *style*, and examine the couple’s lodestone visit to Glastonbury, England, which opened new “outsidereal” inclinations in Dorn’s poetics, just before they returned to America by boat. The final stages of part two also cover Dorn’s aborted involvement with Yippie Party demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that August. Much of the rest of that fall the couple spent in West Newbury, Massachusetts, with their close friend and one of Dorn’s many publishers, Harvey Brown. In December, Dorn and Dunbar traveled to New Mexico to visit the Creeleys, and from there they embarked for Lawrence, in early January 1969, and there part two comes to its close.

I begin part three with a overview of the themes and qualities various poets have invested in Kansas—from Vachel Lindsay to Allen Ginsberg—and I propose Lawrence as a mythic and violent crossroads, a “center” from which Dorn drew a special poetic energy. This final section provides an in depth history of Lawrence from 1969 through the middle of

¹²¹ Nathaniel Tarn, *The Embattled Lyric: Essays and Conversations in Poetics and Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

1970, the point at which horrendous violence erupted on the university hill, and two kids were killed. I concentrate on a few characters among Lawrence's "freak" scene, such as George Kimball, and Jim McCrary, and attempt to establish, as much as possible, a "locality of the living," out of my historical materials.¹²² Close readings of Dorn's work while in Kansas enter the study at this point—including parts of *Gunslinger*, shorts prose pieces from his 1971 book, *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, such as "The Garden of Birth," and "The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas," the first section of a film script, *Abilene, Abilene!* (a metaphysical cattle drive straight north from Texas to Kansas), which Dorn wrote for experimental filmmaker and close friend, Stan Brakhage, and various others. I also explore Ken Irby's long poem, for which Dorn wrote a later introduction, titled, *To Max Douglas*—occasioned by the drug overdose of a young, gifted poet from St. Joe, Missouri, who took Dorn's class in the spring of 1969. Through Irby's underappreciated masterpiece, I explore Lawrence's relationship to "Bleeding Kansas," and Dorn's unpublished poem, "Osawatomie," which interlaces a biographical sketch of John Brown with the shootings in the summer of 1970. Part three closes with a thorough consideration (some of which part two surveys as well) of Dorn's personal relationship with Charles Olson, his mentor, who died in January 1970, and of his relationship with Jennifer Dunbar, his wife, who gave birth to a son, in August 1969—a son they appropriately named Kid Laurence.¹²³ As I develop these relationships in the text, I also explore the general sentiments and behaviors of Dorn's correspondence, and suggest possibilities for positioning his writing in some significant but unexaggerated relationship with his biography, insofar as the correspondence and other sources I've gathered can recreate the life.

Finally, I must say, the most pervasive source behind this project cannot be adequately classified in any methodological category that I know of, and that's the wellspring of friendship. The extent to which my education in the "human universe" is indebted to Ken Irby, who introduced me to Ed Dorn's work, is something the ambitions of this project can only vaguely ascertain. And as I approach the end of this project, a sharp sadness returns for a different friend, whom I lost during the process of writing, and who was likewise a key messenger to my experience of Dorn, and a luminous example to me of what a dedicated, kind, responsible, and intelligent writer should be. I miss John Moritz, miss drinking Old

¹²² Duncan, introduction to *Bending the Bow*, ii.

¹²³ With some uncertainty over his name's spelling—sometimes "Kidd"—I've retained the spelling that occurs more frequently.

Style with him at his kitchen table, and this paper is indelibly marked by his presence, and now, his absence.

Pound said poetry is “news that stays news,” and I wonder what that means about its connection to the kind of news that stays news, or that mercilessly reappears as news these days.¹²⁴ Today I walk up to the Oread and where the Rock Chalk Café used to be, I see the hollow concrete foundation for a new hotel. Turn around—no White House commune, but an Alumni Center—and around: the view from the hill, a parking lot. Then, I look back on a “low, dishonest decade,” and think on it: we are at war in two countries due to obscenely falsified “intelligence”; for purposes not yet made clear, we are readying our battleships and carriers in the Gulf waters off the coast of Iran; our phones are illegally tapped through collusion between corporate enterprise and federal decree; *habeas corpus* is suspended, or reworded; prisoners are flown overseas to be tortured, or rather, interrogated with “enhanced techniques”; and federally-contracted private militia corporations offer disgruntled soldiers exorbitant pay to operate above the law. Here, on the “news,” I hear mostly about high gas prices, the mortgage crisis and rising foreclosure rates, new fees for checked baggage on overbooked flights—is it true what Slavoj Zizek has asserted, that our society finds it easier (and certainly more entertaining) to imagine the apocalypse, even a total nuclear holocaust, than it does a change of economic or political order? Interesting that the satellites drifting overhead, imaging our globe for Google Earth, will document our end. There were hunger riots in Detroit last month, and last week there were outcries in *The New York Times* over the U.S. military’s use of live pigs as machinegun fodder in drills designed to improve onsite treatment gunshot wounds. These times need Dorn’s work. But I chose the ambiguous invocation of “news” in my title because with Pound’s reference that term can abide all of the trajectories of this study. Furthermore, not only does the historical “news” included in these pages seem astonishingly present, even forty years hence, but Dorn’s political “news” also proves Pound’s point: this work can *help* us to understand ourselves, to locate and evaluate our moral despair, and try to do better. And the combination “nowhere”? That’s simple, here’s an instance: in the spring of 1968, when Jennifer Dunbar told Gordon Brotherston, a colleague of Dorn’s at Essex, that Dorn was in Kansas, Brotherston “gap[ed] incredulously ... he’s in KANSAS?” In that way, I also mean for “nowhere” to evoke the “exile that *is*,” in Dorn’s work, and that I’ve herein introduced. But why “now” and “here,” rising up on a

¹²⁴ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1934), 29.

wave in the fissure of “nowhere”? That “wave,” as Ben Lerner’s *Angle of Yaw* begins: “I will here attempt to situate / in the broader cognitive process / of turning the page.”¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Ben Lerner, *The Angle of Yaw* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2006), 3.

PART ONE:

April 1929 – September 1965

... The guy with the dogs at Cowden wasn't going that particular Wed., so I shot the only ten \$ I had for a bus to ticket to K.C. ... In K.C. I had my first, actual look at where the badness, the ugliness that is manufactured and sold as product, by this society, breaks through and spills, runs out as awful yellow pus runs from a cancer which is also and by the same token, the matter of the whole thing. There men have different looks in their eyes. The stare is no so much intensely at, as it is intensely out, from their own heads. These people on 12th Street, the skid row of K.C., have mixed, conglomerate, fantastically inconsistent manners, ways. Most of them, on the one hand, have murdered or done bodily harm for the price of a draught beer, yet these same ones, in a tavern, which almost always reeks with their faint puky smell, will spend their last dime for a beer for you and be insulted if you decline they are so kind with you, so concerned, they are so gentle, yet a Negro can't go into the same bar with them, these lowest of lows, and even though you may rightly say you know all this and that I should too, it isn't at all an obvious thing and when I think about it now I realize I can never say, really, how frighteningly and how close to some quality of truth I was that day, June 5. I got very drunk. Drinking all day is a new drunkenness to me. Then, and since K.C., I have found in the men I have come onto and talked with the most incredible kind of unobjectiveness. They have absolutely no sense of objective. And fact is completely unknown. I have largely kept my mouth shut and listened. The impulse to point out prejudice and superstition is great but I have succeeded in listening, at last, silently. Because one of the first things I learned was the uselessness, the hopelessness of argument with these people. Which brings me to a point. [What I have] said about availability and reality, excuse me for. It is so easy to intellectualize about that. And there is great danger in intelligence only. It is too easy to say, to talk, as I have heard only meaningless empty talk these past few days, about the things we should be living, but are so crippled, by now, that mere talk itself has become the objective. One of the greatest, if not the greatest lesson to be learned from Reich is that if the intellect-body is not whole, is not a unity, then there can be nothing complete and the functioning will not be harmonic. And Olson says the same thing: When 'language is separable from action,' that is, if language is empty, is objective, there will be no action. Which means that I just don't know enough to try to tell you anything at all about what is and what is not available to you. All I can do is tell you what I do.

– Ed Dorn, from an early '50s letter to Gordon Taylor¹²⁶

Let's move.

– from *The Wild Bunch*

— *Can I move?*

— *Move? What the hell ya mean move?*

– from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

1. Groundwork

For three weeks in the mild spring afternoons of 1968, Ed Dorn sat on the roof of the Eldridge Hotel, in Lawrence, Kansas, gazing north at the bottom lands of the Kaw River, southwest to the limestone escarpments rising from the shale plains—to the east, a famous blood-fouled border; to burning pastures in the west. The hotel was his home while he was poet-in-residence at the university that spring, and its roof became his office. He savored the view unraveling in every direction, “the sense is this large,” he wrote, of the landscape’s deep

¹²⁶ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 143-144.

history (and vice versa, history's deep...), "[t]he Kansas River runs its arms / into the air of the Divide."¹²⁷ Dorn frequently evoked this projecting, isotropic energy of place with the term "out"—in his oft-cited, from "Idaho Out," or his dedication to Olson, "from Gloucester Out"—and so might we refer to "the sense," from the mid-continent, from Lawrence, "out," of the animus of that place. His students appreciated the opportunity to investigate those histories, interlocking and alive, as well as Dorn's innovative and more personal approach to learning-as-discovery. "For Ed," ex-student and close friend John Moritz, inscribed the bottom of a broadside he'd published, "Straight out— / from the roof of the Hotel Eldridge / 'a place made' of our making / Love John / Saint Pat's Day / 17 March 1976."¹²⁸

For Dorn's knowledge of place, Charles Olson tagged him "the Geographical."¹²⁹ And it was Olson, in his famous study of Melville, *Call Me Ishmael*, who would single out the plains, first thing: "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America," Olson writes, "from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy."¹³⁰ And a few sentences further: "The fulcrum of America is the Plains, half sea half land, a high sun as metal and obdurate as the iron horizon, and a man's job to square the circle."¹³¹ Squaring the circle is a "timid endeavor" in Dorn's "Idaho Out," a geometry of disenfranchisement agriculturally etched, a "brickwork / not propaedeutic to a life of grand design / wherein *all* men fit."¹³² In a poem called "The Midwest is that space between the Buffalo Statler and the Lawrence Eldridge," the expansive view from the Lawrence rooftop spreads in stark contrast to the local paroxysms of nationalized suffering, provincially embedded along the privatized hills:

And there is the beginning and
the end. A very definite stretch
the Midwest. The only idea
it holds firmly and persistently
in mind
is that infinitive to choke. An association

¹²⁷ Edward Dorn, "The Midwest is that space between the Buffalo Statler and the Lawrence Eldridge," broadside poem, published by Terence Williams, 3 Westwood, Lawrence, Kansas, 1969 (gifted by John Moritz).

¹²⁸ John Moritz to Edward Dorn, 5 February 1976, Folder 182, Edward Dorn Papers. Dodd Mss.

¹²⁹ Jane Wodening, *The Book of Legends: Stories of Maya Deren, Joseph Cornell, & Charles Olson* (New York: Invisible Books, 1993), 25.

¹³⁰ Olson, "Call Me Ishmael," in *Collected Prose of Charles Olson*, 17.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³² Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 109.

with Detroit, the Dutch word for riot. For
instance, the avidity
with which those natives eat pork
is a dead giveaway.

So it doesn't end until you pass
beyond Topeka but already the Eldridge
is cool enough to have a little machine
which makes coffee
in every room and a bed that
emerges

like a butterfly
from its couch
and one of the driest
black chambermaids anywhere, or from
the roof the sense is this large —
The Kansas River runs its arms
into the air of the Divide.¹³³

The Continental Divide, some six-hundred miles to the west. But the Kaw flows east, where it meets the Missouri at Kansas City, thirty-five miles away—an east/west border made volatile by a north/south debate: in 1854 the Kansas/Nebraska Act deferred the question of slavery in those territories to the vote of their inhabitants. Nullifying the Compromise that had loosed fetters north of Missouri's southern boundary in 1820, the act created a period of violence and lawlessness that won Kansas its bleeding appellation. The Plains a fulcrum indeed: the Kansas/Missouri border is a massive, active geologic fault line that seems to aggravate history: in 1882 a Lawrence vigilante group made up of fifty white men lynched three black men from the only bridge in town, the 2nd St. bridge that connects historically African-American and working-class North Lawrence to the commercial downtown on the south side of the river.¹³⁴ Old hickory trees in scattered clusters along the banks provided the fuel and construction materials that built Lawrence. The river's broad passage allowed for fast transportation to Kansas City's larger markets and provided direct access to the Missouri's and Mississippi's wealth of destinations.¹³⁵ Was Dorn thinking of Lawrence, of

¹³³ Dorn, broadside poem, gifted by Moritz. See "The History of Futures" in Dorn's *Collected Poems* for more on "the Bloody Red Meat Habits" that Dorn attacks/laments.

¹³⁴ William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Separate but Not Equal: African Americans and the 100-year Struggle for Equality in Lawrence and at the University of Kansas, 1850s-1960," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 143.

¹³⁵ See James R. Shortridge and Barbara G. Shortridge, "Yankee Town on the Kaw: A Geographical and Historical Perspective on Lawrence and its Environs," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 5-22; and I.E. Quastler, "Charting a Course: Lawrence, Kansas, and Its Railroad Strategy, 1854-1872," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 99-110.

Kansas, that “center of our true richness,” thinking of Langston Hughes (a native of Joplin, Missouri, who grew up in Lawrence) limning the lithe, interminable resistance of the mighty Mississippi river—“and I’ve seen its muddy / bosom turn all golden in the sunset”—when he wrote the last lines of “The Stripping of the River,” the last selection of his 1974 *Collected Poems*?¹³⁶

The continental tree supports the margins
In return for involuntary atrophos
Which can now be called the Shale Contract
Not only are the obvious labors
In metal and grain and fuel extracted
But the spiritual genius is so apt
To be cloven from this plain of our green heart
And to migrate to the neutralized
And individualizing conditions of the coasts
That this center of our true richness
Also goes there to aberrant rest
Bought by the silver of sunrise
And the gold of sunset.¹³⁷

The West, place of ever-expanding closure, from the Latin, *vesper*, meaning “evening”—a setting *and* an action.¹³⁸ And perhaps this poem has another, more foreboding gloaming in mind, from another Midwestern locale, northern Ohio, where in 1972, Dorn taught at Kent State, on the Cuyahoga River—an astonishingly polluted body of water that runs to Lake Erie at Cleveland where in the 1920s it was dredged almost out of existence to ensure safe passage for industrial barges. In July of 1969, less than a year before the National Guard would shoot to death three students protesting the invasion of Cambodia on the Kent State campus, the terrific discrepancy between industry’s astral ambitions and its glutinous terrestrial fallout exploded, surreal: two days after Neal Armstrong famously elided his cautious lunar steps with giant leaps for mankind, the Cuyahoga River, a petroleum-thick ooze, coursed in flames through Cleveland.

But Dorn “the Geographical,” would have noted the Kaw also as a moraine, in that sense quite similar to the Cuyahoga. Both rivers chart north/south divisions in deep time (as Hughes’s “soul grown deep”): the Kaw River valley marks the southernmost advance of the Kansan glacier—come and gone so long ago “no drumlin hills or finger lakes” remain—just

¹³⁶ *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry*, eds. Michael S. Harper and Anthony Walton (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 150.

¹³⁷ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 267.

¹³⁸ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “west.”

as the horseshoe cut of the Cuyahoga marks the southern limit of the more recent Wisconsin glacier.¹³⁹ One edge made Dorn long for the other: “Of all the places I have been over the 11 years of my teaching experience,” he wrote in 1972, from his teaching post at Kent State, to George Worth, Chairman of the English Department at the University of Kansas, “Kansas has been the most productive and pleasing of all of them.”¹⁴⁰ That was after Dorn had held a second teaching position at Kansas, this time as visiting lecturer in the spring of 1969, and yet for whatever reason—his presence, as Anselm Hollo alliterated, as a “cranky, cantankerous, contrarian,” or his lack of a PhD, his un-Academic demeanor—despite Dorn’s repeated attempts, as unrelenting as they were uncharacteristic, to obtain a permanent academic position in Lawrence, the job he sought never materialized.¹⁴¹

In the northeastern corner of the state, about 35 miles from the Missouri state line, lies the town of Lawrence, founded in 1854 by Charles Robinson for the New England Emigrant Aid Company (a Massachusetts-based outfit largely funded by Amos Lawrence, the town’s namesake), who sought out the location because of its relative proximity to the mouth of the Kaw river at Kansas City.¹⁴² At the north edge of town, on a pink, quartzite boulder (hauled from southwest Minnesota and northwest Iowa, and deposited by the glacier), a bronze plaque commemorates the scouting party’s transcontinental trek: “To the pioneers of Kansas who in devotion to human freedom came into a wilderness, suffered hardships and faced dangers and death to found this state in righteousness.”¹⁴³ Hardships and righteousness abounded. The Eldridge Hotel is itself a lasting symbol of national schism and local solidarity, of violence and accord. John Brown, armed with his many sons, once stalked its dusty block. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, the Free State Hotel, as it was then called, was centerpiece to a number of events before and during the Civil War: pro-slavery raids on the town burned the hotel twice to the ground, in 1856 and 1863; and rallying the area’s citizens

¹³⁹ Shortridge and Shortridge, “Yankee Town on the Kaw,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 7. See also Rex Buchanan, ed., *Kansas Geology: An Introduction to Landscapes, Rocks, Minerals, and Fossils* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1984).

¹⁴⁰ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 30 November 1972, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹⁴¹ Hollo quoted in Clark, *World of Difference*, 21.

¹⁴² Shortridge and Shortridge, “Yankee Town on the Kaw,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 10-11.

¹⁴³ Placard on quartzite boulder on the north side of 6th Street, between Massachusetts and Vermont.

to defend their land and honor as abolitionists around its front steps, Brown transformed himself into Herman Melville's "meteor of the war."¹⁴⁴

Along the first limestone ridge in Dorn's southwest view from the hotel stood the University of Kansas, where in April and early May of 1968 he was poet-in-residence. Once known as Hogback Ridge, the largely east-west hill was renamed Mt. Oread to better suit a place conceptualized as "Harvard on the Kaw."¹⁴⁵ The "Hill," as it's better known (like an extension of Winthrop's Puritan vision) turns abruptly north at its easternmost point and runs parallel above Massachusetts Street, the main street in town (named for the founder's patron state) on the north end of which, near where the street meets the river, sits the Eldridge Hotel. In the years leading up to the Civil War, legions sent to protect Lawrence against the frequent proslavery raids from Missouri used Mt. Oread as an eastern lookout. While waiting on his small band of abolitionist cohorts one summer afternoon, in the early 1850s, John Brown stood atop the hill with William A. Phillips, the Kansas correspondent for the *New-York Tribune*: "'What a magnificent scene, captain,' [Phillips] exclaimed. 'Yes,' replied Brown drily; 'a great country for a free state.'"¹⁴⁶ On a clear day at the turn of the century, so William Allen White says, the view stretched all the way to Kansas City, the Paris of the Plains.¹⁴⁷

Dorn's view south and slightly west from the roof reveals two more slender, east-west ridges that sit, with respect to Mt. Oread, along an arc open to the southwest across the prairie. Tectonic activity in southern Missouri—always friction with Missouri—thrust hot, underlying igneous rock into layers of limestone and shale in eastern Kansas, and the pressure forced upward the domes of these hills. Water and time scalped their ridges, stripping away the shale to expose harder limestone beneath.¹⁴⁸ Had Dorn stood on that roof over a century

¹⁴⁴ See Richard B. Sheridan, "William Quantrill and the Lawrence Massacre, August 21, 1863," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 53-62; and Karl L. Gridley, "John Brown and Lawrence, Kansas Territory, 1855-1859: A Militant Abolitionist's Relationship with the Free State Fortress," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 23-40; and Edward E. Leslie, *The Devil Knows How to Ride: True Story of William Clarke Quantrill and His Confederate Raiders* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996); See "The Portent," by Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (New York: Da Capo, 1995), 11.

¹⁴⁵ C.S. Griffin, "The University of Kansas and the Years of Frustration, 1854-1864," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 79-98.

¹⁴⁶ David S. Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 191.

¹⁴⁷ Placard in William Allen White School of Journalism building, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

¹⁴⁸ Shortridge and Shortridge, "Yankee Town on the Kaw," in *Embattled Lawrence*; and Buchanon, ed., *Kansas Geology*.

earlier, he could have watched the alternating light signals from those ridges choreograph the circuits of an Underground Railroad, its weary travelers moving northward from Baldwin to Blue Mound, and on to Lawrence, whereat the state's bleeding appellation was earned. A gruesome and dubious notoriety lurks in the "space" of the Midwest, as in that poem's first stanza: "the white torch / ... / burns the beauty of your vision / in other words all your ancestors / can get murdered by the thrust / of an assured cynacism / they'll call the courage to stand up / for america. 10,000 people / fall down bleeding with plenty / of explanation but not one definition."¹⁴⁹ To whom is this addressed? And to which casualties, and of what event, does it refer? More to, perhaps, the sense of something—in place of real definition, the divisions savagely cast by difference. At the end of the "Midwest" poem, the embers of an incendiary history, of race war, solder the enjambed interminability of Dorn's prairie "sense... this large..." ("large and without mercy")—a view large enough to gather history up into its "arms": "one of the driest / black chambermaids anywhere, or from / the roof the sense is this large — / The Kansas River runs its arms / into the air of the Divide."¹⁵⁰ With the "white torch" in the "air," "the Divide" evokes the vigilante justice that preceded the Civil War, a conflict which saw Lawrence sacked and burned in three proslavery raids, one of which, marshaled by William Quantrill in 1863, almost totally destroyed the town—100 houses obliterated, \$3,000,000 in booty pillaged—and left more than 200 dead.¹⁵¹

The landscape's limestone and shale were deposited by a massive ocean heaving above the Great Plains, a sea whose motion many have seen reduplicated in the waving grasses (and now in the wheat) of the prairie. Dorn discussed the evolution of the prairie as similar to the "*thin*" West, possessed of "a richness in depth," to Tom Clark in 1980: "[E]ven though the Midwest, for instance, is like the East, being largely abandoned... on the other hand, it's the place that's always the richest. Because its got surface, depth of surface. That's the whole meaning of the prairie. It took millions of years of Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois glaciers coming down and making this the broadest river plain that ever was. Which is called the prairie, and it was six feet of loam."¹⁵² The disorienting monotony of this interior created an uncertain frontier for conquests marching north from Mexico, or west, from the Atlantic coast, usually via St. Louis. So it was for Lewis and Clark, who turned north at Kansas City

¹⁴⁹ Dorn, "The Midwest is that Space...", broadside poem, gifted by Moritz.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Sheridan, "William Quantrill and the Lawrence Massacre," 58-59.

¹⁵² Dorn, "Ed Dorn's Views, with Tom Clark," interview by Tom Clark, *Views*, 13.

in 1804, but it was from the southwest that Coronado came, the first European to enter what is now Kansas, in 1541, seeking the golden splendor of Quivira. It's rumored that in the southern plains, near the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles, where he found buffalo "in such multitude that I do not know what to compare them with unless it is the fish of the sea," Coronado and his men drove stakes into the ground to keep their passage straight.¹⁵³ Almost two-hundred years later, in 1714, reaching the mouth of the Kaw River just west of Kansas City, Etienne Veniard de Bourgmont, a French soldier and trader traveling west from St. Louis, wrote in his diary: "These are the most beautiful countries... in the world. The prairies are like seas, and are full of wild animals, especially bison and deer, in numbers that stagger the imagination."¹⁵⁴ Ten years later, Bourgmont forded the Kaw River to meet members of the Kansa tribe, who inhabited what is now (and named for them) northeastern Kansas, from the early part of the 1700s until their forced removal in the 1840s.¹⁵⁵

Amid the mounting and violent pressures of European expansion from the east, these bison-stocked seas became a central destination for a number of tribes relocated from the newly minted states north of the Ohio River. From the 1820s through the 1840s, federal policy envisioned Kansas as a territory permanently reserved for Native American settlement; various tribes—Delaware, Shawnee, Potawatomi, Wyandot, Iowa, Kickapoo—occupied thin strips of land in the northeastern corner of the future state.¹⁵⁶ Such was the case until the early 1850s, when fervor for gold in freshly acquired California boosted railroad interests in Kansas as a throughway, and the tribes were again uprooted, some 10,000 people in all, as the land was sold to white settlers before the tribes had moved off it.¹⁵⁷ In May of 1854, at the threshold of the annual summer bison hunt, Kansas was opened for settlement, and the first settlers came from Missouri. Roughly a year later, John Brown arrived, a "mysterious stranger," his large family in tow.¹⁵⁸ Brown had come from the east, from Eden, New York, answering a call for soldiers to defend Kansas against the vigilantism of neighboring, pro-

¹⁵³ William H. Goetzmann and Glyndwr Williams, *The Atlas of North American Exploration: From the Norse Voyages to the Race to the Pole* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1992), 36-37; and see Haniel Long, *Piñon Country* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce).

¹⁵⁴ Goetzmann and Williams, *The Atlas of North American Exploration*, 94.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

¹⁵⁶ Shortridge and Shortridge, "Yankee Town on the Kaw," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 8-10; and Harry Sinclair Drago, *Great American Cattle Trails: The Story of the Old Cow Paths of the East and the Longhorn Highways of the Plains* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1965).

¹⁵⁷ Shortridge and Shortridge, "Yankee Town on the Kaw," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 8-10.

¹⁵⁸ Gridley, Karl L., "John Brown and Lawrence, Kansas Territory, 1855-1859," *Embattled Lawrence*, 23.

slavery Missouri. When border ruffians sacked Lawrence less than a year later, Brown and four of his sons, armed with broadswords, would hack to death five pro-slavery men along Pottawatomie Creek in retaliation.

So it is that Lawrence and its surrounding plains and hills inhabit an embattled, national space: simultaneously at a geographic center, and on the margins of the frontier; even as a moral center (“of our true richness,” our wholesome, mid-continent “values”) still it rests in the furthest periphery of popular culture’s lascivious myopia. Heartland, “half sea half land,” breadbasket, and dreary, springboard prelude to Oz, northeastern Kansas marks the intersection of numerous geological, biological, climatological, historical, and political vectors by which Lawrence has agglomerated the diverse distinctions of a transit town. Indeed, a railroad town, in the beginning, that lost the big bid to Kansas City—history that would have attracted Dorn. For example, observe “The Sundering U.P. Tracks”:

...Every little bogus town
on the Union Pacific bears the scar
of an expert linear division.
...
2000 miles or so
each hamlet
the winter sanctuary
of the rare Jailbird
and the Ishmaelite
the esoteric summer firebombs
of Chicago
the same scar tissue
I saw in Pocatello
made
by the rapacious geo-economic
surgery of Harriman, the old isolator
that ambassador-at-large¹⁵⁹

Lebanon, a few counties to the west of Lawrence, is the geographic center of the lower 48 states, but the unlikely proof of Lawrence as a cultural nexus, and one historically in resistance, is variously demonstrable.¹⁶⁰ Like all riven centers, its composition is contested, richly stratified by competing forces. These ruptures are evident in the various grasses residents choose for their lawns, the radically inconsistent seasons, the geologic volatility and unique edaphic richness, and the diverse arboreal life—sitting, as the eastern boundary of

¹⁵⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 232.

¹⁶⁰ Kansas Travel, Tourism, Restaurants, <<http://www.kansastravel.org/geographicalcenter.htm>> (25 June 2007).

Kansas is, along a beach of deciduous flora.¹⁶¹ As the 1960s unfolded, Lawrence again became a center for growing counter-culture and anti-war activity. As part of a nationwide Vietnam War Moratorium in October 1969, 4000 demonstrators—KU students and faculty—marched down Jayhawk Blvd, the campus’s main street, holding silent vigil.¹⁶²

By the turn of the decade, however, silence had given way to more provocative, incendiary resistance—such as when student protestors waved plastic guns in the faces of ROTC members on campus—as well as outright combative action—as when Oread residents defended their neighborhood against local police and the National Guard in a gun battle that for lasted two weeks in the summer of 1970. Between March 1968 and September 1969, at least forty acts of arson were “directed at symbols of authority,” and in April, May, and June of 1970, fifty acts of arson and bombings took place.¹⁶³ Underground publications, of which there were many—*Vortex*, *Harambee*, *Disorientation*—claimed these attacks as organized “class warfare” and fanned insurrection’s flames with information on “guerilla warfare, explosives-making, self-defense, first aid, and how to survive a tear gas attack.” As a college town and a stopover point (sometimes permanent) for highway travelers crossing the Great Plains to Denver, to California, or to south to Texas, or north to Chicago, Lawrence was a singular mixture of rural, urban, and idiosyncratic influence. It performed its identity with unique and brazen confidence. When debonair radical Abbie Hoffman, visiting Allen Fieldhouse (the hallowed university basketball arena) in April of 1970, blew his nose into an American flag handkerchief, no one applauded, and Hoffman left, disgruntled. One student called the talk a “drag.” Compared to the fire that incinerated most of the student union ten days later and brought the spring semester to an early close, it probably was.

A surprisingly self-sufficient local culture projected, even advertised Lawrence’s historical persona as a haven for outlaws of the neo-Wild-West, and while the town’s style was bitterly irreverent of the cultural hegemony of the coasts, Lawrence’s geography and freewheeling reputation centered it on the thriving national narcotics network that brought travelers from far and wide in the late 1960s and early 1970s. One hundred and sixty-one marijuana harvesters were arrested in Kansas in 1969—a one hundred and ten percent increase from the year before. The offenders came from seventy different cities, in twenty-

¹⁶¹ Shortridge and Shortridge, “Yankee Town on the Kaw,” *Embattled Lawrence*.

¹⁶² Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”, 128-132; and Monhollon, “Lawrence, Kansas, and the Making of the Sixties,” *Embattled Lawrence*, 211.

¹⁶³ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”, 142, 146.

one states and various parts of Europe.¹⁶⁴ “I mean this was the matrix, the geographical matrix...” remembers one Lawrence resident, “the city was on the Silk Route for drugs. Large amounts passed through from both coasts and came up from Mexico... We thought of Lawrence as Baghdad on the Kaw.”¹⁶⁵

Dorn’s barbed disposition and vehement distaste for institutional rigidity ironically put him at home in Lawrence in 1969. At Black Mountain, in the early 1950s, Robert Creeley, Dorn’s final examiner, remembers “a lovely resistant man... [who] tested all of his experience... wanted to make sure he had offered it a significant recognition.”¹⁶⁶ More inflammatory is a story about Dorn, as a professor at the University of Colorado in the 1980s, lighting the administratively-required student evaluations on fire in front of the class.¹⁶⁷ Or once, while walking the KU campus with Dorn, Ken Irby—poet, friend, and Kansas graduate—pointed out the university’s “prairie acre,” a plot of land reserved for the preservation of indigenous flora. “That’s not an acre.” Dorn muttered.¹⁶⁸ The alert skepticism with which he approached all data sources and any second-hand information, especially information generated by the mass media, enhanced the glamorous isolato mystique in Dorn’s physical presence. The elusive, autodidactic, day laborer maverick behind dark sunglasses, with large Aztec sun rings, in cowboy boots and uncut hair.¹⁶⁹ Dorn chain-smoked during class lectures and often remained contemplatively silent for minutes on end, sometimes meticulously attending to his railroad maps, sometimes browsing books.¹⁷⁰ In some ways it seemed that the Gunslinger’s aesthetics and stylistic nuances equally amplified and elided with Dorn’s nonchalant self-presentations. Alice Notley recalls, “Ed’s reading style for the poem seemed like a very hip take on the then-current Black poetry style: he was so Kool, and his Whiteness remained cool.”¹⁷¹ In his elegy to

¹⁶⁴ Donald Janson, “Rural-State Governors Alarmed by Drug Use,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1970.

¹⁶⁵ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”, 140.

¹⁶⁶ Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 418.

¹⁶⁷ Jeffrey Meyers, “Ed Dorn at Colorado,” In *Privileged Moments: Encounters with Writers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 20.

¹⁶⁸ One of many conversations with Kenneth Irby.

¹⁶⁹ These descriptions come from viewing photographs of Dorn in Kenneth Irby’s private collection.

¹⁷⁰ See Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*; and see Alastair Johnston, “Zephyrus Image and Edward Dorn,” *Chicago Review*, 121-151; and John Wright, “Vaya Con Ojo Caliente: *A Memoir of Edward Dorn*,” *Chicago Review*, 216-225.

¹⁷¹ Alice Notley, “Where’d You Get It?” *Bay Bridge*, n.d., <<http://www.bigbridge.org/ednotley.htm>> (2 June 2007).

Dorn, Amiri Baraka aims to capture this “coolness,” and its sharp edges: “thin movie looking white guy with the mind / of a saw. . . / Hey, Ed / Gun Slinger, / You know, we’ll get to argue / Again.”¹⁷² These arguments, however, were between friends—and Baraka was, along with Olson, according to Dorn, “the strongest the pile [of poets] has...” Others who came into contact with Dorn, those in whom he sensed complaisance, or in whose speech he heard the crude, linguistic camouflage of American neo-liberalism, the quaint “recrudescence” of fireside imperialism, concealing classism, racism, elitism, any ism, their stories record the acerbic counterforce of Dorn’s personality. Unfortunately, a few inflated encounters have eclipsed a comprehensive perspective of—or a will to comprehend, I should say—the man *and* the work. Dorn is, was, contentious, but to a calculated degree, and especially to the degree of language’s elasticity.

In 1966, pieces of Dorn’s loosely anthropological book, *The Shoshoneans*, with pictures by African-American photographer Leroy McLucas, were to be published by the *Paris Review*. However, complications due to the late arrival of the photographs delayed their review. On the 3rd of August, Larry Bensky, poetry editor for the magazine, who was recovering his health in “the tropics,” wrote to Dorn to inform him of the confusion and muddle: “I have only the vaguest idea what is going to be in the issue, and so can’t tell yet how your piece will fit in, or if.”¹⁷³ Beset with pressing financial obligations—even the *Paris Review* pieces would net a mere \$175—and aggravated by Bensky’s disregard for verbal agreements he’d made the previous winter, Dorn felt justifiably frustrated.¹⁷⁴ On top of that, the effete and imperious nonchalance of Bensky’s letter particularly incensed Dorn: “The tropics take hell out of a white man; the natives wear woolen sweaters and never sweat.”¹⁷⁵ Earlier that summer, Dorn had news from Tom Clark, one of the magazine’s younger editors, of his frustration with its management, and the questionable, sometimes pretentious sources of funding they sought. “The Paris Review sounds nutty indeed and as up-town as ever – oh

¹⁷² Amiri Baraka, “Ed Dorn,” from *Cento Magazine* at [Electronic Poetry Center](http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_baraka.html), 15 January 2000 <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_baraka.html> (2 June 2007).

¹⁷³ Larry Bensky to Edward Dorn, 3 August 1966, Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers. Dodd Mss; and Larry Bensky to Edward Dorn, 3 August 1966, MS 55A; Db, New American Poetry Collection (Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence). Spencer Mss.

¹⁷⁴ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, August 1966, MS 55A: Db, New American Poetry Collection (Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence). Spencer Mss.

¹⁷⁵ Larry Bensky to Edward Dorn, 3 August 1966, Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

well,” Dorn wrote Clark.¹⁷⁶ But the earlier conflict fueled the later fire, and not so easy-going is Dorn’s reply to Bensky. Although Dorn never mailed the letter—(“I’ve decided not to send it. Ie, to Bensky the Hopeless. So I’ll just cool it and say nothing to him. OK.”)—it summarily illustrates the Dorn Baraka describes, who “wd rather / Make you his enemy / Than Lie”:

Dear Mr. Bensky:

It suddenly occurs to me as of your letter this morning that you think you'll be doing some goddamn random favor by printing the Shoshoni material. I wonder if it strikes you as odd at all that having a piece in hand you still have “only the vaguest idea what is going to be in the issue.” But you have it, let me assure you, by the right handle—the Paris Review is only the vaguest and whoever it was hired you to waste writers is irresponsible as well as vague. When the time comes and there is room in your unimportant magazine, I’ll tell you if you can print. In the meantime, white man, have P.R. register and send the MS. and the pictures to me immediately.

Very sincerely,
Edward Dorn¹⁷⁷

Though he claimed not to “care what [Bensky] does as long as when he's doing it he wraps it in sandpaper and shoves it up his neat ass,” Dorn sent copies of his own letter to Clark, in England, and likely to others, which means he probably liked it too—evidently beyond its immediate utility, for its potency.¹⁷⁸ A month later, however, it was Dorn’s turn to be embarrassed (something which he kept private), when Henry Rago, editor of *Poetry*, accepted two poems Dorn had earlier sent to *Intransit*, and having heard nothing, wrongly assumed them rejected. Rago was understandably disappointed at having not only been offered work second-hand, but then having it then rescinded. Dorn apologized, and this time received a letter himself: “It is a pity,” Rago earnestly and respectfully replied. “There’s a spiritual expenditure I couldn't begin to describe in the careful reading and rereading of any poem I

¹⁷⁶ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 9 June 1965, MS 55A: Db, New American Poetry Collection (Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence). Spencer Mss.

¹⁷⁷ Edward Dorn to Larry Bensky, 9 August 1966, included in correspondence with Tom Clark, MS 55A: Db (Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence), Spencer Mss.

¹⁷⁸ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 10 August 1966, Spencer Mss.

consider seriously for POETRY and I simply must assume that the poem is not being considered at the same time by some other editor.”¹⁷⁹

All this goes to say that an attraction to the creative fecundities of tension, to friction as a source and condition of knowledge drove Dorn’s intellectual and personal processes. On the verge of the “laboratory” of the West, Lawrence was itself a tense laboratory of war resistance, vigilantism, Midwestern values, “freak” behavior, and not yet illicit drugs; in the zeitgeist fury of international student/worker rebellions, Lawrence made manifest the nation’s frictions, fractures, and fresh possibilities. Of drugs, for instance, Dorn told Stephen Fredman in an interview: “I’m aware of an attitude, which I share somewhat, that really one ought to take anything (except something rather obvious, like battery acid), in no matter how small an amount, simply because curiosity is superior to temptation.”¹⁸⁰ Here Baraka’s “mind of a saw” recalls the Heraclitean adage that asserts the interlocked facticity of destruction and creation: “The cosmos works / by harmony of tensions, / like the lyre and the bow.”¹⁸¹ Everywhere Dorn followed that dictum—a “curiosity... superior to temptation,” seeking the “harmony of tensions.” The third of his *24 Love Songs* insists, “My dear love, when I unsheathe / a word of the wrong temper / it is to test that steel / across the plain between us.”¹⁸² In *Gunslinger*, Parmenides, the pre-Socratic unifier of thought with things, whose “secretary” and mouthpiece is the resurrected character named “I,” repeatedly dispatches, from some kind of preeminence, the eponymous Gunslinger, who calls home the sun, just like his nemesis analog, Howard Hughes, whose astral, anti-gravitational cavalcade, “drawn by rainbow-winged steeds,” also recalls the procession “on the renowned way of the goddess” of Parmenides’ opening “Proem.”¹⁸³ That there’s some of Ed Dorn in the Gunslinger is certain, yet no less certain is there some of Howard Hughes in Edward Dorn—they share an attraction to extreme positions, for example, between a flamboyance among the world of “large populations,” and a frontier, outpost reclusiveness.¹⁸⁴ Similarly highlighting these interpenetrated urges in a series of radio broadcasts after Dorn’s death from pancreatic

¹⁷⁹ Henry Rago to Edward Dorn, 27 September 1966, Henry Rago Papers, The Lilly Library, Indiana University.

¹⁸⁰ Edward Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Stephen Fredman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 90.

¹⁸¹ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Brooks Haxton, 37.

¹⁸² Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 237.

¹⁸³ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 90; *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments*, trans. David Gallop (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 49.

¹⁸⁴ Creeley quoted in Clark, *World of Difference*, 37.

/ going away like snows...”¹⁸⁷). Written as he pondered the mortality of his own body, infested by terminal cancer (another *internal* enemy to write against), Dorn’s 1997 introduction for Tom Clark’s *Empire of Skin*, stridently maintains the poem’s quarrelsome exigency, its commensurate, redeeming, and unruly intensity of sacred orders in the face of entropic, annihilating forces: “And finally it is only poetry that is capable of saving such extensive cultural memory from the decaying vortex of history.”¹⁸⁸ And who is revealed, and what is redeemed, through “Enhancement,” a selection from Dorn’s final book, *Chemo Sabe*, dedicated to his oncologist?

Certain people try to make my cancer grow,
 They seek to feed it, I can feel their unconscious
 Intention to do this—I have
 A list of them in my mind and when
 I exercise my blasting power
 Against my tumor which was environmentally
 Induced and politically generated, I blast them also,
 Their portraits and vitas, their genomes.
 These are the megadonts, they want to chew on me.

I can draw them in their molecular pointillism,
 Their shadow Seurat ghosts,
 Under their molecular umbrellas.
 But I won’t name them, the Gasset workers,
 They don’t know who they are
 And I shall not give them public
 Embodiment nor aid their resolution.
 I will blast them with a beam
 Of my centrifugal silence
 In the flow of the taxodiaceae.¹⁸⁹

“I’m obviously turned on by paradoxical aspects of thinking,” Dorn told Barry Alpert in an interview in 1972, articulating a fundamental concentration of his work.¹⁹⁰ On the brink of moving to England on a teaching Fulbright in 1966, and with heavy anxieties over the escalating war in Vietnam, Dorn wrote Tom Raworth: “I guess I’m suddenly, again damn depressed—I don’t want to be a fucking ‘hated’ american in Europe, for christ sake don’t you

¹⁸⁷ Edward Dorn, *Chemo Sabe* (Boise: Limberlost Press, 2001), unpaginated; Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 80, 41, 81. (These quotes are taken from “Tribe,” “Hemlocks,” “The Sea Corner, Of The Eye,” and “Unlike Music,” respectively).

¹⁸⁸ Edward Dorn, preface to *Empire of Skin* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1997), 12.

¹⁸⁹ Dorn, “Enhancement,” in *Chemo Sabe*, unpaginated.

¹⁹⁰ Dorn, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 11.

realize I've been a hated american in america all my life as it is. Ok I don't mind being hated really."¹⁹¹ Or American? Dorn was always "turned on" by the uneasy merger in contradictions, and the "negative capability" of poetic, or any, language; his was a conviction that from the dialectical springs what's most appositely critical: "[in America] we arrive at understanding and meaning through massive assaults on the language, so no particular word is apt."¹⁹² And of the aberrations between British and American English that Dorn and English translator Gordon Brotherston confronted when jointly translating Spanish poetry, Dorn instructs: "You've got to hone it so that the edges are diminished, because what you want is one expression."¹⁹³ But the effort to abrade one edge might invigorate another, and the "caustic thrust" of Dorn's cultural critique is as widely, as it is wryly, dispensed. Jeffrey Meyers, a colleague in Boulder, recalls Dorn's multiple voices: "He liked to sprinkle his speech with a few Spanish words—*libros, mucho, nada, mundo*—as if to mock the multicultural mania."¹⁹⁴

Whatever reservations Dorn had with universities that pushed "multicultural mania," or with the inertia of settlement, that form of security had a warmer side too. Three months before he spoke of his affinity for the paradoxical to Barry Alpert in 1972, he was writing to Jenny Dunbar, his second wife—with whom he'd moved to Kansas immediately after their marriage three years previous—of the hopeful prospects of long-term employment in Lawrence, assuring her that, "Lawrence as a place to live, be, and work would please us still. So all that time I spent there finally made sense to the FUTURE."¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Dorn was forced to leave behind a shirt belonging to their son, Laurence (named for the British author *and* the town), in a friend's flooded washing machine. "Her maquina was really fucked up," Dorn writes (suiting Meyer's recollection), but his tone buzzes with warmth and humor: "the reading here this afternoon was the best and most right on of the trip and in fact from what I seem to feel from the work today it was the best reading anybody ever gave... ah ha I'm thinking of you very closely – I wonder how all your colds are and hope the heaviest part has passed."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 20 August 1965, Box 1974-0003 (unprocessed), Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁹² Dorn, "Roadtesting the Language," interview by Fredman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 100.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹⁹⁴ Meyers, *Privileged Moments*, 21.

¹⁹⁵ Edward Dorn to Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, 28 April 1972, Folder 93, Ed Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Like Ettiene Veniard de Bourgmont, and John Brown, Dorn entered Kansas from the east. In 1952, after he'd finished his first year at Black Mountain College—an experimental arts school in North Carolina, attended by Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and John Wieners, to name a few; where, in the last phase of its existence, Charles Olson was rector, and at which, through the years, Josef Albers, Robert Creeley, John Cage, Robert Duncan, and Merce Cunningham, all taught—Dorn wandered the American West, finding scattered employment among a migrant workforce whose chronic itineracy and lack of property were repressive and liberating realities simultaneously.¹⁹⁷ A somber perseverance waxes meditative in Dorn's poem "Geranium" when workaday exhaustion suddenly and unexpectedly proffers mercurial richness, and among "the flat regularity... the lust of schedule," lurks a magnanimous, spontaneous, human grace, in exchange for late hours and long days:

I go on my way frowning at novelty, wishing I were closer to home
than I am. And this is the last bus stop before Burlington,
that pea-center, which is my home, but not the home of my mind.
That asylum I carry in my insane squint, where beyond
the window a curious woman in the station door
has a red bandana on her head, and tinkling things hand themselves
to the wind that gathers about her skirts. In the rich manner of her kind
she waits for the bus to stop.¹⁹⁸

"The great geography of my lunacy," to which Dorn refers earlier in the poem, is also a physiognomy, the body the experience of landscape reveals. Concerning the telluric energies of northern California, Ken Irby—poet, friend and correspondent with Dorn on matters geographical—writes in the 1969 introduction to his own aptly titled work, *Relation*: "The poetry of this mild littoral clime is marked by many turnings, distracted and multiplied attentions—but centrally, in my own case, by the conviction that the landscape demands us, and reveals us."¹⁹⁹ Just so for Dorn, psychological and emotional distances are reified by topographical effects, sometimes *become* topographies themselves, functions of a larger system, a cultural geography, or *human* geography, in which the self is multiform; no single ego, the self's dynamic relations to place at once empower and oppress. So while

¹⁹⁷ See *Ed Dorn Interviews*; and Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*.

¹⁹⁸ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Kenneth Irby, preface to *Relation* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1970), unpaginated.

“wandering” seems to afford a gloomy yet piercing cognizance of the communion between man and land that its act unfolds and enables, likewise cultural custom—here, the church, an unlikely ally in his work—provides a young and “confused” Dorn with “a vague solace” amidst, “what happened in the 1930’s / men vomiting from hunger / on the thin sidewalk.”²⁰⁰ In “The Sense Comes Over Me, and the Waning Light of Man by the 1st National Bank,” Dorn assiduously declares:

I became that land and wandered out of it.
 Sharp
 and keen with the fever
 this thrill of spring in the Lord’s prayer
 which I carried and still love as a vague solace
 I carry, confused
 that ceaseless speculation over
 the ways of love
 into the darker borders
 of my wounded middle years²⁰¹

In the same way, Dorn is particular about the kinds of movement he endorses—movement that moves exclusively to disclose and disturb experience, not that antimeric illusion of a “movement”: “I’m not that moved by *movements*, like ecology, or whatever, as a bandwagon, because I know it’s part of the fabric I’ve seen woven for a long time,” Dorn told an interviewer in 1978.²⁰² In “The Air of June Sings,” another early lyrical poem, he muses, “[q]uietly and while at rest on the trim grass,” on the sacrosanct “lightness” of an isolated graveyard, but the hushed deference is tethered from bucolic flight to the “largest stone, larger than the common large,” on which is engraved, “Pioneer”:

...and that pioneer sticks in me like a wormed black cherry
 in my throat, No Date, nothing but that zeal, that trekking
 and Business, that presumption in a sacred place, where children
 are buried, and where peace, as it is in the fields and the country
 should reign. A wagon wheel is buried there. Lead me away
 to the small quiet unpreposterous dead and leave
 me my tears for Darling we love thee, for Budded on earth and
 blossomed
 in heaven, where fieldbirds sing in the fence rows,
 and there is possibility, where there are not the loneliest of all.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 155.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

²⁰² Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, 79.

²⁰³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 11-12.

In the same 1978 interview, Dorn identifies the fundamental difference between his own roving lifestyle, and “that zeal, that trekking / and Business, that presumption” among the settlers who first crossed the Great Plains, of whom Hughes and Dow Chemical, for example, are the sinister inheritors.²⁰⁴ The latter sense denotes “penetration into unknown territory *in a group sense*... The lonesome cowboy figure comes later, after he’s already there and is riding the range. That’s singular, but it doesn’t represent the movement. The movement is connected with property and it’s *going to a place* and it ultimately means *settlement*.”²⁰⁵ This kind of movement paradoxically “means *settlement*.” But settlement is an economy, and thus is limited; it plays favorites, like the subsidies that built the railroads on which the burgeoning mobile labor force of the early 20th century traversed the country. Railroads that violently displaced in order to make “place,” as a destination: “Each side of the shining double knife / from Chicago to Frisco / to Denver, the Cheyenne cutoff / the Right of Way / they called it.”²⁰⁶ For Dorn, the 1950s, that decade through which the various characters of his early prose seek work, love, and drink, “represent the last ability of this kind of Northern European to that,” that migratory condition, not intent on settlement but on board and unbound, or bound anew again and again.²⁰⁷ “[N]ow, of course, most of that population is either marginally employed or on unemployment chronically, and that function has been taken over and largely assumed by other groups—for example, Mexicans in the Southwest.”²⁰⁸ Dorn was speaking in 1979, long after Mexican immigration had convulsed, under the Bracero Program, from 1942 to 1964. Initially, the “importation of Mexican labor” was justified by the program as a wartime necessity, but by the mid-1950s, coupled with the flood of “illegal aliens,” it incited xenophobic reactions in the state. In 1954, through “Operation Wetback,” a series of raids in the Southwest, U.S. forces deported (or frightened into migrating) hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ In an excerpt from an early ‘90s reading included in the Alternative Radio broadcast in 2000, Dorn describes his unpublished long poem, “Westward Haut!,” as being about, “the stupidity of crossing the Great Plains in the first place.”

²⁰⁵ Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Tuckett, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 110.

²⁰⁶ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 232.

²⁰⁷ Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Tuckett, 111.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁰⁹ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), 249.

In the late summer and early fall of 1952, Dorn worked as a logger and lumberjack in Monroe, Washington, just northeast of Seattle. Altitudes up to 4000 feet forced him to “wear long black 100% wool under deals in order not to cry out in sharp exact pain at the current point to which modern man has at this moment arrived since those first beginnings in the tidal water of the then young earth.”²¹⁰ Nonetheless, “working at a job” had salutary effects on his writing—laboring compressed the exercise, limited and refined its occasion, and offered the remunerative, if imposing, rhythm of a method: “[It] cleans up my habits, pins me down a little bit, focuses my attention, leads me to things that on my own I wouldn’t necessarily get to so quickly. It makes me exercise a certain *method*.”²¹¹

It was around this time—1952—that Dorn first came to Kansas City. In his first and only novel, *By the Sound* (originally titled *The Rites of Passage*)—a “biography of myself which... is a slightly different sense than auto”—and in his first short story, “C.B.& Q.,” Kansas City represents a territory of transit, a hub to and from which roving workers gather and embark upon their transcontinental voyages.²¹² Likewise, in his introduction to a collection of essays treating film’s tragi/comic double-sidedness by experimental filmmaker and close friend, Stan Brakhage—and a Kansan who was familiar, as an orphan, with an uprooted and negative sense of place—Dorn’s closing remark emphasizes this geographic circuitry, and the interstitial, refractory space of that city: “Charlie Chaplin left for the West at Kansas City, pretty near where everybody else entrained.”²¹³ Dorn’s journey in the early 1950s would eventually lead him back to Black Mountain, but only after he’d met and married Helene Buck, and become stepfather to her two children, Fred and Chansonette, from a previous marriage.

Dorn’s memories of Kansas City illustrate the internal friction he cultivated as a method or as a productive, if severe, working environment. A delicately-balanced tension structures his relations on and off the page. The following description of the city echoes the presence of Geronimo in Dorn’s 1974 work, *Recollections of Gran Apacheria*, which also examines the explosive, irrational violence when old and new worlds are drawn together: “[T]he most strange, most curious, most terrible, most ludicrous, most lewd, and at times

²¹⁰ Clark, *World of Difference*, 157.

²¹¹ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, 80.

²¹² Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 10.

²¹³ Edward Dorn, introduction to Section 2, “Comedy Tragi/Comedy,” in *Film Biographies* (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1977), 112.

deathly thing.... The skid row, the bum-quarters of K.C. on Main Street I had my grand and laughable awakening as to what this human business is all about.”²¹⁴ This socioeconomic apprehension underscores a perpetual American homelessness explored in Dorn’s work, which interlocks the disparate narratives of personal, local, and national arenas. And in a pious and stubborn effort to guard its own experience against the homogenizing force of mass-culture and the inoculating sinkhole of collective memory (“...and by opposing end them?”), it reorders public language—“the many languages of English,” a poetry “written on air”—into a voice in which “the many cohere.” A circuitry also wired to mythic, celestial movement, “internal migration”—of the subject, of the author, through the poem, through the world, through the “adulterated” self, the self as medium—is the fundamental condition for the individual crossing “the grim territories / of the west / and in the raw greed of the frontier,” Dorn’s self-ascribed “laboratory.”²¹⁵ In an interview from the late 1970s, he discusses the experience of America as always already uprooted:

Everybody on this continent is a stranger, in a sense. That’s why the Western Hemisphere is unique... It was always expansion, it always took up the slack. From a European viewpoint and the viewpoint of all those people who were imported as byproducts of the European invasion—blacks, for instance—it’s been a continent of internal migration.²¹⁶

In another interview from the same time, Dorn again emphasizes the importance of migration to his sensibility of the American landscape; however, unlike the advertised narrative of westward expansion expressed by Manifest Destiny, he proposes a north/south axis as dominant transit for American migration:

I’ve fought for migration. You see I think the West is where the subservient class in America has traditionally always been replaced by somebody else, like the Haitians are replacing the Puerto Ricans in New York right now. Because of certain territorial facts, this has been territory that has been held by various groups. Somehow the Apaches penetrated the whole thing several thousand years ago and got down to the border. And they’re like a droplet off the Athabaskan situation. Then the Spanish-Mexican came up and couldn’t hold it,

²¹⁴ Clark, *World of Difference*, 144. Of Geronimo in “Victorio,” from *Recollections of Gran Apacheria* (reprinted in *Way West*), Dorn writes: “...his taste for Death / is the bitterness we find on the tongue / when we consider La Grand Apachería / He is the most dreaded / The most terrible / The most famous.”

²¹⁵ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 160.

²¹⁶ Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Tuckett, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 109.

before American Manifest Destiny. This is just like literally orthodox history. And now the last of the type has been in some sense merged in a grand migratory effect. ... I mean, there is no way to get rid of the cowboy. It's literally Star Wars.²¹⁷

For Dorn, the fact of human mediation is a part of the fact of the landscape formation—"geography imperceptibly becomes history," Marjorie Perloff writes in her introduction to *Gunslinger*—just as the landscape mediates the self: the "insatiable single-mindedness" of European conquest, the fracture of cultures, of borders, of "states" of mind, all inhere and perform the variegated topographical contours and historical clashes over the ground on which they occur to produce "place" *all at once*: an animascape.²¹⁸ "Negative, says my Gunslinger, / no *thing* is omitted," Dorn writes in Book I.²¹⁹ "Time is more fundamental than space. / ... it stretches things themselves / until they blend into one, / so if you've seen one thing / you've seen them all."²²⁰ And as epigraph to "The Midwest is that Space...", Dorn quotes Pound's *Patria Mia*: "The most apparent effect of the american climate is the american morale."²²¹ But "place," Perloff reminds us, is also part simulacrum, "the TV screen presenting the same images in New York as in Four Corners, whereas *time*, the Vietnam War moment of the late sixties and early seventies, is central to Dorn's narrative."²²² The overwritten-ness of things is a dissociation Dorn seeks out, a conflicted sense of distance, internalized and impenetrable—distance from some "natural" landscape, some "pure existence" that our enduring complicity in the landscape's perverse erosion obscures.

A declaration of both organic and noxious interconnectedness is characteristic of Dorn's wry bravado, as is his confessed attraction to the paradoxical. Language, for example, Dorn calls "a plant potted in the mouth," but not, as one might suspect, watered through the ear: "I would never give that organ a place other than as a deviant, much like a messenger, who goes about among the princely senses, carrying data which is very often drab in its accuracy and practicality. 'I couldn't believe my ears.' And seldom do."²²³ Perhaps this statement intends to affirm the immediacy and singular untranslatability of the "princely

²¹⁷ Edward Dorn, "Ed Dorn's Views," interview by Tom Clark, *View*, 14.

²¹⁸ Perloff, introduction to *Gunslinger*, vii; Edward Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla* (Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1978), 16.

²¹⁹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 4.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²²¹ Dorn, "The Midwest is that Space...", broadside poem.

²²² Perloff introduction to *Gunslinger*, vii.

²²³ Dorn, "Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi," *Kulchur*, 13; and Dorn, "What I See in *The Maximus Poems*," *Views*, 38-39.

senses” (recall the *Gunslinger*’s rebuke of I, who strives after the meaning of events— “Questioner, you got some strange / obsessions, you want to know / what something *means* after you’ve / seen it, after you’ve *been* there”), but it also admits a certain mischievous treachery in the poet, or in the act of the poem.²²⁴ That is, the poet must work with language, with data he otherwise “couldn’t believe”:

Part of the function [of a poet] is to be alert to Spirit, and not so much write poetry as to compose the poetry that’s constantly written on air. What I’ve read and what I hear merge to make the field in which I compose. For instance, a lot of precedent verse merges into a speech I can edit as I hear it. I think it’s important for poets to be as varied as possible, since the instrumentation is the language.”²²⁵

Internal migration, then, of writer and subject, form and content, becomes a method for organizing one’s experience of the cultural landscape through language, toward an instant, protean embodiment of something like a “self.” “I don’t want you to understand that as a qualification of the ego,” Dorn clarified to Tom Clark, in a letter in early 1965, “[b]ecause that ain’t it. More as Medium. When one speaks of the world one is a Medium rather than ego, the difference between local or ‘provincial’ and some total respons(ibility which I have no ready word for.”²²⁶ Difficult not to hear “medium” without thinking back half a century to T.S. Eliot’s lodestar New Critical declaration, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” wherein the expatriated banker calls for an impersonal poetics, “not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.”²²⁷ And yet, Eliot’s two-steps-forward-one-step-back prosody fingers the man, indelibly, a fact Dorn knew better than to try to overpower, or ignore, and instead, sought to include *as part of* the poem, those conditions that prefigure its existence. Note the following lines from “Rick of Green Wood,” Dorn’s first selection in Donald Allen’s seminal *New American Poetry*. Aside

²²⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 29.

²²⁵ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 66.

²²⁶ Ed Dorn to Tom Clark, n.d. (1965), MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

²²⁷ T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Criticism: The Major Statements*, ed. Charles Kaplan (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 435.

from exquisite sensitivity to cadence, iambic rotundity—an “*Elizabethan* care for the sound of syllables,” Robert Creeley writes that Olson remarked—there’s nothing of the genteel, dispassionate Eliot here: “My name is Burlingame / said the woodcutter. / My name is Dorn, I said. / I buzz on Friday if the weather cools / said Burlingame, enough of names.”²²⁸ Searching for a more likely modernist counterpart might turn up Eliot’s self-professed “better,” Ezra Pound, with whom Dorn shared contempt for a “vapid and inane” American culture, and who, as a conscious craftsman, is more acerbic, and more overtly present in his work than Eliot.²²⁹ Dorn’s lines, “written on air,” both of here and elsewhere, recall Canto LXXXI, wherein Pound avows his grand aspiration: “To have gathered *from the air* a live tradition.”²³⁰

And while Dorn’s career developed alongside the popular mid to late 20th century schools of American poetics—the Beats, the Language poets, etc.—it’s rarely associated with either, and his adherence to a Black Mountain school of poetics—as ill-defined as that term is—seems severely problematized if not dissipative through *Geography* and *The North Atlantic Turbine*, and entirely absent from *Gunslinger*.²³¹ But another paradox: while Dorn’s early, lyrical side is frequently pitted against the formal engagements and dissembled manipulations of his contemporaries among the Language poets, Dorn’s sense of “total respons(ibility)” produced strikingly congruent objectives. His 1978 book, *Hello, La Jolla*, begins by defining, justifying, and enacting the method it describes, in a four-line poem titled, “A for Ism”: “A poets occupation / is to compose poetry / The writing of it / is everywhere.”²³² Punning on the self-conscious aphoristic mode, and the “perverse proliferation” of language at the meddling, cumbersome hands of bureaucracy, whether in the capitol or on the campus, “Ism” connotatively goes both ways—toward the derogatory and the de facto—and denotatively goes everywhere: “an action or its result,” “a state or quality,” “a system, principle, or ideological movement,” “a pathological condition,” and so forth. Dorn’s “Ism” is both independent of, and identical to the very pronominal, psychological construct “I” itself. As poetry is “everywhere” already written, so the authorial “I” is

²²⁸ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 3.

²²⁹ Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 47.

²³⁰ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1995), 542.

²³¹ Which is to say Olson’s influence on the surface seems diminished in *Gunslinger*, which as a work of fiction, might have irked Dorn’s “istorian,” archeologist teacher.

²³² Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla*, unpaginated introduction. And note this similarity to Che Guevara’s slogan: “The duty of a revolutionary is to make a revolution everywhere.” Quoted in Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 46.

inseparable from the language it purports to subjugate, and from the “you all” among whom “I” is supposedly distinct. But is “I” part of its suffix, or *all* suffix? We all use “I,” each independently assuming an imperturbable antecedent in a self otherwise out of all definitional bounds. Elsewhere, responding to an interviewer’s observation that “the mode of speaking in *Gunslinger* is repartee”—etymologically that’s “divide again”—Dorn struggles for a corrective terminology to articulate the poem’s multiform, inclusive voice, how “[i]n the singular / the many cohere”²³³:

“Drama” doesn’t satisfy me. “Dialogue” is incorrect... it really is a matter of how to reproduce what you think is the composition of your speech. Which means Where You Are. We move around a lot. We hear many people saying the same thing, but they’re all saying it in different ways... People seem to speak in lines in America—you get a line. Everybody’s got a line. Our articulation is quite different from other people’s; we arrive at understanding and meaning through massive assaults on the language, so no particular word is apt to be final.²³⁴

In the ordering of a particular set of receptions there resolves an “I,” a “changing-same” (to refashion Baraka’s term for the status quo), but “[a]gain, it’s drift. ...there’s locus,” Dorn told an interviewer, “but the locus is where you’re at and when you move, the locus moves. ... you are your space...”²³⁵ The self as where you are, Dorn suggests. With characteristic pith, Robert Creeley orders this evolution (à la Olson) in a two-line shard from his 1969 book, *Pieces*: “Thinking of Olson—‘we are / as we find out we are.’”²³⁶

Wandering, in Dorn’s work, in Dorn’s life, interpenetrates resistance *and* reception—resistant in its mutability, its liminality, and receptive in its moving *into* and *looking out*, for which the eye, empowered by its pronominal pun, is receptacle, both instrument and interstice. Again from *Pieces*—a book Dorn would praise as made *by hand*, “if that weren’t, at this time, a qualified phrase”—here’s more Creeley, referencing his many friends: “Want to get the sense of ‘I’ into Zukofsky’s ‘eye’—a locus of experience, not a presumption of expected value.”²³⁷ The kaleidoscopic shifting residence in “I” is a *locus of experience*, not a “presumption” of self-worth, no appeal to the ego. “There will be some along our way,” the

²³³ Robert Creeley, *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 439.

²³⁴ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, 99-100.

²³⁵ Dorn, “Waying the West,” interview by Cooperman, et al., *Ed Dorn Live*, 95.

²³⁶ Creeley, *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley*, 425.

²³⁷ Dorn, “Robert Creeley’s *Pieces*,” *Views*, 120; Creeley, *Collected Poems*, 435.

Poet in *Gunslinger* notes of I's passing, "to claim I stinks."²³⁸ Migration, on one hand the leaden vestiture of marginality, of *homelessness*, becomes, on the other, a method to reclaim the self, "as medium," to resist static, normative categorization not by sealing off but ramifying sensorial capacity and absorbing the "totality of its forms": a mobile locus of I, an empirical I, the Gunslinger's "organ Ization."²³⁹

To trace the thickly interwoven trajectories that embroider Dorn's *locus of experience*—the relation between personal life, work, and public world—and to explore the occurrence and influence of Lawrence, Kansas—radiating afresh its turbulent, incandescent history when Dorn arrived as a poet-in-residence in early 1968—one must, like Coronado with his stakes, lay first some groundwork among Dorn's early years in central Illinois—where "unruined and damned hieroglyphs / ... form / the message of men stooping down / in my native land"—through his "self-exile" in Pocatello, where Helene's "eyes indelicate / as they were, / were nonetheless / and her eyes guided / me into the recesses of my own / untrackable / world," and finally, to the rainy, disenchantment that shrouded Colchester, abstracted Essex, and which Jennifer Dunbar, a 21-year-old student from London, would blithely scatter with "her slight smiling lassitude."²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 59.

²³⁹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 66.

²⁴⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 135; 143; 230.

*...as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky*

*and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth*

*while imagination strains
after deer
going by fields of goldenrod in*

*the stifling heat of September
Somehow
it seems to destroy us*

*It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off*

*No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car*

—William Carlos Williams²⁴¹

*...the darkness sur-
rounds us, what*

*can we do against
it, or else, shall we &
why not, buy a goddamn big car,*

*drive, he sd, for
christ's sake, look
out where yr going.*

—Robert Creeley²⁴²

2. Fenced Off Little Promised Land

“I was brought up a nomad,” Dorn told his biographer, fellow poet and close friend, Tom Clark in 1980. “There’s an awful lot of pressure now to stop all that. And in fact, the numbers are getting extremely more and more coercive against movement at all. Movement, thought, anything—the numbers are coercing against it. They’re entering the machines. Soon the power of the machines is going to be overwhelming. The machines’ capability is already

²⁴¹ William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume 1: 1909-1939*, ed. A. Walton Litz & Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), 218-219.

²⁴² Creeley, *Collected Poems*, 132.

great, but the data is deficient. But once the data catches up with the capability, it's going to be more and more difficult to move, anywhere."²⁴³ Dorn was born on the lip of the Great Depression, April 2, 1929, near the banks of the Embarrass River (a pun he enjoyed), in Villa Grove, Illinois. His biological father, William Dorn, a railroad brakeman, disappeared when he was an infant, and Dorn was raised by his mother and stepfather, Louise and Glen Abercrombie.²⁴⁴ His rural, impoverished, working class upbringing effected a severe and skeptical sense of manmade place—"My tribe came from struggling labor / ...parents / Wandering work search, up and down / The bleak grit avenues of Flint... / Michael Moore-land from the beginning / Manmade poisons in the cattle feed way"—and early on that "struggling labor" instilled an iron and exceptional (for Dorn) allegiance "to the dispossessed "people of the world," "the lower classes / who have lands and moneys, food and shelter / in the great escrow called Never."²⁴⁵

Though the postwar industrial boom saw the U.S. gross national product leap from \$212 billion in 1945, to roughly \$900 billion in 1970, "the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of corporations and a small number of families remained the most striking fact about the United States economy," writes American historian, Howard Zinn.²⁴⁶ For instance, the lowest fifth of the population, between 1944 and 1961, received a mere five percent of the national income, while the top fifth garnered forty-five percent of it.²⁴⁷ In 1953, eighty percent of corporate stock and ninety percent of corporate bonds were owned by less than two percent of the population, and in 1960, a shocking forty million Americans lived below the Bureau of Labor Statistics poverty line.²⁴⁸ In 1966, in Mobile, Alabama, a particularly painful example of postwar destitution, about sixty people lived "at the dump in shacks built of trash," and roughly 200 others went daily to the dump to scavenge for necessities. Meanwhile, those dining at the restaurant on the thirty-third floor of the newly-constructed First National Bank in downtown Mobile, could look out on the dump below, and "see people outlined against the flames of burning trash."²⁴⁹

²⁴³ Dorn, "Ed Dorn's Views," interview by Clark, *Views*, 23-24.

²⁴⁴ See Clark, *World of Difference*.

²⁴⁵ Dorn, "Tribe," in *Chemo Sabe*, unpaginated; and Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 35.

²⁴⁶ Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 91.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 91; 90.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

Dorn's observation that American society was becoming "more and more coercive against movement at all," is appallingly verified by "the numbers." The bottom tenth of the population, which included around twenty million people, collected the same one percent of national wealth in 1947 that they collected in 1968, whereas over the same period, the top tenth of the population took a steady thirty percent. Still, the largest profits of this exorbitant boost in the GNP took the form of "capital gains for corporations," as Zinn notes, of which there were 200,000 in America in the two decades following World War II.²⁵⁰ Initially conceived as a temporary alliance between companies for the purpose of realizing a specific project, the corporation had facilitated, for instance, railroad construction and bridge building in the 19th century, but always with a narrow legal mandate. However, at the end of the Civil War, the Supreme Court's interpretation of the fourteenth amendment bestowed upon the corporation the legal status (and therefore, the rights) of a "person," a maneuver that exponentially increased its power. Thus, a little over half a century later, 200 mega-corporations "controlled approximately 60 per cent of the manufacturing wealth of the nation. The net profits of the ten largest companies in America equaled that of the 490 next largest companies," Zinn writes.²⁵¹ As these corporations absorbed and merged with one another (larger companies swallowed \$10 million dollars between 1948 and 1965 by acquisitioning 800 smaller companies), and federal highway projects blasted tunnels and poured blacktop to create a streaming, coast-to-coast network for merchandise, the military, and the family vacation, "[p]ostwar America saw a boom in highways, motels, restaurants, and office buildings."²⁵² The landscape was utterly changing. "[T]here are now no / negative areas he has ignored," Dorn flatly bemoans in "Idaho Out," "the poles have been strung for our time together / and his hand is in the air as well."²⁵³

Private Property. No Trespassing. Keep Out: The mantric, ubiquitous slogans of the dismembered American West—its Intermontane Region mottled by the zip-locked and densely fortified "laboratory" territories, both federal and corporate, from Hanger 18 to Skull Valley. But the shifting and expanding concepts of property and free enterprise collusion that guard Dorn's "escrow called Never" formed the core principles upon which a distinctly *American* West was carved out of the wilderness, through which Dorn's ancestors roamed.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 93-94.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 91.

²⁵² Ibid., 94.

²⁵³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 107.

In her lodestone history, *The Legacy of Conquest*, Patricia Nelson Limerick discourages scholarly consideration of the West as a process, and instead frames her study as an exploration of place, wherein certain seemingly archaic processes might be suddenly revived.²⁵⁴ Her perspective emphasizes Western history not simply as a “process of expansion, but [as] an array of efforts to wrap the concept of property around unwieldy objects. Agricultural development on plains and prairies made this process deceptively simple.”²⁵⁵ The unregulated nature of private enterprise in new western “territories,” usually governed by a policy of tactical negligence and absenteeism, gave developing industries “unlimited access to natural resources,” and federal subsidies, which drew few boundaries around grazing lands or timber forests, encouraged the containment of ever more “open” space.²⁵⁶ Limerick notes a startling variety of resources that were subsumed under the notion of private property along the early American frontier: animal pelts and hides, valuable minerals, cattle and grazing territory, timber, transportation routes, oil, and water.²⁵⁷ Not to mention people. The most alarming instance in early Western development of the channeling of public funds to private enterprise, the construction of the railways, inflamed the debate around slavery, and continually defaulted on the allocation of land to indigenous peoples.

Although the relocation of Eastern indigenous tribes to present day Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, was promised to be a permanent arrangement, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, like the Missouri Compromise a decade earlier, soon became a barricade to the insatiable desires of a transcontinental railroad. “The idea of arresting our progress in that direction,” wrote Stephen Douglas, chairman of the Committee of Territories and later Democratic nominee for president in 1860 (against Abraham Lincoln), “has become so ludicrous that we are amazed, that wise and patriotic statesmen ever cherished the thought ... How are we to develop cherish and protect our immense interests and possessions on the Pacific, with a vast wilderness fifteen hundred miles in breadth, filled with hostile savages, and cutting off all direct communication. The Indian barrier must be removed.”²⁵⁸ A native of Chicago, Douglas’s interests in a railroad terminus in that city were largely tied to his

²⁵⁴ See Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 25: “Let the car break down in the desert, or let the Indians file a lawsuit to reassert an old land claim, and the quaint appeal of nature and native can abruptly vanish. The frontier is suddenly reopened.”

²⁵⁵ Limerick 71

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-73.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

considerable real estate holdings. But any proposal for dissolving the self-inflicted “Indian barrier” necessarily had to appease the South’s demand for the legalization of slavery in new territories. Oddly enough, Douglas’s solution, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which left the question of slavery open to the inhabitants of the two territories, reversed the early Compromise of 1850 that he’d put forward. The national consequences of Douglas’s maneuvers were beyond compare. “In Kansas,” Limerick writes, “Americans made the prewar transition to the dehumanization of opponents, to the preparation to wage a justified war against savages and barbarians, and the creation of a climate where verbal violence could suddenly turn into physical violence.”²⁵⁹ And Douglas too, was irreparably maligned: “I could travel from Boston to Chicago by the light of my own effigy,” he claimed.²⁶⁰

Like the exploitative Mining Laws of 1866 and 1872, which “had the principal charm of validating the procedures that had worked to [the] advantage” of the large mining companies (and needless to say, not to those of the miners), the legislative acrobatics that facilitated the railroad industry’s sprawling networks also inscribed the brutality and self-interest of the modernizing empire directly onto the physical landscape.²⁶¹ Soon, a multitude of industries would reap similar benefits and leave similar scars. During the First World War, for instance, the use-value vision of the American forest shifted from a mass of railroad ties to a field of gunstocks, and logging “became a patriotic duty.”²⁶² First, the government “curtailed” civilian use of timber, then transferred control of the industry to the army, who formed the Spruce Production Division of the Signal Corps in 1917, and “produced 180 million board feet of timber, 120 million of it for the Allies.”²⁶³ Overall, “the equivalent of a full year’s supply of civilian timber” was shipped to the European front, “in the form of weapons and provisions.”²⁶⁴ Wartime imperatives for logging fit neatly among the “entire conglomerate,” Dorn remarked, “of need and wasted vision,” a continuum of environmental destruction that eco-historian Frieda Knobloch also identifies: “The army’s aggressive logging of western forests—‘thorough and tragic’—alarmed the Forest Service, which was

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 92-93.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 93.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 66.

²⁶² Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 33.

²⁶³ Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*, 33.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 33.

Lean american-gothic quarter sections gaunt look
Managing to send their empty-headed son who is a ninny
to nebraska to do it, all over again, to the ground, a prairie
Dog hole,
And always they smirk at starvation
And consider it dirty ... a joke their daughters learn
From their new husbands.²⁶⁹

This surplus demand rooted itself as a “standard of living” in the emergent class-conscious mind of the capitalist citizen. To organize and manufacture the demands of citizen-consumers shortly after World War I, Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover envisioned the former homestead confederacy transformed into “a nation of home owners.”²⁷⁰ In his best-selling manifesto *American Individualism*, Hoover argued: “The only road to further advance in the standard of living is by greater innovation, greater elimination of waste, greater production and better distribution of commodities and services.”²⁷¹ To achieve his goal, to produce what Tom Clark calls, an “orthodoxy of comfort in America,” the whole panoply of lifestyle’s accoutrements, Hoover understood the necessity of eliminating those elements antithetical to it—like waste, which in 1920, “accounted for 53 percent of the cost of construction.”²⁷² Emboldened by the success of Henry Ford’s automobile assembly lines, mass production became the single, comprehensive answer to engineering Hoover’s promise of “permanent prosperity”: “Above all, the love of home is one of the finest instincts and the greatest of inspirations of our people.”²⁷³

Through the 1920s Hoover’s plan appeared to be working: “The years from 1922 to 1928 set construction records. In 1925, the peak year, the number of housing starts reached 937,000. That was nearly twice the pre-1922 record.”²⁷⁴ But the 1930s cast a dreary shade over the initial success. In 1933, for example, the rate of foreclosures in the nation’s cities, “reached a thousand a week.” The system that intended to mass produce homes, the yardstick of Hoover’s “standard of living,” was actually amassing foreclosure, debt, and dispossession—not compatible with a concept of home at all. Despite the implementation of Roosevelt’s National Housing Act of 1934, which “created a mortgage-insurance program

²⁶⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 44.

²⁷⁰ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 21.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 23, 20.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

that revolutionized the nation's home finance system," by 1940 the proportion of homeowners had fallen back "to 41 percent, the 1920 figure."²⁷⁵ In the mid-1930s, one-third of the nation's population "still lived in terribly substandard dwellings."²⁷⁶ Perhaps Dorn's family was among those struggling masses, suffering "the inside of an american lower middle class house which has been robbed of life in a way that death doesn't really cover," he recalls in his hometown memoir, "Driving Across the Prairie": "My sister has become middle class by worrying about public safety. The noneconomic path most people take into that subworld. I was never middleclass nor were my parents, I mean our safety was never public. Our poverty was public."²⁷⁷

As a boy, Dorn was particularly fond of his French-Quebecois grandfather, William Merton Ponton, "Master pipefitter in the age of steam / Indian fifty percent, very French."²⁷⁸ It was on Ponton's railroad passes that, as a boy, Dorn and his mother traveled the country. And it was his grandfather Ponton whom Dorn watched, "in the leaky waters of winter / wasted like a job," whose cancer, in the poem "Obituary," invokes both the maniacal, technocratic single-mindedness of a "brutal economic calculus," and its burdens disproportionately heaped on the underprivileged.²⁷⁹ This world gone wrong transforms fellow worker into "antagonist," and human encounter into unctuous, material exchange ("...he / gave me a penny once / with slick smile, big teeth"); the scant dignity remaining in merging oneself with a craft, is effaced by industrial development, or ruthlessly sealed only at the moment of their simultaneous death:

...the time my grandfather died
and his helper hooked his job as death
hooked the master fitter's throat and now
the railroad too is dead²⁸⁰

A formal emphasis on absence in the awkwardly chronological sequence of end words: "died / death / now / dead." Such enjambed alliterative suspensions frequently balance the phraseology of Dorn's early, agonistic lyrics, sometimes as a series of disruptions, or questions, in his poems to John Ledyard and Meriwether Lewis, for example, or sometimes

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 23.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 25

²⁷⁷ Dorn, "Driving Across the Prairie," *Views*, 57; 60.

²⁷⁸ Dorn, "Tribe," *Chemo Sábe*, unpaginated.

²⁷⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 48.

²⁸⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 49.

by the slow accretion of repeated phrases, in such works as “On the Debt My Mother Owed to Sears Roebuck,” and “Thesis,” wherein the incantatory discharge of emotion (as Coleridge observed of the ballad) cannot be exhausted by a single enunciation, or in, “The Cosmology of Finding Your Place,” in which recurring phrases are the floorboards over which one searches for a right place.²⁸¹ Dorn’s final collection of poems, *Chemo Sábe*, recounts the struggle between pancreatic cancer and chemotherapy’s “pharmacopia” that transformed his body into a battlefield, harkening back to his grandfather’s death. The evocation of ruin in the third world as global capitalism’s degradation of the host body formulates Dorn’s conceit in the closing lines of “The Decadron, Tagamit, Benadryl and Taxol Cocktail Party of 1 March 1999”—a conceit which he extends absolutely, to an exalting in his own sacrificial annihilation, as the wretched fate his tumor will share: “But then I see her / puzzled misapprehension and know / what she can never anticipate when my spirit / will watch this Bitch burn at my deliverance / in the furnace of my joyful cremation.”²⁸²

Like the half-requited reprisal of *Chemo Sábe* that only death can fully resolve, most desires remain just out of reach in Dorn’s early work. Distance, severance, and loss haunt family relationships and agitate dark spirits in the territories where home should otherwise be. “I became that land and wandered out of it,” not only bespeaks an Olsonian absorption and projection of place, but also defines the extent to which natural devastation and the squalor of cheap labor are yoked by cruel economic priorities. So corrupted our natural cycles, so mangled our coexistence and feverishly impenetrable our national allegiance—shrouding as it’s soothing—we stare nonplussed, dumb to the juxtaposed absurdity of rotting food and a starving population: “an entire conglomerate / of need and wasted vision. All the children / were taught the pledge of Allegiance, and the land was pledged / to private use, the walnut dropped in the autumn on the ground / green, and lay black in the dead grass in the spring.”²⁸³

Natural cycles and free market imperatives trade places in Dorn’s early poem, “On the Debt My Mother Owed to Sears Roebuck,” to emit a stagnant, ponderous malaise that burdens the air of Dorn’s youth. Over the landscape is fastened the not-quite-visible, but imprisoning superstructure of private property (“an unkind and incessant word whispered / in the house of the major farmer / and the catalogue company”) that transfers the land’s

²⁸¹ See entry for “Ballad,” in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²⁸² Dorn, *Chemo Sábe*, unpaginated.

²⁸³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 155.

barrenness (“Summer was dry, dry the garden / ... dry / with the rows of corn the grasshoppers / came happily to strip, in hordes”) to its most hapless inhabitants—like Dorn’s mother, whom he recalls “waiting,” always, “brooding,” in the house, “a little heavy / from too much corn meal... / a little melancholy from the dust of the fields / in her eye, the only title she ever had to lands—”²⁸⁴ In the dry break of this last line, one divines another kind of movement, an overarching, consuming motion—its gauges and remunerations dispatched, as the land’s fecundity is, to an arena beyond the crippled reach of Dorn’s family. But the machinations of this fixed motion nonetheless incorporate them, “to keep / things going, owing that debt,” to the furthest limit of their exploitative potential: “and man’s ways winged their way to her through the mail / saying so much per month / so many months, this is yours, take it / take it, take it, take it.”²⁸⁵ This machine comes to you; it disguises its corrupted reliance on the indebted consumer as an invitation to the hallowed realms of citizenship and material culture, of social belonging, etc.—“this is yours, take it / take it, take it, take it.” A fixed and exclusive movement whose operations entrench poverty within a class whose labor sustains wealth and comforts for distant parties, the cycle of debt defoliates natural cycles, smears the subjugated landscape “in two hemispheres,” chasing profit at inestimable human and environmental cost. And so, in the tense, restrained scorn of the poem’s final lines, debt, this engine of “progress,” is refashioned (like logging) by the “cogs that turn this machine,” as a dignified, patriotic duty:

...tractors chugged pulling harrows
 pulling discs, pulling great yields from the earth
 pulse for the armies in two hemispheres, 1943
 and she was part of that *stay at home army* to keep
 things going, owing that debt.²⁸⁶

The “*stay at home army*”—is that a (jingoist) commendation, or a (sexist) command? Formally, the poem seems complicit in this, its plodding rhythms enact the arduous, “incessant,” stagnation the narrator struggles to define. Within the poem’s first three lines, four things—summer, garden, hearts, rows of corn—are “dry,” and while the accumulation of new concerns—“is the tank full? thinking of the horse / and my lazy arms thinking of the water / so far below the well platform”—is overwhelming in its collective burden, each detail

²⁸⁴ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 46.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

is as anxiously registered as it is sacrificed for the next. The dizzying compression of this verse extracts from its final lines a frightening disclosure of structure: “from the earth / pulse for the armies in two hemispheres, 1943.”

“After all these pronouncements,” Dorn confesses in “The Pronouncement,” another poem from *Hands Up!*, “[w]hat I already knew: not a damn thing / ever changes: the cogs that turn this machine are set / a thousand miles on plumb, beneath the range of the Himalayas.”²⁸⁷ *The Newly Fallen, Hands Up!, The North Atlantic Turbine*—Dorn’s early titles all interrogate the multifaceted nature of mobility, its transgressions and restrictions, under the diocese of industrial capitalism. Like the debt to Sears, the cogs that shackle the “cooked wrists” of Cleveland Thompson in Dorn’s disarming lyric, “The Prisoner of Bellefonte (PA),” suggest the deeply embedded, “mind-forged” captivity of wage slavery, or social class, where reparations are strategies for assimilation in disguise: “they say the people of the community / got the woman he raped / a job in the factory, / like Darwin’s Tierra del Fuegoan / they took her back to make a go for them.”²⁸⁸ The sinister merger of labor and rape is grotesquely reinforced by the dactylic, Byronesque rhyme of “go for them” with “Fuegoan.” But what to do about all this merciless treachery, all this sick justice? What prescription, Mr. Dorn? What resolution? Nothing but to face that fate, the “World of iron thorns,” and pray that “failure be kindly, and come / in small unnoticeable pieces.”²⁸⁹ “It’s not okay,” Dorn was repeatedly reminded by his childhood Protestant priest, “and it’s not going to be okay.”²⁹⁰ Fifty years later, *Abhorrences* made epigrammatic “The Protestant View”:

that eternal dissent
and the ravages of
faction are preferable
to the voluntary
servitude of blind
obedience.²⁹¹

Anticipation for the father’s arrival festers in the debt poem but only “man’s ways” can penetrate that dust. And a sense of home, beyond the “hedges of fields she knew / in her

²⁸⁷ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 77.

²⁸⁸ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 27-28.

²⁸⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 29.

²⁹⁰ Clark, *World of Difference*, 13.

²⁹¹ Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 19.

eye as a vague land where she lived,” never makes it in the house, “nibbled” by the absence. Dorn’s career records his fixation with corrupted or compromised arrivals (the Europeans to the New World, say, or the event to the newspaper), with failures in communication and the slippery, treacherous tendencies of language. Note the breach in possibility—not enough paper—that ends the autobiographical “Tribe,” or the disdainful impatience with “names” in “The Rick of Green Wood.” And communication without language fascinates Dorn. In “Idaho Out,” for example, silent conveyance is superior to what’s spoken—the pioneering westerner’s “stupidity required the services / of at least one of his saddle bags and, in the meantime / his indian friends / signalled one another over his head / as he passed on his businesslike way / in the depressions / between them, in long shadows / they looking deaf and dumb, moving fingers / on the slight rounds / of nebraskan hills.”²⁹² The terse yet casual, “On the Nature of Communication September 7, 1966,” journalistically records the assassination of South African Prime Minister, Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, who that day, “looked up / as the appropriately colored man / approached. He expected / a message. What he received / was a message. Nothing else. / ...the message was delivered / to his thick neck / and his absolute breast / via a knife....”²⁹³ Two years later, Dorn drew back “the curtain / of the reality theatre” on the Gunslinger’s “slender leather encased hands / folded casually / to make his knock.”²⁹⁴ The Gunslinger’s cloaked and curious arrival is part revelation, part revolution, part spectacle, and disarmingly phenomenological: he fires no bullets but “pure information,” and losing his patience with the tedious inquiries of his too-literal-minded companion, exclaims: “Questioner, you got some strange / obsessions, you want to know / what something *means* after you’ve / seen it, after you *been* there.”²⁹⁵ These are demands on poetry as well—poetry, Olson insisted, *enacts*, minus the slough of description. Perhaps Dorn’s chameleonic stylistic reinventions—from the extended meta-narrative of *Gunslinger* to the winnowed pronouncements of *Abhorrences*—imply an investigation of this kind, into the paradoxical nature of communication—a career in beginnings.

And beginnings end to end. His biological father disappeared when Dorn was still an infant, so the always arriving father in the debt poem might be his step-father. But like his hollowed shell of an environment, an indelible sense of absence encased by “brooding,”

²⁹² Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 110.

²⁹³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 216.

²⁹⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 3.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27; 39.

congeals a caustic substance, like the revolting contradiction of “men vomiting from hunger” downtown. It wasn’t until 1960, at the age of thirty, that Dorn was introduced to his biological father, and only by mail—a letter from the railroad outskirts of Portsmouth, Ohio: “Well I Suppose you wonder what I look like well...”²⁹⁶ Unable to shake the feeling (“repossession”) of the event’s socioeconomic roots, Dorn wrote to Olson: “For all the world I am floored, ...It seems like repossession... I guess I’m crying.”²⁹⁷ A year-and-a-half later, on principle—his only son had ‘rudely’ asked him for a small loan (“I though I was Pretty Nice to send you 40 Dollars Not Knowing you. Does your Friends send you money. I bet they Don’t...”—actually they did), Dorn’s father disappeared for the second time, and for good, as quietly and unimpressively as he’d done some thirty years before.²⁹⁸ After his father’s death in 1968, Dorn tore up his photograph. The *one* he had.²⁹⁹

Throughout his childhood, Dorn watched the starved by-products of the same “brutal economic calculus” that suffocated his grandfather, prowl the streets of his hometown.³⁰⁰ In the preface to Dorn’s *Selected Poems*, Creeley introduces the most widely referenced event of Dorn’s young years in Illinois, the night of his senior prom, when he impulsively climbed the city water tower “to show off,” and unexpectedly found desperate messages scrawled by an indigent, war-torn generation—records of personal hardship that he’d seen on the ground:

...looked out I did
 over the lights of a realm I thought grander than
 and any of it, altogether, was very little, and when
 the pictographic scratches in the silver paint told me
 as I walked around
 the cat-walk expression of what had happened in the 1930’s
 men vomiting from hunger
 on the thin sidewalk below, a lonely mason
 with his business ring on, but beyond,
 in the little shoe repair shops the men,
 part of a hopeless vigilante, exhaling the slow mustard gas
 of World War I. My mother, moving slowly in a grim kitchen
 and my stepfather moving slowly down the green rows of corn
 these are my unruined and damned hieroglyphs.

Because they form

the message of men stooping down

²⁹⁶ Clark, *World of Difference*, 102.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁰⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 94.

in my native land, and father an entire conglomerate
of need and wasted vision.³⁰¹

Here's the stepfather directly, "moving slowly," but here fathering, in the reproductive sense, breeds only suffering, "an entire conglomerate / of need and wasted vision." Like his view years later from atop the Eldridge Hotel, the view from the tower unfolds a landscape inscribed with the "breathless venalities of real estate"—histories of human exploitation, misery, and the criminal misuse of natural resources.³⁰² As the watery predicament was for Coleridge's mariner, so Dorn's view from the Villa Grove tower compounds isolation, the violent amputation from what's naturally provided. These "damned hieroglyphs" call out not to a sacred, sentient presence—here all activity is burdened, "stooping down"—but cry back to the State that has taken its place, an omnipotent and implacable power whose geometric confines we obsessively carve in the unruly land—like "the first white flour makers," in "Idaho Out," who, "jealously / keep that form and turn the sides / of the citizens' hills into square documents / of their timid endeavor."³⁰³

In 1866, the territorial secretary of Idaho, Horace C. Wilson, who, one resident concluded, "seems to have been of a very selfish nature," fled the future state with "\$33,550 of the territorial legislature's funds."³⁰⁴ Wilson's shameless, subsidized version of profiteering, however, was wholly of a piece with the widespread failure in the West (in the Dakota, Montana, and New Mexico Territories, for example) on the part of companies and individual officials to differentiate governmental projects from private enterprise.³⁰⁵ As much as the manipulations that blurred those categories continued through the following century, the property lines that demarcated their engagements became all the more inflexibly defined. Settlement in new territories was increasingly linked to financial exploitation, "the first political questions concerned the location of the territorial capital or, one level below, of the county seat. ...[S]ecuring the seat of government also meant securing financial opportunity through a guaranteed population and a reliable market."³⁰⁶ Over the first half of the 1900s, "federal participation in the Western economy expanded."³⁰⁷ The Reclamation Act of 1902,

³⁰¹ Ibid., 155.

³⁰² Dorn, preface to *Empire of Skin*, 11.

³⁰³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 108-109.

³⁰⁴ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 84.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 85.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 85.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 87.

for instance, consolidated federal control over water, “the West’s key resource,” and the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, “centralized the control of grazing on the public domain.”³⁰⁸

Such legislation, and the “square documents” it firmly established, laid the foundation for an unprecedented surge in new homebuilding immediately following the Second World War. In the mid-40s, government research estimated the need for “5 million new homes and apartments,” to meet the demands of “14 million men and women,” recently discharged from the armed forces.³⁰⁹ Various governmental programs (e.g., The G.I. Bill, the Housing Act of 1949) sought to catalyze production and facilitate consumption at the same time, and their multiform efforts were remarkably successful. In 1956, sixty percent of Americans owned homes. In all, historian Adam Rome writes, “[b]uilders constructed over 15 million homes in the 1950s, more than twice the total for the 1940s and nearly six times the figure for the 1930s. ...[T]he tract-house developer became the dominant force in the industry. By 1959, large-scale builders were responsible for 64 percent of the housing market, compared to just 24 percent in 1949 and 5 percent in 1938.”³¹⁰ Thus, more than ten million people in the 1950s migrated from rural to urban America, or were subsumed by the massive suburban sprawl, multiplying “on the body ... / like a fungus of some / criminal kind.”³¹¹ Over the course of the 1950s, “the nation’s cities and suburbs took a million more acres every year—a territory larger than Rhode Island.”³¹² By 1958, some suburbs in California covered 30 percent of their land with “impervious” surfaces (like concrete), which significantly altered drainage and moisture levels in the soil; by the late 1960s, in a populous county just outside the nation’s capital, “builders had destroyed 60 percent of the streams.”³¹³ At a national level, in the two decades between the mid-50s and mid-70s, “almost a million acres of marshes, swamps, bogs, and coastal estuaries were destroyed by urban development.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 87.

³⁰⁹ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 18.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

³¹¹ Dorn, *Way West*, 173. The U.S. Geological Survey in 1971 explained the process of suburbanization this way: “the land is stripped of much of its vegetation and divided into rectangular lots in a regular grid pattern. This method of development obliterates many of the smaller drainage channels, and they must be replaced by enclosed storm sewers. While the storm sewers are generally adequate to handle the runoff from minor and moderate storms, the sewers overflow during the occasional severe storm and flood streets and basements.” Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 196, and see Rome’s footnote.

³¹² Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 120.

³¹³ Ibid., 195-196.

Builders even began to subdivide wetlands the size of the Florida Everglades.”³¹⁴ In 1970, according to the U.S. Census, metropolitan space occupied 10.9 percent of America’s total area—a steady rise from 5.9 percent and 8.7 percent, in 1950 and 1960, respectively.³¹⁵ Both the concept of home—through magazines and advertisements, kitchenware and corn on the cob—and the home itself—a “tract” house, from the Latin *tractus*, meaning “drawing, dragging,” the first stages of the suburb—were increasingly at the behest of mass production, pasted over and sealed off from the natural landscape on which they sat.

For the burgeoning housing industry to stay afloat—to “keep that form and turn the sides”—it involved a “fusion of demographic trends, government policy and business interests into something like a suburban-industrial complex,” writes journalist Godfrey Hodgson.³¹⁶ More and more the violent partitioning of the natural landscape reflected an egregious compartmentalization of societal needs, thoughts, and desires. Between 1946 and 1955, automobile production increased from 2 million to 6 million cars a year; lawnmower sales skyrocketed ten-fold in less than five years; and over the five year period after World War II, when “consumer spending increased 60 percent, . . . the amount spent on furnishings and appliances rose 240 percent.”³¹⁷ Already a function of property, the *standard of living* quickly became synonymous with material assets and the power to consume: “the single family home with a full complement of consumer goods had become the most common image of ‘the American way of life.’”³¹⁸ By 1970, according to the Census Bureau:

99.8 per cent of the population . . . had a refrigerator; roughly 92 per cent of American families had a washing machine, 95 per cent a television set, 91 per cent a vacuum cleaner. For the top third of the population, there were multiple joys: 36 per cent of the population had air conditioners, 38 per cent color television, 30 per cent more than one car, and a freezer.³¹⁹

The sparkling abundance of household goods and appliances belied other, much less appealing, “signs of distress” in the society. These signs not only illustrated a widening chasm between socioeconomic classes and the discrepant amenities available to each, but

³¹⁴ Ibid., 121.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 195-196.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 43.

³¹⁷ Ibid. 42-43.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

³¹⁹ Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 101.

they also suggested that the current flurry of “gadgets and machines” to improve the “standard of living” was itself the supreme instrument for distracting public attention from social inequality, social distress, self-doubt, self-aggrandizement, self-evaluation, and so on. So, while the gross national product climbed to nearly “a thousand billion dollars” by 1971, by 1965 there were nine million mentally ill patients in America, and more than a million “chronic alcoholics”; twenty thousand people committed suicide, twenty-five percent of marriages “ended in divorce,” and almost “2 million crimes involving property were committed every year.”³²⁰

For Dorn, who struggled through an impoverished upbringing during “the intensity of the Great Depression,” and who reached young adulthood (he was twenty in 1949) as this postwar production flourished and the subtopian “American way of life” hardened around it, these societal disparities were starkly pronounced. “[K]eep my own misery close to theirs,” Dorn’s threnody, for the abused, striking “miners of Hazard Kentucky,” “Mourning Letter, March 29, 1963,” disarmingly pleads, “associate me with no other honor.”³²¹ Are these miners martyrs? What kind of honor is the honor of misery? And what does it mean to be associated “with no other honor”—is that un-murdered martyrdom, is that called *exile*? In “Driving Across the Prairie,” Dorn defines his early awareness of a fireside exile, of an absence where home should be (“Our poverty was public”) in his childhood during a world war: “We needed love. We couldn’t have it. Everything we were made to understand was being proven elsewhere.”³²² From these roots grew a fierce skepticism—“relentlessly perverse,” Peter Michelson describes it, “practiced with something like philosophical discipline... bordering on being its own faith.”³²³ An independence incubated by a decade’s worth of persistent autodidacticism made Dorn “as dialectical as they come,” always “testing the interlocuter’s received ideas,” Anselm Hollo affectionately remembers.³²⁴ The work vocally extends its sympathies in multiple and discrepant directions: to the “starved” miners of Hazard, Kentucky; to Cleveland Thompson, a convicted and executed rapist; to Olga Herrera Marcos, the first woman Castro sentenced to death; to the Shoshoneans; to “the Kurds, the Serbs and the Iraqis”; to 19th century robber baron Daniel Drew; to Hector and

³²⁰ Ibid., 101.

³²¹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 148.

³²² Dorn, “Driving Across the Prairie,” *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 65.

³²³ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 21.

³²⁴ Ibid., 21-22.

Christ; and to the irascible and contemptuous duelist and lawyer, Aaron Burr. For the directness and flatness of Dorn's declarations, it's not surprising that he's accused of moral pretensions, or criticized (as Donald Wesling notes) for a "narrow-minded" or "simplistic" socioeconomic analysis.³²⁵ Dorn pulls no punches in his introduction to Douglas Woolf's *Hypocritic Days and Other Tales*: "'America' is a smug, hardhearted, unforgiving nation of jackals, which forever slaps itself on its back over how generous, selfless and idealistic it is. It is the most preposterous propaganda barrage since Goebbels ran an office, in bloodier and more interesting times."³²⁶ There's a lot reeling in, "bloodier and more interesting times"—the statement's flat, calculated assurance exacerbates its already invidious comparison.

Here's another assertion, full of simple, inarguable, empirical truth, beyond what ideological fractures might branch from the use of force for political purposes: "A bullet is worth / A thousand bullets."³²⁷ Does this endorse violence, or bemoan its undue, but unavoidable prominence? "One of the things about political poetry," Dorn told Effie Mihopoulos in 1991, "is that you have to sort of imply to the reader that this is a rather intimate situation in which I'm going to say something that's rather stiff to you, and you're going to like it, because actually you agree when it comes right down to it."³²⁸ Try on this pronouncement then, from Dorn's *Yellow Lola* (a selection of outtakes from the epigrammatic collection *Hello, La Jolla*)—and no matter that its aphoristic desire is out of the question, it asserts an alternative world substantiated largely by the confidence of the poem's delivery, its declarative rhetoric: "[T]he family is / as big as the unit / shld have got."³²⁹ That's one way to manage, as I've noted above, what's between the bookends of the career: the first of Dorn's *Collected Poems* attends to the rural, domestic occupations of Helene, his first wife—"Her back is slender / and the wood I get must not / bend her too much through the day"—and one among his last retraces austere rituals of childhood ("parents / Wandering work search... / ... following / Other exodus relatives"), in the attempt to reconcile a class-endemic abstraction of home, with a sense of blood belonging, with some confraternity, as ineffable as it is ineradicable, and transgressive of ideological snares:

I'm with the Kurds and Serbs and the Iraqis
And every defiant nation this jerk

³²⁵ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 6.

³²⁶ Dorn, preface to *Hypocritic Days and Other Tales*, 10.

³²⁷ Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 15.

³²⁸ Dorn, "From Imperial Chicago," interview by Mihopoulos, *Ed Dorn Live*, 68.

³²⁹ Dorn, *Yellow Lola* (Santa Barbara: Cadmus Editions, 1981), 41.

“weak unformed,” American citizenry. A decade of war still to come, in 1965 Johnson’s saturation bombing had already produced four million South Vietnamese refugees, nearly a quarter of the population.³³² And just as so many South Vietnamese were forced to flee their homes, many Americans were inversely becoming the fiscal and ideological prisoners of theirs, and of the very horrific television images that the Vietnamese people were living among. “OK,” Dorn wrote to Tom Clark in early 1965, “the news is generally suppressed here. The National guardian has correspondents in the north of Vietnam but that’s all I’ve seen. The situation is more terrible than you could imagine. Americans seem against government stands, but it’s that weak unformed ‘against’ that set in shortly after the revolution.”³³³ In March of that year, in a letter discussing work for the forthcoming issue of *Paris Review*, things seemed worse: “The country is sick at this moment as you know,” Dorn complained to Clark, “there are strange things going down even here in Hoc.”³³⁴ Dorn’s poem, “The Sense Comes Over Me, and the Waning Light of Man by the First National Bank,” appeared in the fall issue of *Paris Review*, and as an activation of the poetic effort he’d discussed in his correspondence with Clark that spring, for “a hybrid thing which involves my own past and topical stuff, current events so-called,” the poem is challenging.³³⁵ Almost immiscibly referential, the poem’s authorial mode exercises the lyric’s comprehensive sweep, and though its voice is confrontational, testing internal irreconcilables (“a less schizophrenic american...”), it illustrates “the direct onslaught of the political poem,” that Dorn would reject a few years later.³³⁶ “The problem seems to be to maintain some stability inside that shifting scene,” Dorn wrote to Clark in 1965, “or at least realize there is no stability possible and write day and night to keep up, which is pure exhaustion by definition.”³³⁷ Dorn wasn’t satisfied with arbitrarily bridging a chasm in the poem (“a hybrid thing”) between local realms and the international political arena, on the tensile strength of personal experience alone—how to amalgamate the topical world and the personal world into

³³² Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 439.

³³³ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, n.d. (1965), MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

³³⁴ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 12 March 1965, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

³³⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, n.d. (1965), MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

³³⁶ Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 26.

³³⁷ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, n.d. (1965), MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

“some total respons(ibility,” some response aware of the divergent sensibilities that shape its registration? Indeed, the referential network in the “Sense” poem is broad; personal, literary, and local histories are tangled into the narrator’s exhaustion with a nation seemingly addicted to its own entrapment. In the following lines, the “*imagination* of the geometry / of our location”—of the geometries that support the brittle, strategic relativism of American civil life³³⁸—summons a nightmarish vision of national torpor in light of President Johnson’s escalation of the war—his troop “surge” in the spring of 1965—and the sophomoric histrionics of the accompanying demonstrations. Consciously paradoxical, Dorn’s aversion is a centripetal force whose allusive reach supercedes topical political spats, and stretches over vast expanses of history—from the Puritans (Edward Taylor’s “civit box of sin,” and Increase Mather) to contemporary race relations and the First Lady

there they do lie, the principal
 residue of my past, and the past
 of my gutless generation, nineteen year olds
 invaded the white house today, a screen
 was put up to shield the nervous exit
 of Ladybird, they sang and refused to move,
 she split and I felt it possible again
 at the end of a very long winter
 to be a less schizophrenic american, a little
 of the pus was spooned out of my brain, I gave
 an arbitrary grade to a backward black girl
 I remembered to spit on the sidewalk
 when I thought of the first 35 hundred marines
 who landed in Vietnam yesterday. I spoke of
 President Johnson as the logical extension of
 Increase Mather, my heart, like theirs,
 a "civit box of sin" and late in the afternoon
 explained *Metamorphosis*, and Kafka as a product
 of a hung up family, and a hung up people,
 bringing forward, inching nearer
 the perpetuality of the lives we lead on the edge
 of the great american desert where you certainly
 do not
 want to be buried but buried you are, the horizons
 recede before you
 ...
 No one
 has loved the west I came into...³³⁹

³³⁸ See U.S. Code 245, discussed in Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 138-139.

³³⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 156.

But ye shall be known by your fruits, not your disclaimers: Dorn's work is a love, a body laboring to keep strife contained in love—love as a struggle, as a frontier; not one to be conquered, but held, as a tone is with breath in the lungs. From Latin *tenere*, meaning “to hold,” also the root of “tenable,” that which can be maintained, that which is (one might say) possible, tenacity is love's elasticity; endurance is both test and evidence of love as a process, not an end: “through all travesty,” Helene, “kept those lovely eyes / clear”; in his *24 Love Songs*, Dorn's “tongue has taken / a foreigner into it,” and endeavors to “test that steel / across the plain between us” (“us” readers too); and Swen, “who came from Sweden” to Pocatello, tries to persuade Dorn, in an early poem, to build a house in those Idaho hills, and half aware of his effort's futility, “went on anyway describing the possibilities, that's love, / in the mists of indifference.”³⁴⁰ That to explore “possibilities ... in the mists of indifference” is love is a central tenet of Dorn's work. And through all this poverty and “self-exile,” Donald Wesling notes, Dorn's poems are not morally prescriptive.

The palpable relations and immediate demands of the work amount to an ethical testament themselves—their struggle for a moral framework against the aberrant supremacy of both subjectivity and objectivity, and religion's murderously decorous rationality. It's Donald Davie, in fact (whom Dorn, after their fallout at Essex, called a “lulu of morality”), who most elegantly identifies this “humility,” in Dorn's work, “the instruction [the writing] looks for and receives from people and places and happenings. It reflects upon them, it moralizes on them; but the reflection and the moral are drawn not from some previously accumulated stock of wisdom, but (so the writing persuades us) immediately out of the shock of confronting each of them as it comes, unpredictably.”³⁴¹ Davie's acute point is richly illustrated in such poems as “An Address for the First Woman to Face Death in Havana,” or “Death While Journeying,” or “Like a Message on Sunday,” wherein Dorn catches a glimpse of his former plumber, silently walking the riverbank with his young daughter:

... he came
to our house to fix the stove
and couldn't
oh, we were arrogant and talked
about him in the next room, doesn't
a man know what he is doing?

³⁴⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 83; 237; and Edward Dorn, “The 6th,” in *Yugen* 6 (1960), unpaginated.

³⁴¹ Clark, *World of Difference*, 14..

Can't it be done right,
 World of iron thorns.
 Now they sit by the meager river
 by the water . . . stare
 . . .
 she thin and silent,
 he, wearing a baseball cap
 in a celebrating town this summer season
 may they live on

 on, may their failure be kindly, and come
 in small unnoticeable pieces.³⁴²

Davie's observation of a dynamic, emergent morality structurally frames, and is frequently paired with a political/ideological "empiricism"—that's a plumber, remember; this something on the sabbath is "like a message" (is that sarcastic? and yet it *is* a sort of message, and ends with a sort of prayer). Dorn described this "empiricism" in an interview with John Wright:

I was never organized in my political thought. I was never a Marxist or anything like that. I sort of entertained all that, but you see, my view of capitalism is not a Marxian view or anything like that. . . I just think capitalism is about one of the worst systems ever developed, and I don't believe there's any such thing as the free market. It's all rigged. I think it's venal and lying and immoral. But, again, that's not ideological. That's just empirical.³⁴³

Empirical is right—that is, if one is looking, or has the chance to look: "in the sky it's a bird, no! and while you were looking of course somebody nailed your big toe to the floor."³⁴⁴ Ideology, if you can get an eye outside it, is empirical in that sense: in 1963, the "major publication" of the toy industry, *Toys and Novelties*, reported that military toys would outnumber all others produced by the twenty-eight toy manufacturers in the country that year.³⁴⁵ The overproduction of military toys mirrored the overproduction of actual military devices: by 1970 the United States was spending \$80 billion a year on defense, half of which went exclusively to weapons systems, and of those contracts, "two thirds of the money [went] to twelve or fifteen industrial giants," writes Zinn—"corporations whose main reason for existence was to fulfill government contracts for death-dealing weapons."³⁴⁶ Despite the fact

³⁴² Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 28-29.

³⁴³ Edward Dorn, interview by John Wright, *Chicago Review*, 195.

³⁴⁴ Edward Dorn, introduction to *The Book of Daniel Drew* (New York City: Frontier Press, 1969), 7.

³⁴⁵ Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 108.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

that the revolving door, which stands between large defense contractors and the Department of Defense, while egregiously exploited, was meagerly concealed, for a population perpetually in fear of annihilation from Soviet nuclear attack, and indoctrinated with air-raided drills and Cold War propaganda, such corruption, perhaps, seemed a small price to pay.

There were other aspects of the “free market” that were patently “rigged,” as Dorn puts it, and definitely “venal and lying and immoral.” Take the “incredible electrical conspiracy,” which by today’s corporate corruption standards might seem light. In 1961, three electrical companies—General Electric, Westinghouse, and Allis-Chalmers—were found guilty of “fixing prices on circuit-breaking equipment,” and consequently robbing the public of “millions upon millions” of dollars.³⁴⁷ A handful of officials involved in the scandal spent thirty days prison. Two years earlier, the U.S. Senate heard testimony regarding “artificially inflated prices” in the drug industry. It was later estimated that the public “was paying \$750 million a year in excess prices for drugs.”³⁴⁸ While consumers paid high prices for basic necessities, the middle and the lower classes also paid a disproportionate amount of taxes to the federal government in the postwar years.³⁴⁹ At the same time, multiple statesmen—Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, for instance, or chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, George Mahon—received substantial farm subsidies either personally, or in their districts. “In 1969,” Zinn writes, “\$3.5 million in farm subsidies were given out. Half of it went to those in the top 15 per cent farm-income bracket. The twenty wealthiest farmers in the nation were getting more from the Department of Agriculture than the bottom 350,000 farmers.”³⁵⁰ More egregious were the concessions made to oil and gas companies, who “could deduct 27.5 per cent of their gross income from their federal income taxes, up to half of their total tax bill,” until 1969, when Congress reduced that number to twenty-two percent.³⁵¹ These phenomenal exceptions set oil companies, who paid eight percent of their income in taxes, apart from other large corporations, who paid forty percent, and their soaring corporate profits were additionally enabled, or secured rather, by federal retrenchment of foreign competition.³⁵²

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 106.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 106

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 98-99.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 98.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 99.

³⁵² Ibid., 99.

So, while the U.S. government was spending \$100 million a year on herbicides to eliminate the jungle disguising the enemy in Vietnam, and President Johnson was preparing to appease General Westmoreland's, and Defense Secretary McNamara's requests for another 280,000 troops for a full scale war effort in late 1965, Dorn was hard at work to move his family from Idaho, where they'd lived for the last three years, to the eastern shores of Essex, England, the town of Colchester, the first grain outpost in Roman Britain.³⁵³ Davie's brief visit to Pocatello in the early summer gave Dorn extra confidence that Essex, where Clark and Davie were, and England in general, where his friends Jeremy Prynne, Tom Pickard, and Tom and Val Raworth all lived, was worth the fight. In the face of opposing externalities and somewhat against his better judgment, Dorn stamped Davie with approval. Davie had a very "engaging manner," Dorn wrote to Clark, who was currently studying Pound under Davie's instruction at Essex.³⁵⁴ "I like the man a lot—he's more than one cld expect, ie an american cld expect from a like person who's made that particular sort of commitment."³⁵⁵ It was actually Dorn that owed Davie a favor, or Dorn that might have been the one to worry over expectations, since Davie had so vehemently insisted, without ever having met him, upon Dorn's presence at the new university, and had consequently offered him a Fulbright teaching position. In the meantime, back in Idaho, aside from the pleasantries Davie's "manner," Dorn's "commitment" was physically and financially stressful, and things looked grim. In his correspondence with Clark, even the Fulbright acceptance takes a backseat to other lingering maladies. In February 1965, visiting Olson, Dorn wrote from Gloucester: "Have been down ill and pressed on all sides besides. Fullbrt. grant came thru so that is great relief as you can well imagine."³⁵⁶ But a fleeting one. In late July, Dorn could do little to disguise his tight situation, and was forced to query Clark about his reimbursement for the poems *The Paris Review* had accepted. "[I]t isn't exactly urgent but... I could use the money, I'm now trying to scrape everything together to get the remaining 4 members of the family across the country and thence the ocean, a sum that will be more than a thousand dollars. I bring it up

³⁵³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 422.

³⁵⁴ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 9 June 1965, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

³⁵⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 31 July 1965, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

³⁵⁶ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 27 February 1965, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

not as a weight but one of many facts now confronting me.”³⁵⁷ However, the reality of a new beginning, not to mention his first trip overseas, was dimly coming into view on the territory of time ahead: “otherwise, do send copies to Essex, not to Pocatello—and that’s pleasant to consider—that we’re now near enough in time to it to be getting mail there.”³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 31 July 1965, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

*The fog reaches the Berkeley flatlands
and renders audible
fogbell sounds across the bay
impossible to hear when clear*

– Ken Irby³⁵⁹

*Yes, we put a man
on the moon and*

*We should have left
the son-of-a-bitch there.*

—Ed Dorn³⁶⁰

3. *The Landscape Reveals Us*

In 1963, a young poet named Kenneth Irby, who'd grown up in Fort Scott, in southeastern Kansas, attended the university in Lawrence, and recently dropped out of his doctorate program in Chinese and Japanese history at Harvard, sought Dorn's advice as an older poet—where to go, what to do, method questions.³⁶¹ Dorn, seven years Irby's senior, told him to "roam":

...if I were single that's what I would do, I mean I wouldn't because I did that, but if you haven't, then you ought to, you can certainly stop here, but you shld not plan on Staying anywhere. The thing is, people have never really seen america, that's still open. And if you want to be a writer you ought to say to yourself, and mean it, be willing to kill yourself over it, I am a writer. Read walk write live go see be arrive leave fuck around work hear, very much hear, (suffer if the chance comes but don't press it) and exercise your mouth and lungs and fingers and given any any any intelligence which you got, you'll be a writer. And don't get married. I mean it's wonderful. But it takes more time, and since you aren't, wait. But not on the road. Be a serious traveler, no one has been

³⁵⁹ Kenneth Irby, *The Flower of Having Passed Through Paradise In a Dream* (Annandale-on-Hudson: Matter Books, 1968), 27.

³⁶⁰ Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 99.

³⁶¹ Of that choice for himself, Dorn has said: "It's notorious that you can try to gain a position of some stability, and it's also notorious that there's a certain price to pay for that. The very stability can emerge as a symptom in people, and you meet them and you hear that story. If it's looser, and you move around and you have a job here and a job there and you take your chances, then there's uncertainty. But you have to write then inside the uncertainty, if that's your choice. And that's what I've done. I've never had any grants or anything like that. I haven't cared, because I don't necessarily want to do it that way. I'd just as soon own my property, without any question. To have money, alternatively, would be OK." (Dorn, "Roadtesting the Language," interview by Fredman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 78)

that in America since La Salle.³⁶²

Dorn had met Irby four years earlier in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Dorn, Helene, their son Paul, and children Fred and Chansonette (from Helene's earlier marriage to Fred Buck), were living in a rented house on Camino sin Nombre—"like gazing at the backside of a tautology," Dorn remarked: "Wild totalities in the name of that road. Earth, Night, Rivers, Sleep, Strife, Victory, and so on. I was the guard of something or other there. I don't yet know what. But it was a yeasty time."³⁶³ Irby, "disguised as a contemporary Serviceman but secretly the manager of a team of proto-zen archers (mostly Kentuckians)," had driven over from Albuquerque, where he and said "archers" were stationed at Sandia Base.³⁶⁴ Perhaps the "proto-zen" comment has something to do with the cut at Kerouac—"but not on the road. Be a serious traveler." Maybe Dorn sensed what KU professor and prairie geographer, James Malin had wondered, when the latter, upon hearing that Irby was living in Berkeley, drolly asked a former student, "is Mr. Irby... a hippie?"³⁶⁵

Dorn was impressed by Irby's fusion of Whitman's long, expansive line with the "derringer," monosyllabic, "molecular constituency" of the tight stitch in Creeley's work—steeped in prepositions that disorient syntax without violating it, and delay closure in moments of vibrant suspense and sudden, unexpected insight.³⁶⁶ There is both a materiality of language, and a sacred, incantatory otherness in the verse. Irby was the first American poet that Dorn recommended to Tom Clark, in January 1965, after Clark had asked for poets to contact for *The Paris Review*.³⁶⁷ By 1966, Irby had moved to Berkeley, California, and was working toward a long poem on 16th-century Spanish lost-and-found explorer, and

³⁶² Edward Dorn to Kenneth Irby, 9 March 1963, letter supplied by Kenneth Irby.

³⁶³ Original mss., Folder 453, Edward Dorn Paper, Dodd Mss.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 1 February 1969, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss; see also Irby, *Catalpa* (Lawrence: Tansy, 1977), 110-111: "...band on my hair / hippie knit on the heart / Malin asked Brodhead / after he first met me, 'is / Mr. Irby a / hippie?' / the old slow lightning historian / leaning forward on his cane / into the doorway, his wife / gossiping on the lawn next door / as we bowed away, 'What despite / all history and civilization *homo / sapiens* still cannot determine / to his satisfaction / is *quality* / as if he had said, 'Laughter / is my appeal in the extremity / to which I have come...'"

³⁶⁶ Concerning this point, of Creeley's 1969 collection, *Pieces*, Dorn writes: "...the grammatical simplicities which largely move the poem around its corners... the poem is of a molecular constituency, never shorthand, and so each one is a model of a social universe located with a high degree of resolution." Quoted from Dorn, "Robert Creeley's *Pieces*," *Views*, 118.

³⁶⁷ Only by the English poet, Gael Turnbull, precedes Irby's name, which is followed by John Wieners, a classmate Dorn revered from Black Mountain. Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 1 April 1965, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

mystic healer, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca.³⁶⁸ In a letter to Dorn in early January of that year, Irby discussed a confluence of experience, behavior, and contemplation, whereat the mind's concentration is transferred to the intricate density of landscape and environment—a meditation that expands by its compression, from what's at-large to what's at-hand:

This city's changed me, Ed – I can tell, the kinds of attentions and perceptions I come to increasingly are of smaller particulars, what's seen out windows (but that's always with me) – well, yes, a city – but a dreamier quality at times, a greater preoccupation w/ inward searching, mystical writings... So it is a love affair of mine, that country – & I keep trying to make that into greater significances, as if it weren't so, that it's my love affair, but one of all men – ? Or, how do I make it one of all men, in the midst of such shit & failed grand promises the US is today? That's, then, the question, & the need – or it seems clearer to me than ever – how I feel abt that, this country, is only a first step, is no subject in itself – the particulars of the whole life are where my predispositions, love, only enter, the interstices into.³⁶⁹

Irby's "interstices into," into and out of which knowledge is forged, coincide with Olson's insistence to "find connections between things." So Irby, like Dorn, was regularly struck by the poignancy of distant territories, territories in the distance, in the memory—particularly those locales infused with curious cultural and personal experience. "I long for them plains," Irby interrupts his appraisal of California, elucidating the tensions between urban life in the Bay Area, and a persistent longing "to be on the move, but more, to be in the open, out of this city, out of any such confines"—confines exacerbated by "thoughts of Kansas always in the brain."³⁷⁰ Thus, the longest poem Irby's time in California produced was not a disquisition on Cabeza de Vaca, but is *To Max Douglas*, an elegiac meditation of the "bloodfouled West," prompted by the heroin overdose of its namesake, a precocious, 21-year-old poet and painter from St. Joe, Missouri.³⁷¹ *To Max Douglas*'s sharp, opening couplets hurl the reader from "the Bloomfield downs of South Sonoma," as from a tornado in a cup of tea, back to northeastern Kansas and northwestern Missouri.³⁷² Like filmmaker Stan Brakhage, who stressed the "*struggle* to deeply perceive," in an "age which artificially seeks to project itself materialistically into abstract space and to fulfill itself mechanically," Irby

³⁶⁸ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 7 July 1966, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

³⁶⁹ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 26 December 1965, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

³⁷⁰ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 5 January 1966, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

³⁷¹ Kenneth Irby, *To Max Douglas* (Lawrence: Tansy, 1971), unpaginated.

³⁷² Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

seeks a method of being, a “total respons(ibility),” alchemical and uncanny.³⁷³ Resistant only to the stultifying commodification and overproduction of the phenomenal world, Irby’s epistolary insights had moved through Dorn’s earlier advice:

It seems more & more the case, though, that such lands as those I grew up in, are less changed – spoiled I mean – than here, Calif., land of magnificent vistas & formations like none on earth, slowly & steadily fucked by tracts billboards freeways & waste dumpage. But that’s not to be avoided, anyway. I love this goddamn land, all things only reinforce that -- & love is no means to do anything, by itself, but love. ‘The goods of the intellect’ lead on. I by God, want to live here, w/o rancor – to enjoy myself, by God – & not to be an idiot.³⁷⁴

Although Irby’s deep study of Cabeza de Vaca never appeared, *Relation*, his 1969 book, takes up similar areas of concern. For instance, the book’s preface (by Irby) ends with the resonant assertion of *all* chorologic relation: “The poetry of this mild littoral clime is marked by many turnings, distracted and multiplied attentions—but centrally, in my own case, by the conviction that the landscape demands us, and reveals us.”³⁷⁵ But just as Irby’s letter observes a landscape, “slowly and steadily fucked by tracts billboards freeways & waste dumpage,” the body’s “revelation”—etymologically from the Latin *revelare*, meaning “to lay bare”—was ironically, frighteningly direct.³⁷⁶ The home-body plundered, scorched, denuded—not by napalm but the harrowing, ghastly by-products of an obliviously manufactured American “way of life,” and its yardsticks of success, the family household and the family car. Since 1949, historian Howard Zinn reports in *Postwar America: 1945-1970*, fashionable shifts in “style”—of car and coffeemaker alike—have cost the American economy “\$4 billion each year.”³⁷⁷ And each discrepant trend both inaugurated and depended upon (“as if increase of appetite,” Hamlet scoffs, “had grown / By what it fed on”) the despoliation, on the one hand, incident to strip mining and the extraction of fossil fuels in order to light the suburbs and run the cars, and on the other, the pernicious accumulation of toxic waste *from those very homes*, and the unimpeded emissions of airborne pollutants *from those very cars*.³⁷⁸ The ruinously perverse ramifications of this capitalist cycle, which remain

³⁷³ Stan Brakhage, introduction to “Metaphors on Vision,” in *Blue Grass* (1962), 31.

³⁷⁴ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 5 January 1966, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

³⁷⁵ Irby, preface to *Relation*, unpaginated.

³⁷⁶ *New Oxford Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “revelation.”

³⁷⁷ Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 104.

³⁷⁸ *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), I.ii.144-145.

indestructibly indivisible from our “standard of living,” were not publicly acknowledged, if they are seriously acknowledged (that is, hedged) at all, until the mid-1960s.³⁷⁹

Beside the family home in postwar America, the automobile shone as a symbol of status and individual freedom (those values, freedom and finance, increasingly intertwined). The automobile also became an uneasy signifier of consumer society’s “overweening gluttony” in the pursuit of material satisfaction at the sacrifice of open space, the preservation of vital natural resources, the survival of wildlife, and, not least of all, the funding for a variety of necessary social measures, like the building of “schools, hospitals, playgrounds, or low-cost housing.”³⁸⁰ Just as the productions of steel, aluminum, and copper were controlled by a few “giant corporations,” so the car industry was ruled by General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler, who “made 95 per cent of all new cars,” in the 1960s.³⁸¹ In industries across the board this extreme concentration of ownership led to “price-fixing, at the expense of the consumer, and fabulous profits, at the expense of the worker.”³⁸² Over a five-year period in the mid-60s, corporate profits rose by \$18 billion, and in that decade the auto-industry alone spent \$2 billion advertising its products. The profits of General Motors in 1965, for example, reached \$2 billion, exceeding the “general revenue of forty-eight of the fifty states,” and besting the GNP “of all but nine nations in the world.”³⁸³ Of the 200 million people in the United States in 1968, there was an automobile for every three of them. And through the 1960s, American firms expanded their power and influence abroad, controlling “more than half the British auto industry,” by 1963, and a slew of other offshore industries: American companies owned “40 per cent of the German oil industry,” for example, and “40 per cent of the telegraph, telephone, electronic, and statistical equipment in France.” In 1967, the year Dorn’s anti-capitalist poetic treatise, *The North Atlantic Turbine*, was published, the “gross value” of goods American companies produced internationally “was more than \$100 billion a year—equivalent in productive capacity to a third ‘nation’ in the world, just behind the United States and the U.S.S.R.”³⁸⁴

All at dear cost, human and environmental. Not only do mass production’s hollow wares disturb Irby’s letter, but their catastrophic intrusions isolate and invigorate his (and

³⁷⁹ See Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 132.

³⁸⁰ Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla*, 16; Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 104.

³⁸¹ Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 92.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

Dorn's, and Olson's, and Brakhage's) "love affair" with the land—"in the midst of such shit & failed grand promises the US is today." Examples of that failure were more pervasive than many chose to acknowledge. For instance, while the federal government spent billions of dollars to get a man to the moon in 1969, the under-funded "grand promise" of widespread prosperity, of "justice for all," couldn't put food in the mouths of the poor. In Brevard County, home of the John F. Kennedy Space Center, one doctor noted: "The irony is so apparent here, ...I treat malnourished children with prominent ribs and pot bellies. I do see hunger."³⁸⁵ Overall, the benefits for low-income sectors of the population implemented by the New Deal—social security, public housing, unemployment insurance, etc.—advanced at snail's pace through the 1960s, and by 1971, "14 million Americans were receiving welfare payments."³⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in 1968, fatherless families, the primary recipients of state-funded welfare programs, received a meager average of forty-three dollars a week.³⁸⁷ At the same time, rampant corporate development and ineffective treatment of household waste poisoned the country's air, water, and soil, and made unhomely the homefront.

By the 1960s, for suburban homeowners the civilized comforts of plumbing and waste management were tainted by evidence that laundry detergents and septic tanks were leaking viruses, harmful bacteria, and pollutants into their water supply. In a "review of 30 studies from 13 states," the U.S. Public Health Service discovered in 1960 that, "37 percent of drinking wells tested for contaminants. In some subdivisions, the figure was almost 100 percent."³⁸⁸ A number of federal and private organizations determined that industrial chemicals had infected groundwater in twenty-five states. On lakes and rivers across the country, "detergent residue formed floating mountains of foam."³⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the destructively bizarre consequences of "poor waste-disposal plumbing" could be witnessed on the sunny coast of California, when septic tanks "saturated the shale ... beneath a 225-acre hillside community," and sent "lots, lawns, shrubbery, and 156 houses," oozing down the hill, "as though they were so much custard pudding."³⁹⁰ The adverse health effects of septic discharge, however, were much more widespread. From 1945 to 1980, "40 percent of all outbreaks of water-borne diseases" were the result of septic-tank failure, and a series of

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 93.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 100.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 100.

³⁸⁸ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 106.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 107.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 98.

studies in the mid-70s found that “septic-tank effluent” was the primary cause of irredeemable “declines in suburban reptile and amphibian populations.”³⁹¹ In 1968, “fifteen million fish were killed by water pollution,” and the Federal Water Pollution Control Commission approximated that six million of those deaths were due to industrial waste.³⁹² There was “mercury in salmon,” there were “other poisons in tuna,” and in 1968, crude oil from a corporate spill lapped California’s beaches.³⁹³ Despite repeated congressional attempts from 1965 to 1974 to clean up the water supply—the Water Quality Act, for instance, and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act—and a significant drop in the relative percentage of houses that “relied on backyard waste disposal,” the sheer number of homes built made that stabilized, low percentage deceiving. Despite the percentile decrease, the mounting tide of suburban construction actually increased the number of homes with septic tanks, from seventeen million in 1970, to nearly twenty-five million in 1990.³⁹⁴

The “unintended and unforeseen consequences of new technologies” spread to other fixtures in the suburban refrigerator as well. The “atmospheric testing of atomic weapons and the devastating effects of the pesticide DDT,” reappeared in the nation’s milk supply in the early 1960s. Still, the “adoption of national standards for air pollution,” largely the result of automobile exhaust, “was opposed by the United States Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the American Mining Congress, and the National Coal Association.” And next to your radioactive glass of milk, was your “adulterated meat”—“infected with parasites,” and injected with unapproved additives.³⁹⁵ A Senate subcommittee investigation in 1967 revealed the country’s largest meatpacking companies were operating under “filthy conditions,” intentionally placing their plants in isolate locations to evade federal inspection, and saving money, “by passing off sick meat to consumers and by using additives not permitted under Federal regulations.”³⁹⁶ This was sixty years after the Meat Inspection Act. Once again, “the shit & failed grand promises the U.S. is today” were shielded by a “rigged” system that favored profit over protecting its citizens and concealed the grotesque side-effects of its habits: “Between 1950 and 1970 America dropped from seventh in the world to sixteenth in the prevention of infant mortality, in female life

³⁹¹ Ibid., 114.

³⁹² Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 105.

³⁹³ Ibid., 105.

³⁹⁴ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 110; 115.

³⁹⁵ Zinn, *Postwar-America: 1945-1971*, 105.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 105.

expectancy from sixth to eighth, in male life expectancy from tenth to twenty-fourth.”³⁹⁷ Of fourteen million homes constructed in the 1950s, less than 280,000 were for low-income families, and in 1960 eleven million already existing houses were classified by the Census Bureau as “deteriorated” or “dilapidated.”³⁹⁸ The “quiet revolution in land use control,” as historian Adam Rome labels it, bled into every nook and crevice in the socioeconomic edifice, and the cultural struggle to realize a pristine and supremely comfortable vision of the “home” by way of mass production, ferocious consumption, and “land jobbing” and “land grabbing,” rigidified boundaries around propriety, suppression, and allegiance.

The human body’s retention of noxious chemicals, in milk, say, as pathogens incubating disease, inimically emphasizes the dissoluble border between man and land. For Dorn and Irby alike, the constriction and contamination of the landscape flowed unimpeded into poetic considerations of chorological relation within and outside the poem. In his 1969 introduction to *Relation*, Irby argues for a *pastoral* mode of poetry, post-fertilizer:

I know Pasternak (his *Zhivago*, that is) concluded that the pastoral nowadays is an artificial genre, a falsity, for *the living language of our time . . . is the language of urbanism*. It seems to me that classical pastoral verse was always the product of city dwellers hankering back to an idealized rustic simplicity . . . and thus the mode was, strictly speaking, always “artificial.” But I am concerned here with the precise landscape wherever we are, here and now, as the “spiritual landscape.” What plants grow in my backyard, 1614½A Russell, Berkeley, California; and how I am aware of them. For the pastoral mode, as I feel it, enacts a state of consciousness or awareness, eternally and recurringly common to human beings, every day every life. Given the amount of shit we live in, it is also manure for all manner of living growth.³⁹⁹

Irby’s title *Relation* alludes directly to *Relacion*, the title of the narrative by Cabeza de Vaca, who became stranded with hundreds of other Spanish sailors, on an expedition in 1528, shortly after they’d arrived on the southern gulf coast of Florida.⁴⁰⁰ After following the western coast of the peninsula north on foot, and suffering hundreds of casualties to disease, Native American attack, and a failed attempt to drive a fleet of small, hand-carved canoes across the gulf (a later attempt succeeded), Nunez and the four remaining members of the

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 100.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 100.

³⁹⁹ Irby, preface to *Relation*, unpaginated.

⁴⁰⁰ See Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Castaways: The Narrative of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*, ed. Enrique Pupo-Walker, trans. M López-Morillas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

group arrived at Galveston Bay, and spent the next eight years walking the southern and southeastern portions of present-day North America: weaving along the Colorado and Pecos rivers, crossing the Rio Grande south at El Paso, traversing a route parallel to the crescent strand of Mexico's west coast, and eventually reaching Mexico City. Starving, intermittently enslaved, naked, Nunez's peculiar encounters and rumors of his occult presence heightened the intrigue of his account for later readers. Dorn refers to him as a "Christ figure, who traversed the Southwest barefoot from Denver to the border, and cured, cast lovely spells, who had long hair, was a man full of grace and humility, a violent kind, who talked too much, walked, was lonely, and had meaning and cognizance, was followed, there was an awe."⁴⁰¹ Nunez reputedly possessed healing powers, which would, understandably, win him a great deal of favor among the native populations: when he finally came upon fellow Spaniards in San Miguel, outside of present-day Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico, his entourage consisted of some 1200 volunteer indigenous tribesmen from the surrounding area. The final chapter of his account describes his fury and indignation over the brutality of his fellow Spaniard's against the native populations.

Nunez's narrative was one of the required texts for Dorn's 1969 writing course at the University of Kansas, and his strange odyssey frequently appears in Irby's correspondence with Dorn in early 1966, one of two years the work in *Relation* covers. As a figure, like Ledyard or Lewis, Cabeza de Vaca was an "interstice," as Irby termed it, a channel through which the currents of relation between man and land were manifest, magisterial, and could be richly and widely excavated: "...trying to get ahold of Cleve Hallenback's book on retracing the whole trip (he went out & found that most of the trails are still followable today, were Indian trails used over & over again before & after CdeV)."⁴⁰² Irby had it in mind to compose a long poem "on, or from, him, his account." After a visit to Kansas in May of '66—"it not only thunderstormed, as if for me to see it, but it hailed abt hensegg size... I wallow sensuously in the weather the way some people do in food & liquor"—he wrote Dorn of further plans for what he considered might be a life's work, in which the author's role was as a gatherer: "I don't have anything original or very profound to offer, my own thought that is; I can best work letting what is around me come out, giving that."⁴⁰³ The geologically spectacular Colorado Plateau that Nunez had crisscrossed looking for Tenochtitlan obviously

⁴⁰¹ Dorn, "What I See in *The Maximus Poems*," in *Views*, 33-34.

⁴⁰² Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 7 July 1966, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

attracted the geographic interests of both poets. In the same letter of January 5, 1966, from Berkeley to Colchester, Irby included a number of recent poems that unveiled the circuitry of a cultural-historical landscape. If language is, as Dorn defined it, “a plant potted in the mouth,” in the following lines Irby reaps a self of the earth (“the plains in the mind”), a harvest possessed of a great negative capability:

It takes such soft wool
as Escalante and his fathers wore, such
pain and ease among, such
care to even see,

to live with that land,

w/ any land,
that the wear is
of our feet across
not inundations
planned

Cabeza de Vaca and Escalante
went through the trek, into the land traversed, the heavy
feet life, over old and used again tracks —
Sauer and Hallenback traced the trails used, still
visible and followable today, from the Texas shore
to the Guadalupe and Sacramento Mountains —

through the land
is its own experience, care for
what care is demanded —

and the interior distance,
the brain pan, the heaviness there —

for Escalante only came back
where he had begun, a great
circle without touching California
or that western sea —

the plains in the mind
eroded to the Ground
the self lost on off
in those steep and wandering canyons

while the soft wool robes, the soft
touch of the
hand of the
naked bearded

wanderer,
created them anew
who touched⁴⁰⁴

After he set off from Santa Fe, Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, a Franciscan missionary who explored the Southwest at the end of the Revolutionary War, failed to reach present-day Monterey, California, but happened upon the Grand Canyon along his circuitous path, which eventually formed, “a great / circle.” Cabeza de Vaca traveled in circles too: shipping from Mexico back to Spain after his near-decade walking voyage, he sailed again *twice* to the Americas—“Old age hath yet his honour and his toil”—until 1550, when his role as representative of the Crown in Asunción, Paraguay, was terminated due to accusations of robbery and treason against him, not to mention his sizable debts—charges for which he narrowly escaped forced labor exile in Algiers.⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, “the land demands us,” makes demands *on* us, and *in* us, and beckons us to its distances until they merge with our own, interiors and exteriors running together, a “self lost on off / in those steep and wandering canyons.” “Place,” Dorn testifies in his essay on the *Maximus Poems*, “you have to have a man bring to you. You are *casual*. This is really serious business, and *not* to be tampered with. You might just as well live in Buenos Aires or Newfoundland, it doesn’t make a damn bit of difference. But being casual, you have to be patient and intelligent.”⁴⁰⁶

For Dorn that man was Olson, but all three poets, Irby included, share a reverence for the early self-identified cultural geographer, Carl Sauer, whom Dorn claims, “was the first one, especially in that ‘Morphology of Landscape’ who spoke to me with that kind of love of the formation of land.”⁴⁰⁷ But Dorn’s investment in Sauer’s ideas went much deeper, and “Morphology of Landscape,” published in 1925, seems equally relevant to our environmentally ravaged present. Sauer calls his approach to scientific inquiry “phenomenological,” in that it emphasizes method and process, and takes “science” itself to be an “organized process of acquiring knowledge rather than in the common restricted meaning of a unified body of physical law.”⁴⁰⁸ For Sauer, an “attention” that focuses on the

⁴⁰⁴ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 5 January 1966, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.; see also Irby, *Relation*, pages 43-45, where this poem, titled “Relation,” is published.

⁴⁰⁵ *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 144; and see Enrique Pupo-Walker’s introduction to *Castaways*.

⁴⁰⁶ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” 31-32.

⁴⁰⁷ Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 22.

⁴⁰⁸ Carl Ortwin Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” in *Land & Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 315-316.

relations and connections between and among data “denotes scientific approach.”⁴⁰⁹ Of Olson’s *Maximus* poems, which reincarnate the spirit and source of the polis, Gloucester, in the poem, Dorn echoes Sauer, when he writes that any “place, as a nonhuman reality, is simply outside the presentments of human meaning.”⁴¹⁰ Of a threefold division Sauer draws in the scholarly terminology “geography,” he prefers the branch that focuses on, “the areal or habitat differentiation of the earth, or chorology,” for which his essay proposes a number of guiding principles.⁴¹¹ First, “landscape” and “geography” are freshly delineated through etymology: the former derives from a German notion of “landshape,” a process “by no means thought of as simply physical”; and the latter “is based on the reality of the union of physical and cultural elements in the landscape.”⁴¹² “Geography should devote its energies,” Sauer writes, “[t]o discover[ing] this areal ‘connection of the phenomena and their order’ . . . their characteristic association, as we find them in the area, is an expression of coherence.”⁴¹³ Sauer names the process of coming to know, of ascertaining the cultural geography, the “morphologic method.”⁴¹⁴ His method emphasizes finding out for yourself; resisting the torpor of titular expertise, “it rests upon a deliberate restraint in the affirmation of knowledge. It is a purely evidential system, without prepossession regarding the meaning of its evidence, and presupposes a minimum of assumption.”⁴¹⁵ Enjamb that and the Gunslinger said it; we’re back to the empiricism Dorn proposes. Beyond its prioritization of method, of paying attention to how one pays attention, there are two features of Sauer’s “Morphology” essay that guide the trajectory of Dorn’s career.

First, as I’ve noted, Sauer emphasizes the significance of relationships between entities, as for instance, when he discusses “forms of the sea in the natural landscape.”⁴¹⁶ “The objects which exist together in the landscape exist in interrelation,” he writes, and only by untangling this “interdependency” between physical and cultural forces can one achieve any understanding of geography in either the broadest or the most particular sense.⁴¹⁷ Second, Sauer deliberately incorporates the influence of the individual geographer and his

⁴⁰⁹ Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” in *Land & Life*, 316.

⁴¹⁰ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 29.

⁴¹¹ Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” in *Land & Life*, 316.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 321; 325.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

particular set of experiences as integral in the process of apprehending the landscape, simply because there is an “element of personal judgment in the selection of content.”⁴¹⁸ This fact underscores the necessity for refined methods and at the same time elevates the import of that personal share, of land and life, of “directed activity, not premature realization.”⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, the “morphologic discipline,” moves beyond the reach of “scientific regimentation,” into “esthetic” realms “to which we know no approach other than the subjective.”⁴²⁰ Sauer references the various proposals of other geographers to identify the intangible, subjectively determined energy of landscape: “Humboldt’s ‘physiognomy,’ Banse’s ‘soul,’ Volz’s ‘rhythm,’ Gradmann’s ‘harmony’ of landscape”—each of which Olson has employed in metaphorizing and declaiming supremacy for the arts.⁴²¹ For example, of the transmission of natural energy through oneself—what Olson speaks of as a “WILL TO COHERE,” and the drive to “take up, straight, nature’s, live nature’s force” (a sentence that seems as likely to stunt its initiative as to enact it)—he writes in “Human Universe”: “There is only one thing you can do about kinetic, re-enact it. Which is why the man said, he who possesses rhythm possesses the universe. And why art is the only twin life has—its only valid metaphysic. Art does not seek to describe but to enact.”⁴²² And like art (the form within the stone) is fashioned from that which sustains the tension of the totality of experience pressing in, to push back out, to respond in kind, just so the landscape—Dorn quotes Sauer as epigraph to “Idaho Out”—“is known through the totality of its forms.”⁴²³ “Culture,” Sauer writes, “is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result.”⁴²⁴

William McPherson cogently pairs Sauer’s influence on Dorn with an Olson-engineered education at Black Mountain: “Sauer’s model of cultural geography taught Dorn to subordinate poetic descriptions of scenery to historical and economic analysis of the human habitation of particular landscapes. This practice of deferring aesthetics to facts and engaging subjects with passionate literalness was Dorn’s true education at Black Mountain.”⁴²⁵ Though Dorn claims to have read Sauer before Olson suggested it, that

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 323.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 349.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 344.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 344.

⁴²² Olson, “The Gate and the Center,” *Collected Prose*, 172; Olson, “Human Universe,” *Collected Prose*, 162.

⁴²³ Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” in *Land & Life*, 337.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 343.

⁴²⁵ McPherson, “Edward Dorn,” *Western Writers Series*, 13.

geographer is a central presence on the formidable reading list Olson compiled, philosophized, and hand-delivered January 7, 1955, in the middle of the night, to Dorn's doorstep at Black Mountain College. In some ways, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn* reads like a lucubration—at times almost inscrutable, cryptic, and exhaustingly referential, but it represents Olson's premiere statement on methodology. One must seek “that exactitude of process known,” Olson writes: “And as yet no one has applied that methodology (HOW—AS, *hu*—PROCESS (is ‘to move’)—METHOD IS (*meta hodos*, the way after: TAO)—what I am trying to say is that a METHODOLOGY is a science of HOW) ... The principle at work here—‘we should start from the notion of actuality as in its essence a process’.”⁴²⁶ Ironically, what is instantly attractive about Olson's text is exactly what seems most daunting: the empowered position it affords the reader. Its unflinching, unapologetic impulse, as Alfred North Whitehead puts it, to “start from the notion of actuality as ... a process” can spare nothing, and doesn't want to; Olson seeks to “live nature's force.”⁴²⁷ No small task. And no small booklist. No doubt the bibliography means to inspire, and does, more than it intimidates, for its primary goal is to catalyze Dorn's development as “*istorian*,” what Sauer is, one who “finds out for oneself.”⁴²⁸

“[A] lot of shit” is what Olson calls sociology, give me “at least events and laws,” he demands, “not this dreadful beast, some average and statistic.”⁴²⁹ To Olson, “*politics and economics*... are like love (can only be individual experience)” —like Sauer's “subjective” imperative for “esthetics”—and contemporary efforts to get-at that experience *as a person* have been occluded by “King Numbers & King Shit.”⁴³⁰ That is, by notions of (a) “quality”—elitist agendas for “culture,” definitions of “art as taste” that have permitted “commodities” to arrogate to themselves principles once sustained by a careful attention to studious process and “saturation” in one's given subject; and (b) the crude generalizations of ‘plurality’ generated by the social sciences. The abstracted modern individual—witness to “all individual energy and ingenuity... bought off—at a suggestion box or the cinema,” and for whom “[s]pectatorism [has] crowd[ed] out participation as the condition of culture”—is

⁴²⁶ Olson, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*, 8-9.

⁴²⁷ Olson, “The Gate and the Center,” *Collected Prose*, 173.

⁴²⁸ Olson, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*, 14.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

ruled by the commodity principle.⁴³¹ This passive citizen envisions time (if he envisions it at all) in neat historical linearity, as an ineffectual zone quarantined from the present, and comes at last, exhausted, confused, and bereft of a “relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence,” to find himself curiously pitted *against* the society that engulfs him.⁴³² He is a “single,” as the endearingly obtuse “I” proclaims of himself in *Gunslinger*—amputated in time, preoccupied, self-indulgent yet disparaged of himself. With this in mind, Olson maps the istorian’s inquiry along two “cross-sticked” axes whose four endpoints each represent one of four components of “*all attention*”: *millennia*, *person*, *process*, and *quantity*.⁴³³ I’ll attempt to define these terms shortly, but it’s important to note beforehand that the application of all four of these moments *at once*, is what Olson, and Dorn too, means—“I never ‘mean’, remember, / that’s a *mortal sin*”—realizes then, by the term “*attention*,” the act of attending to.⁴³⁴ Although Olson faintly determines qualities specific to each, it’s their interrelationships that matter. In fact, “when one widens out on any of these four points of the Double-Axe, one begins to hit one of the other 4.”⁴³⁵ As one bends the vertices of the two-dimensional “Double-Axe” around, one beholds a three-dimensional sphere, at whose center sits Dorn, the *istorian*, in the crosshairs of Olson’s illustration, in the *locus of experience*.

Independent definitions of these four terms are difficult to hold in place. *Millennia* and *quantity* are both concerned with the “field of context” in which one’s knowledge is retained, the thoroughness of its investigation, and the way in which the accumulation of events in a certain place are manifest in that environment’s total disposition in events, cultural behaviors, etc. Specifically, *millennia* is deep-time study, a metaphoric depth that intends to fashion time like space, something tangible to enter into—the “geography of the Plains enforces [millennia sense] on everyone,” Olson proposes.⁴³⁶ And it is by this entrance into time as space that one breaks the chains of “quaintness” in what’s “local,” in an effort to find lasting, persistent qualities of place, not some advertised-out “crutch of ambience,” or some tired proclamation of authenticity.⁴³⁷ One gets a sense of Pound’s injunction to “make it

⁴³¹ Olson, “The Human Universe,” *Collected Prose*, 159.

⁴³² Olson, “Projective Verse,” *Collected Prose*, 247.

⁴³³ Olson, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*, 4; 11.

⁴³⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 31.

⁴³⁵ Olson, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*, 6.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

new” in Olson’s *millennia*, though Olson criticizes Pound’s “grrrate bookes” doctrine, as supportive of “culture... parlayed forward by literary antecedence.”⁴³⁸ But since both men share an anxiety over the need to reconcile wooden, archaic forms with zealous fixation on the renewable energy of the classics, perhaps it makes sense that Olson would see a “science of beginning,” of infinite creation, in his sense of *millennia*.⁴³⁹ And in this sense we’re likewise reminded of Dorn’s irrepressible urge to test new formal directions in his own work. When Olson refines his theory by enlarging its enlistment, “the point is *to get all* that has been said on given subject,” he actually warns against the limitations of books—“they stop... because their makers are usually lazy. Or fancy”—encouraging an interdisciplinary research approach (“PRIMARY DOCUMENTS... you’ll have to dig *mss*”) that he’d begun to formulate as an American Civilization student at Harvard in the late ‘30s.⁴⁴⁰

It follows then, that *quantity* is the principle to reckon on, “as though there were any other ‘like’ than an attention which has completely saturated or circumvented the object” of study.⁴⁴¹ Olson instructs:

Best thing to do is *to dig one thing or place or man* until you yourself know more abt that than is possible to any other man. It doesn’t matter whether it’s Barbed Wire or Pemmican or Paterson or Iowa. But *exhaust* it. Saturate it. Beat it. And then U KNOW everything else very fast: one saturation job (it might take 14 years). And you’re in, forever.⁴⁴²

Person and *Process* are the sieves, the interstices through which this data must pass, both mediums and instruments to determine and execute “how, as yourself as individual, you are acquiring & using same in acts of form—what use you are making of acquired information.”⁴⁴³ The scholar, insofar as his life becomes his study, aims to illuminate (take a deep breath) “the intimate connection between person-as-continuation-of-millennia-by-acts-of-imagination-as-arising-directly-from-firece-penetration-of-all-past-persons, places, things and actions-as-data (objects).”⁴⁴⁴ Here’s the “no lightweight business” Dorn spoke of: find your name at the center of Olson’s diagram, and your work is cut out for you; like Brakhage’s

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁴³⁹ Olson, “A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn,” 305; in the initial publication of Olson’s essay (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1964), this phrase reads: “science of inquiry.”(11)

⁴⁴⁰ Olson, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*, 13.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

vision of “a world before the ‘beginning was the word,’” a world “shimmering with the endless variety of movement,” Olson’s schema envisions the overthrowing of traditional “axes of reference”—*quantity* refashions time as the tangibles of art; *millennia* transforms cataleptic history into an “open field”; *process* harbors the soul, in the acts that make it; and person is “science of the soul,” the casement of all its processes, just as the body is “the cavity... in which the organs are slung.”⁴⁴⁵ Soul is what we make, our consciousness possesses “implicit accuracy, from its own energy as a state of implicit motion.”⁴⁴⁶

The point all along is how to make a better poem. The poem that enacts, doesn’t sit back—remember, “[d]escription, letting things lay,” Dorn insists, “[is] reserved for the slothful, or the merely busy”; and elsewhere: “[t]he idle mind is a receptacle / for all casual dissatisfaction / and loitering.”⁴⁴⁷ Surrounded by this influence, Dorn goes for the pith of what’s in-between, the work inside the distance, the goal to search, “wandering to a purpose.” The eye/I stays fresh on the move. Among the adherents of a migratory approach Dorn’s “cross-sticks” of “all attention” pick up, is John Ledyard, famous American explorer whose walking journey in 1786—its awesome (but unrealized) itinerary from London across Siberia and the Bering Strait, down the western coast of North America, and thence across to Virginia (on the fervent recommendation but without the financial support of U.S. ambassador to France, Thomas Jefferson)—was cut short “in a confusion / of towns named Yakutsk and Irkutsk,” by order of Catherine the Great.⁴⁴⁸ Her officials returned Ledyard six thousand miles on horseback to the Polish border, from which point he walked most of the way back to England where, Dorn reports, he surrendered, whispering, “I give up.”⁴⁴⁹ In “Ledyard: the Exhaustion of Sheer Distance,” Dorn exhibits a trademark, deferential sympathy-through-imaginative-inquiry for his subject, a “passionate literalness,” MacPherson calls it: “But what I wonder at times, / being only from Illinois is / did you count the stretching corridors / of spruce on that trek coming back / as we used to count telephone poles / going home from my aunt’s...”⁴⁵⁰ The rich, lyric sensitivity distinguishes Ledyard’s foot

⁴⁴⁵ Brakhage, “Metaphors on Vision,” *Blue Grass*, 29; Olson, *A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn*, 11; Olson, “Proprioception,” in *Collected Prose*, 181.

⁴⁴⁶ Olson, “Proprioception,” *Collected Prose*, 183.

⁴⁴⁷ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” *Views* 34; Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 42.

⁴⁴⁸ Bill Gifford, *Ledyard: In Search of the First American Explorer* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007); Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 53.

⁴⁴⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 52.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

journey across a continent from the grinding motions of “the cogs that turn this machine,” whether beneath the Himalayas, or orbiting the earth:

they don't say he stopped in taverns
of what condition his shoes, the point
of destination was the Pacific coast of Russia.
This was a way to get to the other side
of America. And that must have been
no irony then. Walking is what I associate
with Ledyard, distance as sheer urge, not
satellite and its utilitarianism.⁴⁵¹

In the poem's final stanza, the gauge of this mad act is a flash of defiance, a spark of “mystic sheer distance” across the lambent sheen:

Mystic sheer distance was in thine eye,
that beautiful abstract reckoning,
the feet, walking: for no other reason
the world.⁴⁵²

“Death While Journeying,” another poem of the early 60's, and one closely associated with the dedication to Ledyard, takes up similar themes of distance, longing, and modernity's assault on the lone traveler, navigating “land hunger and manifested psychopolitical space.”⁴⁵³ The poem tells a story of Meriwether Lewis, who after “an entire continent had flapped at [his] coattails,” died mysteriously “at Grinder's Stand / in the Chickasaw country / of our dreams, one century / before psychoanalysis.”⁴⁵⁴ Here psychoanalysis proffers what anachronistic sympathy it can, but its absence amidst the raw and unremitting geographic and psychological isolation of Lewis' voyage (“going to see his dying mother”) prefigures his ironic and mysterious death on the road. Dorn's Lewis is a man out of time whose disturbed mental affects are hideously reinforced by the faithless aberrations that accompany ‘the taming of the West,’ the West he opened in exploration. These aberrant forces find human representation in John Jacob Astor—whose American Fur Company had a monopoly in the first half of the nineteenth century—and the proprietor of Lewis's lodging house along the Natchez Trace, the “money-eyed” Grinder, who Dorn

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 54.

⁴⁵³ *Empire of Skin* intro, 11.

⁴⁵⁴ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 50.

suggests (in accordance with some historians) murdered Lewis for the money he was carrying.⁴⁵⁵ Moving around his subject, blending the *millennial* and historical, Dorn's "clots of phrase" penetrate the insecurity of Lewis's voyage, encircling a sphere of experience by folding narrative advancement over itself, waylaying, agglomerating.⁴⁵⁶ The title and first line of the poem, "At Grinder's Stand," recurs four times throughout, each enunciation introducing a new distraction, issuing new tangents, until we surround the event, the "Idea":

it was, Fall? when the papaws
drop their yellow fruit,
or Spring? And bear's grease.

...

Going to see his dying mother
or was it summer,
the live oak waving
in the clear air,
but imagine,
trying to make a trip
like that alone.

... was given to fits

⁴⁵⁵ See Robert Von Hallberg, "'This Marvellous Accidentalism,'" in *Internal Resistances*, 45-86: "This is a poem about the ignoble end of a great beginner, Meriwether Lewis, who died mysteriously at thirty-five, a few years after his triumphant return from the Pacific Coast. From 1807 until his death Lewis was governor of the upper Louisiana Territory. During the expedition to the Pacific he had grown accustomed to the *carte blanche* Jefferson had permitted him. But the Washington government was later unwilling to allow him the same liberty in administering the Louisiana Territory; several of his vouchers were not honored by the federal government. Severely disappointed by what he took to be a reprimand, Lewis set out alone in September 1809 for Washington, where he intended to straighten out these financial matters. (He also planned to visit his mother, who was not dying, at Ivy Creek in Virginia on his return route.) ... Robert Grinder was the proprietor of Grinder's Stand, where Lewis died; he was said by his wife to be twenty miles away from home on October 11, 1809. About that, however, there is some doubt. Many years after Lewis's death, a friend of one of Grinder's servants stated that Grinder was present the night Lewis either killed himself or was killed by a robber. Lewis's watch and money (at least \$200) were not with his body on the morning of the 12th; before long Robert Grinder purchased more slaves and better property and moved away from Natchez Trace. Dorn evidently takes the view, shared by others, that Grinder murdered Lewis for money. As an old man Daniel Boone trapped furs to pay his debts. Dorn makes the point that, more or less simultaneously with Lewis's death, John Jacob Astor chartered one of the first great trusts, the American Fur Company (1808), which established a post at Astoria, Oregon, near where Lewis and Clark had camped along the Columbia River."(51-53)

⁴⁵⁶ Dorn, "*The Sullen Art Interview*," interview by David Ossman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 4-5: "I know what meter is, and I know the names of the various meters, and so forth, but the way I write is really in clots of phrase, and that usually comes out to be Idea, in a vague sense. I don't think Ideas come in units. When the individual line ceases to have energy for me, in those terms, I usually break the line there, with certain exceptions."

of depression Jefferson said;
is that possible? 18 whatever
6 or 7? In this case
it would be cruel to be so modern⁴⁵⁷

The West is splayed by the violent mercantilism the abundance of natural resources tempts and facilitates; the frontier expands beyond tangible horizons. Lewis's earth-knowing, like Ledyard's dogged traverse, or Butch Cassidy's renegade West, proves outmoded. The poem's closing stanzas are pinned under a latticework of surveillance, exploitation and profiteering; Lewis's death is the death of a non-purposive, exploratory ideal:

But surrounding this death
Boone had just returned to Femme Osage
with sixty beaver skins "still strong
in limb, unflinching in spirit"
standing there with a gaunt eye
watching the Astorians prepare their keel-boats,

his old ear bent
toward the Pacific tide.

But at Grinder's Stand,
which is south of Femme Osage
on the Trace, whom probably the Astorians
had nearly forgotten, a man rode in
to the final recognition
and who would have been there
but money-eyed

Grinder,

While the Astorians prepared their keel-boats
and Boone watched.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 50.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

The human eye, a sphere of waters and tissue, absorbs an energy that has come ninety-three million miles from another sphere, the sun. The eye may be said to be sun in other form.

...
Though to look at the sun directly causes blindness, sight is an intricately precise tip of branched energy that has made it possible to measure the charge of solar storm, or to calculate nova. It is possible that all universe is of a similar form.

...
The human lens grows flatter for looking across a prairie, and the sparrow is able to see the seed beneath its bill — and in the same instant the hawk descending. A cat watches the-sparrow-at-the-end-of-the-world in a furred luminosity of infra-reds, enormous purples.

After a long time of light, there began to be eyes, and light began looking with itself. At the exact moment of death the pupils open full width.

– Ronald Johnson⁴⁵⁹

4. *Dorn Im Auge*

In the Sears poem, empiricism blends looking on with taking in—a marked transference of Dorn’s work up through *Gunslinger* elaborates a sense of the eye, not merely as a sense receptor but as a physical receptacle, a repository of experience. At the same time, home is a colorless abstraction in the Sears poem, more of the frightful unhomely—“dust masking the hedges of fields she knew,” where the eye holds “the only title... to lands.”⁴⁶⁰ In “Geranium,” the bare utility of Dorn’s Washington home, “Burlington / that pea-center,” where he and Helene lived in the mid to late 50s, is set against “the home of my mind. / That asylum I carry in my insane squint.”⁴⁶¹ Photographs of Dorn support and embellish this image, the “insane squint” facing elemental assaults. In a set of photographs of Dorn posted by the Electronic Poetry Center through the University of Buffalo, for instance, he stands beside a set of public, rental binoculars at Coit Tower, perched high above San Francisco; and on the back cover flap of *Internal Resistances*, he’s pictured grimacing into the wind, looking out, for which the high-Olsonian opening stanza of the first long poem Dorn ever published, “The Land Below,” could serve as pithy caption: “The light wind falters leaves / in the cottonwood. Barely evening. / The rain earlier, coming again / from the West, in front of me.”⁴⁶² Despite the sweet cadence of these lines—“leaves,” “evening,” “earlier,” “again,” “in

⁴⁵⁹ Ronald Johnson, from “Beam 4,” in *Ark: The Foundations* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1980), unpaginated.

⁴⁶⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 46-47.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁶² “Ed Dorn Image Gallery,” [Electronic Poetry Center](http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_cento_image_gallery.html), n.d., <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_cento_image_gallery.html> (June 25,

the octopus, an animal whose nervous system shares certain significant commonalities with our own. Dorn explains the relevance of this fact to his own sensibilities, and the perspective it affords the poem:

[A]pparently the large part of the seat of memory in the octopus is in the eye. I believe that's a true motto for the poem—that it does represent that circuitry and that really upfront residence. He's not saying that the seat of memory is in our eye, but obviously the eye is a very complex thing and it has been thought of as the exposed part of the brain. When I look at you, in a sense, I'm looking at your brain so far as I can see your eye. So, I think that little formulation is my own sensual feeling for that mechanical truth... I have the sense that we know totality all the time through our senses and what part of that totality we can capture is the definition essentially of our sensate capabilities.⁴⁶⁶

This could serve as a definition of our poems too—as the “part of totality we can capture.” Dorn wrote a short piece about these cephalopodic congruencies he called, “The Octopus Thinks with Its Arms,” a title which he lifted directly from Young’s book: “The suckers at the end of each arm serve more for sensory functions than for seizing,” Young writes, “as the delicate tip feels its way over surfaces and into crannies. The centre of the terminal region is occupied almost entirely by nervous tissue, including many very small cells. These presumably serve for computational rather than motor functions. The octopus might be said to ‘think with its arms’.”⁴⁶⁷

As a parallel construction, the nervous system of an octopus provides an intriguing and useful diagram for the ways in which Dorn’s *locus of experience*, as the poems enact it, operates in terms of sensation and reception. “The eyes are probably the most important distance receptors,” Young writes in *A Model of the Brain*. “All the known receptor cells of cephalopods consist of ‘primary sense cells’ in the epidermis, from which an axon proceeds inwards. The same plan is found for the chemotactile receptors of the arms and in the cells of the eyes.”⁴⁶⁸ And so, later in Dorn’s career, when the reader of *Gunslinger* discovers “I” not to be the first-person narrator, but rather (or also) the “handle” of an anxious, neophyte Westerner whose mind is increasingly tangled about his strange astral guest’s trenchant quasi-koans, and whose suddenly deceased body is filled with liquid LSD and revived thus—one understands this playful narrative dissemblance and psychedelic transformation—into

⁴⁶⁶ Dorn, interview by Okada, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 45.

⁴⁶⁷ J.Z. Young, *A Model of the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 101.

⁴⁶⁸ Young, *A Model of the Brain*, 94-95.

what the Slinger labels an “Organ Ization”—as an endorsement, on the one hand, of Dorn’s contemporary critics who sought to expose the fallacy of a single, monologic, authorial presence (the “death of the author,” as Barthes put it), and on the other, as critique of *those same criticisms*, for their inadvertent reliance upon the spurious presupposition that a position beyond what’s subjective (unhinged from the personal, a “dissolved, fictive self”) is available in the first place. That the reader’s expectations are also interrupted by “I”’s shifting identity, which transfers the instability and false assumptions of his perspective on the reader’s experience, forces an awareness of the external influences on first-person assertions.

“A biography of myself,” Dorn described his only novel, *By the Sound*.⁴⁶⁹ He elaborates his sensitivity to the multiple ownership, to the public utility of language, in his discussion of “voice” in *Gunslinger*, with Barry Alpert:

- Dorn: Really, it’s biographical, not autobiographical, in the sense that the voices are obviously my own like they are in Browning. It’s like any narrative poem.
- Alpert: You mean the characters are personae for various aspects of your mind?
- Dorn: Which I take to be the aspects of anybody’s mind. I believe in the shared mind.⁴⁷⁰

Each of us puts the “shared mind” to his or her own use. Dorn’s work is language work, “poetry that’s constantly written on air. What I’ve read and what I hear merge to make the field in which I compose.”⁴⁷¹ The uncertain synapse between the internal and the external faculties increasingly becomes the epicenter of Dorn’s preoccupation with authorial presence and composure. Dorn’s admission that, “I know what meter is, and I know the names of the various meters, and so forth, but the way I write is really in clots of phrase, and that usually comes out to be Idea.... When the individual line ceases to have energy for me, ...I usually break the line there,” is an externalizing conception of the poem, and its interactive process—the “merger” of difference which is writing.⁴⁷²

A decentered self that receives and processes the various energies of its environment echoes Young’s description of the octopus: “Many of the important reflex centres remain

⁴⁶⁹ Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 10: “...a biography of myself which I think is a slightly different sense than auto.”

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁷¹ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 66.

⁴⁷² Dorn, “*The Sullen Art Interview*,” interview by Ossman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 4.

separated at the periphery... On the pathways from the chemotactile receptors and the retina lie centres that play a large part in the coding systems.”⁴⁷³ These coding systems hold information regarding the overall “zeitgeist” of the animal’s environment and thus determine directly appropriate action. So we can detect Dorn’s “Idea,” in Young’s description of the octopus nervous system:

Each transducer point (cell) responds to a change in its immediate neighborhood (‘stimulus’). But the whole assembly of points serves to signal some other characteristic of the ‘stimulating complex’. This characteristic capacity to signal certain selected characteristics of the ‘form’ of a situation (its ‘*gestalt*’) has given rise to many difficulties of interpretation. The words ‘response to stimulus’ can be ambiguous if used both for the point event at the detection surface and for the response to the whole complex.⁴⁷⁴

Below, I’ll return to the similarities these interpretative difficulties—of sensorial input, computation and expression—share with aspects of Olson’s scholarship in “Projective Verse,” and in his treatise on human form and potential, “Human Universe.” For now, we can liken this eccentric system to the self-as-“Medium” Dorn outlined in that 1965 letter to Tom Clark, quoted above: “When one speaks of the world one is a Medium rather than an ego, the difference between local or ‘provincial’ and some total respons(ibility which I have no ready word for.”⁴⁷⁵ As with the octopus, the “Medium”’s instrument in Dorn’s work is the eye. “I’m looking at your brain so far as I can see your eye,” he told Roy Okada in 1973.⁴⁷⁶ But Dorn’s fixation on the eye’s dynamic interstice predates his contact with Young’s book, and forms a central preoccupation of his earliest published work.

The eye consistently reveals the spirits of those Dorn encounters. At Essex, Jennifer Dunbar’s eyes offered, “a variety / of sparkling moments,” and those of an earlier love, Phyllis Sprinkle, back in Villa Grove: “Her eyes were as dark as agates / in 1948, so dark I stayed / an extra year, just to be with her.”⁴⁷⁷ To be with her while there’s space and time,

⁴⁷³ Young, *A Model of the Brain*, 100.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁷⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, n.d. (1965), MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

⁴⁷⁶ Dorn, interview by Okada, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 45.

⁴⁷⁷ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 39; quoted in Clark, *World of Difference*, 72: “...just to be with her. / It was the only thing to do. / I’d been so slow and distracted / when the war ended / and the country was / suddenly engorged with / the youth of five years earlier— / full grown men thrown / into the dead air peace, / some back to the scheduled / combustion of the Railroad, / some saddled in the / tyrannical

without the conspiracy of workaday contrivance—“remember that time / the world seemed open what a satisfying meal / that was. The body outlives... its lighted parts,” Dorn writes in “Wait by the Door Awhile Death, There Are Others.”⁴⁷⁸ And of the onomatopoeic Metz, who “had the nerve to live near / and wait,” in order to inherit Dorn’s grandfather’s railroading job, it’s the “fixed grin,” “slick smile,” and pernicious stare by which Dorn recalls that antagonist: “his eye set / the glint of knowing / no cancer would cancel / his scaling career with dirty pipes.”⁴⁷⁹ In another poem (as mysteriously inconclusive as its title), “A Vague Love,” set in a Pocatello pool hall, time is stretched into a tenuous space that flutters, suspended, awaiting some imminent revelation (this pun in “shoot”), above the waste of eternity. The piece ends ominously, expectant: “We all stand swaying. it’s someone’s turn to shoot.”⁴⁸⁰ The eyes of the wives of the pool hall’s patrons bespeak their solemn pact with the land: “...their eyes / have deep corridors in them / of brown hills of pain and / indecision and under every / searching lash / a question no man, not / even their own / can answer.”⁴⁸¹

Not just human inhabitants make the world over in their eyes. In “The Deer’s Eye the Hunter’s Nose,” the deer’s instinct outwits the “quick alcoholic glance,” of his human predator, in whom, “there is no scent / in the nose of... / just snot.”⁴⁸² The deer hides “inside an old mine where deer’s / eyes wind the light into / yellow balls / back of darkness.”⁴⁸³ And in “Sousa,” it’s the reflective, bulging convexity of a bird’s eyeball that brings “the land into the eye’s view,” and through that lens Dorn surveys the adulteration of the landscape below: “We were / on a prominence though / so lovely to the eye eyes / of birds only caught / all the differences / of each house filled hill.”⁴⁸⁴ Among the most forlorn, and yet redemptive of Dorn’s early poems is his piece to Helene, “Oh Don’t Ask Why.” Dorn struggles to reconcile his sense of guilt (for “giving way / foolishly to public thoughts”) with his obligation to an

throb of cultivation....” Dorn wrote these unpublished lines in a notebook after hearing of Sprinkle’s death, in 1991. Since the mid-80s, Dorn and Sprinkle had picked up a correspondence—just after Sprinkle had become a widow. Evidently, on the day of her death, Sprinkle received a letter from Dorn, who was later told by a friend of hers, that she was, “very happy to have it at that moment.”

⁴⁷⁸ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 233.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-49.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁸⁴ Olson, “Proprioception,” in *Collected Prose*, 185: “*Landscape* / “a portion of land which the eye / can comprehend in a single view” / to bring the land into the eye’s view: / COSMOS / creation / a verb...”; Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 25.

artistic integrity, when considering his family’s perseverance and dedication—a conflict we can trace back to the recollections of his mother in the “debt” poem.⁴⁸⁵ Likewise, the struggle’s geography is grist for the poem: the couple’s endurance in such faraway, rural settings—Pocatello, Burlington, Santa Fe—is a steady, fixed gaze into the distance. “Oh Don’t Ask Why” is worth quoting at length:

That sun, did it come
to warm only us? I think
so
But repeatedly
I don’t know
How you loved me
through all travesty
how you kept those lovely eyes
clear,

their burn
fixed away from some
monument of curiosity,—How
ever can you live like that?

Yes, at moments I did waste
our lives, giving way
foolishly to public thoughts,
large populations.

Are we needed? On this mountain
or in this little spud town in the valley
or along this highway, you held
your eyes on getting us there, repeatedly
where? We

never knew
but now do and what is it
in this small room so bitter
an image of time at times
keeps us from falling
into that religious cry
of I’m not here!
but which we now transpose
with an old hope
we scoured the ground of the earth
to start fires

⁴⁸⁵ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 83.

in these rickety geographies
we knew better than to call home

from smiling
to hiding true thoughts
true feeling as an inner lining
against the cold and secret medicines
heat and water, light
for the lonely comes only as a fringe benefit

Carry geology in the eye
though nobody calls you long distance
to learn the nature of that terrain
Oh don't ask why the welcome signs remain.⁴⁸⁶

The line-breaks of the final quatrain reconstitute an elemental space, an experience of deep time, a cosmos: “eye” and “distance,” the coefficients; “terrain,” “remain” the rhyme.

This demand, to “carry geology in the eye,” recalls Olson’s organic construction in the “Postscript to Proprioception & Logoraphy,” his experimental, ‘field’ treatise which stands as counterpart to his poetic declaration, “Projective Verse.” Defining landscape, in the “Postscript,” Olson writes: “‘a portion of land which the eye / can comprehend in a single view’ / to bring the land into the eye’s view.” These pieces are roughly contemporaneous: “Oh Don’t Ask Why” first appeared in Dorn’s second book, *Hands Up!*, in 1964, and Olson’s essay was serially published by LeRoi Jones, in his magazines, *Yugen*, and *Floating Bear*, as well as Lita Hornick’s *Kulchur*, in 1961 and 1962.⁴⁸⁷ “Proprioception,” the eponymous first chapter, establishes the theoretical precepts that constitute a method of being, a haptic attention, whose objective is “SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM / BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES.”⁴⁸⁸ Movement as behavior is action with respect to a processing, on the instant, of relative location. Here especially, Olson’s model resonates with Young’s conclusions, namely Olson’s argument that “‘senses’ . . . are all that sd contact area is valuable for, to report in to central.”⁴⁸⁹ And it is at this “center,” where consciousness—“implicit accuracy, from its own energy as a state of implicit motion”—mingles with the unconscious—“the universe flowing-in, inside”—and information from

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 83-84.

⁴⁸⁷ David Streeter, comp., *A Bibliography of Ed Dorn* (New York City: The Phoenix Bookshop, 1973), 2; information provided in the notes to Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander, eds., *Charles Olson Collected Prose*, 415.

⁴⁸⁸ Olson, “Proprioception,” in *Collected Prose*, 181.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 181.

“one’s own literal body,” and “the whole inner mechanism” formulates action.⁴⁹⁰ And that’s roughly that: “If man is active, it is exactly here where experience comes in that it is delivered back, and if he stays fresh at the coming in he will be fresh at his going out.”⁴⁹¹

Olson prescribes a reconfiguration of the body’s relationship to its own sensibilities, to its “house,” and of the soul, the “inner mechanism,” to the body (here Olson notes Shakespeare’s sonnet #146: “Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth”).⁴⁹² For at this critical moment, proprioception is part resistance, in order to keep the register one’s own, to stay “fresh,” not merely to “become a window through which things, a channel, etc.,” but that the accommodation of what’s “flowing-in, inside” is similarly acted back upon by that “inner mechanism,” the “SOUL, the intermediary, the intervening thing, the interruptor, the resistor.”⁴⁹³ Olson’s man does not succumb to natural force, but consolidates and reenacts it. The soul, Olson posits, is “equally ‘physical.’ Is the self”; it comes to be thus through its perceptual marriage with a haptic experience of the world.⁴⁹⁴ Migration and “internal” migration, as much as they are methods of *attention* are also modes of resistance, insofar as they filter and test external data. A mode of avoiding the psychological stagnation that loses “things” in “effete, effects,” in “[d]escription, letting things lay, [which] was reserved for not necessarily the doubtful, but the slothful, or merely busy”; a resistance to the tyranny of distance and isolating space, and to the anesthetizing lockstep of mass cultural enterprise, rotting within the “more and more stale” citizen, “as he is less and less acute at the door.”⁴⁹⁵ The introduction to Stan Brakhage’s 1962 written work, “Metaphors on Vision,” published in the same issue of *Blue Grass* in which Dorn’s “The Deer’s Eye the Hunter’s Nose” appeared, articulates a similar, reinvented constellation of *vision*—what’s seen by the eye, and what inheres to shape the process of creation.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁹¹ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 162.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 161.

⁴⁹³ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 39; Olson, “Proprioception,” in *Collected Prose*, 182.

⁴⁹⁴ Olson, “Proprioception,” 182.

⁴⁹⁵ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 34; Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 162, and see 157-158 for discussion of “description” that, Olson writes, “does not come to grips with what really matters: that a thing, any thing, impinges on us by a more important fact, its self-existence, without reference to any other thing, in short, the very character of it which calls our attention to it, which wants us to know more about it, its particularity.”

To see is to *behold*, Brakhage reminds us, (“behold,” from *bi* + *haldan*, to “thoroughly hold”); as one enters into a room, so the eye gathers the land *into* the view.⁴⁹⁶ Like Dorn’s self as “medium,” a *locus of experience*, Brakhage’s project for a comprehensive, polyglot authorial consciousness—to capture the “total disposition” of its experience—is evinced by the way he signs his films:

“By Brakhage” should be understood to mean “by way of Stan and Jane Brakhage,” as it does in all my films since marriage. It is coming to mean: “by way of Stan and Jane and the children Brakhage” because all the discoveries which used to pass only thru the instrument of myself are coming to pass thru the sensibilities of those I love. Some day these passages will extend thru the sensibilities of those I now can only imagine loving. Ultimately, “by Brakhage” will come to be superfluous and understood as what it now ultimately is: “by way of everything.”⁴⁹⁷

As Olson argues in “Human Universe,” for the dissolution of Platonic divisions between object and idea, the implications of Brakhage’s expanding “instrument” of self orchestrate a world “of our own making,” a world in process, emergent, becoming. “I believe in the shared mind,” Dorn told Barry Alpert in 1972, and a year later he reiterated the point to Roy Okada: “‘I’ is dead actually... All our stories are so interchangeable. If they’re significant they seem to be more interchangeable.”⁴⁹⁸ This sharing approaches myth (or is already within it), whose revelation will occur, the Gunslinger commands us, through the “I” reconstituted, through the “purification” of our manacled heads. To think is to manifest is the Gunslinger’s lesson—and likewise one *makes* a poem, as an act is made, or a cabinet—and vice versa, what’s *beheld* are ideas, ideas *as*, not only *in*, things, as Williams insisted. “Their leading ideas / come directly from the landform,” Dorn writes of the Apaches in a poem beginning with the line, “So The infant in bound,” from his 1974 work, *Recollections of Gran Apacheria*.⁴⁹⁹ But before that, before the *idea* came from the *landform*? “Creation,” from the same work, answers that puzzle too, without limiting it: “Some other One then asked / Where is the Earth / and the One replied / to this voice of the story / I am Thinking, Thinking / Thinking, Thinking / I am Thinking Earth.”⁵⁰⁰ The poem’s closing stanzas hark back to a “pure” existence commensurate with Brakhage’s imperative “adventure of perception” in a world

⁴⁹⁶ Brakhage, “Metaphors on Vision,” in *Blue Grass*, 29.

⁴⁹⁷ Brakhage, prefatory statement to *Metaphors on Vision* (Denver: Film Culture Inc., 1963), unpaginated.

⁴⁹⁸ Dorn, interview by Okada, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 49.

⁴⁹⁹ Dorn, *Way West*, 137.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

“unruled by man-made laws of perspective . . . unprejudiced by compositional logic.”⁵⁰¹ A condition poem and film alike wish to enact, a world “wherein all men fit”:

And then he thought
a Little Boy
and poco a poco
the whole phylum
was brought into being

There was great laughter
in the beginning
when all creatures could talk.⁵⁰²

The physical process of perception and somatic power of the imagination are central concerns throughout Dorn’s catalogue. For Dorn, one’s connection to the land is an always already established but endlessly renewable fact, evident to the “time-wanderer” as the very path his discovery takes. Connections of spirit are sustained among the physical interaction of objects. Whatever the authorial or lyric presence is in Dorn’s poems, it traverses a space most often characterized by its distance from other things; the misty sonority of the early pieces, as in “Hemlocks” or “If It Should Ever Come” (and in their titles too), seems exhausted from long-hour efforts among sparsely inhabited landscapes. Fatigue and distance—conditions of a larger, landscape system—are instances of broader relations revealed through a multiform and contentious relationship with the earth, both oppressive and empowering: “We are pained by fetters of wind around our ankles,” Dorn admits in “In the Morning”; and in “A Song,” the tenuous appearance of wildflower blossoms in an early spring snow is consolation for a diffuse sullenness, for a home one can only hope to come to know by finding a way to miss:

I have a dark blue sky
inside my head, ah,
there is a flower here
and there, and yes, believe
I’ll miss this time, sometime,
these old cold mountains
these cold blue hills
sometime.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Brakhage, “Metaphors on Vision,” in *Blue Grass*, 29.

⁵⁰² Dorn, *Way West*, 132.

⁵⁰³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 56; 132.

Here is isolation's compressed registration of its surroundings, moving in and out ("a dark blue sky / inside my head"), a mind coming to knowledge ever partly undisclosed. Dorn locates interior struggle in exterior/environmental contestation—though he becomes increasingly skeptical of that distinction if too strictly drawn, between what's *in* and what's *out*, as it might foreclose on the proprioceptive possibilities of *process*, *attention*, and *objectism*—the poet as an object among objects—the principles of Olson's "Projective Verse," from which Dorn strays without abandoning.⁵⁰⁴ (In fact, if the dictates of "Projective Verse" call for an "objectification of the poem," *Abhorrences*, especially in its "found abhorrences," seems as compliant as can be.⁵⁰⁵) In another poem from Dorn's third book, *Geography*, simply titled, "Song," love's struggle is displaced; it appears in the "green hills" opposite the eye, as if knowledge were experience turned inside-out: "I tell you the gleaming eye / is a mirror of / the green hills / where love struggles / against the drought / in the desert / in the spring / in the quickness / of the fresh bush / over the cove."⁵⁰⁶

Physiognomy is a way in—physical qualities often suggest spiritual ones in Dorn's human subjects. The English and the Germans of "Los Mineros" wear a look "mystic in its / expectancy"; and the mysterious, remote encounter in "Idaho Out" with a "north fork beauty," who despite bourgeois, entrepreneurial aspirations, impresses such an unanticipated grace on Dorn, "a walking invitation / to a lovely party," that he's inspired to (mildly) bless her capitalist venture: "she / would look nice rich."⁵⁰⁷ That this estimation of feminine beauty seems trapped in the qualitative and hierarchical vocabularies of class, one of many structures the poetry otherwise means to reject, is a disjunction that tests the limit to which the reader interprets Dorn's attraction to the paradoxical. The physiognomy of the geography in "Idaho Out," of acculturated geography, is a gendered presence, and Dorn's collocations of landscape with femininity might be said to reinforce a traditionally restrictive model of feminine passivity. No doubt Dorn considers the oppressiveness and isolation of life in the

⁵⁰⁴ See Olson, "Projective Verse," in *Collected Prose*, 244: "Because breath allows *all* the speech-force of language back in (speech is the 'solid' of verse, is the secret of a poem's energy), because, now, a poem has, by speech, solidity, everything in it can now be treated as solids, objects, things; and, though insisting upon the absolute difference of the reality of verse from that other dispersed and distributed thing, yet each of these elements of a poem can be allowed to have the play of their separate energies and can be allowed, once the poem is well composed, to keep, as those other objects do, their proper confusions."

⁵⁰⁵ *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Alex Preminger and V.F. Brogan, eds., 977.

⁵⁰⁶ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 129.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 55; 112.

West as the dour consequence of a homicidal masculine urge to encroach upon natural space, an invasion his work describes also inscribed on the female body. However, the feminine principle, in “Idaho Out,” or elsewhere, and the living presence of geography, are neither submissive nor acquiescent.

For enacting Olson’s principles of sensibility-in-movement, of exact, specific registrations that “‘place’ the thing,” whatever that may be, “instead of it wallowing around sort of outside, in the universe,” “Idaho Out” is exemplary.⁵⁰⁸ While the women attend the living body in the poem, the men destroy it; the feminine capacity for conversion is frequently eclipsed by the male impulse to kill. This atavism is evident at the local level, when Dorn observes the failing attempts of a young woman trying to persuade her too-drunk husband to dance, suddenly reveal a bitter, patriarchic circularity: the “bottled” nutrition of infancy foreshadows an adult dependency that sows strife among the sexes, and chauvinistically apportions familial duties to women: “he has been drinking beer / while she, too young for a public place / has been pulling a bottle apart in the car.”⁵⁰⁹ And gender-related catastrophe is evident over larger spaces, and in more drastic behaviors too. In the final lines of “Idaho Out,” having assaulted and poisoned the body of his environment, man turns on himself, on his own body, in the example of Ernest Hemingway, who shot himself in Ketchum, Idaho, in July of 1961. And yet self-annihilation must also be an act of proprioceptive awareness; the selfsame, furious, “bottled” energy of Idaho spawned Ezra Pound, born in Hailey, in 1885, who dispatched the cry of a desiccated American cultural landscape from across an ocean, through two world wars, and into St. Elizabeth’s Asylum. The tone of the poem’s final lines seems dismissive, as if Idaho must defend the “naturalness” of her body, a cosmetic anxiety, “cut off by geologies she says / I’m sure / are natural”—and the ruination of the West bears the communicative impasse between the sexes:

Where the normal spaces
are the stretches of Wyoming
and north Dakota, Idaho
is cut
by an elbow
of mountain that swings
down, thus she is
cut off by geologies she says
I’m sure

⁵⁰⁸ Olson, “Proprioception,” in *Collected Prose*, 181.

⁵⁰⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 117.

are natural
but it is truly the West
as no other place,
ruined by an ambition and religion
cut, by a cowboy use of her nearly virgin self

unannealed
by a real placement
this,

this
is the birthplace
of Mr. Pound
and Hemingway in his own mouth
chose to put a shotgun.⁵¹⁰

“So there you are” opens an earlier stanza of the poem, and that might serve as dictum of Dorn’s methodology.⁵¹¹ When he encounters the 102-year-old Willie Dorsey, a Shoshone Indian living with his equally ancient wife, who “wanted to *die* very badly,” in their hovel (“one of the dirtiest places I’ve ever seen”), Dorn is disoriented, torn between how to act, how to offer, as a white man, his respect: “Wow I—I don’t know where I am. But then I thought well, again, I’m here. So back to that. How do you get around being where you are? Even though you went to whatever you did to get there. You may question what you did to get there but you’re there, alright.”⁵¹² After considering washing Dorsey’s feet, Dorn offers him a cigarette instead, and the old man is delighted. Dorn’s attention to behavior reflects Olson’s insistence that each moment be treated as an “END,” and that means you, “on this instant... figuring it out, and acting so.”⁵¹³ As a routine command, then, as a resolution, “[s]o there you are,” rephrases Olson’s instruction in “Proprioception” that “*movement or action* is ‘home.’”⁵¹⁴ That “home” can be anywhere, everywhere. In Dorn’s “The 6th,” a poem first published by LeRoi Jones in *Yugen*, in 1960, and never reprinted, an aimless, diaphanous nostalgia rests, dew-like, over his confession to a neighbor’s heartwarming entreaty for Dorn’s family to build a house near Pocatello, and settle down:

...it wasn’t easy to disappoint him, but I think he knew,
he went on anyway describing the possibilities, that’s love,

⁵¹⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 122.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵¹² Dorn, “The Poet, the People, the Spirit,” in *Views*, 110.

⁵¹³ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 157.

⁵¹⁴ Olson, “Proprioception,” in *Collected Prose*, 182.

in the mists of indifference. But I just can't build houses.
At all. Although I dig the juniper and think the hills swing,
you know how very much my world is not closed but open, open.
Everywhere I am, I feel I am everywhere else.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁵ Dorn, "The 6th," *Yugen*, unpaginated.

Imagine the eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of "Green?" How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye? How aware of variations in heat waves can that eye be? Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable gradations of color. Imagine a world before the "beginning was the word."

To see is to retain—to behold. Elimination of all fear is in sight—which must be aimed for. Once vision may have been given—that which seems inherent in the infant's eye, an eye which reflects the loss of innocence more eloquently than any other human feature, an eye which soon learns to classify sights, an eye which mirrors the movement of the individual toward death by its increasing inability to see.

But one can never go back, not even in imagination. After the loss of Innocence, only the ultimate of knowledge can balance the wobbling pivot. Yet I suggest that there is a pursuit of knowledge foreign to language and founded upon visual communication, demanding a development of the optical mind, and dependent upon perception in the original and deepest sense of the word.

Suppose the Vision of the saint and the artist to be an increased ability to see—vision. Allow so-called hallucination to enter the realm of perception, allowing that mankind always finds derogatory terminology for that which doesn't appear to be readily usable, accept dream visions, day-dreams and night-dreams, as you would so-called real scenes, even allowing that the abstractions which move so dynamically when closed eyelids are pressed are actually perceived. Become aware of the fact that you are not only influenced by the visual phenomena which you are focused upon and attempt to sound the depths of all visual influence. There is no need for the mind's eye to be deadened after infancy, yet in these times the development of visual understanding is almost universally forsaken.

This is an age which has no symbol for death other than the skull and bones of one stage of decomposition ... and it is an age which lives in fear of total annihilation. It is a time haunted by sexual sterility yet almost universally incapable of perceiving the phallic nature of every destructive manifestation of itself. It is an age which artificially seeks to project itself materialistically into abstract space and to fulfill itself mechanically because it has blinded itself to almost all external reality within eyesight and to the organic awareness of even the physical movement properties of its own perceptibility. The earliest cave paintings discovered demonstrate that primitive man had a greater understanding than we do that the object of fear must be objectified. The entire history as erotic magic is one of possession of fear through holding it. The ultimate searching visualization has been directed toward God out of the deepest possible human understanding that there can be no ultimate love where there is fear. Yet in this contemporary time how many of us even struggle to deeply perceive our own children?

—Stan Brakhage, from *Metaphors on Vision*⁵¹⁶

5. An Air of Uncertainty

Dorn is a methodologist, interested in the how-to, and in method as a process, which is movement (“implicit”), or behavior, in the strictest sense. This movement represents the process to knowledge in a particular field as a way toward developing larger connections—*“dig one thing... and then U KNOW everything else very fast”*—no matter the craft, *“whether it’s Barbed Wire or Pemmican or Paterson,”* say, *“is the same thing as care of*

⁵¹⁶ Brakhage, “Metaphors on Vision,” in *Blue Grass* (1962), 29-31.

Swedish cabinet maker,” it’s what you *do* with it, how you *use* it.⁵¹⁷ That this migratory system establishes unpredictable allegiances, that its main chorological functions involve the careful discrimination between different kinds of movement—static or improvisatory, authoritative or marginal—operating under divers priorities intermittently conflicting and according with Dorn’s principles—in tension, I should say, with accepted principles, customs, values—are linked facts that become increasingly significant to the writing as *Gunslinger* approaches. For Dorn, it’s *not* “not what you do, but how you do it,” but rather, how you do it that determines and transforms what *it* is. “The fact is [Aaron Burr] was a very good lawyer,” Dorn confessed at a reading in the 1980s, as preface to his “found abhorrence,” titled “The Burr Quote”: “Law is anything which is / Boldly asserted / and plausibly maintained.”⁵¹⁸

The eye-function in Dorn’s work, and its doppelganging paronomasia, exists as an operational center for the gathering and processing of experience and relation. In order to enhance an awareness of its multiform investment and constitution, this “I” must be stripped of the “ego”—too locked *within*—and conversely, must disdain objectivity (“there’s nothing I detest so much,” Dorn writes)—too locked *without*.⁵¹⁹ Composition occurs in a value-neutral, or value-emergent, transitory space. The poem conducts its own system of valuation:

My attitude toward writing is that I handle the language everyday like a material, and I keep it in *interesting* repair. I don’t care about *good* repair... It’s notorious that you can try to gain a position of some stability, and it’s also notorious that there’s a certain price to pay for that. The very stability can emerge as a symptom in people... If it’s looser, and you move around and you have a job here and a job there and you take your chances, then there’s uncertainty. But you have to write then inside the uncertainty, if that’s your choice. And that’s what I’ve done.⁵²⁰

This uncertain negotiation requires delicate handling. The crux of a poem’s vitality for a “projective” poet—a poet who desires to *enact* reality—is not Pound’s “musical phrase,” according to Olson, but the poet’s “breath,” a logical extension of his insistence on the poem *passing through* the poet. Eliot, for example, a poet of extreme institutional “stability,” has

⁵¹⁷ Olson, *A Bibliography on American for Ed Dorn*, 13; 10.

⁵¹⁸ “Edward Dorn: Satirical Verses,” Alternative Radio Broadcast, audiocassette; Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla*, 84.

⁵¹⁹ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 36.

⁵²⁰ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, 78.

likewise, “stayed there where the ear and the mind are, has only gone from his fine ear outward rather than, as I say a projective poet will, down through the workings of his throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs.”⁵²¹ In successfully extricating itself from the myopic, emotive flourishes of the ego, Eliot’s objective “medium” obliterates the influence of the “*person*” Olson proposes in his *Bibliography*. Eliot’s objectivity is similar to Dorn’s sense of socialism, “shit turned only halfway round.”⁵²² In objectivity’s place, Olson proposes “objectism,”

...the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego... that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature... and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For man is himself an object... [and] if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share.⁵²³

The emphatic, organic materialism seeks to liberate the act of composition by restoring the energy and mystery, the “proper confusion,” to relationships of the phenomenal world; objects that “occur” in the poem “must be treated exactly as they do occur therein and not by any ideas or preconceptions from outside the poem.”⁵²⁴ Thinking along these lines, of the poet as an “object among objects,” Dorn clarifies his *locus*, the “centrality” he’s after:

There is no contention that things, in the sense that one holds them, material things, but that is rather limiting, because utensils aren’t only meant, or santos, or carved doors, or the “I” and all its predicament, its environment, inclement and unhappy, and in general the ranges upon ranges of materially disposed things that contain the mines of our lives, there is no contention that these things are really permanently deadening to us, they *are* grotesque in their deathly confrontation... The important thing is that the only quarantine we have from them now is this new discovery of a total disposition of them in the human inherited sense. Coming all at once, and large, it is a morphology that up to now has been lacking. There is no aesthetic to bring us back into a social world of intention, delaying by way of modern functionalism our grasp, shortening our vision, putting us back outside again, where we spend so much time traveling the

⁵²¹ Olson, “Projective Verse,” in *Collected Prose*, 249.

⁵²² Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 208.

⁵²³ Olson, “Projective Verse,” in *Collected Prose*, 247.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 243-44.

hall of distraction and apportionment, not ever coming to rest in cognizance and lingering mystery... my sense of the mystery is: awelike, something unknown but more importantly, cognizant, a crest, by which our common histories are made human again, and thrilling, for *no* other motive than they are ours.⁵²⁵

“For no other reason / [than] the world,” ends the Ledyard poem; “awelike” and “thrilling” indeed, our world, that “‘place made,’ of our making.” Baruch Spinoza, 17th century Portuguese philosopher, argued that “things” wish, above all else, to continue to be as they are, in the fullest realization of their “thingness”—just as institutionalized Christopher Smart’s cat, Geoffrey, after his proper orisons, “is blessed / in compleat cat,” so “stone wishes eternally to be stone.”⁵²⁶ This concept of internal consistency is picked up by Olson too (whose *Maximus Poems* is the subject of the piece from which the above excerpt is drawn), in whose philosophy an internal/external fidelity serves to punctuate the “centrality” of the individual’s discrete experience with whatever “thing” is in question: “we are confronted by, not the thing’s ‘class,’ any hierarchy, of quality or quantity, but the thing itself, and its *relevance* to ourselves who are the experience of it (whatever it may mean to someone else, or whatever other relations it may have).”⁵²⁷ If “we” are to determine a thing’s “particularity... the very character of it which calls our attention to it,” and in a way that “does not—in order to define—prevent, deter, distract, and so cease the act of, discovery,” the violent, blunt imprecision of “slow things, similes, say, adjectives,” of “description” (“King Numbers and King Shit”) won’t do.⁵²⁸ Instead, Dorn’s method strives to “center” itself at the confluence of a multitude of vectors, as in the *Bibliography* diagram, wherefrom the I/eye enacts its own “centrality,” its own nascent awareness (“we are as we find out we are,” Creeley writes), expressive of the circuitry, the “total disposition,” connecting the *person* to the other objects of its environment—the “self” as it is a facet and contingency of its environment. A Heraclitian harmony-in-tension orchestrates the elements of “place,” and Dorn’s “sense of place” moves beyond physical boundaries to compose a *locus of experience*. The creative unification of form and content is an embattled juncture.

⁵²⁵ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 35-36.

⁵²⁶ *Spinoza Selections*, John Wild, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1958); Christopher Smart, “my Cat Jeoffry,” in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 388; Jorge Luis Borges, “Borges and I,” in *The Conscious Reader*, 10th ed., Caroline Shrodes, Michael Shugrue, Marc DiPaolo, Christian J. Matuschek, eds. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 54.

⁵²⁷ Olson, “Human Universe,” 157-158.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

Olson’s essay, “Projective Verse,” clarifies this concept—what Olson refers to as the “incest of verse,” the poem’s heterogeneous and ambidextrous lasso.⁵²⁹ The poem, Olson insists, is “kinetic,” “is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader.”⁵³⁰ That kind of transmission literally incorporates (“forms into a body”) the open space of the page, an engagement Olson labels “composition by field,” wherein “every element... (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense) must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality; and that these elements are to be seen as creating the tensions of a poem just as totally as do those other objects create what we know as the world.”⁵³¹ Here, we might recall Dorn’s summary declaration that, “part of the function [of a poet] is to be alert to Spirit, and not so much write poetry as compose the poetry that’s constantly written on air. What I’ve read and what I hear merge to make the field in which I compose.”⁵³²

This gets abstract rather quickly, and maybe that’s why Dorn introduced his *Collected Poems* with the caveat, “I have known my work to be theoretical in nature and poetic by virtue of its inherent tone.”⁵³³ In 1961, after reading Dorn’s poem “Hemlocks” in an issue of *Nation*, Harold Cammer, a New York attorney, had difficulty identifying Dorn’s piece as a poem at all, and was confident and assertive enough to tell him so: “I cannot discern a rhyme... nor rhythm... nor a meter,” he wrote.⁵³⁴ Cammer’s was a formal hang-up, thinking of form as divisible from the intrinsic demands of content. While the poem exhibits no fixed, traditional schemes—no forms for form’s sake—it includes, like Emily Dickinson’s poems, a number of mostly half or slant rhymes—slight misses in tone that exchange thoughts for things. A musical cadence unfolds in the repetition of distinct rhythms. For example:

Red house. Green tree in mist.
How many fir long hours.
How that split wood
warmed us. How continuous.

⁵²⁹ Olson, “Projective Verse,” 242.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁵³² Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 66.

⁵³³ Dorn, preface to *Collected Poems*, v.

⁵³⁴ Harold I. Cammer to Edward Dorn, 29 June 1961, *Chicago Review* (Summer 2004), 44.

Red house. Green tree I miss.

...

That clean grey sky.
That fine curtain of rain
like nice lace held our faces
up, in it, a kerchief for the nose
of softest rain. Red house.

Those green mists rolling
down the hill.⁵³⁵

For Dorn, the poem is an “attempt to govern a sense of place with certain recurrent properties of that place,” its form is the transmutation of experience among a constellation of objects.⁵³⁶ “[I]t is the matrix which interests me not the metrics,” Dorn writes of *The Maximus Poems*, thinking also of his own work.⁵³⁷ Tom Clark argues that Dorn’s notion of form is not as “an extension of content,” as Creeley’s dictum went, but rather that content “dictates all formal considerations.”⁵³⁸ “Hemlocks” is a poem, Dorn writes to Cammer, or “is not prose,” not only due to its inherent tone, but because “the strictly emotional recall continually re-enters its own sphere,” as it does so compellingly in the Lewis poem.⁵³⁹ In its mere 25 lines, the “refractive” accumulation of “Hemlocks” become self-referential, “like a wave breaking back,” Clark writes, it “repeatedly qualifies what has gone before”: the transubstantiation of time into “cud” (“Toggenburg goat stood in, looking, chewing. / Time was its cud”) might imply another series of transmutations—like one “missed” into a “mist”; like of goat into reader, “looking,” and “chewing” over the “recurrent properties” of the poem, of the world; and of the line into a unit of time—variable, idiosyncratic, it floods in and ebbs: “Red house. Green tree in mist. / How many fir long hours. / How that split wood / warmed us. How continuous. / Red House. Green tree I miss.”⁵⁴⁰ The fluvial grace of slippage—“in mist,” to “I miss”—conducts transformative energy the other way as well, pressing qualities of the landscape into states of mind. And this brings us back to the notion of “centrality,” or the *motion* of it one should say, that Clark identifies in Dorn’s letter to the New York lawyer: “Prose, as implicitly defined in Dorn’s response to Harold Cammer, is a

⁵³⁵ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 79.

⁵³⁶ Edward Dorn to Harold I. Cammer, 7 July 1961, *Chicago Review* (Summer 2004), 47.

⁵³⁷ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” 44.

⁵³⁸ Clark, *World of Difference*, 330-331.

⁵³⁹ Dorn to Cammer, 7 July 1961, 47.

⁵⁴⁰ Clark, *World of Difference*, 331; Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 79-80.

centrifugal medium, has extension, travels and covers ground; poetry is a centripetal medium, has depth, is centered and returns constantly to its necessary places.”⁵⁴¹ “Hemlocks” seems like a mnemonic exercise in the way it constantly returns to its language, as if some encoded fulfillment might be deciphered in the steady, conscientious invocation, *sotto voce*. Though it centripetally returns to “its necessary places,” the poem’s revolutions seek an order that reaches beyond to the unlocking of deeper orders: “The poet of the event,” writes Robert Duncan, “senses the play of its moralities belongs to the configuration he cannot see but feels in terms of fittings that fix and fittings that release the design out of itself as he works to bring the necessary image to sight. . . . He strives not for a disintegration of syntax but for a complication within syntax, overlapping structures, so that words are freed, having bounds out of bound. So, the artist of abundancies delites in puns, interlocking and separating figures, plays of things missing or things appearing ‘out of order’ that remind us that all orders have their justification finally in an order of orders only our faith as we work addresses.”⁵⁴² The stage of Dorn’s development as a poet coinciding with his living in Kansas involved reorienting Olson’s conceptual imperatives—of subject, method, form, etc.—as Dorn entered a social world previously unengaged in his work, and in doing so moved into a new field of language relations with the countercultural communities around him, and new relations with the material of language itself. Fresh combinations of language “play” and “pleasantries” emerged that opened discursive, multi-voiced possibilities for the poem and its narrator: “I think I can include [language] now,” Dorn told Barry Alpert in 1972, “or am included by it now. I think I was locked out of a certain kind of expression that I didn’t have any access to then, and that’s where this insistence and this tone comes, this straining for it.”⁵⁴³

In order to elaborate the cognitive “matrix” on which the notion of “centrality” might be mapped, I want to steer these observations toward a short discussion of Olson’s essay, “Human Universe,” and alternately, to discuss that piece in relation to Dorn’s prose statement on Olson, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*.” This dialogue will provide the remaining critical superstructure necessary for my examination of Dorn’s relationship with Lawrence, Kansas, the American counterculture, and the Vietnam War.

⁵⁴¹ Clark, *World of Difference*, 331.

⁵⁴² Robert Duncan, introduction to *Bending the Bow*, iv; ix.

⁵⁴³ Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 20.

*You have made my ears remember
“the world soul
slumbers in matter”*

– Ed Dorn⁵⁴⁴

6. *Olson, Bernstein, and Centrality*

Rarely does one encounter an interview with Ed Dorn that doesn't begin with his experience at Black Mountain and his tutelage under Charles Olson, the school's rector in its last years. I don't especially wish to place this study among the many that take up the question of Olson's influence; however, I do wish to clarify a few of the ways in which Olson's concepts inform Dorn's poetics in the late 60s and early 70s—the period in which Olson died, and after which most criticism of Dorn's work argues for a decisive retreat from Olson's mode. In fact, Olson, in his last years, found Dorn's *Gunslinger* digressive, and as fiction, distracted (and said so), and since then, scholarship has dismissed much of Dorn's work, especially the later work, during the 80s and 90s, as envenomed by a jejune and flamboyant resentment.

I would also add that my research on Dorn's life has revealed him to be surprisingly uncritical of his mentor. For example, witness Olson's controversial and intoxicated “lecture” at the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference. In his scathing biography of Olson, Tom Clark, who didn't attend the event, claims (in the safety of posterity) that Olson's reading, “degenerated into a wandering, confused monologue on politics and poetry,” and describes Robert Creeley, mid-lecture, turning to ask Dorn, “is *this* the Charles Olson we all know and love?”⁵⁴⁵ But Dorn's reaction to the event couldn't have been further from Clark's and Creeley's assessments: Olson “gave his great political speech,” Dorn said. “And he made people swallow it. He did a terrible number on that crowd, which they absolutely deserved.”⁵⁴⁶ Some of the crowd, however, including Robert Duncan and Ed Sanders, didn't stick around to hear the whole indictment.⁵⁴⁷ In a letter to Clark in late July 1965, shortly after the conference, Dorn delights in the inconvenience that Olson's performance, and the raucous event in general, created for the host institution—a perspective Clark's biography ignores. “The Berkeley Poetry Conference,” Dorn wrote in a letter, “at which I read and gave

⁵⁴⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 130.

⁵⁴⁵ Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2000), 325.

⁵⁴⁶ Dorn, interview by Wright, *Chicago Review* (Summer 2004), 182.

⁵⁴⁷ Clark, *Charles Olson*, 325.

one lecture (in Roi Jones place) was a grand event for all of us but a harassment I'm pleased to say for the University of California."⁵⁴⁸

More surprising than his seemingly uncritical view of Olson's work is the strange absence of almost any statement by Dorn, poetic or otherwise, regarding Olson's death in early 1970. In some ways this lack might reinforce otherwise unacceptable critically proposed severances in Dorn's development as a writer. After Olson's death, concurrent with the inauguration of *Gunslinger*, much scholarship freezes the poet's influence on Dorn's work, sequestering their relationship to Black Mountain related inquiry, capable only of identifying Olson's direct effects in early, geocentric writing. The treatment of Olson's scholarly insights as inflexible, withstanding imitation but impervious to application and mutation, seems particularly ironic. Instead, to locate what is after all the majority of Dorn's work—that is, *Gunslinger* and work subsequent—as a continued engagement of Olson's principles engineered in alternative directions, is a more responsible approach, particularly when critical condemnation of its lack of focus, or a derivative intractability in Dorn's late work, often relies upon the spurious disappearance of Olson's technics in the first place.

One might argue, for example, as Clark suggests, that Dorn extends Creeley's formulation Olson made famous—that form is itself *an extension* of content—to further and further extremes.⁵⁴⁹ Carrying it so far, in fact, that the phrase, as such elusive phrases are wont to do, flips inside out. So while content remains Dorn's focus, at the work's core lie the polemics, content is itself unreliable—and all content is under fire from ideology, is under the plastic surgeon's self-effacing knife of capitulation—the product become its packaging. Advertising, say, and the normalizing forces of mass culture, mass media, and a neo-liberal education—those economies in which Dorn, after 1968, frequently found, and lost himself, in what Creeley called the world of “large populations” (another *extension* of content), the “world [Dorn] wanted and finally did enter”—like it or not, those institutions handle content and delimit language *before our very eyes/I's*. In order to disrupt the commercialized, indoctrinated “centrality” of speech, multiple voices in Dorn's work convert this linguistic interference into unforeseen combinations—as what's “missed” crosses into a “mist” in

⁵⁴⁸ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 31 July 1965, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

⁵⁴⁹ Olson, “Projective Verse,” in *Collected Prose*, 240: “...FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT. (Or so it got phrased by one, R. Creeley, and it makes absolute sense to me....”

“Hemlocks,” and “cosmology” mutates into “cosmetology” in the misappropriated creation tale (*in the beginning was the word*, all over again,) that opens the litany of *Abhorrences*: “Here we go again / PROGRESSIVITY / ASSASSINALITY / INVADITUDE / OVERTHROWISM / FREEDUMNESS...”⁵⁵⁰ As if *extension* were an onanistic thrill unto itself—the “perverse proliferation of language,” Dorn catalogues in his “Baseline Vocabulary,” is the lexicon of Reagonomics (“introduced by the Rawhide Era”) that *Abhorrences* employs to efface.⁵⁵¹ Ironically, this makes Dorn into a kind of formalist, a classification he would certainly reject—a “technology of the senses” is incapable of “resurrecting” the “thing”; Olson’s *Maximus Poems* obtain power through “exacting registration... to make *things* not effete, effects.”⁵⁵² But “effects” and “affects” are *things* too—although what’s “effete” is exhausted by its own futility, its inefficacy is symbolic, and as such forms a piercing critique of capitalism’s derelict utility of language. This is particularly clear in Dorn’s deceitfully dramatic monologue from the 80s, called “Self Criticism”: “I am convinced,” its narrator sardonically confesses, “that what I formerly took to be / a restriction of my spirit / is, in reality, for my salvation, / if salvation is in my future, / but even that doubt is a sign of my new humility.”⁵⁵³ When manipulations of form *become* content, that’s propaganda, and the currency of language shifts. Recall again Herbert Hoover’s grand vision of a homeowner nation, painted here in an address before the President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, in 1931:

To own one’s home is a physical expression of individualism, of enterprise, of independence, and of freedom of the spirit. ... This aspiration penetrates the heart of our national well-being. It makes for happier married life, it makes for better children, it makes for confidence and security, it makes for courage to meet the battle of life, it makes for better citizenship. There can be no fear for democracy or self-government or for liberty or freedom from home owners no matter how humble they may be.⁵⁵⁴

Today one wonders what Hoover was smoking. In passages such as these, an oleaginous, declawed language—“*better children*”? “*freedom of the spirit*”? “no fear for democracy”?—loosely disguises the contorted idealisms of an American *way of life*, homogenizing,

⁵⁵⁰ Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 13.

⁵⁵¹ “Edward Dorn: Satirical Verses,” Alternative Radio broadcast, audiocassette.

⁵⁵² Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 31-32.

⁵⁵³ Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 48.

⁵⁵⁴ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 24.

anesthetizing. “In our time,” George Orwell wrote in 1949, in his lodestone critique, “Politics and the English Language,” “political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible.” He elaborates:

Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.⁵⁵⁵

In mass culture, power and dominance are not bundled at geo-centers, but pitched into and over an ideological economy whose currency is language. In this condition, the language itself (to borrow Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation), suddenly becomes a living proof, the “legitimizing facticity” of an “imagined community”—facilitated by the installation of a national newspaper to set and adjust cultural biases, beliefs, and buying sprees.⁵⁵⁶ No surprise then, in order to break the “crippled stem of the mind,” that Dorn often worked with genres national in scope—twice taking up, for instance, the task of publishing his own newspaper, first in the form of *Bean News*, and later, for ten years in Colorado, in *Rolling Stock*, the monthly political and arts publication he co-edited with Jennifer Dunbar Dorn. And by the 80s, the decade of *Abhorrences*, for instance, with Creeley’s dictum inverted, the epigram is evidence of a struggle between form’s disfiguring demands on its subjugated content—content every bit as volatile and insurgent as its available modes of transmission are complacent and delusional. As if the epigram marks the failure of poetic form to metamorphose the reader’s (i.e., the society’s) consciousness, but simultaneously precedes formal consideration, as a moral preamble, a laying out of the consciousness whose ambiguous desires the uneasy perversions of form cannot accommodate. Dorn’s poetic achievement, whatever it is and to whatever degree Olson influenced it, should first be considered as true to the principle of testing our bondage in language, that’s a “first fact.” Further delineations of the work’s intriguing variety should likewise embrace an inquiry more

⁵⁵⁵ George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” at [George Orwell’s Library](http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit), n.d., <http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit> (5 June 2007).

⁵⁵⁶ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

encompassing of the discursive totality that informs the multifaceted field of Dorn's endeavor, and is less dismissive in purview.

So in taking up one of Olson's central concerns, a central concern for this study appears: "What I am kicking around is this notion," Olson's essay, "The Gate and the Center," begins, "that KNOWLEDGE either goes for the CENTER or it's inevitably a State Whore—which American and Western education generally is, has been, since its beginning."⁵⁵⁷ Young described a series of peripheral centers in the octopus and I likened those to the methods of Dorn's composition and the construction of his poems at a formal level. In Dorn's singular and illuminating essay, "What I See in *The Maximus Poems*," he frames this notion in more appropriate terms for the following discussion: "I don't find the 'ego' at all obnoxious, but am aware it is an undesirable word now; what I want though is its centrality."⁵⁵⁸ "Centrality" outlines a rough matrix for this discussion.

In Dorn's statement, "centrality" defines the unique potentiality of an individual at the helm of a discrete set of experiences, moments. The willed ignorance and abject waste of this potentiality (to find a language of one's own) in modern, mass, consumer culture is the ossifying target of Olson's remedial essay, "Human Universe." The crisis of the human universe is evinced most dramatically by Western civilization's profound isolation from the natural world:

Can one restate man in any way to repossess him of his dynamic? I don't know. But for myself a first answer lies in his systemic particulars. The trouble with the inherited formulations which have helped to destroy him (the notion of himself as the center of phenomenon by fiat or of god as the center and man as god's chief reflection) is that both set aside nature as an unadmitted or suppressed third party, a sort of Holy Ghost which was allowed in once to touch men's tongues and then, because the fire was too great, was immediately banished to some sort of half place in between god and the devil—who actually, of course, thereby became the most powerful agent of all. The result, we have been the witnesses of: discovering this discarded thing nature, science has run away with everything. Tapping her power, fingering her like a child, giving her again her place, but without somehow, remembering what truth there was in man's centering the use of anything, god, devil, or holy ghost, in himself, science has upset all balance and blown value, man's peculiar responsibility, to the winds.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁷ Olson, "The Gate and the Center," in *Collected Prose*, 168.

⁵⁵⁸ Dorn, "What I See in *The Maximus Poems*," in *Views*, 38.

⁵⁵⁹ Olson, "Human Universe," in *Collected Prose*, 160.

Here Olson proposes the question of a diffused, lost center, whereat man's "dynamism" might be realized and natural value regained—something the Egyptians had a sense of, and the Mayans too—discoverable through man's "systemic particulars," that is, the sum of his relations, which I take to be Dorn's methodological task. The shift of attention in Dorn's work from the geographical and natural world to the nature of language—as it constructs urges and rationalizes inclinations that violently impress themselves on the landscape, as the crude externality of a manacled mindscape—is a shift cognizant of the divergent, transgressive and coercive forces that contend for cultural "centrality." Resistance is contingent on a correlative opposition and in that confrontation is complicit—a tension that intermingles the identity of each faction, oppressor and oppressed, private and public, writer and reader. Reformulating and reinforcing the value of what's subjective, as the dissolution and reconstitution of "I" in *Gunslinger* seeks to do, Olson continues his explication:

If unselectedness is man's original condition (such is more accurate a word than that lovely riding thing, chaos, which sounds like what it is, the most huge generalization of all, obviously making it necessary for man to invent a bearded giant to shape it for him) but if likewise, selectiveness is just as originally the impulse by which he proceeds to do something about the unselectedness, then one is forced, is one not, to look for some instrumentation in man's given which makes selection possible... What I do see is that each man does make his own special selection from the phenomenal field and it is true that we begin to speak of personality, however I remain unaware that this particular act of individuation is peculiar to man, observable as it is in individuals of other species of nature's making (it behooves man now not to separate himself too jauntily from any of nature's creatures).⁵⁶⁰

Fair enough. And from there, directly, as Olson would have it, on the instant, arises "Projective Verse," the objective spelled out for poetics. "For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at that moment that he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use," Olson's treatise observes.⁵⁶¹ The poet's task: to make himself sufficiently of use. To give back out. And that, then, is a question of how, of method, the need for a system that encompasses both the preparation for, and activation of, the *moment*, "which is never more than this instant, than you on this instant, than you, figuring it out, and acting, so.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 160-161.

⁵⁶¹ Olson, "Projective Verse," in *Collected Prose*, 247.

If there is any absolute, it is never more than this one, this instant, in action.”⁵⁶² Let’s follow the enumerations of this method, its instruction and application, down a few more relevant avenues in “Human Universe.”

This process of awareness is essentially a political one, “poetics is politics,” Olson insisted, virulently anti-consumerist and strictly anti-institutional. And “politics” is anything having to do with the *polis*, the “city,” etymologically, and the *polites*, its “citizen”—“polis,” Olson writes in *Maximus*, “Letter 6,” “is eyes.”⁵⁶³ But the strictures of institutions and the compulsory surfeit of consumerism radically disrupt and recast human effort. “[T]he management of external nature,” Olson writes, “so that none of its virtu [sic] is lost, in vegetables or in art, is as much a delicate juggling of her content as is the same juggling by any one of us of our own.”⁵⁶⁴ The careless destruction of the natural environment and the frenzied, possessive investment in the spectacle promotes decay in a society whose smug disregard for the burgeoning, exported cost of “first world” comfort is a critical allowance. The cost of this murderous negligence is total stagnation. By insidious displays of opulence and the furious commotion of commerce, the mind is distracted, the spirit abandoned, the world deliriously, maniacally out of whack. Olson continues:

The notion of fun comes to displace work as what we are here for. Spectatorism crowds out participation as the condition of culture. And bonuses and prizes are the rewards of labor contrived by the monopolies of business and government to protect themselves from the advancement in position of able men or that old assertion of an inventive man, his own shop. All individual energy and ingenuity is bought off—at a suggestion box or the cinema. Passivity conquers all. Even war and peace die (to be replaced by world government?) and man reverts to only two of his components, inertia and gas.⁵⁶⁵

“Inertia and gas,” the reigning conditions of the highway, ironically roadblock observation. “[D]rive, he sd, for / christ’s sake, look / out where yr going,” Creeley’s early poem pleads, but in fact, Williams had made it clear a generation earlier, there was “[n]o one / to witness / and adjust, no one to drive the car”; the car on which we might paste Dorn’s bumper-sticker

⁵⁶² Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 157.

⁵⁶³ Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, George F. Butterick, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 30.

⁵⁶⁴ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 159.

⁵⁶⁵ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 159-160.

epigram—“Recreation Wrecks the Nation”—since Williams’ “pure products of America” have gone “crazy,” “tricked out... / with gauds...”⁵⁶⁶

For Olson, this affliction has deep roots in Western philosophy, in Plato and Aristotle particularly. The Greeks embedded a doctrine of classification—wrestling perception and sensation into logic, for example—and of separation—distinguishing the world of objects from the world of ideas. These archetypal distortions, according to Olson, at this late stage of civilization, “are allowed to become ways as end instead of ways *to* end,” and have precipitated a formidable doctrine of existence in fear of its own revelations:

What makes most acts—of living and of writing—unsatisfactory, is that the person and/or the writer satisfy themselves that they can only make a form (what they say or do, or a story, a poem, whatever) by selecting from the full content some face of it, or plane, some part... It comes out a demonstration, a separating out... it has turned false. For any of us, at any instant, are juxtaposed to any experience, even an overwhelming single one, on several more planes than the arbitrary and discursive which we inherit can declare.⁵⁶⁷

Science has burglarized the ontological questions related to human perception and discovery, a theft that perniciously blurs ontology with epistemology, and the full reach of human capability writhes on a pin. With Heraclitus in mind, Olson rejects the confines of logos, favoring “direct perception and the contraries which dispose of argument. The harmony of the universe, and I include man, is not logical, or better, is post-logical, as is the order of any created thing.”⁵⁶⁸ And that includes the poem, as a “made thing”: “art is the only twin life has—its only valid metaphysic. Art does not seek to describe but to enact.”⁵⁶⁹ Because to enact is to move always out from the page, and in so doing, to sustain the circulations of perception, to abrogate the static, descriptive forces that quarantine the human interior.

The anxiety over where perception occurs, those interpretative difficulties—of sensorial input, computation and expression—that I mentioned with regard to Young’s study of the brain, has driven science, Olson claims, to literal extremes, and his project is one of reclamation, of embattled coherence. It’s important to recognize Olson’s emphasis on the

⁵⁶⁶ Creeley, *Collected Poems: 1945-1975*, 132; Williams, *Collected Poems, Vol. 1: 1909-1939*, 218-219; Edward Dorn, *Yellow Lola, formerly titled Japanese Neon* (Santa Barbara: Cadmus Editions, 1981), 40.

⁵⁶⁷ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Poems*, 157.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

internality of the human perceptual process. His desire is not for the idealistic dissolution of all boundaries between self, or soul, and the natural world, but for an increased sensitivity to their interfaces, and to the multiple, parallel energies these quantities share and supply. Thus, Olson adamantly rejects the scientific reduction that “the skin itself, the meeting edge of man and external reality, is where all that matters does happen, that man and external reality are so involved with one another that, for man’s purposes, they had better be taken as one.”⁵⁷⁰

Nonsense, Olson avows, “[I] cannot satisfy myself of the gain in thinking that the process by which man transposes phenomena to his use is any more extricable from reception than reception itself is from the world. What happens at the skin is more like than different from what happens within... Here again, as throughout experience, the law remains, form is not isolated from content.”⁵⁷¹ Movement in and movement out is Olson’s demand, the act of registration is known by and refashioned through the system of the soul—a transit awareness Dorn terms “centrality.” Young’s model of the octopus’s nervous system, Dorn’s model of the poem’s dynamic awareness, and the human perceptual apparatus Olson articulates above, all as systems of attention, sensorial and otherwise, of “total respons(ibility),” share a dispersed perceptual mechanism that seeks to unify reception and declaration in action, in behavior. Action that constitutes a single “Idea,” a *zeitgeist*, from the messages it receives. Olson writes:

[I]f man is once more to possess intent in his life, and to take up the responsibility implicit in his life, he has to comprehend his own process as intact, from outside, by way of his skin, in, and back out again. For there is this other part of the motion which we call life to be examined anew, that thing we overlove, man’s action, that tremendous discharge of force which we overlove when we love it for its own sake but which (when it is good) is the equal of all intake plus all transposing.⁵⁷²

Western man’s overzealousness, his heroism bound up in the conquest of his external world, and that frantic dispersal he effects, his “overloved” force, has thrown off the scale, and scattered a center for civilization. Ancient civilizations in northern Africa, “until date 1200 BC or thereabouts” had “ONE CENTER, Sumer, in all directions.”⁵⁷³ This city, a geographical embodiment of the “good” acts of man—“the size man can be once more

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 162.

⁵⁷³ Olson, “The Gate and the Center,” in *Collected Prose*, 170.

capable of”—represents the “WILL TO COHERE,” the energy of which created the “exact and superior force” of place, and “gave man the chance to join knowledge to culture and, with this weapon, shape dignities of economics and value sufficient to make daily life itself a dignity and a sufficiency.”⁵⁷⁴ According to Dorn, the constraints of ideology as “centrality,” are substituted for the “WILL TO COHERE”—a phantom “center” that attempts to naturalize in the society certain kinds of power.

Questions and reclamations like these were on Dorn’s mind when he visited the Shoshone Indians of the Basin Plateau with African-American photographer, Leroy McLucas, in 1964. From these travels, Dorn wrote *The Shoshoneans*, which included McLucas’s black-and-white photos. At the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference, before the book was completed, Dorn delivered a lecture recollecting the experience, which he titled, “The Poet, the People, and the Spirit”—a title that, he assured his audience, “has no meaning. It was simply a kind of inclusiveness that I knew I could talk inside of.”⁵⁷⁵ Curiously, though Dorn introduces his role in the excursion as someone “tagging along making notes, looking... at the kind of terrible awesomeness of the miscellanea of American upper landscape, what’s superficially on it, the geography. What’s resting on top of it,” he dedicates his discussion almost entirely to the energies and sensations that configured his human encounters—riddled with uncertain differences, and tense along lines of race, nation, and class.⁵⁷⁶ Or maybe that’s exactly what Dorn intends by “geography,” as he explained to Roy Okada during an interview in 1973: “I don’t feel that geography itself... or a concern with the aesthetic properties of landscape and so forth necessarily leads anywhere at all... [u]ntil it’s infused with the whole dynamism of human movement, I think its meaning is trivial... the appreciation of landscape and geography is a human involvement.”⁵⁷⁷ Thus, Dorn’s central question at the conference in California—“if a poet exists... except as he can *be* somewhere and *with* something”—the fulcrum around which he turns after a candid account of the arrogant and limiting presumptions of national language, and the indoctrinating seductiveness of money (“Whether you like it or not. Whether you want it or not... the sheer power and force of money will make you more American than you are without it”), is one of human

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 170; 172.

⁵⁷⁵ Dorn, “The Poet, the People, the Spirit,” in *Views*, 95.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 95.

⁵⁷⁷ Dorn, interview by Okada, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 44-45.

relation.⁵⁷⁸ As an ethnographer, Dorn isn't only attentive to the ways in which his presence influences the behavior of those he's with, but scrutiny of his presence becomes the primary target of the lecture. Dorn's meandering oratorical style underscores his attraction to the paradoxical, his practice of building meaning in tension, reversing proposals immediately after proffering them, endlessly calibrating: "[Y]ou have to somehow get out to someplace where you're just a man, there. And you... have to make them know that. Well they don't know that though. Because you are a man. And that's the precise thing they fear."⁵⁷⁹ Dorn frames his remarks with a phrase borrowed from "Idaho Out"—"So there you are"—and he relentlessly avoids the commodified, popular sympathies that perform national guilt—the inevitable but manageable, even saleable product of the marriage between imperialism and consumer culture—a "first world" burden abstracted from any palpable sense of wrongdoing, or injustice:

So there you are, right there with the first, with the natives, with the first people, the first human beings...on this continent. And you don't know what to say to them... It seems to me that the national life creates a situation in which any person who goes out to do something is thwarted by the fact that he is stigmatized already if he comes from this nation. Right inside the nation. I'm not talking about the "Ugly American" or going to Europe and being loudmouthed and insisting on water when people don't have it or all the crudenesses that we know *do* exist... that's another question altogether. This is simply a matter of how trustworthy you can be if you come from this context. And I assure you, you can't be very trustworthy. Nobody trusts us. You *don't* have to talk about Vietnam. You don't have to talk about South America. You can talk about Nevada. That's much closer to home.⁵⁸⁰

Dorn's conclusion is deceptively simple. His lecture returns to this central dilemma but seems merely to restate its initial question: "Okay. Well those are some of the things I saw. Now I'd like—I want to ask myself if a poet exists except—except as he can *be* somewhere and *with* something... a poem exists. We know that. But it's much harder proposition as to whether a poet exists or not. Sometimes he does, sometimes he doesn't... To my mind he has to *be there* as much as possible. In other words he has to discharge himself into the—some arena of life at least to the extent that—or trying to approximate the extent to which a poem

⁵⁷⁸ Dorn, "The Poet, the People, the Spirit," in *Views*, 114-115; 101.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

can do that.”⁵⁸¹ But this statement draws attention back to the process of Dorn’s talk and stands not as the climax of a linear progression to an arguable assertion, but as an elastic and spatial engagement with the multiple, unstable sensibilities that arrange Dorn’s observations. The poet exists to enact his world from his singular position, his “centrality,” as an “object among objects.” But are poets the only ones capable of this kind of total awareness, and is it only a poem that inhabits this domain? Perhaps, but “[w]hether you think of yourself as a poet or not is irrelevant. I mean, a lot of people who think they are poets aren’t and a lot of people who don’t are. Again it’s just this attitude,” Dorn told *Mike and Dale’s Younger Poets*, in 1997.⁵⁸² And the poem could be a pot, like those the Mayans cast that are to Olson the evidence of a “poised” attention—those clay pots, “porous enough to sieve and thus cool water, strong enough to stew iguana and fish, and handsome enough to put ceremony where it also belongs, in the most elementary human acts.”⁵⁸³ Poetry is a state of being, a ceremonial action that restores to language its ambiguous intensity and invokes difference as the site of exchange, not exclusion.

Piecing together Dorn’s terminology, we can label this force by which the poet comes to exist as “centrality,” wherein the self becomes “medium.” “Centrality” has the force of singular experience, but doesn’t mean to connote that part of the ego that was “made personal,” for consumer use—“this class of senses disintegrates immediately into something cheap and commercial and psychiatric.”⁵⁸⁴ Dorn believes in “the shared mind,” but whose insights occur at discrete locations, or moments—a mind which appeals to a migratory condition for discovery. Dorn is interested in dislodging the ego from the fabric of commercially generated individualism to reengage its transgressive plurality. When in “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” Dorn turns to discuss the ego of that colossal protagonist, he proposes the foil of two “historic gods”: Christ, on the one hand, who represents the figure “of great suffering, sympathy and tenderness... [who] became the property of political intrigue, for civil jurisdiction, then, for centuries,” and Hector, murdered by Achilles, on the

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 114-115.

⁵⁸² Edward Dorn, interview by Michael Price and Dale Smith, 19 July 1997, *Mike and Dale’s Younger Poets*, no. 6 (Summer 1997), 87.

⁵⁸³ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 159.

⁵⁸⁴ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 38; and see Dorn’s assertion of the notion of “centrality,” in the same text, as it pertains to Olson’s *Maximus Poems*: “It reverts to my insistence that a creation of the order of *Maximus* comes exclusively from a man, and if dependencies are evident, it is the man we go to for their explication, not to so-called source.”(38)

other.⁵⁸⁵ Hector, according to Dorn, is drawn against the prison of officialization, and “is impossible to use... as a force of deception because his clarity rests in beauty”:

Hector is not resurrectable. He lives in the manor of the mind and Stands for unalienated beauty... Hector died in battle with the natural ugliness of the world, symbolized as the state in the form of Achilles. The death was final. And the abstraction this event drifted to is the pure abstract. Which is to say it is free from the commitments life in general, life in the Everyday, life in its mechanics, has made. Christ is hopelessly involved in the secrets of the State, because his ego was perverted for its use. Hector still possesses a free ego, the kind of circuit which stays in the human breast in the form of beauty... Whereas Christ was quickly utilized out of existence, Hector remained, precisely because he wasn't chosen. The chosen is the blackest fate of all, and that's why my heart still yearns over Christ. The Roman world rose on the shoulders of a god which is cut on the secular pattern, because beauty is isolated and abstract, while virtue and grace are infinitely manipulatable.⁵⁸⁶

If Dorn sees Olson's *Maximus* as returning “to a pre-Christian ordering of the ego, or... [coming] forward to a non-Christian ordering,” one is tempted to view *Gunslinger* in the same way, and not only because its narrator is transformed into the “secretary to Parmenides,” but also because its phenomenologist hero arrives to address the exigent atrophy of perception in modern man's “sick head,” whose body of direct experience is dismembered by interpretation and the discrepant, pernicious impulses of identity-crazed, consumer culture. Dorn wants to re-“center” the ego, to reclaim the self as a *locus of experience*, simultaneously at a center and in the margin. Illustrating this notion of “centrality,” as the range and expressive force that fashions a *locus of experience*, Charles Bernstein's discussion of “the theory of relativity of the center,” from an interview in the early 1990s, provides a useful template.⁵⁸⁷ Bernstein's insight helps to clarify the shortcomings of the *Internal Resistances* model for Dorn's work, and lends the critical terminology for a dialogue about the complexities of Dorn's character.

Bernstein's theory: “there is no center, only peripheries that agglomerate in various ways—like blood clots at the site of trauma,” he writes. “But there is power, and dominance,

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 41-42.

⁵⁸⁷ Bernstein, “Censors of the Unknown—Margins, Dissent, and the Poetic Horizon,” interview by Tom Beckett, in *A Poetics*, 188.

and these, anyway, need to be differentiated from centrality.”⁵⁸⁸ Bernstein envisions the shape-shifting power struggle among marginal communities as a contest over “fashion”—who’s in, who’s out. “Fashion,” as a discourse, “seeks hegemony but produces *resistance*,” or rather, by prefiguring the production of resistance, its counterforce, proscribes its undoing. Thus, we find manufactured within “fashion”’s cycle both the zesty competitive enterprise of “free market” capitalism—the *mise en abyme*—and the multitudinous dissent to being “in” at all, to “fashion itself.”⁵⁸⁹ But the latter carries a strong caveat; for while the engine of embattled fashion generates and distributes power, in protean forms to various hands, there stands behind that dialectic the “cogs that turn the machine,” the machine of the public mind. “[C]entrality is the power of the dominant margin,” Bernstein writes, “[f]or while power appears factional, centrality has the epistemological clout of the given or normative, conventional or standard: power we’ve grown accustomed to.”⁵⁹⁰ So while “*all* power involves a self-recognition of marginality and finding some way to cash in on it,” mass culture attempts to forestall that process, to fortify its own dominance by galvanizing “centrality,” “by means of stigmatizing nonmass cultural values: thus any form of divergence—regional, ethnic, formal—is rejected as elitist or specialized or separatist, as *not us*.”⁵⁹¹

For our purposes four facts are important facts here. First, “centrality” is power at an epistemological level (“...that we’ve grown accustomed to”), power over the mind. Second, “mass culture,” in Bernstein’s estimation, attempts to usurp dominance, manufacture consent, and ossify “centrality,” by projecting its way as the “right” way, by vilifying the unknown. Third, “fashion,” as both contest and demonstration, creates a twofold, paradoxical crisis around the concept of “resistance,” and that, fourth, like this perverse symbiosis between “fashion” and “resistance,” the exploitation of marginality both inaugurates and continually imbricates the dynamics of power.

I find Bernstein’s explication useful for a number of reasons. He provides a structural vocabulary that illuminates Dorn’s critical trajectory without drastically altering or limiting its broad capacity for paradox, and the mutually engendered relationship he proposes between “fashion” and “resistance” is fruitful for a discussion of Dorn’s popular success with

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 189.

Gunslinger, as well as his being characterized as the “Dirty Harry” of the American poetry revue. And third, the definition that Bernstein’s critique establishes between power and “centrality,” or “power we’ve grown accustomed to,” helps to specify the cultural forces at which Dorn directs his admonishments.

Immediately, however, there appear to be two opposing notions of “centrality” here. Whereas Bernstein envisions “centrality” as an inoculating condition that proscribes dissent by appropriating it, Dorn reinscribes the notion of an emancipatory apparatus of individual experience that wrests the “ego” from its “cheap and commercial and psychiatric” utilization and restores it to the “shared mind.” Here emerges a single concept of “centrality,” which is, itself, a site of contestation: mass culture means to supplant Dorn’s “centrality” of an ego-object in relation to its environment, by substituting the homogenizing force of the status quo through the ceaseless seeming play of “fashion,” as the controlled site of discursive relation. “Discourse has arrogated to itself a good deal of experience which needed to stay put,” Olson writes, and as the Greek ideals of “logic and classification” were for Olson, that which “hugely intermit[s] our participation in our experience, and so prevent[s] discovery,” so the paralyzing notion of “centrality” is to Dorn that which attempts “the cohesion of men’s souls”: “Whatever the benign outward gesture, only the individual (I don’t mean the word in the old doctrinal sense of a way to be a liberal, but as ‘anyone’) has the carrying power of the soul and its responsibilities of the community, also those historical,” Dorn writes in “What I See in *the Maximus Poems*.”⁵⁹² What Dorn really moves *against*—more in the sense of a background, than *in resistance*—are the concretized partitions of the mind, the itemization of attention. Regarding this point, Wesling’s introduction to *Internal Resistances* is both poignant and slightly off-base: “What Dorn’s imagination presses back against, as a chosen ‘reality,’ is not aesthetic or, a word he hates, *epistemological*; it is a society divided by race, class in all its manifestations, and sex.”⁵⁹³ Wesling’s analysis seems to reemploy those divisions between thought and material fact that Dorn and Olson promptly reject; the innately corrupt and pompous authority of *epistemology* is precisely what Dorn’s work “presses back against,” since the divisions of society are animated by tendencies routed deep in the minds that prescribe them. In the end, as much as Dorn isn’t given to concluding things, as much as “It’s not okay, and it’s not going to be okay,” his is a dream of coexistence, not

⁵⁹² Olson, “Human Universe,” 156-157; Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 38.

⁵⁹³ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 9.

fractionalization: “The most important thing for me is the possibility for everyone to be able to live in the world,” he told *The Illustrated London News*, in August 1966.⁵⁹⁴ But “not okay” isn’t negative *as opposed to* being positive, but rather negative in terms of openness, in terms of *negativity*—its flexibility, its maintenance of what’s possible; it’s not going *to resolve*, perhaps Dorn took his priest to mean—to coexist is to celebrate difference. For no world will accommodate everyone, but to consciously interrogate that liminality is Dorn’s task, not to paste over it with facile resolutions, or appeasements—not to say “okay.”

Aware of the resistance that knowledge is to some degree founded upon, and of the imperial forces that shape resistance, Dorn frequently asserts the interpenetration of oppositional concepts—of “home” and “elsewhere”; of love and strife: “I’m making a statement,” Dorn said of *Yellow Lola*, “that says that mere ‘positiveness,’ which would consist in, presumably, being kind, shouldn’t be the explanation of why it’s bad to be unkind. Because violence, cruelty, hurtfulness, and all the deeper psychological underpinnings of human nature are just as legitimate as anything else, although we must learn to restrict them.”⁵⁹⁵ And the contradictions that inhere language and other cultural projects form the pith of post-*Gunslinger* work, illustrated by the punctilious, “An Opinion on a Matter of Public Safety,” for example:

Air Bag sounds like eminent sickness
This device should not be permitted
General Motors was right to suppress it
and wrong to have relented
and Nadar should stay out of it.

Driving is based on alertness
whether that be loose or tight
Those who let their attention wander
must not be encouraged to survive
by a bag full of air.⁵⁹⁶

The “center” of anything is a Janus-faced reality, full of slippages, parings, and frayed edges, a confrontational nexus, where hero and foe, as per *Gunslinger* and Howard Hughes, who both call the sun home, are cut from the selfsame cloth. In the *Gunslinger*, “I” observes the

⁵⁹⁴ “The Cis-Atlantic Americans,” *The Illustrated London News*, 6 August 1966, MS 55A: Db, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

⁵⁹⁵ Dorn, “Interview at Madison,” interview by Sturgeon, *Ed Dorn Live*, 51.

⁵⁹⁶ Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla*, 22. This poem itself has a footnote: “Airbags are a good example of Say’s Law, which says, that production creates, notoriously, the product, but the market also. And of course, the rationale, in this instance, Immortality.”

sense of “some effect / on the perigee and apogee of all / our movements in this, I can’t quite say, / *man’s* presence, the setting sun’s / attention I would allude to...”⁵⁹⁷ Olson would note the etymology: “center,” originally from the Greek *kentron*, for “sharp point, stationary point of a pair of compasses,” and related to *kentein*, meaning “to prick.” This history denotes a non-location-specific intensity of the “center,” a piercing, like that “thingness” ever half-shaded from the understanding that Spinoza argues a “thing” most impresses upon us. How appropriate all this is to a poet whose surname, “Dorn,” means “thorn,” “spine,” “mandrel,” and “arbor,” in German?—the last of which seems doubly relevant, referring to both a shaded garden refuge, and the central axle of a lathe, both to the material, and to the machine that fashions it. When the Gunslinger introduces the Poet to the citizens of “Universe City” at the beginning of “The Cycle,” an oratorical interlude between Books II and III, he entreats the Poet’s sculptural powers: “turn the Cycle of Acquisition / inside the Cobalt Heads of these / otherwise lumpish listeners and make / their azured senses warm Make your norm / their own / deliver them / from their *Vicious Isolation*...”⁵⁹⁸ In that capacity, the Gunslinger links the Poet to a grand canon—to Shakespeare, and Homer, and the sometimes long-winded, “venerable” Nestor, in Shakespeare’s *The History of Troilus and Cressida*. Roaming the Grecian camp in the first act of the play, Ulysses hails Nestor’s “experienced tongue,” and we recall Dorn’s songs (and Pound’s) “written on air”: “...venerable Nestor, hatched in silver, / Should with a bond of air, strong as the axle-tree / On which heaven rides, knit all the Greekish ears / To his experienced tongue...”⁵⁹⁹

With this conflicted condition in mind, Wesling chooses the title and structural metaphor, *Internal Resistances*, for a collection of essays covering Dorn’s work: “By means of internal resistances against what is established, a writer on the margin may claim to understand the contradictions of a historical moment even while his work manifests and is deformed by those contradictions.”⁶⁰⁰ What is “internal resistance”? Wesling clarifies: it’s “an idea of the poet’s integrity, his power to understand the evil of external authority, to ‘blow it to rags’ within the sphere of action of the poem.”⁶⁰¹ Wesling combines two passages from *Gunslinger* here—an allusion to Book III: “To a poet all authority / except his own / is

⁵⁹⁷ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 8.

⁵⁹⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 89.

⁵⁹⁹ *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Harbage, I.iii.65-68.

⁶⁰⁰ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 4.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

an expression of Evil / and it is all external authority / that he expiates / this is the culmination of his traits”; and a quote from Book III: “Entrapment is this society’s / sole activity, I whispered / and Only laughter, / can blow it to rags.”⁶⁰² But in his combination, Wesling collapses “Evil” and “Entrapment,” and seems to overlook that while “Entrapment” limits the poet’s movement, “Evil” is what the poet “*expiates*,” that is, passes through himself. “Laughter,” finally, obliterates only our “entrapment,” our culturally-administered self-deceptions about “violence, cruelty, hurtfulness, and all the deeper psychological underpinnings of human nature,” but doesn’t eliminate those tendencies themselves. And we are imprecise in calling that immersive atonement *resistance*—as Robert Duncan reminded Denise Levertov, in a letter of October 1971: “The poet’s role is not to oppose evil, but to imagine it: what if Shakespeare had opposed Iago, or Dostroyevsky [sic] opposed Raskalnikov—the vital thing is that they *created* Iago and Raskalnikov. And we begin to see betrayal and murder and theft in a new light.”⁶⁰³

It’s important to note that Dorn doesn’t resent power, nor authority, and in many cases, not even those with power—some of whom he rather respects—but he sternly rejects an allegiance to what Bernstein calls “centrality...at an epistemological level.” The enduring elasticity of the status quo objectifies Dorn’s scorn: “It isn’t so bad that men wish to dominate us,” he writes in “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” “because in a cliché they do anyway, but the realm of thought that seeks to make it ‘natural’ is what I cry out against.”⁶⁰⁴ For Dorn, this notion of naturalized “centrality” is always phantom; always an appeal to assimilation, a model that limits the totality of the possible to the ploy of “fashion”’s contestation. In “Driving Across the Prairie,” a prose piece that recollects an October 1968 visit to Villa Grove, Dorn follows the Amish buggies into town with his sister, and focuses his attention on lost friends from childhood and his conflicted impulses towards his family—on the one hand, increasingly frustrated with their bourgeois narrow-mindedness (“they all agree with the dentist”); on the other, drawn to their intense emotional magnetism. The following is excerpted over the span of a few pages:

My sister has become middle class by worrying about public safety.
The non-economic path most people take into that subworld. I was
never middle class nor were my parents, I mean our safety was never

⁶⁰² Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 128; 155.

⁶⁰³ Robert Duncan to Denise Levertov, 19 October 1971, *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, 669.

⁶⁰⁴ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 39.

public. Our poverty was public.... I saved myself by letting my hair grow and establishing a ritual of my own person which even the lightest reflection will reveal as a dangerous thing to do. I sensed this afternoon what she had done and what my own relationship to it is. Because my sister had heard the story from the liquor salesman. I want to be able to look back into the faces of the old gods. That lineage, that result, that crippled stem of this country is made with the mind. There must be a way to stop it.⁶⁰⁵

“...*Hey Slinger you better shut / that boy up! / Cut it, my friend / I was just — / Drop it!*”⁶⁰⁶ This “I,” and the “I” who “whispers” about “Entrapment,” in the passage Wesling highlights from Book III, is, of course, not the poem’s first-person narrator, but the chemically resurrected “secretary to Parmenides.” In Michael Davidson’s essay, “To Eliminate the Draw: Narrative and Language in *Slinger*,” he observes this transposition of roles in the poem—the micro/macrocosmic interchange of events, the ultra-mediated state of language—when of the relationship between Slinger and Howard Hughes, he writes: “They represent two aspects of power in the western world, one that maintains cycles of acquisition and warfare and another that deconstructs the rhetoric upon which these cycles are based.”⁶⁰⁷ And both are elusive, mysterious, domineering, and exceedingly *stylish*. The first thing we know about Slinger is what we see, his “impeccable personal smoothness / and slender leather encased hands / folded casually / to make his knock.”⁶⁰⁸ Later, over tequila, the Gunslinger himself testifies to an interwoven duality in the bar fight unfolding before him: “Lo que pasa he breathed / this place is / in the constructive process / of ruin.”⁶⁰⁹ One must concede the high degree to which Slinger’s “hipness” is imported from pop-cultural texts. It was at Essex, on November 27, 1966, over curry after viewing *The Magnificent Seven*, that Tom Clark recalls Dorn first speaking of the “impeccable” manner of Robert Vaughn’s “draw” in the film.⁶¹⁰

This kind of influence seems no small matter, and illustrates furthermore the rough, performative glamour that enriched Dorn’s slick and caustic wit, and “elegant” sense of

⁶⁰⁵ Dorn, “Driving Across the Prairie,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 60-65.

⁶⁰⁶ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 10.

⁶⁰⁷ Davidson, “‘To eliminate the draw’: Narrative and Language in *Slinger*,” in *Internal Resistances*, 119.

⁶⁰⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 3.

⁶⁰⁹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 16.

⁶¹⁰ Clark, *A World Difference*, 27.

personal style.⁶¹¹ Perhaps this is the disjunct curiosity that Donald Davie detected almost forty years ago, when he proposed that the *Gunslinger*'s humor, perhaps its most "attractive" feature, certainly its most marketable, would remain critically under-stated. Even though it's not entirely accurate, Davie's point is interesting in relation to Dorn scholarship overall. For example, Donald Wesling's essay, "To Fire We Give Everything: Dorn's Shorter Poems," diagrams a triangular configuration of Dorn's poetic voice, the three corner coordinates—"song," "wit," and "pronunciamento"—enclosing a "comedic center... a circle inscribed within the triangle and touching all three sides," that functions "to pull all the points inward and keep them from undue isolation," but at the same fails to reconcile these gatherings, borrowings, and pastings with his notion of *resistance*.⁶¹² In this way, "internal resistance" seems a bit limiting, a bit misleading for the work, and for the person; and to package each divergent impulse under the label of *resistance* inflates that term beyond any specific application, and ignores the ways it imbricates power and dominance. Instead, I prefer Bernstein's notion of "fashion," which better accommodates, for instance, the popular influence and commercial success of *Gunslinger*, and the overall willingness, even insistence, in Dorn's work, to "compose" a poetry, as "A for Ism" instructs, that is written "everywhere." After all, it was *Gunslinger*'s success that by the late 1970s had secured tenure for Dorn in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Colorado, Boulder; it allowed him the freedom to contribute to and edit *Rolling Stock* in the 1980s, and to research 12th century Cathar heresy for his unpublished work, *Languedoc Variorum: a Defense of Heresy and Heretics*, in southwestern France, in the 1990s: and *Gunslinger*'s impact and popularity, from its inception in 1968 up through the end of his life, awarded him multiple readings and residences in Kansas, although it never won him the job that he wanted.

⁶¹¹ See David Southern, "Forensics in the Provinces: Collecting the Correspondence of Edward Dorn," *Chicago Review* (Summer 2004), 93: "Ed Dorn... had a great sense of style—his selections, including those from thrift stores, were elegant."

⁶¹² Wesling, "'To fire we give everything': Dorn's Shorter Poems," in *Internal Resistances*, 36.

So goes: first, shape
The creation –
A mist from the earth,
The whole face of the ground;
Then rhythm –
And breathed breath of life;
Then style –
That from the eye its function takes –
“Taste” we say – a living soul.

– Louis Zukofsky⁶¹³

7. *Style is Soul*

In a 1980 interview with Tom Clark, Dorn outlines a notion of “style”—“whatever is admired”—that seems to closely parallel Charles Bernstein’s conception of “fashion,” as a context for dominance that moves both ways, towards “acquisition” and “deconstruction.” “Style” for Dorn, is close to method, the manifest prioritization of *how* one works. This attention to “style” forms the plot of one of Dorn’s favorite, late ‘60’s books, *The Teachings of Don Juan: a Yaqui way of knowledge*. In Casteneda’s book, Dorn identifies an “absolutism of style.” That is, only the *method* of the search and process can validate its outcome; a method must be adhered to. When Clark attempts to transfer this “absolutism of style” to the British army’s grandiose stiff-upper-lip, “never apologize, never explain” brand of imperialism, Dorn emphasizes “style” as a protean term, always in flux:

No, the way I read that is, style is whatever is admired. And for better or for worse, that’s the whole point of democracy—that it demands style. When it *doesn’t*, then it’s getting sold cheap. When it’s got lame leaders who can’t talk, like we’ve got now. That’s not my kind of democracy. That’s its low point. Literally, that lack of style.⁶¹⁴

While Dorn’s dissatisfactions are directed more toward the fact that there *is* a “power we’ve grown accustomed to,” than for those that wield it, he certainly agrees that *all* power includes a “self-recognition of marginality,” an exploitation of certain marginal characteristics, of homegrown schemes pitched into the fractured discourse of dominance.⁶¹⁵ And thus he keeps close watch on the “how to” of anyone—enemy, or ally, is moot. When Dorn confronts a

⁶¹³ Louis Zukofsky, *A* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 126.

⁶¹⁴ Dorn, “Ed Dorn’s Views,” interview by Tom Clark, in *Views*, 20-21.

⁶¹⁵ Bernstein, “Censors of the Unknown,” interview by Beckett, in *A Poetics*, 189.

figure such as Daniel Drew, we encounter admiration for power's ability to "cash in" on its underdog qualities—what we might call "style"—in order to realize insidious schemes.

In 1969, Dorn published, among other things, a translated volume of Latin American guerilla poets, called *Our Word*, and an introduction to *The Book of Daniel Drew*—a dubiously-penned, autobiography of the infamous 19th century robber baron, Daniel Drew—full of fervent praise for Drew's brute and incorrigible business practices: "Daniel Drew had the only important piece of information about instinct: if the lions don't like it they won't eat it. He knew about the real real. That's inside attention."⁶¹⁶ Let's read "inside attention" against "centrality," and recall Dorn's definition of *how* a poet can exist, from his Shoshone lecture: "To my mind he has to *be there* as much as possible."⁶¹⁷ The vulgar, double-crossing Drew knows what to do when he's "there"—whatever, wherever, whenever that may be: "You might have to be there once in a while if nobody else can do what you can do," Dorn writes, "like Jay [Gould] when he carried a valise with \$900,000 sudden cash from Hoboken to Albany to purchase a certain august body which meets there annually. Or you might fly your own plane, something like that."⁶¹⁸ That "august body" is the New York Senate, with whom Drew's henchmen had to smooth things over during his miniature war with Cornelius Vanderbilt over the construction of railroads in the early 1870s—during which the barons, each with his own private army, occupied opposing banks of the Hudson River. Drew's exacted "ritual of [his] own person" and roguish charm makes him something of an archetypal expert—his playacting, for instance, lures Vanderbilt into a rotten partnership: "Nothing like Uncle Dan'l crying with his hat in his hands turning the careful head of Vanderbilt right around," Dorn writes.⁶¹⁹ Drew's artistry is the artistry of showmanship. And the stature that dazzles buttresses the "crippled stem" of the public mind, whose allegiance, meantime, to an effacing "centrality," is soldered to the distraction of an impossibly narcissistic dream of superstardom—as a spectator, you're always looking up, to another place, "and while you were looking of course somebody nailed your big toe to the floor. You're supposed to think you're Cool Hand Luke. But nobody is. Cool, or, Luke.

⁶¹⁶ Edward Dorn, introductory note to *The Book of Daniel Drew* (New York City: Frontier Press, 1969), x.

⁶¹⁷ Dorn, "The Poet, the People, the Spirit," in *Views*, 115.

⁶¹⁸ Dorn, introductory note to *The Book of Daniel Drew*, viii.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, x.

Everybody is another hand though. Just another? Try it.”⁶²⁰ Try your hand? Like, on the draw? Or is this more narcissism and self-satisfaction—masturbation, quite literally? (“The gun is a form of self flattery,” Dorn scrawled across the top of a notebook for his unfinished film script for Brakhage, *Abilene! Abilene!*).⁶²¹ In either case, indulgent and intrusive, Dorn tried it for himself; Drew’s schemes and chicanery are both method and theme for Dorn’s smoke-and-mirrors introduction: “*The Book of Daniel Drew* is mostly about the art of making money passes and the word comes from the artist,” Dorn writes with Drewian deceit. “It’s simply straight.”⁶²² But *The Book of Daniel Drew*, which first appeared in 1910, is not written by Daniel Drew at all, it’s written by Bouck White—Harvard graduate, socialist, mason, former Congregational minister, and late-life recluse—a fact that Dorn’s introduction (for the reprinted Frontier edition, published by Harvey Brown at Dorn’s suggestion) totally conceals.⁶²³

Donald Davie is correct that *Gunslinger* operates around its sense of humor, and humor is the glia in the joints of Dorn’s later work. Humor reconfigures private and public experience and revives the defunct properties of the *person*, not as an agent of resistance, but an instrument for recombining the data of singular experience. But the post-*Gunslinger* lexicographical parings and grafts also reflect the glutted falsifications which have overwhelmed national discourse, and starved the dignity in pragmatic inquiry with so many manufactured phrasal value-meals and special effects—“*better* children,” “standard of living,” “communist conspiracy,” “*stay at home army*,” and so on. So, when Wesling calls Dorn’s late 1970s work “cryptic, epigrammatic,” I take those features to be either so furiously rational and ablative that they become comic, or so over-processed yet under-scripted, so generalizing yet aggressively direct, that they’re laughable. On that point, compare the following two poems—“Distraction Control” and “An Unremote Recombinant”—both from *Hello, La Jolla*: “The most oecological way / to kill the fleas / is to kill the dog,” reads the first.⁶²⁴ And the brash edifice of the second’s abrupt, inscrutably disturbing news: “Eventually, / They’re going to put you in a petri dish / And therein they’re going to grow you. / Not all of you though. For instance / They’re not going to grow your head / And

⁶²⁰ Ibid., vii.

⁶²¹ Edward Dorn, original manuscript, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁶²² Dorn, introductory note to *The Book of Daniel Drew*, x.

⁶²³ I owe my knowledge of Bouck White to conversations with writer Gerrit Lansing.

⁶²⁴ Dorn, *Hello, La Jolla*, 41.

they're not going to grow your body."⁶²⁵ Now consider that part of *Hello, La Jolla* was written while driving on Highway 101—"I mention this not to demonstrate writing is still capable of illegality," Dorn writes in a brief introduction, "but that it is necessary beyond considerations of place and time. A rather open scrawl while one's eyes are fixed on the road is the only trick to be mastered."⁶²⁶ Thus, with some surprise, on page twenty-two, one reads that, "[d]riving is based on alertness," therefore, "[t]hose that let their attention wander / must not be encouraged to survive / by a bag full of air."⁶²⁷ But the driver-writer, the poet, is still more alert than his readers, who appear in a couplet of *Yellow Lola*, the sequel of outtakes to *Hello, La Jolla*: "I see a lot of people / reading on 101."⁶²⁸ Irony, humor, and style are integral components of *Abhorrences* too—the more it repels, the more it amuses—where style and rhetoric are taken "classically," as Aaron Kunin has defined it: "style is conceived as a mask, a prophylactic device that detaches you from what you are saying, and thus protects you from the dangerous effects of your own eloquence."⁶²⁹ *Abhorrences* should be read therefore not as a condemnation of the reader—"I"'s death in *Gunslinger* is an event in Dorn's development as a poet, not only a device in its poem—but as the reflexive experience of being condemned, an experience unwittingly enjoyed in much popular art. In judging Dorn's epigrammatic later work, and its juxtaposition of the environmental and psychological violence endemic to capitalist culture with the equivocating platitudes by which that culture's media manipulates consent, why does so much critical attention sever *Abhorrences*' rhetorical power of subversion, negativity, and dissimulation, eclipsing those qualities behind an inflated and opaque fixation on the work's already histrionic and half-torpid invective, and thus characterize—as Ron Silliman has recently done—later Dorn, the work and the person, as quixotic, solipsistic, and resentful?

It wasn't only *Gunslinger*'s humor that made Dorn marketable, in the late 60s and 70s, Dorn was meticulous about his self-presentations, possessed a refined set of gestures, and had an ear for genre. Resembling the Man with No Name, dressed like his Slinger, booted, smoking, Dorn signed the first hundred copies of *Gunslinger* Book I, in Lawrence, Kansas, on April 23, 1968, where he finished Book II on his fortieth birthday, April 2, the

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁶²⁸ Dorn, *Yellow Lola*, 60.

⁶²⁹ Aaron Kunin and Ben Lerner, "A Conversation," in *Denver Quarterly*, vol. 40., no. 2 (2006), 72.

following year.⁶³⁰ *Gunslinger*, after all, is a Western. And 1969 was arguably the year of the Western in American popular cinema. That year *Midnight Cowboy*—a tale of the Texas gentlemen turned gigolo in New York City—won the Academy Award for Best Film, beating out Sam Peckinpah’s bloody masterpiece of the end of the West, *The Wild Bunch*, and George Roy Hill’s light and jocular, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*—in which a rapidly modernizing and privatized West routs hole-in-the-wall hideouts and chokes the outlaw’s mobility. In his follow-up study of the Western trope in postwar American culture, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*, John G. Cawelti discusses the genre’s accessibility to a nation of television viewers: “During a typical week of TV (Saturday, September 16, to Friday, September 22, 1967) eighteen hours of Westerns were screened on Chicago’s four major stations between the hours of six and ten in the evening, comprising approximately 16% of the total viewing time. And in the same year, Hollywood turned out approximately 37 major films.”⁶³¹ Having taken up one of the most popular narrative forms, Dorn stuffed his metaphysical Western with contemporary reference to countercultural drugs, civil unrest, notorious celebrities—e.g. Howard Hughes, Mae West, or Mr. *Ed*, that transgenic form of “I” (“is my horse a horse...?”), a “Tampico bombed,” talking horse, named Claude Levi-Strauss, who wears a “stetson XX sorta clockwise / on his head.”⁶³² Also evident of Dorn’s increasing attraction to mainstream forms and compatibility at the end of the 60s is the screenplay he began writing in Kansas, called *Abilene, Abilene*, which he never completed. While living in Lawrence, Dorn saw a number of films screened at the university, and both his unfinished script and the occurrence, in *Gunslinger* Book II, of the “Literate Projector,” reflect the influence of cinema on his writing at the time. And popular music, too, found its way in. “‘Day Tripper,’ is accurate if light,” Dorn wrote in 1965, contrasting the Fugs with the Beatles, whose song Tom Clark recalls repeatedly issuing from Dorn’s office at Essex, over the “intermittent clicking of his typewriter.”⁶³³ “His hipster’s disdain of pop music had been suspended to entertain a change of sensibility,” Clark writes, “[h]e already had an inkling he wanted to be part of that change, perhaps.”⁶³⁴

⁶³⁰ Streeter, *A Bibliography of Ed Dorn*, 8-9; Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 5 April 1969, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁶³¹ John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 2.

⁶³² Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 13.

⁶³³ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 83; Clark, *A World of Difference*, 19.

⁶³⁴ Clark, *World of Difference*, 19-20.

So Dorn fashioned himself too, just as his poems are fashioned, just as “style” derives from *stylus*, the ancient writing implement, that Baraka imagined Dorn carrying in a holster: “a white dude / Straight as / The barrel / Of a pen / Called his self / A Gun Slinger.”⁶³⁵ Roy and Marilyn Gridley, among Dorn’s first friends in Lawrence, laughingly remembered the modish, green velvet jacket that he wore when he arrived in town in 1968, as well as the long hours he spent over their “maquina,” wasting a bottle of bleach to break in a pair of jeans.⁶³⁶ Dorn’s public readings of *Gunslinger* in the early 70s drew large crowds and notable celebrities—such as Jim Morrison and Richard Brautigan (who would become a good friend), who both heard Dorn read in San Francisco in 1970.⁶³⁷ In that year, there were “at least two thousand communes across the country,” the *New York Times* “conservatively” estimated, and a few years later, in the zeitgeist of Californian sodality, Dorn and Jenny tried communal living. But it soured on them, and due to exhausting commutes and uncooperative communers, they were forced to flee under siege from an armed member of their small community.⁶³⁸ On the flipside of the commune, was the gulf course, at which certain poems might scoff, but Dorn found occasionally vitalizing—fresh from some San Diegan links, Dorn exuberantly greeted a friend: “Sometimes, don’t you just want to live!”⁶³⁹

The counterculture’s double-sided embrace (both within and against mass culture) of extravagant performances and of aberrant/eccentric-behavior-as-individuality is fashioned from an imaginal reverence for the isolato hero of the Western film. The self-styled designs of Yippie Party radicals, Black Panthers, Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers, “freaks” and other “Oreaders,” are the liberating counterpart to a pacifying obeisance in the society at large. A “society of the spectacle,” a dissociated, inert mass of consumers gripped by the spectacle as “the bad dream of a modern society in chains and ultimately express[ing] nothing more than its wish for sleep,” writes Situationist Internale co-founder, Guy Debord, in his cinematic

⁶³⁵ Baraka, “Ed Dorn,” *Cento Magazine*,

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_baraka.html>.

⁶³⁶ Roy and Marilyn Gridley, interview by author, Lawrence, Kansas, June 10, 2006.

⁶³⁷ Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, Denver, Colorado, March 12, 2005.

⁶³⁸ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 242; see Alastair Johnston, “Zephyrus Image and Edward Dorn,” in *Chicago Review* (Summer 2004), 143-149.

⁶³⁹ I heard this story from Anselm Berrigan in New York City at the St. Mark’s Place reading for the release of Dorn’s *Way More West*, in April 2007. For scoffing at the links see, “On the Question of God’s Tolerance,” *Sagetrieb*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Winter 1996): 47-48.

treatise of the same name.⁶⁴⁰ As he pondered the first book of *Gunslinger* in the spring of 1968, Dorn was in Paris, where he watched Debord and his contemporaries speak from the balconies and stages of the occupied Sorbonne. A self-acknowledged attraction and repulsion to the interwoven struggle between “counter” and “mainstream” culture precluded Dorn’s rigid allegiance to any particular group or movement, while an affinity for showmanship thrust him into notoriously hip circles. Witness Dorn’s sawing back and forth at celebrity’s insidious hydra in the dynamic tensions of his relationship with Ed Sanders.

In a prose piece from 1965, called “The Outcasts from Foker Plat,” Dorn admires Sanders’ attacks on “centrality...at the epistemological level,” and praises his risible, incendiary rock band, the Fugs: “All the fabulous force of his shamanism is thrown into the ‘total assault on culture.’ ... And whereas movie stars think of themselves as movie stars, Ed Sanders *is* a movie star.”⁶⁴¹ In a society whose abundant surveillance blurs and interposes public and private constructs, the fact that Ed Sanders *isn’t* a movie star, but that he nonetheless *acts* like one, ironically facilitates his authenticity as such. When the political event and the celebrity event lose their distinct identities as they merge into “news,” what does it mean to be an actor, an informed citizen, a poet? “For one thing, I don’t know a thing about politics,” Dorn told David Ossman in a radio interview in 1961, “and I think that gives me the greatest right in the world to be a zealot about it.”⁶⁴² For example, in a letter from Colchester, in March 1966, to New York City mayor, John Lindsay, Dorn defended Sanders, who’d recently been arrested for possession and intent to sell pornographic literature that the New York Police Department had found while illegally searching his bookstore. Dorn’s letter is emblematic yet puzzling, because it unabashedly proposes Sanders’ anti-conventional behavior—i.e. exactly what he’s been arrested for—as the very evidence of his contribution to “world literature,” and as justification for his acquittal. It’s difficult to imagine the letter’s effectiveness in that latter regard; it rather superciliously ignores the ideological differences of its receiver:

If the subject matter and language of Truman Capote can be thought novel and important, if the printed matter of the New York Times can be found legitimate and informative, then the work of Ed Sanders ought to be not found in contempt but be protected because he illuminates

⁶⁴⁰ Guy Debord, “The Society of the Spectacle,” in *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents*, trans. and ed., Ken Knabb (Oakland: AK Press, 2003), 47.

⁶⁴¹ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 83.

⁶⁴² Dorn, “*The Sullen Art* interview,” interview by David Ossman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 6.

and cares absolutely for a part of the human utterance standard and sometimes mindless work finds itself incapable to register. He insists on a definition of “freedom” most of us find abrupt only because we have habituated ourselves to hollow protestations of the sanctity of freedom.⁶⁴³

Two years later, at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in the summer of 1968, Sanders was campaigning for “Pigasus the pig” (a real pig), the presidential nominee on the Yippie (Youth International Party) ticket. Attacked by thousands of National Guardsmen and cordons of riot police, engulfed by plumes of tear gas, and battered with nightsticks for three days at the convention, demonstrators stood their ground, and a shocked country was remained shocked. After the Chicago debacle, eight of Sanders’ cohorts were arrested on charges of “interstate travel with intent to start a riot.” They would later be known as the Chicago Seven, that is, minus Bobby Seale, co-founder of the Black Panther Party, who was bound and gagged in the courtroom, and independently sentenced to four years for being in contempt.⁶⁴⁴

Dorn didn’t physically participate in the Chicago demonstrations, but he did provide, as perhaps an expression of solidarity with Sanders, a number of short pieces (is one word a poem? what if it’s a made-up word?) to be printed on confetti, and blasted over the crowd in the convention hall. The plan never materialized. That makes sense, not just logistically, but biographically, since Dorn’s sense of isolation, in the long run, foreshortens his will to celebrity, and the serious diversity of his writing counteracts such singular purposes as those which he identifies for Sanders in the “Outcasts” essay. The following example of Dorn’s divergent instinct, yet another story from Olson’s divisive talk at the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference, suggests the complexities and shortcomings of *resistance* as a concept for Dorn: “Charles Olson made an intricate point the cap of which was ‘War is Beauty,’” Dorn writes, “Sanders objected, ‘I’m a peace freak, myself.’ That’s no special conflict. Beauty is not Sanders’ stick, particularly. But culture is. Word-culture.”⁶⁴⁵ Beauty, what Hector had, is “isolated and abstract.” Showmanship isn’t everything—it’s not “isolated,” first of all. A “total assault on culture” is limited in its scope not only by its oppositional object, but by an

⁶⁴³ Edward Dorn to John Lindsay, 21 March 1966, Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁶⁴⁴ Quoted in Ward Churchill, *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret War Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 51; and see Jason Epstein, *The Great Conspiracy Trial* (New York: Random House, 1970).

⁶⁴⁵ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 83.

obligation *to deride it*. Where would Sanders be without the war? And yet, Sanders “is not anything so simple as a ‘product’ of the smallish and relatively insignificant insane asylum called America,” Dorn writes; Sanders understands his conflicted commitment, “[h]e looks like the man who *could* have shot Lincoln but didn’t. ... But the *peace* is real too. Not some sticky use of it. ... When you see the Fugs perform you see that what’s happening is important, it’s a grope-group. Groping isn’t violent, but it isn’t, equally, non-violent. Peace has become confused.”⁶⁴⁶ That Dorn, confirming Olson’s kinetic assertion at the poetry conference, reads Sanders’ objection to war (as beauty) as an objection to beauty (as beauty), and beauty’s ferocious, warlike ambiguities, is a decision suggesting the kind of embattled magnitude that Dorn, through his own “medium,” seeks. Thinking of Olson’s *Maximus Poems*, Dorn wants to merge “beauty” and “showmanship,” to restore their marriage—“even such a thing a behavior was once beauty..., but the ego, as well as beauty, and things abstract, are pagan”—and pagans, historically, get bad ratings.⁶⁴⁷

“Justice in our minds is strife,” writes Heraclitus. “We cannot help but see / war makes us as we are.”⁶⁴⁸ War must be part beauty, the degree to which it resides within us, and to which we pursue it, for example, like love, is profound and dedicated: “both love and war attest to an ‘indomitability’ in the human heart,” writes Nathaniel Mackey, “their having to do with one another suggests an unrest or an estrangement at the heart of things, a quiver, an instability from which neither poem nor any word inside it is exempt.”⁶⁴⁹ The poet must remain ever more aware—“fresh at the coming in,” Olson writes—of navigating through this play of forces, lest the anxieties over such disconcerting “instabilities” precipitate a blueprint for settlement, or a blundering plan for war. “The War itself and the power of the State,” Robert Duncan writes of his own writing, “I dimly perceived were not only a power over me but also a power related to my own creative power but turned to purposes of domination, exploitation and destruction.”⁶⁵⁰

Nixon’s covert bombing of Cambodia, something even Johnson had refused, began in early 1969, as soon as he took office, but remained a relative “secret” until April 1970. Dorn was in England in early 1968, at Essex—where the university had been occupied and

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 83; 82.

⁶⁴⁷ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 41.

⁶⁴⁸ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Brooks Haxton, 41.

⁶⁴⁹ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 104.

⁶⁵⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 130.

dismantled by its students, his marriage with Helene was irreparably broken, and amidst the turmoil a new romance was developing with a former student. As America entered into a violent period of social change, Dorn, almost forty years old, entered a new phase of his own life, and poetry became a heteroglossic, experimental space in which experience and imagination could roam, labor, and recombine, a “wandering work search, up and down.”⁶⁵¹ When Dorn chose to “stop looking through these binoculars at the horizon,” and “to look at who was standing next to me. Like who was in the immediate room because I had never done that,” it was in part a move away from Olson, and yet one that maintained the principles I’ve discussed above, of method, movement, strict attention, etc.⁶⁵² But it did *take in* different stuff—no more simple, agonistic longing to be, “where the fieldbirds sing in the fence rows, / and there is possibility... / Oh, the stones not yet cut,”; suddenly all is cut—cut up, cut down, cutting out: “Tap it out O messenger Tap it out / IT IS ABSOLUTELY NOT TRUE / THAT SPIRO TERMINATE AGNEW / WAS BORN ETC. IN THE UNUSUAL WAY”; or, “QUOTE America is a shell around / an explosive core of sullen pioneers QUOTE / Can you dig only one word has been changed / And what is that Milord? / Read on Read on.”⁶⁵³ Dorn’s move was into the wilderness of language as material affect, where work there was to strengthen the “crippled stem” of the “shared mind.” “*Slinger* is a full-scale treatment of the discourses of mystification,” Donald Wesling writes—that is, the “mystification” (or is it *mythification*?) acting on and enacted by, the poet.⁶⁵⁴ For example, the language of both discourses pours forth from “I,” when he’s asked to recount his “tour” on “*that cold sicksties night*,” when he died, and was revived with five-gallons of LSD—“I”’s resurrection is an “overhaul” of the consciousness, a seizure unlocking the mind’s broad, polysemous capacity for paradox, a dizzying intoxication that hovers between illumination and alienation, as it reworks “centrality, at the epistemological level.” “I” explains his “experience”:

Like trying to read a newspaper
 from nothing but the ink poured into your ear
 First off,
 the lights go out on Thought
 and an increase in the thought of thought,
 plausibly flooded w/ darkness,

⁶⁵¹ Dorn, “Tribe,” *Chemo Sabe*, unpaginated.

⁶⁵² Dorn, interview by Alpert, in *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 25.

⁶⁵³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 12; Dorn, *Spectrum Breakdown: A Microbook A Microbook* (Sacramento: Athanor Books, 1971), 5; 7.

⁶⁵⁴ Wesling, introduction to *Internal Resistances*, 10.

in the shape of an ability
to hear Evil praised, takes place
then a stroll through various
corner-the-greed programs
where we encounter assorted disasters
guaranteed to secure one's comfort
After that,
an appropriate tightening down
on all debris left over
from the Latest original question, yet

How rich with regal spoils
It was all Data Redux
caught in the ombrotrophic mire
but I sure got my Mood elevated

Like the Truth from Home, Lil agreed
Did you see the Revolution?

Well I went down to the Square
and somebody slammed a cardoor
on my Sign...⁶⁵⁵

Like those primogenitor correspondents *Gunslinger* points to—Parmenides, Heraclitus, Boehme—Dorn invokes the Now; his writing seeks, sometimes more directly than others, an unalienable resonance through incantation and phenomenology, summoning the “unshacklers / of deep spirits,” and all “the dark gods,” Irby writes in *To Max Douglas*, that “wait in the blooded underground.”⁶⁵⁶ Dorn’s was a move at the turn of the decade toward an “otherness” in writing (“the shape of an ability / to hear Evil praised”), a door to get *outside* oneself *inside* the poem—a condition Gilbert Sorrentino, with help from Robert Duncan, describes in his essay “Black Mountaineering”:

“Losing ourselves in the otherness of what is written,” Duncan says. Because, contemporary propaganda notwithstanding, the poem is not a tool but a manifestation of the poet’s imagination that is absolutely real; and as it is composed, it becomes an “otherness.” It is no longer ours, but is an artifact... “And vast as the language is, it is no end but a resistance through which a poem might move...” The poet knows that fearful pleasure when he gives the language its head and sees the poem embody foreign elements, the unknowns, of his imagination. “I attempt the discontinuities of poetry. To interrupt all sure course of my inspiration.” So

⁶⁵⁵ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 158-160.

⁶⁵⁶ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

that the imagination courses forth to find itself structured into art.⁶⁵⁷

These, then, are my base coordinates: “centrality” as the imaginative constructive force and voice embodied of a particular *locus of experience* (embodied in the eye/“I” function: a receptacle, and transit), and internal migration (vs. internal resistances), as a method to navigate a discordant and indeterminate space, both ideal and real, for which I apply the terminology of “fashion,” and “style.” The poem is record of these many movements. To guide the poet’s “bond of air, strong as the axle-tree / On which heaven rides,” Olson charts a methodology against the “crossed stick of these axes”—*millenia, quantity, person, process*. My terms harness and organize a discussion of Dorn’s life and work, when in the words of Sorrentino (if we substitute Lawrence for Gloucester, Dorn for Olson), “the materials [of Lawrence, were] freed by the intercession of the poet, who orders, *not* by his ego, but by the sense of himself in this city, part of its continuing process, history here, not as a sense of time past, but as present to us as time in space.”⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ Gilbert Sorrentino, “Black Mountaineering,” *Something Said* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), 246.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 249-250.

PART TWO:

September 1965 – December 1968

At first I did not notice other ways in which our ancient civilisation was affecting me. Yet soon I observed a certain reluctance in me to do good to others. I would say to myself, Need I exert what is left of me, I who have undergone tortures in an open boat and every privation and humiliation among the Indians, when there are strong and healthy men about me, fresh from Holy Church and from school, who know their Christian duty? We Europeans all talk this way to ourselves. It has become second nature to us. Each nobleman and alcalde and villager is an avenue that leads us to this way of talking; we can admit it privately, your Majesty, can we not? If a man need a cloak, we do not give it to him if we have our wits about us; nor are we to be caught stretching out our finger in aid of a miserable woman. Someone else will do it, we say. Our communal life dries up our milk: we are barren as the fields of Castile. We regard our native land as a power which acts of itself, and relieves us each of exertion. While with them I thought only about doing the Indians good. But back among my fellow countrymen, I had to be on my guard not to do them positive harm. If one lives where all suffer and starve, one acts on one's own impulse to help. But where plenty abounds, we surrender our generosity, believing that our country replaces us each and several. This is not so, and indeed a delusion. On the contrary the power of maintaining life in others, lives within each of us, and from each of us does it recede when unused. It is a concentrated power. If you are not acquainted with it, your Majesty can have no inkling of what it is like, what it portends, or the ways in which it slips from one. In the name of God, your Majesty, FAREWELL."

– Haniel Long, from *The Power Within Us: Cabeza de Vaca's Relation of His Journey from Florida to the Pacific, 1528-1536*⁶⁵⁹

Since everything is in exile everywhere, try saying that voice is no longer spoken by poet but by self. Self is voice fallen into place.

Let self in turn be a collection of stances, attitudes, orientations, passions which we believe ourselves to be constituted by. Dialogue opens between self and place, self and self, place and place. Each self is moving through a world of places, nature, and other selves, culture, indissolubly intertwined: we simplify here because there has long been no "pure" nature and there has never been "pure" culture. In this cosmos, there are myriads of voices, interacting with other voices; myriads of selves interacting with other selves; voices and selves working off each other: "je est (toujours) un autre / [un autre est (toujours) je]." So much is this so that self rarely speaks from a single "I": I is always, to some lesser or greater extent, already complex, multiplex when it becomes architect.

– Nathaniel Tarn⁶⁶⁰

8. The Exile That Is

In his rich and eclectic survey of the literary American imagination (I write *literary American* to emphasize the point), Geoff Ward writes: "America must always be partly elsewhere for American experience to be itself."⁶⁶¹ Whitman, after all, *heard* America singing, "the voices and sounds of a country that has no centre, that kept moving its capital, that is striated by competing allegiances to race, region or city, that formed an uncivil union through a civil

⁶⁵⁹ Haniel Long, *The Power Within Us: Cabeza de Vaca's Relation of His Journey from Florida to the Pacific, 1528-1536* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944), 36-37.

⁶⁶⁰ Nathaniel Tarn, "Exile out of Silence into Cunning: Being Notes of Elsewhere and the Myths of Presence," in *The Embattled Lyric: Essays and Conversations in Poetics and Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 189.

⁶⁶¹ Ward, *The Writing of America*, 13.

war,” etc.⁶⁶² Rhetorically, Whitman remained within the “echo” of his own insistently magnanimous “I,” a place that, slightly refashioned, might fit the American tourist—“going to Europe and being loudmouth,” Dorn writes, “and insisting on water when people don’t have it,” which Whitman wouldn’t have done, but his dark heir Hart Crane, who drowned himself abroad, did.⁶⁶³ Here, in America, everyone is from elsewhere, and elsewhere is everywhere, is *just like home*. At the hearth, the *unheimlich*, the unhomely. “A concept more than a country,” Ward writes, “America has to be thought in order to be lived.”⁶⁶⁴

Perhaps the popular ritual of expatriation for the twentieth-century American writer invokes a peculiar American anxiety over a deficit of history, over the absence of a stable, continuous “culture,” and in its place, an “uncivil” one—gluttonous yet diaphanous, trifling yet homogenizing. But the expatriated writer eventually confronts the same isolating anxiety, the same existential exile that drove him from America, drawing his return. In Paris, so I’ve read, James Baldwin “discovered” he was an American, or that he wasn’t anything else, and decided to reacquaint himself with the home country he’d earlier sought to flush himself of.⁶⁶⁵ Having returned from southern France to New York City after the 1929 stock market crash, F. Scott Fitzgerald climbed to the roof of the Empire State to look out over the Hudson across the flat expanse of Jersey plains, and suddenly felt the limits of Manhattan, *the island*, saw not the Hudson’s “arms running into the air of the Divide,” but bottling up in the city’s maniacal interiority the roaring excesses of a decade, oblivious and sybaritic.⁶⁶⁶

The return of the neo-native is twofold in that it reinstates the body of, what Irby termed, “failed grand promises the US is today”—the whole “pejorocracy” full of “music”—but it also highlights a reliance in the writer’s expatriated inclinations on a uniquely American understanding of exile.⁶⁶⁷ Here Ward’s thesis might be revised, qualified maybe, as it feels a bit utopian—a *field of dreams*, where *to think it will mean, we’re told, to live it*. So many “thoughts” of America vie, but only vie (that *fashionable* process, again), for the America under which we (increasingly *all* of us) must live, which is in most cases the reason

⁶⁶² Ibid., 13.

⁶⁶³ Dorn, “The Poet, the People, the Spirit,” in *Views*, 97.

⁶⁶⁴ Ward, *The Writing of America*, 13.

⁶⁶⁵ James Baldwin, “The Discovery of What It Means To Be an American,” in *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961), 17-23.

⁶⁶⁶ F. Scott Fitzgerald, “My Lost City,” in *The Crack-Up and Other Pieces*, ed., Edmund Wilson (New York: New Directions, 1993).

⁶⁶⁷ Ken Irby to Ed Dorn, 5 January 1966, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss; Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 7.

one leaves, or tries to, or comes back, say, to die.⁶⁶⁸ Baldwin finally made it back to France, where he stayed; Fitzgerald, sufficiently depleted by his flights, went down with the American ship. But that the vying survives, that it persists, that America forces the writer into a confrontation with the functionality of his past and the multicultural crisis of heritage—its strange and conflicted devotions, its unsolicited bestowals—this is the peculiar, dialectical American condition.

In American mass culture, one finds a “dominance based on centrality,” as Charles Bernstein frames it—a dominance with its “epistemological clout” embedded in societal conventions, exclusions, suppressions. This condition, Dorn writes, this “crippled stem of the country is made with the mind”; here exile is a linguistic alienation: what happens, say, when these *truths* “held” to be “self-evident,” aren’t? Do we continue to “hold” them? But what need do we have, that is, if they’re “self-evident” to begin with? And “hold” them in what sense—up? down? close? back?⁶⁶⁹ This “dominance based on centrality” requires the stabilization (“...*hold* these truths”) and the militarization (seize the right, which is equally an order—*that’s an order, Private!*—to “*acquire, possess, and protect property*”) of a dominant language (a language *within* that property) to govern all cognitive, entropic associations, and to delimit thought before we use it. “Centrality” is a language inscribed by power, and indivisible from it. Referring to America, that “paradisaal ‘something’ had to be written,” Ward writes; or *rewritten*, maybe, or *is the writing* itself? The “written” America, today, seems “overwritten”—not a “paradisaal ‘something’” to be lived, but a tempered set of laws to classify and control, and to be obeyed. Since once “paradise” is written, and the word lunges into the world as a “word,” not as the object we’ve so easily imagined in its place, the object it signifies, or the concept—*equality, justice, freedom*—and what’s self-evident is quarantined with that which is pitifully idealistic, what happens then? Does that mean these *truths* were lost? Where? On the page? In the street? Because we didn’t “hold” them right, or because they’re not, in fact, “self-evident”? As an exile among this ideologically encoded language, the poet must clear his own space whereto plant and harvest his “I.”

⁶⁶⁸ Bernstein refers to the “sliding scale of consequences if you are ‘wrong’—from losing a sale to losing your mind. That is, you don’t need to ‘agree with’ power, just acknowledge it: centrality is the power of the dominant margin. For while power appears factional, centrality has the epistemological clout of the given or normative, conventional or standard: power we’ve grown accustomed to.”

⁶⁶⁹ See Ward’s discussion of Jefferson and *The Declaration of Independence*, in *The Writing of America*, 26-29.

Halfway through *Gunslinger*, near the end of Book II, just before the poem attacks its narrative matrix, dismantles the aesthetics of its earlier phraseology and computes itself into abstraction, the Gunslinger is introduced to the “Literate Projector”—a device that instantaneously translates the images on filmstrips into a continuous flow of text, and projects “a vocabulary of How It Is” onto the screen.⁶⁷⁰ We can read the stated “point” of this “Literate Projector” as the mechanistic reenactment of Ward’s claim that “America was invented, not discovered,” that “in order to be lived, let alone ‘understood’, that unprecedented paradisaal ‘something’ had to be written.”⁶⁷¹ But to the Gunslinger, the “Literate Projector” represents a dangerous weapon of propaganda, it’s even likened to “the cinerama of the 3rd Reich.”⁶⁷² The Projector invades the sacred, “negative” terrain around what *is* and, by manipulating appearances and securing signs, produces, restricts, and distorts meaning—if “distort meaning” can even be written. The fact that any “meaning” beyond experiential intensity is inevitably *already* a distortion, the “Literate Projector” wants to conceal from the citizens of “Universe City.” For the Gunslinger, the projector represents the point at which direct experience atrophies and is replaced by monologic interpretation, by description: “The point is it has to be read,” the Projector’s advertisement reads, “to be seen.”⁶⁷³

The Gunslinger’s distrust of anything that “has to be read / to be seen,” emphasizes the Projector’s script as a coercive strategy, not a moment of clarification. In his dense and imaginative essay on authorial “myths of presence,” “Exile out of Silence into Cunning,” Nathaniel Tarn distinguishes two competing notions of exile: (1) “exile *from*. . . absence from a ‘presence,’ the loss of a once established good, an ‘origin,’ the distancing from anything which, in our persistent longing, assumes the colors of paradise.”; and (2), an underlying permanency of exile, the exile that “plainly *is*. . . the thing, person, place, at the *arche*, the presence, the established root, the *paradiso*. To be exiled *from*, if that can even be thought, is to be separated from the exile that *is*.”⁶⁷⁴ In the latter sense, the “Literate Projector” represents an engine of the former exile, insofar as it produces a material

⁶⁷⁰ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 79.

⁶⁷¹ Ward, *The Writing of America*, 17; 10.

⁶⁷² Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 79.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 79; see also the introduction to *Gunslinger*, where Marjorie Perloff writes that the “Literate Projector” is, “the ultimate useless technological tool, the emblem of the signifier tied narrowly to a single transcendental signified.”(xv)

⁶⁷⁴ Tarn, “Exile out of Silence into Cunning,” in *The Embattled Lyric*, 187-188.

fundamentally designed to distract attention from itself *as produced*. That the Projector is housed in the “center of doubletalk,” “Universe City,” a not-so-subtle pun on university, further demonstrates its propagandistic utility.⁶⁷⁵ Thus, in the combined context of Ward’s and Tarn’s arguments, we find America, as a projected, unifying concept, itself doubly exiled, “exiled from exile.” That’s a “dangerous and difficult” place to be, Tarn writes: “You have to start a whole career in the world, assume a history. You have to make up elsewhere for a great deal you never had at root.”⁶⁷⁶

Initially charged with such negativity, the open potential Whitman celebrated in song, America instead becomes mired in its invented conventions, its “orthodoxy of comfort,” and the intractability of a status quo, whose chokehold “centrality” works not only to restrict “outward movement,” but to naturalize the restriction, to verify it behind “a vocabulary of How It Is.” “To begin with, . . . we are in a foreign country (and who isn’t),” Dorn begins his essay, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat: News from the States,” a brief review of an arbitrary pick of contemporary American writers; or from *North Atlantic Turbine*: “[T]he many languages / of English / are as if / they were foreign”—he writes “Of the English Colonies,” in the poem “Oxford”—“as if commodity / had turned all that sound off.”⁶⁷⁷ Out of necessity then the American writer migrates, and yet that liberating act of self-exile is simultaneously tied to the blinding, fundamental confusion of “home” and “elsewhere” that it’s prefaced upon. This migration remains *emigration*, directs its exile *from*, and still holds to the idealized presupposition of an “established root” elsewhere. And if cosmetic, invented notions of historical and cultural ownership ironically underscore the American writer’s earthly exile, and exacerbate the fear of a cosmic one, then “rewriting” America is a continuous possibility, but must likewise be a constant, discursive practice. Dorn, in fact, emphasizes the futility of retreat, or seclusion. Retreat as the context for Thoreau’s rejection of material society, for example, gets its whole critique backward:

looking out the window at his neighbor trundling around some stores,
Hank is so cute, about what a fool his farmer friend is – while he, Thoreau,
has the gig utterly exposed for the silliness it is, from his window, mind
you – they’re all rangers, the bastards, of little use to anyone save a few
hip middle class pricks here and there, or put otherwise, the very idiots
they purport to put down. Interesting that after the civil disobedience

⁶⁷⁵ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 79.

⁶⁷⁶ Tarn, “Exile out of Silence into Cunning,” in *The Embattled Lyric*, 188.

⁶⁷⁷ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 79; Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 214.

usefulness (literary) H.T. let someone pay his taxes.⁶⁷⁸

Dorn's critique is class-based. Thoreau is blinded by the very privilege he attacks, a privilege that also nurtures his disobedience. If writing, which for Dorn must necessarily be *rewriting*, refashioning the language to shake off its manacles of "centrality," thus, if poetry remains the only act aware of, and capable of overcoming an "exile that *is*," the very act of writing prefigures disobedience for Dorn:

It would seem that *Civil Disobedience* is not the business of the writer anyway, because if he writes anything worth reading, right there he is disobedient, and uncivil. . . .

When Henry Miller, William Burroughs, Thoreau, or Frank Skinner try telling us how to *live*, it's pretty boring – it always involves going back somewhere to pick up – back, to recapture some wisdom that's said to be missed now, etc.⁶⁷⁹

Here retreat, or isolation from workaday society, parallels Tarn's "exile *from*," in the act of "going back somewhere to pick up . . .," back to an idealized, "missed" past. That's counterproductive for Dorn, a kind of romantic disorderliness the middle class entertains; Thoreau isn't a workingman. But the past, as it is in Dorn's "Hemlocks," isn't "missed," but is a "mist," in the air where words are, and slide into one another. Going back is getting here. What's past and what's to come are "intertwined like a helix": "The past is interesting and poetic and fruitful," Dorn claims, and "the future is dialectical and contentious and propagandistic and polemical."⁶⁸⁰ The poem occurs as "one expression" in this flux, a tension that retains and enacts the energy produced in the transmission of time through space, through the poem-space of "you" (reader, writer, "I")—insofar as "you are your space"—that *locus of experience* in language.⁶⁸¹ "Poetry is where you find it," Dorn told a group of

⁶⁷⁸ Dorn, "Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi," in *Kulchur*, no. 7 (Autumn 1962), 11.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁸⁰ Dorn, "The Flint Interview," interview by Tuckett, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 115; see also Dorn, interview by John Wright, *Chicago Review* (Summer 2004), 175: "You see, if the present doesn't maintain the past, there is no past. And the corollary of that would be that the condition of the future is up to the present as well. For instance, if the past isn't cared for, then the future isn't going to really honor this present, which will be its past. And one of the great problems, of course, with the lead-filled mind of the present which has erased its memory—to many fumes, man—is not just that it doesn't have a memory, but the effect on the past is shocking right now. You can feel it. Now what that means in terms of the future is pretty devastating, actually."

⁶⁸¹ Dorn, "Waying the West," interview by Cooperman, et. al, *Ed Dorn Live*, 95.

students in Detroit in 1984, “not where it says that it’s at.”⁶⁸² In fact, according to Dorn, a poet shouldn’t tell anyone what to *do*—

There are some people who have power and a certain kind of means at their disposal who are trying to get the society to think a certain way, to do a certain set of things, and so forth. I think any responsible writer is never that. No writer is ever trying to get anybody to *do* something; what they’re trying to create is a cognizance in the society of itself, to furnish the means—through clarity of language—for self-appraisal and self-evaluation.⁶⁸³

The poet, after all, part of the social organism, must “share” the mind.

That America forces an existential confrontation in its citizens through the same vapid spectacle of cultural-belonging-by-way-of-material-goods, sold both as the distraction from, and the livable solution to an ontological question (who am I?)—this seems almost to argue that the peculiar opportunity America presents—“America” as a category of identity that seeks to conceal the “exile that is”—is the very negation of itself as a viable category of identity. That through the transparent objectives of its mediation, the homogenizing “dream” of America exposes the limitations of its own design, announces its own impossibility. The United States *as a poem*, Whitman might have specified, are the greatest *sonnet*.⁶⁸⁴ America perversely and radically exposes the *writtenness* of all identity, and yet the moment *it*, the American identity, *is written*, as the man says, the moment of ossification, the potentiality of America disappears, is “bought off—at a suggestion box or the cinema.”⁶⁸⁵ Still, to the extent that this “dream” remains perennially just out of reach, the imagined space it opens unsettles further questions and alternative possibilities for belonging and place. The confrontation is half-cosmetic, half-cosmological. Perhaps this is the condition Dorn meant to describe at the 1978 Olson Conference, at the University of Iowa, when he prefaced his comments with a quote from Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*: “The crisis consists in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born. In this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”—that is, the dying order is born in miniature, again and again.⁶⁸⁶ Despite the fact

⁶⁸² Dorn, “Abhorrences concerning the State of American Poetry,” in *Ed Dorn Live*, 40.

⁶⁸³ Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Tuckett, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 109.

⁶⁸⁴ See Walt Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 edition, in *Leaves of Grass*, Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), 711: “The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.”

⁶⁸⁵ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 160.

⁶⁸⁶ Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Tuckett, in *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 113.

Dorn called Gertrude Stein “a slug that should have had salt poured on her,” one might recall in Gramsci’s quote, the brutish, dystopic opening of Stein’s *Making of the Americans*—wherein the son, in some kind of demented tradition that he detests but cannot escape, exacts revenge on the father.⁶⁸⁷ The son’s act of “dragging” suggests the act of writing (the etymology of “to write” from the German *reissen*, meaning “to sketch, to drag”): “Once an angry young man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard. ‘Stop!’ cried the groaning old man at last, ‘Stop!’ I did not drag my father beyond this tree.”⁶⁸⁸ “*The crisis*” that Gramsci delimits spills beyond “this interregnum”—as the son archetypically extends the limitations (for flying, for dragging) set by the father; it spills into the ever-present, heaped “crisis” of exile. The “unprecedented paradisaic ‘something,’” that Ward insists must “be written, in order to be lived,” eludes a dissipated society, in which the “idea that a president could write a letter” is “now practically outrageous.”⁶⁸⁹ Struggles for “fashion” and “dominance”—over nationalism, classism, racism, the whole politics of “overthrowism”—which Dorn understands to contain their own counterforce, form the attempt to distract, conceal, and stabilize the dialectical realities that democratic societies are founded upon. The disabuse of the language is Dorn’s poetic territory, wherein “exile *from*” is conceptually blurred, and the “exile that *is*” becomes visible.

⁶⁸⁷ Dorn, interview by Michael Price and Dale Smith, in *Mike and Dale’s Younger Poets*, no. 6 (Summer 1997), 86.

⁶⁸⁸ Gertrude Stein, *The Making of the Americans* (Urbana-Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), 3.

⁶⁸⁹ Dorn, “On Rejuvenating the Hotline,” an *Abhorrence* outtake, which can be found at <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Dorn.html>.

*Take, then, my answer:
there is a tide in a man
moves him to his moon and,
though it drop him back
he works through ebb to mount
the run again and swell
to be tumescent I*

– Charles Olson⁶⁹⁰

9. *Against Being Against Anything*

For Dorn, Whitman’s parturitive dream of the self’s limitless expansion, his inflated “I,” shares a deviant urge with the uglier and deadlier manifest ambitions incumbent on a set of states Whitman claimed in 1855 were themselves “essentially the greatest poem.” “I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is,” Whitman writes in “Starting from Paumanok,” and to Manhattan, in “City of Ships”: “In peace I chanted peace, but now the drum of war is mine, / War, red war, is my song through your streets, O city!”⁶⁹¹ But that was before he “saw battle-corpses, myriads of them, / And the white skeletons of young men ... / ... and debris of all slain soldiers of the war”; and before his towering figure of liberty, equality, and fraternity, his “captain” and “comrade lustrous with silver face in the night” was gunned down by a Confederate actor in a Washington theatre.⁶⁹²

Just as the modern American experience of mass-produced culture at minimum cost involves the violent, self-reverential, projection of its own image-driven *lifestyle* elsewhere, and must necessarily absorb, assimilate, or annihilate what’s foreign or unknown in order to subvert its own vacuity, the unhomely burden of imperialism also wrests a division in the mind of the imperial citizen, who struggles to reconcile, or to separate a sense of himself from the guilt, despair, and horror incident to his national identity. In late stage capitalism, a century-and-a-half since “Song of Myself,” the “first-world” citizen is sufficiently insulated from the reality of war, and from his fellow citizens, to have the option of ignoring the situation altogether, or forcing it behind the more immediate concerns of family, personal welfare, social status, etc. Shortly before his death, Dorn told Ian Sinclair: “If everybody knows that there’s a war, like with Vietnam, and everybody is morally compromised by it,

⁶⁹⁰ Charles Olson, “The K,” in *Archaeologist of Morning* (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1970), unpaginated.

⁶⁹¹ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Bradley and Blodgett, eds., 19; 294.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 336-337.

then it's difficult to speak of that war."⁶⁹³ At the same time, news outlets, the media "wear you out with it, the tedium factor gets so heavy that you're willing to release that kind of attention to the care of others."⁶⁹⁴ "Tedium" effects passivity—the "release ...of [that] attention to the care of others"; and both are products of an abstract imperial guilt, seized and exploited by a set of commodities (and conversations) disguised as atonement solutions for the imperial citizen—the "Civil Rights cocktail," Dorn writes, and "Vietnam the inflexible entree."⁶⁹⁵ These agglomerations proliferate and magnify the "crisis" of exile, as both excess and absence. A flurry of consumption insulated the American household in the 1960s, a decade that saw a 30 percent surge in energy use in the family home.⁶⁹⁶ By the early 1970s, while 95 percent of American families had a television set, and "30 per cent more than one car," there were close to 14 million people "receiving welfare payments."⁶⁹⁷ "Now we've simply got too much," Dorn told an interviewer in 1978,

our habits are showing to all the world, and they're bad habits, and they're gargantuan habits. And to a certain extent we're being fed like junkies, and also being manipulated like junkies. We're in a very dangerous situation. ...[and] the people are the system itself. Until they admit this and face this and come clean, they're gonna have the habit. I don't think you can blame the government for that. I don't think you can blame anything for that. No ... *we're it*.⁶⁹⁸

This statement complicates the concept of *resistance* in Dorn's work and at the same time underlines and clarifies a startling omission in his oeuvre as an "outlaw" poet. *Gunslinger* overtly avoids the Vietnam War, and Dorn's catalogue post-1967 is curiously absent pieces that could be traditionally, or even satisfactorily labeled as antiwar. Dorn perhaps overstates the degree to which his seemingly topical works function on an archetypal level: "Actually, I'm not very political. I probably have more sympathy to the Left, but the Left is pretty ridiculous most of the time. There is no satisfaction in any of these positions. My interest in politics derives from how it reveals human hypocrisy and self-interest."⁶⁹⁹ This fact sets Dorn apart from a number of his contemporaries in the late '60s and early '70s, including Ed Sanders, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, and Robert Bly. In fact, the poem

⁶⁹³ Edward Dorn, interview by Ian Sinclair, *Ed Dorn Live*, 163.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶⁹⁵ Dorn, *The Collected Poems*, 218.

⁶⁹⁶ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 46.

⁶⁹⁷ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 100-101.

⁶⁹⁸ Dorn, "The Flint Interview," interview by Tuckett, *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 116.

⁶⁹⁹ Dorn, "A Correction of the Public Mind," interview by Kevin Bezner, *Ed Dorn Live*, 71-72.

Dorn wrote in Lawrence in 1969 for Bly's national draft resisters poetry tour doesn't mention the draft, or the war, at all; it concerns a dog pacing the floor of a bar to find a place to rest. The poem addresses a *resistance* that precedes the draft, precedes politics even; the dog seeks out a particular *locus of experience*, his "own space," in the demands of which political resistance is always already included. This process, the "Cosmology of Finding Your Place" the poem's title names it, among "The *Resistantism* of all other places," requires time and attention. One can't simply "break out" of national "bad habits":

You see, that's the other thing: impatience. That question is a dead giveaway that you *can't* break out of it. Obviously, you have to *grow* out of it. You have to so improve yourself as a body that all those questions disappear. There aren't any *solutions*. But that's again an American habit—you think you can call an agency and say, work this out for me.⁷⁰⁰

So the imperial citizen is left with "tedium" and the "release... of attention to the care of others," on the one hand, and "impatience" with the futility of attempting to "break out," on the other. Tedium produces passivity, which incubates guilt; to "break out" rashly misinterprets the agency, complicity, and occasion of its own actions. In this important sense, the poem that makes a "special attempt to include [the war]," Dorn finds "specious." He discusses the relationship between Vietnam and *Gunslinger*:

I never felt I could write anything about the Vietnam War as such, because I didn't have any experience with it, and at that point I didn't feel I could be theoretical about such a thing. But reading it from inside this country, it came across as a way of thinking about a distant event which was obviously the most pervasive psychological problem the country was undergoing. A lot of that got expressed through drugs. Most of it. Because there wasn't much copy written about it here, otherwise. My Lai was suppressed for six months after Europe had the news.

In terms of form and how one controls a composition of that length, it would have been extremely distracting and damaging to the structure to rest it on anything else, anything other than the most common, known, undeniable exchange going on. ... The people who talked directly at [the war] really dropped their tongues.⁷⁰¹

In *Gunslinger*, war exists as an underlying criterion for the American condition. The war is embedded *within* the work, insofar as the war in Vietnam was multiple, "was a drug war, too.

⁷⁰⁰ Dorn, "The Flint Interview," interview by Tuckett, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 114.

⁷⁰¹ *Interviews*, 94.

... There were, for instance, several impression about the war.”⁷⁰² For example, the Pentagon estimated in 1971, that 30 percent of American soldiers deployed “had experimented with either opium or heroin, and quantities of drugs were also being exported to the United States.”⁷⁰³ Indeed, many critics have assigned a drug to each of *Gunslinger*’s four books—as Marjorie Perloff explains, “the first to marijuana, the second to LSD, the third and fourth to cocaine.”⁷⁰⁴ Even the antiwar poem is dependent, at its root, upon that which it so vehemently rejects. In order to purge oneself of this “tedium” without succumbing to the violence latent in “breaking out,” the *Gunslinger*’s interventions are metaphysical and phenomenological—he stops bullets and shoots “pure information”; he advertises “Purity of the Head,” an alchemical cognizance. Sorting the multiple currents of dialogue, narrative, and “internal migration” in the American West, “I wanted to write a poem about the penetration of the only space anyone has ever run into,” Dorn said of *Gunslinger*, “and that’s multiple. I mean, I don’t believe the lone traveler, except for short distances. But even in the mind of a lone traveler there’s a multitude of dialogue.”⁷⁰⁵ Which brings us back to Whitman: “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then ... I contradict myself.”⁷⁰⁶ After all, “I am large ... I contain multitudes.”⁷⁰⁷ It’s important to recall that Whitman’s dream of unification, of national rebirth, was equally a demand “to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,” and came at a famously violent price.⁷⁰⁸ This Heraclitean tension is the wherewithal of one of Dorn’s notoriously abstruse questions for a literature final at Essex University, where, beginning in the fall of 1965, he taught American poetry and literature of the American West: “[Discuss] what connections are there between Whitman’s poetics and General Westmoreland’s military strategy in Vietnam.”⁷⁰⁹

Dorn discards Whitman’s jingoism, or nationalism, or whatever it is, but shares his affinity for the emboldened speech act, for the primacy of a “poetry that exhibits a certain kind of aggression towards its readers,” and, most of all, shares his understanding of the poet

⁷⁰² Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 93.

⁷⁰³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 440.

⁷⁰⁴ Perloff, introduction to *Gunslinger*, xiii.

⁷⁰⁵ Dorn, “The Poetic Line,” interview by Robert Bertholf, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 61-62.

⁷⁰⁶ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Bradley and Blodgett, eds., 88.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁷⁰⁹ Herbie Butterfield, “Ed(ward Merton) Dorn (1929-1999): A Memoir, an Introduction, an Overview, Some Poems, and a Song,” *The Cento Pages*, n.d.

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_cento_index.html> (5 June 2006).

as “multiple,” and perforce “as much evil as good.”⁷¹⁰ In their particular approaches to these categories, of course, the two poets diverge; whereas, for instance, Whitman walks at your shoulder, looking on—“I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine, / I too walk’d the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the waters around it, / I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me, . . .”—Dorn gets in your face, testing your limits, putting thoughts in your head as words in your mouth that wouldn’t otherwise be there: “The new world was an evil world,” he writes, “it should never have / been discovered”; or: “Leading off with a statement / like ‘I am Jesus Christ,’ / was perhaps a bit strong. / Nevertheless, if Jesus Christ / were to return to Earth, / He’d shoot the Pope.”⁷¹¹ Conversely, while Whitman cries out for war to reconcile the broken Union, Dorn’s pronouncements relentlessly call all union into question, relying heavily on dramatic monologue (which enters around the time of *Gunslinger*, Book I) and its layers of subterfuge and paradox. The work frequently hyper-extends its appropriations to academic, scientific, and political vocabularies, mixing them to suggest a masochist compulsion in its cultural appetite. And in all the major works since *Gunslinger*, Dorn’s multiphasic voice suggests a regurgitated, archetypal rigidity behind the motion of current events, the mandates of the State, and the machinations of the media culture. In Dorn’s case that “certain kind of aggression” towards the reader is part pomp, a seduction from behind the mask of style *as rhetoric* that grants presumption impunity: ““Why is wanting to kill Ronald Reagon / and fuck Jodie Foster / considered insane? / Makes sense to me.””⁷¹² This is a ““found’ abhorrence, . . . from 2nd floor toilet / Hellems, U.C. Boulder.””⁷¹³ It appears in Dorn’s controversial “chronicle of the ‘80s,” *Abhorrences*, and claims as poetry the forbidden, illegal, but nonetheless public desires of a bathroom stall—intensely private and abruptly public. However, this *poem* is “resistant” only to the degree that its content and its simple message are crude and objectionable (i.e. the politicized, prurient, and violent desire of the statement, or the inappropriateness of its occasion and context), which may or may not reflect majority opinion, or, for that matter, the opinion of the writer/messenger, who, after all, was only using the bathroom—and to the degree that *all* writing, “anything

⁷¹⁰ Dorn, “A Correction of the Public Mind,” interview by Bezner, *Ed Dorn Live*, 71.

⁷¹¹ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Bradley and Blodgett, eds., 162; Dorn, *The Collected Poems*, 215; Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 61.

⁷¹² Dorn, *Abhorrences*, 62.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

worth reading,” is automatically, “disobedient, and uncivil.”⁷¹⁴ The limitations of the former claim ignore that the poem is resistant in exactly the same way that it’s entertaining, and funny. And according to the latter, if we limit our definition of “resistance”—for example, to social class, or political orientation (two likely categories brought to bear on Dorn’s work)—we’re threatened with excluding some of his most curious influences, like Howard Hughes, or Aaron Burr, or Daniel Drew. Or worse, we overlook the emphasis on process, on language as material, and the methods for absorbing and handling it in Dorn’s work, and we misread the fundamentally pluralistic and interactive nature of a poem like *Gunslinger*, or a book like *Abhorrences*. To Dorn, courter of paradox, *Abhorrences* is “an act of love, actually.”⁷¹⁵ Love for what the book wants, and what the book takes; love in the close attention to the book’s making—a decade dedicated to the daily, civic ritual of topical writing (prompted by the t.v., the newspaper, the grocery store, etc.)—a love for citizenship, a love in ruins: “I mean I took America that seriously. I never had done that before. . . . But I felt that was the corrective for the abysm of greed. I mean, the eighties, there’s no question about it, were the moral nadir. The unrelenting dryness and stiffness of the moral rigidity of *Abhorrences* was meant to counteract the abandonment to banality that the decade, actually twelve years, represents.”⁷¹⁶ That’s another way of containing multitudes, of refashioning America through a process of rewriting it.

Dorn shares Whitman’s role as a gatherer. He famously described *Gunslinger* as “a pageant of its time,” and on a number of occasions iterates the found nature of its material: “I mean, most of those characters were just there, and they were just like people that you were traveling with anyway. The trip has always been a kind of basic thing. But the characters and their habits, that’s a kind of sociology, too, sort of trying to record for anybody who’s interested.”⁷¹⁷ Although this kind of quasi-collage, quasi-historical work can become almost incoherent (for example, Dorn’s 1971 Athanor chapbook, *Spectrum Breakdown*), it also creates poems remunerative to historical exegeses.⁷¹⁸ Additionally, Dorn’s methods of gathering, or collage, with their frequent emphasis on the quotidian, and their total

⁷¹⁴ Dorn, “Notes More of Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” *Kulchur*, 7 (Autumn 1962), 8.

⁷¹⁵ Dorn, “Waying the West,” interview by Cooperman, et al., *Ed Dorn Live*, 93.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷¹⁷ Dorn, interview by Wright, *Chicago Review*, 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004), 204.

⁷¹⁸ Here’s the opening poem of *Spectrum Breakdown*: “MULTIPLECHOICE / CHECKTHREE CHECKTHREE / Wm Burroughs is the Greatest / 1) Pederast since Socrates / 2) Thinker since Empedocles / 3) Director since Von Stroheim, / if you please”; and see James Elmborg’s recent study, *“A Pageant of Its Time”: Ed Dorn’s Gunslinger and the Sixties*.

dependence on mass media, underline another decisive shortcoming in framing Dorn's work and biography in terms of *resistance*.

From Pocatello, in early 1965, Dorn described popular opposition to the Vietnam War as "that weak unformed 'against' that set in shortly after the revolution."⁷¹⁹ In a 1990 interview with John Wright, Dorn explains the iconic upheaval of the '60s in terms of false starts, and smothered and abandoned initiatives:

...when people say, "the sixties," the ones who know what they're talking about may *mean* '65 to '75, but too often people get literal about the decade and include '60 to '65, which was a whole different ballgame. It was very serious, and it was very political, and it looked like something was going to happen. That was the first consciousness of Vietnam, in a national sense. And an alarm. ... After that, people were slouching toward relevancy—and God only knows they should never have reached it, but I'm not sure they did. And dope was the cover story, but quite frankly, that wasn't really it. It was really the rebellion of the masses, to hark back to Ortega.⁷²⁰

The space of more than twenty years must have unnoticeably organized Dorn's own sense of the '60s, in perhaps the same way the distance between England and the West "freed up" the terms of his poetics for *Gunslinger*, a poem whose origin he describes as "portable," as contingent upon exile—"...it started off with the kind of distance I got on the subject and my feelings for the West, and all the times I had been transported back and forth across it, I had that out there as one big vision."⁷²¹ Dorn seems to have found the distinction between the early '60s—"serious" and "political"—and the later '60s—"slouching toward relevancy"—particularly illuminating. In a 1991 interview, he repeats the point; however, reordering the narcissistic "relevancy" toward which the hopeful radicalism of the early '60s was contented to slouch, he remembers a "smart and hip," magnanimous profusion of love:

1960-65 was like the other side of the moon from 1965-70. I liked the early '60s. ... The Blacks were burning everything down, the whole population as far as I could tell was on amphetamine. People would say, "Love? What are you talking about? What's that supposed to do for you? Because I know what you mean by that, what are you talking about? Things are more serious than that, surely." Then suddenly that half-decade died, and everything was love, and the branches started sprouting green

⁷¹⁹ Dorn to Clark, n.d. (1965), MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

⁷²⁰ Dorn, interview by Wright, *Chicago Review*, 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004), 212.

⁷²¹ Dorn, "From Imperial Chicago," interview by Mihopoulos, *Ed Dorn Live*, 66.

twigs and everybody said, “Isn’t it great?” The world was full of walking twinkles and crazy people and abandon, and it was altogether different. And pretty smart and hip.⁷²²

No surprise the turbulent hostility of the early ‘60s attracted Dorn, but he seems equally inspired by the popular comforts of a “slouching” revolution. In further discussion of the dislocation of the decade, he emphasizes the paradoxical character of ‘60s radicalism, of “student rebellions,” for example:

One of the things that was so special about the late 60’s was that those were boom times. Everybody was employed; there was a lot for everybody. . . . Everybody knows about the student rebellions and the beginning of ecology (which was, of course, not true, anyway), but one of the most important things, less talked about, was the economic conditions of that period which made all that possible. You can’t just abandon everything unless things are pretty cushy, basically.⁷²³

Out of this imaginably “cushy” space, this “theatre of impatience” (that same “impatience” that fosters the urge to “break out”) wound the vivid processional of *Gunslinger*’s “pageant”: “...I just dumped into it what I thought was going on during the time that I was writing it, ... When I look at that poem now, I don’t see anything but an empiricism of the language that I was hearing around me.”⁷²⁴ Dorn describes this process in terms of *fashioning* rhetoric (“...how to fashion language is what I get out of various rhetorical practices in the past”)—rhetoric meant not to deceive but to act on its own, and to attack its own expectations and slippages.

“By that time,” Dorn said of the initiation of *Gunslinger*—which immediately followed his series of poems from England, *The North Atlantic Turbine*—“I had become very convinced that the direct onslaught in that sober sense of the political poem was not only very boring but completely valueless.”⁷²⁵ Tom Clark cogently observes this shift as providing the opportunity, simply, “to make things up,” something Dorn’s earlier, somber lyricism didn’t

⁷²² Edward Dorn, interview by Effie Mihopoulos, *The Cento Pages*, n.d. <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_cento_index.html> (5 June 2006). In compiling these footnotes, I discovered the considerable and arbitrary liberties that Joe Richey’s volume, *Ed Dorn Live*, takes in editing Mihopoulos’ interview with Dorn, altering the wording of questions and deleting entire sections of Dorn’s responses—surprisingly, Richey makes no mention of any of these changes.

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 26.

allow.⁷²⁶ In this way, a vivifying and transformative space opened for his work, a “landscape of the imagination,” free, Dorn said, of the, “very dogmatic and insistent, adamant, concerned ... kind of responsibility to say how you feel about things.”⁷²⁷ Asked if this development emphasized language over geography, Dorn told Barry Alpert, “I think I can include [language] now or I am included by it now. I think I was locked out of a certain kind of expression that I didn’t have any access to then, and that’s where this inconsistency and this tone comes, this straining for it. You know for me, all my books, all my work, has been absolutely essential to now.”⁷²⁸

Dorn labeled this new domain “intensity.” Already in the jacket of *The North Atlantic Turbine* he categorized that book as “the last necessity to work out such locations,” geographical ones, that is, as his earlier volumes—*Hands Up!*, *Idaho Out*, and *Geography*—had done.⁷²⁹ But like the sinking island that propelled it, *The North Atlantic Turbine* is set apart from the total continuum of Dorn’s career. He told Barry Alpert in 1972:

I think it was already an apology in front for what was in a sense an over-reached book, *The North Atlantic Turbine*. It’s like an alien’s take and it’s the most uncomfortable of my work to me. ... My dissatisfactions are so unfocused. It’s vague and there’s a harping note in that book because it’s vague and unfocused. ... There’s a lot in it, but it’s mainly the absolutely mistaken take on English criticism that I let myself in for.⁷³⁰

Dorn was well-known late in his career for disavowing its earlier products, but his particular unease with the *Turbine* book attests to the whittled precision of his “centrality,” the specific transformative ritual of ego, through the poem, into *locus of experience*—not merely “forsaking Will and Ego, first, [to] become a window through which things, a channel, etc.”⁷³¹ Like the Shoshone youths Dorn met in Idaho, to whom “death is simply an other occurrence, like any other occurrence that might happen on this *string* we call our lives. ...

⁷²⁶ Clark, *World of Difference*, 24.

⁷²⁷ Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 19.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷²⁹ Edward Dorn, Fulcrum Press promotional pamphlet for *The North Atlantic Turbine*, Box 2, Dorn correspondence, Joel Oppenheimer Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁷³⁰ Dorn, interview with Alpert, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 24.

⁷³¹ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 39; and see, “Waying the West,” interview by Cooperman, *Ed Dorn Live*, 98: “I have a hard time with the so-called “early work” because to me it’s so very angry. I suppose what I lacked then was somebody tapping me on the shoulder and saying, ‘Hey, give it a break.’ ... [I]t sometimes strikes me as being a little overexercised. A certain increase, say in cruelty, would’ve given it a sharper, more focused, more luminous effect.”

And they very much want to test this all the time,” living overseas tested Dorn’s *locus*, his sense of “Americanness.”⁷³² “When I was in England the distance in perspective made me realize that I was a western poet. I mean a poet of the West—not by nativity but by orientation. It sounds pretentious to say that you can feel it, but I could feel that geography. I was impelled westward.”⁷³³ That feeling has imperial roots in the 15th and 16th centuries with travelers like Cabeza de Vaca, or Diego de Landa, but the increasing potency of Dorn’s internal, “westward” drive, for which England was catalyst, extended beyond a refreshed geographical awareness, or a longing for landforms. Just as the journey grew spiritual for Cabeza de Vaca and Diego de Landa, Dorn sought, in his own words, “to explore the mythification of the Gunslinger”—a character introduced by “An Idle Visitation,” the last piece of *The North Atlantic Turbine*.⁷³⁴ The Gunslinger’s mysterious arrival announces a turn in Dorn’s work away from the “direct onslaught of the political poem,” toward what he labeled a “spiritual address”: “I don’t feel that possibility as a ‘mellowing’ but more a transfer from an energy factor of my practice to an altogether direct plane of intensity I hope to find my place on. That non-spacial dimension, intensity, is one of the few singular things which interests me now.”⁷³⁵

Therefore, to locate Dorn’s “integrity” as a poet in a concept of *resistance*, as Wesling and so many others have done, presents too inflexible an interpretive lens, one that misinterprets Dorn’s role as gatherer, and overemphasizes a single instant in the poem’s fusion—that point at which, according to Olson, what’s “flowing-in, inside” is acted back upon by that “inner mechanism,” the “SOUL, the intermediary, the intervening thing, the interruptor, the resistor.”⁷³⁶ That resistance is half the story, but taken by itself ignores the importance of what’s “flowing-in,” and corners the poem in an internal enclosure. Indeed, “resist” derives from the Latin “sistere,” which translates, “to stop,” a reduplication of the verb “stare,” meaning “to stand.” *Resistance* posits a fixed and static relationship to the forces it opposes. It’s this emphasis on immobility, and impermeability, that undermines the capacity of *resistance* to function as a specific, flexible, and continuous category of analysis for Dorn’s work.

⁷³² Dorn, “The Poet, the People, the Spirit,” in *Views*, 107.

⁷³³ Dorn, interview by Okada, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 41-42.

⁷³⁴ Dorn, Fulcrum Press promotional pamphlet for *The North Atlantic Turbine*, Box 2, Dorn corres., Joel Oppenheimer Papers, Dodd MSS.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁶ Olson, “Proprioception,” in *Collected Prose*, 182.

“We have had race / and color and oppression/oppressor / shoved up our asses so long”—Dorn writes in “Of the ‘English Colonies,’” “Part VI” of the long poem, “Oxford”—that “we don’t even see that, *even poets* / are no longer in communication.”⁷³⁷ In 1961, when LeRoi Jones criticized Dorn’s poem “An Address for the First Woman to Face Death in Havana” as “an abstract ‘dis’ of the revolution,” and accused Dorn himself of a “long asceticism”—“That’s what the west is, ain’t it? Asceticism?”—he launched an epistolary argument over the merits of a State system.⁷³⁸ Dorn’s initial response highlights his intense distrust of any hard-boiled allegiance that puts the mandates of a ‘fashionable’ state system before individual human concerns:

Come on, back off. I’m not no fucking counter-anything. I’m as truly gassed as anyone, but much more embarrassed than others, at the poor prospects of fellow poets singing the praises of any thing so venal as a State. ... [The poem] wasn’t written “against” anything, and ascetic (was that aesthetics) aside, you out to know the very word Batista makes me puke. The modern state, revolutionary or not, is run like a Graumans chinese opening. Everybody has some scene, a trademark, like a beard, or a fat stomach and bald head, or a wig-type haircut, with big white teeth sticking out of the middle of the smile. Piss on it. The only point I ever had is that when a picture, namely of Mrs. Herrera, marcos, is printed, showing her puckered up babyface tears, brought forth by the lunatic braggart announcement of her death, it is a matter of *public shame*. *Sides* are a bigassed drag. The biggest small-talk of all, like which one are you on? ... Whatever the Cuban people are doing, god blesses them, and for however long they can make it. A statement in a poem such as I sent you is highly accidental, in the same way junk gathering sculpture is, and gratifying accidents are a really bigger part of the West than that asceticism you mention. If I had seen a picture of a Pro-Castro victim of the same system of organized horseshit, approximately the same thing wld have come out. ... When I hear Cuba si, USA no, I think—fuck both of ‘em. They agree with each other so much. USA has a bigger paw on the rope, that’s all.⁷³⁹

But writing from England, this time *of* LeRoi Jones, Dorn points to the doctrines of exceptionalism and enterprising individualism that rule the American way, and codify its artists: “That Leroi Jones, a mesaba of intelligence, is an exile in his own country is

⁷³⁷ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 214.

⁷³⁸ LeRoi Jones to Edward Dorn, 6 October 1961, in *Chicago Review*, 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004), 53-55.

⁷³⁹ Dorn to Jones, 10 October 1961, in *Chicago Review*, 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004), 55-57.

interesting: a country which prides itself on its resources and vehemently forgets the fantastic shadowed face of Exploitation stares back from the window of the rear coach, clickety-clack, all the way back. Everybody out! Man those tanks in Watts, cordon off those streets!”⁷⁴⁰

To the end of his life, Dorn continued to evade and ward off the nagging constraints of a conceptual system that narrows and bifurcates the range of thought and the modes of communication available to its users. A cultural body structured like the parallel railways it travels: “The scream of the Accomplished Present / A conglomerate of Ends, The scream of Parallels / All tied down with spikes These are the spines / Of the cold citizens made to run wheels upon / Parallels are just two things / going to the same place that’s a bore...”—a cultural body that rejects “as foreign, as not us” those discourses outside of what’s categorically, or financially certain: “You talk of color? / Oh cosmological america, how well / and with what geometry / you teach your citizens,” Dorn writes in “The Sundering U.P. Tracks.”⁷⁴¹ In the following quote from an interview late in his life, Dorn’s exasperation with divisive and confining systems of thought becomes difficult to separate from the sincerity of his egalitarian vision—to imagine that Snoop Doggy Dogg “amuses [Dorn] a lot, ...but I don’t know how great it is,” is not so difficult—nonetheless:

It’s not that I’m against violence or even against misogyny in music or anything, actually. I’m not against anything. In fact, I’m against being against anything, if I’m against anything. ... I don’t think, generally speaking, that anybody in America, anybody, is owed anything. And when you get forms based on implied debt, I think that’s whistling up a stump as far as I’m concerned. We’re all sinners and we’ve all done wrong and we all came from somewhere else, including everybody.⁷⁴²

Although dissent might spring from compassion’s root sentiment, its connotations and entailments are radically discrepant, and they evoke an opposite orientational metaphor: whereas compassion moves *with*, dissent and resistance move *against*.⁷⁴³ But “dissent” comes from the Latin *dissentire*, strictly, “to differ in sentiment,” and is without hierarchical

⁷⁴⁰ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 92.

⁷⁴¹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 97; Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 232.

⁷⁴² Edward Dorn, “Through the Rearview Mirror,” interview by Paul Dresman, *Ed Dorn Live*, 151-152.

⁷⁴³ Note here the interesting etymology of “toward”—“to” + “-ward.” The latter a suffix from the Germanic into OE, meaning “turn” and entirely unrelated to “ward,” as in “ward off,” or “guard,” which, of course, seems to mean the opposite of “toward,” as “in the direction of, etc.” “To turn to,” then, *toward*, that is, to put oneself in the direction of, presumes a mobile center that does not move to or against any stable condition, but rather turns with respect to a multiplicity of laws and forces. (*New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “toward.”)

politics.⁷⁴⁴ The dissenter, like the “heretic”—one who is, literally, “able to choose”—is traditionally framed *against*, in *resistance*, known first for his defiance and offence to established orders, and only afterward (if at all), for the inviolable sense of justice that propels his action. “The heretic ... gets flayed because the heretic believes more than anybody else,” Dorn told a group of friends in an interview shortly before his death, around the time he wrote “Tribe.”⁷⁴⁵ That poem’s final lines repeal their closure by referencing a sea of work always to come—an emergent body whose lines, at the same time, are pre-scribed. The heretic’s enduring ability “to choose” among his “exile,” like the poet’s task to order language *out of exile*—to restore its potency, dignity, and beauty—is inescapable, ongoing: “...it would take more paper / Than I’ll ever have to express how justified I feel.” The dissenter’s locus preserves belief, and the battleground over which he announces and defends his compassions is not *in resistance*, but is *in exile*, “the exile that *is*.” Must we force a poetry that confounds genre and explores divergent, ambiguous possibilities of form, into the narrow, paranoid, and truculent ideological domain of *resistance*? Is it not, after all, the particular set of our sociopolitical customs, those powers “we’ve grown used to,” that is merely *one set* in an infinite series of potentialities? And in that fundamental sense, doesn’t *resistance* get “How It Is” altogether backward, just before it obliterates the critical distinctions it intends to draw? To resist an order that itself resists compassion—what kind of *resistance* is that? Or is the whole world a “Literate Projector,” a query the Gunslinger himself advances, upon seeing it (the Projector, not the world): “is all the world a cinema then?”⁷⁴⁶ The word before the act, the text behind the real? But the world was *already* a cinema: “Imagine a world,” Brakhage pleads in *Metaphors on Vision*, “before the ‘beginning was the word.’”⁷⁴⁷ In this battle over perception, here, “*at the very beginning of logic*,” where the Gunslinger informs us we are, isolated in each our heads, best to speak of multiphasic *relations* and *migrations* of things, or the semantic lapses tempered by homonym:

Like as the waves make toward the Pebbled shore
 Quoth the Slinger
 What were you doing on December 7th?

⁷⁴⁴ “To differ” is *multi-directional*, actually—“differ,” from the French, *differer*, meaning, “differ, defer,” and originally from the Latin, *differre*, *dis* + *ferre*, meaning, respectively, “from, away,” and “bring, carry.” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “difference.”)

⁷⁴⁵ Dorn, “Waying the West,” interview by Cooperman, et al., *Ed Dorn Live*, 101.

⁷⁴⁶ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 76.

⁷⁴⁷ Brakhage, introduction to *Metaphors on Vision*, in *Blue Grass*, (1962), 29.

I wasn't born then.

Nevertheless we must witness this phenomenon
We must have a *Littoral* instance.

I didn't know you had a drawl, Slinger

I don't, I slow up at noon
from the inertia of National Lunch
and from the scatteredness
of the apexed sun which attempts
at that point to enter a paradox—
namely, The West which is The East.

You say the Sun moves!?

Not exactly. Yet when I say what I say,
The Earth Turns.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 79-80.

I think you have to devote yourself completely to the form of speech you're using, if you're writing a book. All the time. Not only in the writing, but you have to think like that, you address other people like that, you try out your ideas for the book on people in ordinary conversation. In other words, I find that I'm always road-testing the language for a particular form of speech.

—Edward Dorn⁷⁴⁹

10. Can This Really Be the End?

While Dorn was at Essex, the Vietnam War, the international demonstrations against it, and the racial unrest in the U.S. exacerbated his inveterate sense of exile, of homelessness, already heightened by living overseas: “I don’t want to be a fucking ‘hated’ american in Europe, for christ sake don’t you realize I’ve been a hated american in america nearly all my life as it is,” he’d written on the eve of his first transatlantic voyage in 1965, to British poet and friend, Tom Raworth.⁷⁵⁰ A year later, his Fulbright renewed, Dorn’s discomfort with living overseas was mixed with relief at being away from the American context: “one has far less time in this part of the world,” Dorn wrote to Herbie Butterfield, in New York, “but England is a wild place to be and we both love the whole idea of being out of the USA, but at times want to return, you know.”⁷⁵¹ Later that summer, however, in disbelief over the violence against and among such black nationalist groups as the newly formed Black Panther Party, or Ron Karenga’s United Slaves, and the brutality and corruption of the Chicago Police department, Dorn wrote to publisher and friend, Henry Rago, in August 1966: “I hope if you have been in Chicago this summer it hasn’t been too unpleasant. The news from there, at this distance, sounds unreal.”⁷⁵²

During Dorn’s three year stay in England—from 1965 to 1968—the Joint Chiefs of Staff expanded the American presence in Vietnam by two-hundred thousand troops, bringing the total to half a million in early 1968, when the communist Tet Offensive shocked and destabilized American military command.⁷⁵³ Between 1966 and 1967 alone, fifteen thousand

⁷⁴⁹ Edward Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 106.

⁷⁵⁰ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 20 August 1965, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.. In *A World of Difference*, Clark quotes a letter from Dorn to Olson discussing the oscillations of his feelings while crossing the Atlantic: “...for some reason the whole thing welled up in me and I started asking abstract questions like do I really want to go to England, do I want to be here on this ship.”(12)

⁷⁵¹ Edward Dorn to Herbie Butterfield, 1 July 1966, Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss..

⁷⁵² Edward Dorn to Henry Rago, 22 August 1966, Henry Rago Papers, Poetry Mss., The Lilly Library, Indiana University.

⁷⁵³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 480-481; 498.

Americans died in battle, and a 1966 war budget set at \$2 billion climbed to \$8 billion, and by the end of 1968, to \$21 billion.⁷⁵⁴ “Revolution was in there air,” Dorn recalled of Colchester’s political/historical *locus* that year, playfully referencing Tacitus’ account of an insurgency, roughly two thousand years before (A.D. 60 or 61), of the Iceni people from Norfolk (in Eastern Britain), who, led by Queen Boadicea, rebelled against the colonizing Roman Empire, sacking the town and decimating a temple to the former emperor Claudius.⁷⁵⁵ When revolution erupted around the world in 1968—the Prague Spring, the Night of the Barricades, the Democratic National Convention, the massacre in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City—the students at Essex followed suit, occupying their university, a *la If*.⁷⁵⁶ Across the Atlantic, the “freaks” in Lawrence—of which there were hundreds, simmering over Civil Rights and bedecked in wardrobes of the outlaw West—armed themselves and grew drugs.

Having accepted, in January 1967, KU’s invitation for a three-week position as poet-in-residence for the spring 1968 (“I would be delighted indeed...”)—a position previously held by Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, and Robert Bly—Dorn was offered, in December 1967, on the eve of his first visit, a visiting lectureship for the full spring semester of 1969. In a letter of January 3, 1968 to George Worth, English Chair at KU, Dorn tempers the strain and exhaustion of living abroad with a dry and formal wit:

I will have been here 3 years come this summer and feel more and more in that sense out of touch with my homeland. And now, this winter I suspect I don’t want to return to England for a long time, say seventy-five years. . . . As I think I mentioned in an earlier note to you Eastern Kansas holds several interests which are central to my own concerns now. Can I thank you then for your idea and say, yes, very much, let’s do think about it.⁷⁵⁷

Here Dorn stretches humor into a professionalism that manages to conceal much deeper distress. In a very different letter to Charles Olson later that month, emotional and occupational strains fracture Dorn’s candor; the radical displacement of England, it turned out, was infecting everything. While abroad, the most “closely tied” and intimate

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 487; 5512.

⁷⁵⁵ Edward Dorn, “Poetry Is a Difficult Labor,” in *Ed Dorn Live*, 125.

⁷⁵⁶ That is, Lindsay Anderson’s 1969, Memorial Enterprises film, starring Malcolm McDowell in his first screen role.

⁷⁵⁷ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 3 January 1967, University Archives, Spencer Mss.. Dorn misdates this letter “Jan 3, 1967.”

relationships of Dorn's life first frayed, then unraveled. He struggled to break the big news to Olson:

the reason I have not written anyway... I suppose there is no reason not to mention it to you certainly, although I have spoken to Harvey [Brown] because I had to borrow some bread from him – It is difficult to speak of it in any sense because it doesn't seem easily to lend itself to believable sense – ok – Helene and I have been thru a very difficult 2 months and one result is that I live temporarily in a hotel – until the end of this week simply to make life easier because we had come to such impasses of “talk” that it was all we cld do ... the whole thing is particularly injury prone and painful and unbelievable because we are so damn closely tied – etc. love, etc. – oh wow you know how much I don't have to say to you.⁷⁵⁸

Whatever charms of being abroad, footloose, whatever freshened perspective England had offered was quickly fading with the break-up of Dorn's marriage. Upheaval was a family matter. In early 1968, Dorn and Helene separated, and shortly thereafter, divorced.

A new relationship, however, was rapidly growing. In fact, the reason for divorce was simple: Dorn's affair and developing intimacy with Jennifer Dunbar, a twenty-one-year-old student at Essex University. An aspiring filmmaker and a talented writer, Dunbar was intelligent, confident, and attractive. At the center of a “swinging,” London art scene that included The Beatles and Marianne Faithful (who married her brother), Dunbar embodied “hipness” in a social world that stood in alarming contrast to Dorn's “pioneering” austerity with Helene in Burlington and Pocatello.⁷⁵⁹ Dunbar's was a world of diverse and intriguing connections. Her father, Robert Dunbar, founded the London Film Academy, and was a close friend of Sergei Eisenstein, Carol Reed, and Francois Truffaut—who initially sought to cast Jenny and her identical twin sister, Margaret, as the leading actors in his 1971 film, *Two English Girls*.⁷⁶⁰ On Dunbar's mother's side, the Blagoveschenskaya's, were members of the

⁷⁵⁸ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 24 January 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.. Harvey Brown, who lived in West Newbury, Massachusetts, relatively near to Olson (in Gloucester) in the late '60s, and with whom Dorn and Dunbar would stay upon their arrival to the U.S. in late 1968 (see chapters 18 and 19), was a writer, publisher, and heir to a small fortune, with which he financed Frontier Press, and was extremely generous in supporting struggling friends (see chapter 25).

⁷⁵⁹ George Kimball, interview by author, email correspondence, 8 May 2005; Clark, *A World of Difference*, 37.

⁷⁶⁰ Their father, however, never informed them of Truffaut's request. Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, telephone interview by author, 18 February 2006. Nicholas Johnson, “Obituary: Robert Dunbar,” *The*

White Army, and the former Russian aristocracy.⁷⁶¹ In the late '60s, John Dunbar, her brother, owned a trendy, avant-garde London gallery where he introduced John Lennon to Yoko Ono.⁷⁶² In the light of all this, Dorn's conflicted desires ("my adulterated self")—irresistibly drawn to Dunbar's foreign and alluring world of celebrity and international intrigue—could be mapped, some close friends argue, by his two marriages. Robert Creeley and John Moritz speak of "two Dorn's—one with Helene, one with Jenny," a concept Clark's truncated biography reinforces, and rather unjustly, since the latter Dorn, but for his torturous bout with cancer, isn't really included.⁷⁶³ Creeley's, Clark's, and Moritz's readings are biographically founded, but compel perhaps a certain Manichean interpretation of the work, to which the critical categorizations of James McPherson, and others, adhere. Creeley identified (somewhat insensitively) a strong attraction in Dorn to the world where fame happens, the "world of large populations," which eventually overwhelmed the asceticism he shared with Helene, and drew him toward Jenny:

Recalling Ed and Helene sitting in that immeasurably dank house in Colchester, Helene's back bugging her, them both with ultimate runny noses, feet in tub of concoction of mustard and hot water—I think Ed just said silently, fuck it—I've got to get out! And Jenny with her modest but swinging London connections, the brother and Marriane Faithful, etc.—her tone, hipness, her brightness—wow! Fuck pioneering, man—on to London! Ed reverted to ONE on the instant, not glibly, but truly—he'd been stepfather/father for three very pleasant kids, had done damn well by them, and then it broke—the feeling between him and Helene, who continued for some time to love him and feel confused, but she was not really in that world that he wanted and finally did enter. It was she who was the pioneer—her initial break with her first husband was heroic.⁷⁶⁴

Creeley's backhanded acknowledgement of Helene's heroism sounds derisive (like "that *stay at home army*") when matched with his chauvinistic presumption, as if a marriage were a concept—"wow! Fuck pioneering, man—on to London!"—and fathering a favor—"he'd been stepfather/father for three very pleasant kids, had done damn well by them, and then it broke..." If Helene felt "confused," she handled it with remarkable dignity and strength; and

Independent, 31 May 2000, online at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20000531/ai_n14317469 (18 February 2006).

⁷⁶¹ Johnson, "Obituary: Robert Dunbar," *The Independent*, online.

⁷⁶² Kimball, interview by author.

⁷⁶³ See Clark, *A World of Difference*, 36-38; John Moritz, interview by author, February 22, 2005, Lawrence, Kansas.

⁷⁶⁴ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 36-37.

she was, obviously, saddened, angry, and disappointed at Dorn's behavior. Despite that pain, by the beginning of February 1968, to separate herself from the situation, Helene moved to Barcelona with her three children. Dorn could look toward a much-needed respite in Lawrence that spring, but he would return to find Essex, the university, in the midst of a student coup, its faculty's allegiances divided, and some of his colleagues—if not for his illicit relations with a student, for his traitorous sympathies with the student radicals—turning bitterly against him. So the reversion “to ONE” wasn't as simple as Creeley has it, but the trajectory that interwove the life and work he describes is illuminating.

If the separation with Helene over an affair with a student half his age was the source of moral indignation among some of Dorn's colleagues at Essex, Dorn's and Dunbar's moving in together was an outright scandal. Like the bittersweet freedom-in-uncertainty that hounded his “professional” future, the tensions and precipitous extremes of his romantic situation could be conducive in a creative sense, but took an emotional toll. The dreary, dark and dank English winter evinced all the storminess of Dorn's internal predicaments, when he wrote to Olson, in late January 1968, about the likelihood of his accepting the visiting lecturer position at Kansas, for the spring of 1969. The possibility offered a fresh start, Dorn hoped—what “home” is, “a way back in...”; Lawrence was the lone beacon on a darkling horizon:

So here it is – six months more confinement in this cloudout white sale so called country and then home ... The Kansas thing may also be good for next year as well as those 3 wks and I may just use it as a way back in but other than that what I want is a form of great looseness which may or may not include a university – we'll see – But let's stay close in all that because I want action ...⁷⁶⁵

Two weeks later, on February 7, in another letter to Olson, Dorn's outlook dimmed—prospects seemed increasingly limited. The “form[s] of great looseness” melted into a uniform nothingness in his mind, and the grain history, for instance, that Lawrence shares with Colchester, became a cryptic signifier of the disparaging, isolating vortex in which Dorn feared himself trapped: “I have no idea what can happen—I have to have bread and not in a casual sense—thus far I have only the very probable offer of Kansas for the fall and of course that cld be attractive but it is damn well exile any way you can think of it. I mean Colchester

⁷⁶⁵ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 24 January 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

to K.C. Can this really be the end?”⁷⁶⁶ But his experience in Kansas would surprise Dorn, and would offer new and unexpected directions for his life with Dunbar, and for his work’s success.

⁷⁶⁶ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 7 February 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers. Dodd Mss.

*What use are these people's wits,
who let themselves be led
by speechmakers, in crowds,
without considering
how many fools and thieves
they are among, and how few
choose the good?
The best choose progress
toward one thing, a name
forever honored by the gods,
while others eat their way
toward sleep like nameless oxen.*

– Heraclitus⁷⁶⁷

11. Home Away from Home Away from Home

In the cover statement for *The North Atlantic Turbine*, Dorn's 1967 collection of poems written in England, he describes his experience as an American writer living abroad in a time of war:

The Rythm (sic) of the search is without variation more interesting than what opinion one might form, those boring differences between peoples and lives called countries, or more threateningly, frontiers. Off shore I have missed my country for the first time ... and thanks to an increase of bad news, I mean in spite of, have learned to see it as no more culpable, when *The Times* is sifted, than that other conglomerate which makes the hemisphere I now find my home.⁷⁶⁸

In a 1966 issue of *The London Illustrated News*, Dorn restates his point, never mentioning England directly, yet emphasizing his refusal, in light of Britain's wealth of imperial experience, to "defend American ways or react to criticism" of American foreign policy:

I shall take back from this country a kind of expanded consciousness. Certain responses, Americanisms, come out pretty strong over here. There is very little I can do with my Americanness, I haven't tried to diminish or increase it. ... I don't have to defend American ways or react to criticism of my country because I would find myself so far ahead of its critics in finding things to attack it for.⁷⁶⁹

This dismissal's nonchalance, however, belies a great deal of complexity and friction that hounded Dorn's experience abroad. While certain terrestrial glimpses of 'home' in England

⁷⁶⁷ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Haxton, 75.

⁷⁶⁸ Edward Dorn, Fulcrum Press promotional pamphlet, Folder Dorn Correspondence, Joel Oppenheimer Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁷⁶⁹ "The Cis-Atlantic Americans," *The Illustrated London News*, 6 August 1966, MS 55A: Db, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Spencer Mss.

were placating—“Comforted by Limestone,” he titles “Part III” of “Oxford”—Dorn’s inveterate sense of himself as a “stranger” transformed Essex, and that “detached / fragment of [Europe]” into an extraterrestrial experience:

I am a stranger on this continent
and more a stranger on this detached
fragment of it.
The Aubrey holes sunk into this land
seem, by their art,
to me, as throbbing
in their intimacy

as the lunar intimacies
they signify, or the dropped H
and glottic T
as suspended in time. To love
that, and retain an ear for
the atrocities of my own hemisphere⁷⁷⁰

And as “atrocities” and imperial cruelties increasingly defined his home continent through the late ‘60s, European and especially English criticism of America created a doubled sense of uprootedness in Dorn—nurturing a rejection of sui generis, national imperialisms, and at the same time, unveiling an ironic possessiveness of troubles he felt uniquely American.

“Part IV” of the eponymous poem, “The North Atlantic Turbine,” etches an “Americanness” apart from the recycled “ignorances” of the British imperial palette:

What they do in Freeborn County Minnesota is *more* my business.
I grew up with death. I do not
need to be reminded of anything
by Europe, least of all do the easy
corrections
of England
instruct me—
we share orogeny...⁷⁷¹

...and there, at “orogeny,” i.e. a long time ago, the “commonness” ends. England went one way, toward the sublimation of affect, the way of finesse—“Manner is what the English have had, and what they have largely become...”—and the resignation of imperial dominance

⁷⁷⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 200.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

inaugurated a period of obsessive, and suffocating self-scrutiny.⁷⁷² America, meanwhile, went another, plunging into the aggressive, propagandistic, don't-look-back expansiveness an adolescent empire demands:

The big question, as regards the two nationalities, seems to me, whether one grew up in an expanding situation or a contracting one. ... In this country it's always been "The Future as a Moving Target." And history has been, if not embarrassment, something that people are widely and notoriously misinformed on. Like religion and politics. But in England there's a profound concentration on the minutiae of their own history, which is lengthy. It's like one of the National Objects.⁷⁷³

Dorn, like George Bernard Shaw, sees England and America as two countries "separated by the same language." Dorn notes:

Detail is for instance death to the American tongue which counts very large numbers, whether they work or not. Americans handle all that social detail in "talk" right where it is and never move it. ... In America everything has to at least seem important. The English can talk for hours without the slightest intention of saying anything at all, and in fact if a frontal attack of a final nature is made there is embarrassment all around.⁷⁷⁴

There's an edge to Dorn's tone, but it's difficult to organize. While violence and amnesia characterize the American empire's "expansion," the fading but intractable British one remains insolent, humorless:

World War II was *not* ended
in Europe because you failed
to take up the language
—not *the* language
oh you still have *that*, you
are stuck with that, that's
all you have,
because you so desired
to be the English Race
you so much wanted the courses
to come in their proper order
"where's the fish" you said
you were so impatient
and now

⁷⁷² Ed Dorn, "On Tom Raworth," in *Vort* 1 (Fall 1972), Department of Special Collections, Spencer Mss, 57.

⁷⁷³ Dorn, "Roadtesting the Language," interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews* 95.

⁷⁷⁴ Dorn, "On Tom Raworth," in *Vort*, no. 1, 57.

all you have is a few people you consider
 problems anyway who won't even bother to speak
 your language
 and all they want to do is beat
 your unemployment schemes, the best
 of them have gone off
 to Katmandu, the best of them
 aren't even interested...⁷⁷⁵

In this passage, Stein's son-dragging-his-father-further-than-his-father-dragged-his-father-through-the-garden-of-literature metaphor seems more and more appropriate for Dorn's relationship with England, on and off the page. Of course, we might append to Shaw's distinction that the "separate[ness]" of the two empires is rather *partial*, that many of their troubled interests are shared, or traded, or *bequeathed*—as was much of the Middle and the Far East, after World War II, swept up by the macerating North Atlantic "turbine," wherein "[t]rade revolved and revolves / [but] it remains the turbine / the atlantic turgidity / defines still our small era."⁷⁷⁶ And *all* our eras: "You could see / how it operated in antediluvian Florence / ... / Ghiberti's doors are the doors / to the biggest bank, and bank doors / may be 'the gate to paradise / ... those doors / would fit the Chase Manhattan as well)."⁷⁷⁷ When salvation is measured by equity—something that particularly irks Dorn, the Protestant—the "turbine" "defines still" our *before*, and our *beyond*:

"... we have had to put up with used shit
 from the beginning. I was presented
 with a 'dull idea' *before*
 I was given a nipple. That 'idea'
 was 'life on earth' which
 wrapped in all that could be easily
 and hurriedly grabbed was supposed
 to appeal to me. It didn't. Was
 an automobile supposed to be
 my Royal car to heaven?"⁷⁷⁸

Embodying the record of this wicked inheritance, *The North Atlantic Turbine*, as a book, defines the geographical network upon which the commercial ambitions of church and State merge and recombine, superceding their own legal and moral bounds—from the Romans, through the imperially exported banking innovations of Medici-ruled Florence,

⁷⁷⁵ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 210-211.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

through the transatlantic trade in “[m]olasses or molasses skinned persons,” to Cold War factionalism and complicity born of multinational production—all this churning at the overwhelming sacrifice of “the people of the world.”⁷⁷⁹ The “turbine’s” monotonous revolutions recall the imprisoning motions of “the cogs that turn this machine,” from “The Pronouncement,” to ensure “not a damn / thing / ever changes.”⁷⁸⁰ Early in the book, Dorn exclaims the “turbine”:

This is no rose
 this is the turbine. Continents
 break before it
 they pull apart to allow
 the pass—it takes only
 a few million years
 to produce any given Cleveland
 Violence is the last chipping
 away
 the ice falls
 the bulk bobs up
 it isn’t race or nation governs
 movement

Movement
 occurs at the split
 displacement is a sign
 We are told the signs
 are men. Men rot.
 Trade revolved and revolves
 it remains the turbine
 the atlantic turgidity
 defines still our small era
 that’s the exploitation people
 mean
 when they say they
 hear a symphony.⁷⁸¹

Characteristic is the careful assessment of long and short-range movement, from local to galactic (“The Aubrey holes sunk into this land / seem, by their art, / to me, as throbbing / in their intimacy / as the lunar intimacies / they signify”), takes shape within the spiritual matrix of geography and human endeavor.⁷⁸² The landscape’s conductivity of a turbulent energy

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 186.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 186-187.

⁷⁸² Ibid., 200.

(“Movement / occurs at the split”) charges historical events otherwise disparate in chronology with behavioral congruence—the slow deterioration of deep, epochal, glacial time, writhes in the fierce uproar of the contemporaneous. During the same time period (1965 through 1966) in which Civil Rights legislation reached its peak intensity, urban riots (frequently spawned by police shootings of unarmed blacks) exploded around the country: New York, Jersey City, Rochester, Chicago, Philadelphia, Jacksonville, Newark.⁷⁸³ Dorn translates the “chipping away” at Cleveland that started 12,000 years ago, when glacial retreat gouged the horseshoe trough of the Cuyahoga river, into a recurring geo-time “Violence” made manifest in July 1966. Over five days of that month two-hundred and forty fires burned during the Hough riots, leaving four dead, thirty critically injured, and over two-hundred and fifty arrested.⁷⁸⁴ Meanwhile, in November 1965, “I Hear a Symphony,” a hit single by Detroit-based Motown group, The Supremes’ (to which Dorn alludes at the end of the passage), scaled the pop charts in the U.S. and Britain. In the foreboding shadow of the Cuban Missile Crisis (in October three years earlier), maybe Dorn heard an eerie allegory in the song’s chorus, a doomsday pun in the unsettling attraction of “arms”: “Whenever you’re near / I hear a symphony / A tender melody / Pulling me closer / Closer to your arms.”⁷⁸⁵ An association echoed in polysemy’s latent militarism (another “foreigner” taken into the mouth) that infiltrates Dorn’s *Twenty-four Love Songs*, from 1969:

Inside the late nights of last week
 under the cover of our selves
 ...
 you were in some alarm
 of your dream
some tableau
 an assembling of signs
 from your troubled day glows
 and trembles, your limbs
 ...
 gather and extend their flesh
 along mine
 and this I surround, all this
 I had my arms around.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸³ Zinn, *Postwar America*, 131; Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Viking, 2001), 300-303.

⁷⁸⁴ Zinn, *Postwar America*, 131-132.

⁷⁸⁵ The Supremes, *The Ultimate Collection*, Motown compact disc. I am indebted Jeff Bergfalk for provocative point, which he made regarding Otis Redding’s “These Arms of Mine,” which

⁷⁸⁶ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 236.

Dorn's transient residence, however, that "home of my mind," was oddly susceptible to nightmares of the modern age. The "abrupt" and horrific exports of home that he encountered overseas, like errant specters of a national hallucination, further embattled his sense of being away. "A Notation on the Evening of November 27, 1966," a poem written while in England, remembers the self-exile ("home of my mind. That asylum") that Dorn and Helene shared in Burlington and elsewhere, when Dorn's longing ("burning") for home is disrupted by the "harsh voice of home" that invokes the *unheimlich*, the horrifyingly familiar, the war, everywhere: "I am at home here only in my mind / that's what heritage is. / ... / I know my wife has gone to bed / and that my heart and my veins / are burning for home. Yet those abrupt times / I hear the harsh voice of home / I am shocked, the hair on my neck / crawls."⁷⁸⁷ No surprise, *The North Atlantic Turbine* is full of references to death, particularly to its attendant niceties, "the fake rich odor we associate with / the end / the fake solemnity / ... / the rank proper smell of death," heaped about its sanctimonious rituals: "when did we dare begin the association of flowers / with our routine deaths."⁷⁸⁸ In "Wait by the Door Awhile Death, There Are Others," an ambiguous dread of nuclear solitude, like the harrowing, surreal inescapability of a lethal gas, or time as space grinding ceaselessly on, infiltrates Dorn's sleep with its mechanical imperatives—"asthmatic" technologies, claustrophobic timelines: "Is this the inch of space in time I have / I awoke just now / I don't know from what / I suppose a certain gas / it could have been / thinking of myself."⁷⁸⁹ His fortieth birthday less than two years away, and "in a fright / to know what to do last" after almost being hit by a car, Dorn matches a grim recognition of the body's impending, mechanical decay ("this thing made / with the end built in") with a sense of dislocation imminent to a world fractured by nation-states, in the paroxysms of commerce, and patched together with inoculating headlines:

...the wrench
of feeling
is turned near forty when the doors
shut with a less smooth click
and biological deliquescence
a tooth broken and unrecoverable
ah news from the Great Manufacturer.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 225.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 217.

This afternoon someone, an american
from new york, spoke
to me knitting his brows, of
“the american situation” like
wasn’t it deplorable, a malignancy
of the vital organs say News
from nowhere. A mahogany sideboard of tastes.
I knitted my brows too
an old response
and tried to look serious
Look like I was thinking of quote back home.

Look like I *have* a home, pretend
like anyone in the world
I know where that is. And could
if I chose, go there.⁷⁹⁰

It’s to this industrious ‘higher’ power, this “Great Manufacturer,” that the “damned hieroglyphs” of Villa Grove’s depression-racked streets signal in “The Sense Comes Over Me, / and the Waning Light of Man / By the 1st National Bank.”⁷⁹¹ Here too, “home” is an expression worn into the face, but one that serves to mask a spiritual exhaustion, desperate for substantive belonging. This is the face of a body whose vital parts “the Great Manufacturer” has consigned to the economy of history-as-commodity, as easily consumable chatter—“Civil rights cocktail,” “mahogany sideboard of tastes”—and an abused body politic—teeth broken by “Vietnam the inflexible entrée / oh gawd what will there be for pudding / (not another bombe.”⁷⁹² The ex-pats around Dorn are gluttons for “News” from home (or “nowhere” Dorn calls it)—news to (falsely) corroborate an idealized, windfall vindication in living abroad.

In place of geopolitical constructs of the self, the “Wait... Death” poem proposes a sidereal relation, the zodiac, to determine identity in the context of space/time. While this cosmological relation underscores the frailty of human systems—“our time and / place / is that limited / our cry for god / that weak / our religion / that constructed”—the casement of the body is plausibly salvaged from those who seek, in Olson’s terms, “to advertise you out,” as long as one loosely and variously navigates that *locus*: “The body. I am / however, the host of my body. / I invite myself to enter myself. / I have gone there sometimes with great

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 218.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 218.

pleasure.”⁷⁹³ That’s *internal* migration. Here the poem drifts toward the oneiric, a voyage that activates multiple currents of self—“the dream / came I ‘thought’ I was Sophia Loren”—and rages against the stagnation of “dull presentments,” issued by “the Great Manufacturer” himself, to reclaim the body’s expressive utility: “I have felt already the reality / of the last breath I draw in. / I want to say something. / I want to talk / turn myself into a tongue.”⁷⁹⁴

These lines evoke the impetus and inception of Dante’s *Inferno*, when the fury of exile—at a troubled age, in an troublous Age—becomes creative force; when only poetry, to steal Ben Lerner’s phrase, “reinscribes the hope whose death it announces”: “Midway life’s journey I was made aware / That I had strayed into a dark forest, / And the right path appeared not anywhere. / Ah, tongue cannot describe how it oppressed, / This wood, so harsh, dismal and wild, that fear / At thought of it strikes now into my breast.”⁷⁹⁵

The final section of the poem presents another fear, the darker side of the liberty mobility affords—not what can feign belonging (“look like I *have* a home”), but that which annihilates all viable reference—strays too far from Bernstein’s notion of “centrality” as the power of the status quo. The poem ends with the account of Dorn’s dream of a “true enough man named Pedro,” a stowaway found aboard an English cargo ship, who exposes at once how fragile and insuperable national identity can be. Eternal migration is Pedro’s exile, his “references... / do not exist”—an unredeemed, bureaucratized (nations-states in place of Gods), Odyssean purgatory:

...he has no papers and every country
rejects him.
...
no nation possesses
the apparatus to fix another identity
or any identity for this man who is without one.
He is the man we all are and yet he doesn’t exist.
He is the man we would all save with our tongues
because we are secretly him. ...
... He may recall as we do
the uncertain days on shore
...when once, remember that time
the world seemed open what a satisfying meal
that was. The body outlives
in Pedro too, its lighted parts. The rest

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 220-221.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 222; 219-220.

⁷⁹⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Laurence Binyon, ed. Paolo Milano (New York: Viking, 1969), 3.

is application...⁷⁹⁶

In his book-length discussion of Ed Dorn, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan, called *The Lost America of Love* (a phrase lifted from Allen Ginsberg's commodity-lush ode to Whitman, "A Supermarket in California"), Sherman Paul describes the atmosphere of Dorn's poems with a pun—"walled in"—that perverts Thoreau's Arcadian retreat.⁷⁹⁷ Like Dostoevski, say, a century earlier, Dorn could look to an American prison system, which held several hundred thousand (now holds roughly 2¼ million) inmates, as a disturbing monument to his nation's ethical bearing. In 1956, fifteen years before New York state police would shoot to death thirty unruly inmates at Attica Prison, forty inmates of Georgia's Buford Rock Quarry Prison, in protest of their living conditions, crushed their legs with their ten-pound hammers.⁷⁹⁸ Hallowed national monuments become jail cells amidst the uproar in "Part VI" of "Oxford": "...destroy the stone / itself," Dorn writes: "That's what / the black men back in my land / propose to do, / tear every / pillar of it / down, and tear the world, / the neat world, down."⁷⁹⁹ The line, "[t]he world seemed open," in a poem called "Wait by the Door Awhile Death..." also evokes Dorn's account of his senior prom in Villa Grove when, with youthful exuberance for the "open" world, he climbed the local water tower and stood gazing out, feeling "grander than" the flat, imprisoned expanse of Illinois prairie, upon which his survival alone seemed assurance enough that an "unrelieved real life ...still had to be hopeful."⁸⁰⁰ But again and again, "real life" refuses to reciprocate the hopes that drive it on. This world can only be *hoped for*, a hope valued only in *hindsight*, only through a ritual awareness of its loss ("laughing at what is forgotten / and talking of what's new / admiring the roses you brought. / How sad. / You didn't know you were at the end / thought it was your bright pear / the earth, yes / another affair to have been kept...")—a degree of *exile*, plotted along the asymptote of "pure expression": "I want to say something," Dorn pleads in "Wait by the Door Awhile Death," "I want to talk / turn myself into a tongue."⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁶ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 222-223.

⁷⁹⁷ Sherman Paul, *The Lost America of Love: Rereading Robert Creeley, Edward Dorn, and Robert Duncan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

⁷⁹⁸ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 185.

⁷⁹⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 215.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 38; 220.

*THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS THE REAL PHYSICAL
ACTS IT MAKES
and the being passes over to become the intuited
visage of loveliness!
Each day is a terrible battle
and need not be!
There need not be fear!
All that matters is physique of the human spirit
&
dreamed of love's perfection.
IT IS TOO SIMPLE TO SPEAK OF! All the stridings,
battles, agonies, and pleasures ARE the spirit, and they
combine with a latent spirit of the genes
AND THEY CREATE OUR PASSAGE.*

I,

WE,

*create our passages to the joy and black music of sweetness
that does not await us but that we make
in our acts preceding the spirit's
explosion into liberty. Passivity of men
is poison. In the universe of matter
the spirit of man is unending crisis.*

– Michael McClure⁸⁰²

***12. ...And There Arose a Smoke Out of the Pit,
As the Smoke of a Great Furnace***

In late 1966, Lyndon Johnson had a recurring nightmare: “Every night when I fell asleep I would see myself tied to the ground in the middle of a long, open space. In the distance I could hear the voices of thousands of people. They were all shouting at me and running toward me: ‘Coward! Traitor! Weakling!’”⁸⁰³ Unlike Dorn’s dream of “Pedro,” the man without a country, whose home shore is always receding, Johnson dreams of a fixed exile, where ‘home’ rushes furiously at him. Here the familiar turns horrific: Johnson’s is an exile from the insulation of state-sponsored “centrality” that once housed his power, and later effected his defeat. And Johnson’s war in Vietnam was the dream of still another kind. An imperial engine of exile, the Vietnam War strove to satisfy the narcissistic American dream for a world *just like home* through the violent erasure of foreign bodies, histories, and imaginations.

⁸⁰² Michael McClure, *Star* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1970), 39-40.

⁸⁰³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 485.

Half a million Americans were in South Vietnam by the late 1960s, and “five million South Vietnamese had become refugees by 1970,” their homeland and rice crops doused with “poisonous chemicals.”⁸⁰⁴ At the turn of the decade, a group of “respected lawyers” in the United States determined that the “war effort” to eliminate the threat of communist infiltration and oppression in South Vietnam, was in fact mixing into the situation another equally inimical offence: “the United States was violating the Hague Convention of 1907, the Geneva Convention of 1949, and the Nuremberg principles unanimously affirmed by the General Assembly of the United Nations. It was in violation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the SEATO treaty, and the United Nations Charter. It was also in violation of its own Constitution, which give the war-making power to Congress.”⁸⁰⁵ But does the war in, “well you know where the War is,” does it alone produce this terrific exile, or does it, as a human necessity, a dark and common urge “turned to purposes of domination, exploitation, and destruction,” reveal exile as a fundamental human condition, underlying man’s flaccid and inflated principles?⁸⁰⁶ “We cannot help but see,” Heraclitus intones, “war makes us as we are.”⁸⁰⁷ On February 8, 1968, a U.S. officer announced a strange fate for Ben-Tre, a town in the Mekong Delta of southern Vietnam: “The only way to save Ben-Tre,” he said without irony, “is to destroy it.” The resurrection took “fifty hours of air and ground attack, using 500lb bombs, napalm, rockets, various anti-personnel bombs and 105mm and 155mm mortars.”⁸⁰⁸

In 1966, Johnson’s haunts were legion, at home and abroad. The Watts riots in the summer of 1965 galvanized white opinion against his integration policies—52 percent of the country in September 1966 (up from 26 percent in April 1965) believed his administration was pressing integration “too fast.” Consequently, his Civil Rights Bill of 1966, which sought to eradicate discrimination in housing, failed to pass.⁸⁰⁹ Johnson’s visionary “Great Society” was showing gaping weaknesses: by 1968, black poverty predictably doubled white poverty, but relative only to population (36 percent, and 14 percent, respectively); in reality,

⁸⁰⁴ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 187.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁸⁰⁶ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 79; Robert Duncan, *The Years as Catches: First Poems (1939-1946)* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1966), vii-viii. The latter quoted in: Nathaniel Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 130.

⁸⁰⁷ Heraclitus, trans. Haxton, 41.

⁸⁰⁸ Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 39; Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 86.

⁸⁰⁹ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 301-302.

seven million white families and two million black families lived below the poverty line.⁸¹⁰ Meanwhile, Robert Kennedy, former Attorney General under his brother John, and now a New York Senator, daily reminded Robert McNamara—his close friend and Johnson’s Secretary of Defense—that the Vietnam War was “terrible and immoral.”⁸¹¹ At the same time, Kennedy began to stride confidently ahead in a volatile presidential race. By October 1967, Johnson trailed Kennedy by 20 percent in the polls.⁸¹² Another poll that month announced that a majority American opinion, for the first time, publicly deemed the Vietnam War “a mistake.”⁸¹³ An important acknowledgment, certainly, but a severely understated one.

The numbers coming out of Vietnam were even less assuring for Johnson. For the 1967 fiscal year alone, the war cost a staggering \$21 billion, a figure that exceeded McNamara’s maximum estimate by \$4 billion.⁸¹⁴ “Vietnam,” according to Jack Valenti, one of Johnson’s closest aides, “was a fungus, slowly spreading its suffocating crust over the great plans of the president.” And like the war they waged, the Vietcong seemed both ubiquitous and impossibly regenerative, a “contagion infecting everything that it touched, and it seemed to touch everything,” Valenti said.⁸¹⁵ Ironically, the viral metaphor is more appropriate for the herbicidal warfare the American military was single-handedly waging. Agent Orange, for example, Monsanto’s infamous defoliant, had, as a dioxin, devastating long-term health effects on rural civilian populations, in addition to poisoning their agricultural food networks. But the primary purpose of the chemical weaponry was to gain the advantage of *seeing* the enemy—where the ability *to see* meant the power to destroy.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹⁰ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 45.

⁸¹¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 511.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, 511.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 488.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 479.

⁸¹⁶ See Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1999). On pages 10, Virilio writes: “According to Napoleon, *the capacity for war is the capacity for movement.*” And on page 20, Virilio complicates the relationship between war, perception, and visual technology further, and excels at illuminating a context for Dorn’s Essex exam prompt concerning Whitman and General Westmoreland: “Since the battlefield has always been a field of perception, the war machine appears to the military commander as an instrument of representation, comparable to the painter’s palette and brush. As is well known, great importance was attached to pictorial representation in the Oriental military sects, the warrior’s hand readily passing from brush to sword. Similarly, the pilot’s hand automatically trips the camera shutter with the same gesture that releases his weapon. *For men at war, the function of the weapon is the function of the eye.* ... Film-makers who survived the war moved without any break in continuity from the battlefield to the

And still none of this could shift the tide of the war. In 1966, for instance, the Jason Study—conducted by two prominent scholars from MIT and Harvard, with forty-seven of their closest colleagues—was organized to assess the effectiveness of U.S. bombing campaigns. It concluded that because North Vietnam was a “subsistence agricultural economy,” it proved an “unrewarding target” for continuing air strikes. In fact, the strikes were having “no measurable direct effect” on the transportation routes of the enemy. The “primitive logistical network” of the country, the study determined, lay unscathed.⁸¹⁷ And as if a shred from General Ripper’s absurd forecast in Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 atomic satire, *Dr. Strangelove*, had come to life, Johnson’s intelligence reported that despite heavy bombing, infiltration into the south from the north had actually *increased* since the air raids began. So, in late 1967, with nearly half a million soldiers in Southeast Asia, Johnson feared a war of attrition, at best.⁸¹⁸ To “guarantee” results otherwise, General Westmoreland demanded more and more troops—a hundred thousand deployed that year alone, “and American soldiers killed in action exceed[ed] nine thousand.”⁸¹⁹

Despite the Jason Study’s conclusions, the Johnson administration was unwilling to accept the strategic futility (notwithstanding massive civilian death and displacement) of conventional methods of warfare. In September 1967, General Westmoreland dropped 2,200 tons of bombs on Conthien, a small U.S. base recently raided by Communists just south of the border that divided South and North Vietnam; and “the jungles surrounding Dakto were pounded by three hundred B-52 missions, more than two thousand fighter-bomber assaults, and one hundred and seventy thousand artillery shells, and chemical warfare units denuded the few remaining shreds of foliage with herbicides.”⁸²⁰ Later that year, Khesanh was saturated with “more than seventy-five thousand tons of explosives over a nine-week span—the deadliest deluge of firepower ever unloaded on a tactical target in the history of warfare.”⁸²¹ Even when Johnson—“hoping” for peace talks—called for limited bombing of North Vietnam in March 1968, air raids actually increased a thousand fold. Overall,

production of newsreels or propaganda features and then ‘art films’.” Virilio refers to the film-maker’s camera as the “armed eye.”

⁸¹⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 499.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 504.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 498; 512.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, 539.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 540.

multitudes: “[m]ore than a million and a half tons of bombs had been dropped since the air strikes began, on both the north and the south.”⁸²²

American frustrations with the rapidly rising death toll in Vietnam converged upon the increasingly outspoken dissatisfaction with rampant police brutality and other painfully evident inequalities on the “home front” to produce explosive race riots and widespread militant protest and “urban riots and rebellions by blacks broke out in every sector of the country,” from 1965 through 1969.⁸²³ The already disproportionate rate at which blacks were dying in Vietnam, for instance, seemed of particularly invidious design when coupled with the blatant lack of civil, or human rights blacks were granted at home. The early concessions won by Rosa Parks and the Freedom Rides, and by the lunch counter sit-ins at Woolworth’s in Greensboro, North Carolina, were partial at best, and did nothing to combat broader race restrictions on the use of public facilities, not to mention the ideological and institutional persistence of racism. The stark contrast between the sluggishness of legal and institutional reforms and the savage thriftiness of the law’s brute response to peaceful marches in Birmingham in 1963 and across Mississippi in 1964, convinced many blacks that a larger and bloodier revolution was at hand—a struggle punctuated by tragedy after excruciating tragedy, like the September 1963 bombing of a Birmingham church that killed four black girls.⁸²⁴ In Chicago, in 1966, the “unreal” news that Dorn alluded to in his letter to Henry Rago, included three blacks “killed by stray bullets, one a thirteen-year-old boy, another a fourteen-year-old girl pregnant girl.”⁸²⁵ In contrast to King’s devout pacifism, black nationalist leader Malcolm X emphasized the profound reach of black solidarity in reaction to common disenfranchisement: “The black revolution is sweeping Asia,” X said, “is sweeping Africa, is rearing its head in Latin America.”⁸²⁶

The chickens coming home to roost is the metaphor Malcolm X chose to describe the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, and the remaining decade extravagantly fulfilled his prophecy, in American assassinations alone: Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Fred Hampton, numerous black nationalist leaders and party members, and a slew of college students across the country. In 1967, John McNaughton—McNamara’s Assistant Secretary

⁸²² Ibid., 512.

⁸²³ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 131.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁸²⁵ Ibid., 132.

⁸²⁶ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 308.

of Defense, his closest advisor, and an otherwise “certified hard-liner”—insisted to McNamara that, “the feeling is widely and strongly held ‘the Establishment’ is out of its mind. . . .that we are trying to impose some U.S. image on distant peoples we cannot understand, and that we are carrying the thing to absurd lengths.”⁸²⁷ Packaged during the ‘50s, ‘60s, and to the end Cold War, as the exigency of containing Communism, the imperial interventions of the post-war United States—from Guatemala to Lebanon to Vietnam—and the violent presence of other colonial powers (the Raj in India, for example, or the French in Vietnam and Algeria⁸²⁸) were assaulted in the ‘60s not only by the “third world” populations they directly subjugated, but also by “first-world” citizens incensed at national hypocrisy and military aggression carried out in their name abroad. Thus, Johnson faced a multi-front war—political, cultural, and social. In November of 1965, two young American protestors, influenced by monks on the other side of the world, immolated themselves—one in front of the Pentagon, the other at the U.N. office in New York.⁸²⁹ In the face of such a densely entangled debacle, Johnson, like Nixon, his successor, became disillusioned and vindictive. “How can I hit them in the nuts?” Johnson demanded of one of his aides during a 1967 peace demonstration. “Tell me how I can hit them in the nuts.”⁸³⁰

Unfortunately, Malcolm X too, became a victim of his metaphor, when he was assassinated in Harlem, in February 1965, six months before the riots in Watts. The incisive comment sparked by Kennedy’s death had earlier caused X’s split from Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam—an organization about which Malcolm, well before his expulsion, had serious misgivings. For one thing, he was witness to the NOI’s secret negotiations with the Ku Klux Klan, an organization involved in the bombing of Southern churches.⁸³¹ More than likely Malcolm’s death is the result of such treachery, a conspiracy between the NOI and the FBI; without a doubt, his assassination crippled the nonviolent cause of his opponents, launching a ferocious and protracted period of militancy in nationalist philosophy and praxis. In July 1966, a rioting mob in Chicago surrounded the visiting, pacifying Martin Luther King,

⁸²⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 506.

⁸²⁸ As the imperial power, the United States increasingly took control of former colonies of other leading nations: “For instance, whereas 72 per cent of the control of the Middle East oil reserves in 1940 was British, and 10 per cent of it American, in 1967 it was 58 per cent American and 29 per cent British.” (Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 72).

⁸²⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 481.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, 513.

⁸³¹ See Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 304-310.

“heckling and cursing” his righteous declarations.⁸³² A growing percentage of younger black activists, especially in the north, were radically less tolerant of the torpidity of social change. Addressing a group of visiting students from Mississippi in 1965, a Harlem high school student was clear: “Turning the other cheek is a load of trash. Up here we understand what snake is biting us.”⁸³³ King’s assassination, however, stripped bare even that charge: “Do what John Brown did,” suggested H. Rap Brown, former Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and later Justice Minister of the Black Panther Party, “pick up a gun and go out and shoot our enemy.”⁸³⁴

While middle-class, white America reeled back in horror at such protestations, Dorn celebrated the possibilities eminent in such tensions, and applauded certain aspects of the violence that blossomed around Malcolm X’s death, and the rise of Black Nationalism: these activities destabilized the imperial and, most of all, the material complacency of domestic America; it scandalized the “first-world” “orthodoxy of comfort.” “Oh wow. Watts – dig that baby,” Dorn wrote Tom Raworth in 1965. “They’ve learned where it is if not what it is – supermarkets – Can you imagine a more central place to hit this pop-civilization?”⁸³⁵ In the two-and-a-half years leading up to the Watts riots, the LAPD killed sixty-five people—of whom “twenty-seven . . . were shot in the back, twenty-five were unarmed, twenty-three were suspected of theft or other nonviolent crimes, and four had committed no crime at the time of the shooting.”⁸³⁶ Although the Los Angeles riots “ranged over forty-five square miles, destroyed an estimated \$200 million of property, led to 4,000 people being arrested, and left thirty-four people dead,” the rioters targeted their rage against symbols of colonial oppression—e.g. racially exclusive, white-owned businesses, police officers, etc.—not at white citizens.⁸³⁷ Under the same rationale, protestors in Newark in 1967 (LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka among them) picketed grocery stores that sold bad meat.⁸³⁸ And as with the riots in Watts, blacks suffered the brunt of the casualties in Newark, comprising twenty-one of the twenty-three killed. Overall, 1967 saw riots in 128 American cities, thirty-nine of

⁸³² Ibid., 301.

⁸³³ Ibid., 304.

⁸³⁴ Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 293.

⁸³⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 20 August 1965, Box no. 1974-0003 (unprocessed), Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁸³⁶ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 303.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., 295-297; Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 132.

⁸³⁸ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 296-297; Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 133.

which were “major or serious,” according to the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Of the disturbances in sixty-seven cities that a Senate committee investigated that year, they reported eighty-three deaths and 1,897 injuries—ten percent of which were suffered by public officials. Again, the “overwhelming majority” of the casualties were black.⁸³⁹

The philosophical foundation for the militancy embraced by various Black Nationalist organizations of the mid to late ‘60s—The Black Panther Party for Self Defense, and United Slaves (US), for example—came largely from the writings of Martinique-born psychiatrist, writer, and revolutionary, Franz Fanon. Fanon’s exegeses on colonial relationships—*The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*—and his urgent call to violence as the primary tool of indigenous liberation were doubly persuasive considering the “authentic” circumstances under which the work was composed: Fanon treated Algerian trauma victims, many of them children, of the French-Algerian war, and later joined the Algerian Nationalist Movement. The directness and vehemence with which Malcolm X, or Fred Hampton spoke is no doubt influenced by Fanon’s frightening, piercing clarity:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect. . . . Illuminated by violence, the consciousness of the people rebels against any pacification. From now on the demagogues, the opportunists, and the magicians have a difficult task. The action which has thrown them into a hand-to-hand struggle confers upon the masses a voracious taste for the concrete. The attempt at mystification becomes, in the long run, practically impossible.⁸⁴⁰

Not shy of entertaining a few absolutist convictions of his own, and given his self-proclaimed “hated american in america” status, Dorn found little in Fanon to argue with. Diagnostically, at least. After reading *The Wretched of the Earth*, he wrote to Tom Raworth, in August 1965:

You know the drag is Fanon is correct – i.e. – any motherfucker who has lived in an “imperialist” country is “guilty” (tho I think McClure pretty much takes care of that shit in Poisoned Wheat.) But Fanon’s point is that if you have in any sense, no matter how “poor” had [sic] in that exploiting country i.e. – engaged Cleopatra etc – you’ve been, in effect, on the backs of those “other” people. I mean LeRoi Jones is as much a hopeless middle class spade as any of the rest of the white collar spooks. dig we all are.⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁹ Zinn, 133.

⁸⁴⁰ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 94-95.

But so what, Dorn seems to say—“[w]e’re all sinners and we’ve all done wrong and we all came from somewhere else, including everybody.”⁸⁴² While he agrees, “people are the system itself,” Dorn’s methodology still holds out the possibility of transforming the “crippled stem of this country [that] is made with the mind.”⁸⁴³ Fanon’s philosophy seems strangely fatalistic, or deterministic, and especially shortsighted with regard to the “voracious taste for the concrete” he theorizes would render, in the aftermath of the bloodletting, “mystification ... impossible.” One wonders what, then, would be possible. In a similar debate with LeRoi Jones regarding the later stages of the Cuban revolution, Dorn distrusted any system’s proposal, revolutionary or not, to beneficently exploit its population: “...[R]evolutions are invariably shortsighted enough to determine usefulness, thus starting the assinity [sic] of set process all over again. That selfish, exclusive ego again.”⁸⁴⁴ Fanon’s directive embraced an ideological appropriation Dorn refused to accept. In a 1979 interview, Dorn’s absolutist condemnation of power’s coercive linguistic machinations includes, inversely, Fanon’s pronouncements—come in through *fashion*’s (as Bernstein defines it) double-door:

There are some people who have power and a certain kind of means at their disposal who are trying to get the society to think a certain way, to do a certain set of things, and so forth. I think any responsible writer is never that. No writer is ever trying to get anybody to *do* something; what they’re trying to create is a cognizance in the society itself, to furnish the means—through clarity of language—for a self-appraisal and self-evaluation.⁸⁴⁵

Though Dorn’s chastisements are many, his expectations are equally and respectably high, to keep fresh “the *shared* mind.” Recall his closing statement for *The Illustrated London News*: “The most important thing for me is the possibility for everyone to be able to live in the world.”⁸⁴⁶ This requires that each *makes* his world (it’s the “*possibility* for everyone to be able...” remember), an Olsonian task, in concept and largesse. “I saved myself,” Dorn

⁸⁴¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 20 August 1965, Dodd Mss.

⁸⁴² Edward Dorn, “Through the Rearview Mirror,” interview by Dresman, in *Ed Dorn Live*, 151-152.

⁸⁴³ Edward Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Tuckett, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 116; Dorn, “Driving Across the Prairie,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 65.

⁸⁴⁴ Edward Dorn to LeRoi Jones, 21 October 1961, in *Chicago Review* 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004), 63.

⁸⁴⁵ Dorn, “The Flint Interview,” interview by Tuckett, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 109.

⁸⁴⁶ “The Cis-Atlantic Americans,” *The London Illustrated News*, MS 55A: Db, Department of Special Collections, Spencer Mss.

reflects upon his visit to Villa Grove in the late summer of 1968, “by letting my hair grow and establishing a ritual of my own person...”⁸⁴⁷ That “ritual” hopes to reclaim the “centrality” of the ego, as a participant in the circuit of the “totality” of place, a *locus of experience*. Fanon forecloses on the possibility of this regenerative space, and to some degree annihilates the *person* (as Olson would term it), in order to save him. Dorn points to the strength of Michael McClure’s 1965 poem, “Poisoned Wheat,” to empower this notion.

Like Ken Irby and Stan Brakhage, McClure grew up in Kansas, born in Marysville, northwest of Lawrence, in 1932. Organizing that geographical inheritance in a conversation with Brakhage in 2001, McClure—like Irby—emphasizes the influence of weather on his perspective as a poet, and the telluric inflections in all human activity:

... we were both headed out of Kansas. We had both been born in the year that was the height of the dust bowl and in which soil electrolytes had been stirred to such disturbances, it probably was rare even in the state of Kansas. There was literally energy in the air and energy in the seasons which maintained themselves like that for a couple of decades afterwards, and we were taking that out with us when we left. We had crazy Kansas eyes and crazy Kansas ways of seeing the violence of things that we did see there, as well as the sensitive human crudeness of things. I remember seeing, as I’m sure Stan does, reapers reaping by hand, not by mower. And then I remember seeing people reaping with horse-drawn reapers, and then later the tractor began to come in.

...

I do think that the violence of the weather that we saw in our childhood, which I believe was probably more extreme than it is today, extremes of heat and snow and wind, and in the violence in the people of Kansas, whether it was manifested as bar fights or tent revivals, which we saw a fair amount of in those days, probably quickened sensitivity to emotional whirlings as much as to seeing the mountains or the oceans.⁸⁴⁸

Featured on the cover of McClure’s “Poisoned Wheat”—which simultaneously recalls both Kansas, the “wheat state,” and Vietnam, is a portrait of Billy the Kid, whose presence McClure would further explore in his 1968 work, *The Sermons of Jean Harlow & the Curses of Billy the Kid*. “Poisoned Wheat,” however, is an outlaw poem in that its voice strives to “act creatively / and *not* fulfill a pre-prescribed pattern / of guilt leading to escapism and cynicism,” in the face of “the atrocities committed by any / government.”⁸⁴⁹ Read, as Dorn

⁸⁴⁷ Dorn, “Driving Across the Prairie,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 65.

⁸⁴⁸ Micheal McClure and Steve Anker, “Realm Buster: Stan Brakhage,” in *Chicago Review* 47:4 (Winter 2001) and 48:1 (Spring 2002), 176.

⁸⁴⁹ McClure, *Star*, 90; 88.

does above, as a response to Fanon’s assertion of the unequivocal and en masse guilt of the colonial citizen, while McClure’s poem is anti-imperial and anti-Vietnam, it refuses to condemn, and in fact celebrates the individual, as a single person, against the machinations of totalitarian society. Like Dorn, McClure seeks a restoration that “is not national in scope / but incorporates all human creatures.”⁸⁵⁰ In this way, McClure’s ‘thesis’ in “Poisoned Wheat” stands fundamentally opposite Fanon’s. McClure writes, “I AM NOT RESPONSIBLE / FOR THOSE WHO HAVE CREATED / AND/OR CAPTURED the CONTROL DEVICES / OF THE SOCIETY THAT SURROUNDS ME!”—yet he shares Fanon’s grievances too:

—I am sickened by the thought
(and photographs)
of cruel and vicious executions
and tortures of Asian
and Algerian soldiers.

I AM SICKENED
by the oncoming MASS STARVATION
and concomitant revolting degree
of overpopulation, and the accompanying
production of incredible numbers
of useless physical objects
whose raw materials demand
a destruction of those parts of nature
I have come to think of as beautiful!⁸⁵¹

But like gazing at photos, “guilt” and “being sickened” are also “luxuries,” and as such, are “meaningless”: the intended, debilitating psychological displacements of a “Capitalist heritage [that] creates fear”:

Acceptance of guilt for the acts of
entrepreneurs, capitalists and imperialists
smothers, tricks, and stupefies

the free creature! He will, is, driven
to fear, racism, and inaction!

If I forget, for a prolonged moment,
the mammal, sensory pleasure of which
I am capable
I must toil to override

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., 90-91.

the creeping guilt that destroys
me spiritually!

I AM NOT GUILTY!

I AM A LIVING CREATURE!⁸⁵²

Unlike many poems that address the Vietnam War, “Poisoned Wheat” pushes back its confrontation to a “biological” place, not a political construction of identity—“I AM INNOCENT AND FREE! I AM A MAMMAL! I AM A WARM-BLOODED SENSORY CREATURE / CAPABLE OF LOVE AND HATE AND ACTION AND INACTION!”—a place where one accepts and understands the Heraclitean plurality of nature, human and otherwise (“It is our nature to explore / that which is called Evil”), but specifically rejects “a rapidly dying and masochistic / Society. ... supported by traitors / and barbarians who operate war / utilizing the business principles of this Society.”⁸⁵³ So McClure’s poem is not anti-war so much as it opposes the forces of inertia, of “centrality ... at an epistemological level”: the “Structural mechanisms of Society / create guilt in the individual,” to ensure that “he will fly / from the possibility of action.”⁸⁵⁴ This is the same process Bernstein describes when he defines dominance in mass culture as predicated upon the fixing of “centrality”—fixing language’s gauge, so that “any form of divergence ... is rejected as elitist or specialized or separatist, as *not us*.”⁸⁵⁵ This ossification of a status quo, this “naturalization” of dominance, is likewise what Dorn “[cries] out against.”⁸⁵⁶ For McClure, the status quo is an illusion within a delusion (for what’s the status quo if not the “delusion” of its being “maintained”?) and is that which he wishes, more than anything else, to explode:

Society is masochistic.
It deludes itself that a status quo is
maintained. It is driving for its destruction.
WESTERN SOCIETY HAS ALREADY DESTROYED ITSELF!

...

⁸⁵² Ibid., 89-90.

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 91; 88; 95. See also discussion of Nathaniel Mackey’s essay on Robert Duncan’s war poetry, below. Of H.D., and her influence on Duncan’s war poetics, Mackey writes: “The manifestly destructive, homicidal imperative of the reigning order elevates the outcast to a privileged position. The relegation of the poet to the absolute fringes of the dominant order allows her to dissociate herself from the war and from the suicidal values it brings to light. ‘This,’ she can say, ‘is not our field, / we have not sown this’ (*T* 115).” (“Gassire’s Lute: Robert Duncan’s Vietnam War Poems,” 97).

⁸⁵⁴ McClure, 94.

⁸⁵⁵ Bernstein, “Censors of the Unknown,” interview by Beckett, in *A Poetics*, 189.

⁸⁵⁶ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 39.

To admire or be silent about pain and death
IS CYNICISM!
To enact a role when Society is a corpse
IS CYNICISM!⁸⁵⁷

Etymologically, “cynic” shares a split history whose roots seemingly oppose one another in the space of the poem. On the one hand, “cynic” denotes “a member of a school of ancient Greek philosophers founded by Antisthenes, marked by an ostentatious contempt for ease and pleasure”—a group who, in some senses, would have welcomed Dorn—recall his epigram-turned-bumper-sticker in Boulder in the ‘80s: “Recreation Wrecks the Nation.” Another derivation, which likely predates the first, comes from the Greek word *kun*, meaning “dog”—hence the “doglike, churlish” nature of the cynic, who believes self-interest to rule the roost.⁸⁵⁸ In a short discussion of “Poisoned Wheat” that appears in his essay, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” Dorn references this language evolution in applauding McClure’s “biological” imperative for a “new society.” Dorn writes: “The work of Michael McClure could be taken as some poetic form of zoanthropy by the superficial reader.”⁸⁵⁹ That is, “the vertical urge of [McClure’s] lines,” coupled with his onomatopoeic “GRAHH,” might suggest some bestial rapture that would undermine rather than underline the naturally egalitarian transmogrification implied in the poem’s form. Dorn praises “Poisoned Wheat,” and McClure’s work in general, for a haptic awareness, for its “concentration” on movement *in* and *out*. Sounding a lot like Olson, Dorn identifies “biological circuits” in McClure’s work wired directly to exalted switchboards: “The verse form, the vertical urge of his lines could seem unbounded if one did not grasp that his whole attention has been directed *in* with such concentration that the rush goes right out again into the limbs—to the tingling points where contact, if it is ever made, is made with all the biological circuits plugged in.”⁸⁶⁰

The process “Poisoned Wheat” sets in motion is alchemical in its scope, and as a poem about war, it’s more concerned with activating archetypal realities and forces in new directions, through a transformative *process*, than it is in attacking the inflated ambitions of those in power who *use* the war for their own means. That Dorn celebrates McClure’s work for its awareness of the tensions and contentions inherent in language and its processes, and for its consideration of war (in Vietnam or elsewhere) not as an object to be attacked, but as a

⁸⁵⁷ McClure, *Star*, 95-97.

⁸⁵⁸ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “cynic.”

⁸⁵⁹ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 88.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

subjective occasion for the poet to reassert his demand for an alternative world, is an example of Dorn's faithfulness to a Heraclitean concept that emphasizes the dialectical reality of *all* things, the fact that "war makes us as we are." Dorn's appraisal of McClure's proprioceptive "rush," the concentrated direction of his "whole attention"—a *locus of experience*—highlights a method that acknowledges rather than opposes the interlocking relations among the competing forces of self and society tangled in the poem's relations. Dorn's rejection of the "naturalization" of corrupted and stultifying orders at work on society—orders set against the negative capability of the poem, and deaf to its "harmony of tensions"—is a constitutive element of "plugging in" for a poet. Spiritual and cosmic "contact... is made," through an attention to process that reclaims the ego's "centrality," reestablishes the individual as a "LIVING CREATURE."

The various and elusive concerns with how to incorporate, or not to incorporate, or to have always already incorporated, the apparent chaos of the war into the order of one's work pressed and strained relations among those in Dorn's writing community. In the spring of 1966, Irby wrote to Dorn from Berkeley, with news of common friends, and the protracted, exhausting news from Vietnam weighing on his mind:

Last Sunday, Easter, I went to Sacramento & marched with the grape strikers their last lap from Delano to the Capital bldg. Even the cops were sympathetic & pleasant—meanwhile Gov. Brown spent Easter w/ Frank Sinatra in Palm Springs. The coils & all motions of relation w/ anyone, are here, this, now. So that Vietnam diminishes all friendships everywhere, but the act where we are w/ those we know is the only construct against it constantly. Where do the poems go, & to what end? if not now. So I applaud Creeley's decision not to go to Pakistan, & even more his explicitly telling them the govt's policy in VN made impossible his going as any kind of representative of it. I w[oul]d go further & say there is no govt anywhere anyone c[oul]d go as a representative of, no matter what current details of policy.⁸⁶¹

Like Dorn, and like Creeley, Irby's response to the war's devastation was a poetics that stressed the power of a personal *locus* as the direct and immediate force of regeneration in the "coils & all motions of relation w/ anyone." In the same letter, he included a passage that expands this notion, quoted from the preface of seventeenth-century philosopher and mystic, Jakob Boehme's *Six Theosophical Points*:

"Let them imagine a life which is the outcome and growth of all

⁸⁶¹ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 17 April 1966, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

lives, and is mixed. But let them also imagine another life to grow in it from all the lives, which, though it had grown from all the lives, was free from all the other lives, and yet possessed all the essential properties of those lives. This other new life (let them imagine) is illuminated w/ the light, and only in itself; so that it c[oul]d behold all the other lives, and they (the other lives) could not see or apprehend the new life.”⁸⁶²

Dorn borrowed Boehme’s vision of parturient revelry for his own poem, “Thesis,” which opens *The North Atlantic Turbine*. Rather than mourn the victimization of those the “Turbine” excludes, those doubly exiled, the poem celebrates the perseverance of a community outside the grinding motions of capital. “Thesis”—whose etymology denotes a proposal, deriving from the Greek *tithenai*, meaning “to place”—focuses on Aklavik—an Inuit word meaning “Place of the Barren Lands Grizzly Bear”—an isolated community on the Western-most point of the Mackenzie Delta that faced near-extinction in the late 1960s. In the poem’s form, its “vertical urge” down the page, and in its elemental, “LIVING CREATURE” sympathies, it recalls McClure’s scaldic invocations, especially when it heralds new birth in the face of imminent destruction:

only Aklavik is life inside life inside
itself.

They have gone who walk stiltedly
on the legs of life. All life is
in the northern hemisphere turning around

...

the poles of pure life move
into the circle of
our north, oh Aklavik only
the outcast and ab
andoned to the night are faultless
only the faultless have fallen only
the fallen are the pure Children of the Sun
only they move West, only they are expected,
in the virgin heat

...

Simple fear compels Inuvik, her liquor store
lifts the darkness
by the rotation of a false summer.

...

...and if blackflies inhabit with the insistence
of castanets the delta of Inuvik in you Aklavik
around you Aklavik they form a core

⁸⁶² Ibid.

and critical shell of inflexible lust, only
 in the permafrost
 is the new home of the Children
 of the Sun in whose nakedness
 is the desire not desire
 in whose beauty is the flame of red
 permafrost a thousand feet deep in whose
 frail buildings
 the shudder of total winter in whose
 misshapened sun the Children bathe⁸⁶³

Currently home to about 600 people, Aklavik was once the territorial capital of the northwestern-most region of the Northwest Territories, but was replaced in that role by Inuvik, 50km to the east, in 1961—when due to flooding and the dense surrounding forest, Aklavik’s building conditions were declared unbecoming. Currently home to roughly 3,500, Inuvik—“Place of Man”—was originally intended to pinch off the commercial lifeblood of Aklavik, accessible only by an ice-road that stretches across the Delta from Inuvik. Meanwhile, Inuvik thrived throughout the 1970s and ‘80s, when it housed an important Canadian Forces naval station on the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line—a string of radar stations running roughly parallel to the Arctic Circle all the way to Iceland installed to detect early signs of a Soviet nuclear attack. And Inuvik also served as an outpost for petrochemical companies surveying the neighboring valley and seabed. All the while, a small but dedicated community kept Aklavik alive.⁸⁶⁴

In early 1967, Dorn sent Jeremy Prynne, a poet and friend in Oxford, a copy of “Thesis” drafted on a map of northwestern North America. “This is one of those late at night things came right out of the air,” Dorn wrote along the bottom of the page, in the left-margin of which he’d drawn a sinuous flower, “a meaning I don’t even know, light fingered, or like all one’s other plodding theses are written for it, in, or to prepare for the ‘event’ shld it come.”⁸⁶⁵ Understanding the winding column of text that shapes “Thesis” as the form Dorn’s principal assertions take—about method, for example, or “place,” literally—reveals a handful of poems near the turn of the decade whose overall trajectory moves toward sidereal and cosmological relations the more the poems explore the personal and (often exaggeratedly)

⁸⁶³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 179-180.

⁸⁶⁴ David Munro, *The Oxford Dictionary of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); *Webster’s New Geographical Dictionary* (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1972).

⁸⁶⁵ Edward Dorn to Jeremy Prynne, n.d., Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

everyday realms of the poet.⁸⁶⁶ Together, “Thesis,” “Tom Pickard and the Newcastle Brown Bear Revolutionaries,” “This Is the Way I Hear the Momentum,” and “The Cosmology of Finding Your Spot,” might represent Dorn’s polyvalent response to having moved beyond the “direct onslaught of the political poem.”⁸⁶⁷ Dorn’s judgment of what he calls “social protest” literature—a term he uses to discuss the work of Alexander Trocchi and William Burroughs, for example—is marked more by an adamant demand for spiritual renewal than an attraction to the enflamed rhetoric and vitriolic denunciations of professedly anti-war poets, like Robert Bly or Denise Levertov.

Dorn’s critical assessment, years later, of *The North Atlantic Turbine*, as an “overextended” book seems in part due to the defection of its formal struggle to the paralytic state superstructure the poems, as *poems*, mean to turn against—“a superstructure is nonehuman having only / an outside)) which hasn’t completed itself.”⁸⁶⁸ From this perspective, the book’s formal failure highlights that ambiguous juncture at which intertwining circuits of form and content reach an aporia—the moment whereat the poetic process, for Dorn, *should be* alchemical. The poem must order and restore forms that extend *beyond* the mandates of their content, forms capable of acknowledging, without being entirely warped by, their embattled constitutions. “Does prose,” Dorn entreats in “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” “to enjoy an ugly time, have to be itself ugly? or clumsy? Is there truly a correspondence between the thing wrought and the wroughting? A *likeness*? Is it that way? Or does it come to be the light and dark it is by virtue of the torque which throws it somewhere else? By its haunting (suggestive) dissimilarity?”⁸⁶⁹ In his critical/historical study of *Gunslinger*, James Elmborg refers to the completion of *The North Atlantic Turbine* as a moment of “crisis” for Dorn’s poetics—there was “an obligation

⁸⁶⁶ See Clark’s similar observation of this period in Dorn’s writing, in his introduction to *A World of Difference*: “...the proverbial categorical boundary between ‘real’ and represented worlds was around this time becoming less and less immutable: the ‘ritual of my own person’ that ... Dorn cited as his private for of salvation included a curiously privatized relation to his own writings, which seemed for these years paradoxically to incorporate more and more of his ‘inside real’ existence the more cosmically provocative and ‘outsidereal’ they became.”(27)

⁸⁶⁷ In fact, and thinking of the Boehme influence, “Thesis” marks illustrates an essential moment for Dorn’s poetics, as he writes in the Fulcrum Press promotional pamphlet for the book: “I have begun to do two things already: 1) Follow the vision of ‘Thesis’ (the poem which leads this collection) and 2) explore the mythification of the Gunslinger.”

⁸⁶⁸ Dorn, “An Address for the First Woman to Face Death in Havana: Olga Herrera Marcos,” in *Chicago Review* 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004).

⁸⁶⁹ Dorn, “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” in *Kulchur* 7 (Autumn 1962), 19.

to myself,” Dorn himself recalls, “to get out of that kind of soft dependency on the description and therefore, hopefully, the implication of myself and what was in front of me.”⁸⁷⁰ Interestingly, and though they share their moment of crisis, the relationship between the Vietnam War’s intensifying presence in the landscape of the national imagination and its presence in Dorn’s work is an inverse one: as wartime atrocities and their accompanying protests became more instantly and vividly linked in the public sphere, Dorn’s work moved increasingly toward imaginative, dramatic, and fictive realms—from “worrying about working out a location to [working out] a spiritual address,” was his description of the process in *The North Atlantic Turbine*’s jacket statement, which already looks toward future work. In this way, the “paradoxical aspects of thinking” Dorn’s poetics remain dedicated to exploring, become more overtly present in works that, as they move centripetally to penetrate inner and oneiric realities, also drift centrifugally toward dynamic cosmic and astral congruencies. This quasi Big Bang model of explosion through compression Dorn calls the domain of “intensity.” Knowledge unfolds its processes in the play of competing forces whose revelation is ambidextrous—in its “duplicity capacity for counterpoint” the emergence of one force continually activates and facilitates its opposite.⁸⁷¹ “Two made one are never one,” Heraclitus writes, “Arguing the same we disagree. / Singing together we compete. / We choose each other / to be one, and from the one / both soon diverge.”⁸⁷² Dorn prefaced his 1971 collection of prose pieces, *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, with this similar maxim-sounding paradox: “In speaking of what / is Outward and what / is Inward one refers / not to Place, but / to what is Known and what / is Not known.”⁸⁷³

Shortly after he arrived at Essex, Dorn met British poet and later filmmaker, Tom Pickard, who ran the Morden Tower Book Room in Newcastle, where various and influential poets premiered and read their work. Dorn introduced *Gunslinger* to a European audience

⁸⁷⁰ Dorn, interview by Okada, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 47.

⁸⁷¹ In “Gassire’s Lute,” Mackey writes: “The saving grace of poetry is not a return to an edenic world, but an ambidextrous, even duplicity capacity for counterpoint, the weaving of a music that harmonizes contending terms.” (152)

⁸⁷² Heraclitus, trans. Haxton, *Fragments*, 39.

⁸⁷³ Dorn, *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, unpaginated prefatory statement. That this ‘extension,’ this slight discontinuity between form and content perhaps dissolves with *Abhorrences*, that its trenchant epigrammatic pronouncements must unavoidably be read, at least in part, as an invigorated, but helplessly indoctrinated return to the self-reflexive possibilities of the “direct onslaught of the political poem”—a shift which has been frequently criticized elsewhere as sophomoric, simplistic, or *resentful*—exposes and disturbs embedded notions of linear artistic development.

there, and Basil Bunting chose the Book Room for his first public reading of *Briggflatts*—because Pickard had apparently convinced Bunting to return to writing the year before.⁸⁷⁴ And Pickard himself had “already earned a place in any competent lyric anthology,” Bunting writes in his 1966 introduction to the twenty-year-old’s first book of poems, *High on the Walls*, and elsewhere declares: “Tradition and fashion have no power over a man who has escaped education, with fresh eyes, a fresh voice, and skill to keep the line compact and musical. . . . He has to endure the hatred of art which persists in the north of England, the insolence of officials, and of those who pirate the money subscribed ‘for the arts’. If he comes through these trials unmaimed while he enlarges his scope and learns to sing with a longer breath, I believe he will provide a solid addition to the corpus of English poetry.”⁸⁷⁵ Like Dorn, Pickard had working-class roots, his in Northumberland, northeast England. As the ‘60s approached their turbulent close, the Tower emerged as a countercultural Mecca; it grew also to house a bookstore run by Pickard and his wife, Connie, who had originally acquired the building in 1964. Dorn’s pronouncement dedication, “To Tom Pickard and the Newcastle Brown Beer Revolutionaries,” published only once, in 1968, in *Lesser Known Shagg*, celebrates the alternative arts community that the Pickards’ made real. At the same time, the poem exhibits indications of Dorn’s growing attraction to ontological puzzles and relativity theory (representative of his general interest in the astrological) as a context for locating personal relations. Because the poem is no longer in print, I include it entirely:

As time is pushed back
 into its back ward bend
 we find what
 we were, that we were
 that time’s intestines took fake shit flower shit
 and begged in those streets
 for the mouth to take something in
 where economy was agreed to be our debt
 dropped into the nest, a machinegun nest
 when the time’s appropriation called
 but a chit was offered when that time’s times
 were that old mother whore like a fixed address

⁸⁷⁴ “Basil Bunting – A Basic Chronology,” n.d., [Basil Bunting Poetry Center](http://www.dur.ac.uk/basil-bunting-poetry-centre/basic-chronology/) <<http://www.dur.ac.uk/basil-bunting-poetry-centre/basic-chronology/>> (21 February 2008). Later, in 1968, Dorn published a broadside of one of his many poems titled, “Song” [“My dew my meadow”] with Barry McSweeney and Tony Jackson for the Morden Tower. See Streeter, *A Bibliography of Ed Dorn*, 11. This song, however, has never been republished.

⁸⁷⁵ Basil Bunting, preface to *High on the Walls* (London: Fulcrum Press, 1967), unpaginated.

Money is air
taken in, and exhaled, it turns everything on
that way, no way else, it does not have quality,
you wouldn't protect it like your sister,
and Redistribution⁸⁷⁶ is what it needs, as air
let's get some fresh air into this room MONEY
to be pragmatic because it saves 'time', it takes time
to breathe, take a walk, or exert your mind
or what we want is to fuck and throw money
AIR, into the wind, and it's time ((AIR
to do that: blow the head off all of it Newcastle
Brown spilt to draw in with your finger and be
carefree when our friends become some of them the closest, killed
in some new way nobody was instructed
to expect.

Of The First property owners
smash all those who would sell you glass trade beads
and trade posters
of yourselves, don't let them touch
your sacred bodies, refuse to allow your shadows
what they claim is image of you,
your secret
to be caught in the black clicking boxes
nor take nor pass on their contaminated

robes and flower s
leave your dicks out
fuck up the costume, wear money, hang
dead bankers around
parked cars are toilets
moving cars are moving toilets
keep your balance, post letters backwards
speak backwards, don't let them touch
and mar your sacred bodies
shun what thy roots have been made
their bribes of wagons of
Flowers of Evil

Take the City.
Take nothing else, don't contaminate
"your homes" with their merchandise, or your bodies
with their production, don't carry their shit home
throw their shit in the river drive, no, point
their cars toward the river
running engines inhale water
make your own archaeology for the future

⁸⁷⁶ Replaced with "Rediffusion," written in the margin.

of what you do

Do what you are
the rough edges of chants
on holy Farne ground
on the Black holy Jarrow
cross, over the spaces
all the shot up shit
Be rich with all
the shit
Be The Shit⁸⁷⁷

The procession of imperatives through which the poem's energy spirals recalls two particular moments in *The North Atlantic Turbine*. First, the condemned realization—"that time's intestines took fake shit flower shit"—is a mutation of the lines—"the flowers of heavy demand / the fake rich odor we associate with / the end"—from the protractedly titled, "England, Its Latitude and Some of Its Conditions, The Seriousness of Ghosts."⁸⁷⁸ Second, the Pickard poem shares its litany of specified demands, its listing—"Of The First property owners / ... / Take the city. / ..."—with the numbered objectives in "A Theory of Truth / The North Atlantic Turbine" (another title within a title), which begins with the apostrophe: "Here luv, this is a list of property to be blown apart / along the North Atlantic perimeter..."⁸⁷⁹ Overall, the tumbling, overlapping, enjambed syntactical motion of the lines above, and their spatial arrangement on the page, body forth a regenerative incantation that evokes the liturgical repetitions—the "rough edges of chants"—of "Thesis." Likewise, the Newcastle poem's emphatic demand is also for Olsonian proactive self-renewal, to build "your own archaeology for the future / of what you do."

The poem's opening stanza mixes the "bending" of time—in a black hole, say, or the Gunslinger's "hands"—with the contorted ideological postures that support "the times," the status quo, and it charges the fusion with Byron-esque rhyme: "dropped into the nest, a machinegun nest / ... / ...that old mother whore like a fixed address." Furthermore, the initial separated "back *ward* bend" indicates the savage persistence of certain coercive institutions: the "ward" as prison, as designated domain in a hospital, as the condition of any

⁸⁷⁷ Edward Dorn, original mss., Folder 444, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

⁸⁷⁸ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 183.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

subjugation, the “Ward and Care of the Crown,” for instance.⁸⁸⁰ “Ward” refers both to the area encircled by the fortress walls, and to the internal ridges or bars of a lock, and their component ridges on its key. Reading down, together lock and key serve to guard (“ward,” in its original sense, as a verb) one’s “shit,” as *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines that word, in its 2003 Draft Edition: “Things, stuff (in the broadest sense), *esp.* personal belongings. Freq. in—*and shit...*”; or in an earlier sense the *OED* cites first in 1950, “shit” denotes, “[a]n intoxicating or euphoriant drug, *spec.* cannabis, heroin, or marijuana.”⁸⁸¹ But the sense of Dorn’s invocation—“Be The Shit” combines and transcends all of these. As the poem’s last offering, the imperative to which it finally and summarily arrives, the line serves conversely to fertilize, to regenerate both “what you are,” and the poem-process itself. Some *backward* “shit,” one might say, naturally, and the poem enthusiastically approves, “post letters backwards / speak backwards,” until one wonders what “backwards”—wherein “-ward,” as a suffix, derives from the Germanic *wert*, “to turn,” a root closely related to that of “verse” itself (*versus*, a plowing term) and the *turn* of the poetic line—really is. The discursive closure of the final line/command implicitly gestures towards the poem’s opening assertion—or is it the society that doesn’t read the poem that’s backward? A society of “contaminated / robes and flowers,” with “glass trade beads / and trade posters” of themselves, with their “secret[s] / ... caught in ... black clicking boxes”? Is it strange that Dorn, in his poem for a poet, Pickard, who “has yet to read most of the English classics,” Bunting writes, dangles such an abundance of literary allusion on the ends of his lines? Or is it to place Pickard among those esteemed forerunners and contemporaries, and to acknowledge the importance of his “made” locale as a nexus for poetry’s transmission through the generations? “Flowers of Evil,” doesn’t really allude to Baudelaire’s master work so much as simply name it; similarly, “make your own archaeology for the future,” screams Olson, his title, *Archaeologist of Morning*, as well as “don’t let them touch / your sacred bodies” recalls *Maximus*, especially “Letter 3” (“root city / let them not make you / as the nation is”)⁸⁸²; and for Dorn, as an American poet in the language’s foreign home, all the talk of “time’s

⁸⁸⁰ See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “ward *n.*,” 2b, example from Sir Richard Steele’s *The Tatler* (1709).

⁸⁸¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed.; and see Alexander Trocchi, *Cain’s Book* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), 41: “The hysterical gymnastics of governments confronting the problem of the atomic bomb is duplicated exactly in their confrontation of heroin. Heroin, a highly valuable drug, as democratic statistics testify, comes in for all the shit-sliding. Perhaps that is why junkies, many of whom possess the humor of detachment, sometimes call it ‘shit.’”

⁸⁸² Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 15.

intestines” invokes the great bard himself, Shakespeare’s sonnet #30—“When to the sessions of sweet, silent thought / I summon up remembrance of things past, / I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought, / And with old woes new wail *my dear time’s waste*.”⁸⁸³ That places the poem in the allusive company of Proust, and a slew of English-language masters, like Philip Sidney, Thomas Wyatt, John Keats, and Wallace Stevens. But the reference also restores great intimacy and kindness to Dorn’s dedication, when one follows the sonnet through its own backward-turning end: “But if the while I think on thee, dear friend, / All losses are restor’d, and sorrows end.”⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸³ William Shakespeare, *Complete Sonnets*, ed. Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), 14. (My italics.)

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

*The eye, the ear,
the mind in action,
these I value.*

– Heraclitus⁸⁸⁵

13. My Dear Time's Waste: of War, Drug, and Fruit

In its move to a “spiritual address,” Dorn’s work assumed many similarities with the work of another paragon of the Black Mountain School, Robert Duncan. For its use of fragmentation, irony, punning, and its Heraclitean awareness of the Janus-faced doubledness of inspiration, of the daemonic that interpenetrates all creative act, Duncan’s work during the Vietnam War, especially his “Passages,” provides a template for the evolution of Dorn’s work at the turn of the decade and through the war. “Of all the people who made an attempt to talk about the war, my least quarrel would be with Robert Duncan, who put it squarely across as a matter of the Morality of the State, and did that historically,” Dorn told Stephen Fredman in 1977. “I like those ‘Passages.’ They were militant statements. But that’s the exception; I can’t think of anyone else.”⁸⁸⁶ In his powerfully elucidating essay over Duncan’s wartime poetry, Nathaniel Mackey imagines Duncan’s vision of war’s destruction as “psychic material that is both an attack and a counterattack, both the suffering inflicted on the heretic poet and the suffering the poet would inflict in return.”⁸⁸⁷ Mackey’s interpretation draws on Duncan’s own discussion of H.D.’s engagement of World War II in her large work, *Trilogy*; Duncan’s terms are almost indistinguishable from Dorn’s, when the former writes:

Outer and inner conflicts enter into and surcharge the poetic. At odds with powerful influences, whether they be his own impulses or the opposing will of other men, the poet holds the new reality only by a heightened intensity... The flaming cities are not only representations of persecutions suffered or punishments anticipated in heresy, they are also representations of a revenging wrath projected by the heretic, the stored-up sense of injustice and evil will over us raging outward. ...H.D.’s apocalyptic vision in the War Trilogy... provides an historical perspective in which the experience of London under attack in the Second World War becomes meaningful in relation to depths and heights of personal reality...⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁵ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Haxton, 9.

⁸⁸⁶ Edward Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, 94.

⁸⁸⁷ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 97-98.

⁸⁸⁸ Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, part 2, chapter 4, *Caterpillar*, no. 7 (1969): 48-49; quoted in Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 98.

Just as Dorn saw the Vietnam War “from inside this country... expressed through drugs,” something that many critics of *Gunslinger* have argued as central to that poem’s structure and concerns, so Duncan felt the war as always already *within* the poem’s process.⁸⁸⁹ Mackey articulates this conflicted reality in Duncan’s work: “To see that the word is not a containment but a contention of meanings is to see also that war isn’t something existing only outside the poem, a fact to be simply referred to or dealt with as topic. War is also an internal characteristic of the poem, a fact of life at work within each word of which the poem is made.”⁸⁹⁰ And thus: “The poem at once refers to and puts into practice the unique liberty we have recourse to in language, the ability to violate the lines between opposite or incongruous meanings, to transgress the distance between otherwise disparate things.”⁸⁹¹ So when Duncan claims the poet’s responsibility is “to imagine evil” not simply call for its destruction (which would likewise mean the vitiation of integral forces within the poet-creator as well), he too complicates the monologic stasis of *resistance*—its stiffened denial of complicity—and in doing so, opens a space (a “meadow,” Duncan calls it) for *internal migration*, a space where one-directional meaning is refracted and variegated manifestations of evil are not inexorably opposed by the poet, but rather, their former exploitation at the hands of the state is radically transformed. Here one recalls Dorn’s notion of the “shared mind,” of which his work forms a part, and, of many parts, is formed: “The sources are the collective voice and those are made up with the particulate voices.”⁸⁹² Similarly, for Duncan, the poem represents a *process*: “an alchemical operation that converts or seeks to convert the ‘lead’ of destruction into the ‘gold’ of poetic thought.”⁸⁹³

Dorn’s understanding of the poet’s complicity in the “evils” of creation, however, is not interchangeable with Duncan’s, and while Duncan praises *Gunslinger*, and Dorn celebrates “The Passages,” their dissimilarities are immediately evident. “I mean ‘evil’ in the classical sense; everybody’s got it, except that there is that kind of potential in the poet to not have it,” Dorn told Roy Okada in 1973. “That’s the connection with the whole burst of glow in the cosmos.”⁸⁹⁴ Like Duncan, Dorn invokes cosmological relations in the poem that testify to the possibility of refashioning a human universe, “wherein all men fit.” In his essay “The

⁸⁸⁹ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 94.

⁸⁹⁰ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 103.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸⁹² Edward Dorn, interview by Alpert, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 28.

⁸⁹³ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 99.

⁸⁹⁴ Edward Dorn, interview by Okada, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 52.

Outcasts from Foker Plat,” Dorn highlights Duncan’s poem “The Multiversity,” wherein Berkeley University, and the “false faces in which / authority lies” (those of its chancellor and president), are imaged as extensions of the multi-headed “hydra” of State, intended to foist “hired minds of private interests / over us / here.”⁸⁹⁵ The poem mourns and renounces this corrupt design at the level of etymology when Duncan notes (from the *Oxford English Dictionary*), “*Evil* ‘referred to the root of *up, over*,” that is, to some writhing of excess, or “surplus” of meaning, to which a mendacious State superstructure arrogates archetypal forces around its own perverse desires. That evil, “like all evil,” as Pound said, “is in the direction of the will.”⁸⁹⁶ Duncan writes:

simulacra of law that wld over-rule
the Law man’s inner nature seeks,
coils about them, not men but

heads and armors of the worm office is

There being no common good, no commune
no communion, outside the freedom of

individual volition.⁸⁹⁷

Referencing the “pitched battles” and “regular massacre of clerks and students” at Oxford in the 14th century, Dorn celebrates Duncan’s recognition of the historical ubiquity of “town/gown” frictions. This superstructure shifts from papacy to Pentagon, Dorn describes, in the quiver and clashing ever at the heart of things: “This clash was between academicians who defended the liberties of their university against papal interference. What, in our day, is the Pentagon if not Papacy. It *is* also the Church. Everyone must have noticed on TV what a fine pair the Pope and Johnson made.”⁸⁹⁸ At the same time, the Pentagon’s isotropic invasion of the university might parallel the war’s intrusion on the poet. Consequently, in his conclusion to “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” Dorn again emphasizes the especial “potential in the poet” for creating new “orders,” new forms from the surrounding disorder (“got to have / newtowns of the soul,” ends the first of Dorn’s *Twenty-four Love Songs*), but with a gesture that hedges his appraisal of Duncan’s “Multiversity”: “I’m not at all sure Robert Duncan should use even a little of his immense energies on creatures such as Clark Kerr or

⁸⁹⁵ Duncan, *Bending the Bow*, 70.

⁸⁹⁶ Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 62.

⁸⁹⁷ Duncan, *Bending the Bow*, 72-73.

⁸⁹⁸ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 86-87.

Chancellor Strong. I'm afraid they are nothing so wonderful as dragons to be slain. And I don't mean by that it's a *waste of time*—Poetry is an organ of the tongue, it makes its own time. But any 'protest' might become a crashing bore ... like Berkeley that 'great University' is a crashing bore."⁸⁹⁹ Here Dorn's use of "protest" again refers to an "inflated" sense of civil disobedience—"pretty boring"—that drives the writer to "tell us how to *live*."⁹⁰⁰

The unshakeable complexity of *any* political identity paired with the impossibly exclusive, separatist claims of "social protest" literature had already drawn, and would continue to draw, varied, often unpredictable, and sometimes abstruse criticism from Dorn. His tenure in England introduced him to a number of such 'anti-state' writers. One of his closest correspondents on these matters was Tom Raworth, who, with artist Val Raworth, his wife, developed an intimate friendship with Dorn and Helene, and later, with Jennifer Dunbar, during the time Dorn was teaching at Essex. Dorn's and Raworth's correspondence, however, had begun four years earlier, while Dorn and Helene were living in Santa Fe. "There is a funny thing about "social protest" in its broadest and most inclusive sense," Dorn wrote to Raworth in 1962, while drafting his thoughts for an essay (which would appear in *Kulchur* that winter) comparing and contrasting St. Louis-born, heroin addict and Beat icon, William Burroughs, and Glasgow-born writer, editor, publisher, poly-addict, polyglot and pornographer, Alexander Trocchi,

...and here I ain't talking about Look Back because I only saw der flick, but the difference in writers say like Orwell and Burroughs, and Trocchi. The first were and/or are middle class and no denying it, only Trocchi makes any real sense out of that area of concern. Burroughs is a coupon clipper and it shows thru everything he says. Orwell likewise, tho it isn't so direct, it is implied in a certain half-assed benevolence, etc. ... No tricks in Cain's book, it is so much more up-to-date or whatever, and new, than Burroughs, it is etc.⁹⁰¹

Though the fact that Trocchi's working-class upbringing created for Dorn an unassailable fraternity between them, it would be over hasty to interpret Dorn's acclaim and admiration for *Cain's Book*, for example, as a jostling for sociopolitical payback. In his piece for *Kulchur*, Dorn identifies the aspects of Trocchi's singular method for prose writing that resonated with his own practices, and contrasted with those of Burroughs.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁰⁰ Dorn, "Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi," *Kulchur*, no. 7 (Autumn 1962), 8.

⁹⁰¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, n.d. (1962), Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

Dorn begins his fragmented, modestly titled, “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” by establishing the social pressures and contusions that constitute the domain of the “normal” along the verge of which “anti-state” writers stake their claims. “By attaching significance to shoes and haircuts,” Dorn writes, “the definition of the normal is as defined as it possibly can be,” and as inflexible.⁹⁰² For example, in the irredeemable shift of the illegality of a narcotic onto the identity of its user, the “subjective receptacle,” the inadequacy and misguidedness of normalizing doctrines are revealed—“*normal* is never a definition but is a temporary fact of instance in the human subject. When it is not recognized in that way it leads to a confusion of what is Subject and what is Object, one of the more brutal confusions with which modern man is beset, *is beset by* arrogancies originating on the outside.”⁹⁰³ For Dorn, and for Trocchi (so Dorn argues), “whatever enlightenment” one might derive from the use of drugs “revert[s] back to its conjunction with a ‘self.’”⁹⁰⁴

From this perspective, the addict—like the homeless, unemployed father of Joe Necchi, *Cain’s Book’s* heroin-addicted protagonist, who lives on a scow and traces his own migratory exile, “just passing on my way from nowhere to nowhere”—through a refusal of the stagnant and craven forms of the *real*, legally-addicted, workaday world, generates his own world in, among, and outside of these constricting superstructures, a world always aware of “the exile *that is*.”⁹⁰⁵ Joe describes his feelings on the eve of a transatlantic voyage:

This time, however, leaving France for no good reason, on my way to America for no good reason, with an acute feeling of being an exile wherever I went, I found it oppressive. I was heavy with the sense of my own detachment.

And that has been with me for as long as I could remember, gaining in intensity at each new impertinence of the external world with which I signed no contract when I was ejected bloodily from my mother’s warm womb. I developed early a horror of all groups, particularly those which without further ado claimed the right to subsume all my acts under certain normative designations in terms of which they would reward or punish me. I could feel no loyalty to anything so abstract as a state or so symbolic as a sovereign. And I could feel nothing but outrage at a system in which, by virtue of my father’s name and fortune, I found myself from the beginning so shockingly underprivileged. What shocked me most as I grew up was not the fact that things were as they were, and with a tendency to petrify, but that others had the impertinence to assume that I would forbear to react

⁹⁰² Dorn, “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” *Kulchur*, no. 7 (Autumn 1962), 4.

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁰⁵ Trocchi, *Cain’s Book*, 185-186.

violently against them.⁹⁰⁶

Contrary to what he's heard, Joe finds nothing in America "in abeyance," and consequently, "to escape this without going away," he retreats to the nearly-subterranean, life "on a river scow."⁹⁰⁷ To Dorn, this world seems "utterly sensible," outside or beyond the mess of politics: "Burroughs I am aware is out to point his finger at this state. Trocchi is simply saying no matter what happens I will have the shit cooking, which strikes me as utterly sensible and clear."⁹⁰⁸ In the following passage from *Cain's Book*, one can detect both Dorn's 'rationale' for drug use—"...one ought to take anything... because curiosity is superior to temptation"—and a familiar refusal of the imprisoning tyranny of societal categorizations:

God knows there are enough natural limits to human knowledge without our suffering willingly those that are enforced upon us by an ignorantly rationalized fear of experience... I say it is impertinent, insolent, and presumptuous of any person or group of persons to impose their unexamined moral prohibitions upon me, that it is dangerous both to me and, although they are unaware of it, to the imposers, that in every instance in which such a prohibition becomes crystallized in law an alarming precedent is created. ... Before we give up any sensual pleasure we should have explored it thoroughly, at least in sympathetic imagination; otherwise, history moving forward primly on its moral bicycle (in morals, nothing as complicated as the internal combustion engine has been invented) may leave something primal and essential behind.⁹⁰⁹

And so the addict reclaims "centrality" for the *person*, "primal and essential," and shields it from concretizing assimilative powers. "One of the simplest reasons addicts are never given their stuff free," Dorn explains, "is that addicts enjoy addiction to the exclusion of what the giver considers to be the *real* world; i.e. the world *they* rule." Hence, Dorn's approval of *Cain's Book*, and Trocchi, who "is using a drug which has a life only in terms of a man. When the state fixes, it uses people," and his rejection of *The Naked Lunch*, and Burroughs, who "doesn't need dope?" No, Dorn surmises, Burroughs is "making use of [dope], but suggesting policies against it. This is a methodology derived from the State. Trocchi never makes the mistake of turning against the best interest of his subjective universe."

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., 185-186.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁰⁸ Dorn, "Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi," *Kulchur*, no 7 (Autumn 1962), 18.

⁹⁰⁹ Trocchi, *Cain's Book*, 40.

In differentiating Trocchi's "sensible," almost sobering embrace of drugs from Burroughs' despair at addiction, Dorn's analysis motions toward corresponding, larger significances in their divergent modes of perception. Here is a passage from *Cain's Book*:

It is as though I watched a robot living myself, watching, waiting, smiling, gesticulating, for as I prepare this document I watch myself preparing it. I have stopped at this moment, ten seconds? five? and the robot goes on writing, recording, unmasking himself, and there are two of us, the one who enters into the experience and the one who, watching, assures his defeat. To look into oneself endlessly is to be aware of what is discontinuous and null; it is to sever the I who is aware from the I of whom he is aware...and who is he? What is I doing in the third person? Identities, like the successive skins of onions, are shed, each as soon as it is contemplated; caught in the act of pretending to be conscious, they are seen, the confidence men.

"To look into oneself endlessly is to be aware of what is discontinuous": Dorn celebrates *Cain's Book's* achievement in aestheticizing the crucial tension between the author, and the "I" of his work—a creative synapse whereat merge the "External" world and the writer's "inner mechanism." The protagonist of *Cain's Book* shares experiences with its author, who certainly used heroin, and who also worked for a time on a barge near New York City, but Trocchi exercises, Dorn writes, "a good-natured relaxed dexterity of the subjective I."⁹¹⁰ Trocchi, he argues, possesses a "deeply intellectual gift," a flexibility and "patience... when rummaging reality, the careful picking and placing and mortising of incident and word."⁹¹¹ The "dexterity" of Trocchi's "gift," of the daemonic energies surging through the writing's circuits, echoes Duncan's ideation of the poet, when Dorn writes: "If horizons are manageable it is because of such [an intellectual] gift; genius is shocking but largely incapable. The devil, because he is a primarily cognizant man, has made use of Trocchi in a quietly fulfilled illumination."⁹¹²

Meanwhile, Burroughs, like Thoreau, appears more and more to Dorn like some mysterious instrument of the state that both writers, through each his own means, intend to reject. That the disjuncture between the middle-class status of many "social" novelists and the anarchic proposals central to the "protest" writer's notion of *resistance*—e.g. "Burroughs is a coupon clipper," that Thoreau "let someone pay his taxes," that both are "of little use to anyone save a few hip middle class pricks here and there, or put otherwise, the very idiots

⁹¹⁰ Dorn, "Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi," *Kulchur*, no 7 (Autumn 1962), 3.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3; 6.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

they purport to put down...”—that this disjuncture is, first of all, overlooked, and secondly, that such a prerogative seems, in fact, a prerequisite for much “protest” writing, which itself often chooses to ignore such provocative realities, troubles Dorn’s sleep.⁹¹³ “Irritating (imitative of the state?) that Burroughs is literally without presence,” Dorn needles, “—the writer not there—it seems less a question of masks than absence—(he is time-bound, i.e., to the present) one can accurately deduce he has led a terrifying life—o.k.—but before he made that aesthetic choice he probably didn’t bust his ass too much—it remains so sticky—where is *he*?”⁹¹⁴ Whereas Trocchi’s gift involves the “intellect,” which “is always relative, to a mastering of material, i.e., what is external to man,” Burroughs Dorn roundly condemns “a genius, but not intellectually vigorous,” and “Genius unbalances,” like “a blow to the head.”⁹¹⁵ Dorn imagines Burroughs locked *inside*, where “experience comes in,” but isn’t “kinetic” (as Olson instructed), isn’t “delivered back,” from the interior chamber, where it remains—like light into a black hole, or *difference* into the State. Dorn likens Burroughs to a prose-machine: “When a language becomes hyperpersonalized i.e., Joyce and others, Burroughs, the process takes place in a matter of seconds—from one word to the next there is no possibility. He may be saying plenty. He is. So does a treadmill.”⁹¹⁶ And near the end of the essay, Dorn concludes: “Burroughs is continuous so long as he defies location, that *is* the cheapest trick in the industry.”⁹¹⁷ So in the attempt to enact his criticism of state censure, Burroughs, as a *locus of experience*, disappears behind the superstructural guises and mechanisms of his prose; the potentialities the writing means to activate are foreclosed upon by the exclusive formal demands of a “hyperpersonalized” voice. Dorn returns to this discussion of authorial presence later in the decade when applauding the work of Tom Raworth, and when composing his own—Books I and II of *Gunslinger* revolve around various distortions and uncertainties in narrative perspective, including the transmogrification of a character deceptively named “I”.

In 1966, nearly four years after his “Notes” piece appeared in *Kulchur*, Dorn met Alexander Trocchi and William Burroughs, together, on a mid-summer visit to London from

⁹¹³ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, n.d. (1962), Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.; Dorn, “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” *Kulchur*, no. 7 (Autumn 1962), 11.

⁹¹⁴ Dorn, “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” *Kulchur*, no. 7 (Autumn 1962), 11.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Essex. Writing in early August to Tom Clark, who at the time was visiting Vence, on the French Riviera, Dorn tries to process the death of Frank O'Hara—"Jesus what a modern death O'Hara had..."—who was struck by beach buggy in the early morning hours of July 24 while walking on Fire Island, and just before ending the letter, adds: "I'm going to see Trocchi this aft and we'll go see Burroughs which means I got to get to school to copy the enclosed and then london."⁹¹⁸ It's unclear what Dorn's thoughts about meeting Trocchi were, since no account exists in the available correspondence and Dorn never published anything about it. However, in a letter dated August 10, to Tom Clark, Dorn does describe an evening he spent with Burroughs, though it remains uncertain (in part because the letter contains no mention of Trocchi) whether this refers to the same occasion that Dorn mentioned in his earlier correspondence:

Spent a couple hours with William "Bill" Burroughs last night in his lush Park Lane hotel room where the radio speaker is the same as the T.V. and is operated from a grand kiosk by the bed. You can imagine the demonstration I got—he was flipping from bed side to tape recorder to TV and somehow mixing all those messages up with a hand camera, 8 mm, which is its own projector. He cld superimpose his own street images with the camera onto the TV screen. Mixed data indeed. You cldnt understand a thing, ie, you cld understand anything it turns out because no matter what the sound and image they somehow go together, like an opera singer singing the news. that's something! Finally its all gagetry. His notebooks are very damn interesting, sorry inneresting, and will sell for 1000 (pounds) whenever he's ready, but he writes like anyone else, as we've guessed, when it comes down to it.⁹¹⁹

Not only as anti-state or "protest" writers were Burroughs and Trocchi suitable subjects for Dorn's and correspondence with Clark, and especially Raworth, but as serious addicts who wrote sensitively and persuasively about drug use, they fit naturally into a correspondence that from its initiation doubled as a minor trafficking network, and with considerable success. From Santa Fe, for instance, in the spring of 1961, before the two writers had actually met, Dorn wrote to Raworth concerning a dozen "little pink pills"—supposedly "hallucinatory mushrooms of Mexico" synthesized by "a firm in Trenton NJ"—that he'd received from Allen Ginsberg, who'd procured them as part of a study conducted by

⁹¹⁸ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, August 1966, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Dept. of Special Collections, Spencer Mss.

⁹¹⁹ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 10 August 1966, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Dept. of Special Collections, Spencer Mss.

“The Harvard Center for Research of Personality.”⁹²⁰ In the same letter Dorn complained of difficulties acquiring “Cannabis” and the “staggering,” twenty-year sentence for possession in New Mexico.⁹²¹ A week later Raworth sympathetically offered what he could along those lines, which turned out to be quite a lot:

Am growing some pot in the garden. Seems to be coming up ok. ... Only abt half as strong as the imported stuff, but plenty of it. Other things are easy. [I] Work ... at firm that makes Methedrine. Sometimes handle parcels of medicine ret'd from chemists and can get hold of some. Have probably abt 1000 or so 5mgm tablets here at this moment. Also Dexamphetamine. If things are really bad over there, cd send you some methedrine. Like wrapped up in a couple of pairs of socks or something.⁹²²

A month later Dorn received the methedrine—“came thru in excellent style & I’m on it right now,” he wrote to Raworth in late May, and enclosed five of his synthesized mushrooms to return the favor.⁹²³ As their trafficking continued unimpeded, and became a topic of discussion in itself, it highlighted the less appealing concomitants of the “protest” writer’s lifestyle, or the fame “protesting” could now bring with it. In a letter from Santa Fe in early summer 1961, the gossip around Robert Creeley defiantly walking out on a reading at Dartmouth—“College kids, they are too goddamn much”—coupled with an account of Raworth’s discovery of cocaine on the job, led Dorn to consider the legal corollaries of his own defiance:

Oh, wow, that tale about cocaine passes me out... whew, what a place to work. What do they have besides meth? The fact that all our pills get thru is encouraging... it must mean they don’t have a rubber stamp for our addresses yet, eh?... That’s the one value I see in not making it... for instance Will Burroughs must have a hell of a time with mail... or stay down and count your advantages... whee... keep the business local or something like that.⁹²⁴

Once Dorn arrived in England, his business with Raworth became local and although he lived in Oxford, a short rail trip away, Raworth became one of Dorn’s closest friends and

⁹²⁰ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 21 April 1961, in *Chicago Review* 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004): 40-41.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹²² Tom Raworth to Edward Dorn, 28 April 1961, in *Chicago Review* 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004): 42.

⁹²³ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 25 May 1961, in *Chicago Review* 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004): 43.

⁹²⁴ Ekbert Faas, *Robert Creeley: A Biography* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), 272; Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, n.d. (1962), Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

correspondents. In the summer of 1966, when Dorn and Helene moved their family from a “16cent bullshit” cottage, leaky with low-beamed ceilings, into “a spooky labarynthian [sic] place,” Tom and Val Raworth lent a hand.⁹²⁵ Later that year, in Raworth’s first collection of poems, *The Relation Ship*, there appeared the piece, “For Paul Dorn,” which remembers that first house, “the shelves / ...warping on the knots / the sap was sticky,” and “the window didn’t shut tight & / it rained.”⁹²⁶ In their frequency and their casual humor, the letters of the two writers testify to the emotional closeness of their families and the fact they often spent their free time together. Although the following sample of causal correspondence—a letter from Dorn to Raworth, March 1, 1967—appears to offer nothing immediately significant, it does, however, vividly illustrate the care and friendship that tied the friends and their families:

Lookee here Tom (the Black redbear) Raworth, we’d be gassed to go to any dinner anywhere... and Smith’s wld do fine and you’re dead right, we’d have a bunch of time to talk. In fact we shld “congregate” a week ahead of time, say meet on Sunday and eat Saturday! and maybe we cld attempt to eat, dine ie, early and do something “else” later. I don’t mean anything “dirty” by that, necessarily, Val, say, a flick. So any night save Thursday which is “my day” and Wednesday, because that’s the day before “my

day” and I have, in that sense to get myself in the bag – that Bag. Actually, we dug “intensely” the late party. I had a chance, for Instance, to meet my two favorite persons, viz, Christopher Logue and Val Raworth. Are you ready for that! and there were other, lesser persons there whom I did not meet but felt fine being w/. So, no, don’t in any sense apologize. Altho you well might seeing as how I am in your country and cld reasonably expect you both to take better care of me. But nothing you cld have known. Perhaps however you didn’t try. That’s a possibility best left “unexplored.”

⁹²⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom Clark, 17 July 1966, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Dept. of Special Collections, Spencer Mss. Having received a letter from Vence, France, signed “Tom,” Dorn thought himself to be writing to Tom Raworth, but was in actuality responding to Tom Clark. Recognizing his mistake, Dorn wrote (again) to Tom Clark, on 9 August 1966, apologizing for his error: “Wasn’t that something my sending you a letter written to Tom Raworth, but even if it was funny it was no mistake, I thot for some reason T.R. was in Vence and that he had written me. How I got there wld be harder to figure. I wonder if TR was surprised to not get the letter. I suppose in one sense, he never knew it. In fact, come to think of it I told a lot of people TR was in Vence and they said oh? fancy that.” (Dorn to Clark, Tom Clark *Paris Review* correspondence, Dept. of Special Collections, Spencer Mss.)

⁹²⁶ Tom Raworth, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), 21-22.

So, we must not lose each other – Love as always and ever, Ed⁹²⁷

Dorn's Fulbright Lectureship, which had been extended through the 1966 academic year, was again renewed for the year following. As his sojourn in southeast England strode toward the end of the decade, Dorn's community of writer/correspondents broadened, and he began a lifelong collaboration with Gordon Brotherston, a colleague at Essex.

Brotherston arrived at Essex University in 1965, the same year as Dorn, to teach Spanish and to build the Latin American studies program. His primary interest (still today, and still at Essex, and Princeton) was in the indigenous peoples that inhabited North America in the two millennia before Columbus's arrival.⁹²⁸ By early 1967, Brotherston and Dorn had begun jointly to translate an assortment of Spanish-language "guerilla poems," authored, in most cases, by extremely young writers from Central and South America, some of whom were already dead, victims of U.S.-sponsored, often U.S.-fabricated, counter-insurgency militias. At the end of that year, Dorn sent Henry Rago, poet and editor of *Poetry* magazine, a selection of the translations for publication and alluded to others in the queue—works by Mexican poets, Jose Pacheco, and Mario Montes de Oca, for example.⁹²⁹ But Rago wasn't interested in the "guerilla" works, and the Montes de Oca translations never appeared; meanwhile, the Pacheco material, a single poem, "Arbol Entre dos Muros" ("Tree Between Two Walls"), was first published by *Flame*, in spring 1968, and soon thereafter, in 1969, was printed by Black Sparrow Press as its own book.⁹³⁰ Dorn's collaboration with Brotherston, however, continued until the end Dorn's life, and grew to embrace work by indigenous North American poets—from the Nahuatl, Maya, and Quechua languages, for instance—as well as translations of Peruvian poet, Cesar Vallejo, and Brazilian socialist, Patricia Galvao.⁹³¹

The end of 1967 would have been the right time for Rago to publish the "guerrilla" pieces, which were nonetheless collected and issued a year later, in November 1968, under the title, *Our Word: Guerrilla poems from Latin America (Palabra de guerrillero: Poesia guerrillera de Latinoamerica)*, by the London-based, Cape Goliard Press. But the historical

⁹²⁷ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 1 March 1967, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth correspondence, Dodd Mss.

⁹²⁸ Edward Dorn, "The Last Lectures," in *Ed Dorn Live*, 124-127; Clark, *A World of Difference*, 25.

⁹²⁹ Edward Dorn to Henry Rago, n.d. (1967), Poetry Mss, Lilly Mss.

⁹³⁰ Edward Dorn and Gordon Brotherston, trans., *Tree Between Two Walls (Arbol Entre Dos Muros)*, by Jose Emilio Pacheco (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969).

⁹³¹ Edward Dorn and Gordon Brotherston, trans., *The Sun Unwound: Original Texts from Occupied America* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1999).

currency of the translations demanded their prompt release, and distribution hang-ups with the London publisher, who'd also produced chunks of Olson's *Maximus* poems, were interminable. "It just won't wash," Dorn wrote to John Martin, in April 1969. "And in the meantime, the guerilla poems, if Cape had made a deal with Grove for instance cld have sold well here last fall just on its topicality. Now I'm sure it's lost."⁹³² The lost opportunity for the book was painfully reminiscent of the massive human losses in which its content was steeped. "The violence and sadism sent to counter [revolutions in Latin America] had silenced most of the guerrillero poets by the time *Our Word* appeared," Dorn and Brotherston remember in their preface to, *The Sun Unwound*, a later collection of their translations.⁹³³ "The year 1967 saw the end of three of them: Otto Rene Castillo (Guatemala), tortured for four days and then burnt; Fernando Gordillo (Nicaragua); and Che Guevara (Argentina/Cuba), whose example easily survives all derogation."⁹³⁴

Roughly a decade after World War II, the United States thrust Latin America into a protracted and horrific era of political, social, and economic chaos, beginning in Guatemala, and stretching south all the way to Tierra del Fuego. Amid public sector squalor, the American engine of exile created sprawling, lush, privatized farms for corporate export, while simultaneously producing thousands of refugees. To protect U.S. corporate assets in the region, and to elude restrictions imposed by international law, the United States frequently employed foreign, disgruntled counter-revolutionaries to act as proxy militias. Figures released by the Defense Department in 1969 referred to over 200,000 U.S.-trained, military officers in Latin America, and to the existence of U.S. military operations in every Latin American country, excepting Mexico, Haiti, and Cuba—already under crippling U.S. embargos by that time.⁹³⁵ That same year, the *New York Times* printed an extremely condensed summary of a series of United Nations reports aimed at assessing the success of John Kennedy's 1963 Alliance for Progress, whose egalitarian rhetoric insisted that, "we broaden the opportunity for all our people," so that "the great mass of Americans share in increasing prosperity."⁹³⁶ However, since the implementation of the Alliance for Progress six

⁹³² Edward Dorn to John Martin, 5 April 1969, Folder 13, MSS 313 BC, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico. Hereafter cited as CSWR Mss.

⁹³³ Edward Dorn and Gordon Brotherston, trans., preface to *The Sun Unwound*, xi.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁹³⁵ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 71.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

years earlier, the *Times* concluded, “the [Latin American] region has plunged more deeply in to foreign debt, has lost ground in world trade and has failed to reduce unemployment.”⁹³⁷

Not that that was entirely “the region’s” fault, as the *New York Times*—which had helped to smother information that could have prevented (and at the very least made public) Kennedy’s embarrassing and illegal invasion of the Bay of Pigs in 1961—seems to suggest. In fact, commensurate with Kennedy’s projected Alliance, the United States illegally funded coups, and sometimes helped to stage them, that intended to depose, or attempted to depose, any democratically elected leader unwilling to cater predominately to the interests of foreign capital. Furthermore, U.S. financial support disproportionately provided aid to dictatorships whose policies exacerbated poverty, starvation, and illiteracy among the lower classes, especially among indigenous populations, and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Still today, both Guatemala and the Dominican Republic, for example, bear the deep and ruinous imprint of the “cogs that turn this machine.”⁹³⁸

In the early 1950’s, Jacobo Arbenz, the leader of Guatemala, began to expropriate vast chunks of uncultivated land controlled by the infamously ubiquitous, United Fruit Company. For the first 234,000 acres he took, Arbenz offered the American corporation compensation, which they superciliously rejected. When he moved to expropriate 173,000 more, U.S.-trained mercenaries stationed in Honduras and Nicaragua, aided by “four American P-47 Thunderbolts flown by American pilots,” invaded the country on June 18, 1954, and overthrew his government.⁹³⁹ Arbenz, the U.S. spuriously asserted, led a communist regime; but of fifty-six total seats in the Guatemalan Congress only four were held by communists, and there were no communists in the presidential cabinet. Nonetheless, in late June, Castillo Armas, who’d received military training at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was escorted to Guatemala in the U.S. Ambassador’s private jet and placed at the head of its government. Despite the fact that the United States’ orchestrated upheaval of the Arbenz regime perfunctorily violated *The Manual of International Law*, as well as Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, Henry Cabot Lodge, Eisenhower’s appointee for president of the U.N. Security Charter, argued that the Guatemalan invasion was an internal affairs issue, and therefore, beyond U.N. jurisdiction. In the first two years of his dictatorship, when Armas “returned [Guatemalan] land to United Fruit, and abolished the tax on interest and dividends

⁹³⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁹³⁸ See Zinn, “Empire,” chap. 2, in *Postwar America: 1945-1971*.

⁹³⁹ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 54-55.

to foreign investors,” he “received ninety million dollars from the United States, ...compared with six hundred thousand dollars given to Guatemala in the previous decade.” By the mid-1990s, military dictatorships in Guatemala had killed at least 200,000 people, mostly indigenous Mayan Indians.⁹⁴⁰

In 1963, the Dominican Republic violently convulsed under another U.S. choreographed coup, this time designed to oust leftist president Juan Bosch, who after winning 60 percent of the democratic election the year before, had subsequently “taxed sugar profits to provide housing for workers.”⁹⁴¹ Bosch replaced the assassinated Rafael Trujillo Molina, whose dictatorship spanned over three decades and whose family owned 80 percent of the entire Dominican economy. Without Trujillo in power, American business interests became distraught over the \$250 million they’d invested in the country. But unlike Guatemala, communists were populous enough in the Dominican Republic to stage a rebellion aimed at reinstating Bosch to power, in the spring of 1965. When the five hundred U.S. Marines initially dispatched to quell the insurgency were derailed by rebel fighters, U.S. forces were inflated to 23,000. Armed thus, the Marines swiftly crushed the rebellion, and subsequently occupied the country, that is, until Juaquin Balaguer, president previous to the unrest, could restore the foreign-friendly power that he would maintain for another twelve years.⁹⁴² And after the imperial guns were put away, the towering edifices of *elsewhere* moved in—the *home away from home* processed into a terrifying homogeneity; the superstructure of home that is itself part *elsewhere*, part un-homely: “The shooting had scarcely stopped before new Hilton Hotels, Holiday Inns, and housing projects sponsored by IBEC, a Rockefeller-family company, were being planned,” writes historian Richard Barnet.⁹⁴³ Exile heaped on exile; this is, as *Newsweek* wrote at the time, “democracy being saved from Communism by getting rid of democracy.”⁹⁴⁴ That modus operandi held flawless tune across the region: throughout the ‘60s leftist forces were violently and illegally suppressed in Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Panama (specifically surrounding the nationalization of

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., 54-56.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁴² Ibid., 66-67.

⁹⁴³ Richard Barnet, *Intervention and Revolution* (1968), quoted in Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 67.

⁹⁴⁴ Quoted in William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1995).

the canal), Uruguay, Bolivia (where Che Guevara was captured and later assassinated), Chile, and Argentina.

Or *almost* flawless tune—flawless but for the most well-known of the Latin American revolutions, the Cuban revolution, led by Fidel Castro, who felled the Batista regime and took over the country in 1959. “You said the sun would rise,” writes Ernesto Che Guevara, in Dorn’s translation of “Song to Fidel.” “Let’s go / along those unmapped paths / to free the green alligator you love. / And let’s go obliterating / insults with our / brows swept with dark insurgent stars. / We shall have victory or shoot past death.”⁹⁴⁵ Those lines come out of the two years that Guevara spent with Castro and a band of revolutionaries, in the Sierra Maestra jungles, fighting off the opposing Batista forces before the revolution. But it was with Castro’s words, on July 21, 1957, from a letter to fellow revolutionary Frank Pais, that Dorn and Brotherston chose to lead off their collection of “guerrillero” translations:

The spirit of renewal, the desire that we should excel collectively, an awareness of a higher destiny: all this we feel abundantly and could feel incomparably more deeply. We had heard so often of those things and had assumed that the abstract words that described them referred to something beautiful; but now we are living that beauty, feeling it with all our senses and it is truly unique. The way our small world here in the Sierra has developed is unbelievable. The phrase “the people,” which so often has a vague and confusing meaning, has here been transformed into something marvelously and immediately real. Now I really know who “the people” are: I recognize them in this invincible strength which protects us on all sides.⁹⁴⁶

Henry Rago at *Poetry* magazine wasn’t alone in his denial to publish any of Dorn’s “guerrillero” translations—*none* of the poems from *Our Word* appear anywhere else. The fact also highlights a curious oversight in Dorn scholarship—scholarship that has firmly, and in this case, ironically fastened Dorn’s work to a poetics of *resistance* and *resentment*—that is, the absence not only of criticism, but of much mention at all of *Our Word*. Here again, one notes that the profound and prompt experience of the works that make up *Our Word* derives not from their patent declarations of *resistance*, but from their penetration into a heightened awareness through what’s at hand, what’s personal; each and all, the poems possess a restful, enriching, daily awareness, invigorated and compressed into spirit, by the exigent weight of the author’s political commitments: “Look it isn’t that I want / to leave life

⁹⁴⁵ Dorn and Brotherston, trans., *The Sun Unwound*, 85.

⁹⁴⁶ Edward Dorn and Gordon Brotherston, trans., *Our Word: Guerrilla poems from Latin America* (London: Grossman Publishers, in assoc. with Cape Goliard, 1968), unpaginated.

back there,” writes Javier Heraud, “but I must follow a path / that death is known to stalk.”⁹⁴⁷ And in his simply titled but steeply enjambed, “Poem”: “No, / I don’t / laugh / at death. / It’s / just / that I’m / not / afraid / to die / among / birds / and / trees.”⁹⁴⁸ All too true: after studying film in Cuba, Heraud returned to his native Peru in 1958, where he joined the Ejército de Liberación Nacional as a guerilla; in 1963, at the age of twenty-one, he was shot to death in the middle of the Madre de Dios river.⁹⁴⁹

In his review of *Our Word* for *Caterpillar* in 1969, Ken Irby identifies the predominant inclination of its poems toward an “inside address,” no lashing out against the state, or the ragged metropolis:

The poems in this book which hit hardest are not “about” the “Revolution” or the struggle for bread and land—in the midst and very much a part of that, they are between lovers, friends, the inside address of self to all others, all to be read. Most poignantly those of Fernando Gordillo Cervantes and of his lover Michele Najlis. And those of Javier Heraud, dead at 21, probably the most impressive poet in the collection. The point, tho, is that these are only a few—fighters, poets, lovers—of many many so engaged—for whom poetry is one, natural, equally intimate, activity. In the midst of the lucha. The U.S. has rarely taught her children that it is anything more than entertainment (high) or cultural possession, a hip taste.⁹⁵⁰

Concluding the review, Irby quotes from Heraud, whom I’ve quoted above, and a short poem by Najlis. The sense is equally acute in the Najlis piece, “To Fernando,” as it is in Heraud’s work, of the natural world as the only adequately variegated and persistent response to the intensity and depth of human sensibility, and particularly human longing; the distances and adulterations of the landscape complements one’s inner relations. As they do for Dorn, natural forces contain and propel the contours and sentiments in Najlis’ human cosmos—the cosmos, Robert Duncan relates, as a “living center where there is no composure but a life-spring of dissatisfaction in all orders from which the restless ordering of our poetry comes.”⁹⁵¹ In “To Fernando,” Najlis writes:

When the earth

⁹⁴⁷ Dorn and Brotherston, trans., *The Sun Unwound*, 105.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁹⁵⁰ Kenneth Irby, review of *Our Word: Guerilla poems from Latin America*, trans. Edward Dorn and Gordon Brotherston, *Caterpillar 10*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1969): 241. Heraud was probably the most renowned, as well: while studying at the Universidad Católica in 1958, his second book of poems, *El viaje*, “won a national poetry prize.” (Dorn and Brotherston, *The Sun Unwound*, 133)

⁹⁵¹ Duncan, introduction to *Bending the Bow*, x.

with the naturalness of woman
 “mujer is more
 than senora or senorita”—
 receives openly the first rains,
 I think of nothing then
 but you.⁹⁵²

If “I think of nothing... / but you” who, “then,” am “I”? Who is this “I,” writing? This “I,” thinking? Or being thought of? Along parallel circuits, related activities: “When the earth / ... / receives... / I think...” When the “I” of the “Sky Man” in “Creation” (from Dorn’s *Recollections of Gran Apacheria*) is “Thinking Earth. / And then... thought / a Little Boy / and poco a poco / the whole phylum / was brought into being,” who is thinking “I”?⁹⁵³ To what “self” does Olson’s Maximus speak of “undone business,” pausing one morning, “with the sea / stretching out / from my feet”? “To look into oneself endlessly,” Trocchi writes, “is to be aware of what is discontinuous and null; it is to sever the I who is aware from the I of whom he is aware...and who is he? What is I doing in the third person?”⁹⁵⁴ “I” in the third person is “I” in exile, the “I” with a foreign tongue, or in another language, or one’s own language *centralized*, dominated. Of that persistent exile, translation becomes a “true” activity: rather than emulsify its component sources, the translation actively seeks a juncture, a new, independent but kindred language, which strives not to resolve its composite voices, but to issue forth from their contiguous lacunae. For Dorn, the creative force of this merger is evident in the activity itself—in his activity especially, with Brotherston, a British friend: “[Translating is] really all in the exercise, not in thinking about it, ...not in the advice. ... I think it’s nice to combine the two languages, because what English can’t stand American can, and vice versa. You just have to be careful with it. You’ve got to hone it so that the edges are diminished, because what you want is one expression. You don’t want a weird marriage.”⁹⁵⁵

The merger the Najlis poem enacts, the “centrality,” one could say, it achieves, it shares with Boehme’s revelatory vision of a new life, “which is the outcome and growth of all lives, and is mixed...,” from the passage Irby copied in a letter to Dorn eight months before the translating of *Our Word* began. There’s a certain unanticipated symmetry in Irby’s reviewing Dorn’s “guerrillero” translations, which is partly illustrated by the “inside”

⁹⁵² Dorn and Brotherston, trans, *Our Word*, unpaginated. Both of Najlis’s pieces in *Our Word* are titled “To Fernando,” and this one, quoted above, does not appear in the later, *The Sun Unwound*.

⁹⁵³ Dorn, *Way West*, 132.

⁹⁵⁴ Trocchi, *Cain’s Book*, 69-70.

⁹⁵⁵ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, in *Ed Dorn Interviews*, 97-98.

attention the review points to in the poems. “In the midst and very much a part of that,” that is, of the *lucha*, the “struggle,” the poems build their hybrid awareness through the landscape, which resonates with the Irby’s work in Berkeley, in the midst of other woe. Of the “longing” shared, “inner” and “outer,” between friend and foe, in the shared distances, Irby writes in *Relation*:

As the land arouses the sensuality, so the corruption of the earth exasperates and frustrates, a hoarseness in the loins. The soft, green Berkeley hills hang down almost into Sproul Plaza, where once again strikers, for the same old silly (*selig*) demands of respect and the word, are beaten and tear-gassed by the cops. The irascible longing. There is always the poignancy, living here in California, in this land that should have been the most beneficent of all human dwelling-places.⁹⁵⁶

When Dorn had earlier recommended Irby’s work to Tom Clark for the *Paris Review*, Clark accepted only two of a group of poems that would later appear in *Relation*. Clark was looking for material that was, he said, “more political.” But for Irby, and increasingly for Dorn (“I had become convinced that the direct onslaught . . . of the political poem was not only very boring but completely valueless”), and for the majority of the poets who constitute *Our Word*, the writer is *already* political, “the minute he has taken himself to be cute enough to be printed,” Dorn writes, the writer is “in the midst *and* very much a part of” the *encompassing* struggle, in which only the poem, by embodying, can prevail.⁹⁵⁷

⁹⁵⁶ Irby, introduction to *Relation*, unpaginated.

⁹⁵⁷ Dorn, interview by Alpert, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 26; Dorn, “Notes More or Less Relevant to Burroughs and Trocchi,” *Kulchur* 7 (Autumn 1962), 19.

*Me sees
past the curtain
a certain destruction
the hills have been upended
theyre no longer blended upon
the plates of their own dynamic principles
could a lover have done this, hombre?*

– Ed Dorn⁹⁵⁸

14. *The Resounding Knock*

By September 1967 Dorn was immersed in *Slinger* (*Gunslinger*'s original title), a lengthy, scintillating narrative that tells the story of a nameless, "Cautious," shamanic gunslinger, "of impeccable personal smoothness," into whose "each gesture... / goes Some Dark Combination."⁹⁵⁹ Preaching action and experience, the Gunslinger desires an overhaul of the perceptual system, sternly repudiates "names" and the ontological shackles attached to "description" (to being "described"), and fires "Straight Information" that freezes, tears, and magically alters the fabric of reality, to abolish spiritual crisis in the offing. He travels alongside his swaggering, black jack-dealing, flirtatious, dope-smoking horse, named Claude Levi-Strauss, who generally agrees with the Gunslinger that, "we'd all rather *be* there / than talk about it."⁹⁶⁰ Together, their mission is to intercept and eliminate Howard Hughes, aka "Robart," the Gunslinger's daemonic counterpart, who, disguised as a janitor, travels in a procession of cars, "drawn by rainbow-wingèd steeds."⁹⁶¹ For Dorn, Hughes represents the "individualism syndrome that we still ... creep beneath completely in this country."⁹⁶² In a 1973 interview, he discusses Hughes's secrecy as emblematic of the institutionalized scheming in America's exploitative commercial ventures:

I think [Hughes] is a rather pure metaphor of a kind of primitive, entrepreneurial capitalist take of what America is, which is still embedded in the political and social instincts of a lot of American activity. He's a great singular—in a strange way like a dinosaur, but nevertheless his lineage in speculators goes back to the seventies and eighties of the last century and I do see him as an extension of the earlier, non-electronic, financial geniuses like Fisk and Gould. ...[he] represents a very provocative sublimation. I suppose you could say dangerous. It's like the tip of the

⁹⁵⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 128.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3; 27.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹⁶² Edward Dorn, interview with Alpert, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 26.

iceberg—what’s back there is so hidden and so secret. The [Watergate] scandal is healthy and refreshing in American life—a cliché everyone can subscribe to.⁹⁶³

Having come north through Juarez, Mexico, to Mesilla, New Mexico—a major stagecoach crossroads of the “Wild West” (the Santa Fe Trail and the Butterfield Stagecoach) famous for its cantinas—the Slinger, as he’s sometimes called, and the (variously titled) “Bombed Horse” encounter “I,” a frenetic, obtrusive and overly-inquisitive idler, who joins them for tequila—what the Slinger metonymizes as “the last / dwindling impulse of the sun.”⁹⁶⁴ Together they ponder the saloon brawl unfolding before them: “Lo que pasa [the Slinger] breathed / this place is / in the constructive process / of ruin – Gaze upon it: / tables upended, the flak / of chips and drink surrounds us. / ... / What is the *principle* of what / you see.”⁹⁶⁵ That last question the Slinger puts to “I,” whom he constantly presses with philosophical puzzles, part of his self-proclaimed, overall “mission” of total regeneration, a mission intended “to encourage the Purity of the Head”—a purging, cleansing, and reframing of the ego’s “centrality.”⁹⁶⁶ Thus, critic Roy K. Okada notes, the principal, metaphysical quandaries Slinger proposes in Book I—his “fundamental questioning of reality”: “Are these men men?”; “Is my horse a horse?”—are “important in attempting to gauge the limits of this new world.”⁹⁶⁷ No longer as material merely to “objectify” its content, language enters this new world in a subjective position—not in the service of description, but to generate “real things” of its own. “Are you trying / to ‘describe’ me, boy?” the Horse asks, and suddenly dissolves the narrative’s dependence on its narrator, by critiquing the language of the poem itself: “No, no, I hastened to add. / And by the way boy / if there’s any addin / to do around here / I’ll do it, that’s my stick / comprende? / Where’s my dark ace?”⁹⁶⁸ That question starts a fight with a stranger (“What’s your business / with Any dark ace! / ... *Horseface!*”), a fight *within the fight*, promptly dispersed by the Slinger’s “disputational .44,” that freezes the “*pliable lip*” of the irascible “stranger” and awkwardly animates his gun: “his store-bought iron / coughed out some cheap powder, / and then changed its mind, / muttering about having

⁹⁶³ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁶⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 14.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid., 16-17.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., 17; Dorn, interview by Alpert, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 46-47.

⁹⁶⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 25. And Dorn told Okada: “I’ve always been confused by those attempts to make language the same thing as the thing. I don’t want to say again what Williams said [‘No ideas but in things’]—in fact I don’t want to say that at all.” (*Edward Dorn Interviews*, 47).

/ been up too late last night.”⁹⁶⁹ Eventually, “on the heated margin / of that general battle,” after the group meets a poet-singer, who strums an “*Absolute*,” the entire party—Slinger, the “Turned-On Horse,” “I,” the Poet, and the “gaudy Madam,” Lil, who owns the saloon—embarks on the voyage to find Hughes, who recently, so the Gunslinger’s interstellar emissaries have informed him, “*moved to Vegas / or bought Vegas and / moved it.*”⁹⁷⁰ But why Hughes, “I” wants to know. “You would not know,” the Slinger tells him, “that the souls of old Texans / are in jeopardy in a way not common / to other men, my singular friend. / You would not know / of the long plains night / where they carry on / and arrange their genetic duels / with men of other states.”⁹⁷¹

While the destination of the Gunslinger’s journey is continuously adjusted, and becomes, in fact, the journey itself, the parameters of Hughes’ mission (“scheduled excursions”) are strictly and rigidly enforced, and endeavor to preclude action by preempting interpretation. For example, Hughes’ “favorite” worker carries an urn that contains, “[t]he final remains of a colossal clock / Which stood in the hallway / At the beginning of Organized History,” onto which the slogan of Hughes’ quest, to restrict new directions for “Organized History,” is “cut in a lascivious style around its liprim,” whose palindrome reads: “EMIT NO TIME.”⁹⁷² Whereas the Gunslinger’s caravan integrates strangers it encounters (hitchhikers, for example), and whenever it pauses, explodes the “Vicious Isolat[ing]” autocracy of the rational “ego” with fantastic phenomenal effects that scramble cause, effect, and cartoonish capability, Hughes (aka “Robart”⁹⁷³) travels with an obsequious entourage—the “Atlantes,” and the “avaricious Vice-Versas / An obscene and gluttonous order of rat”—who together “[program] through their simply relays / ... push all the buttons Close all gratings / Revise all functions,” to aid in his usurious concealment (first, “decoyed as the cheeze in a burger,” then, in “[t]he perfect disguise of the casual janitor”).⁹⁷⁴ “Of opulence is [their] secret Journey, & mad,” the Poet informs us in his “Cycle,” and aside from the iniquitous masquerade, Hughes aspires to immobilize the “Cobalt heads” of the citizenry with “Fear and Surrender.”⁹⁷⁵ Surveillance is Hughes’ grand project, not “attention,” and when the

⁹⁶⁹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 25-27.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17; 9.

⁹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁷² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹⁷³ Howard Hughes’s middle name is Robert.

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

“Interior Decorator Runs the Scenario of the Winged Car,” its vacuous (like a black hole, “[t]he space has *no* front it’s *All* rear...”), stagnating, and oppressive atmosphere suggests a foil (an “uncentered locus”) for the proprioceptive openness of the Gunslinger’s troupe:

By *living* Atlantes, a race of half-column half-man
Who turn each such thing smirking
dizzying with threats of abandonment
To gravity
A basic trick in this uncentered locus

Atlantes also hold the drawn shades down
And they open and close the rear door
When Fear and Surrender come and go
On their scheduled excursions⁹⁷⁶

Meanwhile, the proprietor of the raucous barroom/brothel is an old acquaintance of the Gunslinger, a sassy, loquacious woman named Lil—whose namesake appears to be “Diamond Lil,” the cultish, film persona of Mae West in, for example, *Klondike Annie*, the most well-known in her series of bawdy, demotic, Western quasi-Conversion narratives set against the gold rush of the 1890’s.⁹⁷⁷ Early in “Book I,” “Cocaine Lil”’s recollection of the Slinger’s quest for Hughes—“...*I remember you had / what your friend here / might call an obsession / about the man*”—leads her to recount her disconcerting introduction to Claude, who was once Hughes’ companion, and whom she fails to recognize at first.⁹⁷⁸ The Slinger, in fact, claims to have orchestrated the previous brawl, (“this mass collision, standard in its design”) for this purpose specifically—“to distract the vision / of that spinning crystal,” he tells “I”.⁹⁷⁹ And like a crystal ball images the future, this word “crystal” will presently inform and focus Lil’s recognition, aka “vision,” of “the “abstract” Horse. The lucidity and humor of Lil’s reminiscence of the “Oblique Horse,” and its latent caricature of Lil, demonstrates a vernacular dynamism and narrative fluidity brilliantly set apart from anything in Dorn’s previous catalogue. To get the feel, I quote at length:

*so we turned this stud on
and it took most of a Tampico
shipment to do the job*

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., 98; 102.

⁹⁷⁷ See chapter 24, herein, and Jill Watts’ essay “Sacred and Profane: Mae West’s (re)Presentation of Western Religion,” in *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, Valerie J. Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger, eds. (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 50-64.

⁹⁷⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 9-10.

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid., 22.

*but I'll tell you Slinger
that horse laughed all that night
and they carried him out next morning
and put him on the stage
for Amarillo, him and the Texan
sittin in there all alone
and that horse was tellin everybody
what to do
Get that strong box up there,
get them "horses" hitched up
he'd say
rollin a big tampico bomber with his hooves
his shoes had come off, you see,
and he could do it so natural anyway
and then he'd kinda lounge
inside the stage coach and
lean out the window winkin
at the girls, showing
his teeth, I can't say he was
Unattractive, something kinda
handsome about his big face
and suggestive he was
a sorta manner
he had*

*He kept saying Can You Manage?
and Thank You!
every time the hostler hitched up
another horse
and then he had kinda what
you might call a derisive air
when he'd say "Due In On Monday"
because you see it was Sunday
when they left town, but
he kept knockin his right hoof
against the inside of the coach
sayin You Alright Out There?
and he had the texan's hat on
a stetson XX sorta clockwise
on his head it was
I tell you Slinger you would of
split your levis and dropped your
beads to seen it.*

*Because he
was sayin some of the abstractest
things you ever heard
like Celery Is Crisp!
and we ain't seen him
or that individual Texan*

*who owned him since.
I swear
that stud must have become a congressman
or something since then
He sure was going strong on that
fresh Tampico...*⁹⁸⁰

The personified “Plugged In Horse” suggests that the “genetic duels” Hughes (from whose contingent the same “Stoned Horse” has defected) “arranges” and “carr[ies] on,” also *produce* “men of other states,” or rather, men *in other states*—“I”’s response to the Slinger’s elusive query, “Is my horse a horse?” is understandably confused: “I’m on that score not sure / I said / Your horse seemes different / from these men.”⁹⁸¹ However, “seemes different” is apt, in one *sense* (i.e. the other “eye”), because Claude only *appears physically* to be a horse; he is otherwise inarguably human. Later, in Book II, when “I” himself dies, his journeying companions immerse him in five gallons of liquid acid (LSD)—apprehended from a hitchhiker named Kool Everything, whom they pick up outside “Universe City.” Thus, “I” is resurrected, “the offspring of a thousand laboratories.”⁹⁸²

As I’ve said, “I”’s death is not only a turning point in *Gunslinger*’s plot, but is also a critical moment of fracture in Dorn’s shifting poetic address that destabilizes readerly expectations of narratorial perspective. For example, the unshakably nonchalant Poet’s observation of “I”’s moribund decomposition obscures categories of method and theme—engaging the poem’s content and the poem itself—and collapses (by disorienting) reading, writing, and thinking, into a single kinetic act: “Yes, reflected the Poet / As the Yellow Rose of Dawn climbs / he loses the light azimuthal fragrance of his arrival / and becomes a zenith / of a particular attention— / All Systems Go. / There will be some along our way / to claim I stinks.”⁹⁸³ As the slanting rays of the sun rise to the encompassing illumination of noon (when “the apexed sun” enters “a paradox / namely, The West which is The East”), so by dying, “I”—the character and the subjective authorial voice—transcends the obstacles in looking across (“I wanted to stop looking through these binoculars at the horizon...” Dorn said), and the deceitful pitfalls of horizontal depth-perception and scientific measurement (“azimuthal”), and embraces the “a particular attention” of the “zenith”—i.e. perspective

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid., 12-13.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid., 17-18.

⁹⁸² Ibid., 66.

⁹⁸³ Ibid., 58-59.

beyond a single, relative, earthbound position: “*All Systems Go.*”⁹⁸⁴ Etymologically, “zenith”—from the Latin *cenit*, based on the Arabic *samt*, meaning “path (over the head)” — describes a human connection to the firmament in terms of relative motion. Denotatively, “zenith” refers to a location (“the highest point reached by a celestial or other object”), a time (“...at which something is most powerful or successful”), and a relation (“the point in the sky or celestial sphere directly above an observer”).⁹⁸⁵ Therefore, in Dorn’s polysemous, self-reflexive passage, the word’s totality incipiently conceives of the individual as *locus of experience*, a combinatory “medium” for exercising “the shared mind.”

Shortly after “I”’s revival, while roaming Universe City, the Slinger notes a curious stranger, “at the newstand laughing / into a copy of *Scientific American*,” whom he periphrastically interrogates (and Kool Everything translates):

How, dreamer,
will fate mark you
in her index when she comes dressed
as a crystallographer
to religne the tumblers
inside your genetic padlock?

Hows that?

He wants to know your name.

Ah yes, how foolish of me,
Dr. Flamboyant, Dr. Jean Flamboyant
I was the flame of my Lyceum
I can fix anything⁹⁸⁶

As High West fashion commentary, “Jean Flamboyant” is rich, but could that be “*Gene Flamboyant*,” whose surname comes from the French word for “flame”? This persistent attention to chemical transformation is one thing that connects the Slinger’s mission with that of Hughes, but the fine lines *Gunslinger* draws among chemical experimentation signify huge divisions—battery acid and lysergic acid are two very different things—and on that score, Slinger and Howard Hughes are as dissimilar as Edward Dorn and J. Edgar Hoover.

The earthly action of *Gunslinger* occurs on and around the Colorado Plateau and the Great Basin, an area with which Dorn was already familiar, not least of all from the time he

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid., 80; Dorn, interview by Alpert, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 25.

⁹⁸⁵ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed, s.v. “zenith.”

⁹⁸⁶ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 80-81.

spent with the Shoshone Indians in that area. Of breathtaking topographical beauty and grandeur that are the result of long-term water erosion, this “singular” landscape has also served, and continues to serve, as the government’s secret laboratory for experimenting with new, sometimes nuclear, weapons, and guarding toxic waste “disposal.” Unpacking the chemistry and biochemistry involved in *Gunslinger*’s latter books, particularly Book III, would necessitate a lengthy and complex study of its own, but an overview of the “criminal use” of the intermontane West will elucidate the warfare deeply entrenched in the poem as well as the character of the struggle that separates Slinger from Hughes. While Paul Dresman argues the cosmetic “fragmentation” of Books III and IIII represents the diffusion of “the hopeful spirit of the 1960s” through which “the inward turning of spiritualism [replaced] the outward movement of the community,” the strange linguistic distortions and mutations of those books also exist as by-products of the “genetic duels” to which the Slinger alludes.⁹⁸⁷ The “Prolegomenon” of Book IIII, for instance, which at first appears to relish the terrain’s “natural” splendor, quickly turns to document its rigorous contamination—the fearful “geometry” of industrial progress collides with the abstract and transgressive “extravagant geometry” of nature (from landform to galaxy) to produce “Landscape as Inferno”:

We survey the Colorado Plateau.
There are no degrees of reality
in this handsome and singular mass,
or in the extravagant geometry
of its cliffs and pinnacles.

This is all water carved
the body thrust into the hydrosphere
and where the green mesas give way
to the vulcan floor, not far
from Farmington and other interferences
with the perfect night
and the glittering trail
of the silent Via Lactea
there is a civil scar
so cosmetic, one can’t see it.

A superimposition, drawn up
like the ultimate property
of the ego, an invisible claim
to a scratchy indultum
from which smoke pours forth.

⁹⁸⁷ Edward Dorn, “Through the Rearview Mirror,” interview by Paul Dresman, in *Ed Dorn Live*, 150.

But now, over the endless sagey brush
the moon makes her silvery bid
and in the cool dry air of the niht
the winde wankels across the cattle grid.⁹⁸⁸

Farmington is a city in northwestern New Mexico (as well as northeastern Utah and a slew of other states), whose primary industries are natural gas, oil, and coal. In 1967, as part of Operation Plowshare—the U.S. government’s “peaceful” nuclear program ordained to facilitate national construction projects—a nuclear device was detonated underground just east of the city, in an attempt to expedite the extraction of natural gas.⁹⁸⁹ Today, residents of the Navajo reservation just west and southwest of Farmington, in addition to its own inhabitants, continue to battle the devastating health effects of nuclear tests. However, the historical frequency of nuclear and toxic experimentation in the intermontane West, combined with the rampant practice of matching test sites on or near land already reserved for indigenous populations, suggests an organized and determined initiative on the part of the U.S. government to target specific human populations with the fallout from their otherwise classified “genetic duels.”

Back in 1965, when Dorn addressed the Berkeley Poetry Conference (in place of LeRoi Jones) about his experiences with the Shoshone Indians of the Basin Plateau, he insisted that to non-Americans, “trustworthiness” was not a virtue perceived in the American context: “Nobody trusts us. You *don’t* have to talk about Vietnam. You don’t have to talk about South America. You can talk about Nevada. That’s much closer to home.”⁹⁹⁰ One hears “home,” that is, some irony in Dorn’s use of the word, since Nevada epitomizes home on the firing range: four million of its acres (roughly 5½ percent of the total area) belong to the U.S. military, who also controls seventy percent of its airspace, and for forty years has regularly bombed “Bravo 20,” an enormous central section of the state, “sown with live ammo and unexploded warheads.”⁹⁹¹ Utah, however, molders under an even more horrific

⁹⁸⁸ “Landscape as Inferno,” is Mike Davis’s term, from his essay, “Ecocide in Marlboro Country,” (p. 339-369) in *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, 345; Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 146.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid.; The U.S. Department of Energy, Nevada Operations Office, Office of Public Affairs and Information, “Executive Summary,” in *The Plowshare Program*, n.d., available online through the [Federal Depository Library Program Electronic Collection Archive](#), <<http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/>> and as pdf through wikipedia bibliography for “Operation Plowshare,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Plowshare> (20 January 2008).

⁹⁹⁰ Dorn, “The Poet, the People, the Spirit,” in *Views*, 97.

⁹⁹¹ Davis, “Ecocide in Marlboro Country,” in *Over the Edge*, 342.

miasma. Due east of the Nevada Test Site—where highly confidential “Project W-47” oversaw the assembly and testing of the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—lies St. George, cloaked in “radiation debris” blown over by five decades worth of “lethal clouds”—each one “the equivalent of billions of x-rays, and contain[ing] more radiation than was released at Chernobyl in 1988.” In fact, throughout the 1950s the Atomic Energy Commission “deliberately planned for fallout to blow over the St. George region in order to avoid Las Vegas and Los Angeles. . . . As a result, this downwind population (exposed to the fallout equivalent of perhaps fifty Hiroshimas) is being eaten away by cumulative cancers, neurological disorders, and genetic defects.”⁹⁹²

North of St. George, and forty-five miles southwest of Salt Lake City, one reaches Skull Valley, and the Skull Valley Indian Reservation, home of the scarce Gosiute tribe (cousins of the Western Shoshone). The Gosiute tribe leases their land to the Hercules Corporation, who use it to test “rockets and explosives.”⁹⁹³ At the southern end of the valley sits Dugway Proving Ground, “since 1942, the primary test-site for U.S. chemical, biological, and incendiary weapons,” writes ecological historian, Mike Davis. “Napalm was invented here and tried out on block long replicas of German and Japanese workers’ housing (parts of this eerie ‘doom city’ still stand). Also tested here was the supersecret Anglo-American anthrax bomb (Project N) that Churchill, exasperated by the 1945 V-2 attacks on London, wanted to use to kill twelve million Germans.”⁹⁹⁴ But the weapons at Dugway, especially the chemical weapons, weren’t only tested on “replicas” of foreign homes, they were sprayed on living things too. In 1955, “a cloud generator was used to saturate thirty volunteers—all Seventh Day Adventist conscientious objectors—with potentially deadly Q Fever.”⁹⁹⁵ From 1951 through 1969, the Army conducted “1,635 field trials of nerve gas, involving at least 500,000 pounds of the deadly agent.”⁹⁹⁶ The open-air nerve gas trials were halted due to a mishap in April 1968—the year of *Slinger*’s first appearance—that “asphyxiated six thousand sheep on the neighboring Gosiute Reservation. Although the Army paid \$1 million in damages, it refused to acknowledge any responsibility.”⁹⁹⁷ The breadth of that responsibility is as difficult to assess as the degree to which the U.S. government is unconscionably

⁹⁹² Ibid., 349-50.

⁹⁹³ Ibid., 358.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., 344; 358-59.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid., 359.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid., 359.

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid., 358-359.

negligent. From August through October in 1959, for instance, “the Air Force deliberately let nuclear reactors melt down on eight occasions,” then, Nevada papers reported, “used forced air to ensure that the resulting radiation would spread to the wind. Sensors were set up over a 210-mile area to track the radiation clouds. When last detected they were headed toward the old U.S. 40 (now Interstate 80).”⁹⁹⁸ Over the latter half of the twentieth-century, among other equally egregious projects, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the more ambiguously titled Department of Energy that succeeded it, have “suppressed research on the contamination of the milk supply,” and “abducted hundreds of body parts from victims” of nuclear fallout. A Carter administration task force estimated that, in total, “at least 500,000 people were exposed to intense, short-range effects of nuclear detonation”—Western icon, John Wayne, among the dead. More recently, since the Department of Defense has “dump[ed] most of its obsolete missiles, chemical weaponry, and nuclear waste into the thinly populated triangle between Reno, Salt Lake City, and Las Vegas: an area that already contains perhaps one thousand ‘highly contaminated’ sites (the exact number is a secret) on sixteen military bases and Department of Energy facilities,” a veritable corporate war over toxic waste-disposal has displaced the earlier frenzy of military-industrial experimentation.⁹⁹⁹

Living in the menacing shadow of such apocalyptic configurations brings to mind that rank and weary condition to which William Faulkner in his 1949 Nobel Prize speech saw his contemporaries reduced: “Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up?”¹⁰⁰⁰ But on the contrary, that question seems to expedite the ontological self-awareness Faulkner denies it. Doesn’t living in the shadow of annihilation spark an urgent and commensurate response in its subjects, its victims? Just as “[t]he War rises from the dramatic necessity,” writes Robert Duncan, so the war for Duncan’s poetry, Nathaniel Mackey argues, offers up “psychic material that is both an attack and a counterattack, both the suffering inflicted on the heretic poet and the suffering the poet would inflict in return?”¹⁰⁰¹ Just as the Gunslinger composes fiery jeremiads for the

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid., 359.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid., 361; 368.

¹⁰⁰⁰ William Faulkner, “Nobel Prize Award Speech,” in *The Conscious Reader*, Shrodes, et. al., eds., 609.

¹⁰⁰¹ Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge*, 98-99; see also 163: “There is a similar hedge in the phrase ‘dims humanity and moves us / toward its own End,’ for more immediate than its possible forecast of the end of the world or the end of the human race is its restatement of an abiding assertion of Duncan’s

“sick heads” of Universe City, in order to turn “the condition of the local citizenry around,” and violently tears at the ideological veil of “reality,” harnessing to it *appearances* without precedent, employing metaphysical weaponry designed to forestall other kinds violence, and on occasion, if frivolously, might *abuse* his power: “May I sit down asked the doctor / fanning his neck / with the Scientific American / and motioning to a bench / Prie Dieu! the Slinger gestured / with his long fingers, scattering / half the population of the plaza.”¹⁰⁰² In fact, Dr. Flamboyant’s braggart phrase itself—“I was the flame of my Lyceum”—suggests the “ambidextrous” force (the “flame” of attraction cut with destructive, daemonic potential) that brings forth the poem from Apollo’s temple of inspiration. And that temple, that “dome in air,” is written “everywhere,” as Dorn said, and could be anywhere, and therefore must needs include our “general and universal physical fear”: “We are bleached in Sound / as it burns by what we desire,” Dorn writes in the “Prolegomenon” of Book III, “and we give our inwardness / in some degree to all things / but to fire we give everything.”¹⁰⁰³ Does knowledge, classically associated with fire, likewise consume and destroy that which fuels its unimpeachable luminosity? Even the widespread aestheticization of the apocalypse, like the multicolored brilliance of a radioactive sky, exposes the entrenched reverence that surrounds our inviolably narcissistic lust for knowledge, however inimical its fruits. “It is unbearable what knowledge of the past has been allowed to become,” Olson writes in “Human Universe, “what function of human memory has been dribbled out in to the hands of these learned monsters whom people are led to think ‘know.’”¹⁰⁰⁴ That scientific knowledge’s many-sided crusade destroyed Skull Valley is indisputable, and there Dorn perceives under the noxious blanket of industrial waste, “the ultimate property / of the ego, an invisible claim / to a scratchy indultum.”¹⁰⁰⁵ That is, he sees the landscape’s “civil scar” as the objective correlative for those “superimpositions,” those unsanctioned violations on the *person*, on the “ego,” whereupon it “disintegrates immediately into something cheap and commercial and

aesthetic: art has a life of its own and thus ends—purposes—of its own, and in being admitted into its powers we surrender our interests to *its* will, dim our humanity as we ‘convert the personal,’ for art is a transpersonal, transhuman power that takes us out of ourselves. It is as though the apocalypse were not so much a prophetic, historical claim as a trope for the art experience, being taken out of oneself by way of art.”

¹⁰⁰² Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 81.

¹⁰⁰³ See “A for Ism” in *Hello, La Jolla*: “A poets occupation / is to compose poetry / The writing of it / is everywhere”; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Greenblatt, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000), 441; Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 145.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Olson, *Collected Prose*, 163.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 146.

psychiatric.”¹⁰⁰⁶ In *Gunslinger*, to discard descriptive, categorical knowledge is to engage the world, is to live outside the oppressive politics of identity, to live beyond “those / who advertise you / out”: “The mortal can be described / the Gunslinger finished, / That’s all mortality is / in fact.”¹⁰⁰⁷ For the Gunslinger there exists no knowledge beyond what-is (as Parmenides would say), every moment is an end; nothing (only) lies *beyond* experience, beyond the act: “...you are inattentive / and expect reason to Follow / as some future chain gang does / a well-worn road,” he tells and I, using metaphoric logic to liken logic to prison.¹⁰⁰⁸ And again, upon arriving at Universe City, the Gunslinger dismantles the parlance of his company:

We’re *Here!* laughed Everything

Sounds like an adverb
disguised as a place, commented the Slinger

What?

Sounds like an adventure.

Oh yea, man I *never thot* I’d see this place.

Then you’ll have the privilege of seeing it
without having thot it, prompted the Slinger.

Let’s have Lunch, said Lil,
I’m starved.

Then youre beyond the hand of Lunch
diagnosed the Slinger

Scheduled food is invariably tasteless
said the Poet.

Yet in the desert
you’d be happy to eat the schedule itself
the Slinger finished.”¹⁰⁰⁹

In this “new world,” on this “map of locations,” language’s endlessly dialectical instability itself forecloses on, or rather, infinitely defers, the project of knowing.¹⁰¹⁰ *Gunslinger*

¹⁰⁰⁶ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 38.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Dorn, *Gunslinger* 33.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

reminds us that knowledge sits always on the brink of annihilation—both of itself (scientific/scholarly *theories*) and of its source material; the assignation of *meaning* to *event* commences a process of mortification. In his dust jacket statement for *The North Atlantic Turbine*, Dorn revises his poetic objectives in terms that link directly the “tragedy” Faulkner describes, to an amplified realm of “intensity,” a fertile “landscape of the imagination.”¹⁰¹¹ “I think I can now see my way clear to a spiritual address,” Dorn writes. “I don’t feel that as a ‘mellowing’ but more a transfer from an energy factor of my practice to an altogether direct plane of intensity I hope to find my place on. That non-spacial dimension, intensity, is one of the few singular things which interests me now.”¹⁰¹²

In this sense, *Gunslinger* critically and exuberantly responds to Faulkner’s nightmare of a dumb world, void of art. The poem (moving, Dorn said, “toward a spiritual address”) records a spiritual voyage that dances along the verge of annihilation, nuclear or otherwise, whose absurd imminence contains a paradoxical form of salvation for the poem. Dorn confessed to Stephen Fredman:

After all, one of the tasks for the I is to participate in the world without loss of identity, which is one of the fears of I. I fears that loss.

There’s a certain blandness in self-preoccupation and ego-absorption that can only be solved by the relaxation of the ego. In order for that to happen, the person has to be assured that destruction isn’t around the corner. The comic aspects of *Gunslinger* are there simply to try to handle the fear that everybody feels, that I feel myself.¹⁰¹³

Once “I” is reconstituted as the “secretary to Parmenides”—a pre-Socratic philosopher who preaches a unifying, “imperishable” duality inherent to all things: “All is full of light and obscure night together, / Of both equally”¹⁰¹⁴—he proclaims a new, regenerative methodology for *being*, one that disarms fear’s immobilizing offices: “Entrapment is this society’s / Sole activity, I whispered / and Only laughter, / can blow it to rags / *But* there is no negative pure enough / to entrap our Expectations.”¹⁰¹⁵ The expectation of a better society, of

¹⁰¹⁰ Perloff intro, speaks of “endlessly deferred” blah blah

¹⁰¹¹ “Exactly,” is Dorn’s response to Okada’s interpretation of “intensity” in his own statement (*Edward Dorn Interviews*, 44)—of all the interviews in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, with the possible exception of “Roadtesting the Language,” Dorn seems most agreeable with Roy K. Okada.

¹⁰¹² Dorn, Fulcrum Press promotional pamphlet, Folder Dorn Correspondence, Joel Oppenheimer Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰¹³ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 100.

¹⁰¹⁴ Parmenides of Elea, *Fragments*, trans. David Gallop (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 77aa.

¹⁰¹⁵ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 155.

a world “wherein all men fit,” whose painful distance from our current state laughter can only assuage, still remains. And yet, comedy opens what’s possible, and keeps it open, in the polysemy of its playfulness: the “open, buoyant sense of meaning, to which word-play is crucial, contends with the gravity of the war,” Nathaniel Mackey argues in his essay “Gassire’s Lute: Robert Duncan’s Vietnam War Poems.”¹⁰¹⁶ This is *Gunslinger*’s main strength, according to Donald Davie, Dorn’s colleague at Essex—through comedy, “a steadily inventive play of puns and pleasantries,” the poem remains *in process*, “high-spirited and good-tempered.” In the following excerpt from his short essay, “Ed Dorn and the Treasures of Comedy,” Davie objects to labeling *Gunslinger* a satire, a rejection I would extend to the critically popular but equally limiting context of *resistance* for Dorn’s work, in a broader sense:

All our comedians have to be made into satirists; either that, or else flip entertainers. Between satire on the one side and “light verse” on the other, comic poetry gets no showing at all. So *Gunslinger*, I predict, will be applauded as satire or else damned as frivolity; and it is neither. That is what one means by calling it good-tempered or, better still, good-humoured; it has no illusions about a figure like Howard Hughes, and what he signifies in present-day America, but it delights in him, in his absurdity and the absurdity of his career and his life-style. It quite conspicuously lacks the rancour, the indignant anger of satire. . . . It is more honorable because now, when indignant disgust with America has been taken over as a reach-me-down uniform by successive generations (and by journalists who aim to please them), satire and invective and lampoon are for the moment devalued and discredited forms of writing. They come into a buyer’s market; readers tune into them too promptly, too unthinkingly. And *Gunslinger*, like any good poem, wants to jolt its readers into reorientations.¹⁰¹⁷

So the flipside mythic relatedness of Slinger and Hughes—both originate “behind the sun”—and of their projects—both stipulate a perceptual, sometimes chemical metamorphosis—represents one of many “jolts” to the reader, just one of the pluralistic strains in the “psychocosmology” of *Gunslinger*. In Book III’s “Prolegomena,” the local (Farmington) and the galactic (Via Lactea) interlock, while the moon, likened to a prospector, “makes her silvery bid.” Concurrent with the shift that Tom Clark identifies in *Gunslinger* and Dorn’s other work at the time—a shift from “lyric realism” (a “painfully singular and earnest sincerity”) toward a poetics with “room for making things up”—is a sublimation,

¹⁰¹⁶ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 99.

¹⁰¹⁷ Donald Davie, “Ed Dorn and the Treasures of Comedy,” *Vort*, no. 1 (1972): 24.

Clark argues, of the “ritual of my own person,” which Dorn describes in his 1968 prose portrait of central Illinois—a sublimation of the human universe, in elastic equipoise. Clark writes: “[T]he proverbial categorical boundary line between ‘real’ and represented worlds was around this time becoming less and less immutable ... [Dorn’s] private form of salvation included a curiously privatized relation to his own writings, which seemed for these years paradoxically to incorporate more and more of his ‘inside real’ existence the more cosmically provocative and ‘outsidereal’ they became.”¹⁰¹⁸ Here Clark refers to the epigraph of *Gunslinger* Book III—“The inside real / and the outsidereal”—where the external world *in extremis* (the “out” *sidereal*, that which denotes the firmament, its distant stars and planets) and the “inner mechanism” achieve biological polyphony through a systolic-diastolic transit.¹⁰¹⁹ If we think back to Book III’s “Prolegomena,” to “Farmington and other interferences / with the perfect night / and the glittering trail / of the silent Via Lactea,” one should also note the extraterrestrial unhomey-ness of that locale. Western eco-historian Mike Davis writes: “The aeolian processes of the Colorado Plateau have provided invaluable insights into the origin of certain Martian landscapes, ... while the Channeled Scablands of Washington are the closest terrestrial equivalent to the great flood channels discovered on Mars in 1972. ... Finally, the basalt plains and calderas of the Snake River in Idaho are considered the best analogues to the lunar mare.”¹⁰²⁰ In fact, “Farmington” is itself a double-jointed “outsidereal” reference, suggesting both mankind’s “interferences” in the name of technological/industrial “progress,” as well as a site of visitations from outer space. In June of 1890, the Farmington meteorite burned through the earth’s atmosphere to land, of all places, in north-central Kansas.¹⁰²¹

Dorn himself would land in northeastern Kansas just before Black Sparrow’s release of Book I, the first hundred copies of which he signed in Lawrence on April 23, 1968. In part, the momentum of that re-entry, of his passage from the old world to the new—“I was impelled Westward” Dorn put it—propelled *Gunslinger*’s creation. Dorn’s more encompassing vision of the West, offered by the distance of being abroad, is related to the expanding capacity of *Gunslinger*’s narrative arrangement to incorporate the discordant tone

¹⁰¹⁸ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 27.

¹⁰¹⁹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 111.

¹⁰²⁰ Davis, 367.

¹⁰²¹ “Meteoritical Bulletin Database,” online through [The Meteoritical Society: International Society for Meteoritics and Planetary Science](http://tin.er.usgs.gov/meteor/index.php), <<http://tin.er.usgs.gov/meteor/index.php>> (20 January 2008).

of its “times,” and to the poem’s multi-voiced networks and badinage to channel the “shared mind.” Dorn discusses the “portable,” nomadic, exilic origins of *Gunslinger*:

It was really a portable poem. I could write it in Chicago, San Francisco, Kansas, England—which is, in fact, what I did. It’s because it started off with the kind of distance I got on the subject and my feelings for the West, and all the times I had been transported back and forth across it, I had that out there as one big vision. Because I was a long way from it, and I could see it all, in a sense. I was free of its surroundings. . . . It freed me up from feeling the pressure of making the narrative be true or make sense or whatever—I just let it be its own thread and what people are saying to each other, the kind of, sort of vague, abstract sort of irrepressible mindlessness at times, and the vocabulary that generates and all that, were natural to the time. That’s what I was hearing around me.¹⁰²²

Appropriately, Dorn tested out the completed version of Book I on his class at Essex in November 1967, a few months before its publication, “pretend[ing]... he’d just got it in the mail from another poet.”¹⁰²³ Privately, however, he told Olson in a letter, “I think it’s the best thing I have ever done, . . . I *feel* it that way. It is nice to get away from the heaviness of what I’ve been into for the past, oh, five years. . . . I am trying for my own life to recast everything every time I see any motion on the pool at all.”¹⁰²⁴ And yet there were private matters Dorn held even from Olson, or to which he had only vaguely alluded. In actuality his effort “to recast everything” included much more than his work, and transformed his remaining time at Essex, “into an odyssey of upheaval and exile.”¹⁰²⁵ In a distressed letter to Olson in November, Dorn agonizes obliquely over “endless delay” amidst “multiple requirements”: “I am so confused in my own work now, not what to do but the endless delay in doing it, i.e. my own fucking requirements are so multiple just now, and at a time when I want simply an open shot at it.”¹⁰²⁶

Meanwhile, another source of *Gunslinger*’s inspiration sat quietly that day in November, listening to Dorn read it: “. . . her mouth / a disturbed tanager, and / in her hand an empty damajuana, / on her arm an emotion / on her ankle a band / a slender ampersand / her accent so superb / she spoke without saying / and within her eyes / were a variety / of

¹⁰²² Edward Dorn, interview by Effie Mihopoulos, *The Cento Pages*. n.d. <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_cento_index.html> (5 June 2006), unpaginated. Again, the latter half of this excerpt is excised from *Ed Dorn Live*.

¹⁰²³ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 31.

¹⁰²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰²⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

sparkling moments....”¹⁰²⁷ That seemed obvious, Jennifer Dunbar remembers: “He made it sound like a love song to me. I mean ‘the Song about a woman’ at the end of the book—it’s like he already knew. And of course I knew he wrote it. This must sound crazy, but there are several things in *Gunslinger* he wrote about before they happened. Howard Hughes moving to Las Vegas, for example....”¹⁰²⁸ Although Dorn and Dunbar hadn’t yet announced publicly the romance of their relationship, and in fact, had scarcely shared it themselves, they later agreed, “forces beyond our control had pulled us into this orbit. ... We tried to resist all those months because of course it was ‘wrong’ and would hurt other people, but we couldn’t defy the truth of it.”¹⁰²⁹ By the time, as “Book I” has it, “the mission bells [were] ringing / in Kansas,” and Dorn had left Essex for Lawrence, the couple was living together in a house in Wivenhoe, just east of Colchester.¹⁰³⁰ While Dorn was away, they wrote each other daily.

¹⁰²⁷ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 39.

¹⁰²⁸ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 31.

¹⁰²⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰³⁰ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 4.

again from its farthest point 23½ / ... / three days from now when I shall be 57, so many years / on the lookout and no further than here...”¹⁰³⁴

Needless to say, with all its talk of fathers and aging (Dorn would lose his father in 1968, and would turn forty in 1969), the timing of Olson’s poem struck a resonant chord: Dorn would soon be forced to part with not only Helene, but with his son, Paul, to whom he had dedicated the first book of *Gunslinger*. “Oh, I cld only tell you by saying that such a thing when it came put be back on the rail by its own demonstration of what a quantum is or something,” he wrote to Olson of the “Washing Rock” poem, “ie, how much can we, really, say we know.”¹⁰³⁵ To his praise, Dorn added another affectionate note: “It always, I mean still gasses me that you can be the most poetic worker alive while saying something, nearly anything—and the piece is, I mean has a kind of Liturgical closeness for me, or effect on me, therefore.”¹⁰³⁶ However, although his separation from Helene was official at the time, Dorn found the subject difficult to broach with his mentor, and consequently skirted and stalled on disclosing the news.

A mixture of curiosity about his friends’ troubled relationship, and personal anxieties of his own weighing on him (a *lack* of romance, in part), Olson’s correspondence that January is rather lonely itself in places. He promptly admits to feeling “not so good – reading *Playboy Magazine*, for all the shit in the world,” and his frenzied proposal of occasions when he and Dorn might meet up sounds a bit nostalgic, almost forlorn—a conference in Washington in April, “Language and World Power or something”; a vague job possibility for Dorn at Brooklyn College in the fall, or after, or whenever—“...no idea whether I have any strength there but the guy who had been Executive Dean of the NY system moved up I see in *Time Magazine* to whatever they call Rectors & Presidents these days, at Brooklyn College— & though I’ve never been in touch with since I pledged him to a fraternity (!) I’d heard he’d noticed I was at Buffalo. And cld obviously put the ED on him.”¹⁰³⁷ Or perhaps, Olson tactfully prodded, the whole Dorn family would be interested in living in New York? When the munificence finally settles, simply, on an open invitation to Gloucester, Olson’s tone seems resigned to whatever doom impended: “Keep me on ... to any of your needs anyway

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid., 579.

¹⁰³⁵ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 24 January 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁷ Charles Olson to Edward Dorn, 17 January 1968, Box 18, Folder Letter 1968, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

out ahead. I have of course the beer in the icebox but what abt things more identical with your return with family etc?”¹⁰³⁸

A week later, 24 January, Dorn forced himself, stuttering, to break the news of his final split with Helene to Olson: “...it is difficult to speak of in any sense – because it doesn’t seem easily to lend itself to believable sense – ok – Helene and I have been thru a very difficult 2 months and one result is that I live temporarily in a hotel.”¹⁰³⁹ Once again, Dorn was homeless, but this new homelessness ravaged his interior—“...I am now the stranger to my own life, or traveler in small circles – utterly confused inside utter confidence.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Added to his woes, the bitterness of familial exile exacerbated his already seething longing for the familiar geographies of—he goes so far to call it one letter—“home,” and Kansas, he’d hoped to Olson, would serve “as a way back in.”¹⁰⁴¹

By February, Helene had decided to move south with Fred, Paul, and Chansonette, to Sitges, a small Spanish city on the Mediterranean coast fifteen miles south of Barcelona, “and in the sun,” she wrote to Olson.¹⁰⁴² On the second of that month, exhausted and desperately in need of some relief from the break-up’s grim locale, Helene went to New York City to visit her brother, and to see, if subconsciously to confirm, other old friends. “I’m in a 1000 pieces,” she wrote to Olson on the eve of her transatlantic travels, “and am hoping the trip will put enough of them back together that I can at least begin to think of life without Ed, what to do w/ myself and Chan & Paul, etc. It would be lovely to see you, would there possibly be a beer in the icebox for me?”¹⁰⁴³ Olson, however, was in his own bad place, his health declining precipitously. Still, Helene’s worries that her visit would be “an unwanted interruption,” couldn’t have been further from the truth. In late February, Olson lamented to Dorn the weary condition that had kept him from seeing Helene on her recent trip to the States:

Got so damn worn finally, tried even to get away (cancelled reading in Buffalo, for next week) but haven’t even felt well enough to go away—or still tried to keep some motion. But have now about given up—a fine time, with spring just at least showing its self.

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁹ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 24 January 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴² Helene Buck to Charles Olson, 11 February 1968, Folder Dorn 64-69, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid., 1 February 1968.

So don't please mind etc that I have been so slow to get back to you, in the midst of your and like troubles! ...I talked to Helene on the phone and wish to god I'd been more sprightly and had her up or gone down—But that is another instance of how out of it I have been. —It's a drag, & lousy disappointment and I can't honestly see any particular reason to look for any change unfortunately. But there it is. Shit.¹⁰⁴⁴

The phone conversation, it turned out, was all the assurance Helene needed that her friendship with Olson would remain undiminished, despite her split with Dorn. In sharp contrast to the reluctant and wounded tone of her February 1 letter, after their phone conversation, when she next wrote to Olson, Helene's voice is bright, warm, and energetic: "And you, my dear friend, you must know how much it meant just to talk to you that day. All I really needed to get perpendicular like on my feet, walking, again, was to know that all those people Ed & I both have loved are still there."¹⁰⁴⁵

Though cut short by "a couple of very depressed letters from the kids," Helene's New York trip was successful ("my brother was marvelous...") in lifting her spirits and freshening her perspective. Shortly after returning to England, on February 11, she wrote to Olson of her future plans: "The 10 days in the country, like Ed said, [home, my dear Charles, has always been for me where ever my man was] did put enough of the pieces together that I can be strong enough to get the kids & myself out of here in some positive way, for the next 3 months at least."¹⁰⁴⁶ As it was for Dorn, "home" was a transitory reality for Helene too—"It was she who was the pioneer—her initial break from her first husband was heroic," Creeley would later recall.¹⁰⁴⁷ So Helene found new direction quickly; not having to look far, or at all, in fact, she immediately received messages of a romantic life beyond her broken marriage. Exhibiting her trust of Olson, and acknowledging their friendship independent from Dorn, in the same February letter Helene shared an amusing but inspiring anecdote from her return trip to England:

I remember being told, 'in my youth', that good intentions pave the road to hell. I'd intended to mail this at London Airport but just as I put that period after twice the man in the row in front of me invited himself and

¹⁰⁴⁴ Charles Olson to Edward Dorn, 27 February 1968, Box 18, Folder Letter 1968, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Helene Buck to Charles Olson, 11 February 1968, Folder Dorn 64-69, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Clark *A World of Difference*, 37.

champagne to join me. And I like men and I like champagne, so of course...
A Hungarian engineer now living in Montreal, pleasant enough I guess,
the hours did pass quickly but I am a January child and wouldn't have,
even if I could have, spent the week he suggested with him in London
because finally the only inneresting thing about him was the French twist
to his Hungarian accent!!

I do think probably a week w/ some un-
known man in some strange place would be the best cure for that terror,
that will every now & then creep up, that comes with the being a dis-
carded woman.¹⁰⁴⁸

Through the separation and beyond, whatever or wherever the bitter displacements of
that "terror" were, Helene—considering the circumstances, "being a discarded woman"—
maintained a remarkably tender concern for Dorn, disoriented, moody, and exhausted from
conflicts with the haughty, moral reprobation of some of his colleagues. Entreating Olson to
help lighten Dorn's mood, Helene's magnanimity (her concessionary suggestion, for instance,
that the break-up "is probably harder on him than me") seems sometimes disproportionate:

I came back to find Ed in as bad shape, in fact worse, than when
I left. I ache to help him but can't, except to get the fuck out of here Fast.
You & I both know how flippy he can be, but I think perhaps at this
moment only I know how very fragile he is deep inside and this whole
business is probably harder on him than me, a lot harder. He needs care.
He wants now to live with Jenny & that should be a very simple matter
as soon as I leave.

...The pain of a break-up after 15 years is only just that, the pain of a
break-up. But this flippiness is something else and as you know, I care
enough about him to be deeply worried. Please, if you can, keep letters
coming to him – he knows you are there, as I do, but we're all fragile
enough to need, I don't know what the word is I want, certainly not
proof – expression maybe.¹⁰⁴⁹

Actually, Olson was already aware both of Helene's plans to settle in Spain, and Dorn's
protracted depression, through a letter from the latter on February 7. The word-concept
Helene gropes for in the letter above similarly teases Dorn's correspondence, when, for
example, his expressed gratitude for Olson's friendship seems, nervously and circuitously, to
seek some confirmation, "not proof – expression maybe," of the latter's allegiance. In a
bizarre and scatterbrained juxtaposition, Dorn's letter initially reports a "letter from Creeley
yesterday telling of his discovery of Charlotte ie one of his children in boarding school scene

¹⁰⁴⁸ Helene Buck to Charles Olson, 11 February 1968, Folder Dorn 64-69, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd
Mss.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ibid.

Mass[achusetts]—it is a beautiful story,” but immediately turns to the bleak environs of its author, and to the frustration and manifest ugliness in a “‘situation’ ... of my own flawless manufacture.” Dorn confesses:

All the “explanation” of this scene, the guesses one might make as of “result” are still too preposterous to think abt much less talk. I can only take heart from such people as you, yea and you are almost single in that respect (ie Creeley was cautiously understanding – which is understandable of course – Helene and I never shared anything if not all friends etc – but regrets seem unavoidably loaded to me at this point and in that sense I haven’t been wholly free of paranoia.¹⁰⁵⁰

His present paranoia had, in fact, much deeper foundations, especially concerning the “cautiously understanding,” Robert Creeley. Helene and Creeley had shared quite a lot actually, including having had an affair at Black Mountain College, in 1955, while Dorn was finishing his degree under the tutelage of Olson, and later, of Creeley as well, from whom Dorn took his final oral examinations. Though the affair was short-winded, it created between the two poets a volatile tension that sometimes turned violent. A year later, for instance, while Dorn and Helene were living in San Francisco, Creeley paid them a late-night visit to introduce, so he said, Dorn to Jack Kerouac, with whom he’d been drinking. Doubting Creeley’s good intentions, Dorn ordered both of them out of the apartment, and when Creeley refused, “attacked him with his fists.” Annoyed, Helene left, with Creeley “in tow” to calm her; meanwhile Dorn and Kerouac sat up talking into the late morning, “by which time they had become intimate friends.”¹⁰⁵¹

Like a caring friend (or the figure of a father), Olson took Helene’s suggestion—“keep letters coming to him”—and wrote to Dorn at the end of the month. But his health flagging and his limited mobility irritatingly restrictive of his Dionysian routines, apart from mild empathy Olson wasn’t capable of mustering much positive energy to send Dorn’s way.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 7 February 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁵¹ See Faas, *Robert Creeley: A Biography*, 192; 213; and *The Selected Letters of Jack Kerouac, Volume 1*, Ann Charters, ed. (New York: Viking, 1999), 329: in a letter to Creeley, February 16, 1962, Kerouac’s appreciation for Dorn’s work, and the fight in San Francisco are both clear: “If I only had a wild chauffeur to drive me to Albuquerque to see you, then to drive on say to Mexico City to see Lamantia, or to Frisco to see Whalen, or to wherever Dorn is (I think his poem about the plumber by the river with his daughter is one of the most mysterious yet clearest poems in the world)—Some wild chauffeur ... if I could only become rich like Sinatra and be a Chairman of the Board type with a private limousine with built in bar and TV and jazz records and go visiting poets, hey?—I don’t even drive myself—But as to ‘pulling you out’ by seeing, by my seeing you, you’d probably end up socking me in a blind drunk or tackling me like you done Dorn that night ... no, just kidding....”

“Wow, hard of course to believe in that sense,” he wrote about the break-up, echoing Dorn’s earlier letter, “but also of course not having been the first one myself to have done likewise I feel at least I know what it is like and hope you and Jenny will make it altogether.”¹⁰⁵² That was true, Olson was familiar with promiscuity, and had certainly known the intense pain it could cause others.

A few years before, in July 1966, Olson had taken up residence with old friend, poet, and Black Mountain protégé, John Wieners, and Wieners’ new love interest, a “glamorous, sophisticated New York City social hostess and art patroness,” named Panna Grady, who was vacationing near Gloucester for the summer.¹⁰⁵³ The vast and partly wooded grounds and the lively atmosphere at the Riverdale mansion inspired a slew of new pieces for Olson’s ongoing *Maximus* project, one of which centered around declarations of love and fidelity for those to whom Olson felt closest: “...to live in a world like this one we / few American poets have / carved out of Nature and of God. / ... / the careful ones I care for ... John Wieners, / Edward Dorn & the women they love...”¹⁰⁵⁴ But Olson soon found himself smitten with the woman Wieners loved, and however cruel and injurious it was to his younger friend—already in the throes of a torturous struggle with his own sexuality—Olson pursued his interests late that summer. In September, when Olson discovered Grady was pregnant by Wieners, he selfishly advised an abortion. Then, in October, to add ferocious insult to irredeemable injury and loss, Olson and Grady left for England, alerting Wieners of their plans on the eve of their voyage, by phone, from New York City. Needless to say, Wieners, whose chronic emotional instability saw him briefly institutionalized, was devastated.¹⁰⁵⁵ And at the same time, Olson was fooling himself, playing the “kept monkey,” as Robert Duncan put it, to the affluent patroness.¹⁰⁵⁶ But Olson desperately wanted to maintain his rowdy ways, and wanted no less, an impassioned romance. It was during Olson’s visit to England with Grady, in fact, in the fall of that year, that Dorn first noted the wear and tear Olson’s freewheeling lifestyle was effecting on his health: “All the drinking and the pills were torture for his system, and he was in sweats a lot, yet he could still whale a Camel in about two drags.”¹⁰⁵⁷ And when the

¹⁰⁵² Charles Olson to Edward Dorn, 27 February 1968, Box 18, Folder Letter 1968, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁵³ Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life*, 330.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 330; Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 557.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life*, 332.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 330-331.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.

couple returned to London, in January 1967, things had deteriorated further—“he was way slowed down, more reflective.” Dorn sensed a larger, cognizant shift in Olson’s behavior: “I think he saw the future in some way, that all his habits of intake, his weird hours, just couldn’t be maintained.”¹⁰⁵⁸

If the general and lasting warmth of Olson’s presence—“a beer in the icebox”—outshined his terse, recent attempts at consolation, other friends were more voluble on matters of infidelity and marital strife. Dorn’s situation occasioned both Creeley and Brakhage, in reaching out to him, to explore the painful wisdom, or just the pain, of their own experience. Near the end of January, filmmaker and old friend (and Kansan by birth), Stan Brakhage responded to a letter from Dorn that had announced his separation and impending divorce. “Oh, Ed, / Gee, wow, DAMN – I mean Dear Ed,” Brakhage’s letter begins, wandering into its purpose: “I write ‘Gee’ to, somehow, bring it back to Kansas, I think. ... ‘DAMN’ in that—what can I say? ... I’m damned if I know / damned if I don’t...”¹⁰⁵⁹ In what follows Brakhage says quite a lot, but his letter is hardly consoling. He struggles with a disgusted awareness of systemic, moral unrest, evidenced by the many divorces among his friends, and by his own irresponsibility and infidelity to Jane, his wife. But he mocks the attempt to glean knowledge, or extract advice, from such complexes of experience. His letter is marvelously intense, densely written, and crass, even chauvinistic, in places; a frenetic stylistic edginess, which is at once its charm, also makes it difficult to excerpt. However, the letter is worth quoting at length anyway, for its deep relation to the *locus* of Dorn’s experience:

...and, I don’t know – because I’m exhausted with any such stance, find everyone sick here, thrashing nebulously, fucking around, divorcing: and I, too, fucked this girl because Jane had fucked with this guy several months back because I’d fucked that girl last year in L.A., and also that girl in Salt Lake City, etcetera, finding it all a pleasure, tho’ difficultly arrived AT (complexities of “courting”/“lying” I should say ... these ritual involvements, anyway, being MORE than ever difficult in this country now that the hippies pretend they ain’t, etc), , , yes, a pleasure, simply, then when finally fucking – when the care, however little and/or puffed-up to complexity, at least comes to that, BUT then followed always by the agony of telling – i.e. when asked, as is Jane’s custom ... mine being always to ‘tell the truth’ in that simple-minded sense ... the only truth-telling sense I have the ability to accomplish without falsehood absolutely (I’m such a god-damned Kansas preacher/

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid., 334.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Stan Brakhage to Edward Dorn, “near end” January 1968, Folder 36, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

polotician [sic] at heart): and I had, then, just come to be telling Jane of my fucking this girl and seeing her then furious and wanting to be crying (would then be later) and crying then, dry-eyed, with the voice only – terribly – about you and Helene breaking up ... all that, and then your letter putting it right on the line, being DORN – that specific quality of language for ‘straightness’ above all other, your lovliness in stance against “falling in love”, your naming “high” of it, your specifics, bless you / DAMN you, me too, Jane, all those involved in the looooooong list of divorces and – more terrible in their way – almost-divorces of specifically these last two years. What the HELL?

You tell me, Ed – I don’t know ... : it’s “I don’t knowness” took me to Omaha, N.Y.C., Co-Op, Grove, home again now, rolling around making BIG fool of myself in all converse, walking away from people, not even graciously, stumbling, SOMETHing to let them/me know the same about myself which prompted Olson to do the Berkeley lecture the way he did, everybody doing that these days – sputtering “the truth”, if they’ve ANY wish to live even tho’ that’s being the most stupid groaning piss-and-moan display of saying I DON’T know nor KNOW what I’m doing let alone what YOU/whoever should be, could be, doing – a giant “Get OFF My Back”ness Bellow from everyone who’s ever attempted articulation in ANY form: (I wonder when Duncan, who still holds out, will come apart on stage and how-all he’ll achieve that for himself, go blaaaaah or, perhaps, bleat like the last of Blake’s lambs ... maybe say: with a tiny voice, pleading: “Suck my cock, somebody?” – maybe say “please?”): but it WAS, wasn’t it (I mean, isn’t it always) some Absolute KNOWING took me into that girls, room/womb, life howsomever wherefrom she, natch (as all the others) began wondering, then, began wanting to be making up “let’s play house”, etcetera ... in short: all the possibilities of “love”, as that’s a ONE syllable word thus slippery as hell itself – that which, howsomever is “lovely” in the fucking whosomever being more specific (that sense of complex) ... the “loveliness” of any given experience being therefore three-syllable-nailed-DOWN TRICK of memory – re (bang) mem (brane/brain-echo) brance (Uh! ... or something) ... the trick to get one to remember the future, like they say: and the penis leading the whole body after ALL pulled along a line of some sure want/lack/fault (as in a rock) to FUCK – i.e. ... to KNOW, build a KNOW-LEDGE therefrom, etcetera. It’s all a lot of SHIT, really – i.e. I mean WASTE/PAST what-have-you -- all this KNOWING ... the “K” even drops out of it¹⁰⁶⁰ – one flutters along the ground after “the fall” which IS (and you know it too) inevitable. How am I doing?: will I make a morality, yet, out of all this? – wow? ... what colossal BULLSHIT, if I do – double columned colossal, double hissing too, I see. What am I to make of all these words jerking my figures OFF?, is it? Look, Ed, I’m not, at least, bitter – YET ... don’t really intend to be ... don’t know any way to stop that except keep

¹⁰⁶⁰ recall in *The Cycle*, ??? material is a know with the “K” dropped off??

spilling forth what's at least supposed to be 'the truth', starting with 'facts', like they say, 'of life?' is it? I just swore fidelity again to Jane – fancy THAT! – and am here picking the manyest syllabled word I could find wherewith to DO it: but is that maybe just because it's "her" turn again? ... I don't think so – but to make SURE-ly, I'll say: "Go ahead, but just don't tell me about it": and I DID already say: "Let me be specific – I'm pretty sure I can speak about such basic things in terms of ten years, give or take a couple ... I mean there IS something like a cycle: and let me be very specific: If I have to fuck around anymore within the next ten years, I'll divorce you!" But what's all THIS?, I mean ALL these words – fancy all these incredible WORDS ... I mean YOU'RE a POET – i.e. YOU tell ME! All I've got to hold onto at the moment IS that "I don't know anything" or some-such banner wherewith I keep scratching my back free of all those assumptions (I mean the actual climbing UP on me of actual people with actual petitions, etc.) Fame, as they call it, has put thereon me – I mean, dig THIS, at 9000 feet in a ghost town in Colorado ... / ... my only chance to sheer thru this damned time with any organic, i.e.-growing, form intact ("like a solid moving thru an inferno", said McClure, who's absolutely out-of-his-head these days knowing, Biblically and otherwise, so MUCH does he preSUME, for "them", to KNOW). I mean: "I don't know" gets me off my stance (the birds were shitting on me I was so much of a statue, albeit at least as lovely as The Scarecrow of Oz), OUT of politics – all that ticking of the polis – i.e. OUT of New York City and back – NO! front – home again, inheriting all the mysteries of daily living, loveliness being becoming, body-true/fidelity (ie. NOT "the truth"), believing, at least, as ever again, I can find it all-of-woman again in Jane ... I don't know – ah, there it was UNquoted springing out of me – I mean, I really don't know, Ed: and I'm not trying to put you on oh you tell me...¹⁰⁶¹

Brakhage had received Dorn's letter on the move—from Omaha ("where I trumped up a show just for the excuse to go somewhere/where I sat 4 days drunk in a motel – quart of whiskey a day") to New York City ("finally unable to 'Go Home Again'")—restlessly searching, he put it, "for SOMething to believe-IN and/or get-out-of."¹⁰⁶² As the bitter English winter dragged into its final weeks, Dorn similarly looked to Lawrence as an escape from the dramatic upheavals of Essex. "[T]his winter," Dorn wrote to George Worth, "I

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid.; the ellipses are entirely Brakhage's.

¹⁰⁶² Ibid.

suspect I don't want to return to England for a long time, say seventy-five years. . . . Eastern Kansas holds several interests which are central to my own concerns now."¹⁰⁶³

But in the meantime, financial stress, always just around the corner from a "spiritual address," arose in the wake of Helene's departure. In early March, when Dorn returned his contract signed, to Worth, he was forced to admit his impecuniousness, fearing it might hinder a timely arrival that spring:

I have, because of the separation of my wife and myself a couple of months back, less money than I thought I would have when our first letters were exchanged. She has gone to live in Spain and that move has wiped out what reserves we had. I wonder then, can an air ticket London-Kansas City return be deducted from my fee and sent here? I am sorry to bring up what might seem an annoying thing. But there is scarcely any other way to put it.¹⁰⁶⁴

Dorn was attempting, he told Worth, to reap the benefits of a "21 day excursion rate," arriving in the U.S. on April 22, and returning to London on May 10, which would place him back at Essex, "in the middle of yearly exam preparations."¹⁰⁶⁵ The price of the airline ticket, \$433.40, would swallow almost a third of Dorn's \$1,500 three-week stipend from Kansas.¹⁰⁶⁶ Less than a week later, Dorn received a friendly response to his ticket request from literature professor, Roy Gridley, who had generously already booked the travel arrangements, excursion rate and all. "Your trip by air should be quite a contrast to Ledyard's walking trip," Gridley ended his short letter, and so began a long friendship.¹⁰⁶⁷ A full week later, the

¹⁰⁶³ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 3 January 1968, University Archives, Spencer Mss. Dorn misdates this letter, 1967 for 1968.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 8 February 1968, University Archives, Spencer Mss. Another misdated letter, this time the month, February for March, not the year. Perhaps these mistakes illustrate Dorn's distracted, imbalanced emotional state.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Roy E. Gridley to Edward Dorn, 11 March 1968, University Archives, Spencer Mss. In a 23 January 1967 letter to Dorn, Worth outlined the expectations of the position: "Ideally, we like to have our visitors come for three-week stays, one after (though not necessarily directly after) the other. We are able to offer a basic stipend of \$1,500 for three weeks, which we prorate for those who cannot stay that long; over and above this, we pay travel expenses and a fee for any lecture or public reading which our guest may wish to give while he is here. (We hope that you would want to give such a performance; so far, all our visitors have.) We are very careful not to exploit these writers in residence in any way; though we are, naturally, delighted if they choose to involve themselves in the busy life here, there is no pressure on them to do so and we scrupulously honor their wishes regarding social engagements and extracurricular exposure to students." On 28 January 1967, Dorn responded to Worth's letter: "I would be delighted indeed to spend three weeks at the University and with your students. I would also be quite willing to give a public reading, or lecture, or both, whatever works out." (University Archives, Spencer Mss.)

¹⁰⁶⁷ Roy Gridley to Edward Dorn, 11 March 1968, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

winter term at Essex was coming to a close—“Last day of term today,” Dorn wrote to Olson on March 21, “which means – 7 wks i.e. – nada between me and Kansas good god! Can that exposure be!”¹⁰⁶⁸

Gradually, and understandably, Dorn’s role in the university at Essex took a back seat to his new relationship with Dunbar, and into that mid-life, passional opening flooded the palpably fervid, infectious, and rebellious intensity of the late 1960s. By the time his thirty-ninth birthday rolled around on April 2, 1968, with the near future at least relatively certain, and Book I of *Gunslinger* gone to press in California, Dorn’s horizons were brightening. Dunbar had recently moved into the house at Wivenhoe, just east of Essex, that Dorn was again renting after Helene’s departure, and together they’d become the object of especial scrutiny among the locals and their neighbors. Not to mention the rampant speculation and invidious rumor that spread among the largely conservative Literature faculty at the university. The penultimate selection of Dorn’s *Love Songs* condemns the “insinuation” of those at Essex, and the misogynistic strains in their disapproval of Dunbar’s “arrangements”:

This afternoon I thought why not,
why not get Jenny into something
and we both fly off to meet,
well, almost anyone. Away
from the flat rancorous smell
of their insinuation, which is
just this: you’ve done the thing –
you’ve presumed your body
as well as your mind, *your mind*
we like to watch go through its sideshow
lifted up in the bright creative air
but when you made other arrangements
for your body, baby go away, that’s it¹⁰⁶⁹

That analysis is rather gorgeously unforgiving, but the increased attention the couple received wasn’t entirely unsolicited. Upon moving back into the house, Dorn moved “all the rented furniture—big settees, stuffed chairs and sofas—out on the front lawn”; then, he “[set] up with Jenny and a few pillows and psychedelic posters in the empty house.”¹⁰⁷⁰ The exotic scene resembled “the set of French movie,” Gordon Brotherston later recalled.¹⁰⁷¹ But

¹⁰⁶⁸ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 21 March 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 248-249.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 40.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

Dunbar, half Dorn's age, whose youthful exuberance was as unaffected as it was entrancing, seemed capable of transforming everything from the encroaching darkness of Dorn's midlife years, to the gray and foreboding weather: "Jenny," Dorn wrote to Olson early in the spring, "I almost hesitate to say – ie break the silence as it were a bubble of brilliant color, is lovely like a fine day."¹⁰⁷²

Thus, as 1968 unfolded, or unraveled rather, while "the people of the world," from Saigon, to Chicago, to Prague, to Rio de Janeiro, took up arms against the multiform tyranny of the governing systems that reigned over their lives, Dorn and Dunbar, paying requisite visits to Paris, fell in love—first at Essex, then from a distance, and finally, on their long journey "home":

As our eyes were held together
we withstood there
the space of our returning
and passed thru a country
of heavy, laden boughs
from which we took nothing
and grew thin, and strong
along the lance of our Journey¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁷² Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 7 February 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁰⁷³ Edward Dorn, *Twenty-four Love Songs* (West Newbury: Frontier Press, 1969), unpaginated.

*No one lives in
the life of another—
no one knows.*

*In the singular
the many cohere,
but not to know it.*

*Here, here, the body
screaming its orders,
learns of its own.*

– Robert Creeley¹⁰⁷⁴

16. An Echoing Cañon

During the early morning hours of January 31, 1968—the dawn of Tet, the Vietnamese lunar New Year—the Vietcong, seventy thousand strong, executed a rapid and totally unexpected siege on a hundred cities in South Vietnam. On the roof of the occupied American embassy, in Saigon—the most disturbing, from the U.S. perspective, of the offensive’s seizures—the communist soldiers hoisted an enormous yellow-starred NLF flag (National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam) for the air raiders to gaze upon.¹⁰⁷⁵ In Hue, another major city, after running up their flag, “political cadres” shot, clubbed to death, and/or buried alive, “approximately three thousand people.”¹⁰⁷⁶ Elsewhere in Saigon, a group of nineteen specially-trained commandoes—rags bound around the termite-infested butts of their rifles—stormed the South Vietnamese radio station with the intent of broadcasting propaganda; however, the dynamite they exploded triggered a sensor that automatically cut them from the network. Thus, the South Vietnamese government, with only a limited selection of LPs on hand at the transmitter site fourteen miles away, filled the airwaves during the violent upheaval with an “incongruous medley of Viennese waltzes, Beatles tunes, and Vietnamese military marches.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Eventually, down to seven men, and hopelessly out of contact with their superiors, the remaining Vietcong soldiers detonated the radio station with themselves in it.

For the roughly 95 percent of Americans who owned a television set, especially for the privileged 36 percent with color, the mayhem of Saigon spilled into their homes almost as

¹⁰⁷⁴ *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975*, 439.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 523-525; Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 16.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 530; Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 87.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 528.

quickly as it unfolded *live*.¹⁰⁷⁸ They watched South Vietnamese soldiers steal from the pockets of dead Vietcong; they watched U.S. marines, “securing” the ravished city, mindlessly fire on the outnumbered, even captured, assailants—teenage and female snipers among them. Then, on February 2, the most famously grotesque image from the war thus far, shot in Saigon, appeared on front page of *The New York Times*: General Nguyen Ngoc Loan—chief of South Vietnam’s national police, who’d mercilessly suppressed the Buddhist resistance two years earlier in the city of Hue—held a gun to the temple of a bound and unidentified, young captive, limply upright in the moment just after his execution, an unhuman grimace wrenched and dug in his face.¹⁰⁷⁹ Although Saigon was back in U.S. hands within a few days, the Tet offensive lasted through September. The American military command, stunned and embarrassed by the strength and organization recently exhibited by its enemy, slowly discovered itself estranged from the South Vietnamese, the very population it intended to “protect.”¹⁰⁸⁰ The incendiary aftereffects of Tet heralded a year of international tumult and revolt—a maelstrom hurled from Saigon’s rubble ports to the teeming, race-torn streets of Lawrence.

Tet wasn’t the only bad news coming out of Vietnam in early 1968, appalling events were the norm that spring. The My Lai massacre, in Quang Ngai Province, where American soldiers in the 23rd Infantry Division murdered three hundred and forty-seven unarmed civilians, a number of whom were infants, then piled their bodies in open trenches.¹⁰⁸¹ Despite the fact that the mass killing remained confidential for another two years, the American public was convinced that Vietnam was headed in the wrong direction and civilian demonstrations rose sharply. Still, fifty-three percent of the population maintained the hope that the war could be turned around, rather than wound down.¹⁰⁸² In fact, to General Westmoreland, the Tet Offensive briefly seemed to represent the Vietcong’s capitulation, at long last, to traditional methods of warfare. Westmoreland immediately and vigorously responded: B-52 bombers dropped twenty-two thousand tons of bombs on Conthien, for example, rained chemical agents over Dakto, and to reinforce American troops cut off from supplies on the steep slopes at Khesanh, unleashed seventy-five thousand tons of explosives

¹⁰⁷⁸ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 101.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 529.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 528-545.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 530; Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 86-87.

¹⁰⁸² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 546.

on North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces over the span of nine weeks.¹⁰⁸³ Nothing effected any discernable shift in the war, and among the press Johnson counted fewer and fewer supporters. With his approval rate at its nadir in the wake of Tet, Johnson looked desperately for fresh change in his administration. On March 1, he settled upon Clark Clifford—a native Kansan, from Fort Scott—to replace Robert McNamara as Secretary of Defense. But it was too little too late. With forty thousand Americans killed, two hundred and fifty thousand wounded, over half a million still deployed, plus thirty billion dollars a year flooding into a war effort that showed little if any improvement, President Johnson was forced to deny General Westmoreland’s request, on March 17, the day after the My Lai massacre, for an additional 206,000 troops.¹⁰⁸⁴ At the end of the month, Johnson announced that he would refuse the Democratic nomination in the year’s upcoming election.

On the home front in early 1968, Johnson was working to pass a Civil Rights Act that ostensibly sought to protect *all* civilians, and *all* fundamental civilian activities—like going to school, or seeking employment—from “certain acts of violence or intimidation.”¹⁰⁸⁵ The legislation was desperately needed. In February, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, for instance, two black students were killed, and twenty-seven others injured, when local police—after consistently protecting the racially restricted status of a nearby bowling alley, and beating black co-eds on a number of occasions—opened fire on one hundred and fifty protestors at the all-black, South Carolina State College.¹⁰⁸⁶ Johnson’s act, however, tacitly undermined its efficacy for exactly those groups who were most in need of its protections—civil rights activists and war demonstrators—by excluding from its purview, “law enforcement officers, members of the National Guard . . . or members of the Armed Forces of the United States.” Moreover, the act included Strom Thurmond’s egregiously equivocal “riot act” provision, which determined that the use of virtually any transportation or communication system, “to organize, promote, encourage, participate in, or carry on a riot,”—even use with the vaguely defined “intent” to do so—would result in a \$10,000 fine and no less than five years in prison.¹⁰⁸⁷ Furthermore, the passage of the act came at an uncanny time, six days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, on April 4, 1968. That is, just in time to regulate and

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid., 538-39; 542.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid., 538-545.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 138.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid., 139-140.

legislate the actions spawned by that tragedy: riots in over forty American cities; 4000 members of the National Guard deployed in Memphis (the scene of the assassination) to keep public order and protect property; tanks, burning cars, and broken glass littered the streets of the nation's capital. Overall, thirty-five of thirty-seven killed in the violent aftermath of King's death were black.¹⁰⁸⁸ And while the FBI carried out its meagerly concealed, but brutally, relentlessly systematic disinformation and assassination campaign against the Black Panther Party, in the inner-cities of Chicago and Oakland, Johnson's administration, howsoever publicly distanced from the obsessive ideological fury of McCarthyism a decade before, widely repressed the American Communist Party, denying their presidential candidate Secret Service protection, and refusing, in Arizona, for example, to include the party's candidate on the ballot at all.¹⁰⁸⁹

The public reaction of Lawrencians to the news of the Tet Offensive, and to the mounting volatility of local race relations, fashioned Lawrence, Kansas, into a sociopolitical microcosm of larger American cities, in the late 1960s. Resistance in Lawrence to the Vietnam War earlier in the decade, similar to its support for the Civil Rights Movement, came mostly from churches and other religious groups. But by 1965 university students were drafting petitions and organizing activist groups (for example, the Lawrence chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) appeared in 1965) to collectively demand an end to the Vietnam War and other acts of imperial aggression.¹⁰⁹⁰ At the end of March 1968, a Kansas City television poll reported that Tet had galvanized three-quarters of the area's population against the war, an opposition that clearly incorporated a broad cross-section of the community.¹⁰⁹¹ Then again, although the town had seen slow but steady growth over the bulk of the decade—its population rising from 33,000 to 45,000—“a significant portion of the growth was attributed to ‘hippies’ who made up the so-called street community.”¹⁰⁹² Lawrence's central geographic location, its position on Interstate 70, for example, made it an accessible and popular station on the trek east or west. By the late '60, “[t]housands of young people, a diverse and eclectic congregation of so-called freaks, street people, radicals, revolutionaries, and hippies commonly known as the counterculture, had come to

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid., 143; Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 75.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Zinn, *Postward America: 1945-1971*, 168.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Rusty L. Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”: *The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 77.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid., 139.

Lawrence.”¹⁰⁹³ This peculiar influx diversified and intensified the tone and timbre of Lawrence’s reaction both to the war, and to the manic fragments of popular culture that trickled into the town; in the process, a younger generation invoked and reenacted the historical and geological frictions that suffuse the town. Thus, between March 1968 and September 1969—by the time attacks on the campus ROTC office were deemed, “commonplace”¹⁰⁹⁴—there occurred “at least forty fires directed at symbols of authority and resulting in property damages of over \$200,000.”¹⁰⁹⁵ In September, there were five civilian assaults on police officers. As the end of the decade approached, independent publications of the “freak” community in Lawrence became wildly inflammatory. Papers such as *Reconstruction*, *Vortex*, and *Disorientation* lambasted institutional power, threatened local authorities, called for “guerilla warfare” against “pig Amerika,” and published guides and other information about bomb-making, and “how to survive a tear gas attack.”¹⁰⁹⁶

Anger over sluggish civil rights reform was also noticeably swelling in Lawrence by 1968, particularly among the black population, catalyzed by the reluctant desegregation of the local public swimming pool.¹⁰⁹⁷ Although riots were narrowly avoided in the summer of 1967, violent conflict seemed less and less preventable in the town, especially as the Black Power movement was widely embraced by the younger generations. In the fall of 1968, black students at the university formed Black Student Union (BSU), an organization designed to support Lawrence’s black community through the implementation of the Black Panther Party’s “Ten-Point Program,” which included a free, daily breakfast service, and the establishment of scholarships for black students.¹⁰⁹⁸ In addition to social projects, BSU strengthened, engaged, and inspired the black community by “promoting African history and culture, sponsoring black poetry readings and art displays, and bringing prominent black speakers to campus, such as H. Rap Brown in December 1969.”¹⁰⁹⁹ In late 1968, the BSU began its own regular publication, *Harambee*, to embellish their cultural platforms and encourage the “psychological liberation” of African Americans overall. Within a few years, *Harambee*, like *Vortex* and *Disorientation*, began supplying information on “weapons,

¹⁰⁹³ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ibid., 143.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid., 85-92.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., 105; 109.

ammunition, and guerilla tactics.”¹¹⁰⁰ As an independent, radical, sometimes militant, political magazine, *Harambee* had a surprisingly large number of sibling publications among the relatively small Lawrence community.

Reopened in the mid-1960s, the Ballard Center—once a blacks-only school in North Lawrence—itsself an independent community until 1870, when it was filling with Exoduster migrants—served “principally [as] a recreation center for black youths and a center for the black community.”¹¹⁰¹ The controversial and defiant trajectory of Black Power in Lawrence is vividly exemplified by the center’s choice of the contentious, felonious, Wichita-native, Leonard Harrison, as its assistant director—later, its chief director. Frequently compared with Stokely Carmichael, Harrison was pro-Black Power, virulently anti-integrationist, supposedly belligerent towards blacks as well as whites, and possessed of a militant, charismatic hipness: “[I]f you’re black and don’t believe in Black Power, you’re either insane or a damn fool,” he told a KU audience in 1968.¹¹⁰² But after a seven-week trial in 1969, over an alleged beating in Wichita the year before—a trial that focused mainly on Harrison’s purported connections to such groups as the Black Guard, in Philadelphia—he was convicted, not without some controversy, of armed robbery. In 1970, he fled to Tanzania.¹¹⁰³ In the meantime, one of Harrison’s young supporters and friends at the Ballard Center, Rick Dowdell, still in high school when Harrison came north, organized a walk-out by the black students of Lawrence High, in September 1968.¹¹⁰⁴ Less than two years later, Dowdell’s casket, on a “make-shift hearse” drawn by two ponies, was carried to rest at the head of an armed procession through town; he the modern martyr of the selfsame war John Brown had waged, over a century before.

The eclectic and unique mixture of cultural forces—from farmers and ranchers, to religious fundamentalists, to Leftist professors, to itinerant “hippies,” to Hell’s Angels and Black Panthers—evolved a fiercely independent and homegrown dynamism within the tight confines of Lawrence, and proffered a charmingly hip, foppish and histrionic, eccentricity to the town’s turmoil. This indeterminate cultural space, unaneled of distant seaboard hegemony and simultaneously flavored by it, harbored the kinds of tensions conducive to the

¹¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 145.

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid., 94.

¹¹⁰² Ibid., 94-95.

¹¹⁰³ Ibid., 96; In 1993, Harrison was pardoned.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 170.

protean, mixed media, repartee universe of *Gunslinger*. Louie Louis, a former resident, remembers Lawrence's unpredictable and disjointed array of commercial establishments in 1968, before the onslaught of gentrification in the early '70s:

That summer, sleepy old downtown Lawrence could hardly have been more different from life up on Mount Oread. A *Tale of Two Cities* thing. As far as hippy commerce downtown, there was a head shop called Strawberry Fields. Sometime or other, a secondhand clothing store called Bokonon came in; another store, Primarily Leather, should have been called Primarily Hippies. Meanwhile, up on the hogback ridge where the university sat (it's no "mount," despite its name) was the BIG evolved scene. It was anchored by 3.2 beer bars, in between which sat an alternative bookstore, the Abington, chockablock with poetry monographs published by houses small to unknown. There was an art-supply store, too, and some ratty student housing. The bars were *crucial*, though. I'm talking about the Rock Chalk Café, at the T intersection of Twelfth and Oread, and the Gaslight Tavern, close to Thirteenth and Oread. The sidewalk between the two was well-worn.

...

At that time, the Greyhound station was up at the north end of Massachusetts Street, where the Free State Brewing Company is today. There was no Brewery then, just a gap between buildings where buses pulled in to idle and generally smell nasty. ... The street was wider then. No sawtooth curbs or kitchenware shops or historic Lawrence crap. Back then, the town was just old, not precious. Lots of home-owned joints like Earl's, a pizza parlor, and Keim's, where I stopped for a greasy \$2.45 chicken plate. And then farther down the street Duck's Seafood, where the seafood was not fresh daily, and then Woolworth's, which had one of those lunch counters it was famous for. Not far from the courthouse was an A&P grocery store that sold frozen seafood to Duck's.

Lots of bad food in Lawrence back then. The restaurants couldn't sell liquor was the reason you'd hear; a town couldn't have fine dining till the restaurants could gouge people for hooch. One of the nice things about living in Lawrence in 1968 was that it was impossible to have any pretenses. In the absence of cheap house chardonnay, it's hard for pretenses to take root.¹¹⁰⁵

As Louis's statement makes clear, the decisive ingredient of Lawrence's scene, the *glia*, was the town's uncharted cultural space; "freaks" had landed there as if on an island, where neither the "pretenses" of high culture, nor even the legislation that tailed the counterculture's behavior had yet arrived. As the '60s progressed, Lawrence seemed both *within* and *without* the times. Rampant and footloose experimentation with drugs, for instance, went largely

¹¹⁰⁵ Louie Louis, "Picking Hemp in Douglas County," in *Embattled Lawrence*, Dennis Domer, and Barbara Watkins, eds. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Continuing Education, 2001), 244.

unchecked by the law, which appealed to Dorn—here was an atmosphere that defied categorization, and which merged effortlessly, serendipitously, into the environment of his new poetic project.

During World War II, farmers in Kansas had grown massive amounts of hemp for the purposes of making rope. In the late 1960s, this harvest became the plunder of the Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers, a local organization, who decades later collected their stories in an oral history/memoir, titled *Cows Are Freaky When They Look at You*. “Covering thousands of acres, this low grade-cannabis, a.k.a. K-pot, ditch-weed and headache weed,” one Hemp Picker remembers, “was rooted forever in the rich soil and free for the taking.”¹¹⁰⁶ But not only marijuana circulated among Lawrence’s “freak” population, a plethora of psychedelics wildly embellished an already bizarre and sometimes rough, frontier environment. Another former resident recalls: “There was a mysterious dope dealer out in Wellington. He’d been dealing longer than anyone, and he always had acid. They could never catch him. Some of those rednecks out there were the worst loadies I’ve ever seen, next to Mexico City pimps. They mixed uppers, downers, acid and booze. You put any kind of pill in their hand and they’d swallow it, no questions asked. They’d drop acid and go drive tractors.”¹¹⁰⁷ Wayne Propst, another “freak,” argues that “the “love-and-flowers angle of the Haight Ashbury didn’t ever happen here”—a migrant to Lawrence “might have been the nastiest guy” in his smaller, rural Kansas town: “They were not lightweights. Creeps, but not lightweights,” Propst remembers.¹¹⁰⁸

So Lawrence presented an emulsive and unpredictable collision of patently American cultural trends, and initially escaped the self-important pretensions that coastal *movements* and *modes of fashion* frequently arrogate to themselves. The juxtaposition of a relatively quiet and conservative, Midwestern cowtown, with the “Nothing is forbidden... social contract of the Kaw Valley Hippies,” who, “agreed to treat life as a laboratory and themselves as an experiment,” gave Lawrence an air of fresh possibility that was more than reminiscent of Kansas’ historically inscribed geographical isolation, but in fact relied on, and exploited it, and with it, the residual traces of lawlessness left in the wake of Bleeding Kansas and the so-

¹¹⁰⁶ *Cows Are Freaky When They Look At You: An Oral History of the Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers*, David Ohle, Roger Martin, and Susan Brosseau, comp. and eds. (Wichita: Watermark Press, 1991), unpaginated preface; for description of the effects of K-pot see Louis, “Picking Hemp...” 245

¹¹⁰⁷ *Cows Are Freaky...*, preface; see also Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 141.

¹¹⁰⁸ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 141; and see *Cows Are Freaky...*, 18.

called Wild West.¹¹⁰⁹ As the decade came to a close, the breadbasket heartland of Kansas began to look more like a doped-up Oz than it did feel like “home.” International mouthpieces and gurus of the countercultural revolution, such as Procol Harum, a London-based psychedelic/progressive rock band, began to acknowledge the anomalous rise of Lawrence: “The devil came from Kansas / Where he went to I can’t say...” Even Frank Zappa was surprised enough to sing about it: “Whooooo could imagine that they would freak out somewhere in Kansas... Kansas... Kansas?”¹¹¹⁰

When Dorn landed in Kansas City on April 18, John Meixner, a KU Professor, drove him west to Lawrence and dropped him at the Eldridge Hotel, Dorn’s office and residence for the next three weeks. Arriving that evening, Dorn just missed a university-sponsored talk by Paul Krassner—editor and “ringleader of a national underground publication,” called *The Screw*, and prominent member of the Yippie Party, an “ice cream party,” he told his audience.¹¹¹¹ The primary goal of Krassner’s national speaking tour was to encourage attendance—“equipped with helmets”—at the massive demonstrations against the Democratic National Convention, to be held in Chicago that August. “We’ll just have a ‘browse-in’ in a department store” he said, “looting will be optional.”¹¹¹² The following afternoon, when Dorn was ushered by Roy Gridley to campus to meet his students, he must have sensed early indications of Lawrence’s active and vibrant community. Both Denise Levertov and William Stafford (not likely one of Dorn’s favorite poets, the latter) had recently held residencies at KU, and that day’s *University Daily Kansan* announced that Joseph Heller would be writer-in-residence for the following week.¹¹¹³ Over the weekend, on Sunday, April 21, Dr. Benjamin Spock addressed roughly 2,500 students and faculty in Hoch Auditorium, declaring the Vietnam War “illegal.”¹¹¹⁴ And yet, topical and encouraging as university-sanctioned events were, their backs seemed toward the town. The same front page that repeated Dr. Spock’s condemnations of the Vietnam War, half a world away, also reported a spate of local youth and police violence. The country, it turned out, was still writhing in the bleak shadow of King’s assassination. For the first weekend that Dorn spent

¹¹⁰⁹ *Cows Are Freaky...*, preface.

¹¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, preface.

¹¹¹¹ Jerry Bean, “Krassner, purple words, slap America’s sacred cows,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 19 April, 1968, p. 1.

¹¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹¹³ George Worth to Edward Dorn, 23 January 1967, University Archives, Spencer Mss.; “‘Catch-22’ author at KU next week,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 18 April 1968, p. 9.

¹¹¹⁴ Spock says the war is illegal; LBJ foolish,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 22 April 1968, p. 1.

in Lawrence, the *Daily Kansan* issue of Monday, April 22, recorded a series of unsettling incidents: after a Temptations concert held at Allen Field House (the hallowed university basketball arena) multiple charges of “harassment” were filed against both juvenile attendees and the local police; two liquor stores were vandalized, one of them robbed; a downtown furniture store was attacked; a modified gas-can Molotov cocktail exploded a car in a fraternity parking lot; and a fight in front of the Eldridge Hotel, on Dorn’s front stoop, left one student victim—who claimed the local police stood silently by as he was beaten unconscious—in the hospital.¹¹¹⁵

But for Dorn, Lawrence was a sunny, spring retreat from drear latitudes of Essex, and an opportunity for him to move beyond the personal turbulence of the last six months. He quickly became close with a number of young students and truants who attended his lectures, and frequented the Oread “freak” bars—the Gaslight Tavern and the Rock Chalk Café, both close to the university. Aside from Roy and Marilyn Gridley, who both held doctorates (the former a professor at the university) and were roughly his same age, Dorn would develop lifelong friendships with four young Lawrencians: John Moritz, a student from Chicago and an already seriously-engaged poet, who ran the local and popular Tansy bookstore, which later evolved into a magazine and a press, both of which shared the name; George Kimball, a one-eyed, foul-mouthed, gun-toting, cop-baiting hustler and incendiary writer for *Vortex*, and who later ran for county sheriff; Jim McCrary, another young poet from Chicago, and self-educated pharmacologist; and Lee Chapman, a talented artist and illustrator, who intermittently operated the Tansy bookstore, and years later would return to Lawrence, from New York City, to begin First Intensity Press.

Basically, Dorn fit in. Moritz remembered immediately spotting him as a signal figure in the milieu, and someone “interested in what I was interested in”—a beacon not only to write by, but in the light of whose behavior and enunciations one might discern a new and richer way to live.¹¹¹⁶ And Dorn’s presence energized things: at a Draft Resisters benefit reading in the spring of 1969, after Robert Bly’s gloomy, pedantic condemnation of the war—“Why are they dying? I have written this so many times. / They are dying because the President has opened a Bible again”—Dorn sauntered onto stage, paused, continued to pause, then reached down the front of his pants and with a grand and dramatic gesture, withdrew his

¹¹¹⁵ “Violence mars weekend”; “Incendiary bomb explodes in car,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 22 April 1968, p. 1.

¹¹¹⁶ John Moritz, interview by author, 10 March 2006, Lawrence, Kansas, audiocassette.

manuscript.¹¹¹⁷ “That really picked things up,” recalls Lee Chapman.¹¹¹⁸ Absorbing his instruction, Moritz plugged Dorn’s example rather straight into his own poetics: a precise and discriminating awareness of the eternal and essential facts of one’s present often understated exchanges; an eye for the unpredictable recurrence, through forces and elements peculiar to a place, of interconnected events spread across historical space. The third section of Moritz’s “Crossings,” with its epigraph from James Lane (1814-1866)—Free State leader, Senator, abolitionist lawyer, and partner of John Brown—renders, re-renders, and plows the times:

*“The whole question of slavery
depends upon the hemp crop.”*

—Senator James Lane

so the point is Lawrence
kid the weed dries in attics
root up & read the gold leaf
on the Kaw Valley Hemp
Pickers Association
matchbook & strike up the band
to match that, Ole John went
to Harper’s & Lane took
the RR with him everywhere
went to congress & Robinson
sold his land
to the university

but the kids cut it
in August, coins spread
the Outlaw
snapshots give us back
young Billy
grinning buck tooth
“easy as shootin’ ground
hog”

while packaging a bundle
for the coast.¹¹¹⁹

Under the spell of the overlord outlaw Billy the Kid’s “grinning” image, the poem intertwines the illegal harvesting and smuggling of “ditchweed” in and out of Lawrence, with the abolitionist maneuvers of an earlier century. At the same time, it compares the Kansas hemp-farmers’ coastal profiteering to the equally furtive, but disproportionately remunerative

¹¹¹⁷ Robert Bly, *Sleepers Joining Hands* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1973), 24.

¹¹¹⁸ Lee Chapman, interview by author, 15 June 2005, Lawrence, Kansas, audiocassette.

¹¹¹⁹ John Moritz, *Cartography: Selected Poems, 1968-1998* (Lawrence: First Intensity Press, 2001), 18.

“dealings” in gubernatorial real estate between and among federal agencies and private enterprises.¹¹²⁰ Charles Robinson was the first governor of Kansas. In early 1856, Lane, Brown, and Robinson, hiding out in the Free State Hotel—the original name for the Eldridge—developed their strategies for the Wakarusa “War”—a title by which that skirmish has been rather drastically inflated. True, the Wakarusa War came frightfully close to starting, when the second Kansas governor, Wilson Shannon—who was sympathetic to the South, and had replaced the unjustly impeached Robinson—endorsed 1,200 proslavery border ruffians to amass along the southern bank of the Wakarusa River, just south of Lawrence, to threaten the town’s increasingly voluble abolitionist contingency. But before the war could get underway, Lane and Robinson negotiated a settlement with Shannon (in the very same hotel), and so the muted conflict left only a handful of dead. The rage, however, in which it left John Brown, never the negotiator, was incandescent, and deep enough that he would embrace his own death.¹¹²¹

As Dorn connected with the countercultural scene in Lawrence, and felt restored and encouraged by the casual lifestyle, and acute sincerity of its younger population, he held hours for student appointments on the roof of the historic hotel, where he scribbled on hotel stationary, and received letters from Dunbar almost daily. For Dorn, the excitement of a new place combined pleasantly with the bittersweet anticipation, and the grace he could witness, in repose, created by the brief separation from his intensifying romance in England. Now living with Dunbar, Dorn discovered in returning “home” to the U.S. that he’d left his new “center”—“you be / a still center”—“somewhere abroad,” in a foreign country, in an *elsewhere* that was at once her home, and now, in his present absence, a kind of exile: “Sometimes I wonder,” Dunbar writes in one letter, echoing Hamlet’s “weary” and “unprofitable” Denmark, “if this isn’t the weirdest most unfruitful place to be cut off at.”¹¹²² The seventh of Dorn’s *Twenty-four Love Songs* offers a half-soothing response to that isolation, but at the same time weaves medieval combat history as its conceit for love’s intertwining, embattled facticity:

But you are a green plant to me
only to be acknowledged
with passion

¹¹²⁰ See Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 141.

¹¹²¹ David Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 145-147.

¹¹²² Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 243; 245; Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 24 April 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

tended by my whole attention
there is argument only in equality
one war we can hope to ignore

What we have done is embroidered
our two figures are
as if set forth from Bayeux
and I fly like a dragon standard
yet my soul because I left home
as you did
pulls against a martingale
and having stayed at home too
or more
how much more pulls against you¹¹²³

Love's tensions are symbolized in the imaginal reconstruction of the Bayeux tapestries that narrate the Norman conquest as one instance along the violent continuum over which the French and English languages and national identities are "embroidered." A *sotto voce* intimacy—the reader listens *in* on the talk of others—fashions the poem's apostrophe. And here again, the work celebrates difference as that which exists *between* the lovers, that which both separates ("pulls against") and negotiates ("[w]hat we have done is embroidered...") their bond, and that which the bluntness of "equality" would too facily obliterate.

Now the old tensions were new again, and Dorn put *Gunslinger* aside, momentarily, to complete a series of love poems for Dunbar: "you be / a still center / which has about it pivoting / ramifications of my strain"—but aren't "ramifications" typically unwelcome consequences? And "strain" something burdensome? Perhaps, but the etymological structures of those words are also "pivoted." Each word's semantic lineage inverts its connotative actuality, replacing associations of aftermath and encumbrance with natural growth and common strength: the former from the French, *ramifier*, to "form branches"; and the latter, spilt in itself, on the one hand, passing through the French from the Latin, *stringere*, to "draw tight," and on the other, an Old English word of Germanic origin, *strion*, also related to the Latin, *struere*, meaning "to build up." Or is "ramifications of my strain" meant to suggest a biological process, a reference to the early stages (again the "building" in *struere*) of pregnancy—an image of post-coital presence in absence?¹¹²⁴ On a related note, in the fifteenth of these *Twenty-four Love Songs*, "home" and "abroad" are jumbled by internal and

¹¹²³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 240.

¹¹²⁴ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "ramify," and "strain."

external migration, and nearly sealed off by the demarcations of Customs—“do you know where we are now / do you know the platform any more than / I arrived at the same time one september / what was crossed / is still crossed.”¹¹²⁵ In this confusion of “crossing,” flowing and ebbing, *Twenty-four Love Songs* becomes a kind of palimpsest, upon which the inscription of “home” seems suddenly to shift, and consistently to reappear on the opposite shore. Or perhaps Dorn proposes the restfully utopian, cultural-geographical concept “home” to signify the intermittent but totalizing harmonies within a shifting *locus of experience*—those moments when the “self” becomes “Medium,” when love becomes the signature of difference, “echoing” in dialectical space:

The cleft in our ages
is an echoing cañon – look
I insist on my voice
Archeus become my life
and as any other extension
not to be ignored
if you were my own time’s possession
I’d tell you to *fuck off*
with such vivid penetration
you’d never stop gasping
and pleasure unflawed
would light our lives, pleasure
unrung by the secretly expected
fingers of last sunday¹¹²⁶

Archeus is the alchemical designation for the lowest section of the “astral plane,” or esoteric world of bodily desire, which oversees the growth of all living beings, and whereat matter begins to undergo its spiritual metamorphosis.¹¹²⁷ Likewise, through love’s equation, authorial voice expands (one must admit) to “contain multitudes,” and likewise, takes the poet out of himself—for, “if you were my own time’s possession / I’d tell you to *fuck off*,” but as it is, that is, since you’re not, since you’re from *elsewhere*: “my tongue has taken / a foreigner into it / Can you understand / my uncertainties grow.”¹¹²⁸ And it’s that boundless possibility uncertainty admits that *feels* right to the poet, in the fifteenth of the *Love Songs*,

¹¹²⁵ Ibid., 245.

¹¹²⁶ Ibid., 239.

¹¹²⁷ *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*, published online by The Theosophical University Press, 1999, <<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/etgloss/anj-arc.htm>> (10 June 2007).

¹¹²⁸ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 239.

for instance, when personal and cosmological orders coincide on Dorn's 39th birthday—April 2, 1968—in England; not his home but where Dunbar is:

do you know where we are now
from my soul I want to know
from my beginning in and out
within me
and now returned home
from somewhere abroad
on the second day of april
with the snow¹¹²⁹

For Dunbar, who remained briefly in London after Dorn's departure, England's isle remoteness epitomized more and more the environs of a lover's solitude. "I love you miss you and want to go to wivenhoe knowing it'll be full of your ab sense," begins her letter the day after Dorn's transatlantic flight, "at least to feel you inside out ... life no joy without you."¹¹³⁰

Although Dorn's letters to Dunbar over the three weeks he was in Kansas are currently unavailable, Dunbar's side of the correspondence on its own illuminates a great deal about their relationship, and about her own experience. One might consider Dunbar's brief sequence of letters a discrete collection—since its individual components complement one another, filling out minor narratives, intermittently developing primary characters, chronicling the imagination's pathways, and cross referencing the obstacles and outcomes of daily activities. Together, the letters assert and develop specific themes, their language is lyrically and beautifully subjected to Dunbar's mood and character, and they're frequently interrupted by exclamations of affection, pained by longing, or strained by desire. To buttress this synthesized reading of the letters one can point to the meta-structure of Dorn's 1971 project, *The Day Book*—as yet to be published in its entirety—and in which Dunbar's entries are occasionally included. *The Day Report*, or *Day Book*, as it's sometimes called, reconstitutes 1971 as a set of daily, dated (sometimes even including a time), mostly short writings—some poems, some prose, some lists, some mixed, some inscrutably abstract, others openly autobiographical.¹¹³¹ And in their restless desires both pitched elsewhere and

¹¹²⁹ Ibid., 245.

¹¹³⁰ Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 20 April 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹¹³¹ Selections from *The Day Report* appear in the following publications: "The Day Report," *Caterpillar* 15/16 (April-July 1971), 182-200; "The Day Report," *Georgia Straight Writing Supplement* 8 (27 July 1971), 2-3; and "The Day Report," *Tansy* 5 (spring/summer 1972), 58-80. Only

securely anchored within, Dunbar's letters share migratory roots with the "love songs" that Dorn began to write to her in early 1968, and which were collected a year later and published by Harvey Brown. Like those love songs, Dunbar's letters are love letters of the most elemental, "poetic" sort: they focus equally on the grief in love's absence, on the disparaging counterforce within the force of love. By the following chronological selection of passages from those letters, with minimal editorial interruption, I mean to provide the opportunity for Dunbar's percipient and creative mind, her talent in writing, and her generosity of spirit to speak for themselves. In the same way, as Dunbar played a central role in Dorn's life, and thus informs this telling in ways impossible to ascertain or articulate, the following selection represents an attempt to counterbalance, for the sake of this telling, the relatively huge amount of accessible material through which one can explore the complexities of Ed Dorn's character and experience. The date of the source letter and a short contextual explanation precede the excerpt clusters. All of the letters are to Dorn:

Saturday, April 4, 1968. Margaret Dunbar, Jennifer's twin sister, was staying with her in London:

I love you very very much and walk around trying to forget I want only to sit quietly at the cross.¹¹³² The attraction towards the streets is the first step to the train. I'm reading a book on perception. Even in the eye fixation makes small oscillations. Your self elfin else finned elf ed ad infinitum
 It's awful to be cut off from you so closely with only madly simple words ... the eye you in camera I want to play write me¹¹³³

Tuesday, April 23, 1968, "is Georges birthday & Shakspeares, saints!" Tuesday was also the day on which Dorn received and signed the first hundred copies of *Gunslinger*, Book I, published by John Martin through his California-based Black Sparrow Press.¹¹³⁴ Back at the quiet Wivenhoe house, which Margaret was sharing too, Jenny wondered what confounded rumors were circulating the small county town:

I dig your letters, with sun in the mornings. Sunday itself was best in

in John Moritz's Lawrence-based magazine, *Tansy*, do selections of Dunbar's appear alongside Dorn's.

¹¹³² Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 20 April 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹¹³³ last two lines, handwritten

¹¹³⁴ Streeter, *A Bibliography of Ed Dorn*, 9. (Through Streeter mistakenly writes "13" for "23.")

nineteen years and I sat on the grass and read *Confidence Man*.¹¹³⁵ Margaret's staying here, isn't starting at her place in Norwich which she hasn't got til next week. Strange...[sic] makes me want you here. But we look at Brakhage films and play around with ours. I wonder what people think of the two of us, like the pub man! Saw a fantastic Hitchcock film on t.v., that's where new Hollywood finds roots. I have to go the universe,¹¹³⁶ pick up grant to put in bank. Haven't walked since my london outings which were kind of tired. I'll write again when I come back. God I was sure the radio said there was a tornedo [sic] in Kansas, in Lawrence killing 50 people and then I didn't hear about it again. I love love love you, King & Queen setting the style in the background and please come back soon.

...

Well I came back pretty quickly. No (zodiac turn) grant yet. On the little bridge Nick & Johnny¹¹³⁷ and we drove around in the car where Nick and I split our differences and agreed to pay ten pounds each for my room which will stay empty (Johnny driving screwed up in digs) But as his is a question of head and mine of money ... a nice walk in a circle to the city today, flashed in the square, pigeon-holes up and about out. What a drag drag it is and everything, only you can make it bright. Viliyat Khan¹¹³⁸ and underground festival starts tomorrow. Maybe you can phone black sparrow press and tell them where you are?

Oooahh love you darling
ed dorn you
all of me¹¹³⁹

Wednesday, April 24, 1968:

This morning started long ago back through the stoned part, even sat in the back with the sun reading Olson on Melville on Shakespeare...¹¹⁴⁰ [sic] Now it's a new beginning and wow that's somewhere else. Played you talking (your record) publicly poetry. I'd never listened to that before and dug it, your voice breaking walls words sharp points of your breath. The sun just came out again. This road bugs me with its singular traffic directed along one front. But birds surround.

...Margaret's still here and keeps me human, though it's also distracting in another sense. Like traffic. But she turns me on too to things I'd pass by, reminds me. Sometimes I wonder if this isn't the weirdest most unfruitful place to be cut off at, I'd like to close the curtains.

¹¹³⁵ An 1857 novel by Herman Melville.

¹¹³⁶ That is, the University of Essex.

¹¹³⁷ Two of Dunbar's college friends; she had lived previously with Nick. See the ninth of Dorn's *Twenty-four Love Songs*: "EYE high Gloria / a fine europ ean morn ing / black coffee / for Nick in the nick of time / he gives me something for you / and Otis Redd ing / with his feet up watching / infinity roll in and nick / his time ing / and sudden lee the lid / comes off / and we head straight for / the thing we could be in / cannabic warm / and rime ing." (*Collected Poems*, 241).

¹¹³⁸ Renowned, Indian sitar musician.

¹¹³⁹ Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 23 April 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹¹⁴⁰ That is, Olson's study, "Call Me Ishmael," in *Collected Prose*, 1-106.

Thunder now. God I want you you you, like to be in kansas laughing with you. Don't want to think in this slow place, drifting bursts of energy and calming down. WITH you pure. There's a huge bird in the field, or maybe it's a white cow ? Still haven't got my glasses. I ordered some new ones changed my mind about frames & appointments several times and finally found myself back where I started. Crazy nowhere, which is good find a string in my reading that carries me along. *Confidence Man* is sure to screw anyone up until it subsides into a man in a suit shifting tarot cards. I'll face some words and write about them for Herbie.¹¹⁴¹ Haven't seen many faces around here, Gordon¹¹⁴² came to the door and had his grin waiting when I opened it. It conducted the conversation in and out of the front door way. Finding you were out he went away on his bicycle, but I told him yes, I was sure you'd sent all the gorillas [sic] to the right place at the right time.¹¹⁴³ So he was happy, blue sky. So was I. But I miss you, gaping incredulously 'But he's in KANSAS!??' And I was in your dressing gown.

Thundering blundering bits of weather coming from that toy world, I'll go and post this before it gets cut off altogether. Should have arranged with Johnny & Nick to come fetch us out, even Viliyat Khan is a feeble magnet and a storm would interfere with that. ... I've got bills from the library and andrew robinson (c.?) is begin charged with kidnapping Billy the Kid,¹¹⁴⁴ he's shifting the trail to me. I love you and it's been years since we laughed and sighed together, make it quick there and come back as I can't flip over there. Bye, in your superroom darling darling ed I'm traveling along with you

but as you're not here
it's in strange spaces
of timelessness : like hell?¹¹⁴⁵

Saturday, April 27, 1968:

Another blue hot one, a bit of wind. Spent the morning traveling to&fro Colchester. Your letter this morning, I love you, you must have some letters by now? I sent one a week ago to the university. One more there I think. God I spent last night thinking of you, if you can call it thinking but it's more like a pain, wanting and missing you in circles, really it's so many years since you left and every little thing here misses you. It's alright here, like the sun and

¹¹⁴¹ Herbie Butterfield, editor of *Poetry*, in Chicago.

¹¹⁴² Gordon Brotherston, Dorn's colleague in the Literature department at Essex, and translating partner.

¹¹⁴³ A reference to the translation texts of *Our Word*, Dorn's project with Brotherston, which would be published that November by Cape Goliard Books.

¹¹⁴⁴ A reference, perhaps, to Michael McClure's 1968 collection of poems, *The Sermons of Jean Harlow & the Curses of Billy the Kid* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1968).

¹¹⁴⁵ Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 24 April 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

passing the day, writing, seeing films and words and even a little talking and walking. But the rest of the time, when you allow yourself to stall and feel the void is pretty much like hell. So on goes a smile ... [sic] I'm lonely for you, and I can't even get away from the thought of you now to tell you anything else. ... Anyway I doubt the gunslinger digs a town like Lawrence. There are a whole lot of films begin shown at this end of university, Anger, Baillie, Jack Smith.¹¹⁴⁶ MASS starts in half an hour, but they'll go on all day. Lee Harwood¹¹⁴⁷ gave a reading yesterday with Elaine Feinstein¹¹⁴⁸ but I missed it.

I'm going to have to look up and go out, Ed you are so clearly there as image...[sic]

Sunday [April 28] – it just came too. Driving country fish out in the Open makes me think of America, & you, here in this room of sea submerged in our square blue wave box of maps and boats. You on the road? Wowiee...! music changed to soul, and I must do some writing. Haven't made it to a class yet. Saw a lot of films and they're sinking further in as I go on. It's half way across our separated span; Margaret going to London today.¹¹⁴⁹

Tuesday, April 30, 1968, "the times say":

No letters. It's grey here with puddles. Today you got a letter from the american embassy, Edwin it was addressed to, & I thought maybe you'd got swallowed over there in some remote place and there was an order for your replacement. Anyway it was only from a miss singleton of culture who still happily expects to see you address some meeting in a few days. Yesterday a little pakistani came to the door and poked his head around sniffing hash all over the floor, the furniture falling out of the door on the right, asking is your father or mother in? He followed me in, me backwards covering up bits of evidence, looked at the curtains and posters and shouted above the music that he'd like to go all over the place to see what needed done to. So I said better wait til you come back and you could write him. Then an old butt rd¹¹⁵⁰ visitor, Martin came on his bicycle with bluebells and a dog. But I got a cold badly and don't feel too good in the head. Still haven't made it to the university for a class. Or done much about writing essays. I hope very much you're fine, and that you've written me, big gaps these last morn-

¹¹⁴⁶ Kenneth Anger (American, b. 1927, avant garde filmmaker and author); Bruce Baillie (American, b. 1931, experimental filmmaker); Jack Smith (American, b. 1932, underground filmmaker, actor, performance artist, and photographer).

¹¹⁴⁷ English poet; b. 1939.

¹¹⁴⁸ English poet, novelist, playwright, biographer, short-story writer, and translator; b. 1930.

¹¹⁴⁹ Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 27 & 28 April 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹¹⁵⁰ The street of Dunbar's former address.

ings as you drift...[sic]

Johnny & Nick came round, Nick's settled a studious couple in my room and I gave him 8 quid and we both are very happy. Nice to see him, he's going to Cambridge tho til July he says. So I'll finally have to go and move all my junk out I guess.

It's a shitty day so I'm staying in. EMPTY HOUSE gives me a kick for a few minutes, wander around starting a hundred things stoned. So I'll try that for a time, maybe try focusing even. O I love you and I don't dig not having you here, not being with you. Like another kind of test, and I want to make a whole of something before you get back, but it's all vagrant, a half vacancy. It's YOU I care about!

love love love you
 all of love you
all all
 love love you of you
 all all
 you

when are you
coming back?¹¹⁵¹

Sunday, May 5, 1968:

Want to fill all the space up with LOVE for YOU¹¹⁵²

Friday, woke up at one and got a whole lot of letters from you which was great. From Mexico too saying forward so I'll do that tho it doesn't seem worth it. No I won't. Guess what ! Yesterday the furniture couple left to visit the U and tell Johnny to pick me up to take me to Butt rd.¹¹⁵³ for all my gear. But no one turned up. Instead much later on, in the evening, Margaret's walking up the stairs with suitcase come to stay. As if the whole world have planned it I can't spend a night alone, or they can't...[sic] anyway I did kind of feel like talking to someone at that point as I had things to say. Earlier on I'd sorted out a hundred sheets of beginnings in several directions and decided writing wasn't my scene at the moment. I realised that any essay I'd write was going to be a vehicle for EVERYTHING I was into at the time. I'm seeing America organic space crossed by electric speed. Anyway I had another of my countless visions again, FILM. Thinking to really get into THAT instead of this other thing. After all, if I'm leaving anyway I might as well fail exams and get chucked out as that would mean there'd be no grant to pay

¹¹⁵¹ Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 30 April 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Ms.

¹¹⁵² Handwritten in top margin.

¹¹⁵³ See fn. 196.

back, no hassel. So it's just a question of presenting myself and the 'film unit' at the U with some kind of script. ... It's something that's almost happened a hundred times and people are always asking me what happened to it and why aren't I making a film. And now I realise I don't care a shit if the film's never finished or lousy. What I want to do is to exercise the need to make it, so that's what I want to do.

It's incredibly strange having people around all the time and not being able to feel my centre, like I let them live here but want to forget them. Can't be really real. At least Margaret knows you, this other couple talked like I was living in your house for a while and never connected us in the plural. I've still got a cold ache in my heavy sinus head. I've got to go to Colchester. Only five or six days now til you get back. Maybe I'll stay a night in Bentinckland [sic] so I can get up early to meet you. Of course I will, so you don't have to order me ! I LOVE you and MISS you and want to SEE you as SOON as possible. It thundered and now the sun's shining and it's getting late, still undressed. I see seconds of you on bits of film and think you're beautiful greatly wonderful. See I found some thin paper finally. I'm still surrounded by you and America, sometimes til it makes me wonder where I am and how strong must be all those vibrations...[sic] like england squashes [sic] me out, it's too tiny and tied to time. See you SOON!

Yeah it's Tuesday for you?? LOVE to dearest most loved you Ed in our love ... you're kind of funny too & make me laugh and smile myself to sleep¹¹⁵⁴

Amidst the mellow richness and rich nonchalance of Dunbar's correspondence, Dorn also received (forwarded) word in Lawrence from Robert Creeley, who'd held the same three-week residency at KU in the spring of 1966. In the recent months since Dorn's divorce, Creeley's letters, rife with his own marital strife, had been distracted and infrequent: "Forgive the silence please," Creeley wrote in early June. "At the moment, everything's flooded by the suddenly bitter death of Kennedy—so much the so-called sign of the times continually, and entering so quickly that meat-grinder of 'news' distribution. It's weird what that does to 'reality'. Ah well..."¹¹⁵⁵ Spring had brought all back with it; Creeley wrote in late April to encourage Dorn and Dunbar to pay him and Bobbie Louise, his current wife, a visit, either in Eden, New York—"house is extremely comfortable, like they say. I'm sure we could get some manner of set-up for reading if you'd like it"—or in Placitas, New Mexico, where the

¹¹⁵⁴ Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, 5 May 1968, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss. These messages are handwritten in the margins.

¹¹⁵⁵ Robert Creeley to Edward Dorn, 6 June 1968, Folder 77, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

Creeley's planned to move in June.¹¹⁵⁶ Under pressure from estranged relations with a number of his own teenage children, and exhausted from an ill-conceived television experiment in San Francisco, organized by poet, Joanne Kyger, that tried to combine network television and poetry ("awfully frustrating – just that nothing happened, over and over..."), Creeley repeatedly apologized for his negligent silence during the recent rocky period in Dorn's life:

The damn time has gone by so quickly – both a pleasure and a damn drag. ... I hope things go ok. I had sort of word of you from Stan Power in NYC – but he is so good-naturedly bland you could have been dying "happily" with yellow fever, etc. ... Anyhow tell us what looks likely. – AND forgive this damn rambling. My head really is somewhere "back there" "in flight" – fuck it. On to Shreveport... Meantime take care – "by the throat and throttle it..."¹¹⁵⁷

In San Francisco, Creeley had also seen Olson. Energized by the presence of friends, and inspired by the opportunity to record poetry for public broadcast, Olson once again ignored the deterioration that his "Zeus beat" oratorical intensity and drug-braced late nights were accelerating. Later that spring, having collapsed, like a rock star, after six weeks on the road, Olson checked himself into the Gloucester hospital. Among other disturbing symptoms, he'd lost his voice.¹¹⁵⁸ Two weeks later, however, when it inexplicably returned, the six-foot-seven bard walked out on his bill. "So Charles is alright as everyone basically knew he'd be, no?" Dorn wrote to Raworth in late May. "My conviction is he'll live another 300 yrs. the mother raper."¹¹⁵⁹

While Creeley and Olson were both mired in rough times, Dorn was on the upswing by the end of his Lawrence visit. On May 1, with *Gunslinger* in hand fresh from the press, he gave an outdoor reading at the university picnic pavilion, above the bucolic, willow-hung Potter Lake, just below the north face of hogback ridge.¹¹⁶⁰ A crowd of roughly one hundred and fifty people "took advantage of a warm Wednesday afternoon" to hear Dorn read his work, "which is very popular among students," the *Daily Kansan* reported on its front page,

¹¹⁵⁶ Robert Creeley to Edward Dorn, 22 April 1968, Folder 77, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹¹⁵⁷ Ibid.; and see Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, 340-341, for more on the television project.

¹¹⁵⁸ Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, 341.

¹¹⁵⁹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, n.d. (1968), Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹¹⁶⁰ "A Popular Poet," *The University Daily Kansan*, 2 May 1968, p. 1.

under a large photograph of Dorn, gazing askance at the campanile.¹¹⁶¹ On an inside page were two more pictures of Dorn—slouching in the grass, cowboy boots, dark sunglasses—under which the droll caption ran: “Both Dorn and the students listening enjoyed the poetry and the setting.”¹¹⁶² The poetry *of* the setting, the setting *for* the poetry, itself not merely enjoyed, but resonant. As Dorn began to read Book I, thinking of Jenny, maybe, and the recent demonstrations in London—“...Flageolets of fire / there will be. / This is for your sadly missing heart / the girl you left / in Juarez, the blank / political days press her now”—Roy Gridley remembers the campanile bells chiming the quarter hour, as Dorn read on— “[t]he mission bells are ringing / in Kansas.”¹¹⁶³ And as his poem unfolded, its references approached, as in, got closer—“...*the way I twirl this / Kansas City parasol / ...to keep the dazzle / of them spurs outa my eyes*”—and closer to home (i.e. where he was): “*I put a stop to it / we had special furniture / hauled in from Topeka. / That horse would sit at / the table all night, terrible / on whiskey...*”¹¹⁶⁴

The next day, next to Dorn’s picture, the *Daily Kansan* printed Chancellor Wescoe’s refusal to gratify the demands of Voice, a student activist group who’d submitted a petition of 1,500 names requesting “greater [student] involvement in policy-making,” at the university.¹¹⁶⁵ Their name identified their loss—like Olson, in want of a *voice*, their petition acknowledged the absolute necessity in fighting to reclaim it. Yet, even if we can agree that as a general rule the individual’s self-liberation/self-realization-through-unconstrained-self-expression (occasionally extended to “free love”) was, or is now presented to have been, the countercultural imperative *numero uno*, the willed independence from society’s institutionalized fetters, from “centrality... at an epistemological level,” that that expressive right assumed made neither self-expression, nor self-consciousness, any less complicated at the time. “Ours was a subtly competitive culture,” remembers Louie Louis, “or perhaps that’s a strand I recognized in it because I arrived here with a not-so-subtly competitive edge to me—and I found out that I could not or would not outdrink, outsmoke, outdrop, outrave or outdiss the heavyweights around here.”¹¹⁶⁶ The Gunslinger’s demand for a flexible sensitivity in one’s self-presentations, in the transaction of one’s *locus of experience*, and his

¹¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹¹⁶² “On the Slopes of Potter Lake,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 2 May 1968, p. 8.

¹¹⁶³ Roy and Marilyn Gridley, interview by author, 10 June 2006; Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 4.

¹¹⁶⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 8; 10.

¹¹⁶⁵ “Wesco replies to demands,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 2 May 1968, p. 1.

¹¹⁶⁶ Louis, “Picking Hemp in Douglas County,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 247-248.

insistence on the fundamental, human value in bending social patterns, and challenging social principles, in order to create exchange in “the shared mind” outside of commerce—that demand, that message, probably most of all, struck the freaks, bikers, loadies, hemp-pickers, professors, and whatever unlabeled others gathered together on the grass that afternoon:

Nevertheless,
it is dangerous to be named
and makes you mortal.
If you have a name
you can be sold
you can be told
by that name leave, or come
you become, in short
a reference, or if bad luck
is large in your future
you might become an institution
which you will then mistake
for defense. I could
now place you
in a column from which
There is No Escape
and down which The Machine
will always recognize you.
Or a bullet might be Inscribed
or I could build a maze
called a *social investigation*
and drop you in it
your name
into it—

Please! I implored him
you terrify me.¹¹⁶⁷

Within the historical *locus* of Dorn’s reading—May Day 1968—an increasingly disgruntled, American collegiate population was both tempted and terrified by the recent eruption of student riots in London, Paris, Prague, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil—where in the first two weeks of April, a military terror campaign murdered thousands of innocent students and civilians, mostly in the countryside, and in the few months following, imprisoned fifteen thousand others.¹¹⁶⁸ Coercive state and federal measures taken against domestic opposition also goaded the American way that April—evidenced in the fact that co-founder and

¹¹⁶⁷ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 32-33.

¹¹⁶⁸ Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 70-81.

president of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton, still sat in the same Oakland prison cell where he'd been unlawfully detained since the previous September. Meanwhile, on the "outside," Hoover's agents aimed brutal counterintelligence and covert infiltration operations at prominent, law-abiding black leaders, and their constitutionally protected organizations.¹¹⁶⁹ In mid-April, at Columbia University in New York City, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) formed an alliance with Black Power leaders, Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, and occupied five university buildings for eight days, organizing free-form artistic workshops and improvisatory musical performances.¹¹⁷⁰

But in the turbulent wake of King's assassination, and the exhaust of ill-served Civil Rights reforms, much more was needed. In late April, a group of American black athletes, with some support from their white compatriots, announced a boycott of the Olympic games that summer in Mexico City.¹¹⁷¹ On May 2, beneath Dorn's photograph on the front page of the *Daily Kansan*, one headline announced: "'Poor people' begin Washington march."¹¹⁷² Not surprising, since the benefits for the retired and the unemployed had grown at snail's pace over the past two decades.¹¹⁷³ That march, orchestrated by Martin Luther King's pacifist organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), headed east from his Memphis death-site. Overall, the '60s had been particularly rough on "Poor People"—welfare rolls, for example, had risen precipitously throughout the decade, by the fall of 1971 there were fourteen million Americans receiving payments.¹¹⁷⁴ At the same time, according to the Census Bureau, millions of American homes were either "deteriorating," or simply "dilapidated," and low-income housing comprised only a small percentage of new-housing development at the turn of the decade. Astonishingly, the same twenty-year period—1950 through 1970—that saw the U.S. governmental budget soar, from \$40 billion to \$200 billion, also watched the United States sink, "from seventh in the world to sixteenth in the prevention of infant mortality, in female life expectancy from sixth to eighth, [and] in male life expectancy from tenth to twenty-fourth."¹¹⁷⁵ All that money was going elsewhere: by 1970 the U.S. military budget had reached \$80 billion—up from \$12 billion

¹¹⁶⁹ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 318.

¹¹⁷⁰ Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 81-82.

¹¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹¹⁷² "'Poor people' begin Washington march," *The University Daily Kansan*, 2 May 1968, p. 1.

¹¹⁷³ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 100.

¹¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

twenty years earlier—\$40 billion of which was spent exclusively on new weapons systems. The revolving door through which top-ranking, retired military officials found employment with the country’s largest defense contractors delivered the latter, in turn, almost seventy percent of U.S. military contracts in 1969.¹¹⁷⁶ But the unwieldy pressures of that expansion were centripetal, and cooked the interior. In the two years following Dorn’s May Day reading, many more groups like “Voice” would form—in Lawrence and obviously elsewhere—with many more members, and more militant. Soon, the National Guard would be called, to patrol the dusty streets of downtown Lawrence, and enforce the early curfew.

For now, Dorn’s flattering photos from the *Daily Kansan*, according to Creeley, not only radiated his lately “purified” and “centered” composure, but seemed also to embody and emit the imaginative force of his recent work, to verify the overall “centrality” he’d successfully harnessed. Creeley immediately mentions the pictures in the opening of his next letter, which Dorn received shortly after his return to England. “I had a very happy if brief visit with Stan and Jane [Brakhage] in Colorado,” Creeley writes,

so had fresh news of you, and I must say the photos of you from Kansas looked very goddamn good, i.e., I’d trust to that happiness that so clearly shows in all of you now. That’s got to be the center, very damn truly. So though one will obviously worry as to whether or not one’s being whatever, really that’s no one else’s business, for one thing, and finally beside the point, for another. So, onward. We’ll certainly look forward to seeing you and Jennie in New Mexico at any point you can get there.¹¹⁷⁷

There’s little to verify that Dorn visited the Brakhage’s in early May, as Creeley’s letter seems to suggest, or if he simply mailed the *Daily Kansan* news clipping to Colorado. However, in Dunbar’s April 27 letter, she too mentions the possibility, or likelihood rather, of Dorn visiting Brakhage: “I wonder if you’ve made it to Denver yet, or out that way. You must go to colorado – for me I want you there, and mountains and stan brakhage.”¹¹⁷⁸ Considering the special care Dorn took in organizing his visit to benefit from the discounted, twenty-one day travel rate, it seems unlikely he could have had the time to get to Denver. His return flight was scheduled to depart from Kansas City on the evening of Wednesday, May 8, and to arrive in London the day after.

¹¹⁷⁶ Zinn, 76-77.

¹¹⁷⁷ Robert Creeley to Edward Dorn, 6 June 1968, Folder 77, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹¹⁷⁸ Jennifer Dunbar to Edward Dorn, Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

On the other hand, Dunbar, Moritz, and Roy Gridley, all vaguely recall that Dorn left Lawrence prematurely that May, but each for a different reason.¹¹⁷⁹ Perhaps that discrepancy, however, is no discrepancy at all, but is evidence of the calculated secrecy of his trip: that Dorn cut out early on the dates of his residency, snuck off to Colorado the weekend after his reading under some false pretense that he was obligated to return promptly to Essex (see below), then snuck back to Kansas City just in time to catch his original departure flight, all without violating the time-restrictions imposed on his visit. This story seems to fit the context of the following letter (dated by its year only) from Dorn's student, John Moritz. The abruptness of Dorn's departure that spring, the lack of closure, which on the one hand occasions the letter, is reversed, on the other, by Moritz's open and unassuming tone, by his tacit gesture towards a long-term friendship, and by the seriousness and scope of the task he plans to undertake:

Sorry that I never saw you Saturday. Went by the hotel twice but you were out. Anselm¹¹⁸⁰ took over the class Monday. He left at 9:00. I heard him read earlier but didn't get to talk to him.

A friend and I are starting a magazine once I'm through with school. Interested in a magazine as a medium that we can develop in terms of art and poetry. Since you were encouraging toward my poetry, I seek your help. The magazine is an extension of what we see and feel, capturing the electricity and energy of the moment. The artwork will be a visual clash against the word arrangements of poetry.

First of all, would you be interested in submitting? We haven't decided on what we'll pay for the poetry, but we plan to make it competitive with the reviews now in existence. Secondly, could you send us the names of some people that may not be well known, yet whose work is an experimentation in the word and visual form involving their own experience.¹¹⁸¹

And so began *Tansy*, which represented a widely respected, Lawrence-based poetry and arts magazine—edited by Moritz and Lee Chapman (art editor)—as well as an independent press. A dedicated and talented writer, Moritz had spent most of his April afternoons that semester smoking cigarettes with Dorn on the roof of the Eldridge Hotel, absorbing the totality of the landscape below, and listening. He wasted no time in assimilating the wandering, iambic

¹¹⁷⁹ Gridley, because of the student rebellion at Essex, encouraged (one assumes) by Dorn's letter to Worth in mid-May (interview by author, 10 June 2006); Dunbar, because of the Paris petition and the break-up with Helene (interview by author, Denver, Colorado, 19 March 2005); and Moritz, because of the break-up with Helene (interview by author, 10 March 2006).

¹¹⁸⁰ Anselm Hollo, b. 1934, Finnish poet and translator.

¹¹⁸¹ John Moritz to Edward Dorn, n.d. (May 1968), Folder 182, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

cadence of Dorn's line, and its delicate but methodical accretion of "areal particulars," to suit his own expressive means, and to draft his own "Cartography":

Night falls over abandoned hills, over the brown of grass,
over those places the heart dwells. Those dark waves of
[inland sea
pitch on the arm of this vast loneliness.
The approach opens in the west. The map of a day gone
across the toss of bluestem hangs over the far slope.
A few scrub cottonwood, hedging the memory of a creek bed,
frame a resistance. In the last length of an orange
[filtered light,
the filter of sandstone passes through the broken tangle of
[branch.¹¹⁸²

But Moritz, who refused to take Western Civilization, would never finish school, and had dropped out by the time *Tansy's* first issue, which featured Dorn, alongside many of his Lawrence friends, would appear a year later. In the meantime, Moritz found himself back in Dorn's classroom the following spring, this time all semester.

Dorn's short(ened) time in Lawrence was evidently quite enough to convince him that a future appointment there would offer an amicable and stimulating "way back in"—as much for his future with Dunbar, as for the direction of his writing. The town's lack of geo-cultural pretension, and its Midwestern, agricultural and working-class roots helped to postpone, if briefly, the influx of commercial trends in the counterculture and the mainstream consumer society, and fueled the town's local "movements" with diverse membership—whether they were against the war, or for Civil Rights, or county sheriff, or Justice of the Peace. As the anti-war movement grew in Lawrence, as it "included but went beyond draft card burning, marches, teach-ins, and other symbolic episodes of public protest," it likewise "blurred the boundaries between the town and the campus."¹¹⁸³ That spring Dorn began to develop friendships that would last the rest of his and Dunbar's lives. Shortly after he arrived back in England, he wrote to Worth to thank him for a pleasant time, and included the bibliographical information and a brief dossier, which were necessary for his visiting professorship application. "I enjoyed Lawrence and the University very much and would like

¹¹⁸² Moritz, *Cartography*, unpaginated prefatory poem.

¹¹⁸³ See Monhollen, "*This Is America?*" ..., 112; Monhollen adapts sociologist Charles Tilly's definition of a "social movement": "a sustained *interaction* in which mobilized people, acting in the name of a defined interest, make repeated broad demands on powerful others via means which go beyond the current prescriptions of authority." (242)

to return there the Spring semester next year if that proves possible,” Dorn wrote from Essex on May 14. “In any case all my best wishes to you and thank you for the invitation to be there those three weeks.”¹¹⁸⁴

In the same letter to Worth, Dorn alludes to “the difficulty with the house,” which might’ve doubled as an excuse for his early departure. At the same time, it was part truth—what did that “pakistani” *want* anyway?—who, “poked his head around sniffing hash all over the floor,” when he visited Dunbar at the Wivenhoe house. Maybe the scandalous living arrangements and eccentric behavior had elicited serious objections from the small community? In any case, upon Dorn’s arrival back in England, that “difficulty with the house” was temporarily cast aside, in light of the more immediate and encompassing conflict at the university:

I came back to more than the difficulty with the house—the whole university was in an uproar, taken over by students and some staff, a “free university” set up in its place, and classes being conducted in the new frame work. All because a representative from the British equivalent of Dow Chemical tried to deliver a lecture on sugar. I heard they weren’t so sweet to him. So I don’t know what will happen. First it was the Literature department split because of Davie’s resignation, now the whole place.¹¹⁸⁵

Despite the fact that he’d been away from Lawrence for less than two weeks when he wrote to Worth in mid-May, Dorn references the “free university” commotion to apologize for his “slowed down” response. He must have been interested in the future “Kansas gig”: acknowledging the importance or, conversely, apologizing for his tardiness is an infrequent occurrence in Dorn’s professional correspondence.

Fitting as a climax, the student revolt at Essex became the final episode of Dorn’s two-and-a-half year Fulbright Lectureship that had, he would laconically comment later, “turned into an odyssey of upheaval and exile...”¹¹⁸⁶ Once again, the mobility of Dorn’s participation (never allegiance) in established “offices”—whether of marriage (not that he was repeatedly unfaithful; his marriage with Dunbar lasted for the rest of his life), or of Academia (“casual labor,” he called it)—the sincere conviction he shared with Olson, whether nobly or ruthlessly, that “[w]hat *does* not change / is the will to change,” created

¹¹⁸⁴ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 14 May 1968, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁶ Dorn, author’s acknowledgements to *Way West*, 8.

inescapable tensions that could sadden and inspire.¹¹⁸⁷ Most of all, however, they kept him on the move—*gotta keep moving*, as Robert Johnson insists—kept him “acute at the door” of his being: “...I just can’t build houses. / At all. ... / you know how very much my world is not closed but open, open. / Everywhere I am, I feel I am everywhere else,” Dorn wrote a decade earlier, in “The 6th.”¹¹⁸⁸ In early July 1968, Dorn accepted Worth’s offer of a visiting professorship at Kansas, for the following spring—his salary set at \$6000 for the semester.¹¹⁸⁹ Throughout the remaining months of 1968, as he crisscrossed the Atlantic and the North American continent on his long way back to Kansas, that restless sentiment returned—not as a plea, but as a demand—for instance, in the first of his “love songs”: “there were old towns / in our hemisphere sadness / now as then / no sense in old towns chontal / got to have / newtowns of the soul.”¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸⁷ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 12; Charles Olson, *Selected Poems*, ed. Robert Creeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 5.

¹¹⁸⁸ Olson, “Human Universe,” in *Collected Prose*, 162; Dorn, “The 6th,” *Yugen*, no. 6 (1960): unpaginated.

¹¹⁸⁹ George Worth to Edward Dorn, 29 May 1968, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹¹⁹⁰ Dorn, *Collected Prose*, 236. The Chontal were a lithic people of pre-Hispanic, western Mexico—specifically the Northeast region of Guerrero—who developed a variety of earthenware sculpture to accompany their dead in the afterlife. Much like the Etruscans, for example, mystery shrouds the Chontal civilization, which dates roughly 1800 B.C. to 600 A.D.

I shall confine myself then to a few words to announce that whatever others may wish to say about it, Paris no longer exists. The destruction of Paris is only one exemplary illustration of the fatal illness, which, at this moment, is carrying off all the major cities, and this illness is, itself, only one of the numerous symptoms of the material decadence of a society. But Paris had more to lose than any other. It was a great blessing to have been young in this town when, for the last time, it shone with so intense a fire.

There was at that time, on the left bank of the river—you cannot go down the same river twice, nor touch a perishable substance in the same state twice—a neighborhood where the negative held its court.

—Guy Debord¹¹⁹¹

17. Love in the Time of Barricades

When the radical students at Essex voted to dismantle the structures of established power at their university, they were taking up a continental, if not an international cue. Throughout the spring of 1968, student-organized rebellions all across Europe occupied their universities and/or founded new universities in place of them. In mid-February, while filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard and Luis Bunuel (later joined by Orson Welles, Roberto Rossellini, Robert Bresson, and others) marched in the streets of Paris to protest the Ministry of Culture's removal of Henri Langlois as director of the Cinematheque Francaise (an organization he'd founded), a young American poet and psychiatrist, named Joseph Berke, proclaimed the opening of the Anti-University in London, featuring such lecturers as poet and psychiatrist, R.D. Laing, and playwright, David Mercer.¹¹⁹² At the same time, SDS presented the International Congress on Vietnam at the Free University in West Berlin, where Rudi Dutschke—an East German dissident, former theology student, and compelling orator, who'd roused a massive opposition to the Vietnam War among West German students—chided the overarching connections between class oppression in Europe, the imperialist interventions in Vietnam, and the masked perpetuation of slavery among the urban, black population in the U.S., chained to a modern, institutionalized system of poverty, crime, and addiction.¹¹⁹³ Two months later, as the Essex schism began to boil over, Dutschke, waiting to buy medicine for his infant child, was shot three times—in the chest, face, and head—by Joseph Bachmann, an angry twenty-three-year-old from Munich, who'd "heard of the death of Martin Luther King and ... hate[d] communists," he explained to the local police. Support for Dutschke poured

¹¹⁹¹ Guy Debord, "IN GIRUM IMUS NOCTE ET CONSUMIMUR IGNI," *No: a journal of the arts*, no 6. (2007): 125-126.

¹¹⁹² Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 88-100.

¹¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

onto the streets. In the short time between the SDS International Congress in West Berlin, and the declaration of the Free University at Essex, thousands of students in Rome, Prague, and Warsaw (over ten thousand in Warsaw) demonstrated and fought to wrest their educational experience and their communal identity from the homogenizing stranglehold of state power.¹¹⁹⁴

The Essex revolt put Dorn in tight spot. Donald Davie, whose vision and hard work had built the Literature department, and who'd painstakingly traveled to Pocatello to recruit Dorn to it, had since been appointed to Pro-Vice Chancellor, a position incontestably antithetical to the notion of a "Free University," proposed by the radical factions of students and some of the faculty. Therefore, as a symbol of established power in the hierarchical superstructures that a "Free University" theoretically holds in contempt, Davie was automatically discarded from the college's new ranks. Understandably, Dorn was unable to vote against Davie in the divisive departmental election held that April, but he was also incapable of taking the administration's side against the largely student-driven platforms. As a result, he refused to participate in the vote at all, arguing that as an "American," and therefore an outsider to any logistical concerns at the *English* university, his opinion on the matter was irrelevant.¹¹⁹⁵ Davie predictably lost the vote. Infuriated by what he perceived as Dorn's betrayal, and a cowardly one at that, and shocked by the loss of half a decade's work, Davie promptly left Essex for Stanford late that spring. In the meantime, Dorn, along with Brotherston, continued to lecture until the end of the term under the Free University "auspices," where highly charged debates over the organization and operation of the university were frequent and public.¹¹⁹⁶

A "lulu of morality," Dorn later remarked of Davie, after reading his memoirs of the time.¹¹⁹⁷ Creeley spoke in similar terms: "Apropos Davie," he wrote to Dorn in the early summer of 1968, "that's always I guess the limit of such scenes. I'll remember him going in to lecture, donning the gown, etc."¹¹⁹⁸ Dunbar recalls Davie's resentment over the Essex

¹¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 79-80.

¹¹⁹⁵ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 41.

¹¹⁹⁶ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 41. Gordon Brotherston recalls Dorn's relationship to the Free University: "The lecture theatre block became the daily focus of public debate. . . . Ed was very, very present in the Free University. He kept on meeting classes, but lecturing under the Free University auspices. It was an extraordinarily interesting time—for me, because I was very, very involved, and I'm certain for Ed as well." (Clark, *A World of Difference*, 41).

¹¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁹⁸ Robert Creeley to Edward Dorn, 6 June 1968, Folder 77, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

debacle lingering, and resurfacing years later in an unexpectedly negative recommendation letter, which kept Dorn from a teaching position in San Francisco.¹¹⁹⁹ In Davie's short autobiographical sketch, *These The Companions*, he elegantly compares the seething, political atmosphere at the Caius College at Cambridge, in the early '60s—where “the politics of envy, which I sometimes think of as the politics of self-pity, had sapped independence, self-help and self-respect, and had exalted ‘solidarity’—not with the nation of course, but with a section of it—as the highest of all social and political virtues”—with the myopic and irreverent radicalism he saw at work behind the disaster at Essex:

What went wrong with [Cambridge's] students and teachers in the 1950s and 1960s was something that was going wrong with the national life in those years, as I discovered to my cost when I left it in 1964 to help found the ill-starred University of Essex. Every instance of elegance or propriety, in the University's social arrangements as in its architecture, was to my Caius undergraduates an affront, since it would be either unnoticed or else misconstrued by a rugby-player from South Shields.¹²⁰⁰

By the sound of “elegance and propriety, in the University's social structure,” it seems likely that the schismatic faculty vote that separated the two Protestants—Dorn and Davie—was perhaps the final affront, in a series of affronts, that Davie judged in Dorn's behavior that spring.

In addition to moving in together, and moving the furniture to the lawn, “like the set of a French movie,” Dorn and Dunbar had accompanied a small group of Essex political activists on a trip to Paris to behold the swell of student uprisings that spring, and the radical lecturing that fueled even as it was giving them context. The couple never intended their casual attendance on the trip to represent an allegiance to the principles of the “politicals” from Essex; in fact, they intended to keep the trip a secret from the rest of the Essex community altogether.¹²⁰¹ However, that plan was ruptured when another member of their traveling party announced in “a manifesto of sorts to *The Times*,” that their collective voyage was meant as a “gesture of support for the ‘revolution’.” Dunbar remembers:

He listed all our names—including Anna Mendelsohn who was later arrested with others for having a bomb in her house (can't remember what they intended to blow up) ... the point is that the telegram was published in *The Times* and announced to everyone that we were going

¹¹⁹⁹ Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, 19 March 2005, Denver, Colorado.

¹²⁰⁰ Donald Davie, *These the Companions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 134.

¹²⁰¹ Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, 19 March 2005.

to join our fellow revolutionaries in Paris, and of course it served as a public announcement to be read by Helene, Donald Davie, et al. that Ed and I were off together. We did not want to be part of this official revolutionary group and it caused us some embarrassment.¹²⁰²

For many of those at Essex, the mere timing of the trip was probably evidence enough to justify whatever assumptions there existed about Dorn's and Dunbar's support for the "revolution." Yet in the couple's mind, a vast and variegated distance lay between the support "advertised" in *The Times*, and their *sympathetic* interest in traveling to Paris. The fourteenth of Dorn's *Love Songs* reiterates one of the work's quasi-refrains—"Do you know where we are now"—and details the simple and natural charms of traveling, empty-handed, for the mere sake of traveling. Is "the announcement" of the following lines, the same to which Jenny refers?

we have come here the day after
the announcement
and we look at our lives
in a camera

We have made the journey by train
it was cold now and then
a day scored by a cloud
the heat we had we had in our pockets
and occasionally we took some
what more can be said
more than the existence we have¹²⁰³

A lot; one must have an undeviating moral framework, Davie might have argued, even while he praised the experiential approach to morality in Dorn's work. No doubt that crucial distance between support and sympathy for the "revolution" was foreshortened from Davie's perspective, already psychologically wounded by a rash of student revolts he refused to understand. Not to mention that the situation in Paris was arguably the very epicenter of student unrest in 1968, a student uprising *par excellence*.

In early May 1968, when about five hundred students from the leftist Nanterre University, under student control since late March, appealed to their compatriots at the Sorbonne for support in protesting outdated and overcrowded French educational institutions, and rejecting the recent imperial actions of the de Gaulle government in Vietnam and Algeria,

¹²⁰² Clark, *A World of Difference*, 39.

¹²⁰³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 244-245.

all hell broke loose. In spite of the cordons of police armed with nightsticks and tear gas, demonstration numbers grew by the tens of thousands. On the night of May 10, demonstrators and students used cobblestones, street signs, trash cans, and other illegally acquired refuse, to barricade themselves in the Latin Quarter. In the early morning hours of May 11, gun-toting riot police charged the blockades, beating and arresting demonstrators. Consequently, on the thirteenth of May, over a million people joined the demonstrations against de Gaulle in the streets of Paris. For several weeks afterwards, the Sorbonne became a center of revolutionary ideation.¹²⁰⁴ Among the many groups represented at the occupied university were the Situationists, led by Asger Jorn and Guy Debord, whose philosophy seized upon the unanticipated and extraordinary moments of life in modern society, and hailed the creation of “situations,” that is, “the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality.” The Situationist methodological objective, for a “transitory” and yet totalizing social condition, is congruent with the Gunslinger’s. For example, in “Toward a Situationist International,” Debord writes:

We must develop a methodical intervention based on the complex factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the compartments which it gives rise to and which radically transform it. ...first of all by the use of the ensemble of arts and technics as means contributing to an integral composition of the milieu. ...we have to multiply poetic subjects and objects—which are now unfortunately so rare that the slightest ones take on an exaggerated emotional importance—and we have to organize games of these poetic objects among these poetic subjects. This is our entire program, which is essentially transitory. Our situations will be ephemeral, without a future; passageways.¹²⁰⁵

By the end of the month, not only the traditional curricula of the universities, but nearly all of Paris was effectively shut down by demonstrations: four thousand Renault workers occupied their factories; the media employees of ORTF, France’s state broadcasting corporation, rejected further instruction from the Cultural Ministry; in all, ten million workers, from coalminers to department store clerks, went on strike.¹²⁰⁶ But the political damage that the de Gaulle administration suffered as a result was temporary; the protracted and violent strikes and demonstrations were soon quelled, and the city went back to business as usual. However,

¹²⁰⁴ Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 86-105.

¹²⁰⁵ Guy Debord, “Toward a Situationist International,” in *Art in Theory*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1993), 694-695.

¹²⁰⁶ Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 101-105.

the liberalizing cultural impact of that spring's events and of the intellectual movements that incited them, was enormous.

Meanwhile, for the lovesick Dorn and Dunbar, this was Paris, after all, "City of Light," even if it were on fire. And it was spring; love was like a song: *April in Paris, this is a feeling / no one can ever reprise*. The fury that spring seemed to externalize the wild frictions between the intensity of their commitment to one another, the necessarily clandestine nature of the Paris trip (and other trips), and their subsequent "embarrassment" at its exposure—"it is to test that steel / across the plain between us," that love grows in a time of war, and sows its own strife: "The agony is beauty / that you can't have that / and sense too."¹²⁰⁷ Thinking of Paris, thinking of Kansas, thinking of intercontinental travel: "I just can't imagine how bucolic life was then, I mean in my memory," Dorn remembers. "If you went to the Sorbonne, which we did, and, you know, saw the *situationistes* spilling over the balconies and explaining the L.A. riots, it all made some kind of sense. It was beautifully intellectual and feasible and containable, embraceable ... and now it's so cheap, you couldn't give it away."¹²⁰⁸ Interestingly, while Dunbar's recollections are similar to Dorn's in their self-conscious idealizations of the time, the images each assigns to those shared sentiments are strikingly opposed: "We did attend lectures at the Sorbonne ... going from room to room to catch the range of polemic from structuralists to situationists. ... It was exciting. We saw the students rioting in the streets, cars on fire, cobblestones uprooted."¹²⁰⁹ In a word... bucolic? Dorn's vocabulary seems a bit strange there, and to no small degree, because it feels entirely appropriate at the same time. Appropriate in that, by "bucolic," Dorn means to suggest the gilded, ecstatic delusions by which one's memory, in love, is pleasantly beset, and one's experience exalted. The seventeenth of his *Twenty-four Love Songs* steadies its pace around the pensive satisfaction Dorn takes in reflecting on the determination required to keep "open" the world before him. The "City of Light" speaks directly to the imagination:

The imagined
is the quality of life Paris
not the bones in the fish
in the oppression
of La Cupole, the drama of
our time, masks, a dramatic
event dinner, turns, grin

¹²⁰⁷ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 237; 248.

¹²⁰⁸ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 39.

¹²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

frown, tables
a view of that world
open and filled
with the prospect, the long
perspective of the pain
of my life
in that text¹²¹⁰

All the “turns” and “masks” (are these verbs, or nouns, or both?) dizzy the “long / perspective ... / of my life / in that text,” even as they work to explore it. To explore the life in the drama of a “text,” where the “text,” like a “mask,” can offer the “prospects” of another perspective. In his letters to LeRoi Jones half a decade earlier, Dorn criticized the aesthetic priorities of revolutionary movements: “The modern state, revolutionary or not, is run like a Graumans chinese opening. Everybody has some scene, a trademark, like a beard, or a fat stomach and bald head, or a wig-type haircut, with big white teeth sticking out of the middle of the smile. Piss on it.”¹²¹¹ In the poem above, the “dramatic / event dinner” at La Coupole, the famous brasserie in Montparnasse, where Ernest Hemingway boozed with fellow expatriates, “where Jean-Paul Sartre philosophized over lunch and where Pablo Picasso often painted,” proffers a similar glimpse of the supercilious, imaginal marriage of aristocracy and erudition evinced and sustained by “the drama of / our time...”¹²¹² But that “drama” propels the artist and the society alike, in competing directions—at once toward the imprisoning, superficial formalities that determine social strata, and oppositely, toward the transgression of those categories, through a surplus of voices and identities given substance by the “masks” and “turns” inherent to a “text.”

Through the dissemblance and disassembly of aesthetic and formal device, “the drama of / our time” is expanded and embellished; it reveals the ever-present struggle over *fashion* (as Bernstein terms it), where an “embraceable revolution”—“beautifully intellectual and feasible and containable”—had swept up Dorn in its ranks.¹²¹³ As his adjusted *locus of experience* suddenly allowed for the incorporation of “who was standing next to me... who

¹²¹⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 246.

¹²¹¹ Edward Dorn to LeRoi Jones, 10 October 1961, *Chicago Review*, 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004): 55-56.

¹²¹² Steven Greenhouse, “A Restaurant Empire, Parisian Style,” *The New York Times*, 29 February 1988,

<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DEEDB1238F93AA15751C0A96E948260&sec=&spn=&pagewanted=all>> (12 July 2006).

¹²¹³ Referring to Dorn’s statement (“[i]t was beautifully intellectual and feasible and containable, embraceable...”), Clark employs the term “embraceable revolution.” (*A World of Difference*, 31)

was in the immediate room,” he increasingly found himself in cultural spaces, in “rooms,” that were more populous, more socially diverse, and much closer to the epicenter of the advertised revolution, than his previous experience had known. In this sense, Dorn’s *locus* naturally shifted to rhythmically align itself with socio-cultural frequencies that his work now recorded; the “centrality” of the ego, the limber and transitory objective that Dorn identified in his “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*” essay, took shape in *Gunslinger*, for example, as an “empiricism,” a seamless translation “of the language I was hearing at the time.” “I’m just giving it a kind of expression,” Dorn insisted.¹²¹⁴ This overlap and absorption inflamed certain double-jointed tendencies that were latent in Dorn’s character as well, or were infrequently exposed. Hence, an unmistakable ‘coolness’ increasingly exuded from Dorn’s “self presentations”—a “Whiteness [that] remained cool,” Alice Notley remembers, fashioned from the zeitgeist aesthetic of the “Black poetry style.”¹²¹⁵

Dorn was obsessively direct and often laconic (“Tall rock hard / Slim...”), decidedly on his *own* schedule (at the podium, “Ed Dorn *pauses* and *thinks* before reading,” the *Daily Kansan* instructively observed), and by the time he left Essex, was confident in having successfully wired the “ritual of [his] own person,” to the whittled demands of his poetics.¹²¹⁶ “[T]hat happiness that so clearly shows in all of you now,” Creeley observed in his letter, “that’s got to be the center, very damn truly.”¹²¹⁷ Speaking in the context of his own filial tensions, Creeley continues: “You can see what the task is, i.e., not to enter the miasma of that contest, but just to keep to one’s own reality and to invite therein all or any of them who care to make it.”¹²¹⁸ There, Creeley describes a cosmologically modeled “center” for the human universe, wherefrom experience is alchemically reordered, projected outward, and bodied forth in *style*—“to keep to one’s own reality”—the extrinsic clarity of “the inside real.” It was to Zukofsky’s achievement of getting the “eye” into the “I,” as a *locus of experience*, that Creeley had looked, and Zukofsky aptly defines “style” as well: “[F]irst

¹²¹⁴ Edward Dorn, interview by Effie Mihopoulos, *The Cento Pages*. n.d. <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_cento_index.html> (5 June 2006), unpaginated.

¹²¹⁵ Alice Notley, “‘Where’d You Get It?’,” in *In Remembrance of Ed Dorn*, Dale Smith, ed., *Big Bridge Press*, n.d., <www.bigbridge.org/ednotley.htm> (2 July 2007).

¹²¹⁶ Baraka, “Ed Dorn,” *Cento Magazine* <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_baraka.html>; “A Popular Poet,” *The Daily University Kansan*, 2 May 1968; Dorn, “Driving Across the Prairie,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 65.

¹²¹⁷ Robert Creeley to Edward Dorn, 6 June 1968, Folder 77, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

shape / ... Then *rhythm*,” he surmises in the 12th book of his lifelong project, “*A*”: “Then *style*— / That from the eye its function takes. / ‘Taste’ we say – a living soul.”¹²¹⁹ Elsewhere, thinking of Dorn, Creeley advises:

I think one’s well advised to keep conscious of how deliberate and worked for were Ed’s “self presentation,” like the white linen jacket Helene [once hand-sewed] for him, the intense self-consciousness and awareness of others he demonstrates insistently. “Gunslinger” is a successful “Ed” in obvious ways, and Gunslinger’s company is ideal indeed, a comfortably hip woman and a talking horse, another “Ed” as it happens, in an echo at least of the TV series—and “I” gets finally what he/she/it deserves. Stoned.¹²²⁰

That recalls Baraka’s monodic blazon: “Thin straight blonde cowboy / Movie looking white guy... / Straight as / The barrel / of a pen / Called his self / A Gun Slinger...”¹²²¹ These lines, tuned of the nuances of *style*, suggest a mottled complexion, the partial merger of the author and the character he fashions.

Style rather obviously denotes the manner of doing something, anything, from one’s use of language, to one’s choice of wardrobe, to one’s behavior. “He was about sixteen,” poet Lucia Berlin recalls, retelling a story she’d heard from Dorn about the Saturday night dances in Newman, Illinois:

That’s when the pachuco kids out in L.A. were wearing zoot-suit pants. Ed, with his great sense of style, had brought back home the most beautiful pair of pants. He loved to talk about those pants, they were brown-and-white striped garbardine, they had these big wide pleats, he went on and on describing the weave and the fabric of those pants. They were so fine. Well, he brought them back to Illinois, wore them to the dance—and nobody had ever *seen* such a thing!”

Less obvious perhaps, in botanical vocabularies *style* defines that part of the pistil—a term for the female organs of a flower (another pun, like Dorn’s “barrel / of a pen”)—which supports the stigma, that which directly receives pollen during the process fertilization. In “stigma” is retained the doubled sense of *style*, both as a *locus* of creation, a fertile site, and as a mark of ill-distinction, of *bad taste*. “Stigma” comes directly from the Greek, where it signifies “a mark made by a pointed instrument,” like a “stilus,” maybe, or “stylus” (as it’s been

¹²¹⁹ Louis Zukofsky, *A* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 126.

¹²²⁰ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 37.

¹²²¹ Baraka, “Ed Dorn,” *Cento Magazine*

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/dorn/DORN_CENTO/dorn_baraka.html>.

erroneously spelled for nearly three hundred years), from which the word *style* is derived.¹²²² And like the stigma-bearing “style” of the flower, “stylus” denotes the sapphire or diamond ‘needle’ that brings forth music from the grooves of a phonograph, and also designates an ancient writing implement, the pointed end of which would inscribe a wax-covered tablet, and the blunt end efface any unwanted text.¹²²³ Zukofsky’s connection between *style* and “soul” is therefore rooted in the parturitive capacity of the former, which likewise appears to “pierce” and intertwine the etymology of Creeley’s (and Dorn’s) terminology of the “center,” which comes from the Greek *kentron*, meaning “sharp point, stationary point of a pair of compasses,” and is related to the Greek *kentein*, meaning “to prick.”¹²²⁴ *Style* is soul, the “outfront residence” of inner-penetration, the palpable evidence of “centrality” plugged-in, “embraced.” In the twelfth of Dorn’s *Love Songs*, this process of writing and rewriting possesses astral properties and deep-time effects, both for the poem and the life:

Not this
 not that
 and not this nor
 not this or that
 nor caught
 on poles at
 all I have
 no place
 outside might welcome
 might warm me

I am nothing
 anymore at all
 than in myself, you be
 a still center
 which has about it pivoting
 ramifications of my strain
 a marvelously pure chrystal
 the center still and in me
 located
 and in the ten thousand
 years or more
 will change
 and be
 the shift, location
 and polaris

¹²²² *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “stigma.”

¹²²³ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Style.”

¹²²⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v. “center.”

a new name¹²²⁵

The poem's opening lines, and its closing image of a star, suggest a redacted version of the first quatrain of Shakespeare's 55th sonnet, which argues for the eternal character of poetry alone—the sonnet as the indestructible embodiment of love's contest and power—to persevere amidst crumbling dynasties, wars without end, and time's slow erosions: “Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme, / But you shall shine more bright in these contents / Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time.”¹²²⁶ Ironically, in Dorn's penultimate line, “polaris” possesses a startling double-reference, both to “war's quick fire,” and to the “brightness” of celestial bodies, always already obliterated. As the name for the U.S. and British submarine-launched ballistic missile, “designed to carry nuclear warheads,” “polaris” signifies an underlying and sinister relationship that binds the couple as allied citizens. On the other hand, thinking (like Heraclitus) of the married couple *as one*, and of the *oneness* of Jennifer and Margaret Dunbar *as twins*, one notes that Polaris—the North Star, or Polestar, in Ursa Minor—is itself a double star. And its bright light has guided oceanic navigation for millennia. In either case the “polaris”'s over-determined, migratory context (the missile tracking, the earth turning, the stars shifting, etc.) recalls Dorn's earlier frustration with acclimating himself to the “latitudes” of England (“So cold / you wake up / mumble some complaint / to yourself”), which serve only to confirm the fact that, “no place / outside might welcome / might warm me.”¹²²⁷

In “England, Its Latitude and Some of Its Conditions, the Seriousness of Ghosts,” Dorn repeats a central conviction of his work, the unimpeachable luminosity of one's place—“so there you are,” wherever you're at: “From the center of / the earth / the line comes up to / pierce / any man / can't understand / what gravity is / that he has an / ordered and / endlessly transferable / place.”¹²²⁸ Belonging is an “endlessly transferable” and relative property of the physical universe, but who does the “ordering” of it, what clears the path belonging takes? In the twelfth *Love Song*, the question arises, returns, recrudesces: “no place / outside...” outside *what?* Outside this place called Now, this body in action and acted upon? Outside “myself,” is it?—that *locus*, where “you be / a still center”—that is, a *new* center, of gravity,

¹²²⁵ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 233.

¹²²⁶ Shakespeare, *Complete Sonnets*, Appelbaum, ed., 24-25.

¹²²⁷ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 182; 243.

¹²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

like the orbit of planet and moon, but “in me / located,” among these “newtowns of the soul.” In Tom Clark’s biography of Olson, he describes a similar love-driven transfiguration that that poet experienced (and later wrote about) in the early 1950s on his way back to Washington D.C. from a romance-filled stay in New York City. Clark writes: “On the bus back to Washington [Olson] experienced a recurrence of mystical solar ‘illumination,’ sensing a ‘sun inside’ transforming him with a radiant inward heliotropism. (‘The moment you love, there is a SUN born, a sun inside yourself.’)”¹²²⁹ Likewise, as Dorn’s “still center” enters Archaeus (“Archeus become my life”) the transmogrification of its material form generates another “center”—that which is made of the light it provides—and inheres its gravitational counterforce. Thus, in the fourteenth song:

The largest center we know
 makes his move
 sundown in the window
 and in space, double space
 each one a concentration of
 the other a difficult fact to absorb
 it is a double labor to love
 one twin¹²³⁰

In the eleventh song, lovers and twins, like rocks and stars in orbit, gravitate toward one another, and sometimes align, say, under Dorn’s astrological sign, at vernal equinox:

you are a double letter
 and I am equal only
 to my own singularity

the mixed strings of aries begins
 you are sometimes in the trance of what
 is beyond you,

 sometimes close
 and then you turn into it
 so fast we turn

into another room we hear inside
 and all the people looking
 over the wall
 are frozen¹²³¹

¹²²⁹ Clark, *Charles Olson: Allegory of a Poet’s Life*, 225.

¹²³⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 244.

¹²³¹ *Ibid.*, 242; and this occurs in the fifth *Love Song* too: “I’d know you were my katalysis [sic] / had we never met, in all space / I am fixed beyond you, the cruel / is a decision of the stars, in all space /

The architectural intimacy of “another room we hear inside”—a place we hear as lovers, a space we *make* in which to hear—evokes the amatory unification in John Donne’s “The Good-Morrow,” which title suggests love as a syncretic and perpetual moment of birth. In fact, Donne’s poem catalogues many of the themes explored by Dorn’s *Love Songs*. In casting their close attentions along the verge of language’s productivity, into the murky provocations and distortions of border regions, and in scrutinizing knowledge’s overlooked vanishing points, and in their talk of overcoming fear, and embracing uncertainty (#13), or sea-voyaging (#1), or new and old worlds (#1), or dreaming and awakening (#2; #24), and conjoining (#3; #4; #5; #18), the *Twenty-four Love Songs*, as a whole, seem to ramify Donne’s twenty-one line declaration. “I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I / Did, till we loved?... / If ever any beauty I did see, / Which I desired, and got, ‘twas but a dream of thee”—so opens and closes Donne’s first stanza, and the stanza that follows could serve as an epilogue (ever at the waking) for Dorn’s *Songs*:

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown:
Let us possess one world; each hath one, and is one.¹²³²

That navigation and seafaring are central themes of Dorn’s *Love Songs* is a symptom of the couple’s situation during the summer of 1968. After traveling in northern England for most of June and July, in early August they boarded the United States Lines steamship bound for New York City. Over the first week of that month, while Dunbar read about King Arthur and Avalon, the legendary refuge where the king is supposedly buried—thought to be at Glastonbury, in Somersetshire, southwestern England, where the couple had recently visited—Dorn wrote, from the “mid Atlantic,” to Tom and Val Raworth. In sharp contrast to the dreary anxieties of his correspondence earlier that year, Dorn’s idiosyncratic humor reemerges in the following passage, wherein he catalogues their sea-voyage pleasantries:

So last night was this night called Gala Night thus at dinner we

our clef is pitched together / we share / a completely trued voice / our substance carried / in our joined mouths / flows.”(238)

¹²³² John Donne, “The Good Morrow,” in *The Longman Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Lynne McMahon and Averill Curdy (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 222.

found two small falgsh uh flags on sticks an Am. flag and an United States Flage, ie, the steamer. People had uh horns and were Wearing their hats. ...

And they brought us a pate which was in a package and the toast was rusk and in a package also. And then they brought fish which had come from the sea betimes, but had been frozen and many other things they brought. And then they brought a great piece of meat which was utterly nude and accompanied only by five poor mushrooms in cowls. And when that went away they brought nuts and mints and figs and there was some ginger dried in sugar. Then Ice Cream was brought and it had a sea of chocolate on it and there were biscuits stuck in its side. And grapes in whole bunches covered with ice. And so the English gentleman took his grapes into his room and his wife went with him. And of all that we ate only the ice Cream and removed ourselves to the lower bar where we spent the evening drinking Brandy Alexanders. The host of the boat is Commadore Alexanderson.

Now then we are in the letter Writing Room there really is a room for doing that. The cat who sold me these stamps even told me in his NY accent How to put the stamp on – “upright like this” – wow I must look like I never done anything

Jenny sends love to both of you and stays very lofty-minded indeed. ie, insofar as she has come to believe any of it. She spends most of her time here in avalon located somewhere near the lower bunk.¹²³³

Dorn and Dunbar were soon back in America, making frequent trips to visit old friends and new acquaintances who lived in the northeastern U.S., and once taking a longer road-trip into northeastern Canada. By the end of the year, they were in Placitas, New Mexico, staying with the Creeley's, wherefrom they left for Lawrence. In the fall in between, they spent their time wandering New England, visiting Olson in Gloucester, but mostly staying with Harvey Brown, who lived in West Newbury, Massachusetts, where he ran Frontier Press. The summer sun of New England was restorative, and the days, where “love is,” were “fresh” and open again:

Back Home, Back Home
the day wakes up and once
out the door into what's
left of the fresh air it still
comes clear
how lovely
love is there¹²³⁴

¹²³³ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 3-4 August 1968, Folder Letter 1968, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²³⁴ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 249.

During the years in Paris I had my doubts about those who had nothing good to say about America just as I had my doubts about those who talked about Europe's being dead. They were like my father and his pal who always talked about the good old days. As a child I used to think that adults when they spoke always gave the impression that one lost something by still being alive and that all places had been better in former times. Before I ever went there I heard that Paris was dead, and later I heard that Greenwich Village was dead...but I never found any place dead where a number of men and women for whatever reason tried to strike permanently against uncreative work. In those places I found dissent, sedition, personal risk. And there I learned to explore and modify my great contempt.

—Alexander Trocchi¹²³⁵

18. Reconvening and De-Convention

“It’s good to be in New England after Olde because it gives us some time to focus it,” Dorn wrote to Raworth, from West Newbury, in Essex County (oddly enough), northeastern Massachusetts, on August 15.¹²³⁶ The ascetic strength of their voyage to which the dedication of the *Love Songs* refers—“we took nothing / and grew thin, and strong / along the lance of our Journey”—also dictated the couple’s first weeks in America.¹²³⁷ First, their luggage had been misplaced, and its arrival substantially delayed—“card from the steamship trucking co. this morning,” Dorn wrote in the same letter to Raworth, “they are dropping our bags at the local supermarket... They accept anything dropped off.” Then, in New York City, their original plans to stay with sculptor and Black Mountain alumnus, John Chamberlain, were initially soured by “the dust and heat of a shut up place,” and eventually abandoned due to an “up tight” landlord, so the visit was cut short: “[E]verybody was out of town or out to lunch,” Dorn complained.¹²³⁸

The northeastern landscape was rejuvenating at least, and with a car at their disposal Dorn and Dunbar kept themselves energized and busy with day trips from Brown’s house in West Newbury, taking long hikes through the Berkshire mountains—“...climbed a mountain... 3 thousand nearly 4 thou ft. on a short steep trail and it left a delicious exhaustion in the bones. Sweated everything out.”¹²³⁹ Enjoying his extended hiatus from teaching that fall, over the next couple of months Dorn and Dunbar traveled as far as Labrador and Newfoundland, a trip which inspired the short prose piece, “Of Eastern Newfoundland, Its

¹²³⁵ Trocchi, *Cain’s Book*, 220.

¹²³⁶ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 15 August 1968, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd. Mss.

¹²³⁷ Dorn, *Twenty-four Love Songs*, unpaginated.

¹²³⁸ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 15 August 1968, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²³⁹ *Ibid.*

Inns & Outs.”¹²⁴⁰ In all, the time was relaxing: “Bright days and already fall crispness to the air, the sun hot but the temp not high,” Dorn wrote to Raworth, with a subtle nationalistic prodding, “it was nice in fact getting that letter from England but especially so as the sun shone. We think of you all a lot and now it seems possible to keep closer track at this distance and especially for me since I’ve seen it. The next step is for you to make the trip.”¹²⁴¹

Among all the activity, however, Dorn sensed a change in the “changing same” of the American atmosphere: “There is that funny inconsequential speed and that seems newer and more but not different,” he told Raworth. Student discontent with elevating death tolls in Vietnam and administrative shortsightedness had spiked since Dorn’s visit to the U.S. in early May—many things were rather different. Most shocking, perhaps, had been the assassination of Democratic Presidential nominee, Robert Kennedy, in a Los Angeles hotel on June 6, 1968. An event that officially confirmed, if confirmation was needed, that bitter divisions in the society initially exposed and irritated by student demonstrations were in fact deep and infected cultural wounds. Student dissidents in Berkeley, California, enraged over the protracted incarceration of Huey Newton, and incensed by the Oakland police’s brutal treatment of Eldridge Cleaver (soon to be charged with attempted murder, and later would flee to Algeria) clashed repeatedly and violently with state authorities. By November, and through December, when SDS (Students for a Democratic Society)—more ethnically diverse and more militant than before—teamed up with the Black Panthers, striking oil workers, and numerous others, and demanded the implementation of a Black Studies Program at San Francisco State College, something Governor Ronald Reagan perfunctorily rejected, it sparked another set of demonstrator/police altercations, which left 450 arrested students charged with criminal actions.¹²⁴² Facing the situation first hand, Irby wrote to Dorn that fall:

...blow up in the University over Cleaver & his class still just simmering—the feeling of living in Germany c. late 1932 is still strong, except the Berkeley politicians (at least) aren’t that clear & efficient yet—but they’re learning. How’s Canada? I don’t really think abt leaving seriously yet, esp. since such a move, just to C., wdnt change too much—the demand is here, whatever is is or will be, at least for & in me—I don’t know—any more or different than the demands have always been here?¹²⁴³

¹²⁴⁰ Appears in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 11-25.

¹²⁴¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 15 August 1968, 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁴² Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 211-217.

¹²⁴³ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 11 October 1968, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

Having just returned to America—"I was compelled Westward," Dorn later put it—he must have agreed with Irby that, "the demand is here." At the end of August, struggling to articulate the nascent energies of reentering that sphere coursing through him, Dorn wrote to Olson:

Do you know what I'm trying to say. That I feel terrifically excited being back home and that my ear is just dimply all over the place and I haven't got my speech back from what I now feel was a long isolation. ... The way I lived in America during the last 9 months in England, like a pregnancy jan to Aug. makes all this present effort toward correcting that abstraction.¹²⁴⁴

Among other things, Dorn's ironically displaced American "pregnancy" birthed a unique and largely unknown set of short and mostly comic epigrams. The poems are unique because they are the only tangible evidence of Dorn's direct participation (not quite, it turned out)—and aside from his oblique dedication to Lawrence's draft resisters—in the "embraceable revolution."

When Dorn and Dunbar left New York City in early August, they just missed Ed Sanders. Sanders was stopping over from Chicago, where he would soon return to continue preparations for the Yippie Party demonstrations surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention to be held at the International Amphitheatre in Chicago, from the 26th through the 29th of August. Dorn explained to Raworth:

Called Ed Sanders who was leaving for interview in Chicago where it is all expected to go down the 22nd or some date around there. But we left before he got back the next day. He's going to run a pig for president. The idea as he explained it is up to now we've had a president who ate the people and what we need is a president the people can eat. So the candidate of the Yippies is a black female pig. And he asked for FBI protection for the yippie candidate which it doesn't look like they'll get.¹²⁴⁵

"Pigasus" was the candidate's name, who was confiscated during the convention mayhem, after the Yippies had threatened to spike the Cook County water supply with LSD.¹²⁴⁶ A bit of context: Sanders was an old friend of Dorn's, on whose behalf Dorn, years earlier, had written to John Lindsay, Mayor of New York City, in protest of Sanders' arrest for

¹²⁴⁴ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 29 August 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁴⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 15 August 1968, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁴⁶ Ali and Watkins, 1968: *Marching in the Streets*, 51.

“possession with intent to sell pornography,” at his Peace Eye Bookstore. It was a charge of “ignorance and anachronism,” Dorn argued.¹²⁴⁷ Primarily, Dorn’s admiration for Sanders’ was rooted in the latter’s acute sense of style and humor, as the passage above attests, and which Dorn develops more freely in his prose piece, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat”: “Sanders is *the* medicine man of our era. He looks like the man who *could* have shot Lincoln but didn’t. ... And whereas movie stars think of themselves as movie stars, Ed Sanders *is* a movie star.”¹²⁴⁸ As an alluring, witty symbol of the hip and friendly “revolution,” and an architect of the amusing Yippie Party image, Sanders convinced Dorn to compose a number of brief poems to be printed on slips of confetti and rained over the convention floor.¹²⁴⁹ How that would happen, no one was sure.

There are actually three sets of poems Dorn drafted for the occasion: a series of five chants, and two series of cryptic epigrams, with seven and twenty-one poems, respectively. Common to all sets is the critical and mysteriously comic reordering, through pun and portmanteau, of the intense masculine air of the Convention—among its security, or the official Party ranks (“The funny destiny of their homonotional heads”).¹²⁵⁰ For example: “HOMOMENSURA / where is the manness here / HOMOMENSURA / ... / where are the menhir / where is our cercle of perpetual apparition.”¹²⁵¹ Here the overweening masculinity in American politics seems faint (see “mensur,” in footnote 17, below), and is mocked aside the elemental endurance of ancient cultures in Britain—“menhir” are standing stones; “our cercle of perpetual apparition,” both invokes the cosmic alliance arranged at Stonehenge, say, and the ghostly (in its secrecy, and its effects) “Cycle of Acquisition” that drives forward imperial war and churns over earth for commerce.¹²⁵² Each set of poems also shares the demand to refashion traditional orders through experiential understanding, simply and

¹²⁴⁷ Edward Dorn to John Lindsay, 21 March 1966, Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁴⁸ Dorn, “The Outcasts of Foker Plat,” in *Views*, 82-83.

¹²⁴⁹ I learned of the existence of these poems from James K. Elmborg’s, “*A Pageant of It’s Time*”: *Ed Dorn’s Slinger and the Sixties*. The poems themselves are part of the Poetry Manuscripts special collections held in the Lilly Library, at Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana.

¹²⁵⁰ Edward Dorn, “Chant 3,” original manuscript, Poetry Mss., Lilly Library.

¹²⁵¹ Behind the punning, “mensura” is Latin for “measure,” and at the root of *mensurable*—something measurable, or “with fixed limits”—and *mensural*, a musical term for notes of “fixed” duration and tone. (*New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “mensurable.”)

¹²⁵² Elsewhere in *The North Atlantic Turbine*, of the perpetual cycle of responsibility to the “shared mind,” Dorn writes: “We are *all* in the sarsen circle. / We are *all* in the *da nang*. Even the Shades / *All* / of our numbers come up / Russia and china jockey, / it is not race, ‘La révolte / de Los Angeles / est une révolte contre La Marchandise / contre le monde de la Marchandise....”(201)

directly: “turn now and rise / Wrest the matter into your own / hands – and Nature’s laws,” reads one; “It is time the people had something to say about / War, about Peace, about Property,” reads another; “the fear of being / misunderstood (a great mass / Disease / that stops everybody / thats stopped,” reads a third; “They feel easier in the protection which the / inactivity of permanence temporarily gives,” reads a fourth.¹²⁵³ Among the set of chants, “CHANT 5” presents the most piercing rhetorical situation:

A MASS OF NAMES STARING UP FROM THE BALLETT
 think of the one you love
 A MASS OF NAMES STARING UP FROM THE BALLETT
 ask how your mother lived
 A MASS OF NAMES STARING UP FROM THE BALLETT
 ask where your father is
 A MASS OF NAMES STARING UP FROM THE BALLETT
 is there one there you love
 A MASS OF NAMES STARING UP FROM THE BALLETT
 who could you point your back to
 who could you leave with the simplest task
 how could you state a simple need to
 what molecule of the connective universe
 what sign of the spiritive permeation¹²⁵⁴

It seems accurate to refer to the rhetorical “situation” of a piece like this, as it was intended for the participants on the floor of the convention. Read in context, as an item picked from the falling confetti, one imagines a rather jarring experience. Not as jarring, however, or not as disorienting at least, as would have been the experience of reading, in context, the longest sequence in number, which contains the shortest individual pieces. The following represents a collection of terse curiosities through which seems to run a scattered, ‘McCluric,’ narrative—each number was printed on its own card:

- #1: America you boil over
- #2: The presidential pattern
 on the wall in Hell
 The Colesseum Birthday party
 for the Man of Sin
- #3: We are in the Room-of-Sin
 absorbing the pattern
 we are in with the men of Gath¹²⁵⁵
- #4: All this depicts our lives

¹²⁵³ Edward Dorn, original mss., Poetry Mss., Lilly Library.

¹²⁵⁴ Dorn, “Chant 5,” original mss., Poetry Mss., Lilly Library.

¹²⁵⁵ “Gath of the Philistines” was one of five Philistine cities, and home to Goliath.

#5: Where is the Man-of-Men?
 #6: The Manroot
 #7: Man-of-the-Earth
 #8: The Man of The Signs
 #9: UnConvention!
 Homo Signorum Homo Signorum
 UnConvention!
 Homo Signorum Homo Signorum Signorum
 #10: Beware the approach of
 #11: Man of Wax
 #12: Man of Bland Iron
 #13: Man of Mold
 #14: Man of Motley his eyes
 #15: and all the distortions of our friend
 #16: the Man of Sorrows
 #17: who can be the Man of Spy
 #18: not the Man of War
 #19: we are the Men of Men together Homo Signorum
 #20: the Men Here, say it
 the Man of the Woods
 the Man of Blood
 #21: So contra the Man of Motley wallpaper eyes
 fixed history on the wall
 say the wall away
 free of the hum
 in the Man of The Signs.¹²⁵⁶

Not surprising, Dorn's messages, like Pigasus, never made it to the Convention floor: "If any question cld be branded into the horizon, / wld it penetrate the hog?" another of Dorn's epigrams queries.¹²⁵⁷ The immense and diverse attendance that gathered at the demonstrations in Chicago that August—from militant radicals to upset-but-upstanding citizens—were met with an even more alarming display of police force—ten thousand strong, plus five thousand National Guardsmen—who indiscriminately beat protestors, bystanders, and members of the media, over the four, hectic days of the event. "Czechago," the Yippies called it, alluding to the Soviet takeover of Czechoslovakia a week-and-a-half earlier. Having announced five months before that he would decline his Party's nomination, and now sitting at home in Texas, President Johnson, watched tyranny dismember the democratic process on television, along with thirty million other Americans. On television, Chicago looked a lot like Eastern Europe: barbed wire circled the tops of temporary board fences that separated the

¹²⁵⁶ Edward Dorn, original mss., Poetry Mss., Lilly Library.

¹²⁵⁷ Ibid.

Convention grounds from the low-income, minority neighborhoods nearby; barricades blocked littered streets; and tear gas hung in the air. After the chaos, eight protestors were arrested—including famous Yippie leader, Abbie Hoffman, and Black Panther Party co-founder, Bobby Seale—and charged with an array of illegal activities, including conspiracy and inciting a riot.¹²⁵⁸

Unlike his curious little poems, Dorn never intended to physically participate in the Chicago demonstrations. Quite the contrary in fact, on August 28, he and Dunbar enjoyed another day trip: “J. and I spent the afternoon on the Rolycoaster [sic] at Salisbury Beach!” he wrote to Olson the next day.¹²⁵⁹ However, pleasant as his homecoming with Dunbar was, Dorn sensed an uneasiness in his older teacher, and was soon reacquainted with the dramatic personal episodes and conflicts among those he knew from Black Mountain. Olson, for example, already exhausted from sickness and travel, was deeply mourning his most recent loss in love. In August, Inga Loven, an “attractive Swedish journalist,” arrived in Gloucester to interview Olson, who was instantly enamored of his guest and, Clark writes, “spiced his remarks with Scandinavian references, ...[and] With the tape recorder turned off, ...stepped up his wooing efforts.” Evidently, little but offence got through, and Loven returned to Sweden, where she received, but did not reciprocate, a final, inspired love letter, written (said Olson) “in Icelandic.”¹²⁶⁰

Distraught, Olson turned to Harvey Brown, his “legendary phone man,” and throughout the fall, Dorn and Dunbar accompanied Brown on visits Gloucester.¹²⁶¹ On one such visit, on the heels of Loven’s departure, Dorn unwittingly took Olson’s grief too lightly, or so Dorn later worried, after he’d talked with Brown:

...that moved me around to send you this and tell you how goddamn sick I felt to let such an impression of myself get past the gate, ie that last night, but you know how real paranoia is / I mean I don’t believe you can say you know whats happening to you in such a cool way as a smile might seem to reflect and of course I was unhappy, I was unhappy with the image of myself to which I said I won’t give this, I must give something better, or nothing, and I understood your pushing

¹²⁵⁸ Zinn, *Postwar America*, 177-178; 192; Ali and Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets*, 151-153.

¹²⁵⁹ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 29 August 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁶⁰ Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life*, 341-342.

¹²⁶¹ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 29 August 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

at the same time I was “certain” it was a put down¹²⁶²

This kind of oblique, cautionary, “mealy-mouthed” talk seems exclusive to Dorn’s correspondence with Olson.¹²⁶³ As the same late-August letter continues, Dorn’s hesitations bespeak his ill-defined and generalized uncertainty about how to reengage old friends, to match rhythms in conversation—how would Dunbar find Olson, say, or Robert Creeley, and vice versa? etc.:

It is great to see you. If my pride weren’t so much larger than my physical presence I’d ask you to wait a bit, as I almost tried that night jumping up but then I had that experience of seeing myself abt to do that and of course couldn’t.
... What I’m saying is a thing I’d just guess you can imagine—how overwhelmed I am to see you again. And how beautifully and properly difficult you make, no Create, my reentry into this thing.¹²⁶⁴

In terms of his old friends, those closest to him, Dorn’s “reentry” was rather turbulent, and wasn’t completed until the end of that year.

By late November, Dorn and Dunbar were in Placitas, New Mexico, staying with Robert and Bobbie Creeley. The rancor that had earlier grown between Olson and John Wieners over their shared affection for Panna Grady, and mainly Olson’s treachery, had since spilled over to irritate subdued but extant tensions among other members of Dorn’s community. On December 1, after what appears to be an uncomfortably prolonged silence, Dorn wrote to Olson: “There have been those long pauses in the life of my last month when I looked at the wall and wrote you a letter on it or lifted the handle of the phone and spoke w/out dialing...”¹²⁶⁵ The letter was occasioned by Dorn’s reading “that Turville-Petre book on Icelandic origins which Harvey gave me and you recommended,” he told Olson, for whom Icelandic references were likely still a sore subject. In defining Olson’s power as a poet, when Dorn refers to “the mythic relation one must become ... to go beyond the mere the natural abilities are,” he rephrases the demand for a personal “ritual,” and for “centering” of one’s own language, to refashion myth in the unlocking orders of the poem:

...and that I shld now write to the scald of our Time – and I don’t know

¹²⁶² Ibid.

¹²⁶³ See discussion of “An Exercise,” chapter 25.

¹²⁶⁴ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 29 August 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁶⁵ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 1 December 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

if that will please you at all to be thot skaldic – but I was very struck by that distinction the literature of that time and place makes... that the accentual skills of the Eddaic relation were the possibility of the born poet, the powers of the heroic lag – that transfer/transmission, but for the scald, the invention, the care and repair of metres, the mythic relation one must become that, as I take it go beyond the mere the natural abilities are. I was also working on the postscript to that “What I See” piece for Donald Allen and trying to see if there might be something important to add – because my secret problem has been w/ your work that I am essentially uncritical, ie, of it. But maybe that’s why I keep at it.¹²⁶⁶

As usual, it’s necessary for Dorn to sift his appreciation and admiration for Olson’s work in order to clear a space to voice personal conflicts or concerns. “The thing about Olson and myself,” Dorn bluntly put it to an interviewer in 1992, “is that we were never really friends.”¹²⁶⁷ Later in the interview, he developed the claim further:

We were close in the sense that our interests and our sense of morality and integrity were rather aligned. Our loyalty to one another and our allegiance was not based so much on friendship as on a concern for poetry and intellection and knowledge and public morality, which, in fact, I found him flawless on. He had much better friends, people who were close in that sense, but then a lot of people were not as close as we were in this other sense.¹²⁶⁸

Interestingly, though Dorn clearly defines “friendship” as separate from the “concern for poetry and intellection and knowledge and public morality” that he shared with Olson, the allegiances drawn in Dorn’s correspondence seem to blur that distinction in practice.

In the December 1 letter, for example, the (un)critical praise Dorn heaps on Olson’s work undeniably influences his appraisal and judgment of the present discord— i.e., the far-reaching aftereffects of the Grady affair—among their group of “friends” (one must say, since the discord depends on friendship in the first place). In *Placitas*, Dorn had learned more about the strife between Olson and Wieners—who’d recently been hospitalized—from Creeley, now also involved in the rift somehow. The following excerpt is an intriguing example by which to ponder the idiosyncratic nature of Dorn’s relationship to Olson, and to Creeley. Dorn writes:

The point is John is the only instance of something natural run away into that madness you spoke of one night as a thing you too shared but were saved from ultimately by the strength of your grasp of the

¹²⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁷ Edward Dorn, “A Correction of the Public Mind,” interview by Bezner, *Ed Dorn Live*, 75.

¹²⁶⁸ Ibid., 76.

sane, or rational – I mentioned that feeling of yours to Bob when he showed John’s letter to me and he ridiculed the idea that you might share such an aspect as that w/ John as a romanticism of yours but I ascribed his inability to see it to that peculiar inability of the Creeley’s generally to listen at all to what one might have to say – I don’t, also, find “The Finger” any indication, in itself, of an alteration of perception – it seems the same domestic inflexibility as ever. So Bob’s explanation is mainly that John suffers a love-hate relationship w/ his, Bob’s, person. I find that explanation egocentric and unengaging in the light of the really fantastic formality of John’s lunatic prose.

Now, the big thing that kept me from calling you or writing about John’s condition knowing you and Harvey were back there was that for the first time in my life I was stopped in a literal linguistic sense by a fantasy which I found too rich to absorb. There was the other fact that John had laid on me a load of “history” involving you which I’d not expected – ie – I thot when I finally asked him questions to get only the content you’d indicated from the calls... Harvey tells me you have received a legal text now of your own portrait from John’s hand. The last thing he sd to me when we parted at your motel was “thanks for bringing me Jenny” which straightened my hair for days after. ... The Creeley’s again as always in that environment, an “instance” of conversation about persons or as Jenny says they talk about the “appearance” of people.¹²⁶⁹

Does Dorn’s overwhelming respect for Olson’s intellectual integrity and scholastic morality—“I found him flawless...”—occlude his attachments to certain (mere) “friendships”? That is, if the two obligations should problematically intersect? One notes that just as Dorn’s sympathies and emotional support for Olson follow in the letter from his warming up to Olson’s work, so does his acrimonious disapproval of Creeley’s personal conduct lead to a more than mild rebuke of Creeley’s work. Are there human connections of spirit for Dorn that supercede friendship? And if that bond is indeed separate from other “loyalties,” do the demands of “friendship” lag behind it? Do they lose their relevancy when set beside deeper alliances forged through the personal magnetism of another’s work? As his letter continues, Dorn admits that his conflicted feelings for Wieners are directly related to his impressions of the writing; Dorn sees an introverted tendentiousness evident in Wieners’ work and behavior, that moves him in opposing directions, both toward illumination and self-

¹²⁶⁹ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 1 December 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

destruction. Dorn alludes to the strange genius of Wieners' poem, "He's not here / no one's here," published that fall in the *Paris Review*:

impatient to act, unable to turn off
because of the highway, in haste rejecting
your suggestion, 'I know a motel,'
coming to my room instead, prone amid sheets
taking off my shirt and socks, the ghost
of Rudolf clinging to my limbs, hearing
this afternoon your scream from prayer
as I lay down beside you...¹²⁷⁰

The steady exchange between inner and the external spheres of activity, sensation, language ("in haste rejecting / your suggestion") was no longer a fluid, reciprocal transmission, but in Wieners' "madness," all was compressed into a single static force of interiority. And yet, the mysterious "lunacy," Dorn noted, and "light/loose control of pure instinctual art" that Wieners possessed seemed to eradicate the possibility of personal judgment for Dorn, and forced his impressions of Wieners' character into an ambiguous space:

What I'm trying to say is that I think you'd be the first to see that the world John invokes is as anti-personal as the world is – or I guess this evening I still feel that way abt it – the most dangerous property of it I see as a progressive enclosure for him, an increasing perpetuation that he become the pearl itself in the oyster of himself, that he become the obscurest kenning of himself as his perception is chased in some sinister interior. But he may be the self sacrifice of our parts – because I think at least I see him hanging upside down grasping the rune sticks — Listen we both send our love to you Charles and think about you often.¹²⁷¹

Back in Gloucester, Olson—chronically ill, malnourished, and lonely—was becoming increasingly familiar with the interior of his own Fort Square apartment, where the sun had thoroughly faded his harbor maps, and visitors were as scarce as heavy drinking was frequent.¹²⁷² Shortly after Olson received Dorn's letter, however, unexpected events brought the two together in person.

"In the last 3 wks I've been on move so much I literally am misplace-able," Dorn wrote to John Martin in early January, 1969, "to Barcelona, London – Boston and back

¹²⁷⁰ John Wieners, "He's not here / no one's here," *Paris Review*, vol. 11, no. 44 (Fall 1968): 143.

¹²⁷¹ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 1 December 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁷² Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, 343.

here.”¹²⁷³ In early December, Helene had been in a car accident in Spain and required hospitalization for a badly broken leg. “Tom – I’ve had to come here to clean up this mess,” Dorn wrote to Raworth on December 11, on his way from Barcelona to London, with Dunbar, Helene, Paul, and Chansonette.¹²⁷⁴ From London, they traveled together back to the U.S., where they at first tried to find a house for the family in Boston, until Harvey Brown suggested they move to Gloucester. “So took them up there,” Dorn wrote to Raworth, “and did find a very comfortable temporary place – a springboard from which the cast can come off and Chan can get into school and Paul too.”¹²⁷⁵ After settling matters in Gloucester, and briefly visiting with Olson, Dorn and Dunbar arrived back in Placitas by Christmas, exhausted from incessant transatlantic and transcontinental flights. On December 27, Dorn explained to Raworth the complications of their return from the northeast:

...I had to leave abruptly when I realized there had to be a point at which I stopped cleaning the stables – and I was at the end of my energy reserves – we returned here w/out reservations which at this season means trouble – 3 different airlines and airplanes – finally at Kansas City I complained so much they put us in 1st class seats from there to Albuquerque which simply means more room for the ass which I assume those people really need, and a very fine double martini which we needed. Now it is quiet and warm again – piñon in the fire place – I think now we’ll go to Kansas early to find a place – perhaps by the middle of January or earlier.¹²⁷⁶

They stuck to that plan, leaving New Mexico for Kansas by car on the 11th of January. The last month had been extremely chaotic and stressful, but despite Dorn’s “misplace-able” sensation, his writing was moving confidently ahead: “It has been oddly possible to work,” he wrote to John Martin, “tho – I’m growing an auxiliary head.”¹²⁷⁷

¹²⁷³ Edward Dorn to John Martin, 10 January 1969, Folder 13, MS 313 BC, CSWR Mss.

¹²⁷⁴ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 11 December 1968, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁷⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 27 December 1968, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁷ Edward Dorn to John Martin, 10 January 1969, Folder 13, MS 313 BC, CSWR Mss.

...all terrestrial life originating in fire is attracted by the fire that dwells in the center. We had desired that in return the central fire would be attracted by the circumference and radiate without: this interchange of principles would be eternal life.

– Gerard de Nerval¹²⁷⁸

There are moments when I despair of others, give them up, let them stray out of the circle of light and definition, and they are free to come and go, bring panic, or chaos, or joy, depending on my own mood, my state of readiness. Readiness—as every Boy Scout knows—there is the virtue of the citadel.

– Alexander Trocchi¹²⁷⁹

19. *The Tor, the Ley, the Henge, the Joy of Expansion*

“[N]ot men but heads of the hydra / his false faces in which / authority lies / hired minds of private interest / over us,” Robert Duncan writes in “The Multiversity / Passages 21,” in late 1967.¹²⁸⁰ Soaring to unprecedented levels of prosperity, that decade witnessed the continuation not only of rapid, post-war, U.S. economic growth, but also of its thwarted, lopsided distribution—dumping ten times the income into the pockets of the wealthiest fifth of the population than it did into the bottom fifth’s hands. At the end of the decade, that portion of the population still made about two or three thousand dollars a year.¹²⁸¹ As Duncan’s lines suggest, there was a sharp, concomitant increase in corporate reliance on governmental contracts—which for some airline companies became the sole source of income. In general, private interest began to eclipse public responsibility: “Lockheed Aircraft, for instance, made a profit in 1965 of 19 per cent of its net worth,” and General Dynamics, a defense contractor, “had government contracts totaling \$2.2 billion”—both in shocking contrast to the mere four percent interest growth on the average American’s savings.¹²⁸² As Mayor Daley’s militia took to the streets in Chicago for the ’68 Convention, and the tensed city awaited “democracy,” even *Newsweek* magazine seemed to agree with Duncan’s assessment, that the “hydra heads” of big business interest, operating far over the body of national citizenry, determined the outcome of political elections: “The plain fact of

¹²⁷⁸ I found this quoted in Kenneth Irby, *Call Steps: Plains, Camps, Stations, Consistories* (Barrytown and Lawrence: Station Hill Literary Editions, and Tansy, 1992), 17. Irby’s citation is as follows: Gerard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient*, “Les nuits de Ramadan”, III, vi

¹²⁷⁹ Trocchi, *Cain’s Book*, 235.

¹²⁸⁰ Duncan, *Bending the Bow*, 70.

¹²⁸¹ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 96; 100.

¹²⁸² *Ibid.*, 97.

the matter,” an editorial bluntly put it, “is that U.S. Presidential nominations are not delivered by the people, but by the party professionals.”¹²⁸³

Like Duncan’s work, Dorn’s poems for the Yippie’s in Chicago demand fresh orders: an inclusive social concept fashioned and inspired by the “embraceable revolution” that surrounded and delighted him. In fact, Dorn viewed Duncan, most of all, as a beacon at the time: “Duncan was a California touchstone for me all through the years of religious wars in Southeast Asia and the mindless tolerance of the satanic spirit at home.”¹²⁸⁴ Dorn’s recollection, his choice of “satanic spirit at home,” for example, draws on Duncan’s introduction to his 1968 collection of poems, *Bending the Bow*, which mines the Heraclitean consistency of the poet-citizen, and of his poems—each simultaneously a part of, and apart from the war, which “has invaded an area of our selves that troubled us”—that is, an area within us whereat we *already* harbor the destructive force bitterly inflated by the war. The war without “restriction,” Dorn might say, “because violence, cruelty, hurtfulness, and all the deeper psychological underpinnings of human nature are just as legitimate as anything else, although we must learn to restrict them.”¹²⁸⁵ To *style* them, let’s say, to give them appropriate form. For Duncan, the imperial war is a misuse, an arrogant and misapplied force of destruction, “a monstrosity in the hands of militarists who have taken no deep thought of the art of war and its nature.” Duncan’s introduction to *Bending the Bow* continues:

In a blast the poem announces the Satanic person of a president whose lies and connivings have manoeuvred the nation into the pit of an evil war. What does it mean? It is a mere political event of the day, yet it comes revealed as an eternal sentence. Polysemous – not only the nation but the soul and the poem are involved in the event. In these days again the last day, the final judgment, in a form that knows only what the here and now knows of first days and last days. What is out of joint with the times moves as this poetry moves toward a doubling of the joint in time, until, multiphasic, we could imagine the figure we had not seen in which the joining is clear where we are.

For these discords, these imperatives of the poem that exceed our proprieties, these interferences – as if the real voice of the poet might render unrecognizable to our sympathies the voice we wanted to be real, these even artful, willful or, it seems to us, affected, psychopathologies of daily life, touch upon the living center where there is no composure but a life-spring of dissatisfaction in all orders

¹²⁸³ Ibid., 117.

¹²⁸⁴ Edward Dorn, “From the Modern Language Association panel on the Poetries of California,” in *Ed Dorn Live*, 89.

¹²⁸⁵ Edward Dorn, “Interview at Madison,” interview by Tandy Sturgeon, in *Ed Dorn Live*, 51.

from which the restless ordering of our poetry comes.¹²⁸⁶

Though a cursory reading of the two poets might suggest few discrete connections, or superficial differences, the excerpt above presents nonetheless, a number of contextual realities and poetic objectives for Dorn's work at the turn of the decade. The most important of these congruencies is a totalizing view of the poem: ever at the verge (the "last day"); ever emanating new orders from a "living center, where there is no composure," to sustain and enact the slippery double-sidedness of being, and "daily life," through the polysemous dynamism of their arrangements; and ever intertwining the nation and the soul into a single column of force. The poem for Duncan, like Dorn, "is a field of ensouling," "a locality of the living," and we might add, congruously, a *locus of experience*. Thus, in the mythologizing transmutations of Dorn's convention epigrams—"Man of Sorrows," "Men of Gath," etc.—one notes already the attempt to reorganize contemporary, political trajectories into cosmic networks of heteroglossic exchange, whereat "the real voice of the poet might render unrecognizable ... the voice we wanted to be real." Implicit in this attempt is a combined desire for the poem to both ascertain and establish its interrelated cosmic order—an order whose sequences, by their own ceaseless upending, are enthralled *and* empowered, and which remain aware of "the exile that *is*," by bestowing upon time the nonlinear properties of space. Dorn invokes this deep-time/deep-space relation, ringing its "discordant," zenith harmonies ("[f]rom the strain / of binding opposites / comes harmony"), as an overwhelming, organizational counterforce against the imprisoning superstructures of the state.¹²⁸⁷ Thus, from Dorn's Convention poems, we take the ritual of "Chant 4," like some Dolman conjuration:

O,

LET THE POWER OF THE RECLIMBING OF THE TOR
LET THE SPREAD OF THE LOW SATURATIONS
AND THE HIGH BRILLIANCE OF THAT DAY
AND THE TINCTURE OF THE AWARENESS

LET THE HEIGHT OF THE TOR
AND LET THE DIFFICULTLY OF DECENT BE CLEAR
LET THE MANNET AND HIS MANNETS
GO OFF IN THE CAR

¹²⁸⁶ Duncan, introduction to *Bending the Bow*, x.

¹²⁸⁷ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Haxton, 31.

TO BE BLOATED BY MAN-IN-THE-GROUND

AND THE MEAN SAVED
AND ALL WHO ARRIVE IN THEIR SKIN
MANIFESTIVE AND MANKIND

AGAIN ON THE TOR
AND THE MANICATE
AND MANIFORM

AND THE HOLY WINE OF THE QUEST
FOR THE TOTAL CUP
BE RAISED AND LAID

AGAINST THE PREDILECTIONS OF CHI¹²⁸⁸

The particular imperatives of the chant that engineer “the mythic relation one must become,” are useful to establish overall context for Dorn’s work and experience in Kansas, and for prefacing the contours of the later works’ course.¹²⁸⁹

1968 pushed Dorn to the extremities of his emotional constitution, and yet, in the abject pain of his divorce, he found the seeds of another new marriage. The internal push and pull of that circuitry seems to parallel the concord-in-opposition of his external, social environment. Just as student dissatisfaction with current political orders drove them to explosive demonstrations against the war, that enraged confederacy also inspired new and intimate fellowships among those youthful, idealistic and disenchanting ranks. In the midst of all Dorn had left behind, and all that he newly encountered on arriving in New England that August with Dunbar, he admitted to Olson another unresolved, personal disturbance, some “indefinite” message he’d received, just before sailing from England: “I had some experiences just before I left England that left me quiet, and without any definite information about them: Glastonbury. I mean I don’t know literally anything about my relationship to it except this knarl of feeling I now possess....”¹²⁹⁰ In Glastonbury, Dorn experienced a disorienting revelation of an underlying, geomantic order, a “sacred geometry” in the landscape, that connected the human universe with celestial spheres and configurations. Rattled, he also wrote to Raworth about the incident: “We did get that last weekend to the

¹²⁸⁸ Edward Dorn, “Chant 4,” original mss., Poetry Mss, Lilly Mss.

¹²⁸⁹ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 1 December 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁹⁰ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 29 August 1968, Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

most important place on the way to Wales, or anywhere, I think because it must be Glastonbury where those people put their thing, like it still comes up heads. yet was on top of Glitterbury Tor something turned my head all the way around like I didn't think cld be done again. And at the last moment too.”¹²⁹¹

Glastonbury, in southwestern England, is the site of significant geomantic, historic, and astrological interest. The town is home to Glastonbury Abbey, the oldest Christian church in the world, built in the early 700s on land previously settled by a community of monks in AD 63, the year that Joseph of Arimathea is rumored to have left the Holy Grail there, in their hands. Therefore, Arthurian legend also centers on the town, or more on the Tor nearby: the Glastonbury Tor, a neatly conical sandstone hill infused with erosion-resistant iron oxides deposited by a subterranean water source. Atop this mysterious hill are the ruins of another cathedral, under which King Arthur and Queen Guinevere are supposedly buried. Or so goes the “excavation story” that a group of monks concocted in the 13th century, hoping to raise much-needed funds for the renovation their church. But the Tor is commonly associated with Avalon, the mystic land of ferries, and Dorn’s unusual experience climbing its terraced sides is added to a rather long list of strange and similar occurrences.¹²⁹²

Aside from the grail and the apocryphal double-tomb, Glastonbury sits at the intersection of a number of moments of mystic and telluric energy, that trace a variety historical trajectories back to pre-Roman times. Standing on top of the Tor in the 1920s, pondering “references in legends and old histories to hidden giants in the landscape,” Katherine Maltwood, author of *The Glastonbury Temple of the Stars*, suddenly envisioned a vast, interconnected map of the zodiac inscribed in the surrounding landscape, and unlocking the Arthurian, “hidden astrological quest”—the ancient wells, hedgerows, and roads, demarcating its astral coordinates.¹²⁹³ In its entirety, this map was designed, Maltwood vaguely surmised, with the intent to measure and/or direct dynamic forces contained in the overarching movements of the firmament, through materials of the “terra firma.”¹²⁹⁴ Around the same time, Alfred Watkins, a self-taught archaeologist, and antiquarian, and the son of a

¹²⁹¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 3-4 August 1968, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹²⁹² See John Michell, chaps. 1, 2, 3, and 5, in *The View Over Atlantis* (London: Sago, 1969), 1-82; 131-152; and David Cowan and Chris Arnold, *Ley Lines and Earth Energies* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited, 2003).

¹²⁹³ Michell, *The View Over Atlantis*, 7-8.

¹²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

respected brewer in Hereford, for whom he was a traveling representative, made a similar discovery from the Tor's peak. One that, at first, invested more significance in the land itself.

Watkins observed an enormous grid, plotted along many of the same points as Maltwood's axis, which he initially concluded to be the remnant of an ancient Druidic transportation network, and to the axes of which he gave the name, "ley lines."¹²⁹⁵ After further collaborative study, however, Watkins proposed that "ley lines" indicated the organization of a much broader set of activities, such as the migratory pathways of bees, antelope, and some birds. To some scholars these lines connect religious and holy centers, to others they represent the wiring of the earth's electric field, "that is, the voltage gradient which exists between the negatively charged planet and the positively charged ionosphere," to others "straight" lines are "faery and spirit paths," along which "ancient cultures ... believed that the souls of the dead could [travel]."¹²⁹⁶ To others still, these notions are merged: this rich and "sacred geometry" patterned over the earth's surface is capable of harnessing celestial messages and transmitting them along directed pathways through a series of stone circles and ancient sites.¹²⁹⁷ These sites themselves conduct and radiate earth energies. Many of the standing stones in England bear "cup-marks," or small columnar indentions that serve to coil, focus and transmit magnetic forces in the earth.¹²⁹⁸ These telluric energies, as they're called, are frequently tracked by dowsers, or witchers—those who regularly locate subterranean sources of water, in addition to other sources of "etheric disturbance." Not surprisingly, these water-seekers widely agree on the peculiar intensity these vectors, and their "disturbance," at Glastonbury.¹²⁹⁹

Other scholars have compared "ley lines" to the Nazca lines in Peru, or to the mythological pathways of the Native American gods, which likewise connect holy centers, and serve as "cables of mental communication," for instance, for the Hopi of the Southwestern U.S.¹³⁰⁰ In Chinese culture, which often links "the planets with the materials of the body," and landforms with astrological projections, telluric energies called "dragon lines"

¹²⁹⁵ Ibid., 9-13; see p. 10 for derivation: "A peculiar feature of the old alignments is that certain names appear with remarkable frequency along their routes. Names with Red, White and Black are common; so are Cold and Cole, Dod, Merry and Ley. The last gave Watkins the name of the lines, which he called Leys."

¹²⁹⁶ Cowan and Arnold, *Ley Lines and Earth Energies*, 3.

¹²⁹⁷ Ibid., chaps. 10, 12, and 13, 94-97; 103-116.

¹²⁹⁸ Ibid., chaps. 3, 4, 5, and 8, 25-57; 71-83.

¹²⁹⁹ Michell, *The View Over Atlantis*, 152.

¹³⁰⁰ Ibid., 19-21.

indicate “currents streaming” over the earth’s surface and, “until recently... every building, every stone... was placed in the landscape in accordance with a magic system by which the laws of mathematics and music were expressed in the geometry of the earth’s surface,” writes John Michell, in *The View Over Atlantis*, his study and history of geomancy.¹³⁰¹ The path of these “dragon lines” held great influence over the shape of the cultural landscape: “The eaves of a Chinese house were always set at a different height to those of its neighbours; if they were level, the long straight line might form a dangerously powerful conductor.”¹³⁰² This network’s power is held in a delicate tension and must be handled carefully, in order to avert its destructive potential: “Straight lines drain the beneficial influences from a quiet, secluded site,” writes Michell. “They introduce tempestuous forces into areas of peace. The lines of the dragon current run straight across the country, but locally their course should be modified by a series of gentle curves. By this means the violence of their flow can be abated and their currents diverted into smaller channels to irrigate the surrounding countryside.”¹³⁰³ Like these “dragon lines,” the intersection of multiple “ley lines” at Glastonbury creates a uniquely charged atmosphere on the Tor, as well as underscoring the relationship between the dimensions of Glastonbury Abbey, and the solar geometries of Stonehenge, for example.

A “henge,” according to English Heritage, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, is “a roughly circular or oval-shaped flat area over 20m in diameter which is enclosed and delimited by a boundary earthwork that usually comprises a ditch with an external bank. Access to the interior is obtained by way of one, two, or four entrances through the earthwork.” The internal space of a “henge” may consist of portal settings, stone circles, timber circles, central mounds, monoliths, and a variety of other earthen components and/or modifications.¹³⁰⁴ In the case of Stonehenge, where the concentric arrangement of the “external bank,” or mound, and “ditch” are reversed (making the “ditch” the outermost circle), the avenue, or “entrance,” into its stone ring, (the standing stones and lintels of which were transported over great distances) connects the Neolithic site to the Avon River, over a mile to the east. The sarsen circle itself is positioned along the axis of the solstice—to

¹³⁰¹ Ibid., 50.

¹³⁰² Ibid., 50.

¹³⁰³ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁰⁴ English Heritage – Stonehenge & the History of England, n.d., < <http://www.english.gov.uk/mpp/mcd/sub/henges1.htm> > (2 March 2008).

receive the summer's sunrise, and the winter's sunset.¹³⁰⁵ Yet, while the confidence and exactitude of Stonehenge's placement and organization are obvious empirical facts, the monument's particular purpose (or uses, perhaps, since through the years it was put to different uses) remains an enduring mystery—a calander? a site for healing? certainly a burial ground, but why? “Henges” are generally considered to represent ancient “ritual or ceremonial monuments, perhaps meeting places, trading centres, or sacred areas of some sort.”¹³⁰⁶ So whatever Stonehenge's *uses*, or whatever powers it possesses, one is sure that Stonehenge is, and was a center for migration—plugged into a decentered, dynamic network that transmits and blends astral and terrestrial energies to unknown degrees of signification. In the broadest sense of connectivity, the “ley” confluence at Glastonbury Tor, another central node on this geomantic, migratory grid, invokes the vast configuration of cup-marked standing stones and stone circles that conduct and direct “ley” passageways through other holy and ancient sites.¹³⁰⁷ According to two “notable” dowsers, the main line running through Glastonbury Tor is called “St. Michael's Line,” named for the cathedral that once stood on the Tor's peak, whereat Henry VIII, in 1539, was hanged, drawn and quartered. And St. Michael's Line is not the ordinary, “traditional straight energy ley,” that said dowsers “had initially expected”; it is, in fact, “two tortuous streams of energy,” intertwined, that rush “through Glastonbury Tor, Avebury and Silbury Hill, amongst others.”¹³⁰⁸

As “Chant 4” and his letters to Olson and Raworth demonstrate, Dorn's view from the Tor, like his view from the Eldridge a few months before (“the sense is this large...”), not only had a lasting psychological impact, but its organizational concept was strikingly relevant to the present concerns of his work. In the preface for his 1971 collection of experimental prose pieces, entitled *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, Dorn asserts a principal paradox, the uncertainty of which might prefigure that “knarl of feeling” Glastonbury left him with: “In speaking of what / is Outward and what / is Inward one refers / not to Place, but / to what is Known and what / is Not known.”¹³⁰⁹ If nothing else, his dizzying farewell experience in southwest England confirmed for Dorn that the recent

¹³⁰⁵ Michell, “Stonehenge and Glastonbury,” chap. 5 in *The View Over Atlantis*, 131-152.

¹³⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁰⁷ Michell, “Stonehenge and Glastonbury,” chap. 5 in *The View Over Atlantis*, 131-152. Stonehenge is dedicated to the sun, and its specific geometric relations have a strict correspondence with their distance from, and the movement of the sun throughout the year; the Glastonbury Abbey shares a relationship with many of these exalted dimensions in its original layout.

¹³⁰⁸ Cowan and Arnold, *Ley Lines and Earth Energies*, 5.

¹³⁰⁹ Dorn, *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, unpaginated preface.

centrifugal tendency in his writing, already emergent in *Gunslinger*'s "multiple form of expression," was not merely a way of engaging what was external (from those "in the room," to those shapes in the stars) as opposed to what was lyrical, but also provided an efficacious model for exploring the reciprocal, centripetal motions of the inner, "human universe."¹³¹⁰ The time-traveling Gunslinger's methodical, interstellar hipness, for instance, his particular sense of *style*—half "timeless," since he is "un semidios"—is programmed by his solar constitution: the *style* as "the gnomon of a sundial," an instrument both of, and outside of, time—an instrument that *makes* time. For, like Dorn's poet who "can be there," the Gunslinger is never outside *the moment*—before departing Mesilla at the end of Book I, for example, the Gunslinger genuflects, "...on his long knees / facing the burning hoop / as it rolled under / the swinging doors west"—the very same ritual he earlier performed, when toasting to his larger order:

Do you know said the Gunslinger
as he held the yellow tequila up
in the waning light of the cabaret
that this liquid is the last
dwindling impulse of the sun
and then he turned and knelt
and faced that charred orb
as it rolled below the swinging doors
as if it were entering yet descending
and he said to me NO!
it is not. It is that
cruelly absolute sign my father
I am the son of the sun, we two
are always in search
of the third...¹³¹¹

¹³¹⁰ Dorn discussed the compositional environment of *Gunslinger* at a reading at the State University of New York at Buffalo, on April 20, 1974, available through [PennSound](http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Dorn.html), n.d., <<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Dorn.html>> (2 October 2007): "I felt a great urgency to get away from a kind of single lyric voice and into a kind of multiple form of expression simply because I thought poetry, at least as I was practicing it, was too bitterly simple, in a way. And I didn't at any cost want to be associated with those who were simple, or anything else—confessional, or academic. I came out of a past of almost rabid anti-academicism. ... Also I wanted to write a poem that would remain a poem at every point, insofar as I could force it to, but still take advantage of those dramatic and multiply voiced conventions that had existed in poetry at one time but had gone out of fashion. Also I was interested in insofar as I could reactivating the narrative. Because after all my mother read to me narrative poetry when I was a child... I was also interested in having the books be in their time, in a strange way, and I think that happens. I decided to remain emphatically unembarrassed by a certain currency of language, even though I thought perhaps I might look back on it and feel a bit... that it was current to another time."

¹³¹¹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 41; 14-15.

In the proprioceptive balance, the “syzygy,” of “Inside” and “Outside” realms, through the “I/eye”—such as when the Gunslinger, “pulling on his vest / fastened the mescal buttons / thereon and truly turned his eyes / into the landscape”—one absorbs and emits a certain *style*.¹³¹² One of advantage of *style* is the phenomenal ability “to eliminate the draw,” that is, to remove it from “the space between here / and formerly,” which “permits unmatched Speed, / a syzygy which hangs tight / just back of the curtain / of the reality theatre / down the street...”¹³¹³ And don’t be mistaken, Reader—you who were so slow *on the draw* in thinking “I” was the narrator—“speed is not necessarily fast.”¹³¹⁴

The Glastonbury experience inspired two poems actually—the chant for Chicago, and a longer poem, “This is the way I hear the momentum,” whose meandering lines recall the oscillating structure of “Thesis,” or “Tom Pickard and the Newcastle Brown Beer Revolutionaries,” and other adamant invocations for spiritual renewal that pepper Dorn’s oeuvre. If “Chant 4,” as I’ve said, means to harness the intersecting energies of Glastonbury, “the holy wine of the quest / for the total cup,” and to raise them, “[a]gainst the predilections of Chi,” then the “momentum” poem finds among the epoch-vaulting relations and orders inscribed on the plains around the Tor, an interstitial moment of infinite expansion, “a syzygy which hangs tight / just back of the curtain / of the reality theatre”—wherein the future and the past coincide in the restless melliflence of fresh poetic orders. “[H]aving touched the Slaughter Stone / of the Henge of Stone / Rock,” the poem follows a footpath to Glastonbury in the isotropic pressure of an empty stomach:

yet
well being arose
from
the emptiness
of the stomach
from the universe
every change of placement
the shift of every leaf
is a function
of the universe which
moves outward from its composed center
40 bilynyrs.¹³¹⁵

¹³¹² Ibid., 52.

¹³¹³ Ibid., 30.

¹³¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹³¹⁵ Edward Dorn, “This is the way that I hear the momentum,” *Io*, no. 6 (Summer 1969), 109.

As with the palimpsestic motions of the *Love Songs*, wherein the double star, “polaris,” represents the “syzygy” of the lovers, the “new locations” and “newtowns of the soul” that love continually bodies forth—when expansion from the “composed center,” in the “Momentum” poem, again and again, “returns...”

...the pulse
and location will have changed
The location free of reference
except this obvious measurement because you can feel
completely a straight 5 b. years
from some moment now which is not
an apparent edge
but as mappa India anna
as the source of speech
is no simple explosion¹³¹⁶

In these last two lines, the developments of all language over scattered geographies and through time becomes the analog for the expanding fabric of space/time itself. In this twinned growth—language surging through the poet-speaker, as St. Michael’s Line’s doubled-stream does through the Tor—the poem’s self-consciousness nourishes its “field of ensouling.” Here, the way of going, the foot, is equally a rhythmic consideration, as is the rising pulse on the steep slope of the Tor, the heartbeat of the cosmos “hit[ting] inside this / ... the soul of the universe”:

our given pulse
everymoment we live
COSMOS
the soul of the universe
calls indifferently the populations
to proceed
from the tincture
to the root of the natural
in the present effort
to arise into the light
ness of these limbs
these parts of the universe having growth
So the foot of this book
is grown at last for the book to stand upon
thrown from myself as my life was given to me
with sharp aim¹³¹⁷

¹³¹⁶ Ibid., 109.

The last stanza ascends the Tor, from which the poem's *locus* skips along its own event horizon ("the scansion of its trip"), scanning, "the moment / approaching when all of it / will be stilled." But the poem scans "the last day, the final judgment," as Duncan writes it, "in [its] form that knows only what the here and now knows of first days and last days."¹³¹⁸ The Tor "trip"'s final "open[ing] / on the arc" distends chain-linked borders of time, and restores to the "moment" its etymologically inherited tension of "movement." In a "beautiful seizure," the "elevation" unleashes, as it did for Maltwood and Watkins, "configured presentations," now obscured by industrial misuse, of the ancient and living landscape:

When I reached the Tor
and walked up to
be elevated
enough to sense the zodiac
of its configured presentations
of itself the lit
and distant hills simply
the joy of expansion
which is what we've experienced
for 35 billion years
and can take in
the moment
approaching when all of it
will be stilled in a shimmy
of its own distance
as the whole thing holds so
with the delicacy of water tension
to avoid dispersal
of all that's here the wholly
beautiful seizure of the co-
ordinates of its distance
the scansion of its trip
as we come around again to feel wide open
on the arc¹³¹⁹

The version of this poem that Dorn mailed to Olson from Lawrence in early 1969 includes three final lines that were excised from the poem (the version I've quoted) when it was published in *Io* that summer: "...on the arc *of our lives / as the organism / contracts toward its*

¹³¹⁷ Ibid., 109-110.

¹³¹⁸ Duncan, introduction to *Bending the Bow*, x.

¹³¹⁹ Dorn, "This is the way I hear the momentum," *Io*, no. 6 (summer 1969), 110.

/center.”¹³²⁰ But it appears that Dorn reworked these final lines, and moved them to an earlier section of the poem; an earlier line in the *Io* version—“moves outward from its composed center”—is itself absent from the copy sent to Olson.

Dorn himself appears to have been unsatisfied with the “momentum” poem, and never chose to collect it. Or maybe the poem was too *close* to him, personally—or too eagerly compiled, too “stoned,” too ecstatically direct a sentiment. For Olson’s copy, Dorn made a photonegative—white words floating in black space—but wasn’t swayed by the result: “I want you to have the black background even tho it too fails to come close to my own present conception of the nature of what I feel its abt—...”¹³²¹ The Glastonbury incident seems to be inextricably tied, in Dorn’s mind, to Olson, as an example of the unsolicited proprioceptive opportunity that Dorn’s education was intended to enable him to seize. Yet, for Dorn, the poem “fails to come close” to seizing it, to *enacting* “the nature of what I feel its abt,” and thereby invokes the *exile*—“the return into a people / woe to them who eat too much / from a people who eat / too fast as / tho it were an exercise”—that accounts for the need to “be elevated” in the first place. Back in Gloucester in early fall 1968, the “intellection” connection with Olson surfaced again, when Dorn surveyed occultist ground in his short prose piece, “A Narrative with Scattered Nouns,” which opens the *Some Business* collection. The “narrative” tells of the ritual construction of a large, driftwood sculpture, on a Gloucester beach. Though the endeavor’s mythic, heliocentric dimensions are uncertain—“[t]hey wanted to call back the departing sun. ...but these celebrants are removed a considerable distance from the altar of that center”—their awakening ceremony is structured around “the instance of this Circle,” whereat the past and future blend into one.¹³²² In the following passage, Olson is bestowed the archetypal appellation, “The Scald” (as in Dorn’s letter above), whose all-encompassing perceptive index is wired to the pagan, chthonic motherboard of Gloucester, on which time splays its own passing:

They wanted to call back the departing sun. Blood was not in their minds, blood was in their hearts, but these celebrants are removed a considerable distance from the altar of that center, tho not so far of course as the pedestrians. As everyone can feel, this is the nature of all true difference. There was a metaphysical space alternating them across what is taken to be the real space. They came across a

¹³²⁰ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, n.d., Folder Dorn 2, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³²¹ Ibid.

¹³²² Edward Dorn, “A Narrative with Scattered Nouns,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 2-3.

seam of time which in some vast tongue of silence had been nearly joined. They had entered a process, at the instance of this Circle, in which the future took its tail in its mouth and clamped its teeth quite firmly in the flesh of the past. The past is not simply that, they knew, to find oneself in it is not a “predicament” and is never dismissed by any appeal to indecision. I meant to say torque, the result of the twisting of those time fragments we count one two three. I was among the processions. The event was filmed and still exists, I believe, in a cardboard box.

This event occurred under the very eye of the scald. He took no formal notice because in fact he may not have known of it. Nonetheless I owe any granite sense I have of New England to him and refer at all times of doubt to the Chronicles which are the result of his labor. And I must say it was with some deeply lateral instinct the Charm was made a tribute to the Eye of the Scald.¹³²³

But just as he disclaimed the “Momentum” poem, Dorn also hedges the gravity of these cosmic intimations: “It must be understood that this is play,” he writes near the end of the story. “There is not even a shred of a work-ethic here. These people are beautifully ascended. They pay attention only to the ecstatic of the absolute and have no tolerance whatsoever for the static of the absolute.”¹³²⁴ By early 1969, “Eye of the Scald” was noticeably dimming—the “ecstatic of the absolute” was expediting the impending and irreversible *static of the Absolute*. Dorn’s frequent yet oblique salutations seem somehow apprehensive, anxiously conclusive.

A chaotic, stressful, and impassioned year behind them, Dorn and Dunbar were officially married in Placitas at the end of 1968, and by mid-January, were on the road to Kansas, “to leave car and what gear then on to NYC for a few days then back to Lawrence to find house,” Dorn wrote to John Martin on the eve of the trip.¹³²⁵ On the twelfth, Dorn mailed Olson a postcard from Dodge City, Kansas, with a photograph of the Cowboy Statue (“On the ashes of my campfire this city is built,” its base reads) on legendary Boot Hill—“Poised for action, with six-gun leaving its holster,” the postcard’s caption vibrantly describes, “this life size statue of an early day cowboy ... was modeled by D.O.H. Simpson, a pioneer dentist of Dodge City.” On the back of the postcard, Dorn scrawled a single question: “is this the statue of the fisherman put another way? love from the high

¹³²³ Ibid., 2-3.

¹³²⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹³²⁵ Edward Dorn to John Martin, 10 January 1969, Folder 13, Mss. 313 BC, CSWR Mss.

plains...”¹³²⁶ His query alludes to the Fisherman’s Memorial in Gloucester, Massachusetts, a statue “in the heroic manner, of a fisherman crouched at the helm,” which was erected in honor of all fishermen lost at sea, “by the people of Gloucester in 1923.”¹³²⁷ But a “pioneer dentist”? That droll curiosity was all the more appropriate: Olson references the “bad sculpture of a fisherman,” in one of his *Maximus* poems, and invokes Heraclitus in his condemnation of its public iconography, “...they pray to these images, ...knowing not what gods or heroes are.”¹³²⁸

On January 20, 1969, Richard M. Nixon was inaugurated as the thirty-seventh president of the United States.¹³²⁹ Less than two months later, in response to the growing number of attacks on South Vietnam since the Tet Offensive a year earlier, Nixon initiated a secret bombing campaign in Cambodia to target and intimidate Communist soldiers traveling on overgrown, agrarian routes running through neutral, neighboring countries.¹³³⁰ A year later, the public exposure of Nixon’s Cambodian secret inspired a string of the most violent student and police clashes America had yet seen, leaving student protestors dead in Ohio, Mississippi, and Kansas. In the meantime, Dorn and Dunbar, back from Dorn’s reading in New York City in late January, found their housing arrangements incomplete, and a dense snowstorm piling up on the quiet streets. They were forced to move back into the Eldridge Hotel. Exasperated with the peripatetic frenzied last six months, and again plagued by the familiar homelessness he otherwise sought out, on January 31, Dorn scrawled a short response on hotel stationery to Tom Raworth, who’d asked for some manuscripts:

...my problem is one of vast displacement – I haven’t lost anything but getting to it will take a day or two – we’re in the goddamn hotel because the lady who sd she’d rent us a house now can’t leave when she was supposed to – it has been that way endlessly and we get more and more beat down by it – that damn stupid and perpetual problem of a space of your own. What’s that but just to be able to find yesterday’s newspaper. The mail in the meantime to raise classical paranoias, is more fucked up everyday – the post office no longer recognizes state – just that hopeless telephone looking zip number –
Snow here so deep you’d not believe it – and glazed over w/ ice from freezing rain – the excuse for not doing anything here in the weather

¹³²⁶ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 12 January 1969, Box 150, Folder 1969, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³²⁷ Butterick, *A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson*, 224, I.152.

¹³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 224, I.152.

¹³²⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 584.

¹³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 590-591.

and it makes sense...

I'm sorry to be the one to hang all this up – it is the result of our skipping like dragon flies over the mud.¹³³¹

Four days later, on the evening of Tuesday, February 4, Dorn headed up the steep, sandstone slopes of Mount Oread, the “Hill,” at the top of which stood Fraser Hall, where, in a first floor room, every Tuesday night, from 7:30 to 10:30, for the next four months, he taught teach English 293: “The Writing of Poetry.”¹³³² That first Tuesday he was accompanied by New York-born poet, W.S. Merwin, who was passing through on a reading tour.¹³³³ Merwin was the first of many notable guests in Dorn’s classroom that semester, which also contained a number of talented students. By the end of that week, Dorn and Dunbar were settled into a comfortable white house at 1420 Kentucky street—a one way street, shaded by maple trees, running north along the eastern base of the “Hill.” Over beers at the Rock Chalk and the Gaslight, each only a few blocks from their house, they were quickly reacquainted with Dorn’s friends from the previous spring. Despite the fact their stay in Lawrence lasted less than six months, the town’s brazen, unpredictable energy left a steadfast impression on the young couple. “We really enjoyed Lawrence,” Dunbar quietly recalled over thirty years later.¹³³⁴ And from Kent State, in late 1972, Dorn wrote to George Worth, trying to find a permanent position for himself in Lawrence: “Of all the places I have been over the 11 years of my teaching experience,” Dorn wrote, “Kansas has been the most productive and pleasing of all of them. I want you to know that I understand there is a certain scarcity of places and that any such proposal on my part might turn out to be long range. ... [I]f there were an opening in your department I would prefer it before any other.”¹³³⁵

¹³³¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 31 January 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³³² *The Timetable of Classes*, spring 1969, The University of Kansas, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹³³³ “Official Bulletin,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 4 February 1969, p. 5; Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, 19 March 2005.

¹³³⁴ Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, 19 March 2005.

¹³³⁵ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 30 November 1972, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

PART THREE:

December 1968 – January 1970

*Oh, I have walked in Kansas
Through many a harvest field,
And piled the sheaves of glory there
And down the wild rows reeled:*

*Each sheaf a little yellow sun,
A heap of hot-rayed gold;
Each binder like Creation's hand
To mould suns, as of old.*

*Straight overhead the orb of noon
Beat down with brimstone breath:
The desert wind from south and west
Was blistering flame and death.*

*Yet it was gay in Kansas,
A-fighting that strong sun;
And I and many a fellow-tramp
Defied that wind and won.*

*And we felt free in Kansas
From any sort of fear,
For thirty thousand tramps like us
There harvest every year.*

*She stretches arms for them to come,
She roars for helpers then,
And so it is in Kansas
That Tramps, one month, are men.*

*We sang in burning Kansas
The songs of Sabbath-school,
The "Day Star" flashing in the East,
The "Vale of Eden" cool.*

*We sang in splendid Kansas
"The flag that set us free"—
That march of fifty thousand men
With Sherman to the sea.*

*We feasted high in Kansas
And had much milk and meat.
The tables groaned to give us power
Wherewith to save the wheat.*

*Our beds were sweet alfalfa hay
Within the barn-loft wide.
The lost doors opened out upon*

The endless wheat-field tide.

*I loved to watch the windmills spin
And watch that big moon rise.
I dreamed and dreamed with lids half-shut,
The moonlight in my eyes.*

*For all men dream in Kansas
By noonday and by night,
By sunrise yellow, red and wild
And moonrise wild and white.*

*The wind would drive the glittering clouds,
The cottonwoods would croon,
And past the sheaves and through the leaves
Came whispers from the moon.*

— Vachel Lindsay, “Kansas”¹³³⁶

20. *Ad Astra Per Aspera*

“The Kansas excitement / is our infancy,” Dorn writes in “Osawatomie,” an unpublished poem from 1970.¹³³⁷ That’s an autobiographical fact: in his rural Illinois childhood Dorn often heard poetry, which his mother read aloud to him—the verse of Illinois-native, Vachel Lindsay, for example, or Daniel Defoe, or James Whitcomb Riley.¹³³⁸ For the deep impressionistic appreciation of landscape, the adventurous, character-driven narratives, and the robust dignity the work affords to physical labor, and blends it with the labors of the poet, Dorn remained specially attached to Lindsay’s writing for the rest of his life. Lindsay’s “Kansas” poem above images its namesake as an embattled but open field, over which the organic and the oneiric continuously collide, and the tangible distance

¹³³⁶ Vachel Lindsay, *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 150-152.

¹³³⁷ Edward Dorn, “Osawatomie,” original mss., Folder 609, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³³⁸ Edward Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 69. Dorn tells Fredman: “She read to me, before I could read, the things that she knew, that she had been read. I don’t know where in the family that comes from. Among people who were not literate in that conscious sense, there nevertheless was a habit of reading, say, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* or Stevenson’s *Kidnapped*. . . I got was James Whitcomb Riley, because he was a newspaper poet, and known. My part of Illinois, east-central, is close to Indiana where he wrote. . . I got the stories, like “Jack and the Bean Stalk,” not from these books that are now fashionable, especially in English-looking edition with period drawings and considered *good*, but they were told to me by my grandmother and my mother very close together since I spent whole summers or even part of the year with my grandmother when I was small, when my parents were moving. I lived with my parents, but my grandmother kept me at various times, and I always liked staying with her.”

between natural elements in counterposition—sun and wheat, sun and moon, land and sea, etc.—likewise collapses. Objects absorb the full, discursive character of their constitutive and connotative relations. Kansas was once the bed of a great mid-continental sea, whose biological contents fed the present mineral-rich soil, and thus the “wheat-field tide” also embodies the source of its life: “each sheaf a little yellow sun.” In the middle of “Kansas,” the poem opens in two directions; the sun that both nourishes and “beat[s] down with brimstone breath” the anvil of the “harvest field,” similarly radiates its polyvalent luminosity on the territory of history. “Burning Kansas,” becomes a doubled reference to the annual controlled burning of grazing pastures, *and* to the manic invidious violence in northeastern Kansas leading up to the Civil War, and up to the state’s admission into the Union, in 1861. Admitted as a *free* state, a victory for abolitionists, but placed at the threshold of an even greater struggle—that noble tenacity “in the hearts of men,” was condensed in the new state’s “outsidereal” motto: *Ad astra per aspera*, “to the stars through hardship.”¹³³⁹ That which is Kansas, therefore, seems built at the level of myth, and Lawrence’s incendiary past, its “local variables of death,” Dorn writes, must divulge some indispensable and diabolical strain to those selfsame “hearts of men.” One of the most famous men of his time, *in* his time, and one of the most feared; John Brown was a principled and noble leader, and a cold-blooded, broadsword killer. No surprise that Lawrence and Kansas have an enduring connection to poetry, from the era of John Brown, to the era of Clark Kent.¹³⁴⁰

In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act rendered obsolete the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery on the Great Plains, or north of the southern border of Missouri (excluding Missouri). The 1854 Act thrust the abolition question into the hands of the Kansas settlers. “I look upon the Kansas-Nebraska law not as a *law*,” Abraham Lincoln wrote to a friend in the summer of 1855, “but a *violence* from the beginning. It was conceived in violence, is maintained in violence, and is being executed in violence.”¹³⁴¹ Lincoln’s early judgment of the act was born out by the perspectives, and soon the actions, of those entrenched on either side of the emancipation debate. They too saw Kansas as a liminal and contested, “centered” space. A South Carolinian, named Warren Wilkes, who led an armed

¹³³⁹ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 73; see discussion that follows.

¹³⁴⁰ According to the DC Comics official guide to *Superman* (issues 67 and 81), Clark Kent was adopted by a farming family in Kansas after being rocketed from Krypton, and still cherishes “the smell of Kansas in the springtime.” (citation on “Superman,” and “Clark Kent” entries, [wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superman), n.d., <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superman>> (5 March 2008).

¹³⁴¹ Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 139.

unit of southern settlers in Kansas in the 1850s, envisioned their struggle dictating the nation's future course: "Kansas is ... the turning-point in the destinies of slavery and abolitionism. ... All depends upon the action of the present moment."¹³⁴² In the spring of 1856, an abolitionist settler was sniped on his farm outside of Lawrence, and in response a band of free state supporters rescued another abolitionist, who'd been falsely arrested and held captive by a proslavery posse in town. As a result, a group of 750 proslavery, Missouri vigilantes sacked and burned Lawrence on May 21, 1856.¹³⁴³ This series of events initiated the Wakarusa War, which, as I've noted, consisted less of battles in the traditional sense than it did a spattering of lurid, vengeful, isolated, surprise attacks, the most famous of which is John Brown's Pottawatomie Massacre, fed by outrage over the recent pillage.

Fanatically dedicated to abolishing slavery, Brown "brought Southern tactics to the Northern side," one contemporary journalist wrote.¹³⁴⁴ His national struggle was endowed with biblical proportions—in a fundamental battle "for the remission of sin," the "guilty" land, Brown claimed, "will *never be purged away; but with Blood.*"¹³⁴⁵ He chose his methods accordingly, and with special attention to the newsworthiness of spectacular violence, when his marauding, broadsword-wielding battalion, that included four of his own sons, hacked eight proslavery men to death along the Wakarusa River, in late May 1856. And from that corral, Brown's fearsome and theatrical reputation rocketed across the country—the "meteor of the war," Melville called him—eventually landing him in at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, where his ill-conceived slave revolt backfired, and he was tried, and swiftly hanged.¹³⁴⁶ Echoing Melville, Whitman saw Brown's mission and execution herald the "Year of Meteors": "I would sing how an old man, tall with white hair, mounted the scaffold in Virginia, / ... with age and your unheal'd wounds you mounted the scaffold."¹³⁴⁷ From that year's blessed rage the upsurge of a just war poured forth to cleanse and unify the states, from their sacred, "bloody" center: "Chants going forth from the centre from Kansas, and thence equidistant, / Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all," Whitman writes in "Starting

¹³⁴² Ibid., 140.

¹³⁴³ Ibid., 157; Karl Gridley, "John Brown and Lawrence, Kansas Territory, 1855-1859," in *Embattled Lawrence*, 26-27.

¹³⁴⁴ Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 167.

¹³⁴⁵ Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), epilogue unpaginated.

¹³⁴⁶ Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War: Civil War Poems* (New York: Da Capo, 1995), 11.

¹³⁴⁷ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Bradley and Blodgett, 238.

from Paumanok.”¹³⁴⁸ One of Brown’s sons, John Jr., imagined the strife in Kansas effecting the same isotropic, centrifugal wave of savage purgation: “...it is now decreed and certain that the ‘Slave power’ must desist from its aggressive acts upon the settlers of Kansas or if they do not, the war-cry heard upon our plains will reverberate not only through the hemp and tobacco fields of Missouri, but through the ‘Rice swamps’, the cotton and sugar plantations of the Sunny South.”¹³⁴⁹ The echo of Brown Jr.’s warning—with its “hemp fields” and “‘Rice swamps’”—hits on the other side of the century.

Amidst such bloodlust, the Kansas settlers also discovered fertilities of psychic dimension in the landscape—“we sang,” Lindsay writes, “felt free... / For all men dream in Kansas.” John Jr., the first of Brown’s sons to settle there, wrote to the remaining family in New York, as if from Arcadia: “Arrived in Kansas, her lovely prairies and wooded streams seemed to us indeed like a haven of rest. Here in prospect we saw our cattle increased to hundreds and possibly thousands, fields of corn, orchards, and vineyards.”¹³⁵⁰ And yet the magnificent yields that the Kansas-Nebraska Act accelerated, by politicizing the territory and flooding it with partisan settlers, were the ancillary benefits of a settlement promotion unleashed primarily in the interest of a flourishing railroad industry. A mess of Pacifics—the Union, the Missouri, the Kansas, later to merge with the Union—fought to control the Midwestern route of a destined transcontinental railway.¹³⁵¹

These glistening steel lines crisscrossing the rolling plains Whitman celebrated when he visited Kansas in the late 1870s, as evidence of an “advance beyond primitive barbarism.”¹³⁵² A century later, when Allen Ginsberg first came to Kansas, and Lawrence, amidst incipient student unrest in 1966, this industrial geometry over the plains—radio towers and high tension power lines now included—became the unhomely circuit through which he would not only recollect Whitman’s visit, but also be psychically transported to Vietnam. In Ginsberg’s “Wichita Vortex Sutra,” radio newscasts repeat false claims from the architects of the Vietnam war, the “funky warlocks” whose “vortex of hatred ... defoliated the Mekong Delta,” and those “inferior musicians” (e.g. McNamara, or CIA Director, Allen Dulles), who

¹³⁴⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁴⁹ Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 151.

¹³⁵⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹³⁵¹ See I.E. Quastler, “Charting a Course: Lawrence, Kansas, and Its Railroad Strategy, 1854-1872,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 99-110.

¹³⁵² Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 532.

speak “Black Magic language, / formulas for reality.”¹³⁵³ This diabolic, entombed noise resounds along the dark, isolate highway stretch of cosmos between Wichita and Lawrence, while the “Radio antennae high tension / wires ranging from Junction City across the plains,” and the “highway cloverleaf sunk in a vast meadow,” are the pacifying constraints that shackle the brooding power of the landscape—whose clamorous activities and violent outbursts explode all time into a kaleidoscopic anachronism:

Kansas! Kansas! Shuddering at last!
 PERSON appearing in Kansas!
 angry telephone calls to the University
 Police dumbfounded leaning on
 their radiocar hoods
 While Poets chant to Allah in the roadhouse Showboat!
 Blue eyed children dance and hold thy Hand O aged Walt
 who came from Lawrence to Topeka to envision
 Iron interlaced upon the city plain—
 Telegraph wires strung from city to city O Melville!
 Television brightening thy *rills of Kansas lone*¹³⁵⁴

“Rills” are the streams and channels carved both in the earth’s surface, and on the lunarscape. Ginsberg’s technologized rendition of the final line of Melville’s, “The Muster,” channels “rills *from Kansas lone*” through cathode ray tubes.¹³⁵⁵ It also bears a prescient awareness of the outrageous collision of distant and ultimately foreign worlds that the backward, inflated, imperial ambitions of the Cold War “Races” (for Space, Arms, etc.) produced three years after Ginsberg wrote the poem: in July 1969, the nation saw, or watched rather, a man first walk on the moon, then raise the flag. The two modes of the model citizen, in outer space.

That this volatile fecundity attracted a vast and diverse spectrum of travelers to Kansas, and to Lawrence in particular, is a reality that the Kansas-Nebraska Compromise highlighted, certainly, but did not create. The role of northeastern Kansas as a fractious historical nexus, an “uncomposed center,” to appropriate Robert Duncan’s phrase, reflects the peculiar geological and geographical significance of the area. In the middle of its continent, Kansas lies over a myriad of east/west and north/south borders: the line of glacial retreat we call the Kaw River; the meridian borderland of the Great Plains and the West proper; the lip of the massive New Madrid Fault Line running up from the Missouri-Arkansas border. For Dorn, and for Irby, and for Moritz, these geographical elements of the landscape are the

¹³⁵³ Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems, 1947-1980* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1984), 410; 401.

¹³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 394.

¹³⁵⁵ Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, 147.

ingredients, the deep root system nourishing historical fissure. There's something like a tradition, "in Kansas center of America," as Ginsberg plainly puts it another poem, of psychic relation to landform, and of living in the presence of history.¹³⁵⁶

"There is no placement but fixation in Kansas," Dorn writes in his introduction to Ken Irby's 1971 book, *To Max Douglas*.¹³⁵⁷ Fixation involves the eye and the mind, and derives from a Middle English usage, "originally as an alchemical term denoting the process of reducing a volatile spirit or essence to a permanent bodily form."¹³⁵⁸ Fixation is a method of ordering among exile, and as such, it makes a poem. In Irby's case, a poem about Max Douglas, who was from St. Joe, Missouri—fifty-four miles northeast of Lawrence—and who met Dorn in the spring of 1969 as a student in his class.¹³⁵⁹ Only nineteen years old, having *already* moved beyond painting, and having also deeply mined Olson's work, Douglas was a remarkably accomplished poet and a perspicacious attendant of his own locale. He was also a heroin addict, and a year after Dorn's class, he died of an overdose in his parents' living room. While in Berkeley at work on his long poem to Douglas, Irby wrote to Dorn: "Sauer suggested St. Louis was the nerve-center of Pleistocene N. America, and Calif. a dead-end drift – but what's connecting, in between?"¹³⁶⁰ For Irby, Douglas was a figure "emblematic" of this *locus*—a soul enmeshed in the "weird crossroads" at which both poets had "stayed." "Stayed," that is, was what Irby also had done, Dorn's introduction relates; even in California, Irby had, "Stayed with the materia."¹³⁶¹ Later, in his own letter from the fall of 1971, Irby identifies a "sacred geometry" underlying the Kansas and Missouri borderlands, "the refractory space of the Plains." Irby's network is strikingly similar to the one Watkins assigned to the English plains, and its mysterious energy is released through human creations, both violent and artistic:

So there was Max, who might, in time, have found out, St. Joe is such a weird crossroads – alas, who's up to it now? Kelly talked abt some guy's notion that there are literal lines on the ground (visible from air in some cases, still?) connecting all the important early Neolithic centers

¹³⁵⁶ Ginsberg, *Collected Poems, 1950-1984*, 393.

¹³⁵⁷ Edward Dorn, introduction to *To Max Douglas*, by Kenneth Irby (Lawrence: Tansy, 1974), unpaginated.

¹³⁵⁸ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "fixation."

¹³⁵⁹ Moritz, interview by author, 6 August 2006; Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, 19 March 2005; biographical information provided in back pages of: Max Douglas, *Collected Poems*, ed. Christopher Wienert (Washington D.C.: White Dot Press, 1978), 175.

¹³⁶⁰ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 12 February 1971, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³⁶¹ Dorn, introduction to *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

of Europe (or earlier than that – meso – ?)

I dunno, questions as usual – somehow in my still dizzy brain (& stomach) this spring morning, its bound up w/ the roots of jazz in the Great Plains – Coleman Hawkins was from St. Joe, after all, & went to Washburn in Topeka before he ran off w/ Mamie Smith’s Jazz Hounds c. 1923 (the year C.O. Sauer came to California & joined the freaks & exotica) - & Scott Joplin, I mean! Sedalia! from Texarkana! ... & Charlie Christian from Oklahoma, Buck Clayton from Parsons before he went off to Shanghai & played in a dance hall from 1934-36 – oh well, all the cross currents & travel lines of jazz in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, down to Texas of course – Walter Page’s Blue Devils, Andy Kirk’s Clouds of Joy, Mary Lou Williams - & of course the K.C. scene –

but all those lines of movement – in that refractory space of the Plains, focus also on the Ice Age lines of movement – my lord, yes...¹³⁶²

Appropriately, Dorn called Irby a “symphonic” poet, one who weaves “sound together,” in tight “derringer” couplets, and called his *Douglas* poem “an address to native genius.”¹³⁶³

Not only through the introduction for Irby’s book, published in Lawrence, by John Moritz’s Tansy Press, but also through his friendships with Irby, Moritz, and other young, writers who were concerned with “place” in Kansas, Dorn found an occasion, during and after the spring of 1969, to refocus his earlier notions about geography and the cultural landscape.

Dorn would’ve immediately recognized a connection between the “lines of movement” Irby mentions in his letter, and the celestial network he’d seen from Glastonbury Tor. If one understands the reticulum of “ley lines” and their points of intersection as a set of passageways linking certain geomantic nodes—mythic “centers” of concentrated dynamism, whereat streams of telluric energy, trading routes, paths migration—for vertebrates, invertebrates, and deities, alike—even patterns of supernatural visitation, converge, combine, and disperse, and at which edaphic and astrological constituents of a *locus* are negotiated—one can situate Lawrence, and its “Hill,” like Glastonbury, and its Tor, at the uneasy confluence of a number of competing and interlocking forces, whose formidable potency, like the massaged power of the “dragon lines,” must be handled and distributed with extreme care. These discursive environs disturb and arouse the creative faculties, the “restless” energies that form into protean order the continual coming-into-being of the poem, as a “made thing.” But this atmosphere can also inflate, or obliterate those faculties. While

¹³⁶² Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 12 February 1971, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³⁶³ Dorn, introduction to *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

tragic, Douglas' death was "emblematic" of the violence, "forever at the heart of things": "His creative psychosis came simply as his share of the normal meteorology of his homeland," Dorn concludes, in his introduction to Irby's book—hitching weather to "psychocosmological" space, as both McClure, and the epigraph from Pound that Irby had suggested to introduce Dorn's 1968 poem, "The Midwest is that Space between the Buffalo Statler and the Lawrence Eldridge," do.¹³⁶⁴ By the late '60s, narcotics trafficking pulsed along Lawrence's circuits: "The city was on the Silk Route for drugs," one memoir recalls. "Large amounts passed through from both coasts and came up from Mexico. When coke came through in 1970 everything was buzzing. There was all this cash flowing out of the hemp fields. You could feel the excitement accelerating every night. We thought of Lawrence as Baghdad on the Kaw."¹³⁶⁵ Just as John Brown, to promote his cause, had deftly constructed an image of his own furious grandeur in the nation's many newspapers, the Lawrence "freaks" adopted and accelerated that practice, costuming and posturing themselves as snarling, gun-toting, neo-Boot Hill outlaws—and some were drugged sufficiently to lose track of the anachronism. From the continental "hinge" of California, Irby watched this "instant millennia" consume and regenerate itself, without end: "the underground railway now / is dope not slaves, runaways / of revolution, nutcrackers, unshacklers / of deep spirits / the dark gods / wait in the blooded underground / their visage is more shapeless / and more terrible than ever."¹³⁶⁶

Irby's poem stands on the other side of the fateful summer of 1970, when a local war broke out between members of the freak-run Oread community, and the National Guard and Lawrence police, who shot and killed two young adults—an event Dorn specifically addressed in his poem, "Osawatomie." But for Dorn and Dunbar, before all of that, "fixation" and "infancy" were eminently applicable themes for Kansas in spring of 1969. In terms of his work, Dorn flourished in Kansas—he completed Book II of *Gunslinger*, as well as much of its subsequent "Cycle" section; he published a number of short poems; he participated in a series benefit readings; he wrote a slew of the prose pieces that would later be collected as *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*; and he completed the first section of a screenplay, called *Abilene, Abilene!*, for Stan Brakhage. In addition but intimately related to his work, many close friends and poets—like Robert Creeley, Robert

¹³⁶⁴ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated; Dorn, introduction to *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹³⁶⁵ Monhollon, "This Is America?" ..., 140; preface to *Cows Are Freaky* ..., unpaginated.

¹³⁶⁶ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

Duncan, Ted Berrigan, and Anselm Hullo—passed through town to visit, to read, and to collaborate with Dorn in his classroom, where it turned out, a surprising number of his students were already serious and dedicated writers. However, more exciting than this vernal productivity were the signs of another new life: Dunbar was pregnant.

While protestors slung rocks and Molotov cocktails at the campus ROTC office, and *Vortex* meticulously tracked the town's narcotics market, printing the prices and availability of mescaline, or psilocybin, Dorn's exhilaration for the hopeful, youthful atmosphere in Lawrence and the approaching reality of a family with Dunbar charged equally his work and correspondence with new velocity and humor. "Coke is pure crystal," Dorn instructed Raworth about the powder stuffed into the fold of a late February letter, "cld be cut w/ milk sugar – otherwise 2 lines straight – see what you think – more later – the baby shld materialize sometime august, poss. late July."¹³⁶⁷ Dunbar's pregnancy gilded other activities, too, and Lawrence's environment seemed uniquely conducive to both relaxation and writing. "The idea that a town like Lawrence," said Jim McCrary, another student and friend of Dorn's at the time, "on the edge of the West, the abolitionists, Quantrill, etc., having a culture of drugs, sex, rock and roll and economics thru hemp stuff... I think after spending so much time in the cities like London... he enjoyed the slowness... laid back."¹³⁶⁸ As it was for the early settlers in a blood-fouled land, so it was for Dorn, that Kansas SPACE felt somehow large enough (I write it like Olson), and separated enough from the predilections of big cities, to naturally allow, even unwittingly nourish, all sorts of new social and cultural possibilities. And in that sense, it seemed the horrifying, bloody displacements of time-as-recent-history oozing toward 1970—rising body counts in Cambodia, in inner-city Chicago, in Soweto, and so forth—were momentarily held in abeyance, to be reworked through Kansas' "refractory" space. In early April, upon returning from a car trip to Iowa City, "for big resistors (draft) reading which are sweeping the country toward Harvard," Dorn wrote to Raworth with a guarded but genuine excitement that characterizes his letters that spring: "Just what's happening here I can't say – it has looked like going down this way so often before and then nada it's dangerous to hope really – and anyway – it all stays inside the university compound

¹³⁶⁷ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 20 February 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³⁶⁸ Jim McCrary, interview by author, 6 May 2005, email correspondence.

except for the brilliance of Blk Panth's...."¹³⁶⁹ The inspirited, radiant sensation that even such firmly hedged optimism generated had tangible effects nonetheless, on both work and life. For evidence of that, one needn't look much further than the expansive and sincere dedication, approaching incantation, to *Gunslinger*, Book II, compiled in Lawrence:

May this book go
to all the ones I love into time out
and beyond forever for Jenny and Channy
and Paul again and Helene and Harvey and Polly
and Charles always every moment
and for Bob and for Bobbie too
and for Raymond and Lorna back of time
yet it would be for Robert at last
and then Orville from 1948
and Fletcher who will never know it
and Buddy and Lee and Herbie
Jack and Kell and George and Jim, Lee
and Margaret, and Michael and Allen
and John, and Jill and then Mary
as Anselm and Ted, Gordon and Henry
and Jane and Stan and their progeny
and for Frederick in his distance and John
and his phantom and Lucia and Jeremy in his
and Tom and Val in theirs and their progeny
and for one without name it will also be¹³⁷⁰

That last "one" growing yet, gestative, in "The Garden of Birth," as one of Dorn's prose sketches that spring titles it. When later that summer the "one without a name" did begin to "be," the name Dunbar and Dorn gave to him was a doubled reference to the prenatal *locus of experience*: Kid Laurence.

The "centrality" Dorn sought, that Creeley had identified a year earlier, was an expression aligned with his own *Kansas locus of experience*. Dorn's registration of the

¹³⁶⁹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 24 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³⁷⁰ Edward Dorn, dedication to *Gunslinger: Book II* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969). The list of full names runs (nearly) as follows: Jennifer Dunbar; Chansonette Buck (Helene's daughter); Paul Dorn; Helene Dorn; Harvey and Polly Brown; Charles Olson; Robert and Bobbie Louise Creeley; Raymond (Dorn's early painting teacher and lifelong friend) and Lorna Obermayer; Robert Duncan; unknown; unknown; unknown; Lee Harwood (British poet, b. 1939); Herbert Butterfield; unknown; Kell Robinson; George Kimball; Jim McCrary; Lee Chapman; Margaret Dunbar; Michael McClure; Allen Ginsberg; John Moritz; unknown; unknown: Anselm Hollo; Ted Berrigan; Gordon Brotherston; Henry Rago; Jane and Stan Brakhage; Fred Buck; John Wieners; Lucia Berlin; Jeremy Prynne; Tom and Val Raworth; [Kid Laurence Dorn]. Dorn later apologized to Irby, for not having included his name in the above list.

external by the instrument and “medium” of a “centered” ego—his “speed” the Gunslinger might call it, his full *attention*, Olson would say, the man’s *style*, Zukofsky and Creeley would agree—became a swift transmission, a fluid thoroughfare along which Dorn encountered and arranged the lively “pageant” of his time. And he extracted from that “shared mind”—with “[a]erial roots? Yes, if the mind has aerial roots, having been in the air so long”—a set characters as “a constellation of one body.”¹³⁷¹ This multiple-voiced narrative inheritance determines both *Gunslinger*’s “spiritual address,” and its “epic” propensity. Dorn provided an encoded definition for the latter term in the eponymous, “A Epic,” a Stephen Crane sounding parable wedged in the middle of *Some Business*:

HE STOOD BEFORE THE DARKLING PLAIN.

The combination came before his eyes, his eyes located it. The Combination next entered his ear and knocked directly on the brain itself.

His brain went to the door and opened it and asked who’s there?

The stranger said we are the Combination. Shelter us from the rain.

There’s only one of you the brain observed, it takes 2 to make a combination.

Not where I come from, they answered.¹³⁷²

The combination Dorn received in the spring of 1969 rearranged and invigorated his former habits. Concerned, for example, with geography and migration, with the instability of the single author (another kind of migration), with narcotic experimentation (yet another) as an invitation to plural awareness, with the violent paradox in the pith of all creative activity, and with an attention to sacred or cosmological “fixation,” as “home,” or right placement, among the “exile that is.” In a 1977 interview with Stephen Fredman, Dorn outlined a loose girdle for gathering material:

Content very often reflects habit. I’ve never wanted to impose my own notions on the content. Except insofar as elements enter the context of my use, but not *what* they are. I consider one thing as good as another, whether it arises from science or so-called humanities, the newspaper or a bubblegum wrapper. All that’s equal to me, as source. Because you have to imagine that you’re sharing these sources with many other people. I mean, Hasting’s *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* is a mass publication, available to anybody who wants to look at it, just like *Hustler*. That’s in theory. In practice, the reader of *Hustler* probably won’t consult much

¹³⁷¹ Dorn, introduction to *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated; Dorn, interview by Okada, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 48.

¹³⁷² Dorn, “A Epic,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 10.

else. So the range of material is meant to be impressive, but is logically no more than you can see—to get back to Olber’s paradox.¹³⁷³

Olber’s paradox asserts fundamental spatial properties for time: if the universe is static and composed of an infinite number of luminous stars, night’s darkness is a difficult fact to account for. However, if the universe is expanding through time, in all directions outward, from an “uncomposed center” (as Big Bang theory proposes)—and the further one peers into outer-space, towards the event horizon, the further one looks into the past—then perhaps the combined luminosity of countless stars has yet to traverse the space of time’s passage, and to reach our visible, temporal plot.¹³⁷⁴ Envisioning Olber’s paradox as a structural, or rotary model for Dorn’s poetic sources and content—thinking of his frequent “listing,” his invocatory directness—this suggests a delayed, multiphasic emergence of the work’s total implications—and not necessarily dependent on Dorn’s authorship at all. Here “content,” within its own era, physically moves out, on *its own time*, say, while simultaneously transmitting its event’s historical and imaginal residue back, like a star’s light, to the reader’s *locus*—back *to the future*. Dorn consistently subjects narrative continuity to this paradox. This selfsame aporia and interpenetration of space and time ruptures the fabric of both, and splices their fabrics as one; it dispatches the reader into temporal gaps, and other logistical cracks, in the devious verisimilitude of the idiomatic edifice. For example: “The temperature under the tin awning at 3 p.m. was 105 degrees above zero,” Dorn writes in his cinematic, Lawrence-based, short story, “The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas.” “The time is shortly after that and the temperature a little higher.”¹³⁷⁵ Whatever you say, the reader likely thinks. With no time as “The time” to orient us, what need for its scrupulous and abstract partitioning?

The past tense, like a “theatre,” can hold a lot. And the narrator in charge of its only door has a big responsibility, he must remain alert, or else—“Fire! [Deputy] McHead spit out, please / don’t say shoot I despise that / word, it’s vulgar / *Fire’s* what a gun does / Fire?! Not

¹³⁷³ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 103.

¹³⁷⁴ “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*; see also footnote 2, p. 106: “Heinrich Wilhelm Matthaus Olbers (1785-1840) was a physician in Bremen by day and an astronomer by night. He revolutionized the method for computing the paths of the comets and propounded a major paradox for modern cosmology, to wit: if the universe is infinite and static, then the infinite number of stars should fill the sky completely. Olbers suggested that massive dust clouds prevent this and keep the sky dark at night.”

¹³⁷⁵ Edward Dorn, “The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas,” *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 68.

so loud youre gonna move all the customers right outa the chalk / see theyre fallin around in there / showin the booths around get outa the / way....”¹³⁷⁶ In the case of “The Sheriff of McTooth County,” who, shaded under this opening awning, “[e]very now and then... removed the Lucky from his mouth and stuck in a toothpick,” the past retains an enormous amount of nothing, actually—of air, of speech acts whose climactic, “real-world” effects absurdly vanish if the conversation drops them. And since time’s sequencing is crucial, but its specifics are ignored, narration and dialogue happen outside of time’s passing, and yet influence its path—as if from the sidelines of a half-mythic/half-lethargic field of reality. Therefore, late in the story (in terms of its paragraphs), the “Sheriff” occupies, but no longer wanders the same set (as in a movie “set,” partly from the Latin *secta*, “sect,” meaning literally, “following”).¹³⁷⁷ His haptic attention is now put to a set of tasks that, in turn, seem to dislocate the sensorial mechanisms of his physical body—like a drug experience, or an Egyptian god, whose “eye/I” came before all “Combination,” or who was dismembered in a swamp. Dorn writes: “Sheriff Ballmik had his ear to a walkie-talkie which he held up with his shoulder. He was wrapping up some low-grade weed with one hand while in the palm of the other he rolled his glass eye around like an agate.”¹³⁷⁸ A strange “Combination” indeed.

Thus, Dorn’s evocation of Olber’s paradox presents another, if heady, model for conceiving the ways in which the work at the turn of the decade inheres the precedent tendencies and the subsequent histrionics of his catalogue overall. In Lawrence, the geographical and lyrical concerns of Dorn’s earlier work merged into a single, multifaceted index that “centered” the rays of his idiolect with the pluralistic and psychodramatic demands of his changing *locus*, or “recentered” them in it. In very much the same way, the “self-exile” and homelessness of his previous years—in Pocatello, or Essex—were transformed, largely due to *Gunslinger*’s success, and largely due to his new marriage (it was “overdetermined,” a word Dorn would have mocked), into an empowered sense of his own mobility, of his ego’s (his “I/eye”’s) “centrality,” as well as a tangible increase in job opportunities. Worlds away from the context in which he found himself on his thirty-ninth birthday, Dorn was in Lawrence when he turned forty, on April 2, 1969, and that day he put the final touches on *Gunslinger* Book II. After its altruistic dedication, the book’s opening stanza, now chiseled

¹³⁷⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁷⁷ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “set.”

¹³⁷⁸ Edward Dorn, “The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas,” *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 74-75.

on Dorn's headstone, alights on the Gunslinger's merry caravan, as they greet the new day, on their way to "Universe City." As an epigraph, however, *ad astra per aspera* would suit the timbre of the lines (or of Dorn's life) just as well. The passage seems particularly hopeful, celebratory, open—"embraceable":

This tapestry moves
as the morning lights up.
And they who are in it move
and love its moving
from sleep to Idea
born on the breathing
of a distant harmonium, To See
is their desire
as they wander estranged
through the lanes of the Tenders
of Objects
who implore this existence
for a plan and dance wideyed
provided with a schedule
of separated events
along the selvedge of time.

Time does not consent.

This is morning
This is afternoon
This is evening

Only celebrations concur
and we concur To See
The Universe¹³⁷⁹

¹³⁷⁹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 45-46.

*... that what-is is ungenerated and imperishable;
 Whole, single-limbed, steadfast, and complete;
 Nor was it once, nor will it be, since it is, now, all together,
 One, continuous; for what coming-to-be of it will you seek?
 ... what-is is in contact with what-is.
 Moreover, changeless in the limits of great chains
 It is un-beginning and unceasing, since coming-to-be and perishing
 Have been driven far off, and true trust has thrust them out.
 ... The same thing is for thinking and is that there is thought;
 For not without what-is, on which it depends, having been declared,
 Will you find thinking; for nothing else either is or will be
 Besides what-is, since it was just this that Fate did shackle
 To be whole and changeless; wherefore it has been named all things
 That mortals have established, trusting them to be true,
 To come-to-be and to perish, to be and not to be,
 And to shift place and to exchange bright colour.
 Since, then, there is a furthest limit, it is completed,
 From every direction like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere,
 Everywhere from the centre equally matched; for it must not be any larger
 Or any smaller here or there;
 For neither is there what-is-not, which could stop it from reaching
 Its like; nor is there a way in which what-is could be
 More here and less there, since it all inviolably is;
 For equal to itself from every direction, it lies uniformly within limits.*

– Parmenides¹³⁸⁰

21. Baghdad on the Kaw

When Nixon was inaugurated in January 1969, as the 37th president, he inherited the crisis in Southeast Asia by which Johnson, in his vicious mishandling of it, had been defeated. There were now more than five hundred thousand troops in Vietnam and some thirty-thousand American dead; “American planes had dropped more than two million tons of bombs on North and South Vietnam—about one ton for every three Vietnamese families; and the United States had made hundreds of villages in the south uninhabitable, through bombing, artillery fire, and the burning of huts.”¹³⁸¹ Nixon might’ve found some comfort in early opinion polls, which showed the public was willing to give their new leader a chance, but instead he took the opportunity to advance on illegal initiatives at which even his predecessor had balked. Within three months of his being in office, Nixon had implemented a covert bombing campaign in Cambodia, a country whose sovereignty the U.S. supposedly

¹³⁸⁰ Parmenides, *Fragments*, trans. Gallop, 65-73.

¹³⁸¹ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 84-85; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 601.

acknowledged.¹³⁸² For much-needed advice on how to deftly execute such unlawful maneuvers, while at the same time keeping them a secret, Nixon turned to his chosen Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger.

The son of Jewish refugees who'd escaped from Nazi Germany to New York in 1938, Kissinger had been educated at Harvard, where he'd begun to strategize and situate his global contacts, and to sharpen his critical obsession with confidentiality and a cutthroat independence in all of his affairs.¹³⁸³ The latter quality made him an extremely attractive political commodity in Nixon's eyes, who shared a firm belief in the superior efficiency of secrecy, over the obstacles and regulations that support democracy's checks and balances, and sustain its public participation. This joint conviction eventually created the Watergate scandal, which led to Nixon's impeachment, but well before that, it generated the depraved anarchy and mass killings that spread all over Cambodia in the early 1970s. Surprisingly, in May 1969, a *New York Times* correspondent exposed the covert bombings. Not surprising, Nixon and Kissinger were indignant, resentful of a free and critical press. "[The administration] will destroy whoever did this," the Secretary of State told J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, who immediately placed wiretaps, "of dubious legality," on the telephones of four journalists and thirteen public officials, "including members of Kissinger's own staff."¹³⁸⁴ For now, the majority of the American public had missed the news release, or hadn't perceived its severity, and flanked by Kissinger's threats and Hoover's surveillance, press coverage of the Cambodian atrocities was wrapped back up in a body bag. Eventually, however, the only hermetically sealed feature of Nixon's and Kissinger's many clandestine operations proved to be their arrogant assumption that others, even their enemies, wouldn't engage in the same kind of treachery.

Although the suppressed *Times* report about Cambodia raised little public concern at the time—that outcry would come a year later, when Nixon himself half-admitted to the bombings, and Cambodia was aswarm with insurgents—there were other urgent matters that spring. For ten days in the middle of May, for instance, American troops fought to seize Apbia mountain from communist forces, and suffered over three hundred casualties and

¹³⁸² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 590.

¹³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 584: "Henry, don't you remember your old friends?" a Harvard colleague, and minor European civil servant, asked Kissinger years later. "The secret of my success is to forget my old friends," Kissinger replied.

¹³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 592.

seventy deaths doing so. Only to lose the position a month later. And quick on the heels of that disheartening news came a June issue of *Life* magazine, the pages of which were filled with the photographs of each of the two hundred and forty-two American soldiers killed in the span of a single week.¹³⁸⁵ And yet, compared to the hoards of dead Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, these numbers were small. For example, the struggle for Apbia Mountain (“Hamburger Hill” as it’s now known, for the battle’s effect on its casualties) claimed the lives of six-hundred and thirty soldiers in the Vietnam People’s Army. And the CIA’s half-cloaked Phoenix Program, conceived three years earlier to purge the official Saigon ranks of Vietcong interlopers, had been either radically efficient or unutterably careless at achieving its objectives by 1969: “19,534 Vietcong organizers, propagandists, tax collectors, and the like were listed as having been “neutralized”—6,187 of them killed.”¹³⁸⁶ But the killing couldn’t win the Vietnamese “hearts and minds.” Almost seventy percent of the Vietnamese officers that the Phoenix program sought to retain defected when bribed, or threatened by communist forces.¹³⁸⁷

Faced with such grim realities, resistance to the war on the home front grew exponentially in the late ‘60s. In contrast to the 380 Americans prosecuted for refusing induction between mid-1964 and mid-1965, 3,305 were prosecuted in 1968; and while fifty percent of Americans polled in 1969, “said they would not respect persons who refused to go into the armed forces,” in 1970, that percentage dropped to thirty-four.¹³⁸⁸ During those latter two years dissent began to fester among the troops waging the war, as well. A formidable G.I. resistance movement was organized at the turn of the decade. During the October 16, 1969, Moratorium, journalists in Da Nang reported that half of the U.S. soldiers wore black arm bands in solidarity with the anti-war demonstrators.¹³⁸⁹ In early 1970, the Saigon correspondent for *Le Monde* outlined an even more bizarre situation: “In four months, 109 soldiers of the First Cav, American’s first air cavalry division, have been charged with refusal to fight. At Saigon, as at Danang, the security services pursue deserters. In most units, more than half the soldiers smoke marijuana. A common sight is the black soldier, with his left fist

¹³⁸⁵ Ibid., 601.

¹³⁸⁶ Ibid., 602.

¹³⁸⁷ Ibid., 601-602.

¹³⁸⁸ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 221-222.

¹³⁸⁹ Ibid., 226; 229.

clenched in defiance of a war he has never considered his own.”¹³⁹⁰ As if their situation were gradually transposed, Americans serving tours of duty in Southeast Asia adopted the habits of those protesting the war back home, and those back home, especially college students and minorities in disenfranchised urban areas, dedicated themselves to a physical, and in some cases, an armed struggle.

The incipient revolution, Dorn wrote to Tom Raworth in late April, 1969, “all stays inside the university compound except for the brilliance of Blk Panth’s, but they are being assassinated by Ron Karenga’s U.S. people.”¹³⁹¹ Dorn’s respect for the Black Panthers was rooted in their well-defined, and community-based party platforms. Their Ten-Point Program, which the BSU had adopted in Lawrence, “combined reformist, revolutionary, and nationalist demands.” Those demands included calls for the release of blacks from prison and military service, for an end to police brutality, and for the establishment of a “black colony,” by United Nations decree.¹³⁹² In an era of the hip revolution, the Black Panthers, armed with the stunning rhetorical power of their leaders—party founders, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, for instance, or Fred Hampton, an influential Chicago member—uniformed in black leather and black sunglasses, and often carrying semi-automatic weapons, exuded an “immensely photogenic” elan—“cool, streetwise, hard-edged.”¹³⁹³ This prepossessing hipness made them particularly threatening to factions dedicated to strictly maintaining established social orders. And especially in light of the Black Panthers’ undeniably beneficial community programs, such as “patrolling ghetto neighborhoods to deter police harassment, providing free breakfasts for needy children, recruiting doctors and medical students to staff free health clinics, conducting voter registration programs, and setting up ‘Liberation Schools’ for black children.”¹³⁹⁴ In Oakland, where the Party was founded, 2,400 of the 4,400 men ordered to report for induction in 1968, ditched the occasion, and of those that attended, eleven percent “refused to serve.”¹³⁹⁵ By 1970, a governmental report estimated “hard core” Black Panther Party membership at 800, but noted a recent poll that had concluded twenty-five percent of the overall black population, and forty-three percent of

¹³⁹⁰ Ibid., 229.

¹³⁹¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 24 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹³⁹² Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 317; see also Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).

¹³⁹³ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 317.

¹³⁹⁴ Ibid., 317.

¹³⁹⁵ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 221.

those under twenty-one years of age, had a “great respect for the BPP.”¹³⁹⁶ Combined with the Panther’s outspoken willingness to use force—even if they maintained a policy of “self defense”—and their unabashed displays of weaponry, such alarming proof of their influence in Oakland saw the Panthers embroiled, “in more than a dozen firefights” with police forces—which killed two officers, and over ten Panthers, between October 1967, and December 1969.¹³⁹⁷ But by 1969, the Panthers and the United Slaves (U.S.), a separate black nationalist organization (also formed in California in 1966), led by Ron Karenga, found themselves at the center of multi-front war.

In early 1963, J. Edgar Hoover had dubbed Martin Luther King, “the most notorious liar in the country,” so Hoover’s outspoken goal five years later, to “destroy what the [BPP] stands for... [and to] eradicate its ‘serve the people’ programs,” was less than surprising.¹³⁹⁸ The gruesome methods employed by his governmental bureau, however, and their remarkable “success,” are shocking. In a November 1968 Memorandum, Hoover ordered federal agents “to exploit all avenues,” for creating dissension within the Panther Party, and “to submit imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP.”¹³⁹⁹ Thus began the infamous COINTELPRO operation, a massive FBI campaign designed to infiltrate the Black Panther Party with undercover agents, and to neutralize their ranks directly through assassination, or preferably (and it turned out, more frequently) through disinformation—forged letters and political cartoons that incited violence not just among the Panther Party itself, but between the members of other, militant black organizations as well.¹⁴⁰⁰ Such was the constructed nature of the conflict between the Black Panthers and the United Slaves. For instance, two Los Angeles Panther leaders were shot to death by a US gunman on the UCLA campus in January 1969. In mid-August of that year, US assassins seriously wounded two more Panther members, and killed a third, in an ambush in San Diego.¹⁴⁰¹ That summer, the FBI began to exploit the mere suggestion of counterintelligence operatives among the Panther Party (called “bad-jacketing”), as grist for their disinformation

¹³⁹⁶ Noam Chomsky, *COINTELPRO*, quoted in Ward Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 63.

¹³⁹⁷ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 318.

¹³⁹⁸ Former quotation from: “Memorandum, Hoover to Attorney General Kennedy, caption unknown, January 18, 1963,” in Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 55; Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 318.

¹³⁹⁹ Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 63.

¹⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 318-319; David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993).

¹⁴⁰¹ Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 42.

campaign. This led to the Bay Area Panthers executing one of their own members on trumped up suspicions, and it drove those in Chicago, where the FBI regularly raided Party offices, to paranoid and desperate acts of violence.¹⁴⁰² By 1970, Huey Newton was falsely convinced that SNCC leader, Stokely Carmichael, once his close friend, was an undercover agent for CIA.

If disinformation strategies failed, the FBI turned to more extreme measures. After repeatedly arresting L.A. Panther, Geronimo Pratt—a double-tour Vietnam veteran—over the summer and fall 1969, the FBI targeted him for assassination in raid of the Party office in early December. Because of an injury in the service, however, Pratt slept on the floor, and thus avoided the bullets, blasting through the wall, that riddled his bed. Chicago Party leader, Fred Hampton, wasn't as lucky. Gracious and intelligent, Hampton was a persuasive speaker, and a dedicated community leader. He helped to establish the People's Clinic on the West Side of Chicago; he regularly attended (every day of the week) the 6 a.m. Breakfast for Children Program; and he taught political education classes and the Liberation School.¹⁴⁰³ His FBI file, meanwhile, was four thousand pages long.¹⁴⁰⁴ Then, miraculously, in late 1969, Hampton successfully negotiated the merger of the Chicago Party branch with the Blackstone Rangers, a South-side street gang with several thousand members. The FBI moved quickly to intervene. In the early morning hours of December 4, 1969, almost a year after infiltrator William O'Neal had planted himself in the Party's administrative ranks, FBI agents, with a map O'Neal had provided, stormed Hampton's apartment. They immediately killed Mark Clark, another Party member, and wounded four others who were sleeping in the front room. After emptying multiple rounds into the wall of Hampton's bedroom, they drug him bleeding and mumbling into the hall, and while his pregnant wife looked on, shot him twice in the head.¹⁴⁰⁵

Hundreds of other Black Panther members and Black Power leaders were “neutralized” through the burgeoning American prison system: in 1969 alone, over three hundred members of the Party were arrested, for every charge conceivable.¹⁴⁰⁶ And being prison was even more dangerous than being on the street. “Most of the nation's 187 state

¹⁴⁰² Ibid., 49; 51; 68.

¹⁴⁰³ Ibid., 69.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 64

¹⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 71; Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 318.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 318.

prisons are so lawless that they are more productive of crime than of its cure,” the Public Information Center in Washington D.C. reported, in 1971.¹⁴⁰⁷ In August of that year, George Jackson, author of *Soledad Brother*, was gunned down while running across the San Quentin yard, after he’d beaten down three other assassins.¹⁴⁰⁸ In September, the inmates of Attica, a state prison in New York, revolted. They took thirty-eight hostages, and held negotiations for four days in the attempt to improve their living conditions. But at that point, Governor Rockefeller had had enough: state police, armed with tear gas and machine guns, rushed the prison, while others fired from helicopters circling the yard, killing ten hostages and thirty inmates. As a Public Information Center study concluded, the American prison system was promoting, not abating violence.¹⁴⁰⁹

Back in Lawrence, the controversial and contentious Black Power advocate, Leonard Harrison, became a guest lecturer on the KU faculty in 1970, which outraged Lawrence-born, Republican Senator, Reynolds O. Schultz. Hitting Harrison the only way he could, Schultz forced the university’s printer to suspend publication of *Harambee*, the Black Student Union (BSU) newspaper, due to its “obscene” content. In response, Harrison organized for 6000 copies of the *University Daily Kansan* to be dumped in Potter’s Lake on campus.¹⁴¹⁰ The fury over Harrison’s appointment highlighted the tightening of “town-gown” tensions that Black Power’s presence had throttled in Lawrence. Anti-war demonstrations, on the other hand, for most of the town’s population, targeted a slightly more agreeable cause. Or at least certain forms of demonstration did. Silent Vigils for Peace, for example, were popular, and were held every Sunday in South Park on the southern end of Massachusetts street. And to honor the October 15, 1969, Moratorium, an unusually large Silent Vigil gathered in another downtown park, bolstered by a petition that demanded an end to war, signed by 152 local residents. In fact, several activist advertisements appeared that month in the local *Journal World*, including one with 318 signatures.¹⁴¹¹ But in spite of that growing local activism, when the New Mobilization protest rolled around in November 1969, and university students unleashed a raucous and more aggressive discontent onto the town’s main streets, again the “town-gown” chasm widened, over war and race.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 185.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 98.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 184-187.

¹⁴¹⁰ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 145.

¹⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

Some 300 Kansans traveled to Washington to march on Veterans Day that November, while 150 others headed down Massachusetts street. An additional 300 students debated the war in Hoch Auditorium on campus, where the newly-hired Chancellor, E. Laurence Chalmers, Jr., defended students rights against charges of treason from others in the community.¹⁴¹² Others like Reverend Harold G. Barr, a Religious Studies emeritus professor: “There should be a line drawn between dissent and treason,” Reverend Barr argued in South Park, at a small, “patriotic ceremony” for veterans—one of whom, after playing “Taps,” assaulted a young dissenter, breaking his jaw.¹⁴¹³ Even among the town’s population that opposed the war there was substantial disparity. “I am not a sandal-wearing, folksinging beatnik,” insisted Ruth Eigner, a self-proclaimed, “midwestern housewife and mother,” who nonetheless opposed American aggression in Vietnam. And Monti Belot, a local physician, felt trapped in voicing his disapproval of American policy in Southeast Asia: “[I] have withheld doing so because I did not want to associate myself with some of the unpatriotic groups which are making these objections,” he said.¹⁴¹⁴ If Belot is correct to equate a lack of patriotism with the anti-war demonstrations on college campuses across the country, patriotism was at an all time low. American historian, Howard Zinn offers the following assessment of student protest at the turn of the decade:

When the Urban Research Corporation did a survey of student protest—for the first six months of 1969 only, and for only 232 of the nation’s 2,000 institutions of higher education—it found that at least 215,000 students had participated in campus protests, that 3,625 had been arrested, that 956 had been suspended or expelled. The FBI estimated that in the 1969-70 school year 1,785 students demonstrations took place, including the occupation of 313 buildings.¹⁴¹⁵

What the New Mobilization march represented for Lawrence, as distinct from what it meant for the antiwar movement overall, was the resurgence of an historical propensity for violence, with a national context, at the local level.¹⁴¹⁶ The wave of militancy in Lawrence

¹⁴¹² Ibid., 132-133.

¹⁴¹³ Ibid., 132-33.

¹⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 115.

¹⁴¹⁵ Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971*, 212.

¹⁴¹⁶ For George Kimball, gun-running radical on the Hill, the unrest was more than the sum of its war and ditch weed. Monhollon writes, “George Kimball allowed that ‘Vietnam is part of it, but not all of it. I think everybody here recognizes that Vietnam is just part of a system. This would continue if the War ended.’ An Associated Press report concluded that the ‘consensus’ among city leaders was that marijuana was the primary cause of ‘the radical problem’ and that Harrison’s ‘galvanizing effect on young blacks’ was at the heart of ‘black unrest.’” (“*This Is America?*” ..., 181)

rose precipitously when Dorn and Dunbar arrived in early 1969. In February, a debate over carrying guns on campus occupied the All Student Council (ASC), who in light of their “attempt and failure to disarm the campus pigs,” proposed that students also be granted the right to brandish firearms. Fat chance. Eventually, the university administration and the ASC reached a compromise that limited the hours during which campus police could carry weapons.¹⁴¹⁷ Not that it mattered much, the students were armed anyway. Attacks on the campus ROTC office, for example, were frequent throughout 1969. A Molotov cocktail was pitched into the head office of the Navel ROTC in February—around the same time that the Military Science building was firebombed, causing \$500 worth of damage.¹⁴¹⁸ Later that month, campus radicals interrupted State Attorney General, Kent Frizzell’s address to the College Young Republicans—lambasting his defense of property rights over human rights, and his arguments against free speech.¹⁴¹⁹ In April, “student protestors waved toy guns in the faces of ROTC cadets during an awards review in front of Allen Fieldhouse.”¹⁴²⁰ And a serious violent disaster was narrowly avoided on May 9, when Chancellor W. Clarke Wescoe tried to deliver his annual, ROTC address in Memorial Stadium, and 200 raving students broke in, dancing, denouncing the war, and taunting the cadets on the football field.¹⁴²¹ Fortunately, rather than call in the two battalions of Kansas National Guardsmen—whom the Chancellor had positioned on nearby streets in the case something should go awry—Clarke called off the ceremony.¹⁴²² But the mere presence of the National Guard, as one might have predicted, only fueled the already irate student activists; just as the national, sociopolitical environment that engulfed and belabored the essential goals of the Civil Rights struggle, seemed to demand, unavoidably, a guerilla mentality. That September, there were five

¹⁴¹⁷ “Firearm ban proposed,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 4 February 1969, p. 1; Richard Louv, “ASC defeats gun bill,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 5 February 1969, p. 1; “Strong Hall Says: ‘No pistol-packing students—please’,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 10 February 1969, p. 1; John Gille, “ASC hears gun plan,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 12 February 1969, p. 1; “Comment: Police and Guns,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 14 February 1969; “Comment: Guns Needed,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 18 February 1969; Richard Louv, “ASC restricts firearms,” *The University of Daily Kansan*, 19 February 1969, p. 1; “Wescoe kills resolution on Hill firearms,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 5 March 1969.

¹⁴¹⁸ “Fire-bombing, threats cause tightening of campus security,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 7 March 1969, p. 16; Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 142-143.

¹⁴¹⁹ Mike Frederick, “CYR speech interrupted by noisy demonstrators,” *The University Daily Kansas*, 20 February, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁴²⁰ Phyllis Jones, “Protesters taunt ROTC,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 30 April 1969, p. 1; Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 79; 142.

¹⁴²¹ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 79.

¹⁴²² *Ibid.*, 79-80.

incidents of assault against police officers, and two car accidents escalated into “gunfights between motorists.”¹⁴²³ The Wild West was returning fire.

By 1970, Lawrence was stuffed with guns, explosives, and a variety of homemade weapons. These instruments were not only in the hands of student radicals and BSU members, however, but also in the stockpiles of Lawrence’s anticommunist, extreme Right militia, known as the Minutemen, some of whom were purportedly police officers, and who collectively insisted, “there comes a time when the only way to stop violence is with violence.”¹⁴²⁴ Evidently, that was then: crime in Lawrence had increased by twenty-five percent in the first six months of 1969, and as Harrison’s divisive lectureship drew more and more ire from the state and conservative community in the spring of 1970, the streets went taut with anxious agitation.¹⁴²⁵ In April, an “unexploded firebomb” was found near Strong Hall (the administrative center of campus), and a homemade bomb was detonated near Judge Charles C. Rankin’s front door.¹⁴²⁶ Bomb threats on institutional centers and symbols of the establishment were as commonplace as the death threats and racial epithets—hurled by the Minutemen, who had ties to the Ku Klux Klan—against black leaders and organizations in the community.¹⁴²⁷ Thus, BSU president, John Spearman, fearing the worst was yet to come, encouraged blacks to arm themselves, just as Monty Beckwith had done, the editor of *Harambee*—Lawrence “pigs,” Beckwith wrote, were “using every tactic from A to Z to commit legal genocide on BSU members.”¹⁴²⁸ Then, as if an infernal confirmation of the town’s seething intensity, on April 20, “a multimillion dollar arson gutted the Student Memorial Union.”¹⁴²⁹ Although the crime was never solved, FBI and KBI agents privately assigned responsibility to a radical group of young, Black Power advocates associated with BSU.¹⁴³⁰ The day after the Union fire, Governor Robert B. Docking implemented a citywide, dusk-to-dawn curfew—“alcohol sales were limited, and the sale and transportation of flammable liquids, firearms, and explosives were prohibited.”¹⁴³¹ The curfew, however, did little to quell the mounting disorder; acts of arson, firebombings, and sniper fire continued,

¹⁴²³ Ibid., 142.

¹⁴²⁴ Ibid., 148-49.

¹⁴²⁵ Ibid., 142.

¹⁴²⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹⁴²⁷ Ibid., 146.

¹⁴²⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹⁴²⁹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁴³⁰ Ibid., 151.

¹⁴³¹ Ibid., 151.

aimed primarily at the local police and the National Guardsmen, who now patrolled the streets. Over the next three months, there occurred more than fifty bombings and acts of arson. Confident of the superior firepower of the police and the “redneck” vigilantes, David Awbrey, a former activist who spent several weeks in jail for violating the April curfew, argued that stockpiling weapons and ammunition was the only recourse open to “freaks,” who wanted to survive in such a divisive atmosphere: “Through guns is the only way that we relate to the outside community,” Awbrey reasoned.

The April curfew had profoundly negative effects. In fact, it produced a “war zone” in the “Oread,” the student and “freak” neighborhood on top of the “Hill,” which encompassed the Rock Chalk Café, the Gaslight Tavern, and a large commune known as the White House (where the Alumni Center now stands). “What started as a group of freaks living together and sharing together,” a writer for *Vortex* proclaimed during the April curfew, “turned into the first site of battle and open rebellion in Lawrence by the white people.”¹⁴³² Not “the first” at all, actually, but many of the writers for *Vortex*, and no doubt an even greater percentage of its readers took their role in promoting that battle more seriously than in fighting it, and their battle cries drifted to lurid extremes. “Are we demonstrators or revolutionaries?” the magazine questioned in late April: “We should take a lesson from the first American Revolution: when people met the troops head on they got vamped on, but when they took to the woods and sniped at ‘em they wiped those cocksuckers out? ... A Molotov Cocktail under a pig car will usually do the trick, and if they’re on foot an M-80 dipped in hot wax and rolled in B.B.’s can really do some paralyzing. And if you’ve got some guns, they should be employed.”¹⁴³³ It’s difficult to say exactly how widespread or how tangible was the support for *Vortex*’s positions, but guerilla tactics, usually minor ones, were obviously common. For instance, Lawrence mayor, Dick Raney, announced that during the curfew Oread radicals strung piano wire, “at leg and neck height in [the] darkened alleys” leading into their neighborhood, then set small fires to entice the authorities.¹⁴³⁴

To make matters much worse, on April 30, Nixon admitted, rather insensitively, to the clandestine and systematic bombing of Cambodia he’d authorized over a year before—reasoning that if the U.S. “acts like a pitiful helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and

¹⁴³² Ibid., 153.

¹⁴³³ Ibid., 154.

¹⁴³⁴ Ibid., 155.

anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world.”¹⁴³⁵ Meanwhile, out of the other side of his mouth (and on tape, he later learned), Nixon bitterly referred to the “bums blowing up the campuses,” and reminiscent of that royal line of Richards, commanded his staff to ruthlessly attack congressional critics: “Don’t worry about divisiveness. Having drawn the sword, don’t take it out—stick it in hard. ...Hit ‘em in the gut. No defensiveness.”¹⁴³⁶ Nixon’s merciless strategy was also embraced that spring by the National Guard, in their brutal repressions of student demonstrations at Kent State, in Ohio, and Jackson State, in Mississippi. Nixon’s supercilious dismissal of actions that would otherwise be prosecuted as war crimes aroused intense protests at both of those universities, and in each instance, Guardsmen fired upon the crowds, killing four in Ohio, and two in Mississippi.¹⁴³⁷ A few days later, in Augusta Georgia, an explosion “set by a white racist” murdered nine black children.¹⁴³⁸

The campus shootings outraged and invigorated the Lawrence radicals. On May 7, three days after the incident at Kent, two hundred people pummeled the military science building with rocks, and a hundred sitting students barricaded Highway 59 (Iowa St.), a major thruway on the west side of campus, until riot police drove them away. A few blocks away, five hundred students in front of Strong Hall denounced the war and the school murders it produced, and “demanded that the campus be shut down.”¹⁴³⁹ Amazed by the escalating violence, Chancellor Chalmers, facing severe criticism from other state officials, and from ROTC cadets whose review he’d canceled, brought the semester to a premature close, side-stepping, for the time being, further violence. But few students left, and militancy persisted. In mid-June, twenty-three sticks of dynamite were discovered under the rear bumper of a propane delivery truck. In mid-July, things totally unraveled.¹⁴⁴⁰

Rick Dowdell, who’d led the black student walkout at Lawrence High three years earlier, had already distinguished himself as a capable public speaker, and a resourceful leader in the local black community, befriending Harrison and other prominent figures, by the time he graduated from high school in 1969. He also had a year to live. Between February of that year, and July of the next, local police “arrested or stopped” Dowdell, at least ten

¹⁴³⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 609.

¹⁴³⁶ Ibid., 611; Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 157.

¹⁴³⁷ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 156; Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 611.

¹⁴³⁸ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 161.

¹⁴³⁹ Ibid., 157-158.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 165.

times.¹⁴⁴¹ On the night of July 16, 1970, another BSU member sitting on the porch of the Afro-House, the BSU's cultural center, was "wounded by buckshot," and down the block, a white woman was shot in the leg. As police approached the confused scene, they were threatened by sniper fire. Altogether, the incident was shrouded in uncertainty, and the assailants were unknown. Later that evening, however, looking for leads, local police attempted to pull over Franki Cole, who'd left the Afro-House in her Volkswagon with Dowdell earlier that evening.¹⁴⁴² Cole, they later claimed, was driving recklessly, but rather than stop her car—understandably fearing any confrontation with the police, *at all*—she raced back toward the Afro-House. Careening into an alleyway between Rhode Island and New Hampshire street, her car stalled on a curb. Dowdell ran. According to the police, he fired off rounds as he fled. Before he reached the end of the dark alley, however, officer William Garrett shot off the back of his head, killing him instantly. Meanwhile, Cole was taken into custody. Before dawn, word had spread that the Hell's Angels were on their way to Lawrence, to assist in the unfolding guerilla war.¹⁴⁴³

Another confrontation was unavoidable. Gunshots and explosions filled the early morning hours of July 17th; the next day, fifty people marched on the police station demanding Garrett's dismissal, though he was only suspended. That night snipers shot out police car windows and one officer was seriously wounded in a gun battle near the Afro-House. Up on the hill, George Kimball, Defense Chairman of the Lawrence Liberation Front, orchestrated "diversionary tactics" (turning on fire hydrants, starting fires, etc.) to divert police attention from the black community. Dowdell's father arrived from Spokane, Washington, on the 19th of July, and tried to assuage the angry mourners of his son's death that they should "cool it as they had got his boy killed and there would be others."¹⁴⁴⁴ His prediction was confirmed the next day. On the evening of July 20, police tried to disperse an unruly crowd of some 150 young people—"light-hearted but with an ugly and tense edge"—who were gathered outside the Rock Chalk Café.¹⁴⁴⁵ As the crowd disbanded, however, some of its numbers began to ignite trees, shrubs, and then, an upended Volkswagon Bug. Stationed at 13th and Oread, and armed with M-1 rifles and shotguns, the riot squad opened

¹⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 166.

¹⁴⁴² Ibid., 166.

¹⁴⁴³ Ibid., 167.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 168.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 168.

fire. This time, Nick Rice, a nineteen-year-old, white student, who'd recently completed his freshman year at KU, suffered a gaping head wound. As if suddenly actors in the grand, explosive finale of a Western film, a small group of demonstrators attempted to carry Rice into the Alamo-style, stuccoed Gaslight Tavern, but were gassed out by the police. Rice bled to death on the sidewalk.¹⁴⁴⁶

In the wake of the police shootings, the chasm between the radical, campus community and the town's conservative citizenry widened inexorably. Harrison promised to "avenge the death of our beautiful brother by any means necessary. ... we will kill ... any other muthafucka that gets in the way of the total liberation of our people. ... Lawrence will become a police state if justice is denied us."¹⁴⁴⁷ George Kimball made similar promises, speaking after Dowdell's funeral: "This is the last Goddamn non-violent march I'm going to ever take again. The response to murder will no longer be non-violent marches in the streets. ... If the pigs come into our community, they are going to find a lot more than open fire hydrants."¹⁴⁴⁸ When *Vortex* was censored by state decree—anyone distributing it would be charged with defamation—Kimball's Liberation Front called for a "people's war." On the opposite side of the issue, vigilante committees made up of local residents similarly amplified their rhetoric—pledging "guerilla warfare" to put an end to "hippies and nigger militants"—and likewise augmented their weapons supplies. "[W]e'll shoot," promised Norman Ransford, a white, electrical contractor, and member of one such "V-Committee." "If we don't stop them [blacks] in East Lawrence," he bitterly feared, "they'll be in [predominately white] West Lawrence."¹⁴⁴⁹

More firebombings and acts of arson shook the town through December, but fatal confrontations eventually came to an end, and certain progress was non-violently realized by other minority groups, who sought out their fundamental rights with much less press. For example, the February Sisters, a feminist group of twenty women and four young children, occupied the East Asian studies building in early 1972, demanding a number of administrative directives—such as the establishment of an affirmative action program and comprehensive women's health care at university medical facilities, as well as the creation of daycare centers on campus, a department solely dedicated to women's studies, and an end to

¹⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 168-69.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 170.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 173.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 176.

gender-based wage inequality.¹⁴⁵⁰ Dorn, however, was out of Lawrence some time before the February Sisters made their petitions, and already was living in Chicago when the mayhem of 1970 erupted. Nonetheless, the dark sequence of events struck a chord, bringing back memories of a breezy, “laid back” town, teeming with a hundred-plus years of borderland warfare.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 187.

*Edge of place
put on between*

*its proposed
place in*

*time
and space.*

– Robert Creeley¹⁴⁵¹

22. *Enter Violenta*¹⁴⁵²

When Dorn heard about the violence in Lawrence in the summer of 1970, the news was inflected by two significant changes in his own life: the birth of his son, Kid Laurence, roughly a year before, whom Dunbar was pregnant with while in Lawrence; and the death of Charles Olson, in early January 1970. On the 12th of August, Dorn recorded his response to the events in an unpublished poem called “Osawatomie,” which seems partly inspired by relations between fathers (Brown, Dowdell’s father, czar Nicholas, Olson [father figure], and Dorn himself) and sons (Dowdell, Rice, Dorn [to Olson’s figure], and Kid). Overall, the piece marks the provocative intersection of a number larger trends in Dorn’s work, combining the lyrical, historically-driven narratives of his earlier career (e.g. “Ledyard,” “Death While Journeying,” and “Idaho Out”), the “areal” perspective that gleans cultural geographical nuances to compose a sense of place, with the demotic, elusive, dazzling, topical language-play of *Gunslinger*, and later works, like *Hello, La Jolla*, *Captain Jack’s Straps*, and *Abhorrences*.¹⁴⁵³ In terms of its form and content, “Osawatomie” explores history

¹⁴⁵¹ Robert Creeley, *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1975-2005* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006), 249.

¹⁴⁵² Shakespeare, “All’s Well That Ends Well,” in *The Complete Works*, ed. Harbage, 385, III.v. In the stage direction for scene five, we are told Violenta, a neighbor and friend to the Widow, among other characters, enters; however, Violenta does not speak, and is otherwise absent from the play.

¹⁴⁵³ For example, a few lines from Dorn’s poem, “For the post-mortem amusement of Richard Brautigan,” a friend who committed suicide: “Death by over-seasoning: Herbicide / Death by annoyance: Pesticide / ...Death by blow to the head: Upcide / Death from delirious voting: Rightcide / Death from hounding: Leftside / Death through war: Theircide & Ourcide / ...Death following a decision: Decide.” In “Decide” the cadence seems eager to snatch up an extra syllable, and therefore faintly to suggest both *deicide*—the killing, or killer, of a god—and the fictive construction *diecide*, which would mean the killing, or killer, of death. Does that make those two words weird synonyms? And does it afford the *decision*, i.e. “to decide,” in this case, to die, that is, to beat the fear of death, some sort of chiasmic necromancy? When Dorn ends his uber-suffixed list of “perversely proliferated” jargon, in “Baseline Vocabulary introduced by the Rawhide Era,”—“...*AIRFORCEONEERY / GUNSHIPICIDE / ... / REABORTIONMENT*...”—with a *real* word, “*Artillery*,” is this to say that the militaristic is an inflated, appended art, or that art has militaristic tendencies and effects?

as a linear classification that detaches and isolates otherwise simultaneous, soul-bound events (“all is transhistorical,” Dorn writes elsewhere). Here, history is resurrected as a living presence, a “strobe,” Dorn calls it, whose poem splices disjointed events into a centurial landscape in which the poem moves.

Dorn presents two parallel columns of verse—on the left, a narrative of John Brown’s peripatetic and agitated biography; on the right, an account of Lawrence’s “assembly of events” in the summer of 1970. Echoing the alchemical fusion of disparate forces in Lindsay’s “Kansas,” “Osawatomie” ponders far-reaching, epochal protuberances in the Kansas landform and mindscape, where opposing forces coalesce: in the Gaslight’s neon sign, for instance, wherein “name / and the illumination are the same,” or when the poem synthesizes sea and prairie; or when it envisions Kansas rising up (etymologically part “evil”?) from that ur-sea, like a Midwestern Heliopolis, as the centerpiece of an archetypal creation myth—that “mythic relation one must become...”). At the end of the poem, a formal merger similarly occurs. Under the command of Robert E. Lee, who led the forces against Brown Harper’s Ferry, the earlier era’s battle marches across the synapse of history (its “strobe”), formalized in the vertical boundary (like the embattled state line) dividing the parallel chronologies of verse on the page, into the column of current events. Throughout the poem, however, that vertical frontier creates a strange, polysemous, sometimes tense, correspondence between the verse elements that flank it. Because “Osawatomie” is unpublished, I provide its full text:

When John Brown
was open for set-
tlement Kansas
was fifty-four
years old

He was born in
Connecticut in
May, 1800, the
sixth generation
from the Mayflower
Calvinist, he drank
water, Mystic, he

The dictation of Lawrence
is the assembly of events
of unbroken records of itself
unbroken by cessation, unbroken
therefore by Death Lawrence
is the unclosed casket
Lawrence is the live body
of Captain Brown Lawrence
coincides with its own time
and is the same flash
as its own body and its black strobe
measuring the year
the timing gear
~~was~~ set by Osawatomie

He defined the nature of phase ~~there~~
He made known the system

was trained to Anti-
Slavery in the
family of Owen
Brown his father

and local variables of death

From Mt. Oread
the Gaslight coincides
with that strobe, the name
and the illumination are the same
the victum
has become the color of the name
the victum of 1970
was removed by stretcher
a refinement whereby
we do not handle directly
our own bodies ?who
was the father of the blackman of July
we need the name in Order
to honor the order
that is the Law

He passed his early
childhood in the
Western Reserve, from
Ohio to New York to
Pennsylvania to Ohio
again to Connecticut
to Massachusetts and
finally to New York
once more

He was a tanner farmer
sheepman horseman
woolman bankrupt in
much litigation He
was twice married
the father of twenty
children eight of whom
died in infancy

Early in the spring
of 1855, five
of his sons

The Son and the Father
are of unbroken value
if the energy of the value is
unbroken there will be
a concentration of value
There must be no further inflation
of Death

~~To be unbroken we will flow~~
Into the time passing
our genetic time
we will flow into
our natural time
which is the sea, we will

We are a Gerund:
Bleeding Kansas
a noun whose quality
resides in its in-
ability to stop
and we must protect
the leadership as
Nicholas did his son

Kansas is a sea
of land
you ride the waves
of land
you rock on the horse over
the land

As early as 1834 Brown
had shown some active
interest in the education
of negro children, first
in Pennsylvania then in
Ohio In 1948 the Brown
family became associated
with an enterprise of
Gerrit Smith in Northern
New York where a hundred
thousand acres of land
were offered to negro
families for settlement

At the same time of the Fugitive
Slave Act of 1850 Brown
organized among the people
of Springfield Massachusetts
The United States League
of Gileadites

He instructed them:
Should one of your number
be arrested you must col-
lect together as quickly
as possible so as to out-
number your adversaries
who are taking an active
part against you Let no
ablebodied man appear on

flow down
to our allegory
which on earth is the sea
where that which is raised
above it in remoteness
seeks to be

Where the ice-vaults of Greenland are
the memory of the turning earth
is stored

The Kansas excitement
is our infancy, it is perpetual
when our children die under
the blank roof of the porch
of the Gaslight which is
our heavenly sky with the stars
sprayed out and we are carried
from it following a mortalism of the head
which has ears only for what we claim
This is no particular death
This is a completely general Death
All is the incident, All is that activity
Everybody is under there

the ground unequipped or
with his weapons exposed
to view: let that be under-
stood beforehand Your

plans must be known only
to yourself, and with the
understanding that all
traitors must die wherever
caught and proven to be
guilty “Whosoever is
fearful or afraid, let
him return and depart
early from Mr. Gilead”
Give all cowards an op-
portunity to show it on
condition of holding their
peace. Do not delay one
moment after you are ready
You will lose all your
resolutions if you do Let
the first blow be the signal
for all to engage: and when
engaged do not do your work
by halves, but make clean
work with your enemies,—
and be sure you meddle not
with any others By going
about your business quietly,
you will get the job disposed
of before the number that an
uproar would bring together
can collect; and you will
have the advantage of those
who come out against you, for
they will be wholly unprepared
with either equipments or
matured plans; all with them
will be confusion and terror
Your enemies will be slow
to attack you after you have
done up the work nicely; and
if they should, they will have
to encounter your white friends
as well as you; for you may
safely calculate on a division
of the whites, and may by

A disgust for the military
is not a disgust for killing
it is a disgust for the military
which is a disgust for yourself
and a desire for the lowest possible
degree of association, a farm
on the mountain and a cow in the barn
a chicken on the roost and an egg
in the box, tight
a car in the garage
a bathroom in the sky, a knowing wink
to the Boys in the Band
and a firm grip around
that thing in your hand

That aintchur attitude is it?

What you are possessed by
doesn't really matter

that means get to an honorable
parley

The exaggerated notion
is the real notion

Captain Brown seized
that which had value

The fugitives were
landed in Canada

The rest of the horses
were sold in Cleveland

John Brown was in motion there
only one year He wanted
to effect the redemption of Kansas

Colonel Lee
he arrived at midnight
with a white light
and some D.C. marines

The march from Kennedy farm
began eight o'clock
Sunday evening Before
midnight the bridges, the
town, the arsenal were
in the hands of the Invaders
without a gun
having been fired Before noon
on Monday
forty citizens of the neighborhood
had been assembled as prisoners
and held as hostages for the safety
of members of the party
who might be taken
Before noon Kagi strongly urged
escape to the mountains
But Brown said Nay
for sympathy for his prisoners
and their distressed families¹⁴⁵⁴

Brown's strength as an orator, his steadfast character and unshakeable sense of purpose—"make clean / work with your enemies,— / and be sure you meddle not / with any others"—make him a likely subject for Dorn's work; and his chronic poverty, his nomadism, and his terrifyingly emboldened self-stylizations—newspapers constructed an "Osawatomie Brown" of mythic proportions—were also conditions to which Dorn could easily relate.¹⁴⁵⁵ Franklin Sanborn—"the Concord schoolteacher whose students included children of

¹⁴⁵⁴ Dorn, "Osawatomie," original manuscript, Folder 609, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁴⁵⁵ See Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 28.

Emerson, John Brown, and Henry James, Sr.,” and who later formed an Emancipation League with Brown, connecting him with funding and arms—called Brown “a modern Oliver Cromwell,” a stern, puritanical, but assiduous and dynamic leader. Sanborn was impressed with Brown’s “tall, slender, [and] commanding figure,” which possessed, he said, a kind of strict, “military bearing.”¹⁴⁵⁶ By the time Brown was twelve, however, he was vocally “disgusted” by the military, whose “profanity, disobedience, and mutinous talk,” he’d witnessed when accompanying his father, Owen, or trekking alone, from Ohio to Michigan, to supply the Detroit front with beef and horses during the War of 1812.¹⁴⁵⁷ Afterwards, Brown steadfastly refused to either “train, *or drill*,” for the rest of life. In the same way, he abstained from voting in presidential elections after 1830, having also grown “disgusted” with slaveholding Whig Party members like Henry Clay, and slaveholding Democrats like Andrew Jackson. When Brown took the stand at the end of his own trial, having already been sentenced to hang, his “alignments [were] like the ligaments of a starved man, very clear,” and he accepted his fate with pious confidence in the justice of his cause.¹⁴⁵⁸

[H]ad I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends whether father, mother, brother, sister, wife or children, or any of that class, and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right. Every man in this Court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment. ... Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done.¹⁴⁵⁹

This kind of furious independence is an unimpeachable counterpart of Brown’s intractable stance not only with regard to the abolition of slavery, but also in support of the labor movement of the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁴⁶⁰ And it seems fitting in light of his unpredictable eccentricities. Dorn calls Brown a “Mystic,” and the rendering in “Osawatomie” might suggest some relation between Brown and the earlier itinerant healer, Cabeza de Vaca, who, Dorn writes, “talked too much, walked, was lonely, and had meaning and cognizance, was

¹⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 4, 6, 208, 290-91.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Edward Dorn to LeRoi Jones, 10 October 1961, *Chicago Review*, 49:3/4 & 50:1 (Summer 2004): 56.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 354.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 80.

followed, there was an awe.”¹⁴⁶¹ Brown had worked as a tanner for the opportunity, most of all, to be close to animals; as a shepherd he was compassionate and fastidious. Biographer David Reynolds writes: “When his adult sheep contracted a disease called grub-in-the-head, he ensured the survival of their newborns by spending hours holding the lambs to their supine mothers for feeding. Often he would revive an apparently dead lamb by bringing it into the house, bathing it and wrapping it in blankets, and spoon-feeding it warm milk.”¹⁴⁶² If this singular, disarming ingenuity didn’t win him followers and funding outright, it nonetheless attracted the oral support from many of the country’s leading intellectuals, including Frederick Douglass, who refused to participate in what he deemed the rash and ill-devised Harper’s Ferry raid, but lauded Brown with respect and a truly egalitarian vision: “History has no better illustration of pure, disinterested benevolence,” Douglass writes. “It was not Caucasian for Caucasian—white man for white man; not rich man for rich man, but Caucasian for Ethiopian—white man for black man—rich man for poor man—the man admitted and respected, for the man despised and rejected.”¹⁴⁶³

The day Brown hanged in Virginia, Abraham Lincoln was in Kansas, “Dec 1859, Elwood, Troy, Atchison / spoke from the hotel steps in already long / decadent Leavenworth / looking back / across the river to far / certain Washington,” Irby writes in his long poem, *To Max Douglas*.¹⁴⁶⁴ According to the Lawrence *Republican* editor at the time, Brown’s momentous hanging was a public event beyond compare: “It is safe to say that the death of no man in America has ever produced so profound a sensation. A feeling of deep and sorrowful indignation seems to possess the masses.”¹⁴⁶⁵ Dorn’s “transhistorical” collage of Brown, mewling in the “unclosed casket” of Lawrence, in August, 1970, compliments the areal perspective and methodical accretions of Irby’s long poem, for which Dorn supplied an introduction.¹⁴⁶⁶ *To Max Douglas* seeks the syncretic juncture of the poet’s expanded, mobile, and conflicted consciousness with the discordant, Heraclitean capacity of the northeastern Kansas/northwestern Missouri locale, preserved as it is in the memory, and delivered in a vision “all at once, as Freud saw / all the ages of Rome superimposed in one

¹⁴⁶¹ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 33.

¹⁴⁶² Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist*, 46.

¹⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood*, 356; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 209.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Dorn supplied an introduction for the second edition of *To Max Douglas*, published by Tansy in 1974.

vision / as on the palm.”¹⁴⁶⁷ Irby’s poem discovers Kansas, “in the whirlpool of the continent,” the heartland fed and torn by violence at either end of the century, full of “*exiles*,” and carved by exilic motions, leaving behind bodies, or boulders that don’t belong: “the dark age as of ice again / of the quartzite boulders / as far South as Lawrence / driving the heart before them / into exile...”¹⁴⁶⁸ Not placement, but displacement in “the sea” of Kansas—here only “fixation” is possible. Like the Shoshone youths, whom Dorn recalls “testing” death regularly (“...not any *great* thing. It’s either there or it’s not. And if it’s not there then you know it wasn’t, so you test it again...”), among this mid-continent exile, in the minutiae of daily activity, of drinking beer, say, Irby observes Douglas testing his spot, feeling for his *locus*: “in the space of a beer / swaller you held / your breath / in just plain desperation in / between those Sunday points of Northeast Kansas / that isn’t home / it’s what the heart is given / to make home out of.”¹⁴⁶⁹

As an instrument, like John Brown, specially tuned to sound the clashing wavelengths of his place in time, the song Douglas composed, or the symphony that pulsed through him, also destroyed him. A physically loose but assertive presence, tall, with a thick wave of long blonde hair, Douglas reminded Lee Chapman of a bottomlands Oscar Wilde.¹⁴⁷⁰ An accomplished painter by the age of seventeen, Douglas then quit painting to take up writing, and to record his deep interest in local history, which included “collecting rural artifacts and farm implements during trips through the Kansas and Missouri countryside.”¹⁴⁷¹ In the spring of 1969, as a student in Dorn’s class at KU, where he met Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley, Douglas also corresponded with John Martin at Black Sparrow Press, and in fact, had already published a short volume of verse before the semester began.¹⁴⁷² In the summer after Dorn’s class, Douglas attended a “Creative Arts” workshop in San Diego, and then traveled to Berkeley, where stayed briefly with David Bromige and Sherril Jaffe, and met Irby, who was on his way to Oregon the following day: “We only met one time,” Irby

¹⁴⁶⁷ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Dorn “The Poet, the People, the Spirit,” in *Views*, 107; Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Lee Chapman, interview by author, Lawrence, Kansas, 10 September 2005.

¹⁴⁷¹ Douglas, *Collected Poems*, 175.

¹⁴⁷² Douglas’s first book was called *Bottomlands*. See *Collected Poems*: “Things go well wth Dorn, tho I hvn’t had mch person contact wth him. On one occasion, an invaluable reading list. Also read his copy of *Teachings of Don Juan*, remarkable book. Public reading of “Songs” & more recently GS. 1 & 2. Brilliant! Creeley, himself, due soon for a reading & Duncan in May, on Walt Whitman’s birthday....”(168)

writes in *To Max Douglas*, “at Bromige’s, talked of Dorn, of Ratzel and Sauer / before dinner, never again...”¹⁴⁷³ But Douglas’s self-destructive drinking and later drug abuse tainted his relationships, or at least his anxious sense of them, and his “saturnine” disposition lead him to become more and more vulnerable to criticism and doubt. He wrote to John Martin in September, 1969:

Let me acknowledge the awkwardness of my behavior re Creative Arts/San Diego. ...If I offended anyone wth whom you are in touch, please convey my apologies. Wakoski sez I was criticized on account of my silence... No word from Creeley, again. Busy fucking, doubtless. Still, no call for me to get smart, I guess. Aint my place. ... Creeley, you are a great poet. Will you please send my crap back here to Missouri, where it belongs....¹⁴⁷⁴

Douglas admitted to having also written Duncan regarding the San Diego conference, and earlier events in Kansas, “trying in my own hard-headed way to apologize for some indefensible things I/d sed in Kansas, while drunk & hv continued to regret,” he wrote to Martin in early 1970.¹⁴⁷⁵ After he’d witnessed Douglas repeatedly drink himself into a state of self-loathing, Dorn, John Moritz recalls, once sarcastically suggested, “‘you know, Max, if you really want to kill yourself, you ought to just shoot heroin.’ But Max took that as advice!” Moritz exclaimed.¹⁴⁷⁶ Or does that give Dorn too much inimical credit? Recalling Douglas’s apparently reckless habits, Irby writes: “[S]ome people can make it without drugs, you said / Ed told you, but I can’t.”¹⁴⁷⁷ The sympathy in those lines is a wandering “I”—the “you” and the “I” share an antecedent—a thought defined far beyond the speaker.

Douglas’s abrupt death by heroin overdose on October 8, 1970, in the grip of his own time’s struggle (the “underground railway now / is dope not slaves”), combined the violence of Brown’s end with the excess of Olson’s, just ten months before. The “grief of the close,” Irby wrote to Dorn, divulged some lasting symbolic import in Douglas’s “parting”: “his death was suddenly the occasion for so much to get said – however strung out & hodgepodged – to him, or where he was from...”¹⁴⁷⁸ Like Brown in “Osawatomie,” in Irby’s poem Douglas is a figure of compressed geomantic attention, about whom in all directions the fabric of territorial history unfurls: “so there you stood on St Joe / at the *wholly* crossroads centrum / of

¹⁴⁷³ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Douglas, *Collected Poems*, 169.

¹⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Moritz, interview by author, Lawrence, Kansas, 10 March 2006.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 12 February 1971, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

every whichaway America / underfoot / which direction now / does *distance* take / that aches in the feet?"¹⁴⁷⁹ Douglas's peculiar routes of travel—"you were crossing South of the Pony Express / North of the Santa Fe trail, askew / from the Oregon utterly and at / right angles to Lewis and Clark"—contribute to an always emergent hieroglyph patterned by migration on the plains—"all these *grids*, Max."¹⁴⁸⁰ Of Douglas's presence, the "child of the crossing," and the "emblematic" quality of his death in Irby's restless threnody, Dorn writes in his introduction:

Max Douglas, child of the crossing. From the Missouri bank, but imbued with a Kansas tendency to flow out over the western swells, a grand inclined table. The diesels breath hard going out to Denver, easy coming back. Max was quite Saturn, full of the sensation of his own brilliance. In his short life he was able to modify Olson's procedures to fit his own situation. But he also had a fine ear for river-plain exactitudes, probably inherited. His creative psychosis came simply as his share of the normal meteorology of his homeland. His hunger for the power of language was his own.¹⁴⁸¹

A mesh of inheritance: in Douglas Dorn saw a version of Olson—the polis in the person, the areal perspective—"the areal person – suddenly gone," Irby wrote to Dorn, in early 1971, after Douglas's death.¹⁴⁸² In a transfusion he names "Maximus," Olson became Gloucester—"the GROUND of / sd poet's (TOTAL) knowing/being," Douglas writes in his *Vortex* epitaph for Olson.¹⁴⁸³ To the proprioceptive properties of Olson's expanded *locus*, Dorn's poem "from Gloucester Out" ascribes a centripetal and centrifugal pulse: "he / walks / by the sea / in my memory / and sees all things and to him / are presented at night / the whispers of the most flung shores / from Gloucester out."¹⁴⁸⁴ Douglas received such "presentations" and "whispers," messages indivisible from the momentary sensations that contain them, organized by the landscape's contours, elements, and sudden compositions: "crows / as if / suddenly / a furnace / had been / stoked," Douglas writes in "Crows," from his earliest book, *Hound Dog Band*.¹⁴⁸⁵ In the third section of his "Northwest Missouri," for instance, the paths of migration and root-growth crisscross in an instant of anthropomorphic

¹⁴⁷⁹ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸¹ Dorn, introduction to *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁸² Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 12 February 1971, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁴⁸³ Douglas, epigraph for Olson in *Vortex*, full page photocopy, gift from John Moritz; see also Douglas, "Charles Olson," *Tansy* 5 (spring/summer 1972), 42-43.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 91.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Douglas, *Collected Poems*, 3.

clarity, which either mocks, censures, or reaches out to the isolate despair of the human world, but cuts off before disclosure:

beside clear running
water dry leaves and
rocks like down

in the same bed
the tracks of small
animals in the mud

a tree upright still
by virtue of what roots
the bank has not abandoned

leans over the water
which mirrors it
nestling a beer can

in a crotch
of its roots¹⁴⁸⁶

The April 1969 issue of *Caterpillar*, which featured a poem by Dorn, also featured a number of poems by Douglas. “I was delighted to see poems of Max Douglas in the last Caterpillar,” Martin wrote to Dorn on April 14, 1969, and with disingenuous naivete, probed a bit further: “Do you know Douglas personally? (I think he’s in one of your classes now.) A potentially vital and good young poet. What do you think?”¹⁴⁸⁷ Dorn no doubt agreed; Douglas, he later wrote, was a “native genius,” and consequently tormented by the rituals and “meteorology of his homeland.” Douglas confesses his night beat in “Wathena: Wednesday Night (The Sacraments,” which appeared in *Caterpillar* that spring: “[D]rinking my beer too fast / im drunk by ten / taking a whizz in the cold / because i don’t like pissing by twos in the back /

¹⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 52.

¹⁴⁸⁷ John Martin to Edward Dorn, 14 April 1969, Folder 169, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss. Martin was in rather frequent correspondence with Douglas and knew very well Dorn had met him, as for example, Douglas’s letter of January 14, 1969 illustrates: “took the liberty of enclosing yr letter of Oct. in a folio tenderd to the university for admission. i needed the beefing up badly, due to unfavorable transcripts. met Dorn briefly before he had left for new your and learnd he will review sch folios personally. had i known this, i wd not hv included it. in any event, he seemd amenable to hving me in his class. yr offer to write is thotful, but in view of the above events, i cannot come to a decision as to whether it wd be appropriate. if y. consider it wd be, then by all means the mention wd be appreciated.”(*Collected Poems*, 167)

pleasure, socrates sd, is to be attained only thru moderation / in all things . / more difficult than spacing steps / to walk from tie to tie / following a night freight back to the bar.”¹⁴⁸⁸

“[A]ll these *grids*, Max / we travel on,” Irby wonders in *To Max Douglas*, “where did you put your great big *feet* / pissing of that tie / behind Wathena?”¹⁴⁸⁹ The “crossroads centrum” at which Douglas stood is multi-dimensional, flanked not merely by what’s East and West, what’s North and South—“the deepest routes of movement on this continent / are North and South”—but also by what’s above and below, of the ground, or the threshold of existence: “*Did you walk*,” Irby’s epigraph (quoted from Olson’s “The Death of Europe”) asks, “*on your own unplanted self*?”¹⁴⁹⁰ In that restless Kansas loam the roots of ‘home,’ the earthen roots, find placement to the degree that the mind’s “aerial” roots, “having been in the air so long,” are “fixed,” to absorb and transmit their cosmological relations. “[W]hat does it ‘mean’ to be from Kansas?” Dorn asks in his introduction to Irby’s *Douglas* poem. “Not grass roots,” he continues, “That’s the broken wing dragging across the cowpiles of the republican party. Aerial roots? Yes... No matter how far [Irby’s] body wanders, He never wanders.”¹⁴⁹¹ The mid-continental, transhistorical tree of the *Douglas* poem grows both ways, a “crown” in the air mirrored by roots in the ground—the “crown” and the “coroner,” that share their root in the Latin, *corona*, which is itself a celestial projection, “a rarefied gaseous envelope of the sun and other stars,” circling the central fire.¹⁴⁹² In preliminary notes for his introduction, Dorn scribbles: “*To Max Douglas*... is a completed and very satisfactory interlieved retrospection... ‘intent upon the highest vista’”¹⁴⁹³ “Interlieved,” a word Dorn created, seems to retain these opposing vertical motions: its second half from the Latin, *levare*, “to raise up”; and its first, as a verb, “inter,” suggesting burial, the lowering of a corpse into a tomb, or as a prefix, “inter,” meaning “between, among,” and “mutually, reciprocally.”¹⁴⁹⁴

Irby moves “among,” certainly, those “unshacklers / of deep spirits” that his poem registers—“we both, Max, face out / to reach the Great Plains in the back of the head”—and the poem is a communal, and “reciprocal” act: “I wonder if you’ve met / King, will meet him

¹⁴⁸⁸ Douglas, “Wathena : Wednesday Night / The Sacraments,” *Caterpillar* 7, vol. 2, no. 2 (April 1969): 13.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁹¹ Dorn, introduction to *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁹² *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “crown.”

¹⁴⁹³ Edward Dorn, original mss., Folder 453, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁴⁹⁴ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “inter” and “lever.”

yet, as I would greet / and question him if I were where you / *see* through the eye of your needle / where *do* the dead meet each other / or is it only here again?...¹⁴⁹⁵ Maybe not reciprocal, but the poem weaves a mutual act of resurrection, of “raising up,” in that the insights and offerings of Douglas’s work constitute a legend for the psychocosmological map of Irby’s journey. Douglas himself is simultaneously Virgil, the poet’s guide down under, and a spirit he might meet there—for example, in the Dante’s Seventh Circle, ringed by burning sand, where those who committed suicide, those “violent against nature,” are confined, “puckering their brows, they pried / Like an old tailor at his needle’s eye.”¹⁴⁹⁶ Douglas “was quite saturn,” Dorn’s introduction comments, an observation that moves in two directions, toward the galactic (the ringed, sixth planet) and the edaphic, the agricultural, negotiated by the deific in between—since Saturn is the Roman god of husbandry, equivalent to the Greek, Cronus, who ate his own children. In “Late October After Death of a Friends Father,” Douglas writes: “[S]pate of kernels / over kid flapping / the too long sleeves of / his fathers shirt... / ...sad to look at mowd fields / blank as barns / tho hungry crows scrutinize them.” His awareness, blown in the “spate of kernels,” remains aloft, lifted into the evening’s thin air, and there, in the poem’s final lines, “something dark / dangling from a tree / against the sunset/against venus: / net of worms.”¹⁴⁹⁷ If the continent’s edge is a “hinge” for Irby, “to hang *loose* by,” a coastal pivot by which to enter again “the Bloody Land”—or “henge,” we might hear, that ground of enchantment and incantation that has vertical powers, so Douglas’s death swings memory and poesis in two directions. His death opens an interstice through which the tangled circuitries of person, place, and time, of landform, idea, and love—“born on the breathing / of a distant harmonium,” Dorn writes at the beginning of Book II—surge into Irby’s *locus of experience* (a kind of “henge” of its own)—“we both, Max, face out / to reach the Great Plains in the back of the head,” Irby writes.¹⁴⁹⁸ All these unraveling networks in the “refractory space of the plains,” form the net in which Irby’s recollections are cradled. Thus, near the end of *To Max Douglas*, Irby’s vision, “all at once,” projects the violence “forever at the heart of things”—sowed and ceaselessly upending the Great Plains, sprawling West from the bluffs of St. Joe, high above the Missouri River:

¹⁴⁹⁵ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated. This “King” is not Martin Luther King, as one might expect, but the geologist of the West, Clarence King.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Dante Canto XV, 20-21

¹⁴⁹⁷ Douglas, “Late October After Death of a Friends Father,” *Caterpillar* 7 (April 1969): 12.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 45; Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

looking, as you always
seemed to, West over the river

into Kansas, or along the Missouri shore
going that way – South

and West – the plat of settlement
is instantly more open

thataway – on the road map
all the mycelium mat of roads

stays in Missouri, East, behind the head
behind the eyes, before the river

the shift of more than half a century
from Thomson in Kansas City, looking East

indeed to Patee, and with the
Southern leas distrustful

of the Kansas freaks and sprees
of peanutbutter pie

border people are always strange
river people even more so

together, not just *unease*
of *edge*, but watery

deep inland introspection
subject to inundation

and heavy mud, the boundary between
Kansas and Missouri is a zone

as violent of movement
as the San Andreas Fault

John Brown is still not a casual visitor
Border Ruffians still

wait above the flood plain
their clodhopper boots gunked with mud

stockpiling homemade shotguns
clubs and bombs, the high febrile

acid gorge rising in the blood
to break wide open this new *day*

the bright wild *blood* time coming, Quantrill
still waits to raid Lawrence, only from

within this time, the *rise*
is high tide *here* already

hard at hand

•

The woods around Osawatomie
are as wild, the thickets

on Potawatomie Creek just
as dense and matted beard

as John Brown's sons' farms
John Brown's grimeyed cutlass *hacking* massacre

a hundred years? anyone with sense would *still*
be scared *shitless* to go out there on foot at night

high, and knowing
what we do?¹⁴⁹⁹

For Irby, Douglas's death (again, the "henge" of relation) both inheres and unleashes the emulsive violence contained in his environment, and as a loss it indicated some essential, treacherous, ever just-out-of-reach synthesis with the "totality" of the landscape. For Dorn, the Douglas poem represented Irby's dedication to the kind of research requisite of a poet, in order "to recognize what's amazing and what's not, and how it's amazing and how it's not." In the sense of the poem as a way toward knowledge, not the completely formulated issuance of a self-expression, but evidence of the path discovery takes, the two poets work along closely related lines. In a lecture near the end of his life, Dorn enumerates these innately poetic "recognitions," and the *work*, not *feeling*, it takes to get there:

The point I want to make is about the call of the creative imagination to ... make certain discoveries directly because of its energy, as a result of going out of its energy of the imagination; "to image" a place that you've never seen, or visited in any sense except your mind; also,

¹⁴⁹⁹ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

how the act of researching a poem, and treating it as if it's a trowel into archives so the past sheds a very different kind of light on the text. I would say that the connection is you. If you're going to be isolated—this isn't an isolating situation. You are the connection and it calls for deep study. Poetry springs from acquired knowledge and the exercise of one's native curiosity. Self-expression as a motive for the production of poetry is almost invariably an interference with the deadening of insight.¹⁵⁰⁰

The "I" of self-expressive, lyric poetry is inflated, expansive to a overwhelmingly obscuring degree—whose "I" is it? In "Osawatomie" Dorn's interlaced syntax confuses then conflates Brown and Kansas—"When John Brown / was open for set- / tlement Kansas was fifty-four / years old." A year later, in a poem titled, "an oecological prophecy," wherein the "traditional distinction between sense and reference" dissolves, and comic metonymies abound (i.e. "Texas, some day that'll all be beef / ...Nebraska, someday that'll all be dreary..."), Dorn gazes upon Kansas as if from a great distance: "Someday," he writes, "that'll all be / Ken Irby."¹⁵⁰¹

Dorn's droll prediction is partly realized by the engagement and collaboration of "native curiosity" that Irby's poem to Douglas made possible, just as Douglas's death occasioned the poem's gathering of its varied sources. The production of *To Max Douglas* appropriately incorporated, and subsequently drew together a number of the the figures its couplets invoke. Nearing the book's release, Moritz wrote to Dorn from Lawrence in the summer of 1971:

Ken Irby due in town very soon and that should settle everything that has been lingering in the mail for these last three months, and then off to the printer. God, I am still amazed/excited about this piece even after all the mechanical steps of lay-out and over and over with proof reading. But how he scopes Malin, Webb, Sauer and then throws in that bit from Cage about peanut butter pie leaves a big print in this area. Also, the piece is true to Max, I think of the line something like I cried when he left but was glad to see him gone—again I'm very happy to have a part with this poem. And it shall be good to meet Irby after all this time of knowing each other only through the mail. It'll be good to set down with him over some wine and talk.¹⁵⁰²

¹⁵⁰⁰ Dorn, "Poetry Is a Difficult Labor," in *Ed Dorn Live*, 127.

¹⁵⁰¹ Dorn, reading in Toronto, 2 February 1973, at [Penn Sound](http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Dorn/A-Space_1973/Dorn-Ed_01_Part-1_A-Space-Reading_Toronto_02-02-73.mp3), n.d., <http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Dorn/A-Space_1973/Dorn-Ed_01_Part-1_A-Space-Reading_Toronto_02-02-73.mp3> (13 May 2008).

¹⁵⁰² John Moritz to Edward Dorn, n.d. (summer 1971), Folder 182, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

Perhaps Dorn had suggested to John Moritz, fellow student and friend of Douglas, that Tansy publish Irby's book. In February 1971, Dorn received a letter from Irby containing an early draft of the poem—"look, please tell me anything you can abt these... especially the one for Max – I've been at it since Oct & down so long I don't know up no more, or out of it, or where..."—wherein Irby also wondered about publishers who might be interested: "...haven't sent it to [John] Martin yet, but what can he do w/ just a small bk? Wd/cd Harvey Brown? ...Maybe mimeo it myself well, hog balls & wormwood, no matter now, I want you to see it, & I'll fret the other shit later..."¹⁵⁰³ In any case, the poem was published by Tansy and its release became the occasion for Moritz and Irby to meet face to face. Dorn's introduction would not appear until a later edition of the poem, but Douglas' parting and Irby's subsequent poem actually occasioned the second attempt at collaborating between the two poets.

"I am particularly pleased to think of being in Kansas," Dorn had confessed to George Worth, before his residency in spring 1968, "because I have been increasingly interested in that area of the Great Plains, for instance, in Idaho I read the books I could get hold of by Malin."¹⁵⁰⁴ Originally born in North Dakota, but a lifelong resident and professor in Lawrence, James C. Malin was an historian/philosopher of eclectic interests and varied sources. In his expansive and candid preface to *Grasslands of North America*, a painstakingly detailed analysis of landscape formation and a remarkably comprehensive overview of scholarship regarding the subject, Malin argues for the interrelated efficacy of responsible historiography in the post-World War II struggle over ethics and politics: "Freedom can be defended only by positive action; by presenting constructively the principles of history to serve as guides along the path of freedom. There can be no concessions on principles; to compromise is to betray freedom."¹⁵⁰⁵ While his steadfast declarations probably appealed to Dorn, it was Malin's methodological synthesis of multiple disciplines—the physical sciences, philosophy, local history, poetry—and his assiduous attention to the intimate particulars of landscape that resonate most with Dorn's interests. Malin's is a scattered body of work, in theme and press. The previous October, Irby had sent Dorn an impressive annotated bibliography of Malin's publications—matters ranging from "early theatrical troupes visiting Fort Scott," to "the history of the bluestem pastures," to

¹⁵⁰³ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 12 February 1971, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 28 January 1967, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹⁵⁰⁵ James C. Malin, *The Grasslands of North America* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1967), v.

“reflections on agricultural policies of the U.S. in relation to a mechanized world.”¹⁵⁰⁶ Thus, compelled by their shared interest in Malin’s diverse, and dispersed catalogue, Irby and Dorn contemplated editing a collection of Malin’s writings. In December 1968, Michael Brodhead, a friend of Irby’s and former student of Malin’s, presented the idea to his elder teacher, who “was agreeable, interested (hopeful, probably—he’s been disappointed so many times in such concerns),” Irby wrote to Dorn, in February 1969.¹⁵⁰⁷ Concerned about disappointing Malin should the book not materialize, Irby encouraged Dorn, then living in Lawrence, to visit the aging historian: “you should go see him, of course, & Grier can introduce you, or see that it is arranged, set up—M. is a strangely shy man, sitting in a rocker turned ¾ away from Grier & me on the sofa, so he turned to us each time he spoke but otherwise faced away, into the NE more or less, & the stretches of history—now he’s much more of an invalid, I gather, & doesn’t even get out of the house—....”¹⁵⁰⁸ Whether Dorn visited Malin that semester is uncertain, and though Irby queries the possibility of a collection as late as 1971, the book never got underway. Instead, the introduction for *To Max Douglas*, like the “victim of 1970” in “Osawatomie,” presented another occasion for Dorn to trace over the geography of his 1969 stay in Kansas, and properly to address those presences who filled its air.

Those presences were multiple that spring. “Spring seems to produce an abundance of that stuff,” Dorn wrote to Olson, in July, 1969, of his productivity in Kansas, “but now the summer is dryer, very much so – I haven’t done anything much since coming here beyond laying the ghost not of Lawrence but the Idea of Lawrence...”¹⁵⁰⁹ Dorn probably refers here to D.H. Lawrence, on whose former New Mexico ranch he was the writer-in-residence in the summer of 1969. But the “idea of Lawrence,” of the town, clung vividly to his imagination as well. The local “freak” and Black Power commotion, his work’s popularity among the young residents, packed with experimental writers, artists, and personalities, and the intimate excitement of Dunbar’s pregnancy, all this gave Lawrence an elemental energy, mixing chaos with insouciance in the Oread, and blending, on the page, the “excitement / [of] our infancy” with the “local variables of death.”

¹⁵⁰⁶ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 11 October 1968, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 1 February 1969, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 1 February 1971, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss. Ed Grier, who edited Whitman’s notebooks and played a significant role in establishing the American Studies department at KU, was a literature professor, and friend of Irby’s.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 18 July 1969, Folder Dorn 1969, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

But man has a soul, though you can't locate it either in his purse or his pocket-book or his heart or his stomach or his head. The wholeness of a man is his soul... [W]hat we think we do is not very important. We never really know what we are doing. Either we are materialistic instruments, like Benjamin [Franklin], or we move in the gesture of creation, from our deepest self, usually unconscious. We are only the actors, we are never wholly the authors of our own deeds or works. IT is the author, the unknown inside us or outside us. The best we can do is to try to hold ourselves in unison with the deeps which are inside us. And the worst we can do is to try to have things our way, when we run counter to IT, and in the long run get our knuckles rapped for our presumption.

– D.H. Lawrence¹⁵¹⁰

23. *The Constant Present Snap of Eternity, Take One*

As the 1969 spring semester got underway, and the “leaden skies” of mid-February slowly revealed “sunny Kansas days,” Dorn and Dunbar were settled in at 1420 Kentucky Street, where they began to entertain a regular turnover of guests, and engage in local festivities.¹⁵¹¹ “The spring came and the trees are turning green but it hasn’t been so hot and sunny as everyone said it would be,” Dunbar wrote to Val Raworth in late April. “I’m reading quite a bit and keeping myself busy like that. [Robert] Duncan’s here for three weeks and a lot of people passing through. Race’s first wife Lucia visited us while you were visiting him! Most weeks I go to Ed’s poetry class, tonight Duncan will be taking it.”¹⁵¹² Despite the recurrent fire-bombings, acts of arsons, and intermittent presence of the National Guard, Lawrence pleased the newly-wed couple. “This place is good enough,” Dorn wrote to Olson in late February, “but the institution is like wading through mills most of the time – I don’t go up there that often anyway and mills is supposed to be good for the skin.”¹⁵¹³ Instead, most of the couple’s afternoons, Dunbar recalls, were spent in the Oread neighborhood, drinking beer at the Gaslight Tavern or the Rock Chalk Café and talking to the younger, “freak” crowd. “Ed, I think, found most of the English Dept. types pretty boring,” George Kimball remembers, “and though most of us were younger than he, preferred our company. ... Ed and Jenny attended most of the parties that seemed to occur back then ... which might last for a couple of days, and there was something happening nearly every night. We also spent a lot of

¹⁵¹⁰ D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1961), 10; 20.

¹⁵¹¹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 20 February 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Mss.

¹⁵¹² Jennifer Dunbar Dorn to Val Raworth, 29 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁵¹³ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, n.d. (spring 1969), Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

time just hanging out at the house he and Jenny had rented that year.”¹⁵¹⁴ Aside from the time they spent in the house on Kentucky, the epicenter of social activities for the couple, and for most of young Lawrence, was somewhere just up the hill from Dorn’s and Dunbar’s house, in the vicinity of the Oread.

Soon to become the grounds for multiple shootouts between the “street people” and the National Guard, the Oread was a vibrant and bizarre community, “where people can smoke their dope and play their guitars,” one resident remarked.¹⁵¹⁵ These few blocks gave Lawrence the reputation as a “friendly place for wayward freaks,” placing it on an “Oregon trail for hippies.”¹⁵¹⁶ Of the more than two thousand communes that the *New York Times* counted nationally in 1970, there were a small cluster, in the spring of 1969, nestled along the Oread block between 12th and 13th streets.¹⁵¹⁷ Eight “freaks” lived together in the “Blue Max,” for example, an eight-by-forty foot trailer, parked in an alley nearby.¹⁵¹⁸ Lawrence Liberation Front members and *Vortex* insurgents planned war on “pig Amerika” in the White House, a commune standing betwixt the two bars that sat at either end of block. To the south was the Gaslight, “a mixed-race deal,” and to the north, the Rock Chalk.¹⁵¹⁹ Operated by a “straight-looking” man named Virgil, who smoked hashish with the customers, the Rock Chalk had a ragtag clientele: “high I.Q. no-fit-ins, returning Vietnam-vets-turned-heads, motorcyclists, yee-haw-screaming-frisbee-flipping-shirtless-Coors-drinking-hemp-picking longhairs who generally landed more than one toke over the line.”¹⁵²⁰ Unlike the “haven” Lawrence appeared to be in the mid-‘60s, a “small colony of gentle hippies smoking grass,” by the end of the decade the environment was rifled with a motley, sometimes scary, collection of inhabitants, including “gypsy, vagabond revolutionaries,” eager for scuffles with the police.¹⁵²¹

¹⁵¹⁴ George Kimball, interview by author, email correspondence, 8 May 2005.

¹⁵¹⁵ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 140.

¹⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁵¹⁷ Zinn 242.

¹⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

¹⁵¹⁹ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 153.

¹⁵²⁰ Louis, “Picking Hemp in Douglas County,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 244. Virgil Cooper was the Rock Chalk owner’s full name, who, Irby fondly remembers, sold beer to regulars out of the back of the bar on Sundays (when Sunday sales were outlawed).

¹⁵²¹ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 140-141.

This atmosphere was bolstered by the fact that, until 1970, local police did little to combat the growing influx of narcotics streaming into the hill neighborhood.¹⁵²² *Vortex* openly advertised drug availability:

ACID—all pretty good and clean.
Green—\$2 a hit.
Blue—slightly better \$2.50-\$2.75 a hit.
PSILOCYBIN—White caps \$2 a hit not quite as good as the—
Pink tabs--\$2.50 a hit. Really Good
MESCALINE—New in town. White caps. Really good dope.
GRASS—Lots of it \$15 a lid varies in quality so shop around.
HASH—Black—\$7 a gram. \$85 an ounce.
KIF—\$60 an ounce—it’s a different stone.
HORSE TRANQUILIZERS—\$2 a cap.
OTHER DOPE—There is some cocaine around in small quantities
but samples of excellent stuff coming in soon have been
tried. The price will be \$5 a gram, give or take a nickel.
DMMDA-2 in town. Amphetamine base. Mellow dropping dope.
Hallucinogenic, euphoric. Dealers look for it, this stuff is
worth being spread around.¹⁵²³

In the spring of 1969, the *University Daily Kansan* ran an extensive, four-part special on marijuana, detailing its growth and harvest in Mexico, its smuggling routes into the U.S., and its enormous popularity among young people.¹⁵²⁴ Marijuana users in the U.S., the first editorial reported, “number in the millions... and most of it—70 to 90 per cent in varying U.S. estimates—comes into the country from Mexico.”¹⁵²⁵ In 1968 alone, there were 38 million border crossings in the California-Arizona district, another editorial observed.¹⁵²⁶ But Kansans had their own supply of grass, *Cannabis sativa*, which was “less potent than the favored Mexican or Vietnamese varieties,” but grew in abundance, “along the edges of fields, river banks and railroad tracks,” where the seeds had been “shaken off trainloads of hemp bound for rope factories.”¹⁵²⁷ Kansans called this specimen “loco weed,” because of the

¹⁵²² Ibid., 140.

¹⁵²³ Preface to *Cows Are Freaky When They Look At You*, unpaginated.

¹⁵²⁴ see Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 141: “Dr. Raymond Schwegler, the director of health services at KU, admitted in 1969 that his staff had been treating LSD users for many year. He claimed that only a few KU students used ‘hard narcotics,’ but that a ‘high-percentage’ used speed, LSD, and marijuana.” See also four part installment on marijuana in *The University Daily Kansan*, in the following footnotes.

¹⁵²⁵ “Grass: From seed to schoolroom,” (part 1 of 4), *The University Daily Kansan*, 19 February 1969.

¹⁵²⁶ “‘Pot’ brought from Mexico,” (part 2 of 4), *The University Daily Kansan*, 20 February 1969.

¹⁵²⁷ John Kifner, “Marijuana: Random Harvest in the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, 7 November 1969, p. 49.

effects it had on farm animals; in 1968, according to the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weeds Division director, 52,050 acres of the state were covered in it.¹⁵²⁸ By 1970, "ditch weed" (another of its names) grew on 68,000 acres, in 71 of the 105 counties.¹⁵²⁹ An early November 1969 issue of the *New York Times*, printed an extensive report about the Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers, which included a large photograph of two members harvesting their fall crop. That year's yield was the biggest in history, law enforcement agents suspected, and most of the domestic supply was centered in northeast Kansas. "The marijuana has been like a super benefit to this community," a KU student told the *Times*, "a lot of people have got new motorcycles and things because of it."¹⁵³⁰ Not surprisingly, ballooning yields reported in national newspapers, and vast expanses of crops became difficult for the police to ignore by the end of the decade. Between July and November 1969, there were "175 arrests for marijuana harvesting" in Kansas, up from forty the year before, and while the same year saw an overall increase in drug arrests by forty-five percent nationally, Kansas witnessed a 110 percent spike.¹⁵³¹ Nevertheless, the "freaks" barreled ahead. George Kimball, head of the Lawrence Liberation Front, ran for county sheriff, and won the Democratic Party's nomination, unopposed. In 1970, self-proclaimed dope-peddler, White Panther and Yippie Party candidate, Philip C. Hill, was elected Justice of the Peace, due to a printing error on the ballot. "Secrecy was the secret of my success," Hill said. "I had the unswerving support of the Democrats without their knowing it." At Hill's inauguration his "administration" passed out packages of Kansas grass, "wrapped in striped paper that looks like an American flag."¹⁵³²

Drugs, therefore, not only infused, but seemed to energize and elevate all activities, and amped-up the strange, the *unfamiliar*. "You couldn't go to a party without weed, at least, being there," George Kimball remembers, "and there was lots of acid and mescaline around too, and occasionally some speed. In spite of this, the one constant was good old 3.2 Kansas beer."¹⁵³³ Originally organized by art students at the university, but soon taken over by the "hippies," the most sensational and memorable party that spring was the Big Eat, an annual

¹⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁵²⁹ Donald Janson, "Rural-State Governors Alarmed by Drug Use," *The New York Times*, 21 July 1970, p. 23.

¹⁵³⁰ Kifner, "Marijuana: Random Harvest in the U.S.," *The New York Times*, 7 November 1969, p. 49.

¹⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁵³² "Hippies in Kansas Rejoice as Brother Is Elected Justice," *The New York Times*, 7 November 1970

¹⁵³³ Kimball, interview by author, email, 8 May 2005.

“gathering of the tribe that lasted two to three days,” recalls Jim McCrary, a local drug aficionado, former student, and close friend of Dorn and Dunbar. A “drug ‘n’ drink ‘n’ fuck picnic,” the Big Eat took place outside of town, on one of the many rural, Douglas County communes around Lawrence—“Chicken roasted on bedsprings and served medium rare, bad beans warmed, tepidly, in a bathtub: that kind of affair,” writes a former Hemp Picker.¹⁵³⁴ “I had the most wonderful electric cranberry sauce,” McCrary reflects, and some “fucking powerful dosed almonds ... lots of folks could never eat an almond again!”¹⁵³⁵ For fear that *everything* was spiked with LSD, Dunbar, pregnant at the time, remembers being “terrified” to imbibe anything at the event.¹⁵³⁶

The deluge of narcotics into the community predictably brought with it an assorted crowd of visitors looking to buy, sell, or partake in “reckless experimentation.”¹⁵³⁷ The mass consumption of “headacheweed” was one thing, but the use of horse tranquilizers was no doubt something quite different, and their respective audiences didn’t necessarily harmonize. One former resident and memoirist, recalls an “entourage of blacks” from New York City, friends of a criminology graduate student at the university, “trying to open up a market in Lawrence. Some guys in their 40s wearing business suits. Some pink blazers. ... Some of them had never been out of New York, and Kansas spooked them...”¹⁵³⁸ But alarm at the surreal, social pulse of Lawrence was common, even among its homespun cast of characters. Around the turn of the decade, one employee of Strawberry Fields, a local head-shop, sensed a palpable shift in his clientele, and in the town’s freaky transmutation: “it’s full of mad dogs and crazies. It’s really kind of frightening, even for me.”¹⁵³⁹ And the crazies filled the Oread bars: “There were no more terrifying places on earth than the Gaslight and, down the street, the Rock Chalk,” a former student later swore.¹⁵⁴⁰

George Kimball, who regularly paced the Rock Chalk front porch, was perhaps the most notorious, and most feared “Creep” in town. A lifelong friend of Dorn’s and Dunbar’s, Kimball was a talented writer and journalist, and later became a successful sports columnist

¹⁵³⁴ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 140; Louis, “Picking Hemp in Douglas County,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 247.

¹⁵³⁵ McCrary, interview by author, email, 6 May 2005.

¹⁵³⁶ Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, Denver, Colorado, 19 March 2005.

¹⁵³⁷ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 140.

¹⁵³⁸ *Cows Are Freaky*..., 124.

¹⁵³⁹ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*” ..., 141.

¹⁵⁴⁰ *Cows Are Freaky*..., 25.

in Boston.¹⁵⁴¹ He had initially come to Lawrence as a student, in the mid-‘60s, and had been arrested during a 1965 war protest for running naked with a sign that read, “Fuck the Draft.” With long, wiry hair, a broad, imposing posture, and a glass eye, Kimball was a magnetic and larger-than-life figure, and became rather famous for his maniacal, extravagantly rancorous behavior.¹⁵⁴² As Defense Minister of the Lawrence Liberation Front, Kimball ran guns to Black Power advocates in east Lawrence, or, as one memoir has it, radicals in east Lawrence bought the guns in order to keep them out of Kimball’s hands.¹⁵⁴³ Maybe so. In the early ‘70s, Hunter S. Thompson attempted to find employment for Kimball at *Rolling Stone*, but with “mixed motives,” he told the young writer, “I want Wenner [the editor of the magazine] to have the experience of dealing with somebody more demonstrably crazy than I am—so that he’ll understand that I am, in context, a very responsible person.”¹⁵⁴⁴ Kimball had contacted Thompson earlier in the ‘60s, when the former completed his violent, pornographic novel, *Only Skin Deep*. Thompson didn’t mince words in his judgment of the work: “...this book of yours is the foulest, most rotten thing I’ve ever laid eyes on. It goes so far beyond pornography as to approach a new form of some kind ... you may be the founder of the Carnal/Axehandle School,” Thompson wrote Kimball in November 1968.¹⁵⁴⁵ When the book’s publisher, Olympia Press, offered Thompson \$500 to write a small jacket endorsement, Thompson let loose:

Unfortunately, I can’t under any circumstances endorse that heap of deranged offal that Kimball has coughed up in the shameful guise of art. I’m sure you’re aware of Mr. Kimball’s background: he has dealt,

¹⁵⁴¹ Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, 19 March 2005; *Cows Are Freaky...*, 19. Kimball’s pseudonym is “Hugo,” in the latter work.

¹⁵⁴² *Cows Are Freaky...*, 8-9; 25.

¹⁵⁴³ Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”..., 148; 168; 173; Louis, “Picking Hemp in Douglas County,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 247.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist: 1968-1976*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 385. On May 9, 1971, Thompson wrote Kimball: “I’ve just been talking to Jann Wenner (*Rolling Stone*) about you—suggesting that he get you into writing some articles, in addition to that record-review gig. My motives were mixed, of course. Aside from your undeniable mastery of the medium, I want Wenner to have the experience of dealing with somebody more demonstrably crazy than I am—so that he’ll understand that I am, in context, a very responsible person. This seems to have escaped him, up to now. We just had a bad argument over my expense account—like who was going to pay for the rental of a white Cadillac convertible & gross of coconuts in Las Vegas. I suspect I lost . . . but what the hell? I’m getting used to that. We just had the mortal shit stomped out of us in last week’s city elections. How are things going in Lawrence? In Aspen, it’s back to the Underground. We’ve completely blown our public leverage here.”

¹⁵⁴⁵ Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 144.

as it were, with Agents. These people, as you know, are the Enemies of Art. Kimball suffers from more strange diseases than any three people you know; Angina Pectoris is probably the work and most offensive of these. I doubt very seriously if he wrote that stinking book by himself; it strikes me as the work of a pre-teen visionary of some kind. ... In any case, I'm coming to NY in December to beat the living shit out of Kimball. *Only Skin Deep* is a vicious and intolerable mockery of the whole filth industry... pornography is one thing, but raw obscenity is quite another. Somebody is going to have to answer for this book; if I were you, I'd get the hell out of town.¹⁵⁴⁶

Like Thompson, in Aspen, Kimball ran for Douglas County Sheriff in the summer of 1970, but against a one-armed incumbent. Drawing on the disabilities he shared with his opponent, then molesting them, Kimball's campaign slogans promised he would, "keep an eye on the law," but demanded that Lawrence have a "a two-fisted sheriff."¹⁵⁴⁷ Though he won the nomination, he lost miserably in the election. Kimball was a regular fixture of the Oread—often lounging at the Rock Chalk with McCrary, usually stoned, Lee Chapman, usually drawing, and Pim, a large, intimidating Dutchman who accosted passing "hippies." As a drinking ritual, Kimball would remove his glass eye and drop it in his beer.¹⁵⁴⁸

Flagrant self-stylization played a crucial role for the unruly cast of characters in the Oread and for the countercultural scene in Lawrence overall. The volatile combination of colorful and extreme theatrics with rampant drug use created an atmosphere somewhere "between hysteria and euphoria," as one resident described it.¹⁵⁴⁹ Some members of the community considered themselves "street guerilla theatre fun folks," and viewed clashes with the National Guard and law enforcement officers "as a kind of game."¹⁵⁵⁰ And the Oread "freaks" took as many opportunities as they could to emblazon their outlaw image, fashioning themselves "as a gang of new-age Daltons" (the 1890's Kansas-based band of bank and train

¹⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Cows Are Freaky...*, 119; and see Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, p. 328., to Paul Krassner, "The Realist," on 12 August 1970: "George Kimball just left today, after a vicious three-day strategy conference. He's running for Sheriff of Lawrence, Kansas, but with no hope of winning. This is a strange phenomenon—Albert in Berkeley, Oscar Acosta in LA (he got 110,000 votes), Kimball in Kansas & me in Aspen—with no prior collusion. Very odd." And see footnote, p. 328: "Among the Freak Power Party's 1970 candidates, George Kimball won the Lawrence, Kansas, Democratic primary contest for sheriff running unopposed, but was trounced in the general election." Thompson lost the Aspen race 1500 to 1065.(332)

¹⁵⁴⁸ *Cows Are Freaky...*, 18-19.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Monhollon, "This Is America?"..., 154.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Monhollon, "This Is America?"..., 154-55.

robbers).¹⁵⁵¹ When a CBS “60 Minutes” special featured the Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers, for instance, national viewers witnessed the brazen histrionics of a neo-Wild West stunt show, “suffused with a vague menace.”¹⁵⁵² One harvester while interviewed, “wore a cowboy hat and kept his head lowered the entire time as he fiddled with his gun.”¹⁵⁵³ This outré and eccentric spectacle, fueled by drugs and the rich allure of armed rebellion near the O.K. Corral, afforded a cinematic quality to the environment. And this highly stylized crossroads offered Dorn a fruitful context out of which to extract and embellish his characters and tone. In an interview with the *Lawrence Journal-World*, in November 1984, when Dorn spent a week in residence at KU, he reflected on the source voices from the Oread scene fifteen years before that had informed *Gunslinger*: “We were sort of like travelers.... A poem like that has to be fed by a lot of reality and examples of characters.”¹⁵⁵⁴

The affinity Dorn felt for the hip edginess of the Oread and its wayward characters is illustrated by the surprising frequency with which that scenery and those inhabitants enter his work, and by the amount of time he spent with members of the Lawrence community that spring. George Kimball saw Dorn and Dunbar “at least five days a week”; and Dorn and McCrary often spent long afternoons together, wandering the area—“we drove around a lot, up the river road, looked at the ditch weed...”¹⁵⁵⁵ Dorn directly involved himself in local projects, as well. For instance, when Roy Gridley permitted Kimball and McCrary to build an A-Frame house on his land outside of town, “which became notorious for LSD, mescaline parties and keggers,” Dorn offered a laboring hand. “We’d buy our supplies for the day, pick up some weed and a case or two of beer, drop by the Gaslight and say ‘Who wants to come out and help today?’” Kimball recalls. “Of course, neither Jim nor I was experienced enough to clearly think through some of the more intricate design work, but there were guys around who were... at least one day when we were putting on the roof, Ed and Jenny had come out for a picnic and to watch. ...the next thing I knew Ed had his shirt off and was up there on the roof hammering nails.”¹⁵⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵¹ Preface to *Cows Are Freaky...*, unpaginated.

¹⁵⁵² Ibid., unpaginated.

¹⁵⁵³ Louis, “Picking Hemp in Douglas County,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 245.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Chuck Twardy, “Dorn turns from epic to short ‘Abhorrences’.” *The Lawrence Journal-World*, 4 November 1984, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Kimball interview

¹⁵⁵⁶ Kimball interview

The Lawrence scene appeared directly in the work the first time in early April, when Dorn composed a poem, “The Cosmology of Finding Your Place,” for a Draft Resistors League benefit reading held, “at the united campus christian fellowship.”¹⁵⁵⁷ The reading was part of a national tour, headed by poet and translator, Robert Bly. “The money goes to Baltimore office of Resistors which also gives to Black Panthers school breakfasts etc.,” Dorn wrote to Raworth in late April, after returning from a “big” reading in Iowa City with his co-translator from Essex, Gordon Brotherston, who was teaching at Iowa that spring, and various others.¹⁵⁵⁸ Although the readings brought many poets together, they also became the occasion for the acting out of personal disputes. Dunbar wrote to Val Raworth at the end of April, about their visit in Iowa:

We just came back from Iowa City. Gordon B and Anselm [Hollo] and this guy called Ted Berrigan came down here and the next morning we all went up to Iowa in cars all day and Ed read at this reading for resistors, to get money for bail and lawyers. Creely [sic] read for about two hours, maybe it was a novel and anyway it pissed people off a lot as there were ten poets reading and he was mumbling in his waterproof suit. He goes to readings every weekend to get away from home, he’s coming here next week. We spent most of the weekend stoned at the Hollos I think though its difficult to remember exactly, it was great to be among those people, lots of blonde children. And everyone talked about how great Tom and Val are, altogether it was a shame you weren’t there.¹⁵⁵⁹

Creeley’s monomania wasn’t the only disagreeable element of the Resistor reading events, however. Some of the students in Dorn’s poetry class declared Robert Bly a charlatan. On the afternoon of April 10th, before that night’s reading in Lawrence, Bly addressed one hundred and fifty students in the Student Union. “Dressed in a Mexican serape with a paper scroll, given to him by his six-year old daughter,” Bly lambasted President Johnson—“A stomach with eyes, something that moves along the ground eating...”—and told his audience that if they didn’t participate in political actions to end the war, their children would “spit in [their] face.”¹⁵⁶⁰ John Moritz, Dorn’s student, found Bly’s dramatic oratory, his tritely

¹⁵⁵⁷ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 235.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 24 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Jennifer Dunbar Dorn to Val Raworth, 29 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁵⁶⁰ “Poet decries LBJ,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 10 April 1969.

authentic costume, and his “rock star” tour of insurrection, pompous and insincere.¹⁵⁶¹

Moritz recorded his thoughts in a poem for Dorn’s class called, “Capt Bly”:

recites from
a serape
inciting riots
then sails away
with as much of a
vested interest
in the skull ring
as Westmoreland

both views
are done
w/ binoculars
& a hug¹⁵⁶²

In Moritz’s poem, Bly’s inflated self-presentations along a national schedule of appearances are the signs of the methodological solipsism he shares with General Westmoreland’s viciously impersonal war from the above. Bly was interested in the fame and instant pleasantries surrounding the antiwar movement, Moritz recalled, not in seriously investing his energies toward building an alternative community.

Dorn’s poem for the Lawrence Draft Resisters League, “The Cosmology of Finding Your Place,” is strikingly dissimilar to Bly’s diatribes, and it constructively opposes the distancing of oneself from the displacements of one’s activity. The process of discovering one’s placement, “in the constant present snap of eternity,” one’s right “Spot” (an earlier title of the poem labeled it), proffers both theme and form to the sinuous, unbroken column of overlapping phraseology. And the attentive search *for* “The Space ... [the] **soul** can occupy” on a cosmological plane of relation, does not itself *resist* the external, but moves between and among the “*Resistantism* of all other places.”¹⁵⁶³ In contrast to the “binocular” distance of Bly’s pronouncements, and their unabated, supercilious invectives, Dorn’s poem focuses on an intensely local scene. Into a ritual challenge lifted from Carlos Casteneda’s popular 1968 anthropological, hallucinogenic novel, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, Dorn amusingly inserts, among the “social bilge,” and, “filters and the Spillings”

¹⁵⁶¹ Moritz, interview by author, 10 March 2006; Kimball, interview by author, 8 May 2005.

¹⁵⁶² Moritz, *Cartography*, 35.

¹⁵⁶³ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 233.

on the floor of the Rock Chalk Café, two dogs (a la “Toto” too) as the main characters on a mystic quest for knowledge, *in situ*. The poem itself paces the page:

On the floor among the filters and the Spillings
The cosmology of the floor of the Nation
The cosmology of finding your place
The cosmology of smelling and feeling your Natural place
inside the place, feeling the filters
feeling the rock, feeling the roll
feeling the social spray at that level

...
Western Civilization is Beer
The Great White Dog of The Rockchalk
went through the door of Western Civilization
Which is north of the Barbershop
and north of the sailor pants incense shop
The Great White Dog went between all that
and the Gaslight, *The Great White Rockchalk Dog*
shakes hands with both paws indiscriminately
For he seeks his own true place on the floor

...
and doesn't know anything but his instinct for the search
for his place somewhere in the litter
of the filters and the literally dropped dreams
of the *Great Rock Chalk*, he smells the dreams
on the floor dropped from between the legs
of young English majors, ejected from between the
Dual Spraycans of the fraternizers
He seeks his place on top of this matter
among the feet of the privileged nation on the floor
of the *Great shit...*¹⁵⁶⁴

Dorn taught Casteneda's book that spring semester—“[a]t the time, all my students read him,” he later recalled.¹⁵⁶⁵ The novel meticulously registers the author's experiences, his actions and sensations, as a disciple of Don Juan, a Yaqui Indian *brujo*, or “medicine man, curer, witch, sorcerer,” who possesses the “secret knowledge” of peyote.¹⁵⁶⁶ Like the apocryphally autobiographical, robber baron memoir, *The Book of Daniel Drew*, which is “mostly about the art of making money passes and the word comes from the artist,” Dorn writes in his 1969 introduction, *Don Juan* is also a book about method, and its tales are

¹⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 233-235.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Edward Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 86.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Carlos Casteneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), 2.

likewise of uncertain, unverifiable origin.¹⁵⁶⁷ But as a book about the art in method, Dorn sees the master Don Juan as a “performer,” of the highest degree, involved in a continuous studious act, not as a seer, seated and passive. In “A Note on Don Juan,” published in the April 1969 issue of *Caterpillar*, Dorn explains:

He might be mistaken for an etiologist simply because to the mind of any Westerner the man who seems habitually eupractic is almost immediately awesome that way (a performance, the highest thing you can be here)—but Don Juan in no Maharishi—nor even contrary to that condition. As a man of knowledge he teaches the strictness of the feeling in lizards, and the careful inspection of roots, the ethos of plants.¹⁵⁶⁸

In this way, the novel made an important statement about drugs as a way to knowing, for Dorn—a ritual of awareness: “it got some order into drugs and reconnected them with the mind, in the form of the dialogue. It seemed to enforce the idea that there were skills of the mind that were chemically enhanced, or skills of the mind that could be applied to drugs as well as anything else.”¹⁵⁶⁹

Dorn’s “Cosmology” poem alludes to the first lesson, or riddle, of the *Teachings*, in which Don Juan, to accept Casteneda as his pupil, orders him to find his “spot” on the house patio. “Finally he told me that there was a way, a proceeded to delineate a problem. He pointed out that I was very tired sitting on the floor, and that the proper thing to do was to find a “spot” (*sitio*) on the floor where I could sit without fatigue.”¹⁵⁷⁰ Confused, the narrator circles the floor, sitting and standing, noting perceptual shifts in “hue” in the periphery of his vision. After many hours, he feels an “unusual apprehension,” a strange and disconcerting pressure against his stomach, when he shifts his weight from leaning on a large rock, to another place on the floor. When he returns to the rock to ponder the experience, he quickly falls to sleep. There Don Juan finds him the next morning, and is satisfied with the outcome of the search. Casteneda reviews the lesson with the master:

I asked him if each of the two spots had a special name. He said that the good one was called the *sitio* and the bad one the enemy; he said these two places were the key to a man’s well-being, especially for a man who was pursuing knowledge. The sheer act of sitting on one’s spot created a superior strength; on the other hand, the enemy weakened a man and could even cause his death. He said I had replenished my energy, which

¹⁵⁶⁷ Dorn, introduction to *The Book of Daniel Drew*, x.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Dorn, “A Note of *Don Juan*,” *Caterpillar* 7, vol. 2, no. 2 (April 1969): 243.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 86.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Casteneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, 19.

I had spent lavishly the night before, by taking a nap on my spot.¹⁵⁷¹

Into this *sitio* dilemma, Dorn places the two dogs who regularly attended the Rock Chalk Café in 1969—Wayne Kimball, George Kimball’s dog, and “a big white German Shepherd that pretty much lived on the floor... the dumbest, craziest dog you ever saw,” Kimball recalls.¹⁵⁷² Wayne Kimball was “uncommonly clever, as well as amazingly self-sufficient. He’d jump out of a car at a stop sign clear across town and come find me at a party three miles away a few hours later,” Kimball remembers. Whereas the white dog, “would lie around in the sun and didn’t do much of anything, ... Wayne would jump right up into the booth with you, pretend to listen to conversation, and lick beer off the table.”¹⁵⁷³ Dorn writes:

WAYNE KIMBALL told me all this, WAYNE KIMBALL
is social, he knows only persons, he doesn’t
give a shit for the floor of the *Rockchalk*
WAYNE KIMBALL is neurotic like us, he wants
to smoke Grass, WAYNE KIMBALL sits in the booths
WAYNE KIMBALL drinks beer, has a part time job
pretending to be literate, WAYNE KIMBALL uses
the telephone and all other public Utilities
including Cocaine, *The Great White Dog*
of the Rock Chalk is full of shit and can’t shit
until he finds his place, WAYNE KIMBALL has diarrhea
WAYNE KIMBALL hasn’t got a driver’s license
WAYNE KIMBALL is thin and knows everything that happens
He has ears, He is a corrupt little mongrel like us
turned on to everything hopeless and bullshit¹⁵⁷⁴

While “Cosmology” exemplifies Dorn at his most expressly, belatedly confraternal, as a poem for the Draft Resisters, the piece refuses to directly address the war, or the draft. The poem frames the question of resistance as a necessary, defining element of one’s “enemy,” as Don Juan terms it, without whom one would find no place. This balance in tension, in *sitio*, recalls Egyptian cosmology’s assertion of an ambidextrous, paired force, that fuses creation and destruction. The eye of Ra, for instance, the Sun God and Creator of the Universe, from whose tears humanity is born, also administers humanity’s destruction.¹⁵⁷⁵ At the end of Dorn’s “Cosmology” poem, Lawrence is likened to a kind of Heliopolis, a center

¹⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵⁷² Kimball, interview by author, 8 May 2005.

¹⁵⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 234.

¹⁵⁷⁵ See Geraldine Pinch, chaps. 3 and 4, *Egyptian Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 30-53.

of creation whereat local characters, like deities, establish their place, seeking the double-edged pike of knowledge.

and I love these dogs because they are us and more us
than we are and they seek their places as do the true
whether they are *Resistors* or just scared or both

They are the twin dogs of creation in our image
and I give them both the floor as I give the *Resistors*
This poem from the throne of Belief as the **Egyptians**
Gave and took from the Dogs Their access to Heaven
That we may all be Gods and seek our Place.¹⁵⁷⁶

Dorn sent a copy of his poem and a copy of Casteneda's book to his close friend, esteemed British poet, Jeremy Prynne, at Oxford. Prynne found the poem charming, and celebrated the book as a mythical proposal see beyond the confines of the its enumerations, into a "semidios" region, where Dorn's Gunslinger also traveled:

...I least of all expected that in itself serio-comic notion of sitio (the good spot) to re-emerge in the mock-heroic of the canine prayer parlour. I have, indeed (watch this spot for further grave inflections) no frame at all for that diatribe, so that I just found it funny (threatening to spiral off into hysteria if ever the dog should be lost sight of): and, well, a man may see how the world goes with no eyes, looke with thy eares, see how yon Iustice railes upon yon simple theefe, harke in thy eare handy, dandy, which is the theefe, which is the Iustice...

Casteneda's book is truly exciting, especially as he lets you guess right past him into a world too dangerous for him. The narrative is in that sense clean, which is very good, showing what was almost open to him: semidios. I was glad to be put on to that, what with all the puny fervour still about the current drug scene. ... Maybe we are quite deeply stuck on bad spot, now that the metaphor of culture as politics has been inverted to make politics as culture. Frankly I think language is too resourceful to commend itself to the current stylised dialectic of interest-groups. Only the first phase of a new voltage-surge through the system seems to make all the machines tick faster; then it gets more and more obvious that the energy-source is highly specialised, you need a new apparatus (hardly poesie, whatever else) to plug in to all that. ...¹⁵⁷⁷

The "ear" as a "thief" sounds like a metaphor Dorn would entertain, but he probably didn't agree with Prynne over the necessity for "a new apparatus," outside "poesie," a word he wouldn't use anyway. Dorn sought to modify the tools and means already at his disposal. If

¹⁵⁷⁶ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 235.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Jeremy Prynne to Edward Dorn, 31 May 1969, Folder 333, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

drugs were one catalyst “to plug in to all that,” his attraction to cinema and cinematic displacement—the possibilities inherent in its interruptions, as opposed to its depictions, of reality—provided another stylistic implement with which to experiment.

Again the Rock Chalk Café, George Kimball (this time his campaign for sheriff), and Jim McCrary became the inspiration for Dorn’s prose piece, “The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas”—a satiric, maelstrom of a short story about the industrialized and over-narcotized neo-Wild West. McCrary later labeled the work’s violently experimental prose “cinematic.”¹⁵⁷⁸ In Dorn’s scenario, Kimball has actually been elected, and goes by the prurient anagram moniker, Sheriff Ballmik, and McCrary, his “Chief Deputy,” is known as “Jim McHead.” In terms of a plot, little happens; the story relates few actual events, takes place in less than a single day, and is overall more concerned with developing the surreal mise-en-scene of Lawrence’s intoxicated and outlaw character, than moving its characters from place to literal place. As the scene opens in the afternoon, we find Ballmik and McHead at the “Rockchalk Café under the shade of a tin awning,” where Ballmik intermittently smoking his “Lucky” and chewing a toothpick, paces the sidewalk, “with his hands on his hips and a bottle of Schlitz stuck out of his pocket.”¹⁵⁷⁹ The narration, however, quickly shifts, returning to the “start” of Ballmik’s day, which gives just cause for the rapid and phantasmagorical imagery, and frenetic raillery that carries off the remainder of the story:

At 7 a.m. [Ballmik] walked off the porch of his rooming house onto the sidewalk and there, lined up in a crack, was a blue cap.

That musta dropped right out of a spaceman’s pocket, he said.

He threw it up in the air where it inscribed three quarters of a circle and fell dead center into his mouth and stopped far down in his neck. His adam’s apple sent it on immediately.

Mescaline, the Sheriff said, and smiled.

Then he got in his car, turned on the siren, started the engine and drove down to his headquarters where he smoked a lot of grass and briefed his men on their Fourth of July assignments. The rest of the day he drank whiskey and beer. Yes, Sheriff Ballmik was in a good mood because he had started well.¹⁵⁸⁰

Here, linearity predictably scatters; the story floats over the background of Ballmik’s victory in the election, and the subsequent policies he’s tried to implement with McHead’s help. In a

¹⁵⁷⁸ McCrary, interview by author, 6 May 2005.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Dorn, “The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 68.

¹⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

droll play on the ballot confusion that placed Hill in public office, Dorn imagines the explanation for Ballmik's victory in the election: "A printing error put Ballmik on the Republican ticket and the incumbent on the Democratic and there were no split tickets in McTooth County. The incumbent received two votes, presumably cast by Ballmik and McHead. Apparently the Democrats had not got their entire vote out."¹⁵⁸¹ In fact, the only votes Ballmik and McHead *don't* receive are their own. But when the incumbent "naturally refused to yield," the perpetually stoned Deputy McHead, "with unbelievable slickness," shot out his "ten top teeth at one time."¹⁵⁸² The same corrupted process that placed Ballmik in office likewise inverts the roles, relationships, and expectations of other members in the community—for instance, Ballmik has appointed as deputies, "2 black and 2 white inmates who seemed to possess leadership qualities," has assigned a "Detail of Doctors" to repair the main street and a "chaingang of Leading Businessmen" to break "that dam apart out / on the Platte."¹⁵⁸³ And while he emphatically promotes the "letter of the Law," Ballmik is absolutely "uninterested" in "Order."¹⁵⁸⁴

After the morning mescaline episode, narrative development in the story is mostly generated by Ballmik's dynamic speech acts, all centered around the "few simple propositions" upon which his campaign was waged: "1. Round up the drugs / 2. Leave beer alone / 3. Promote women / 4. Fix the roads / 5. Fresh air and / 6. Make the county pay."¹⁵⁸⁵ Mostly formulated as orders riddled with profanity barked at McHead, the paronomasic slippages of Ballmik's enjambed declarations and McHead's curt responses inadvertently create alarm among other character-citizen-customers of the story, and these distortions effect the only tangible happenings. For example, when Ballmik wonders about McHead's curious efficiency under the somnolent spell of dope, questioning how he could accurately "shoot" the incumbent's teeth, "without opening [his] eyes," McHead takes offense, and his objection incites a "frenzied hysteric exodus" from the Rock Chalk Café: "Fire! McHead spit out, please don't say shoot I despise that word, it's vulgar / *Fire's* what a gun does / Fire?! Not so loud youre gonna move / all the customers right outa the chalk / see theyre fallin around in

¹⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 70-71.

¹⁵⁸² Ibid., 71.

¹⁵⁸³ Ibid., 72; 74.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 71.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 70.

there / shoving the booths around...”¹⁵⁸⁶ Soon McHead becomes wary of his boss’s incessant and abstract demands for “reports,” especially regarding the repossession and symbolic obliteration of certain car models—those Ballmik envisions as industrial perversions of the horse. “Deputize a couple of freaks to put / out those Novas,” he tells McHead, and as for the “Mustangs, ... select / some volunteers to drivem straight / off the roof of the McEldridge Hotel, / that’s the highest building in town / of any historical connection...”¹⁵⁸⁷ Narrative expectations, like electoral ones, entirely disrupted, the story’s accidental protagonist/main actor, Ballmik, abruptly cuts out on his own scene by fleeing the “set”—“What about Fresh Air, Jim / asked with a worried look on his face. / Yea, it’s about time we got the fuck / outa here and got some, the / Sheriff answered.”¹⁵⁸⁸ And that’s that.

Not only does Dorn’s “Sheriff” piece scatter chronological events in a time-warp of hallucinatory sensation, eliminating the necessity for its characters to advance, moment by moment, through a series of discrete experiences, it also transforms the traditional literary notion of the story “setting” by sealing off space and time within the concept of a movie “set.” The existence of the “set,” both within and outside of time, allows certain characters, as well as the author, to exploit the negative space, the synapse in between the two. The “scene” is a cosmological contingency of its principal characters, for whom the string of cause and effect is bundled in a stereoscopic collage in which they cross time like space. Like the *Gunslinger*, whose ability “to eliminate the draw” is a “syzygy” that “permits an unmatched Speed,” who channels metaphysical forces through adjustments in the delicate tension linking his internal ‘mechanism’ to his external environment, McHead and Ballmik bend and alter the fabric of their own reality.¹⁵⁸⁹

This particular kind of performance, on the “set” of Lawrence, is the nucleus of another story in Dorn’s *Some Business...* entitled, “Greene Arrives on the Set.” Due to the popularity of a discussion group on black history offered in 1968 by History professor William Tuttle, the university instituted its first official course on the subject in the spring of 1969.¹⁵⁹⁰ The class was taught by professor Lorenzo Greene, who commuted from Lincoln University, in Jefferson City, Missouri, and was, “one of the outstanding black scholars in

¹⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 30.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Irene Economou, “Black history introduced,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 12 Feb 1969.

America today,” according to the *Daily Kansan*. Greene was the author of *The Negro in Colonial New England* and co-author of *The Negro Wage Earner*, and he intended for his course, he told the student newspaper in February, to explore not only the black experience in the armed forces and other areas of American life, but its origins in Africa as well.¹⁵⁹¹ If his story can be trusted, Dorn was impressed by Greene—after he “arrives on the set,” and “computes the scene from the eyes of the audience,” Greene’s oratorical power freezes his audience.¹⁵⁹² But first, we understand his self-presentation: “He stands. His hair is in good shape. Last week he said Watch this and went to K.C. to keep his appointment with Mr. Cool the anti-astronaut [sic] barber.”¹⁵⁹³ In the final paragraph of Dorn’s three paragraph piece, in which we discover Greene was once a boxer in Utah, his “semidios” speed of the tongue and sharpshooter style are unified in a grand performance:

Greene speaks. He takes a stance from the assortment gravity has in stock. Greene, Under his theatre of hair and out into the orchestra which are his limbs trained then tutored from the ringside Back in Salt Lake City where the bloodfilled mouths of the Pioneers are wiped with golden gloves. ... He steps straight out of the split world and distributes a cluster of construction sites in the air immediately in front. One angel notices Greene has been stricken from the manifest of existence. ... Greene Speaks. *Ex nihilo*, baby. Out of Nothing comes plenty like a mad gravel truck.¹⁵⁹⁴

The act of speech is a syncretic and violently cosmogonic outburst that merges orchestral collectivity with the agile fury of boxing. Greene’s linguistic dexterity in stepping “straight out of the split world,” to insert an alternative “cluster of construction sites,” specifically recalls the *Gunslinger*, who enjambes reality sequences, and refashions the “manifest of existence” in Universe City, through cryptic, alchemical rituals of language and gesture: “...Into the dead center of the ellipsis / the Slinger shot a complex gesture / and his mouth worked feverishly / thru the data of a forgotten alphabet / and his eye tracked smoothly toward the East...”¹⁵⁹⁵ Drawing on the language’s topical elasticity through his “constellation” of characters, Dorn united method and theme; like his *Gunslinger*’s “forgotten alphabet,” or Greene’s “*Ex nihilo*, baby,” Dorn himself picked the stylistic presences of his *Gunslinger* characters, from the fabric of popular tropes—the movies, the drugs, the “trip”:

¹⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹² Dorn, “Greene Arrives on the Set,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 77.

¹⁵⁹³ Ibid., 78.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 78-79.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 69.

“Because [that] poem is like everyday life back then: it’s a time trip,” he told an interviewer in 1991.¹⁵⁹⁶ The idiosyncratic linguistic links and slippages in “The Sheriff” story, for instance, parallel the commanding apparatus of *Gunslinger* that recycles and reorders language to test denotative extremities as fruitful sites for forging new relations by assaulting already existing logic systems. When the Poet’s “Song to a Woman” refers to “her mouth / a disturbed tanager,” in Book I, Marjorie Perloff writes: “Such parody ballads take literalism to its logical and absurd extreme. Consider the following syllogism: (1) in formulaic folk-ballad diction, lips are conventionally scarlet; (2) there is a bird called the scarlet tanager; therefore....”¹⁵⁹⁷ In an image of searching and gathering borrowed from “The Cosmology” piece—“[w]e’re like dogs to a certain extent...”¹⁵⁹⁷—Dorn described *Gunslinger* in a late interview, as his own *centered* orbit, into which arbitrary cultural content could gravitate, and the burdensome narrative preoccupations with closure and symmetry, with “I” detached in the third person, for example, would be transformed into an self-reflexive awareness of the irregularities and distortions of everyday language, empowered through “puns and ambiguities”:

This becomes increasingly the poem’s preoccupation. How do puns and ambiguities of language enter into everyday life? ... We’re like dogs to a certain extent. We go around and sniff here and there, and we may not go back. The circle may never be completed. ... Driverless horses because I really don’t want to have to bother with having to deal with a driver. I don’t want to describe him. I just want to stay inside the coach. So these horses know where they’re going: The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh, through the something and the drifting snow. Maybe it comes from that kind of stuff: over the river and through the woods, to Grandmother’s house we go. It’s the same thing. He didn’t have a driver.¹⁵⁹⁸

In the three works discussed above—“The Cosmology...”; “The Sheriff...”; and “Greene Arrives...”¹⁵⁹⁷—cinematic components (sets, roles, wardrobes) and drugs function as thematic and stylistic outlets for accessing multiple currents of language that constitute an authorial *locus of experience*, whose stylistic intensity and integrity is a measure of “centrality”—what’s been recovered, regained, been made anew, been fashioned from one’s *locus*. As a narrative, yet one that subjugates its scene to the irregular rhythms of a psychodrama, and as spiritual quest, agitating the incompatibility of epistemological and ontological frameworks,

¹⁵⁹⁶ Edward Dorn, “From Imperial Chicago,” interview by Mihopoulos, *Ed Dorn Live*, 66.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Perloff, introduction to *Gunslinger*, xvi.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Edward Dorn, “From Imperial Chicago,” interview by Mihopoulos, *Ed Dorn Live*, 67.

binding together hero and anti-hero (their common root “behind the sun”), *Gunslinger* draws on both these outlets (cinema and drugs) to release the baggage of the subjective author’s impressions, and to turn, not against the culture, as one might expect, but to turn culture endlessly on itself.

In his essay over Robert Duncan’s Vietnam War poetry, Nathaniel Mackey writes, “art is a transpersonal, transhuman power that takes us out of ourselves. It is as though the apocalypse were not so much a prophetic, historical claim as a trope for the art experience, being taken out of oneself by way of art.”¹⁵⁹⁹ To Mackey’s regenerative apocalyptic trope for art, Dorn adds the experience of drugs and the cinema as parallel frameworks, within his poetry, for taking oneself *out of oneself, into* the language, say, whereupon one freely engages the “shared mind.” More than one critic has proposed categorizing the transmogrification of each book of *Gunslinger* according to a drug—grass, acid, and cocaine (for the third and fourth books), respectively—and just as Casteneda’s book demonstrated an “order” with which to bring drugs into a “dialogue” with the mind, and the mind into a dialogue with itself, the characters of *Gunslinger* represent “a constellation of one body,” a composite cultural voice.¹⁶⁰⁰ Appropriately, in Book II of *Gunslinger*, the curious death of “I” is reversed by chemical means, when he is resurrected—brought out of himself, “shot past mortification,” with five gallons of Kool Everything’s liquid acid. Thereafter, “I carries the Broken Code / the key to proprioception / ... / I is now a living Batch.”¹⁶⁰¹ This metamorphosis of “I” also involves the symbolic annihilation of the subjective, lyrical perspective in Dorn’s work, as Dorn observed likewise in Casteneda’s prose: “...my attempt to have a Figure, or say a congeries of characters within one Figure, was certainly encouraged by the fact that the *Pronunciamento* as an experience was suddenly legitimized by the exchanges between Casteneda and Don Juan. The irreducible difference is that formally *Gunslinger* is not a dialogue.”¹⁶⁰²

“Dear Tom: Last night I read novel again this time backwards to see if it really is serial! Wow, it’s true,” Dorn wrote to Raworth around Christmas 1968, referring to his new novella/memoir, *A Serial Biography*. Dorn continued: “I think it is very goddamn great,

¹⁵⁹⁹ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 163.

¹⁶⁰⁰ See Perloff, introduction to *Gunslinger*, xii; and Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 91-92.

¹⁶⁰¹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 66-67.

¹⁶⁰² Edward Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 87.

‘greater’ than Joyce or someone like that. So I wrote this thing for Stuart, which has nothing to do w/ it of course.”¹⁶⁰³ Dorn’s praise for Raworth’s novel, like Prynne’s praise for Casteneda’s, centered on the multi-sided evocations of its voice, “thrown out into an interspace where what’s possible is more interesting than what’s established,” Dorn writes.¹⁶⁰⁴ In short, richly detailed chunks of prose, Raworth offers a scattered collection of vignettes that lurch ahead of themselves, double back, and suddenly rise from their dictation to assault the system of their own registration. Thinking of the book he’s writing, Raworth reads, writes:

I looked further back in the book. And read. Realised that while it was possibly a dam that might be blown up, and which *could* be holding back a great flood of water, equally the channel might be dry, bottom cracked. . . . It was easy to produce clever little exercises, puns, twistings of words, while it was nearly impossible to capture any emotion or feeling. Then when I started I had all those years of I I I ME ME to wash out. Like the rusty water from the tap at first in a long-empty house.¹⁶⁰⁵

The “I” of someone else, overused or long out of use, is the only first person available. What can it hold, what can it maintain, is the project of the *Biography*. Raworth avows: “It was a release to write it down. Slipping from I to he. From he to I.”¹⁶⁰⁶ The exacted strength he awards *A Serial Biography* bespeaks Dorn’s own stylistic and perspectival ambitions, not for the “cheap and commercial and psychiatric” notion of the ego (the “I”) as a self-entitled, prearranged “center,” but for its “centrality,” that is, its power to work through and reorder the language map whereupon dominance heaves its influence, by refashioning and realigning its contours and legends:

The illumination Raworth’s prose makes is the instinctive pro-nomial multiplicity [sic] of experience running through the field of sense. Everybody is him; even tho they have been given other names they derive their perceptual principle from him, and as the white world breaks up this power moves into the center or the exhaust of the art and in this demonstration *A Serial Biography* is a very new twist. . . . When you speak with precision of your own person you have broken that bag and are immediately into the

¹⁶⁰³ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 27 December 1968, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss. That’s Stuart Montgomery, who published *Gunslinger* in England through Fulcrum Press.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Dorn, “On Tom Raworth,” in *Vort*, no. 1 (Fall 1972): 56.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Raworth, *A Serial Biography*, 27-28.

¹⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

World and sometimes lay a stripe across the social cosmology of your Present: “My disease is the exercise of power with feeling for the person.”¹⁶⁰⁷

That’s exercising power over one’s own language, setting one’s own gauge of “centrality,” to administer “Purity of the Head” on a larger scale.

But to achieve this “outfront residence,” as Dorn calls it, this authorial “centrality,” one does not simply take a drug, in the same way one doesn’t, to resist imperial warfare, merely don a serape. In “A Note on Don Juan,” Dorn summarizes the severity of the knowledge quest, the total absence of short cuts along its way:

There are still, after all the effort and thinking ... the same two ways: all the way in, and, all the way out. Presumably if anyone makes that a combination he’s scored too much speed and better have a rubber neck—and it doesn’t matter much how the ready made expansion is explained—Zen, Sufi, or Christian Science, or who it is thinks they can program it there is “apparently” no way to get there on a stolen horse, no way to move over by moving over, no way to climb on by climbing on.¹⁶⁰⁸

So Dorn doesn’t object to the view “of *Gunslinger* through drugs,” he told Stephen Fredman in the late 70s, “unless someone were to argue that they were special. I see drugs as such a transcultural signal from the society in which I lived, that they weren’t that special.”¹⁶⁰⁹ In fact, according to Dorn, the drug “experience,” like the cinematic “façade,” is no *experience* at all, but an opening for the intense activation of one’s perceptive index to entangle a broader set of forces. If not closely attended that collision can have unwanted, stagnating, even lethal consequences—like the sudden discovery, Dorn writes in his 1969 introduction to *The Book of Daniel Drew*, that you’re a spectator, too late—“in the sky it’s a bird, no! and while you were looking ... somebody nailed your big toe to the floor. You’re supposed to think you’re Cool Hand Luke. But nobody is. Cool, or, Luke. Everybody is another hand though. Just another? Try it.”¹⁶¹⁰ Or you can take it from John Moritz, his letter to Dorn a few months after Max Douglas’s overdose describes the deflated, “George Kimball outlaw fantasy”: “...that wild west medicine and stunt show. In some ways I think it was the cheapest thing I’ve ever witnessed and I know it wore upon George. Then every western magazine on every

¹⁶⁰⁷ Dorn, “On Tom Raworth,” in *Vort*, no. 1 (Fall 1972): 56-57; quote from Raworth, *A Serial Biography*, 51-52.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Dorn, “A Note on *Don Juan*,” in *Caterpillar 7*, vol. 2, no. 2 (April 1969): 243.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Edward Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 92.

¹⁶¹⁰ Dorn, introduction to *The Book of Daniel Drew*, vii.

magazine shelf from the St Louis Arch (arc) to the golden gate bridge.”¹⁶¹¹ Louie Louis, a former Hemp Picker in Lawrence, remembers the impediments to grand countercultural vision at an everyday level: “Every one of the three communes I lived in suffered from the problem of dirty dishes, evidence that people had trouble giving up much self when it came to the commonplace responsibilities of life.”¹⁶¹² And for Douglas, Dowdell, and Rice, the “medicine and stunt show” meant giving up life altogether.

Dorn’s respect for *Don Juan* represents an example of his insistence on the strict performance of requisite activities to sustain a delicate, reciprocal transmission between the “inside real” and the “outsideral,” to stay fresh at the door of one’s haptic house. Don Juan emphasizes the “efficacy” of a proper method, when he describes the necessity for an “ally,” a guide on one’s search for knowledge with peyote and other hallucinogenic substances. “Allies” are powers contained in two kinds of plants, Casteneda tells us—*Datura*, “plants commonly known as Jimson weed”; and mushrooms “belonging to the genus *Psilocybe*.” Like Mackey’s apocalyptic trope for art’s “transpersonal” potentiality, “allies” have a “transhuman” power, “a power capable of transporting a man beyond the boundaries of himself,” Casteneda writes, quoting Don Juan.¹⁶¹³ “Undoubtedly many elements would have fulfilled don Juan’s definition of an ally,” the disciple continues, but what distinguishes the ally’s metaphysical domain is the mandatory existence of a “rule,” a strict and “inflexible” method for engaging its attendant powers: “The outlines of activity forming the body of the rule were unavoidable steps that one had to follow in order to achieve the operational goal of the teachings. . . . The inflexibility of the rule was intimately related to the idea of efficacy. Dramatic exertion created an incessant battle for survival, and under those conditions only the most effective act that one could perform would ensure one’s survival.”¹⁶¹⁴ In a discussion with Tom Clark, who refers to the Gunslinger’s “self-conferred aristocracy of the city-bred character, but whose credentials are only that he acts that way,” Dorn merges Casteneda’s calculated “outlines of activity,” with the Gunslinger’s “impeccable personal smoothness,” into a common style—what he terms, “absolutism of style”—that rules the West:

The gambler and the gunfighter in the West are the Khomeinis of the

¹⁶¹¹ John Moritz to Edward Dorn, n.d. (summer 1971), Folder 182, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶¹² Louis, “Picking Hemp in Douglas County,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 248.

¹⁶¹³ Casteneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, 213-14.

¹⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

West. Definitely. All you have to do is translate into Western terms—the “canon” is the gun, the “dictum” is the gun. Sure. The reason I’m trying to call people’s attention to the concept of absolutism in terms of style is precisely because of that. There’s no *content* to any of this, really. I mean if you read Khomeini’s content, you’re going to read that you have to start by washing the back of your neck, and then you proceed to your right ribs, and then you go to your left, and then you wash your hands, and then you go on down and so forth. And no matter how clean you get yourself, it’s still *invalid* if you haven’t done it that way.¹⁶¹⁵

Dorn’s Gunslinger struts the fine line between order and inspiration, seeking “Purity of the Head,” and his knowledge adheres to a set of rules and formulas—his “syzygy” communion with “the yellow sun” of tequila, for example, or with the sun itself (“...Gunslinger? I asked. Don’t move / he replied / the sun rests deliberately / on the rim of the sierra”)—a set of rules and formulas that as their orders are fulfilled disorder the expected sequence of reality.¹⁶¹⁶ Thus, in Book II, when a “band of citizens” in Universe City, “meshed with the appearance” of the pharmaceutically reconstituted “I,” gather about him with “an old appetite / for the Destruction of the Strange / govern[ing] the massed impulse of their tongues,” only the Gunslinger is capable of a “dramatic exertion” that can “ensure one’s survival,” that can overwhelm the imprisoning force of the “orthodoxy of comfort”:

Whats That! they shouted
 Why are his eyes turned north?
 Why are his pants short on one side?
 Why does his hair point south?
 Why do his knees laugh?
 How does his hat stay on?
 Wherez his ears?
 The Feathers around his ankle!
 ...
 He bought a license for his armpits!
 Look! they shouted,
 his *name* is missing
 from his shirt pocket
 and his Managers name
 is missing from his back,
 He must be a Monster! Look
His pocket meters show Red
 and they all laughed and screamed
 This Vagrant, they shouted,
 has got *nothing*, has no *cash*

¹⁶¹⁵ Dorn, “Edward Dorn’s Views,” interview by Clark, in *Views*, 20.

¹⁶¹⁶ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 6.

and *no card*, he hasn't got a *Pot* ...

Into the dead center of this ellipsis
the Slinger shot a complex gesture
and his mouth worked feverishly
thru the data of a forgotten alphabet
and his eye tracked smoothly toward the East
and there was produced in I's right hand
a Pot, and in his left hand *a Window*
exactly between the citizens voices
... to piss in or a w i n d o w
like when the Plug is pulled.

Whereupon the Slinger
with a bow of *great* elaboration
and Immense profundity
turned to the half hyphen crazed crowd and said
I thank you, kind people...
Witchcraft! shouted a man deep inside the crowd
and was instantly conveyed to within one inch
of the Slingers nose
by an arm become a boom, its fingers
encircling the mans neck—You are correct
citizen, your identification is the *same*
as your word for fear!¹⁶¹⁷

The Gunslinger, one might say, is a pragmatic alchemist, and the exactitude of his methods choreograph natural events into supernatural configurations. His condition is similar to that of the poet, who, Robert Duncan reminds us, “strives not for a disintegration of syntax but for a complication within syntax, overlapping structures, so that words are freed, having bounds out of bounds.”¹⁶¹⁸ “So,” Moritz’s epistolary discussion of Lawrence celebrity continues, situating *Gunslinger* in the void between St. Louis and San Francisco (“the St Louis Arch (arc) to the golden gate bridge”), the diffuse border between appearance and reality where the Western spectacle resides: “the Gunslinger climbs onto the stage and occupies that void in between and fills the air with the motion of his arm. The medicine show takes on all the symbols and language of an alchemist like Zosimos or John Dee—and ‘Heavy Double Duty’.”¹⁶¹⁹ The Gunslinger’s “impeccable personal smoothness” is not an already fulfilled image, or advertised “self” he lives up to, but the protean distillation of his “Cautious”

¹⁶¹⁷ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 68-70.

¹⁶¹⁸ Duncan, introduction to *Bending the Bow*, ix.

¹⁶¹⁹ John Moritz to Edward Dorn, n.d. (summer 1971), Folder 182, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

dominion, act by precious act—*only* a methodically executed “absolutism of style” can produce that “*pot*” and that “*window*” for “I.”

In *World of Difference*, Tom Clark’s biography of Dorn, he patches together Robert Duncan’s assessment of *Gunslinger*: “... a breakthrough from ‘the poetry of process or organism’ to a new genre-bending mixed-media poetry having ‘to do with scenario and masque’ and driven by the verbal devices of ‘a screen-narrative voice that takes off as a movie scenario [in] the Western, Marx Brothers style.’”¹⁶²⁰ Clark himself suggests that *Gunslinger* had, at least “accidental,” cinematic origins, namely in the Western rendition of Kurosawa’s *The Seven Samurai*, called *The Magnificent Seven*, which Dorn, Clark, and Dunbar (when the latter two were briefly dating), had gone to see at Essex.¹⁶²¹ Shortly after having viewed the film, Dorn produced “An Idle Visitation,” the short poem that would later make up the opening of Book I. Clark recalls a conversation following the movies:

Over a post-movie dinner of curry at a Colchester Indian restaurant that late-November evening we had discussed the code of conduct of the Hollywood Samurai, a matter which Ed insisted, in typical out-on-a-limb fashion, had been treated satirically in the film. In further debate on the comparative merits of those lethal dudes’ six-shooter techniques, he adjudged the anxious, edgy, elegant quick-draw delivery of the character portrayed by Robert Vaughn “impeccable” —as I remember—while those played by Steve McQueen, James Coburn, Charles Bronson and Yul Brynner also received style points.¹⁶²²

As both Duncan and Clark observe, *Gunslinger*’s success in moving away from what Dorn termed the “dishonest pretenses” of a lyric voice, “that strives for compassion with all the artifices which make up a poem,” and toward the disjointed, heteroglossic tensions of a multi-voiced narrative, often blended explicitly cinematic concerns, just as drugs provided “the façade or the molding on the building.”¹⁶²³ In this way, the work’s form approaches the

¹⁶²⁰ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 24. Unfortunately, Clark’s book has no references and no bibliography.

¹⁶²¹ Ibid. In “Notation on the Evening of November 27, 1966,” Dorn writes: “This evening we all went to see / an old classic flick at the Odeon / The magnificent seven introducing / Horst Buchholz, I’d seen it before / and *had not* got it that a german / played a mexican, of course! / An American foreigner is every body / navajoes play iroquois / the American myth is only ‘mental’ a foreigner / is *Anybody*. Theoretically at least / an Italian could play / an English man or a London jew / if nobody knew. / Tom and Jenny were there and Nick Sedgwick. / Tom remarked, on the evidence of / the last scene when the Mexican- / Japanese said Vaya con Dios / and Yul said a simple adios. / ‘that was philosophical.’ / Then the five of us went home / singing Frijoles!....”(*Collected Poems*, 226)

¹⁶²² Clark, *A World of Difference*, 27.

¹⁶²³ Edward Dorn, “Poetry Is a Difficult Labor,” in *Ed Dorn Live*, 117.

affectations of its topical content—“[c]ontent very often reflects habit,” Dorn says—and in the evenings of the spring semester, when they weren’t at the Rock Chalk, Dorn and Dunbar often went to the university film series.¹⁶²⁴

Dorn finished “Book II” of *Gunslinger* in Lawrence on his fortieth birthday in early April. He wrote to the Raworth’s three days later: “last wed. the 2nd of april, on my B.day, I finished Bk II of G.Slinger after abt a month of trance – high and low. at times I didn’t think I could go on [image drawn of notes on musical staff] But I did! and out came another opus of Bullshit.”¹⁶²⁵ And later that month, Dorn completed the first section of another cinematic project, all cinematic actually, a screenplay, for friend and filmmaker Stan Brakhage. Dorn’s working title for the script was *Abilene, Abilene!*—for the film’s sacred cattle drive embarks from Abilene, Texas, and marches for Abilene, Kansas, in a circle of terminology that isn’t a circle. And to that unfinished and entirely unpublished work, I’ll now turn.

¹⁶²⁴ Dorn, “Roadtesting the Language,” interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 103; see Dorn, interview by Alpert, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 32-33.

¹⁶²⁵ Edward Dorn to Tom and Val Raworth, 5 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

*A sacred ritual
may be performed by one
entirely purified but seldom.
Other rites belong to those
confined in the sodden
lumber of the body*

– Heraclitus¹⁶²⁶

24. *The Opening of the Strip, Take One*

In 1964, Czech New Wave director, Oldrich Lipsky, released *Lemonade Joe (aka Horse Opera)*, a parody musical of the American Western, sprinkled with psychedelic interludes, that tells the story of foppish, jolly, teetotaling (hence the “lemonade”), golden-blonde, prudent and obsequiously law-abiding cowboy. Slim and daft, Joe shamelessly advertises, “Kolaloka Lemonade,” which (like Kool Everything’s liquid acid) can resuscitate the dead, and he abstains from killing his enemies by stupefying them—shooting guns from holsters and the pants from gunslinging opponents. Joe’s nemesis, his darker, inebriate counterpart, Hogofogo, also possesses paranatural gunslinging talents, as when, for example, he magically transforms a combatant’s revolver into a white rabbit. When Joe arrives at the swinging doors of the Trigger Whiskey Saloon, in the film’s opening scene, his silhouette is haloed and blurred by the light of the setting sun at his back. The saloon is in the throes of an all-bar brawl, intermittently and instantly postponed—men in mid-air, whenever “Tornado Lou,” the bawdy-house’s maiden, appears, who enralls the patrons with songs like, “Do You See My Moist Lips?” and “When The Smoke Thickens in the Bar.”¹⁶²⁷

The body of the film covers the battle over prohibition, a struggle between Joe and Hogofogo, who finds an ally in the Trigger Whiskey’s bartender, Doug Badman, and together they nostalgically recall the debaucherous, rapscallion West of old, in “Wichita and Topeka!” Near the end of the film, Joe is captured, tied to a cross, and tortured by the spoliation (with grease) of his pristine, pale yellow suit. However, in the middle of this ridiculous abuse, the main characters suddenly discover their blood relation, and then, even more preposterous, dislodge an oil reservoir in their subsequent celebration. Thus, with former vendettas cast aside for family unity, and for the sake of good business, Joe, Hogofugo, and Badman reach a compromise in the prohibition debate, and together create the paradoxical “Whiskola,” for

¹⁶²⁶ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, ed. Haxton, 91.

¹⁶²⁷ Oldrich Lipsky, *Lemonade Joe (or, Horse Opera)* (?????), dvd.

both “the alcoholic and the teetotaler!” “The farce of life flies on,” Hogofogo claims near the film’s finale, “and no one cares what happened in act one.”¹⁶²⁸

Lipsky’s *Lemonade Joe* was shown as part of the International Film series at Kansas University, one of many film series underway in the spring of 1969.¹⁶²⁹ Foreign films were popular at off-campus Lawrence theatres as well in the late ‘60s, because “fears of losing money or audiences no longer exist,” the *Daily Kansan* reported in February 1969.¹⁶³⁰ This was part of a general surge of interest in alternative cinema: “Success of the art films have been within or above expectations,” a theatre manager told the local paper.¹⁶³¹ A litany of influential films came through Lawrence that spring semester: Ronald Neame’s aptly titled, *The Horse’s Mouth*, starring Alec Guinness; Lindsay Anderson’s topical but fictive account of an armed rebellion at a British boarding school, called *If*; Jean-Luc Godard’s symphonic tragicomedy, *Contempt* (starring Brigitte Bardot, Jack Palance, and Fritz Lang), that sets the failing marriage of a discontented movie producer against his frustrated collaboration with an aging, lauded, foreign director’s (played by Lang) abstract and riotously minimal interpretation of *The Odyssey*; George Roy Hill’s popular, jocular, sunset-of-the-train-heist-West feature, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*; Bernardo Bertolucci’s coming of age drama, and first film, *Before the Revolution*; Franco Zeffirelli’s period adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*; D.A. Pennebaker’s 1965 verite documentary on Bob Dylan’s tour in England, called *Don’t Look Back*; Sam Peckinpah’s bloody, High West, gunfighter posse, virility epic, *The Wild Bunch*; Jean Cocteau’s *Blood of a Poet*; Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront*; the list goes on and on.¹⁶³²

In a discussion over *Gunslinger*’s cinematic influences, Dorn relates its quasi-Egyptian Stella object, called “Sllab,” in Books III and IIII—which “has a Double Trough Antenna / from which he gets his information,” and upon which “The Code” of Parmenides is inscribed—to the omnipotent black monolith in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*—a film which also played in Lawrence that spring: “...the idea of something deific and stone. It had that weird spelling of ‘S-double-l-a-b’ and the fertility increment from its reverse

¹⁶²⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶²⁹ “Kansan Arts Calender,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 5 March 1969.

¹⁶³⁰ “Foreign flics big in Lawrence,” *The University Daily Kansan*, 9 February 1969.

¹⁶³¹ Ibid.

¹⁶³² Information gathered from *The University Daily Kansan*, “Arts Calender,” and advertisements in the student paper in the spring of 1969: February (4, 5, 7, 10, and 12); March (3, 4, and 5); May (3).

reading. The biggest pictographic representation I ever saw of this was in *2001*.¹⁶³³ In Sllab and in Kubrick's immutable monolith, we're reminded of the sarsen standing stones of Southeast England, but both Dorn's and Kubrick's objects carry some eternal cosmic decree—in the case of *2001* inscrutable and implacable, in the case of *Gunslinger*, implacable but direct; they deliver a reckoning from the Beyond. Sllab's "final words" are a judgment of modern society's avaricious roots and "overdeveloped rites":

The Fenomena is stark, energetic
full-of-shit & well defined==
altho there is much that I find sickening==
the excessive opulence & waste,
the blantant commercialization
on which the society is built,
the selfish introspective approach
to world affairs, the hysterical
obsession with disease,
the puerile abhorrence of old age
& death==all these illnesses
are the manifestation of overdeveloped rites¹⁶³⁴

The *Gunslinger*'s encounter with the "Literate Projector," in the (pun of a) town "Universe City," at the end of Book II, seems to offer a foil for Sllab. Whereas the Projector's filmstrip is a sheen placed over "How It Is," Sllab's tablet decodes, rather than *encoding*, the "naturalization" of ideological realities.

A great deal of Dorn's work, it turns out, was directly influenced by the Lawrence campus film screenings. Dorn told an interviewer in 1972: "During the time [in Lawrence, Kansas] I was working on that section [of Book II] I went up to see some films and that passage comes directly out of an evening in which I came back and continued to work. It seemed to me at the time that there were great profundities resident in that idea. ... I mean it was so literal that night that, in fact, there were names that I since removed ... [of] the filmmakers, actually."¹⁶³⁵ One of those filmmakers made it into a separate, shorter poem as well, called "It was in a dream," published in *Café Solo*, in the early 1969, but never collected. The poem accounts a dream in which Dorn, seated at a lunch counter, is approached by a

¹⁶³³ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 132; Dorn, interview by Okada, and, "Roadtesting the Language," interview by Fredman, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 54; 73.

¹⁶³⁴ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 165.

¹⁶³⁵ Edward Dorn, interview by Alpert, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 32. In the original, Black Sparrow edition of Book II, filmmakers Jonas Mekas and Robert Kramer are directly mentioned.

rudely presumptuous and contentious John Huston, who accuses Dorn of wastefully “taking up—

Your Time?
Your telling me
my dream is your
Time? I thot you
lived in Ireland, hounds
estates, hats
that shit, furthermore
I saw in film culture once
—that’s a magazine yea
uh, no, not the kind
that blows up,
fallen IDOL they called you
or something about
your reputation, false
I think it was
and then I get
this letter from Stan, uh
you don’t know his work,
I can believe that
anyway, he says

So how does that affect,
me.

...
dreams don’t
have locks
on their doors—
I mean
I never know
who they’ll send.¹⁶³⁶

The casual incorporation of popular cinema provides Dorn stylistic instruments (the “STRUM” of *Gunslinger*’s scene changes, for instance) and structural metaphors (Sllab; or film as a mask, a simulated, cleft reality, as opposed to *style* as “soul,” pith—not a garment but a gaff [a weapon, a critique, a “home,” as it is in Britian]), and harmonizes with the more conversational (“uh, no, not the kind...”; “I think it was / and then I get...”; “anway, he says...”) and more porously biographical trends in Dorn’s turn-of-the-decade work. Twenty years later, Dorn told an English class at University of Colorado that all his work around the

¹⁶³⁶ Edward Dorn, “It Was in a Dream,” *Café Solo*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Summer 1969): 24-25. Retrieved at electronically through KULibraries inter-library loan from WSU Holland.

time of *Gunslinger*, “was really influenced by the spaghetti Westerns, the Italian films made in the early sixties and early Clint Eastwood films.”¹⁶³⁷

In the beginning, Dorn’s idea for *Abilene, Abilene!* was in some way associated with the “Literate Projector,” but by April 1969, he was envisioning an independent, full-length film. In notes he prepared for Stan Brakhage, Dorn riddles on the fragmentary (that is, individual frames as “fulfilled” works—like Brakhage’s hand-painted film-strips) yet continuous nature of the film strip’s mechanical narrative operation (the “truth” framed, saith Godard, twenty-four times a second). He proposes a difficult analogy that conceptualizes the relationship between what is “seen” in a film as selected from a larger system of the “scene,” just as any “speech” is selected from, and necessarily relates to, the entire system of the “language”:

“1 pic is worth 1000 words,” like they say: movies are 24 individual pics. (complexities of fulfilled and possible directions) every second: “faster than the eye,” etc.: description (except as it be personal/poetry) is a waste of photographic (certainly cinematic) time! Speech is the only area of language that is not in competition with visual media: you cannot predict and/or out-guess any movement : nor can any vision supercede (or alter either) any “I speak for myself!”: scene/seen! :: language/speech!¹⁶³⁸

Dorn’s cover for one of the project’s notebooks, labeled, “A Moving Picture: Abilene-Abilene,” is decorated with photographs from *Life* magazine, and a crudely hand-drawn, aerial map of the film’s territory (with north at the top of the page). Two diagonal lines converge at the middle-bottom of the map; two jagged vertical lines, labeled “Mtns,” run along either side of this central V, one on the left, one on the right. Railroad tracks cut through the northeastern quadrant, and heading slightly south of easterly, a number of wavy horizontal lines, labeled “Rivers,” run across the map’s middle, from one side to the other. Running due north, a vertical dotted line, at the bottom of which appears the word, “start,” passes through the eye of the V into the prairie of northeastern Kansas, where we read: “END – the end so / wide / you can’t know when / you get there.” The V marks the central

¹⁶³⁷ Edward Dorn, “On the Making of *Gunslinger*, circa Chicago, 1971,” in *Ed Dorn Live*, 28.

¹⁶³⁸ Edward Dorn, original mss, notebook for *Abilene, Abilene!*, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

“corridor,” through which “the Great [Cattle] Drive” of the film (whose motion is represented by this dotted line) travels, from Abilene, Texas, to Abilene, Kansas.¹⁶³⁹

Abilene, Abilene takes up a similar “motif” to *Gunslinger* as a metaphysical Western, or, rather, “a theological western,” as Dorn labeled the film’s story.¹⁶⁴⁰ Costumed as colorful gunfighters, mostly, plus the roughneck bartender, and a trenchant, business savvy, femme fatale who carries a riding whip, the film’s characters are, like Dorn’s long poem, “the constellation of one body.” In the case of its central characters, that’s the body of God: “The characters are Dios I, Dios II, Dios III—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” and the conflict of Part I largely rotates around the strained and imbricated relationship of the protagonist—“Artist,” or “Art,” as “un semidios,” the human potential as creator—within and among that deific “body.”¹⁶⁴¹ And like *Gunslinger*, the film’s overall narrative centers on a group voyage that becomes, through its own dissipation, a sacred quest, replete with snake-essence elixirs, a “special” cow (East meets West), and saloon showdowns in which the firepower of mystic, linguistic conjurings and combinations is exchanged. Aside from the three deities and Art, there are, as I’ve said, at least two other characters in the film, both of whom elaborate the archetypal, allegorical structure of Dorn’s disgruntled, mock-epic, but are identified simply in the script, as “woman” and “Bartender.”

In a notebook, Dorn summarizes the film’s central event: “A starts w/ 10,000 head which is gradually reduced at outskirts of Abilene, [Kansas] to one cow which he claims is ‘special,’” and then adds, ostensibly from Art’s perspective, “anyway the drives the thing anyway safer that way because attract less attention. less attention huh.”¹⁶⁴² To a draft of the screenplay’s first section, Dorn affixed two short, rough, and overlapping introductions for Brakhage:

the film is about, if anything, the raw schizophrenia of a man wandering in the west, a western man in the west. the dominating film quality is then an extension of that predicament: all indoor shots are

¹⁶³⁹ Ibid. And for geographical reference, see *Ed Dorn Live*, 155: “In fact, there was a corridor which looks like what we call a panhandle, which led all the way to Montana. Colorado was once part of Texas. And that’s where the last cattle drives were after the rail had reached Dodge City.” And just before that: “Arkansas was provocatively placed on the trail from Texas to Kansas City. That’s the early traffic in cattle and all its various parts, tripe and sowbelly. So all that kind of heavy protein chain traffic from Texas and then Kansas City and then Chicago all went through Arkansas. Arkansas was known to be an extremely dangerous place, full of cannibals, and extremely questionable people.”

¹⁶⁴⁰ Edward Dorn, interview with Okada, in *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 48.

¹⁶⁴¹ *Interviews* 48

¹⁶⁴² Dorn, original mss., notebook for *Abilene, Abilene!*, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

black and white, outdoor shots are in color. this shld be done as if it were “natural” even tho it is easy to see ~~that as~~ it is unnatural in the ordinary sense. the only dependable sound is the sound of the human voice. all other sound is occasional: a horse may whinny, a dog may whelp, a child may whimper, the wind may whisper – but these are all voices too, not “sound,” not effects. a door may shut, but again, the sound is the “voice” of the door. a hand may knock on a door and perhaps “nothing,” no sound, is conveyed.

there are two conditional environments: one surrounds the form of the gun, ~~and~~ is purely linguistic, and involves the people who speak. the other is Indian, is non linguistic the ~~people~~ persons who speak are white. all other persons no matter what the function are Indian and non-speaking – but not necessarily silent.

the gun itself is never heard to speak, altho the sight of its sound may appear as smoke.¹⁶⁴³

While this first explanation concerns stylistic and aesthetic dictates for the film, abstract as they may be, Dorn’s second overview addresses the story’s core existential crisis: an absolute quandary that situates Hamlet’s dilemma—to avenge his father he must kill his uncle, making himself king—in a gunfighter allegory of the modern, Western artist, who both condemns and conserves the destructive monstrosity of Western Civilization.¹⁶⁴⁴ To “draw or not,” that is the question that “Art,” and “DIP” (Christ), to a lesser degree, both face:

man wandering in west involved in basic schizophrenia = the personality of Brakhage, as example:
– man rest on essential / conflict: it is fact but / cannot resolve whether / he shld draw or not /
– reputation indeed / built on this irresolution / reason why he hasn’t / been killed up to now / is he cld talk himself / out of confrontation in / those moments of / indecision and when / decisive has killed opponent / with the idea of death / in other words love and / hate are literally equal / in this man because abstract. / He’s come west leaving / family behind (down to / the Olde Motel) he says / “we all have a family / in the east that’s / why we come west” / in fact this story revolves / around the inability to finally draw / and although / there is intensely the pre- / liminary action of the / whole western action / sensation, in fact not / a shot is ever fired / in any but the linguistic / sense, and not a wagon / overturned / only those people necessary / to G.f (critic) white / All other persons men / women children / INDIAN / going abt. their business...¹⁶⁴⁵

¹⁶⁴³ Dorn, original mss., “Note: from Lawrence late April 1969,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.: p. 1.

¹⁶⁴⁴ See discussion below of God’s critique of Art, after Art murders him: “...you blame it all on Western culture while you rob that same world to make your thing – you even claim you’re saving the thing that made you a psychological cripple, a true conservative, a very political act.”

¹⁶⁴⁵ Dorn, original mss., notebook for *Abilene, Abilene!*, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

Before moving further into the main text of the script, the contents of a different notebook are pertinent to Dorn's introductions above. Titled, "The Twenty Dollar Sun / Vision," this notebook sketches another section, loosely related to the central narrative of the film, but unclear as to its specific relationship, or placement with regard to the *Abilene* script—whether its action comes before, after, or is separate entirely. In "Twenty Dollar Sun," Dorn expands his focus on the collision between European and Indigenous societies as a thematic context for the story, and charts the opposing concepts and values of human creation, of "art," in multi-cultural encounters, and of style, as inherited, or as invented. The notebook's cover drawing depicts a landscape overlaid with playing cards—"the cards lay on the plains acre big." Dorn's notes weave current politics—"King black power..."—into their discussion:

vision is art undercover
it comes out of the lake or a white cloud
is image -inated like magic
uncovering a deeper reality

vision of indian who finds his life unfurling out of clouds and follows the path and is given his name and knows himself.
a brave.
honoured by his tribe for taking his life in his hands, for being at his own centre where the Great Spirit dwells.

Sqaw of Chief who died fighting for his vision (King black power pacifist She carries on, knowing, though, the indians are victims. She has total intuition of the process of their death, the gunfighters... she feels the presence and murderous aims of the whiteman establishment as if ~~they~~ it sent out ~~their~~ poisonous vectors before ~~them~~ it moved. She senses and talks through her eyes, coolly.

HORSE
2 or more indians = all
the single = the single – the sign of isolation

ISOLATION
v
COLLECTIVE freedom of movement

The individual always subject to isolation – rushes out to Cherokee strip to fill 80 acre boxes

Indian = name & dream to follow. Given from collective.
Gunfighter = invents personum. [sic] Must cause his OWN relation-

ship w/ god. Invents his own god ie personum – so can't identify with the basic indian humanism.

OLD WOMAN – seer, Healer.

Death of mystic, vehicle she for carrying drama, suspense.

...

Old personum invention rod round western cinema

in love with style an invention

Young indians/ancient world

in love with the self inherited¹⁶⁴⁶

The notes for “Twenty Dollar Sun” include a set of charcoal drawings that indicate a shot sequence of lone objects intended to blur into one another through a series of slow dissolves—sun to coin-in-cup, to tree, to hand, back to tree, to butte, etc.—and a long, numbered list—forty-seven items in all—of scenes for another, seemingly incomplete story exploring individual and collective identity in the West. The plot involves a group of “young indians” who attempt to sell the sun—first to a farmer, who spurns them, and then to a gunfighter, “sophisticated enough to be interested.” Dorn’s storyline is not intended to be funny, not as a joke on the indigenous merchants at least: “Indian attitude = the sun is theirs = obviously they can sell it / why do they need/want to sell it? (coin in cup!)” But the encounter between the gunfighter and the “4 indians” backfires when he steals their cup, containing the now sacred, sun-infused gold coin. Subsequently, and inexplicably, the Indians are hanged later that day. Mourning the hanging, the gunfighter “trys to ‘forget’” by drinking and gambling that night; however, a run of “bad luck” sees him lose the sacred coin (from the cup), which he attempts, unsuccessfully, to win back: “...offering horse then horse and saddle. Refused. Humiliated.” Thus, the gunfighter returns to his room to retrieve the cup. However, in the meantime, through a cut hat interrupts the gambling scene at the very moment the gunfighter loses the coin, we witness a shadowed hand mysteriously withdraw the cup from the gunfighter’s hotel mantle. Vexed and confused, the gunfighter leaves town.¹⁶⁴⁷ And there “The Twenty Dollar Sun,” like “The Cycle” of *Gunslinger*, is suspended.

Although *Abilene, Abilene!*, which shares conceptual features with “The Twenty Dollar Sun” sequence, is unfinished, Dorn offers a vague finale at the end of one notebook overview. “The end scene is after the highest theatrical draw,” in which the “hero”—whether

¹⁶⁴⁶ Edward Dorn, original mss., notebook for “The Twenty Dollar Sun,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

that's "Art," "DII," or "G.f." (from "The Twenty Dollar Sun"), or if the latter is the same as "Art," is not clear—is killed: "the cat pulls / trigger slowly shoots / w/ no qualification / whatsoever – Hero, / falls to knees saying / ~~what~~ that's not / the point – you don't / understand. What happened? dies."¹⁶⁴⁸ Leading to this simple, cut curious climax, the central section of the script, that which covers the cattle drive that culminates in northeastern Kansas, is missing. How much of this second part was ever written remains uncertain; there are only two extant pages.

The first of these pages briefly details the opening scene of "Part II: the Great Drive Into ~~Along~~ the North Drag": "the new day makes / an exhibition of slowly / increasing light starting from MAT / Black revealing rising / dust as from a great / trail herd, the grains rising / far into the thermal air."¹⁶⁴⁹ This primordial image recalls the alchemy of Lindsay's "Kansas" conceit—"Each sheaf a little yellow sun"—and as an opening, refers to an explosive cosmogony, at the center of which *Abilene, Abilene!* lands Kansas, again a kind of Heliopolis, a mythic space, wherein "we may all be Gods and seek our Place."¹⁶⁵⁰ In his introductory notes, and through DII's (Christ/Son) monologue that closes Part I, Dorn images northeastern Kansas at the intersection—the "transept," DII appropriately labels it—of an enormous continental "Cross," formed by two perpendicular continental movements: the north-south line, which the group follows on their "Great Drive" north, and the east-west route ("the relative stupidity of a family vacation," DII says).¹⁶⁵¹ Like the ancient cultural/geographical center of civilization at Heliopolis, or like Glastonbury, as a nexus (one of many) forged beyond secular apprehension on a *decentered* latticework of ley lines—whose revelation is the instant juxtapositioning (*out* of time) of those historical events upon whose accumulation, *in* time, their network is established—the confluence of continental passageways at northeastern Kansas not only distributes energies across the landscape, but also transmits them along a "z" axis, perpendicular to that plane, up and down, of earth and sky, *in* and *out*. In this way, we might refer to the "hinge/henge" of this Kansas locale—a migratory "center" and celestial trading post, whereupon, like Archaeus, the "astral plane," physical matter (e.g. Art's herd) begins to undergo its spiritual metamorphosis. Thus, Dorn scrawls large across the top of his screenplay's first section: "ALL THE POWER THAT

¹⁶⁴⁸ Dorn, original mss., notebook for *Abilene, Abilene!*, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 235.

¹⁶⁵¹ Dorn, original mss., "Extention [sic] Part I," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

EVER WAS OR WILL BE IS HERE NOW.”¹⁶⁵² And this transit likewise serves as an inroad for the deities into the script’s passage.

The “deities” in *Abilene, Abilene*, however, are also “disputants,” and “[d]isputants are rarely good judges,” Dorn writes in the margin of a page. And neither is Dorn’s disputatious artist, “Art,” the arrogant, hotspuric protagonist, who upon arriving in “Caffeine Town,” early in the film, itches for an opportunity to parade his talents among the lowly citizens (so he chauvinistically deems them): “God! I’ve come all that way to get here. All these people. All these foreign people. They’re all alike. (*Laughs to himself.*) They look like they need something, like mixed up. Spilled on the floor. Then we could talk abt their lives. Do something for them.”¹⁶⁵³ Likewise, the second extant page of Part II, which contains fragments of dialogue between Art and, most likely, DII (Christ/Son), though the conversant is never identified, exhibits Art’s presumptuous, ostentatious self-assurance. Although the scene is late in the story, and provides, in fact, the only dialogue available to us from the second part of the film, the short passage is useful up front because it illustrates the “comedic tension” upon which the film pivots—an obsessive, ongoing debate—which occasionally elicits actual competition between the Artist and the deities—over the merits of the individual creative powers of each—powers entirely demonstrated, it seems, by how “fast” one is on the “draw.”¹⁶⁵⁴ As they ride north over the plains with the herd, the braggart Artist eloquently speaks:

A: Out of these archaic seas
evaporated the dry swamp of morality
:
: How can one say that—Art—at this late date
What if that shot turns round?
A: Even when I’m attacked
the attack has to appear absurd
I’m the only ~~thing~~ way, outside nature, ~~they~~ you got
and ~~they~~ you know it
since speechless science / put the squeeze on ~~their~~ your amen

Then, as a cow, perhaps, wanders from the herd, the “*Artist turns in saddle, shouts*”:

¹⁶⁵² Dorn, original mss., notebook for *Abilene, Abilene!*, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss. In the Fredman interview, Dorn relates this intersection to the monolith of *2001*, which forms a cross as it moves through outer-space, perpendicular to the vector along which the planet’s are aligned.

¹⁶⁵³ Dorn, “Note from Lawrence late April 1969,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss: p. 9.

¹⁶⁵⁴ “Comedic tension,” is a reference to Donald Wesling’s diagram for Dorn’s poetics in, ““To fire we give everything”: Dorn’s Shorter Poems,” in *Internal Resistances*, 35-37.

It's a symbiotic relationship
Let that one go!
Like the alligator and the bird
language picked right out
from under the tongue.¹⁶⁵⁵

The Artist's reference to "these archaic seas," is both historical and mythical. Historically, the Pennsylvanian epicontinental sea, which filled an enormous north-south divot left by glacial ice, heaved above the Great Plains over 300 million years ago, and its salts and biomass became enrichment for the soil of our present epoch.¹⁶⁵⁶ As a mythological reference, Art's archaic seas invoke the features of Egyptian cosmology, which centers its worship (like the Gunslinger) around the sun, and maintains that the creator and sun god, Ra-Atum, was born in "nun," the primeval ocean of chaos, up from which afterwards rose the first land, as a mound in the air.¹⁶⁵⁷ When Ra became lonely in this great sea, he gave birth to the first divine couple—Shu (god of air) and Tefnut (his sister)—by taking his own semen into his mouth and spitting them out.¹⁶⁵⁸ Subsequently, Ra's powers, as well as those he bestows upon his children, cut both ways, administering both life and death, creation and destruction. For example, having lost his children, Ra sends his fierce daughter, the eye goddess, sometimes named Sekhmet, embodied in his own eye, to search for his lost children. Upon her return, Sekhmet discovers Ra has grown a new eye, causing her to weep the tears that give rise to humanity; the same humanity whose disobedience she later punishes, as decreed by the gods, with warfare and plague.¹⁶⁵⁹ This aberrant duality in creation—the perpetual contest between *maat* (order, truth, justice) and *isfet* (chaos)—exists as a fundamental element of all Egyptian cosmogony, which frequently depicts battles, often involving physical mutilation, between and among family members.¹⁶⁶⁰ This cyclical struggle forms a great regenerative cycle occurring on multiple levels of signification and

¹⁶⁵⁵ Dorn, original mss., notebook for *Abilene, Abilene!*, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Prynne's letter of May 31, 1969, mentions this process for other reasons: "Oh, and for a metaphor almost strangled before it struck its point of fact, you might take a look at the first batch of word-frost in *Artic and Alpine Research*, I (1969), especially 5-6, where the authors describe how as the ice-sheet receded, "what had been a broad, high, east-west saddle [of glacial ice] between the Cordilleran and Laurentide ice centers became a low north-south corridor from the Artic to the Great Plains."(Folder 333, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.)

¹⁶⁵⁷ Pinch, *Egyptian Myth*, 10.

¹⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37; 41-42; 49-50; Stephen Quirke, *The Cult of Ra: Sun-Worship in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 31-35; 47.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Pinch, *Egyptian Myth*, 53-54; Quirke, *The Cult of Ra*, 25-26; 41; 43-47.

over varying stretches of time (from the span of a single day, to the lifespan of a whole civilization), and it emphasizes the necessity of the journey to the process of regeneration: Ra must travel through the underworld (called “the Beautiful West”) each night in order to renew the world for the following day.¹⁶⁶¹

As it is in *Gunslinger*, the exalted power of speech in *Abilene, Abilene!* (of particular dynamic language combinations) effects material outcomes, and that ambiguous realm of signification, in which the Artist moves, aggravates an internalized tension between the holy and the diabolic potentialities eminent to all acts of creation. The ability to order and channel the incipient powers of language is the Artist’s deific conduit. But for Dorn’s Artist, the forces of parturition and destruction constantly collapse into a single, indivisible current. The pomp and carelessness with which the Artist taps this language power, and his inability to acknowledge the indeterminate and paradoxical—even hypocritical—nature of his source material and medium, bodied *as one* in his enunciations—is DI’s (God) polemic against Art. Appropriately, the main event of Part I involves a barroom duel, wherein Art, with “words,” kills God. An old acquaintance of Art, when DII (Christ/Son) arrives, he identifies his father to the bartender and lightly berates the Artist’s rashness:

DII: (*to the bartender*) ...that’s god. And he’s my father. But he’s not dead – he was in eternity in the first place. What did you say to him Art? He looks arrested in some challenge.

A: He drew first – I beat him that’s all.

DII: Now look – you know better than that – you can always beat god to the draw if you’ve got enough will power – and any artist wants to make it that much – what did you say to him?

*Artist drinks from whiskey bottle.*¹⁶⁶²

In Dorn’s obvious yet casual allegory, Art’s assertions and conversations signify the impassable breach between the human realm of formation/fabrication and the deific one—language is both the instrument and the embodiment of man’s alienation, his separateness from god, and his only weapon against it. In *Abilene, Abilene!*, the “Word” of creation from the mouth of God (DI) is transferred into the mouth of the Artist, the mouth asserted by Egyptian mythology as a “womb” of ambidextrous power: Art’s language retains the cataclysmic associations of *isfet*, the fire at the heart of creation.

¹⁶⁶¹ Pinch, *Egyptian Myth*, 58.

¹⁶⁶² Dorn, original mss., “Note from Lawrence late April 1969,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

Part I of Dorn's script appears to be complete; it introduces us to the primary characters of the story, and prefaces the voyage north. The film opens in Caffeine Town just as the Artist awakes, "fully dressed, gun and belt down to boots and spurs." While the Woman character in the bed remains asleep, Art drinks a cup coffee, peers at the sun out the open window, and then, wearing "the perplexed non-expression of 1000 years of studied self calculation," heads out of town on his horse. Along his way, he encounters (a la *The Wild Bunch* opening) a group of dogs encircling and taunting a snake—"Hey you. Hi there. Hey you dogs. What do we have here. What do we have here dogs," the Artist playfully inquires. Delighted at the mismatched fight that favors him, and the chance to blow up evil's archetypal embodiment—or rather, the opportunity to impose a symbology over the encounter-turned-confrontation that justifies his homicidal whims, Art proclaims the snake, "The devil himself!" and shoots off its head—an act which, however, offers him only meager satisfaction: "...[*watching the snake*] his face moves from easy mirth to a quiet blankness."¹⁶⁶³

Soon Art reaches "The First Chance Saloon," which provides the setting for most of Part 1. There he encounters DI (God), who at first needles Art, with indirect gibes at his violent megalomaniac impulses (e.g. having killed "The devil himself!"), and then prods him with a bottle that supposedly contains the dead snake's essence. This creates a showdown in which god, slowed by age, is "killed" by Art—a killing that DII (Christ), on his way into town, senses from a distance: "There's been a killing and not a simple one – some strong willed individual has chosen the meanest instrument of murder – words." Such phenomenological feats function also as comic interludes, and aside the casual banter of characters whose expansive allegory is nakedly, absurdly overstated, here *Abilene, Abilene!* particularly recalls *Gunslinger*. Again, because the script is entirely unpublished, I quote at length:

Inside the Saloon

Full of people (Indians) they neither stand at the bar nor sit at the tables. They are in every sense neutral in the scene. The artist stands at the swinging doors his gloved hands hold them open. He drops his arms, the doors fly. He walks to the bar.

Bt: What's it gonna be?

A: It has to be whiskey. Has to be. Two thousand years of distillation

¹⁶⁶³ Ibid.

tells us that. Yes since, straight from Miriam, the sister of Moses.

Bt: That's the way to look at it.

Artist smiles at D1

A: As a matter of fact I wasn't 'lookin' at it at all – I was, uh, saying it, and now if you think you can tend bar, I'll drink it.

D1: May I enquire – what is the meaning of the letter you wear on your lapel.

A: You certainly may. This letter stands for two things: my name and what I am.

D1: I see.

A: You see what.

D1: I see what it stands for. Bartender, has the new shipment arrived?

Bt: Sure thing, this morning, a few minutes after dawn.

A: Then you know my reputation.

D1: Yes. Tho I don't know you, I know your reputation. So Bartender, where did ~~it come from~~ this shipment come from?

Bt: Curious source. They say some feller stepped out of the hotel over in Caffeine Town and blew its head off – seems he had an idea abt it – called it “the devil himself.”

The Bt and D1 break up laughing.

You want some?

D1: Sure, why not – it's insensitive to partake of the essence of some gods and not the others.

A: Are you sure you won't have some whiskey – that bottle has nothing in it.

D1: No, thank you.

A: You aren't by any chance one of those fugitives from some hokey drama in which objects are declared unreal, unless they look like canned soup. I mean some happening ~~in which~~ where everybody ~~to~~ takes their cue from that great prompter sitting in the wings of ~~their~~ the soul and whose alias is nearly always HOW I FEEL?

D1: (*sniffing the bottle*) God of Snakes! This is fresh stuff. Oh yes. I get the vision of this sacred creature, holy and lonely, caught offbase in Caffeine Town – ~~how many times had it been stepped on by the newly shined boots of the sheriff, how many times~~ many times drown with a bucket of shaving lotion from the barber's backdoor, surrounded by the dogs of the artist's wife, because she wanted you for a collage, a piece of the real thing.

A: Drop it.

The Bartender stops polishing his glass, his eyes shift between the two men.

D1: Drop what.

A: The diabolic principle – what you've been calling the shipment.

D1: OK – but I think I'll just set it down – you wouldn't like it if it broke.

D1 sets bottle on bar, slowly, very deliberately.

And now we approach the heart of the liquor experience – pure distillation. It will be some fever of the brain alone. The gun is

now expected to play its role.¹⁶⁶⁴

What are we to make of the Artist's relationship to the "the diabolic principle"—does he protect the elixir as a property of his own domain, a threshold DI (God) mustn't cross, lest the Artist lose his superior speed on the "draw"? Does the "diabolic principle" catalyze what the Artist refers to as his "breakthrough" in the following sequence? Or is the Artist protecting the world from "the devil himself," purging evil as he comes across it? A cut to DII (Christ), riding south towards town, occludes this duel's climax, and when we return to the scene in the bar, a "bluish vapor" floats in the bottle, and god lies in a pool of blood. With his "last words," DI (God) condemns the Artist's mimesis, his strategic disregard of the recycled quality of his material ("...go to the toilet twice just to prove it happened the first time..."), his righteously false assumptions of impunity, his catastrophic hubris and careless heresy—"you must learn to partake of the spirit of the thing you've killed," God instructs him. Like Hogofogo, the Artist seeks a witness in the Bartender:

A: You saw it. He made the draw and you saw it all – his bullet had left the chamber before I made my move.

Bt: Yeah yeah. I saw it all. I saw what you're telling me I saw. You're a great artist.

A: You can goddamn well say that again and I've taken all the shit I'm gonna take from these new types. They'll take every breakthrough you ever make and shake it around and call it their groove. I've had it.

D1: Turn out the light, bring on the illumination. Ah my friend you are indeed the fastest. Marvelous. What a crucially timed art ~~you do possess. Oh but~~ You are just a big drag. You always go to the toilet twice just to prove it happened the first time. And you blame it all on Western culture while you rob that same world to make your thing – you even claim you're saving the thing that made you a psychological cripple, a true conservative, a very political act. My parting words are the same ones I had for you in the beginning – you must learn to partake of the spirit of the thing you've killed. I'm speaking to you not your gun. Please follow your...

A: [*To the Bartender.*] Get that other bottle out of here, or I'll blow it straight into the cosmos. You don't believe anything that freak said do you?¹⁶⁶⁵

¹⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., "Note from Lawrence late April 1969," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., "Note from Lawrence late April 1969," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

When DII (Christ) arrives at the saloon, accompanied by the Woman who seeks the Artist's signature on "the contracts from the East," the Artist is similarly goaded, called out, by the new visitors.

The Woman and the Artist, we discover, have a long and tumultuous past. Though the Woman is speechless, as she readies herself for travel in her first scene, when she crosses paths with a chauvinistic DII (Christ) on her way to the saloon, the Woman is outspoken and ferociously laconic:

DII: Fair damsel!

W: Fair my ass! I'll hock your balls when your out looking for a job.

DII: Beautiful! A rare thing is a lady of wit.

W: OK. I'm going to deliver some contracts to the artist. Have you got the nerve to accompany me?

DII: Delighted. And I take it I'm in no danger since I've never looked for work.¹⁶⁶⁶

Once romantically involved, and evidently still lodging together in "Caffeine Town," the Artist and the Woman have grown estranged over Art's reluctance to sign the contracts and finalize his mysterious business arrangements with partners from "the East," whom the Woman represents. Bored with the Artist's inflated self-presentations, the Woman demands he honor his agreements if he wants to enjoy her flattery—the "fastest" reputation that he so prizes:

W: ... And I haven't been in your bed for nothing no matter how much you may have imagined we were in love – and anyway that was a long time ago – you haven't even took off your clothes for years not that you'd have noticed – so baby you just sign these contracts if you want to keep being told you're the fastest. You keep saying you want to change the world but all you mean by that is you want to remain the fastest so you better pay attention.¹⁶⁶⁷

This self-interested Artist is bent on the glamour attached to his "cause." While DII's criticisms of Art also involve these narcissistic impulses, he emphasizes, like his Father, their more sinister displacements.

As both the Woman and DII enter the First Chance Saloon, they encounter Art in the middle of a long, disgruntled oratory, directed at no one in particular—since the "Indians" in the bar are nonplussed by Art's abilities and speeches. After a short while, DII interrupts Art,

¹⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., "Note from Lawrence late April 1969," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., "Note from Lawrence late April 1969," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

interrogating him about the imperial tendentiousness (“a homesteader’s notion of creation”) of his monomaniacal dedication to mobility and exoticism in “Great Art.” Particular elements of Art’s calumnious monologue suggest a thinly veiled stage address in which Dorn himself speaks to an unknown cadre of critics, or a too-demanding audience of readers:

A: ...I’ve lived alone out there long enough to know absolutely my own draw. It is a lonely art. Shadows. And you may end up any bright morning following the first music you hear. Passing lightly, urging you across the hills. And no one give a damn if you go or not. Or whether you come back if you do. It’s true. I do prop up the West. I store the grain from that chaff and volunteered to do it. Nobody asked me to get that fast. It is my own vision. And of course these hip types will tell me I’m stuck w/ it, that it is precisely limited because it is all mine. Well fuck that! I am interested in my life now – work I can do in what’s left of it. And I’m not too impressed by that other load these people have for me – I mean I gave them their goddamn costume in the first place. So I’ll draw if I want, and if I don’t want I won’t – I took up the mortgage, in other words, on my own vision. (*drinks*) So it’s mine. And all that’s problematic therein. ~~That’s why~~ Great Art is made in the farthest, least mapped stretches of your own Brazil. ~~The artist is close to god because he goes out to meet him~~

The woman and DII come thru the swinging doors.

DII: That’s a homesteader’s notion of creation, my friend.

A: (*continuing*) The artist is close to god because he goes out to meet him everyday not just when he turns on. Therefore he has a contract w/ the entire world, like he’s not national even tho he may have to flit from country to country as the pressure mounts.

DII: That’s a parochial view and if true, a pact w/ the devil.

A: How?

DII: As a duck flies across the ice he breaks his flight unerringly over the hole and drops faultlessly into the water and skips to the far side – it is not the same hole he labored to keep open all night during the lowering temperature. The world has moved. Thus the hole has also. When the artist flies across the ice he flies toward a concept which he will always call his memory – if the hole is ~~there~~ where he “thot” it was, he will call that memory accurate and never know the difference.

A: So what does your riddle mean?

DII: This: no matter what country your man of Western vision lights in, he will feel it lit according to how he remembered it was “supposed” to be. And if that country does not live up to that memory he will accuse it of atrocity, or of serving him an uninteresting brew of coffee – in his mind all shortcoming will be equal because it is simply a memory to him anyway. Not what the duck senses, a real target each time. Thus after the usual preliminary gossip abt his friends, who have moved on, he will look around for the best

possible accommodation, and if that country praises him, there he'll surely call understanding – he will gradually contrive to place it back on the map off whence it came in the moment of his displeasure. That's why you're so fast artist – you'll kill anybody and then try to patch it up to make it look good.

A: Hello Jack.

DII: Hi Art.¹⁶⁶⁸

The Artist's claim—"the artist is close to god because he goes out to meet him everyday..."—comic and ironic in its context, echoes an observation Tom Clark made about *The Magnificent Seven* that Dorn included in his poem, "A notation on the evening of November 27, 1966": "Tom remarked, on the evidence of / the last scene when the Mexican- / Japanese said Vaya con Dios / and Yul said a simple adios. / 'that was philosophical.'"¹⁶⁶⁹ "Adios," goes *to*, that is, not *with*, god, and as a salutation, goes either way—as go the effects of Hughes's departure, in the poet's recitation of "The Cycle," between Books II and III of *Gunslinger*: "Goodbye Goodbye as if I / Were a bomb saying Hello to Guatemala...."¹⁶⁷⁰ In this asymptotic but evolving deific confrontation the Gunslinger seeks "Purity of the Head," traveling through the materials of *this* world, whereas the movements of his nemesis doppelganger Hughes are amputated from time, sealed off in a static, vacuous bubble of timelessness—Hughes's traveling module has "no front," is "all rear," an "uncentered locus"—that occupies the public mind by freezing "Fear" and "Surrender" as its only available refuge—Hughes seeks "cracks" in the "linoleum" edifice of reality not to aggravate and activate, but to slip in, to escape to, and his *style* is a dissemblance with disastrous results that opposes the instant disseminatory discoveries of the Gunslinger.¹⁶⁷¹ The methods and philosophies embodied in the distinct and competing *styles* represented in *Abilene, Abilene!* also indicate unexpected similarities among its characters. After DII (Christ) concludes his esoteric debate with the Artist over the interferences and distortions that the Westerner's colonized/colonizing memory—through its multiple sets of embedded expectations—injects into *future* experience, and *onto* the rest of the contemporary world, the two characters greet

¹⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., "Note from Lawrence late April 1969," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁶⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 226.

¹⁶⁷⁰ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 93.

¹⁶⁷¹ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 96-103.

as old acquaintances.¹⁶⁷² And although they endlessly bicker over Art's sacrilege, and DII's outfit, they plan to collaborate on the cattle drive to the north—a migration toward some "central" condition.

Art's critical "attention" to DII's wardrobe and weaponry exposes the irreconcilable distance between their modes of being, a discrepancy in *style*. Aside from a "*crown of thorns*," DII rides a mule, by choice, and wears "*the conventional gunfighter costume but in his holster ... there is a sprig of weeds, golden rod and thistles*." After tending to his soon revived father in the saloon, DII wanders the room, and Art picks at him:

Artist watches DII as he moves about the room.

A: Hey you haven't been workin lately man, you got weeds growin in your holster.

DII stops abruptly, stares thoughtfully at A.

DII: ~~I'd rather have you~~ I want your belief. You give me your attention. That's where every artist fails.

A: What?

DII: It's true, I long ago put my holster to another use. I've now got as my defense a garden of verses – golden rod and thistle.

A: (*undertone*) Piss poor weapons in this world. (*overtone*) Damn shame. I always thought you were the fastest, possible faster than myself.

DII: I may have been. I may still be. That's not what's important to me anymore. I no longer fear death from a single man.¹⁶⁷³

Outside the saloon a few scenes later, as Art, the Woman, the Bartender (whom the Artist "hires" as cook on the drive), and DII, prepare to leave for Art's ranch, DII has difficulty mounting his mule. As he soothingly whispers in its ear, the Artist mocks him, and DII cleverly retorts:

A: Jack ~~you've got yourself something there~~ you're into something there. One animal poorly disguised as the halves of two others.

DII: ~~Altho I've not experienced that fate~~ ah ha... I didn't experience that process but ~~it's been my observation that~~ I'm told most creatures are thus derived. (*Mounting up at last.*) Shall we go? ~~Shall~~ We now leave Abilene to go to Abilene across the brown, across the red, over the Cimarron.¹⁶⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷² Perhaps one hears a bit of John Ashbery's "The Instruction Manuel"—a ponderation on escapist poems which can only imagine Guadalajara within the silly, innocuous confines of a middle-class travelogue—in DII's conversation with the Artist.

¹⁶⁷³ Edward Dorn, original mss., "Note from Lawrence late April 1969," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

The conflict between the Artist and DII (Christ) echoes Dorn's comparison of Hector and Christ, as "two kinds of gods," in his earlier statement about Olson's *Maximus* poems—a discussion that helps to elaborate the archetypal and ethical concepts that structure human potential and alienation in *Abilene, Abilene!*

Of the Artist, Dorn writes in the introductory note to his film: "love and / hate are literally equal / in this man because abstract."¹⁶⁷⁵ Abstraction is a quality Dorn likewise celebrates in Hector, who, Dorn reminds us, "a poet created," whereas Christ "wasn't created," which "made possible his resurrection, and the resurrection harks back to the immaculate nonhuman conception. Hector is not resurrectable. He lives in the manor of the mind and stands for unalienated beauty."¹⁶⁷⁶ For Dorn, resurrection permitted the appropriation of Christ as "a force of deception," an infinitely manipulable kind of god, who thus became the "property of political intrigue, for civil jurisdiction, then, for centuries."¹⁶⁷⁷ In *Abilene, Abilene!*, as DII (Christ) tends to DI's (God) "arrested" countenance in a corner of the saloon, he bemoans his molested eminence in the lives and minds of men:

DII: How many times? I live a single life, and try to fill it up as the allotted years will take the strain of this passage, and even tho I am assured I shall pass full blown into eternity as a pure demonstration of human event for men to remember, they'll get it wrong – they'll read it as a victory over death in their name. Titles, mortgages, a license to live in segments. What fools, in their competition. When will they see that in Eternity the only title is Now. When will they see their spirits ~~are~~ ^{is} here, as well as to Come.¹⁶⁷⁸

To the Artist, Christ represents the ego, "utilized out of existence," like the boundless, lyrical "I"—"cheap and commercial and psychiatric": "Christ is hopelessly involved in the secrets of the State, because his ego was perverted for its use," Dorn writes; whereas, "Hector still possesses a free ego, the kind of circuit which stays in the human breast in the form of beauty (even such a thing as behavior was once beauty), but the ego, as well as beauty, and things abstract, are pagan."¹⁶⁷⁹ Behavior and beauty are synonymous in the "impeccable

¹⁶⁷⁵ Edward Dorn, original mss., notebook for *Abilene, Abilene!*, Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Dorn, "What I See in *The Maximus Poems*," in *Views*, 41.

¹⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Edward Dorn, original mss., "Note from Lawrence late April 1969," Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁷⁹ Dorn, "What I See in *The Maximus Poems*," in *Views*, 41.

smoothness” and gestural refinement of the Gunslinger, and that synergy grants him an “unmatchable speed” that pulls time into its own warp of relativity—“When the act is / so self contained / and so dazzling in itself / the target / can disappear / in the heated tension / which is an area between here / and formerly.”¹⁶⁸⁰ And so the Artist, the supposed “fastest” gunfighter in *Abilene, Abilene!*, is also defined by an urbanity that is the inflated result of his linguistic potency: the Artist is pagan (kills god), abstract (condenses love and hate), and rejects the facile, organic, passivity of DII’s new *style*—his holster full of flowers, an image that again recalls Dorn’s central assertion from the *Maximus* essay: “...flowers mean nothing to man except his own flowers, those he has brought forth, and he loves them as does nature love her flowers.”¹⁶⁸¹ Does the symbolic distinction between Art and DII in *Abilene, Abilene!* intend also to signify divergent trends within the countercultural movement in 1969? (“Bullshit!” Art later berates DII, “You got too Natural!”) Is DII (Christ) an extension of the “love-and-flowers angle of the Haight-Ashbury,” which, according to Kansas countercultural icon and artist, Wayne Propst, “didn’t ever happen” in Lawrence—“...[t]hat was a lesson for the rednecks. These hippies were not throwing flowers around.”¹⁶⁸²

Northeastern Kansas, in fact, as the “sacred geography” of Dorn’s screenplay locates it, inhabits the eternally present—the spot of “NOW” and “HERE” in the aerial map’s assertion: “ALL THE POWER THAT EVER WAS OR WILL BE IS HERE NOW.” In between the East-as-Past, and the West-as-Future, northeastern Kansas sits at the intersection of the perpendicular transcontinental movements with which *Abilene, Abilene!* is concerned. Ironically, the mysterious consequence of this location to the overall story is punctuated by the missing sections of the screenplay. However, certain features of the story’s cosmic cartography are clear, the most prominent of which is the mapping of time on the physical landscape. In a diagram Dorn drew for Brakhage, he depicted the First Chance Saloon at the base of the trunk—i.e. “the route to the north”—of a “great Tree,” its branches etched by the east and west roadways, “the two confluences,” meeting at the First Chance Saloon in town. This temporal topography is introduced in the dialogue upon the arrival of the Woman and DII to the saloon, when Art inquires from whence they’ve come:

¹⁶⁸⁰ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 30-31.

¹⁶⁸¹ Dorn, “What I See in *The Maximus Poems*,” in *Views*, 41; here also consider Dorn’s drawing for the cover of 1971’s “The Cycle,” which depicts the Poet, who delivers that book under the “Tanner’s shed,” with a holster full of flowers. (West Newbury: Frontier Press, 1971)

¹⁶⁸² *Cows Are Freaky*, 18-19.

DII: Well, I came out of the future.

A: From the West, huh?

DII: Yea.

W: I brought the contracts from the East.

A: Shit. I forgot to sign them. Always something out of the past.¹⁶⁸³

In this orientation, the north/south route that the cattle drive traces runs up a midcontinental column of the present, a verge of the Now, into “the total stretching of the Spectrum that direction enforces.” In this sense, northeastern Kansas is doubly “Now,” the central vortex of the “the Nation [as] a transept.” Along this timeless corridor, this “back trail,” Art’s herd gradually disappears. “Everything in this godforsaken country reverts soon as you turn your back,” he complains, as he watches workers dismantle the First Chance Saloon at the end of Part I, all foreshadowing the dispersed fate of his drive. And DIII (Holy Spirit), heading south at the start of the film, traverses this ominous passageway.

Possessed of the supreme speed on the “draw”—the “Pragmanatural,” the “thing that can’t be beat,” DII (Christ) later informs Art—DIII (Holy Spirit) is the Artist’s nemesis and foil in *Abilene*, *Abilene!*, or so Part I suggests. Elsewhere, in a note along the bottom of one of his several aerial diagrams, Dorn asserts this dramatic conflict as central to the film. The film represents, he writes, “A test of Art against DIII/Natural.” And the note at the top of this map identifies the North, the direction from which DIII (Holy Ghost) rides, as death’s domain—“Death always comes from the North,” Dorn’s notes insist. For example, the north sky behind DII as he arrives to town is dark, “*professional and organized*,” and against the flat horizon of that foreboding atmosphere, DIII (Holy Spirit) appears in eerie silhouette—a haunting, gothic figure of “effortlessly” mechanical composure. Dorn’s involved description of DIII’s strange, disconcerting grace and stylistic potency—“*Spiritus and pneuma define his face*”; he is “an enclosed quantum”—and other essential but externalized features “recognizable” at a “fleeting glance,” is a lot to imagine conveying in images:

DIII rides south. He is long and bony altho he rides a large horse his feet nearly touch the ground. In his eyes there is the quality of shafts. There is at first glance something mechanical about him. Somewhere in his experiences there has been too much repetition – he has heard the same story too many times. He is totally black. This is not to say he is unable to see a certain joke. He himself may be a joker. There is nothing obvious about him. Nothing quickly pinned down. He never

¹⁶⁸³ Edward Dorn, original mss., “Note from Lawrence late April 1969,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

sings, he hums. Effortlessly, randomly, slowly, all time is his, an enclosed quantum. He has nothing particular to do w/ death. He is the Holy Ghost and as such there is even a sense of the anti particular abt him. He is everywhere, in every place. Even in those hearts which have long ago decided they pump their own blood. His transcendence is so total he seems almost to be ~~totally~~ absent. Yet this blackness he has is vibrant, not polished, vibrant, no dull blackness insinuating blackness, a living force in black. In other words, this is the supreme style of color just because it refuses color.

There is no discernable age in this figure. His discriminations stretch across space – the one thing he loathes, the thing which curls his lip with derision, is time. He has always known everything; but he is not cold in that sense, thus his procedure has been heuristic through what he might for his own amusement call Life, as against what others call death. He might say “give me your hand” and mean it literally. And if you hesitate he’ll not even bother to call you a fool. He is a revelationist of inexhaustible capacity. Spiritus and pneuma define his face.

All the foregoing aspects of DIII are recognizable as of the most fleeting glance. It is important that they be thus conveyed. ...¹⁶⁸⁴

When DII (Christ), Art, the Woman, and the Bartender, riding north from the saloon to Art’s ranch, first encounter DIII (Holy Spirit), riding south, the group is filled with a “figgeting silence” as the Holy Ghost unassailably approaches—“Care for a smoke?” Art asks DII: “What is it?” / A: ‘Tobacco.’ / **DII**: ‘No thanks.’” As they pass, Art is seduced by the stranger’s manner:

DIII appears at first not to be aware of their presence at all. Then abreast of them he turn his head, as if programmed, to smile on all of them and about his teeth and eyes at that moment are the sparkles of a soft, unobtrusive brilliance. In his holster is a red 45.

A: (looking back) You don’t see that much any more. ~~A cross draw w/ the left hand.~~ A left hand cross draw.

W: That’s got to be the tallest man in the world, (trailing off) or somewhere ~~like that~~¹⁶⁸⁵

Once DIII arrives in town, he glamorously dismounts—“*throwing one leg over the horses head*”—and converses with God, now revived and wandering the dusty street. Their casually handled discussion’s overarching allegory broadly ranges from westward expansion on the North American continent—the “opening” of “the strip,” they call it, when “the past rushes in”—to the disappointment they share in the wayward, loafing Son’s choice of “three

¹⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., “Note from Lawrence late April 1969,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

ordinaries” for travel companions. Before they part, DI (God) saddled on his camel, DIII broods over avenging the Artist’s irreverent negligence. God is less impetuous, more forgiving. Their full interaction follows:

DIII: Hello God.

DI: Hi Ghost.

DIII dismounts by throwing one leg over the horses head then bends down then stretches full length arms up.

DIII: That’s a rough circuit, Abilene to Abilene. Every time I make it I swear it will be the last time.

...

DIII: ...I was a ~~bit~~ little amused ~~me a bit~~ to see you use that snake trick again.

DI: Um, I suppose that was a bit too much. So, how are things along the drag.

DIII: Oh, I don’t know. There’s a new sense of some kind around the strip – they say its going to be opened up. I’ll have to be there when the past rushes in. ...

...

DI: If that race wants it I’m inclined to let them have it – its time now to give the 1st people a rest, you know they’re the ~~oldest ones~~ straightest blood I got. By the way did you see –

DIII: Yea, I saw him on the road traveling north with three ordinaries.

DI: I think that’s New Business ghost.

DIII: I understand you’re interest, but I can assure you it’s old business – can you believe the artist didn’t recognize me?

DI: Scarcely.

DIII: He’ll recall. But he won’t recover.

DI: Easy.

DIII: Easy does it.

...as a camel is brought up, the muzzle rope is given to DI...

DI: I’m going West.

DIII: Give my regards to the future

DI: Give my regards to the people, as you come across them.

DIII: Sure. Be Great.

DI: I will.¹⁶⁸⁶

As DI and the DIII part ways, the scene fades to Art’s ranch, for the final installment of Part I.

At the ranch, the prelude to the “Great Drive,” Art broods over the “pneuma” and the “left hand cross draw” of the strange traveler, whom he still fails to recognize—an “essence no sense can catch.”¹⁶⁸⁷ While the encounter between Art and DIII, and the suspended

¹⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸⁷ Edward Dorn, original mss., “Extention [sic] Part 1,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

closure of the episode between DIII and DI both point toward the likelihood of a later confrontation between Art and DIII, the ranch scene bundles the various themes and narratives of that which has proceeded in Part I: the Artist finally signs the contracts; the Artist continues to attack the “flora” sprouting from DII’s holster; the Artist and DII contemplate the “Pragmanatural” powers; and so on. The lurid and bizarre ritual of signing the contracts—wherein the Artist, with his own blood, draws in the missing eyes, ears, and mouth, respectively, on three “grotesque totems”—further exacerbates the already existing friction between the Woman and the Artist, who in his exhaustion, frustration, and disgust with the procedure, turns bitterly misogynistic. After concluding the biographical section of the contractual process, the Artist queries Christ about his predictions for their trip. In Christ’s final address, the last soliloquy of Part I, the script offers its most expansive and rich vision of the central, mythic nexus of northeastern Kansas—“a Quivira of the nerves...”—toward which the characters direct their journey. Because the scene comprehensively gathers the script’s earlier events, and because it exists as the final, completed episode of the available screenplay, I include it in its entirety:

[speaking of DIII]

A: ...some strange manner of false movement preliminary to the whole experience so fast only the intuition registers the thing – like the Déjà vu inside a dream, an essence no sense can catch, an essence expectation itself crushes w/ a heavy hand, fast to drop therefore slow, slow to rise!

DII: You’re talking abt. the ~~praeter-natural~~ Pragmanatural.

A: That’s right – the natural Pragma. The thing that can’t be beat. The thing you had Jack, as nearly as I ever saw it twice.

DII: There are always two forms of the present. You have to choose. To have it nearly is to Not Have it Immensely. There is no Exit from the Stage center ~~front~~ of Carnation. We ~~have-only~~ are compromised by that which comes next. The Natural wasn’t for me Art. I was meant for something else.

A: Bullshit! You got too Natural – that’s why you got weeds growing in you holster –

The Artist rocks and rolls the ice in his drink then snaps his fingers. A servant leaves the room.

A: – which by the way bothers me, I just can’t get used to it – where did you pick ~~that~~ up that flora?

DII: Along the road one day as I rode back from the Future, I saw a light emanate ~~from~~ back of a Golden Rod charged with Aurora, the Field forced with high density pollution.

A: Religion?

DII: If you mean you’d answer the telephone with that word, yes.

A: Some say Buen Dia!

DII: An ordinary temporal exactitude.

A: It can happen. And I always staked my reputation that Art could beat it.

DII: By which you mean yrSelf – that’s a slack method for counting time.

W: Speaking of Time, Art, these contracts are still waitin’ – the referees have been chosen for the current year, they’re all your friends, you can’t miss. And I’m here to let you tell me to go away, so you can enjoy the phony privilege of telling me to come back. Like you thot of it all by yrSelf.

A: Spread ‘em out, and prepare my pen. (*turning to DII*) Jack, how abt signing some contracts? The price of the Past is too high.

DII: Can’t make it – I pour ~~my blood~~ it all into the roots of the Tree.

A fountain pen of extraordinary design and scale, being 2times the size of a common fountain pen, is brought in by the servant dispatched earlier. The pen is ~~enrusted~~ inlaid with miniatures ~~from~~ of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Emerging from its cap is a peacock feather. The instrument is unscrewed by the attendant and the two parts placed carefully on the tassled pillow. The artist has meanwhile sat with his chin resting on his thumbs, his fingers entwined – a distance has replaced his eyes. He suddenly starts into the present, his eyes gradually return to the room. The attendant rolls up the sleeve of the Artist’s right arm and finds a vein with the tip of the pen and draws out conspicuously more blood than is needed for the signing – the cap is put on top the pen and it is ~~handed~~ given to the artist’s left hand.

A: The Contracts!

The woman unties and unrolls the first of the bundle of parchment. Inside the first roll is the ~~statue~~ long cylinder of a grotesque totem w/ no eyes. And the artist puts in the eyes with the bloody pen’s tip.

W: This is what ~~they~~ we saw.

A: Save the explanation habitu , the thing’s in the signing speech!

The woman unties unrolls another parchment, inside is a cylinder decorated with heads which have no ears and w/ the bloody pen he ~~draws~~ creates simple ears

W: This is what we heard.

A: Save the talk, gossip – the thing’s in the notation of the eye!

The woman unrolls the third and final scroll and presents the artist with a green statue which has no mouth. He inscribes a red mouth thereon and holds the pen into the air, his head averted – the servant takes the pen and ~~puts~~ screws the cap on puts it on the pillow, walks away.

W: This is what they said.

A: You stupid cunt! Sometimes I think you really believe that. Until I remember you invented the whole thing and therefore must have ~~had~~ got a hint somewhere along the way!

The woman snaps her fingers and the keeper of the pen ~~instantly~~ returns w/ the promptness of a geni.

W: You’ve forgotten something Art.

A: Something is always forgotten. What's your version?
W: The Auto Biography.
A: That means more blood.
W: Usually. But in your case we can skip it.
A: Blood never scripts.
W: Skip it! Come on, the last document.
A: Well. I was born in mid air my mother was a sky diver. She had me in the two full minutes it takes to reach EARTH – I was born in a parachute. I hit the ground at a speed between 15 and 20 miles an hour landing on my head in the suburbs. I was picked up by an alert letter carrier and saved from General Delivery – I've been subsidized ever since – to need nothing in the beginning is to need nothing in the End.
W: That's your story?
A: That's my story. (*Then turning to DII*) ~~What~~ Who do you think will join the Herd on the Great Drive?
DII: Everyone.
A: What do you think will be in the Herd on the Great Drive?
DII: Everything.
A: Where do you think it will go?
DII: Due North.
A: Into what?
DII: Into the total stretching of the Spectrum that direction enforces.
The candles flicker on a sudden breeze in the room. DII continues.
The Nation is a transept of two primary movements which is to say one Cross. The Sun to Sun Impulse has always expressed the relative stupidity of a family vacation, the recurrent pantomime of doctrinaire hard work – and, an occasional discovery, an occasion very ~~clear~~ close to the heart of the Ordinary. The South to North movement is headed into the resistance, feeds headlong against the Contrary and makes the Cross, gropes in great civilized spasms into a Quivira of the nerves seeking the end of the line, the last ~~extension~~ point of the nerve growth, from back East? (*Here DII laughs uncontrollably.*) East of Back!

END P.I¹⁶⁸⁸

Dorn finished Part I in Lawrence in late April 1969, and that appears to be the last work (archived, at least) that he did on the script. An interview in 1973 is the last time that Dorn mentions any intentions to complete *Abilene, Abilene!*: “I wrote a film script for Stan Brakhage. As it turned out we couldn't come up with the money and for one reason or another we decided not to do it. It's a western. He was interested, not from a director's standpoint, but to be the cameraman on such a project. We worked together on it and talked it

¹⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., “Estention, [sic] Part 1,” Folder 455, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

over for about a month. ... Maybe I'll finish it soon."¹⁶⁸⁹ Maybe the piece, was too close to the matrix of *Gunslinger* after all, or perhaps Dorn's interest in making a film—an unavoidably more mainstream maneuver, especially in the context of the Western's popularity in the late 1960s—dissipated, as he, Dunbar, and their family migrated from the Midwest to the Southwest in the summer of 1969, then back to England that fall, then to Illinois, to California, to Ohio, and so on, until finally settling in Denver, Colorado in the early 1980s.¹⁶⁹⁰ Or maybe the collaboration wasn't there, or didn't materialize when those "back East" lost interest. On his way to New York for a brief visit in early 1969, Dorn wrote to John Martin of his hopes for the forthcoming screenplay, "a chance to talk [to] someone in NYC abt doing it which is still my main interest."¹⁶⁹¹ For whatever reason, like the Malin collection Dorn contemplated with Irby, but eventually abandoned, nothing further came of *Abilene, Abilene!* It stands with "Osawatomie," "It was in a dream," and "Notice How a Vaster Crystal of Lives Comes Around" (which I'll turn to in the following section), as an overlooked, but illustrative work from Dorn's oft-cited, mid-career stylistic transition—a "crisis," Elmborg labels it, between the anguished, lyrical address, and the playful psychocosmology of *Gunslinger*.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Dorn, interview by Okada, *Edward Dorn Interviews*, 48.

¹⁶⁹⁰ There now exists further mention of *Abilene, Abilene*, which Dorn apparently returned to in San Diego, in the mid-Seventies. (However, the only pieces of the screenplay available through Dorn's papers at the Dodd Library are those I've discussed.) In his memoir/essay, "The Zephyrus Image and Edward Dorn," published in the summer 2004 issue of *Chicago Review* (49:3/4 & 50:1), Alastair Johnston writes: "Dorn was appointed Visiting Professor in the Department of Literature at U.C. San Diego and resumed work on *Abilene, Abilene!* This was a film script suggested by filmmaker Stan Brakhage, that got as far as galley proofs but was never formally published. ... The film was announced for publication on 31 May 1976, but circumstances (read: lack of funds) prevented its appearance. ... There are several sets of galleys for *Abilene, Abilene!* in the ZI archives, so it may have been issued in galley format. It would not have been atypical for a ZI production to appear on newsprint, unbound. But other, more pressing plans were afoot at the time." (144-145) Evidently, Dorn and family were preparing to move to a commune with the Zephyrus Image founders. Johnston quotes a letter from Dorn to Holbrook Teter, 12 February 1976: "It grips me to think what I've got yet to do compared to what I haven't even done. And the script is the foremost in the candidacy of that what. Tonight sees it thru, and Tomorrow sees it off. Things look brighter, courtesy of the sunne, the floods having subsided (fancy all that rain where it's considered a nuisance.... I am more prepared by the grossness of this void to tackle life on its own terms all in quotes than ever before and this whole enterprise takes on the glow of: 'I'm movin to the country, mama, gonna let this crazy world go by.'" (143)

¹⁶⁹¹ Edward Dorn to John Martin, 10 January 1969, Folder 13, MSS 313 BC, CSWR Mss.

Imagine a fairy chain stretched from mountain peak to mountain peak, as far as the eye could reach, and paid out until it touched the 'high places' of the earth at a number of ridges, banks, and knolls. Then visualize a mound, circular earthwork, or clump of trees, planted on these high points, and in low points in the valley other mounds ringed round with water to be seen from a distance. Then great standing stones brought to mark the way at intervals, and on a bank leading up to a mountain ridge or down to a ford the track cut deep so as to form a guiding notch on the skyline as you come up. In a ditch or mountain pass the road cut deeply at the highest place straight through the ridge to show as a notch afar off. Here and there and at two ends of the way, a beacon fire used to lay out the track. With ponds dug on the line, or streams banked up into 'flashes' to form reflecting points on the beacon track.... All these works exactly on the sighting line. The wayfarer's instructions are still deeply rooted in the peasant mind today, when he tells you—quite wrongly now—'You just keep straight on.'

– Alfred Watkins¹⁶⁹²

*And it is all one to me
Where I am to begin; for I shall
return there again.*

– Parmenides¹⁶⁹³

25. *The Garden of Birth*

“Quantrill / still waits to raid Lawrence,” Irby writes in *To Max Douglas*, “only from / within this time, the rise / is high tide here already.”¹⁶⁹⁴ Here and there, now and then: up from those prairie seas, in the early morning hours of August 21, 1863, William Quantrill—a former school teacher and teamster, turned Missouri guerilla leader—led 453 Confederate soldiers and volunteer fighters in a murderous raid on Lawrence. The border ruffians killed over two hundred men and boys, and set much of downtown on fire, including the abolitionist stronghold, the Eldridge Hotel, the symbolic burning of which had become, since the “Wakarusa War,” a traditional gesture of proslavery attacks.¹⁶⁹⁵ But Quantrill, after all, isn't on the side of the history he took a part in making.¹⁶⁹⁶ Not like Brown, that broadsword

¹⁶⁹² Alfred Watkins, from *The Old Straight Track*, quoted in Michell, *The View Over Atlantis*, 15-16.

¹⁶⁹³ Parmenides of Elea, *Fragments*, trans. Gallop, 59.

¹⁶⁹⁴ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Richard B. Sheridan, “William Quantrill and the Lawrence Massacre, August 21, 1863,” in *Embattled Lawrence*, 55-60; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 785-787.

¹⁶⁹⁶ See Aaron Kunin in conversation with Ben Lerner, *Denver Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4 (June 2006), 68: “What could it mean to be on the side of history? There's a scene in the Gillo Pontecorvo film *The Battle of Algiers* where a captured rebel leader has a conference with the international press. One of the journalists asks: did you really think that your tiny band of terrorists stood any chance against the entire modern French army? And the rebel says: well we thought that we had a much better chance of defeating the French army than the French army had of defeating history. That's a commitment to history in the future, 'the history that will be,' as Eduardo Galeano puts it. Particular historical events might not appear to be on the side of some individual rebel, but history is ultimately going to favor this

artisan, who Ralph Waldo Emerson promised would “make the gallows as glorious as the cross.”¹⁶⁹⁷ And Brown made the condensed fury of his own death a work of art—“I am worth inconceivably more to hang,” he told his brother, “than for any other purpose”—an artwork whose lethal climax exploded all closure, and that split a nation to rebirth it.¹⁶⁹⁸ But both figures, Brown and Quantrill, keep open the “casket” from which the embattled body of Lawrence is cyclically, brutally resurrected, and both exorcise/exercise the “local variables of death.” The fire that consumed the student union in 1970 was one more crest, another “uprising,” of this arterial violence, “forever at the heart of things.” All these fires in Lawrence’s history, the fires that brought Kansas into existence, that made it “available” and “visible” as a free state, embolden the cosmological/mythological stature Dorn’s work affords the place.

“[I]n every event of his art,” Robert Duncan writes, “man dwells in mixed possibilities of inflation or inspiration.”¹⁶⁹⁹ To explore this notion, in his essay over Duncan’s wartime poetics, Nathaniel Mackey proposes a structural metaphor in the ancient African story from the *Dausi* of Gassire’s lute, whose tune ignites and destroys the city of Wagadu, where Gassire’s father is king. Wagadu represents, “the strength which lives in the hearts of men,” Mackey writes, and is destroyed four times, in fact—each time through the vanity and malevolence of its human inhabitants. This continuous cycle of disappearance and reappearance engenders Wagadu’s primeval association with the nature of earthly strife, warfare, and human imagination. Mackey summarizes the city’s overlapping histories: “So what is available to us is an enigmatic picture of a spectral city that is both of the earth and not of the earth, visible at times and at other times invisible. . . . war has something to do with making Wagadu visible.”¹⁷⁰⁰ A fierce warrior whose bitter longing for the throne leads to Wagadu’s initial destruction, when jealous Gassire questions the “wise man” about when he will inherit his father’s throne, Gassire is given a lute with specific instructions: “It cannot sing if it has no heart. You must give it a heart. . . . The wood must ring with the stroke of your sword. The wood must absorb down-dripping blood, blood of your blood, breath of your

rebellion. History starts to look interesting to me when it’s about modality rather than chronology. ‘What mood do you want to live in?’ Rather than: ‘what tense?’”

¹⁶⁹⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 209.

¹⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Robert Duncan, quoted from *The H.D. Book*, in Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 74.

¹⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

breath.”¹⁷⁰¹ Outraged by the fact he will never become king, Gassire declares, “Wagadu can go to blazes!”; and for “the next seven days,” Mackey writes, “Gassire goes into battle, with the lute slung over his shoulder and one of his sons at his side. Each day a son is killed and his blood drips down onto the lute. On the eighth day, the men of the city gather and tell Gassire that the killing must cease. They banish him from Wagadu....”¹⁷⁰² Days later, after he flees the city, the lute’s sonorous melody entrances Gassire in the middle of the night, and simultaneously actuates Wagadu’s decimation. For Mackey, this destruction extends the notion of war’s function in “making Wagadu visible,” in thrusting it into the domain of the imagination, and it complicates the moral ambiguity at the core of creative activity—the tension between “inspiration” and “inflation,” wherein Gassire represents the artist:

There is also reason to see warfare as having to do with daimonic inspiration. ... If Wagadu is “the strength which lives in the hearts of men,” it cannot help but be their “indomitability” too. Both the availability and the invisibility of Wagadu have to do with a rendezvous with vertical powers—the war drum, remember, is tied to the sky—a rendezvous that makes for unruliness. The capacity for invasion alive “in the hearts of men” is the openness to an otherness that cuts both ways. Our inspiration is also our peril, a risk of inflation.... The singer of the tale is caught between cosmology (the claim that for better or for worse this is how it is) and morality (the claim that were it not for human vices things would turn out well.) ... The splendor of Wagadu and the loss of Wagadu are variations on a single theme of inspiration.¹⁷⁰³

This “single theme of inspiration” bodied in the tumult of Wagadu seems equally poignant for envisioning the historical animus of Lawrence’s “sacred geometry.” Lawrence, burning across the centuries, *is* a Wagadu—land of El Dorado, city of gold, and the Seven Cities of Cibola, known only to the avaricious dreams of the conquistadors who sought that vision; and the “bloody” turf for another vision of total human liberty (“to purge this land with blood”), over which civil war was born—born by “the strength which lives in the hearts of men,” and born out in their state’s slogan, itself “tied to the sky”: “To the stars *through* adversity.” And through acts of arson, firebombings, and sniper fire, the “unruliness” surrounding Vietnam again made “visible” in Lawrence the double-jointed divining rod driven into the heart of the

¹⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁷⁰² Ibid., 73.

¹⁷⁰³ Ibid., 73-74.

country—"the *heart* / that is the *mind* / as the Zohar / also knows them one," Irby observes in *To Max Douglas*.¹⁷⁰⁴

The dangerous slippage between "inspiration" and "inflation" that Mackey defines no doubt acts on Brown and Quantrill, but also contextualizes the pitfalls of Lawrence's late '60s countercultural environment, as those close to Dorn, and Dorn himself, saw it. The commercialized ricochet, that Moritz described, of George Kimball's "outlaw fantasy" as a force of mass cultural deception; the glutinous, especially sexual, indulgence of the Oread lifestyle that many memoirists regret; Robert Bly's distended cult of personality; Max Douglas's overdose; Leonard Harrison's fashionable, persuasive, and dangerous doctrine of militancy; all suffer a passion whereby immersion elides with submission—in Bly's case, and perhaps Kimball's, effects an "inflated" sense of self; in Douglas' case, a lethal intake. Though the particulars of his later experience are unknown to us, the Artist in *Abilene*, *Abilene!* acts recklessly on similar "inflated" presumptions, and his inability "to partake of the spirit [he's] killed," suggests the disclosure of a flaw that will later be fatal.

At the same time, the "will power" of any artist, Dorn reminds us through DII, presses this Heraclitean tension—the fire *without*, and the fire *within*; the war that "makes us as we are"—just as Gassire's lute and Duncan's line remind us "that fire has both its malevolent and its beneficent sides," Mackey writes, "[w]hat makes the hearth can also destroy it."¹⁷⁰⁵ Dorn's *Twenty-four Love Songs* are acutely aware of this volatile paradox, announced in the book's first poem by the terrifying "preservation" of Mayan culture during the Spanish colonialization of North America: "the runic secret of homeward / when Diego de Landa / the glyphic books destroyed."¹⁷⁰⁶ A member of the Franciscan order in Yucatan, Landa is known for two equally awesome acts. The latter survives as a volume of writings which provide "ninety-nine percent of what we today know of the Mayas"—of their ceremonial festivals, hunting rituals, interior decorations, etc.; the former was his decree in 1562 that destroyed "ninety-nine times as much knowledge of Maya history and sciences as he has given us in his book."¹⁷⁰⁷ In July 1562, Landa orchestrated "the famous Auto de fe... at Mani, at which, in addition to some 5000 'idols,' he burned as he tells us twenty-seven

¹⁷⁰⁴ Irby, *To Max Douglas*, unpaginated.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Mackey, "Gassire's Lute," in *Paracritical Hinge*, 103.

¹⁷⁰⁶ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 236.

¹⁷⁰⁷ William Gates, trans., introduction to *Yucatan: Before and After the Conquest*, by Friar Diego de Landa (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), iii-iv.

hieroglyphic rolls, all he could find but could not read, as ‘works of the devil,’ designed by the evil one to delude the Indians and to prevent them from accepting Christianity when it should be brought to them.”¹⁷⁰⁸ Landa’s atonement, titled *Yucatan: Before and After Conquest*, was included on Dorn’s syllabus at KU. In Dorn’s *Twenty-four Love Songs*, Landa’s corrupted resurrection of Mayan history suggests the palimpsestic nature of all writing—part eradication, part renewal—and the sparring maneuvers of intimacy: “you’re eyes tonight are journals / of unburnt records.”¹⁷⁰⁹ The tensions that twisted Dorn’s and Dunbar’s social engagements at Essex, and their summer 1968 transatlantic escape by boat, which likewise meant Dorn’s official return to America without Helene and his family—both are motions that inscribe and efface the poem’s tablet, “to test that steel / across the plain between us,” “to have / newtowns of the soul.”¹⁷¹⁰ But how to find them, now that the “runic secret of homeward” is destroyed?¹⁷¹¹

In love, when the “sun inside us” is formed? Dorn’s are *love* songs because they recline with negativity aside passion’s all-consuming fire. Love’s indispensable disobedience to categorization or logical deduction makes beauty of its own dynamic irrationality, fueled by that “inside” sun Olson said “love makes,” and from which *style* radiates. “Style is *soul*,” Olson said: “the state of the body—the beauty of it—shall depend upon the potency of the source of its light and heat.”¹⁷¹² If Dorn’s *Love Songs* replace Gassire, say, with Diego de Landa, adding and linking imperialism to the act of writing, they also substitute the thematically related stories of Egyptian cosmology—the lost-and-found eye of Ra that is the instrument of both the creation and the destruction of humanity—for those of Wagadu from the *Dausi*.¹⁷¹³ Sexual acts, for instance, are charged with archetypal formulations in song five, when “in our mouths / the warm sperm rises / and prolongs us,” recalls Ra’s creation of the universe, taking his sperm into his mouth and spitting out “the first divine couple,” Shu and Tefnut, who rule over air, water, and sunlight, and separated earth from sky—hence, in

¹⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., iv.

¹⁷⁰⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 240.

¹⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 236-237.

¹⁷¹¹ Ibid., 236.

¹⁷¹² Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life*, 3. In an essay by Michael Palmer, (“Take the X Train: A Discrete Series: For Oppen,” *No: a journal of the arts*, no. 7 (2008), 262), he attributes the quote, “style is soul,” to Olson. See also my introduction, fn. 49: Stan Brakhage refers to Olson’s comment in “A Conversation with Stan Brakhage,” interviewed by Philip Taaffe, orig. published in *Composite Nature* (New York: Peter Blum Edition, 1998). I accessed it through the latter’s website: <www.philipptaaffe.info/index.php> (10 June 2008).

¹⁷¹³ Pinch, *Egyptian Myth*, 93.

Dorn's song, the lover's are sonically reconciled, in the poem's hybrid voice, its single breath: "our clef is pitched together / we share / a completely trued voice / our substance carried / in our joined mouths / flows."¹⁷¹⁴ Is this "substance" sperm, or speech? And again, in song nineteen, the procreant merges with the writing process, in the combined figure of Hermes—god of merchants, thieves, and orators—also identified as Thoth—god of wisdom, language and writing, whose "breath of life" restored the mutilated eye of Horus, son of the murdered and dismembered Osiris, god of the underworld, and the rightful Ur-king of Egypt. (To keep that title, in a contest of power, Horus tricked Seth, his archrival, into eating his sperm, by spreading it over Seth's garden. When the deity tribunal gathered to determine the lawful king calls out to Horus' sperm, and it answers from within Seth's stomach, the tribunal restores the throne to Horus.)¹⁷¹⁵ Much later, to mark distance and protect travelers, the Greeks lined their roadways with small rectangular busts of Hermes, the messenger of the gods, frequently depicted with wings on his feet: "Hermes standing," Dorn writes in song nineteen, stitching sex and cosmogony, "anyone from the beginning of time / will know the initiation of time / covered with sperm."¹⁷¹⁶

Like the Gunslinger's sun-worship, or the songs for the sunrise of the poet he praises—whose "mind / is marvelously heliocentric," and whose "fingers have been brushed / by the fleece on Aries flank"—the *Love Songs* are also a heliocentric set of movements—of the "sun inside" and out.¹⁷¹⁷ Yet, at every moment they are threatened and eroticized by the always imminent entropic collapse of their frenetic orbit—"you are sometimes in the trance of what / is beyond you, / sometimes close / and then you turn into it / so fast we turn...."¹⁷¹⁸ With traps, gaps, and cracks in its language, the poem fashions and renews its world as the world of its lovers—a retreat both *to* and *from* the "real" world. In the friction stirred by its moving into an order that contains the prescription for its own undoing, the poem opens as it closes, an apocalyptic impulse that integrates oppositional forces without sacrificing their individual potency: "I feel that fear / my own / that fear a face presents / ...says words and the words / mean something / else / and the fear / is inside the other meaning / meaning which / would have no meaning then / of the thing that's not itself / would fear not itself / fear not, /

¹⁷¹⁴ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 238; Pinch, *Egyptian Myth*, 48; 36.

¹⁷¹⁵ Pinch, *Egyptian Myth*, 80-82; chap. 8, 89-99.

¹⁷¹⁶ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Hermes"; Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 247.

¹⁷¹⁷ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 49.

¹⁷¹⁸ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 242.

could have no meaning / Don't kill me / with that other meaning."¹⁷¹⁹ A section of the Egyptian Coffin Texts, appropriately known as "The Book of Two Ways," records the *duat*, Ra's nightly journey through the underworld, which culminates in a totalizing concept of "tomorrow," extending beyond the confines of a new day to project a new world.¹⁷²⁰ When the harbinger of that new world first rose from the primeval ocean at Heliopolis, it formed a blue lotus—the very same hallucinogenic water-lily Odysseus was warned against—which opened its petals "to reveal a golden child." This birth was the first sunrise, "the beautiful moment... when the creator became manifest as the youthful sun god."¹⁷²¹

In Dorn's tenth song, the primogenital image of the "lotus" merges with the issuance of Gassire's ambiguous music—the creator as "lutist"—into the poem's final word/line, "lutus," that announces Dunbar's metonymy: "now everywhere I turn / and everytime there is / that full thing with us / I am cotted / high inside you / lutus."¹⁷²² These apparently discrepant motions—to "turn," and to be "cotted"—are the basic currency of poetics, of verse, from *versus*, "a turn of the plow, a furrow, a line of writing"—turns and lines that are gathered into "stanzas," the Italian word for "room."¹⁷²³ And Dorn's "cotted" liberation is a Donnian conceit, replacing the latter's ecstatic syntax with a spare, flat affect. To fasten adjacent materials, a "cotter-pin" opens out like a blossom after threading its hole; while its homonym looks back to a pre-industrial scene of dispossession, to the "cottar" farmer, who traded labor for his cottage.¹⁷²⁴ Dorn's device retains Donne's notion of an overpowering, obliterating love force that, Donne writes, "makes one little room an everywhere" in which liminality and eventuality are undifferentiated. A place called Now: "I wonder, by my troth," Donne writes in "The Good-Morrow," "what thou and I / Did, till we loved?"¹⁷²⁵ That is, till love bound us to its obliterating and timeless present. Stemming from his reading of Duncan's essay, "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," Mackey's discussion of love's compressed, unruly dynamism recalls the "abstract" consolidation of "love and hate" in Dorn's Artist, and clarifies love's conflicted presence in Dorn's *Love Songs*:

[L]ove, like any other fire, has a way of moving on. Its refusal, whether

¹⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 244.

¹⁷²⁰ Pinch, *Egyptian Myth*, 54; 58.

¹⁷²¹ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷²² Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 241.

¹⁷²³ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "verse" and "stanza."

¹⁷²⁴ Ibid., s.v. "cottar."

¹⁷²⁵ John Donne, "The Good Morrow," in *The Longman Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Lynne McMahon and Averill Curdy, 222.

as word or as feeling, to be domesticated by or to come to rest in any single meaning, any one incarnation, eats away at the tranquility of the hearth. Aphrodite gets in an affair with Ares, as both love and war attest to an “indomitability” in the human heart. Their having to do with one another suggests an unrest or an estrangement at the heart of things, a quiver, an instability from which neither the poem nor any word inside it is exempt...

The possibility of envisioning bondage as a two-way affair, one side imprisoning crypt and the other a womb from which freedom is born, of seeing through to what dwells inside but otherwise outlives bondage, is hinted at by way of figural and mythological equivalents of the antinomy of wrath and love, Old Testament Jahweh and New Testament Christ.¹⁷²⁶

Robert Duncan himself refers to “a doctrine of wrath,” put forth by the seventeenth century “theosophist,” Jacob Boehme, who proposes wrath’s transmutation into love through patriarchal blood relations: “the Father’s Wrath working to create Itself in the Son as Love.”¹⁷²⁷ Similarly, in the climatic moment of reckoning in Kubrick’s *2001*, after the preternatural monolith crosses the axis of planetary alignment to complete the galactic transept, the nomadic space captian’s time-warped consciousnesses explodes, and is reborn as the radiant star-child in the film’s final image, omniscient as the soul of the universe itself.

Through the hyper-extended, yet casual allegory of *Abilene, Abilene!*, *Gunslinger*’s multi-voiced collage narrative, the canteen philosophy riposte of “The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas,” and “The Cosmology of Finding Your Place,” and the impassioned repetition and usufruct ambiguities of *Twenty-four Love Songs*, Dorn explores the polyvalent authority of the writer, and interrogates the dubious ability of any assertion to stay put, to stabilize the entropy of its meaning. Restlessness pervades the work; whether through mystic ritual, restive psychedelic transport, or transhistorical voyage, movement and journeying inform Dorn’s writing on multiple levels of signification. As plot device, method, or central theme, they work to propel its formal idiosyncrasies and its manipulations and violations of genre. Like *Lemonade Joe*, for instance, *Gunslinger* is riddled with strange, anaphoric, and comic songs that mix ancient Greek with illicit substances into a verbose psychocartographic cocktail—“draw your fingers / across a variation of the line / ‘Cool Liquid Comes,’” the *Gunslinger* asks of the poet, who obliges:

Cool liquid comes

...

¹⁷²⁶ Mackey, “Gassire’s Lute,” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 104; 148.

¹⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

cool blending comes
...the plain

branding morning
on the worlds side
the great plaining zodiacus
The great brand of our crossing
the fabulous accounting
of our coursing
the country of our consciousness¹⁷²⁸

Intent not to reinscribe the motions of imperial acquisition, Dorn's work moves not merely *across* the earth, but toward it, and oppositely, toward the sun. All of the pieces above glorify that central star we are turned around, that grows the wheat, a "heap of hot-rayed gold," Lindsay writes—this interlocking fluid motion points to deeper congruencies between one's immediate place, "on the floor among the filters and the Spillings," and one's cosmic placement, "in the constant present snap of eternity."¹⁷²⁹ The mid-continental transept sits also upright, perpendicular, in a "rendezvous with vertical powers," Mackey writes, "the war drum, remember, is tied to the sky—a rendezvous that makes for unruliness."¹⁷³⁰ In "Wait by the Door Awhile Death, There Are Others," and "This is the way that I hear the momentum," for example, Dorn tacks his locus to the starry firmament, a paradox all by itself—its light without source, its parallactic deceit. Yet even against that eternal artifice Dorn skates on a verge, a "cusp," that is both limit and hinge, beginning and end. Its etymological root, from the Latin *cuspis*, meaning "point or apex," retains the dynamic conjunction of a "center," from Greek *kentron*, "sharp point, stationary point of a pair of compasses," while also suggesting dispersion about some rough circumference: "April / is my month. I learn the 6th card / of the major arcana. But so is March / the zodiac cuts me that way, the ram / and the bull, it is love I am / or the 5th, and mediate the material / and divine, a simple sign the ram / the reflection of Isis. I wear / a tiara. I can think of people / who won't believe that."¹⁷³¹

The same embattled terrain up from and over which Dorn stretched the creative tensions of these works provided the symbolic tapestry into which two counterpoised and

¹⁷²⁸ Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 50.

¹⁷²⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 233.

¹⁷³⁰ Mackey, "Gassire's Lute," in *Paracritical Hinge*, 73-74.

¹⁷³¹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 221. In fact, Dorn's birthday (April 2) places him at the edge of a month, but firmly in the territory of the ram, but because April as a month laps over the bull, as well, Dorn claims that too.

equally momentous events in his personal life were woven: the loss of Olson, a father figure, and the birth of his son, Kid Laurence. Their close proximity split Dorn in two directions, thrust him into a gap between the paternal and the filial, between celebration and commemoration. As Olson's light dimmed, for Dorn, and especially for Dunbar, that "sun inside" that the now waning "Scald" had earlier declaimed, transformed its pun (in "son") into a new life, a "life inside life." It was that growth, that plural inner residence, and its mysterious, emergent beauty, by which Lawrence, the town, was impressed most of all upon the couple's memory.

Having lost his absent father, William Dorn, the previous year, over the course of 1969 Dorn watched, or mostly heard from afar, the ailing old artificer, Olson, his father of letters, succumb to lonely intimations of mortality.¹⁷³² In a pre-dawn notebook entry from March 1969, "the Scald" as Dorn had taken to calling him, baldly states his despair:

snow all over Cape Ann [starving
and my throat tight from madness of isolation &
inactivity, rested hungry empty mind all
gone away into the snow into the loneliness,
bitterness, resolvedlessness, even this big moon
doesn't warm me up, heat me up, is *snow*
itself [after this snow not a jot of food left
in this silly benighted house all night long sleep
all day, when activity, & food, And persons]
5:30 AM hungry for every thing¹⁷³³

Word of Olson's condition had spread across the ocean. "How has Charles been so silenced?" a confounded Jeremy Prynne wrote Dorn in a letter early that summer.¹⁷³⁴ More and more, Dorn sensed Olson's fierce energies dwindling, his aggressive mobility winding down. "I do get news of you whenever I phone Helene and sometimes from Harvey of course," Dorn wrote to Olson in mid-July. "There's so much of both our pasts around there, some of it on your doorstep I suppose we don't have to have any 'direct communication' – but that's bullshit, it was very nice getting that letter yesterday."¹⁷³⁵ In mid-October, when Dorn and Dunbar, on their way back to England, passed through Gloucester to see old friends, it would be the last time they saw Olson—the Scald, the Master—in his "polis."

¹⁷³² Clark, *A World of Difference*, 106-107.

¹⁷³³ Quoted in Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, 343-344.

¹⁷³⁴ Jeremy Prynne to Edward Dorn, 31 May 1969, Folder 333, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷³⁵ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 18 July 1969, Folder Dorn 1969, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

In mid-December 1969, in an ambulance rented and driven by Harvey Brown, Olson traveled to a New York hospital, hoping to receive a liver transplant. But “harrowing abdominal punctures” were the evidence that his cancer had metastasized and further operations were pointless.¹⁷³⁶ Confined thus to a “sunny solarium on the hospital’s twelfth floor,” Olson “held court for friends and followers in diminished but determined fashion.”¹⁷³⁷ The pleasant visits of Olson’s last days, “conversing in intermittent snatches and staring out over a sea of skyscrapers,” are largely owed to the extraordinary beneficence and considerable means of Harvey Brown, who not only put up the money for the poet’s accommodations, but paid the airfare and reserved suites at the Plaza Hotel for many of his closest friends. Clark recalls Dorn’s account of his arrival with Dunbar, from London: “[They] walked into a scene like a death ceremony out of some medieval allegorical pageant: corridors of both hotel and hospital were awash with Olson friends, disciples, scenemakers, bookdealers, literary groupies, ‘everybody lined up in order to get a piece of the manna.’”¹⁷³⁸ Ten days into the new year, 1970, in the middle of the night, Olson fell into a coma and died. He was fifty-nine.¹⁷³⁹

For many of his pupils at Black Mountain, Olson’s burly, loquacious, good-natured presence encapsulated the persona of a father. Former student and poet, Joel Oppenheimer, for instance, recollected that Olson, “handled me the way I wish my father had handled me,” and novelist and artist Fielding Dawson spoke often of the older poet as, “my other father.”¹⁷⁴⁰ With poet John Wieners, however, the character of Olson’s presence along these lines was altogether more complicated. On a trip to Italy with Olson in 1965, Wieners had been more “enchanted” with his elder teacher, whom he “adored,” than with the ancient scenery: “With you, father, I have found delight,” the young poet wrote.¹⁷⁴¹ A year later, when Olson’s furtive adjudications crushed Wieners’ plans to have a child with Panna Grady, the emotional wound tore deeper into Wieners for the paternal hand that dealt it.

As I’ve discussed, Dorn resists the word “friendship” with regard to his relationship with Olson, and beyond a certain cautious, near deferential tone, exclusive to that correspondence, neither does Dorn associate him with the presence of a father. And yet, it

¹⁷³⁶ Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life*, 348.

¹⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, 350.

¹⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 321.

seems the only term capable of engaging the intensity of their commitment to one another. Perhaps it didn't need to be said, or written, rather, as it's indivisibly grafted to the body of Dorn's work. An unfortunate if fitting irony: Dorn's death prevented his completing the preface for Tom Clark's Olson biography, *The Allegory of a Poet's Life*—a loss that Creeley's replacement preface dutifully observes, but admits to being incapable of measuring: "Ed Dorn was to have written this note and would have given it a focus and clarity I cannot. Why? Because he is the defining poet of Olson's effect—the one who did hear most particularly. Charles spoke of him as having an 'Elizabethan ear' years ago and marveled at his grace."¹⁷⁴²

Dorn himself marveled at the command and fluency of Olson's shamanistic, "unerring knowledge of what is decent and lovely and dignified in man."¹⁷⁴³ Both comments—Creeley's of Dorn, and Dorn's of Olson—are explicitly refined in Dorn's earlier poem, "From Gloucester Out," in which the city and the poet—"the populace of his mind"—form the antecedent of the anaphoric invocation "he," unnamed in Dorn's blazon, and lightly suspended ("because poems and love / and all that happens in the street / are blown forward / on the lightest breeze") on the gust of enjambment:

He hears the cries, the falling gulls
and watches silently the gesture of grey
bygone people. He hears their cries
and messages, he never

ignores any sound.
As they come to him he places them
puts clothes upon them
and gives them their place
in their new explanation, there is never
a lost time, nor any inhabitant
of that time to go split by prisms or unplaced
or unattended,

that you may believe

is the breath he gives
the great already occurred and nightly beginning world.
So with the populace of his mind
you think his nights? are not
lonely. My God. Of his
loves, you know nothing and of his

¹⁷⁴² Creeley, preface to *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, by Clark, xx.

¹⁷⁴³ Dorn, "What I See in *The Maximus Poems*," in *Views*, 42.

Raworth, and Jeremy Prynne—“Line up your head with this / all you white motherkillers / the scene is a bookshop....”¹⁷⁴⁹ But deceptively simple language somehow accumulates words without developing meaning, or completing thoughts, and builds sentences that dismantle the already meaningless contexts they’ve constructed, often with silly rhymes that force trite, symmetric rhythms, as if they intend—like the disputatious “pneuma” of John Huston in “It Was in a Dream”—to waste your time: “Yes, I’ve been fine Jeremy said / who was on his knees talking to / a row of books. Yes, she said / that’s smashing. Which is not / strictly true because she never / uses that word. On the other hand / it’s the truth / that she didn’t say that’s absurd.”¹⁷⁵⁰ However, halfway through the tenth stanza, the poem abruptly changes course. Suddenly intent on making a statement before it’s yanked offstage, the poem is interrupted by an undercurrent of grief that unpredictably lets drop its elastic, spasmodic phraseology, and it speaks briefly, and unabashedly, of itself:

That’s the price of success
Indeed I said it’s less
than that. The real gig is
reciting, reciting is exciting
Anybody can read. So read it.
For tansy, which I take comes
from Charles somehow, this is
a poem...
Tansy, Mr. God, if you only
understood how close that is
to my Master’s heart. Tansy
amazing member of the Kingdon
and how close to my Master’s
hand.

You can’t just hand it over
a fence like that.¹⁷⁵¹

Not a property but a presence among us—“Like the star whose ray / announces the disappearance / of its master by the presence of itself”—tansy, from the Latin *athanasia*, meaning “immortality,” in “Letter 3” of *The Maximus Poems*, is “for all of us,” whose scent drifts over the city, “in the present shame of, / the wondership stolen by, / ownership.”¹⁷⁵²

¹⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 29.

¹⁷⁵² Dorn, *Gunslinger*, 82; *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “tansy”; Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 13.

But the Master's "heart" and "hand" are rooted in the perennial poem, not to be owned but endlessly traded—and the poem's world was rooted in the mind long before the awareness of making the poem was there: "Tansy from Cressy's / I rolled in as a boy / and didn't know it was / tansy," Olson writes.¹⁷⁵³ The tender frustration of Dorn's lines above, however, molts into a stiff professionalism in the poem's last stanza, which through the ceremonious formality of its enunciations, means to assign the poet, the "Master," the place he insisted upon, among the high statesmen ("poetics is politics," Olson chanted at the Berkeley Conference in 1965):

They, who to states and governors
Of the Commonwealth direct their speech,
High Court of Parliament, or,
Wanting such access in a private condition,
Write that which they foresee
May advance the public good;
I suppose them, as at the beginning
Of no mean endeavor, not a little
Altered and moved inwardly in their heads.¹⁷⁵⁴

And just as abruptly as the poem's sentiment shifts, so the poem obliquely ends, moving "inwardly" in the head.

As Olson's health steadily declined through the spring of 1969, and an abundance of writers—such as Joseph Heller, Robert Duncan, and Galway Kinnell—visited Lawrence for residencies at the university, much of Dorn's studious and affectionate attention centered on Dunbar, and the child they were expecting. In February, Dorn sent Olson a new poem, included with an upbeat, rambling letter about what he was reading, and when they expected the baby to arrive:

Oh shit I've been reading some funny stuff for me and not telling anyone, but you now, like Johnson's life of Milton – I'm glad I never read that shit before¹⁷⁵⁵ (even if it does make me feel foolish) and I find it an amusing and petulant sort of gratuity, that MIND, but god, what marvelous assurance, is that the eighteenth cent.? if it is that's us, not those workers in between – I'm a fan in some weird way I can't trust – his sense of "fairness" and sternness can make you weep at times – taking it all in stride – Hating Milton

¹⁷⁵³ Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, 13.

¹⁷⁵⁴ Dorn, "An Exercise," *Tansy* 1 (Spring 1970): 29.

¹⁷⁵⁵ Dorn adds in the margin: "It is enough to scare you off your ass like when Johnson says "and so, as Milton had promised the nation a grand performance" those people called themselves in a very direct way – none of this you can "write a poem if you want to, or not if you don't" shit were wading in –"

“but let that go” ... Except, I don’t have to feel the same way abt Donne for instance (via lowly) but then there are space ships again – I don’t know what I’m going on abt – your laughing at this reading report.

... Jenny went to the doctor yesterday and his opinion is she’ll have the baby august 5th, it made some sort of sense to get another word at last. She already shows it a great deal – I don’t know how to end this – not w/ some stupid apology – you know anyhow about everything or must be used (if weary of) to the burden of that assumption...¹⁷⁵⁶

At a loss for how to express his sympathy and concern for Olson’s condition, Dorn cuts his letter off, referring instead back to the gift of the poem he’d enclosed, abstrusely titled, “Notice how a vaster Crystal of Lives comes around.”¹⁷⁵⁷

Like the “Momentum” poem inspired on the Tor, “Notice how...” is an abstract experiment with vast conceptual variables—“Creation,” “the Lives,” “Death,” “Universe,” etc.; it motions toward some elemental and inviolable fusion of artistic vision, sexual reproduction, and narcotic stimulation, and stands as one of the most intense examples of Dorn’s “spiritual address.” The poem’s extended and stubbornly obscure metonymies (“the Tenon of the burning masses,” “the history of the heart”), and its esoteric clauses, some of which bear no discrete or causal relationship to one another, but are grammatically interlinked nonetheless, make it one of Dorn’s most challenging, and most intriguing works: “The Beauty chains attention,” he reflexively writes, “Salutes / in fact nothing else.”¹⁷⁵⁸ The poem begins in the vocabulary of construction (“Mortised,” “Tenon”), but constructing what exactly? And from what foundation, what ramified, critical instant—cosmogensis, conception, birth, death—or is this an allegory for the multi-voiced poem itself? In the following excerpts, I’ve retained the segments Dorn discarded when he published the poem in *Caterpillar* in April 1969:

Mortised by the attention of all matter
into the Lives the Tenon of the burning madness
of all Creation and the useless invective of Being
into the entrance into the house of the Universe

¹⁷⁵⁶ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, n.d. (spring 1969), Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁵⁷ Edward Dorn, original mss., contained in letter to Olson, n.d. (spring 1969), Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.; published (only once) in *Caterpillar* 7, vol. 2, no. 2 (April 1969): 11.

¹⁷⁵⁸ Dorn, original mss., contained in letter to Olson, n.d. (spring 1969), Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

where at last the I-Go of direction is led emptyeyed
off the site, turned scrap and recast and thereby
~~the Lives made rid of the old local entrenchments~~
not of reality but of corrective secular presumption
and the Lives themselves become plural ~~across dimensia~~¹⁷⁵⁹

Here too, as one moves out into the “plural” life, the “shared mind,” the single perspective, the “I,” is obliterated. The capacity of this language can support—its “Tenon” fixed in the “Mortise”—the weight of multiple associations, and at the same time, its magnitude seems almost irreducible. That this whole process is sexualized, concerned with coming “around” into being (“as we come around again to feel wide open / on the arc,” Dorn writes in the “Momentum” poem), and the motions of conception (“the I-Go of direction is led emptyeyed / off the site, turned scrap and recast...”) is reinforced by Dorn’s explanation, in his letter to Olson, of the poem as a sonnet:

I think this is a sonnet – maybe, I mean hope – it’s been on my mind since last week it cld be made big but I don’t think I have ... the “size” seems to depend for its growth on the compression but then I thot fuck that so I’m trying to magnify the thing anyway – a line at a time – would you read it that way – ie – nothing really continues, very much, I think, ~~œ~~ and what does spill over is what must – a larger shower wave...¹⁷⁶⁰

In light of Dorn’s attempt “to magnify the thing... a line at a time,” one should also note the joints that fix the lintels atop the towering bluestone interfaces at Stonehenge are “mortise and tenon” joints. Analogously, the “clots of phrase,” which Dorn once labeled his poetic line’s currency, are here hoisted and arranged as a kind of *wordhenge*. The lines of this linguistic geomancy support without imposing upon one another, and their circuit ritual invokes “the burning madness / of all Creation”—that is, more than what may be immediately apparent, but no more than what’s *there* (than “what is,” Parmenides would say, of being’s continuity): “...as everywhere as in the Lives / and as environment is only total and has everywhere / the inference of the curvature of the Universe,” Dorn writes.¹⁷⁶¹

¹⁷⁵⁹ Ibid. One of the lines Dorn excised from the version in *Caterpillar*—“the Lives made rid...” —he’d originally added for Olson: “I just got this funny poem together last night and tonight changed it for you by adding line 8,” Dorn concluded his early spring letter to Olson (Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.)

¹⁷⁶⁰ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, n.d. (spring 1969), Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁶¹ Parmenides of Elea, *Fragments*, trans. Gallop, see “Fragment #4,” p. 57: “Look upon things which, though far off, are yet firmly present to the mind; / For you shall not cut off what-is from holding fast

Although “Notice how...” is over twice as long as a traditional sonnet, it possesses certain affinities with that form’s thematic conventions. For instance, traditionally the sonnet’s narrator is occupied equally with that which impedes or obstructs his desire for fulfillment (whether that be amorous, religious, or otherwise), as he is smitten with the desire, or the desired object itself—“nothing really continues ... what does spill over is what must.” Therefore, a spiritual distance inheres the sonnet, as a form, making it a vehicle for self-exploration, a soul-making affair. Despite its mellifluous density, the cyclical unification to which Dorn’s poem aspires confuses, even erases the boundaries that separate the event(s) of birth and death, and thus the poem’s expansive, transcendent vision continually ties back into the intra- and interpersonal corners of Dorn’s life—like the “Sunne” ring he wore, or Dunbar’s “Moone” earrings, or their unborn child:

...nothing else

than cosmic gesture than small immediate graces
 than a Sunne on the fourth finger, light marriage
 of the young with the wise, the Moone hung
 from an ear, neighborhood ornaments and less ramified
 when felt aside the diffusions of the history of the heart,
 across the span of an hour and the hours
 in the quicker measuring of the Lives, is realized
 in the Lives in things, that plants have nerve
 past freezing as the Lives of the yet unborn, the system
~~said in the old languages to be detached, yet not~~
 comparable to the exclusiveness of death that guessed-
 at town on an old map Where, as everywhere as in the Lives
 and as environment is only total and has everywhere
 the inference of the curvature of the Universe¹⁷⁶²

“[N]othing really continues”? But Dorn’s lines do continue, as “plants have nerve / past freezing,” as time flows unimpeded through discrete, successive days, and as the sonnet must turn (“as the Lives of the yet unborn”), locking and unlocking its lines, in order to fulfill its form (its “system / comparable”) by reevaluating its content. “There are no problems / which defy solution by their sums,” the poem’s final lines read, “and no fires unworthy / to be fed, even the desperate abstractionist / drives his car of ice into the great question of fire.” All things are ambiguously forged in “the great question of fire” (for “to fire we give

to what-is, / For it neither disperses itself in every way everywhere in order, / Nor gathers itself together.”

¹⁷⁶² Edward Dorn, original mss., contained in letter to Olson, n.d. (spring 1969), Folder Dorn 1968, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

everything,” Dorn writes in Book III), hurled forth from “the burning madness / of all Creation and the useless invective of Being,” and as such “centrality,” whether “at an epistemological level,” or wherever else, if “[m]ortised by the attention of *all* matter” can be “recast” and “the Lives become plural.” Here Dorn’s celebration of Raworth’s “Everybody is him,” multi-voiced “perceptual principle” becomes clearer: “The voice of the [*Serial Biography*,” Dorn writes, “is thrown out into an interspace where what’s possible is more interesting than what’s established.”¹⁷⁶³ An “interspace”—a gap, a “crack,” a synapse, a tension that sustains “the great question of fire,” as a *question*, a *possibility*. The “abstractionist” necessarily adopts the shifting forms his ever-outward search for new questions dictates. “You are the basket / In which lie / Your questions,” Dorn writes in the twelfth of his, *Songs Set II: A Short Count*.¹⁷⁶⁴

The encompassing vision of “Notice how...” equally accommodates, even conjoins the “unborn” and the afterlife, and thus it points both to Olson, and the “inner sun” he proposed, and so to the married couple’s unborn child. And if “the Lives of the yet unborn,” are the greatest “burning” question of all, waiting to enter “into the house of the Universe,” that last observation—“You are the basket...”—seems weirdly applicable to the couple’s comedic puzzlement concerning Dunbar’s expanding “locus” as spring came and went in 1969. “I’m getting bigger and bigger in spurts so it still amazes me to see whats happening,” Dunbar wrote to Val Raworth in April, “and I think maybe I’ll have the baby before I remember I’m going to.”¹⁷⁶⁵ An equally droll humor characterizes Dorn’s letter to the Raworth’s earlier that month, shortly after he’d finished Book II:

[T]hat’s the reason for prolonged silence – I’ve, naturally, thot abt you all very often. Perhaps you’ve felt it. I’ve felt you there sometimes. True, feelings can be vague at 5280 ft per mile. And Jenny was quite pleased to get that letter, Val, from someone besides her sister. She’ll be writing. She’s reading now. She’s getting bigger and bigger. But not taller. Which I don’t understand. And never will.¹⁷⁶⁶

¹⁷⁶³ Dorn, “On Tom Raworth,” *Vort*, no. 1 (Fall 1972): 56.

¹⁷⁶⁴ Dorn, *Songs Set Two – A Short Count*, unpaginated.

¹⁷⁶⁵ Jennifer Dunbar Dorn to Val Raworth, 29 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁶⁶ Edward Dorn to Tom and Val Raworth, 5 April 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

Always alert to the composition process, Dorn later transferred his notion—having “felt you there”—from this letter, into a short, admiring prose piece about Dunbar, which he titled, “The Garden of Birth.”

Published in the 1971 prose collection, *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, “The Garden of Birth,” embellishes Dorn’s parturitive “lutus” vision of Dunbar in the *Love Songs*, set in the context of the prose volume’s baseline assertion that, “[i]n speaking of what / is Outward and what / is Inward one refers / not to Place, but / to what is Known and what / is Not known.”¹⁷⁶⁷ At the start of the story, nature’s nascent power is consolidated within Dunbar’s multifaceted and deeply interlinked animus. An expecting mother, *and* a twin, whose effortless, mystic, interspecific percipience recalls Don Juan (note: “that plants have nerve / past freezing as the Lives of the yet unborn”), Dunbar’s cosmic synthesis includes “hashish” as biomaterial of extramundane conveyance:

His mother smoked hashish. She was herself a garden and its outward expression was in the rich loam of the brown sense of her blue eyes ringed within a slightly within a black edging. Truly, it could be said that drug was her companion from the botanica. More than Grass. And she spoke of it as to an old acquaintance, and Grass she thought No that’s to close to a football game...¹⁷⁶⁸

After this opening, the piece tumbles from the third to the first person, and spirals through a network of orientational phrases that examine the proprioceptive interconversion between Dunbar, her child in utero, and her twin sister, Margaret—each of whose outward sensations, as if of a single body, are shared, and correspond to inward moments. A “moment,” that is, as the physical sciences denote it: a “torsional effect” (the rotation about a vertical axis) acting on one body, that is the “product” of an external force, and the perpendicular distance from that force’s “line of action to the point about which rotation may occur.”¹⁷⁶⁹ As a “garden,” Dunbar’s especial force of vitality permits her dilating consciousness to vault (in both its oppositional senses, to “secure” within, and to “propel” beyond) the threshold of being, and the threshold between beings (the “interspace”), all turning toward, around, and into one another—an orbit in which to conjoin beyond the bookends of birth and death:

Sometimes I miss Miss? I miss my sister. I miss my identical. When I turn around I miss her on the other side of me. Then I enter a state in which I find her. She is my There. I am her Here.

¹⁷⁶⁷ Dorn, prefatory statement to *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, unpaginated.

¹⁷⁶⁸ Dorn, “The Garden of Birth,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 66.

¹⁷⁶⁹ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “moment.”

Sometimes when she turns to get into a more comfortable position he feels a new crowding in his bag and moves accordingly, an adjustment she could feel. Her sister could feel it. This is the way he formed the first notion of his mother's sister. He can begin to feel how the new people walk through the old world amazed, an amazone.¹⁷⁷⁰

The bewilderment among this “amazone,” is underscored by the etymologies of the portmanteau's components. The uncertain source of “amaze,” juxtaposed with the officialized and gendered enclosure implied by the origins of “zone”—from the Latin *zona*, meaning “girdle” (which suggests the “amazing” circumference of pregnancy)—seems, in the story's systolic/diastolic fluctuations of prose and perspective, to transpose the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, enfolding the universe in the womb. (That source of power also echoes in “Amazon,” a member of a tribe of female warriors who the Greeks believed to live at the edge of the known world.) This symphonic transposition conjoins blood and breath: “And when she played the flute her heart beat would enter in the score and guide the playing with sometimes the accompaniment, his heart under hers. Learning to beat the source of relation. The still sway of treetops in the sidereal wind, a motion far slower than centuries.” And a movement that “A-mazes,” interwoven beyond rational comprehension?

Lawrence is often and appropriately represented in Dorn's work by the recurrence of porches (of the Rock Chalk, for instance, or of the couple's house), and the town's spacious, carefree atmosphere, and its spirited disposition are a distilled richness that permeates “The Garden of Birth,” nurturing its many gardens, and quickening Dorn's “abstruser musings.”¹⁷⁷¹ Dunbar's motherhood and twin-hood, and her graceful, demiurgical “lassitude,” correspondingly imbue her environment with the hues of myth—the heliotropism of Lawrence, arisen from the bottom of the sea, whose circularity Dorn turns over in “Osawatomie”: “we will / flow down / to our allegory / which on earth is the sea / where that which is raised / above it in remoteness / seeks to be.”¹⁷⁷² Thus, the porch at 1420 Kentucky street, on which Dunbar sits—“her blue eyes,” as the blue lotus of all creation, rising from their loamy “black edging”—becomes the epicenter of nativity:

And in this period of his life, if you understand, along with the work that follows conception, turning into his nativity, he saw trees. She was sitting on the screen porch. A hot slowly undulating afternoon.

¹⁷⁷⁰ Dorn, “The Garden of Birth,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 66.

¹⁷⁷¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Frost at Midnight,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed., vol. 2, 457.

¹⁷⁷² Dorn, “Osawatomie,” original manuscript, Folder 609, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

A maroon tree and a yellowgreen tree moved the contacts together at the point where the tree would be. Later, in him, all trees would be.¹⁷⁷³

This accretion and transference bodies the curious, but contextualized resolution of the “story,” which seems to employ reason at logic’s expense.¹⁷⁷⁴ In the final paragraph, all components of the story move centripetally, into the hands of the unborn (like the “star child” of *2001*), whose home is the metronomic *and* musical vibration of the human heart: “So he had two trees in her eyes and his mother was his sister. And his mother as well as his mother’s sister, could feel him outside her while he was in her, opening his hands in the precategory fluid of his home.”¹⁷⁷⁵

By early June, Dorn and Dunbar had left 1420 Kentucky Street, and Lawrence, Kansas, traveling southwest to New Mexico, where Creeley had helped to secure a summer residency for Dorn at the D.H. Lawrence ranch in San Cristobal. Multiple visitors kept the couple busy through June and early July: Harvey and Polly Brown, from West Newbury, Massachusetts; rancher, poet, and soon-to-be founder of the Malpai Borderlands Group, Drummond Hadley; University of Essex cohort and writer, Herbie Butterfield; beat poet and Buddhist, Gary Snyder; John Martin, head of Black Sparrow Press¹⁷⁷⁶; southwest poet, Max Finstein, who suggested that Dunbar have their child in a teepee (“...uh, we went to a hospital, actually”), and George Kimball, who suggested they name their son-to-be, not simply Kid, but Billy the Kid.¹⁷⁷⁷ In a letter to Olson in mid-July, Dorn mildly admonished his own lack of productivity amidst the demands of his social circumstances (“the summer is dryer, very much so”), but was still tracking his usual intrigues—fashionable drugs and their

¹⁷⁷³ Dorn, “The Garden of Birth,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 66-67.

¹⁷⁷⁴ See Ben Lerner’s “The Didactic Elegy,” in *The Angle of Yaw*, for elaboration on this—logic at logic’s expense—idea in poetics.

¹⁷⁷⁵ Dorn, “The Garden of Birth,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 67.

¹⁷⁷⁶ letters about argument over *Gunslinger* that stems from “promise” Dorn made over this visit

¹⁷⁷⁷ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 18 July 1969, Folder Dorn 1969, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.; Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, interview by author, 19 March 2005. Dorn writes to Olson of Hadley and Snyder: “Monday, I believe it was, Drummond Hadley came up to stay for 3-4 hours in the afternoon—I’d not spent that much time w/ him quietly like that—He’s pleasant—I kept having the feeling there is something deep down inside him he’d like to blurt out but perhaps that’s not true—or perhaps that’s true of Everyone. He thinks to be around this area for a while and seems to vaguely be awaiting the arrival of G. Snyder who is vaguely somewhere in Utah. They will be taken to see the Indians by Frank Waters (but then I hear that Frank Waters is not very welcome by very many Indians these days)...”

trafficking networks, for example, indigenous populations and their migration routes, and the influence and appropriation of modern political and economic systems on the same, etc:

One curious thing – the hippies around here – but perhaps they shld be called communitarians because they do resemble the Hutterite-Amish thing more now than Haight-Ashbury – use Ute and sometimes Navaho roadmen for their peyote ceremonies. The Navahos are the greatest singers but apparently the Utes are more into the medicine. Again, the thing that threatens all that most is supply – cut off in the gardens of Texas by Texans.¹⁷⁷⁸

In New Mexico, the couple continued to travel too. A short “circuit” in late-July through the northwest part of the state to see ancient, “pre-Columbian” dwellings, was particularly gratifying for Dorn, and an extremely rotund Dunbar—“a three day excursion to Acoma, Zuni, and the greatest of all remains of all that pre-Columbian mess – Pueblo Bonito in Chaco canyon,” Dorn wrote Tom Raworth. “[I]n fact all the scores of sites (sights) are marvelous – the dressing of the stone remarkable and some of it looks like mosaic – and the whole conception is huge – I didn’t know there was anything that together north of Mexico.”¹⁷⁷⁹ Less than a week after they returned from their archaeological jaunt, Dorn drove Dunbar to the nearby hospital in Taos, where she was soon in labor.

On August 2, 1969, at the auspicious hour of 12:34 a.m., Kid Laurence Dunbar Dorn was born.¹⁷⁸⁰ Three days later, on a West Baffin Eskimo greeting card showing a simple drawing of a mother with her child, Dorn sent the Raworths a gleeful announcement: “I just now got Jenny and the kid home – both in very good shape – J had the kid in 1½ hours start to finish (I mean not counting those prior 9 months). It was a blast, she ‘literally’ shot him up in the air and he came down Heads, dig it! 20 inches long, 6 lbs. 8 oz. at 12:34 Ante Meridian I can’t help saying it again.”¹⁷⁸¹ Nevertheless, the flood of company continued unabated. New York poet and translator, Paul Blackburn, “unfortunately arr. when we got home,” Dorn wrote to the Raworths, “too much congestion in our pad.”¹⁷⁸² And other messages from friends, near and far, arrived by post. Michael McClure, for example, sent an unpublished

¹⁷⁷⁸ Edward Dorn to Charles Olson, 18 July 1969, Folder Dorn 1969, Charles Olson Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 26 July 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd. Mss.

¹⁷⁸⁰ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 5 August 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd. Mss.

¹⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸² Ibid.

poem, “For Ed and Jenny Dorn,” a symbolist meditation on experiential morality and the unity of nature:

Can that which IS be wearisome?
Does Evil
stretch
&
grin
like a skinny wolf
in a field of baby ducks?
Does Good sprout lilies in a pond
of Virtues?
Aren't we prows
that stretch
BACKWARD
to Eternity?
Isn't Chinese music decoration
of the elegant mind
or the sound of nature
pressing in
at us
by
beaming out
from where
we made it?

Rainbows in the badger's eye.

Quicksilver pouring over scarlet crystals.

The Furies smiling in their sleep
upon a boulder.¹⁷⁸³

At a reading in Taos in 1997, just after his cancer diagnosis, draped in a large coat with a mercurial smile drawn across his etched face, Dorn fondly recalled, between long moments of silence, “the mesas” that summer in 1969, and the birth of his son. “I just can't imagine how bucolic life was then, I mean in my memory...”¹⁷⁸⁴

Near the beginning of October, the family flew to Boston in order to stopover briefly in Gloucester before heading on to London, and eventually to Essex, where Dorn had agreed to teach for one last term, and where Margaret, and the rest of Dunbar's family, could meet Kid. In Gloucester, Dorn not only had the opportunity to see Olson, but to see Helene, and

¹⁷⁸³ Michael McClure to Edward and Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, n.d. (c. 1969), Folder 170, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁸⁴ Clark, *A World of Difference*, 39.

his son, Paul, as well, with whom tense relations had now smoothed into a strong friendship. After her visit with Dorn, and still recovering from her broken leg, Helene wrote to the Raworths, who were themselves, like she and Olson, suffering the pangs of diverse, unpredictable hardship—Val had kidney complications, objects had been accidentally lodged up their son’s nose, others had flea bites, etc.:

By Feb. I should be walking for real again. Paul is talking again in his sleep, I can hear him thru the curtains that separate our rooms... every night I hear him and don’t have the strength to go listen. weird. He’s beautiful, by the way; I don’t see too much of him these days, but always the prince, if at times a bit impatient, and available when it is really necessary.

Ed here on Saturday, you’ll see him soon, I shld. think. Don’t know exactly when they plan to leave. He looks great, seems really to have found himself, and what more can you ask for anyone you love?

I’ve got to go soak my stupid fut! I’d like to sit here and tell you abt. the beach and the birds and the man who mends the nets but if I let this sit till tomorrow it won’t get mailed.

Val, keep the kidneys minor. That bit abt. Bruno and the stone in the nose is too far out to even comment on, & Lisa, its no help I know, but we all suffer from flea bites now the mosquitoes have split. But our cat is too beautiful to shed.¹⁷⁸⁵

Helene’s observations about Paul and Ed are elegant and compassionate, and bespeak also her generosity to Olson, to whom she lived nearby in Gloucester, and for whom she was a close friend, in the last year of his life.

In England by mid-October 1969, Dorn was again beset by the familiar routines of homelessness, from which the previous ten months had been a welcome reprieve. Thus, the “precategorical fluid” of Kid’s embryonic “home” early on gave way to the peripatetic lifestyle of his parents. But he wasn’t too concerned: “...the kid is on solid food (strained) and hasn’t apparently noticed this is England not California,” Dorn wrote to John Martin; the continental shift was alarmingly pronounced, however, for Kid’s father: “I’m appalled at how intensely irrelevant England becomes,” Dorn complained to Martin in another letter, “like it’s a geometric fact. small small.”¹⁷⁸⁶ More specific about his exasperation with the sluggishness

¹⁷⁸⁵ Helene Buck to Tom Raworth, 1 October 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Tom Raworth Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁸⁶ Edward Dorn to John Martin, 29 October 1969, Folder 13, MSS 313 BC, CSWR Mss.; Edward Dorn to John Martin, 8 November 1969, Folder 13, MSS 313 BC, CSWR Mss.

of the “Olde world,” Dorn outlined the family’s housing situation to the Raworths, whose condition, in the meantime, had improved:

As H.B.¹⁷⁸⁷ may have told you we did locate a home in Ardliegh(?)¹⁷⁸⁸ some village 5 mi north of your fair city, yet, tho it is empty and seems to have been empty for some long time, the “boy” sent out by the agent sd. we’d know in a fortnight as if that were, in effect, the next five minutes – time is truly, and largely, a matter of indifference in the Olde world. In fact, I understand how large time has grown here as space, its connective tissue, has become thin as parchment on top of that fatness of Time and I don’t suppose I need elaborate how put down we sometimes feel in this particular instance and demonstration. Still, that fat does dissolve and as surely as the days shrink to that hemorrhoidal date – the 24th of October we shall be “at home.” The weather, “mean-time,” is California and unusual. Why don’t you pay us a visit some evening?¹⁷⁸⁹

But in less than three months, the family was again forced across the Atlantic, to pay their last respects to Charles Olson—then back to England, where they stayed through the early summer of 1970, then to Chicago, until early 1971, then to Vancouver, Merida (Yucatan), Mexico City, San Francisco, then a commune north of San Francisco, then back east, to Kent, Ohio... “the path of all is backward-turning,” Parmenides intones.¹⁷⁹⁰ In *Songs Set Two – A Short Count*, Dorn imagines all their countless border crossings—“We done the crossing of the border,” song three begins—as a single, sustained, invigorating traverse that sharpens “the lance of our Journey,” from the first volume of *Love Songs*, to clear a path along which the family, as a unit—“as big as the unit / shld have got”—moves from the fuselage transport, the polysemous “plane / On which we go and come,” toward the light of creation:

Between the pulse of the World Breath
Through the desire for symmetry, the plane
On which we go and come
Oh my darling kid my darling thing
My darling twin
And your offspring
From out of the dark hall we came¹⁷⁹¹

¹⁷⁸⁷ Herbie Butterfield.

¹⁷⁸⁸ Correctly spelled; a village northeast of Colchester in Essex County, England.

¹⁷⁸⁹ Edward Dorn to Tom Raworth, 20 October 1969, Box 1974-0003, unprocessed, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁹⁰ Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, phone interview by author, 18 February 2006; Parmenides of Elea, *Fragments*, trans. Gallop, 61.

¹⁷⁹¹ Dorn, *Yellow Lola*, 41; Dorn, *Songs Set Two—A Short Count*, unpaginated.

Dorn, Dunbar, and Kid, joined in 1971 by Maya Dorn, a daughter, continued to live on the move until 1977, when Dorn became a full-time member of the faculty at University of Colorado, in Boulder. Throughout the '70s, Dorn returned frequently to Lawrence; he published work in its small magazines, and actively sought a permanent teaching position at KU.¹⁷⁹² In early February 1971, for instance, Dorn visited the town to read excerpts from his upcoming *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*—an event at which Tansy/Peg Leg Publications distributed free broadsides of his poem, “The Poem Called Alexander Hamilton,” purportedly from the non-existent, “Book IIIIII” of *Gunslinger*.¹⁷⁹³ A little over a year later, on April 22, 1972, staying in the Gridley’s basement while he interviewed yet again at the university, Dorn wrote to Dunbar, in California, serious and optimistic about his chances for a job, and having myriad difficulties (which I’ve included) with the electric typewriter:

Dear J++ Kid and Madja I just now set up this typewriter in the Gridleys basement remember mama where we stayed the children wont remember tthat att alll. and I am doing my part of the diary to go with your part for moritz plus another thing for graham which i enclose and which you might remember from lincoln park that day this is an electric typriterand I cant use it too wlll. Well. fuck it its ell . well. the point i guess is you dont have to bang and i'm catching on to that more and more and going faster and faster and in fact ccan get into the juice part of it completely ototally . ok [...] I have been courting this scene in a very sensible way this time, keeping my head shying off the drug circuit which is a little bit more subdued thank go any way because I really want to maintain a clear head. the thinnis about this typing if the copy looks like this will it be anngood anyway. Youknow the nnewspaper suff. the work gordon and I did was most of what we had to d it wentt very well, the trilce poems particularly get to look very finnannand then we kind of set policy and ddid some of poemas humanos also enouth to finish up in a week of goo work by mail. I”rellly wantto see it out now. isnt this outrageous copy. I hpoe it livens up your lunch time.

been alot of rain here but today sunny and quite woarm are youunny and arm i always tot you are the most suny and warm. ok love I L O V E M Y J¹⁷⁹⁴

¹⁷⁹² McCrary, interview by author, 6 May 2005. Dorn continued to publish poems in Moritz’s magazine, *Tansy*, as well as broadsides with Tansy and Cottonwood press, also in Lawrence.

¹⁷⁹³ “Feb 11 Poet Ed Dorn reads his works,” flyer (1971), University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹⁷⁹⁴ Edward Dorn to Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, 22 April 1972, Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

The work Dorn refers to—his translations of Cesar Vallejo with Gordon Brotherston; and selections from the *Day Book* (sometimes titled *Day Report*), a hodgepodge record of daily passages and fragments that include trivial errands, lists, political epigrams, concert reviews, etc.—appeared in *Tansy 5*, in the summer of 1971. When he wrote Dunbar six days later from Barry Alpert’s trailer in Bloomington, Indiana, having come from nearby Terre Haute—where he half-seriously, half-narcissistically mocked, “[t]hey ain’t even heard of me in that town baby! It was all a dream in an old crumbling town”—Dorn’s confidence about his interview in Lawrence had grown. His excitement is immediately evident in the letter’s buoyant tone, and Lawrence, as a town in contrast to Terre Haute, seemed more and more delightful:

At one moment I was having an interview with Geo. Worth, the HEAD of the department and the next moment I seemed to be snapping the buckle of a funky little Kansas City to Indianapolis jet. You’ll now have a letter from Terre Haute written with love in Kansas. What I finally thot of the Interview was (1) the chances of a job a year from this coming September are Excellent. And (2) Lawrence as a place to live, be, and work would please us still. So all that time I spent there finally made sense to the FUTURE. [...] So. The Question still is, don’t you lose something when you transmit yourself serially. And the answer still is: la tad a tad a, but I never lose my place. The reading here this afternoon was the best and most right on of the trip and in fact from what I seem to feel from the work today it was the best reading anybody ever gave. And now I’m off for the weekend just like really at work. Again it enters my mind I’ll talk to you before this letter arrives. Never mind. This will come to you from where I was at Friday night. Listening to Big Boy Crudup coming from another part of the trailor. (Farout). To my front right, expensively framed, is a portrait of Edward Dorn, by Ron Kitaj, and to my left are three cats and B. Alpert taking some burnt bread out of the trailer stove oven. A party is going to come. I feel apprehensive. I fear it will fill the trailor. If you ever been to Georgia, man you know just what I mean. But now, I can make the next move – 9:00 in the morning plane to Boston. A day and a half rest. Everything immediately ahead is within reach. That was not always so.¹⁷⁹⁵

Almost content, Dorn again associates his “right” place with his excitement for new beginnings in Lawrence. Assuring Worth that his interest in a permanent position was exclusive to Kansas, Dorn reasserted his commitment in November 1972: “I do have a couple

¹⁷⁹⁵ Edward Dorn to Jennifer Dunbar Dorn, 28 April 1972, Folder 93, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

of good one-year proposals for next September, but of course if there were an opening in your department I would prefer it before any other.”¹⁷⁹⁶ However, despite Dorn’s determination and persistence, the job in Lawrence remained unavailable. In December, an apologetic George Worth could only encourage him to, “keep in touch with us.”¹⁷⁹⁷

So he did. In May 1974, while living in San Francisco, Dorn visited Lawrence on a reading tour headed for Toronto. “Dearest Eduard,” Dunbar began a letter to him in Kansas, thinking back to Whitman: “I feel you are on a long voyage. I see your ship way out in the mist of the mid west. Waves of corn and steel factories. . . . my love to everyone.”¹⁷⁹⁸ Like the others, this trip doubled as a job scouting opportunity. And though the effort seems to have progressed somewhat further than his attempt two years earlier—discussions of salary, thoughts on tenure, etc.—it soon fell apart.¹⁷⁹⁹

After his appointment at Colorado, Dorn continued to keep up on the happenings in northeastern Kansas, corresponding with Moritz, Gridley, McCrary, and Irby, who had moved back to the town in the late 1970s. In early November 1984, Dorn spent a week residency at the university and in September 1987, as if to confirm the town’s status as a still-thriving countercultural nexus, Lawrence hosted the River City Reunion, an enormous and raucous arts festival that gathered beat writers (William Burroughs now lived in Lawrence, where he died), rock’n’roll musicians, former Hemp-Pickers, and sundry love and drug enthusiasts from the “embraceable” revolution of the “sickties.”¹⁸⁰⁰ George Kimball recalled a hazy and chaotic scene—“Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg, Tim Leary, and Marianne Faithful were all there. . . . we were all, in fact, staying in the same motel, and there was so much booze and so much coke around that Marianne, who’d just gotten out of rehab, literally had to flee.”¹⁸⁰¹ But the mayhem Kimball describes, Jim McCrary remembers Dorn avoiding: “He didn’t hang with the rest very much . . . maybe [Ed] Sanders, not Ginsberg or Burroughs. We also sat awhile down in front of the bank at 9th and Mass—homeless hangout there now and Ed would like that!—and talked about what was up here and i guess he was living in

¹⁷⁹⁶ Edward Dorn to George Worth, 30 November 1972, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹⁷⁹⁷ George Worth to Edward Dorn, 20 December 1972, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹⁷⁹⁸ Jennifer Dunbar Dorn to Edward Dorn, n.d. (May 1974), Folder 94, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁷⁹⁹ George Worth to Edward Dorn, 6 May 1974, University Archives, Spencer Mss.

¹⁸⁰⁰ Chuck Twardy, “Dorn turns from epic to short ‘Abhorrences,’” *The Lawrence Journal-World*, 4 November 1984, p. 1D.

¹⁸⁰¹ George Kimball, interview by author, 8 May 2005. Stan Brakhage and Robert Creeley attended the Reunion as well.

Colorado by then, in Boulder, and he hated it. He liked being in Lawrence, [...] he always wanted to know everything going on in Lawrence.”¹⁸⁰²

And through the years, Lawrence remained interested in him (“Groovey, Jim inserted / Yea that’s how I wanta be / remembered / Quantrell II,” responds the crazy Sheriff Ballmik.)¹⁸⁰³ Dorn left a durable, arterial impression on his students at KU, and on untold others he met in Kansas—Douglas, Chapman, Ed Grier, and so on—many of whom became lifelong friends—like Moritz, Kimball, McCrary, and the Gridleys. Dorn’s presence was housed in the minutiae of the life in things: “Thought of you & Jenny very particularly a few nights back,” Irby wrote in a letter in early January 1981:

when Roy & Marilyn Gridley... were here for dinner, Marilyn brought a seed cake, the same recipe as tried first w/ you here in Lawrence yrs ago, I remember you telling me abt – devastatingly, sinfully delicious, w/ poppyseed & almond & whipped cream on top – to return Marilyn’s plate I’m going to try one w/ caraway seed & lemon peel (& brandy) & see how that goes – Anyhow, you were both greatly missed & asked after...¹⁸⁰⁴

There was a larger “sharing” Dorn and his work left living in his wake—“...greatly missed & asked after”—a resonance left in the “shared mind,” as Moritz graciously let him know, a few years after Dorn had moved elsewhere:

[...] while I had the bookstore many people came in and bought a copy [of *Gunslinger*]. You know, freaks or whatever—like that guy who led us up two flights of stairs to a friend’s place who he didn’t know and so we sit there out in the hall way smoking a joint. His name is Piper—well, you know he’s read Gunslinger which is great that that’s probably the only book of poetry he’s read—all though he also digs science fiction... maybe this doesn’t mean anything. I don’t think it really should—but there’s much more for me until you get to the meat—the sharing—... like I’ve never enjoyed—except maybe Chaucer’s prologue to the Canterbury Tales¹⁸⁰⁵ the first Canto of Pound’s, and maybe now that I think of it another half dozen poems—reading a poem out loud more than the Gunslinger, just for the thrill of it. Just as the three times I’ve heard you read the different parts of the Gunslinger has always been a real treat.

¹⁸⁰² Jim McCrary, interview by author, 6 May 2005.

¹⁸⁰³ Dorn, “The Sheriff of McTooth County, Kansas,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 74.

¹⁸⁰⁴ Kenneth Irby to Edward Dorn, 17 January 1981, Folder 137, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

¹⁸⁰⁵ Moritz scribbles in the margin: “It’s interesting to think of Gunslinger to as a pilgrimage which it is, and the shrine being Las Vegas—Howard Hughes.”

Whitehead tells us in Adventure of Ideas that the literature of a nation in the state of decay is marked with satire. A healthy nation's literature is rich with imagination. We are balancing on the cusp of that curve. On one hand it is that Olson reference of dead fish and at the same time all that shit about the age of Aquarius is true. So, I hold that to be The State of Being & yes, the billboard & jive and hip talk &..... The State of Being. On comes the voice of Edward Dorn for Radio Free America [...] & I remember that statement of yours in the Daily Kansan that your primary concern was that America stopped hating each other which like the snake with his tail in his mouth gets me back on the track of Geography & too that piece in the Shoshoneans about the old man, and how you flashed on washing his miserable feet, and that thought rocked you back and forth in your mind and suddenly, instead you offered him a camel, and he's overjoyed with the gesture. So what's left but to go out and get him a whole carton. So this seems rather muddled. Yet, I assure you it's the enthusiasm I have for your work and a desire to say something more than, "I liked it." Like in a way it was good to get Marsha's reaction even if [I] think it was sad in that I don't think she has any faith in herself and so the woman hood (like Chicago brotherhood) party line comes out to put you up against the wall. The poet seems always to be in the back seat for those kind of things—but yet it was a reaction—like the freak "O, wow" and so this is mine. Like the guy in Maine waving a gun at you—I think you've made a broad sweep in occupying that void I mentioned earlier and I think you're going to be challenged. And all who can't see their own beauty deep down and the adventure deep down, the in & out of your Business will challenge for they don't know or feel their own pulse. No wonder English depts. don't have you, but students are a much better lot anyway. So log it!¹⁸⁰⁶

Just so Lawrence remained "logged" for Dorn, and suspended as the poet's "Cycle" is, "in mid-air," a frenzied space, an "excitement" that "is our infancy." And like Wagadu, the city built and burnt by "the strength which lives in the hearts of men," Lawrence, the "unclosed casket," rendered "visible" by war, is a furnace of becoming, of deep migration ("we're not in Kansas anymore...") in and out of oneself, "for all men," Lindsay writes, "dream in Kansas." And Lawrence, ever on the verge of "invisibility", formed in the strength of the imagination—"we both, Max, face out / to reach the Great Plains in the back of the head"—is ever at the heart of nowhere. Nowhere but the strength of our being *here, now, in and out*, at

¹⁸⁰⁶ John Moritz to Edward Dorn, n.d. (summer 1971), Folder 182, Edward Dorn Papers, Dodd Mss.

the kinetic intersection of each our many selves—as when Lorenzo Greene put Dorn on the spot in a KU lecture hall:

What birds the fassess bird in the world, you know what I mean, the fassess bird from one place to another, Watch This, which you can't ever see it, fingersnap, like that. What bird would that be? The Fastest Bird the chorus sings, What is the name of the Worlds Swiftest Bird, Yea the fassess, see what I mean? Mr. Dorn whas the name of that bird. Mr. Dorn ducks and his eyes pop out. Several egos swivel their attention and open fire. Slow machine guns are that harmless, you can dodge the bullets. The Hummingbird! Oh yea the Hummingbird. Thas Right, he moves his wings, up and down, forwards and backwars, and all around 10,000 times in a secunt, and Watch This! hes not even going anywhere, just hittin a few flowers. Greene throws a group of rapid punches around in the air.¹⁸⁰⁷

The spiked punch of creation (“of all Creation and the useless invective of Being”) that Dorn felt in Lawrence was impelled (“forwards and backwars”) by the strength of manifold relations, his *locus of experience*, which he bundled and launched into a “cosmology” of his own language-“place,” his own “centrality.” “I am a part of all that I have met”—Ulysses’ claim in Tennyson’s famous monologue goes more than both ways: all that I have met is a part, is itself part, and is *apart*, of me—this is the intertwined, “adulterated” existence Dorn’s work complicates to clarify.¹⁸⁰⁸ Or take it from John Wieners, wistful, in “For Ed Dorn,” thinking of his old college friend out there somewhere wandering a world awash in stupor, in exile from itself, gathering “cherry or alder,” to build a fire to talk by, “cherry or alder or something strong,” with which to refashion “the possibility for everyone to be able to live in the world”:

Over the yearning century, dreaming of its heroes
Evening one after another, and the passion pours down from our hearts
to hearten the lives of those we love and who love us.

Not revolutionary sentiments; we leave each other alone
thinking we can take care of ourselves. While time steals our youth and
moon music
Whispers on the hill, over the evergreen trees and salty ocean.
I long for you, as my brothers secrete their individual lives in separate

¹⁸⁰⁷ Edward Dorn, “Greene Arrives on the Set,” in *Some Business Recently Transacted in the White World*, 77.

¹⁸⁰⁸ *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 144.

places.¹⁸⁰⁹

¹⁸⁰⁹ Dorn, *Collected Poems*, 3; Dorn, Fulcrum Press promotional pamphlet for *The North Atlantic Turbine*, Folder Dorn correspondence, Joel Oppenheimer Papers, Dodd Mss.; John Wieners, *Selected Poems*, ed. Raymond Foye (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1998), 254.

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