

Unpublished

On the Nature of ‘the Modern’ and ‘Modern Art’

Schopenhauer agreed with Kant that, for the most part, our knowledge is structured by categories that the mind imposes on that with which it is acquainted; this is true of our understanding of material things, for example. He accepted Kant’s distinction between appearance and the thing-in-itself. He agreed, to, that the phenomenal world did not exist in itself, but was given its form by the activity of mind, which imposes space, time, and causal relations on phenomena. In fact, Schopenhauer interpreted these Kantian ideas in a fashion that made Kant system resemble somewhat that of the great Advaita Vedantic philosopher, Shankara. For Schopenhauer wrote as though the empirical world were simple a world of appearances (“*Vorstellungen*,” he called them, which means “representations,” but also “mental representations,” so that when Schopenhauer says that the world is empirical world is an organization of “*Vorstellungen*,” he can be seem to be saying that the world is made of ideas in the mind—ideas structured by the mind and, as we shall see, by the interests of Will—almost like the realm of illusion from which, according to Vedantic philosophy, we can be released only by *moksha*, an experience of enlightenment). But, while agreeing with Kant our concepts of space, time, causality, relation (*et. al.*) organize the familiar world of objects into the form in which we know it, Schopenhauer asked whether there is anything we behind these appearances that we can know. Schopenhauer’s claim against Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was that we have knowledge not just of representations or phenomena (appearances presented to the mind, which Schopenhauer identifies with being-for-another) but also of noumena (objects as they are in themselves, apart from our awareness of them, which Schopenhauer identifies with being-in-itself). What we know, immediately and without concepts—what appears not as a representation but as it is in itself—is will. Or rather, as we shall call it, “Will,” since Schopenhauer showed that our experience of particular acts of willing provides a window onto the fundamental reality. The world in its existence for another, is representation, but in itself it is Will. “To-exist-for another’ is ‘to-be representation’” Schopenhauer says, “but to be ‘being-in-itself’ is to will.”

The historical importance of Schopenhauer’s philosophy rests partly on his having grounded our understanding of ultimate metaphysical on corporeal experience (experience I frequently refer to in this book as “primordial experience.”) The Will itself, in its very essence, is disclosed in such primordially—“primordially” because, indeed, this noetic-noematic structure has not yet separated into a subject and an object; there is awareness, and this awareness is not ontologically distinguished from what is disclosed in this awareness (just as in my inner awareness of my body, my body is indistinguishably the agent and object of awareness, for I am not outside my body, and my understanding does not conform itself to its object as to an other). Schopenhauer recognizes that his theory of the Will expands the concept beyond its usual range—he refers to the “requisite extension of the concept” that is necessary if one is to understand his system, and explains that requirement arises because we use nouns to refer to “objects”—entities “thrown over against us”— while in the primordially of Will knows no distinction between known and known. In the end, what Schopenhauer means by the Will is simply a form of striving. Striving is the essence of our inner lives, and that of World; striving is the essence the essence of the noumenal realm, of the thing-in-itself. This is a knowledge that each person possesses concretely, as feeling.

This is the knowledge that the inner of nature of his own phenomenon, which manifests itself to him as representation both through his actions and through the permanent substratum of these his body, is his *will*. This will constitutes what is most immediate in his consciousness, but as such it has not wholly entered into the form of representation, in which object and subject stand over against each other; other the contrary, it makes itself known in the immediate way in which subject and object are not quite clearly distinguished, yet it becomes known to the individual himself not as a whole but only in particular acts. The reader who with me has gained this conviction . . . will recognize that that same will not only in those phenomena that are quite similar to his own, in men and animals, as their innermost nature, but continued reflection will lead him to recognize that the force that shoots and vegetates in the plant, indeed the force by which the crystal is formed, the force that turns the magnet to the North Pole, the force whose shock he encounters from the contact of metals of different kinds, the force that appears in the elective affinities of matter as repulsion and attraction, separation and union, and finally even gravitation, which acts so powerfully in all matter, pulling the stone to the earth and the earth to the sun; all these he will recognize as different only in the phenomenon, but the same according to their inner nature. He will recognize them all as that which is immediately known to him so intimately and better than anything else, and where it appears most distinctly, is called *will*. It is only this application of reflection which no longer lets us stop at the phenomenon, but leads us on to the *thing-in-itself*. All representation, be it of whatever kind it may, all *object*, is *phenomenon*. But only the will is *thing-in-itself*, as such it is not representation at all, but *toto genere* different therefrom. It is that of which all representation, all object, is the phenomenon, the visibility, the *objectivity*. It is the innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing and also of the whole. It appears in every blindly acting force of nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of man . . .

Schopenhauer's proposal that the highest form of knowledge is the knowledge our body grants us of the Will—that is to say, of striving—marks a decisive repudiation of the traditional conception of knowledge. Classical philosophy, as the example of Aristotle's philosophy shows well, had claimed that the highest form of knowledge was the abstract knowledge acquired by reason; to attain such knowledge one had to put bodily sensations at a distance, detach the mind from body's energetics (from the dynamic exchanges within the body that constitute a permanent substratum underlying all awareness), and apprehend general truths through the abstracting power of reason. The idea that the highest form of knowledge is granted through the body, that expanding awareness of the stirrings of the body is required if one is to attain knowledge of the ultimate, is a claim that classical philosophers (and, for that matter, almost all philosopher prior to Schopenhauer, who to a greater later extent, were still under the spell of the *mathesis universalis*) would have found preposterous. Yet is exactly this claim that Schopenhauer asserted, and that it did so is one of the reasons his philosophy is so important to our inquiry. Schopenhauer understood himself not as the subject of cognition, as most traditional philosophers had understood human being (consider Aristotle's notion that humans are rational animals), but as the subject of volition. Cognition depends upon representation, Schopenhauer understood, and so give us purchase only on *Vorstellungen*, not on the thing-in-

itself.

Furthermore, both the classical philosophy and the religious tradition considered the body as that part of us that condemns us to die. Plato and St. Paul both taught that the body, and the senses, must be controlled if our soul is to find the peace that is rightful element. Prior to Schopenhauer, no philosopher had taught that body, the *feeling* body, was the source of knowledge of what is ultimate. Sure, the Cynics had taught that it is important that one feel at ease with one's fleshy being, but this really was a counsel on how to adjust to misfortune; and admittedly, a few philosophers through the ages celebrated the body, but that position was adopted largely by way of thumbing their noses at respectability, a gesture that depends upon the idea that the body is a degraded thing. But Schopenhauer wrote of the body, the *feeling* body, as though it vouchsafed secrets about the inner nature of reality. If one only sets aside that thinking in representations that has been method that philosophers have used in the past, and attunes oneself to the throbs and surges and strives of the body, one will discover the answer to the riddle of existence. Such was the radical cast of Schopenhauer's philosophical temper.

Many other thinkers were to follow Schopenhauer's lead in formulating a radical conception of the body's role of our understanding of ultimate things; indeed, as we shall see, it is an important feature of twentieth century thinking that the body has been required to the sustain the burden of grounding our our relation with reality—a burden that, in the absence of help from above (in the form of a warrant for belief that existents have a ground), it cannot possibly sustain. It is for this reason that so many twentieth century thinkers have argued that theoretical reason is a vain and fruitless activity, and that is through practical understanding that we acquire knowledge of the ultimate, if only we look inwards. Schopenhauer's historical importance also helps explain why so many twentieth century thinkers have cast the will in the role of rational agent that, if it knows enough about its circumstances, will act in accord with the principles of self interest.

In fact, Schopenhauer's claim that we have knowledge of something behind appearances depends upon the realization that we possess two distinct types of bodily self-awareness:

In fact, the meaning that I am looking for of the world that stands before me simply as my representation, or the transition from it as mere representation of the knowing subject to whatever it may be besides this, could never be found if the investigator himself were nothing more than the purely knowing subject (a winged cherub without a body). But he himself is rooted in that world; and thus he finds himself in it as an *individual*, in other words, his knowledge, which is the conditional supporter of the whole world as representation, is nevertheless given entirely through the medium of a body, and the affections of this body are, as we have shown, the starting-point for the understanding in its perception of this world. For the purely knowing subject as such, this body is a representation like any other, an object among objects. Its movements and actions are so far known to him in just the same way as the changes of all other objects of perception; and they would be equally strange and incomprehensible to him, if their meaning were not unravelled for him in an entirely different way. Otherwise, he would see his conduct follow on presented motives with the constancy of a law of nature, just as the changes of other objects follow upon causes, stimuli, and motives. But he would be no nearer to understanding the influence of the motives than he is to

understanding the connexion with its cause of any other effect that appears before him. He would then also call the inner, to him incomprehensible, nature of those manifestations and actions of his body a force, a quality, or a character, just as he pleased, but he would have no further insight into it. All this, however, is not the case; on the contrary, the answer to the riddle is given to the subject of knowledge appearing as individual, and this answer is given in the word *Will*. This and this alone gives him the key to his own phenomenon, reveals to him the significance and shows him the inner mechanism of his being, his actions, his movements. To the subject of knowing, who appears as an individual only through his identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word *will*. Every true act of his will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he cannot actually will the act without at the same time being aware that it appears as a movement of the body. The act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing, though given in two entirely different ways, first quite directly, and then in perception for the understanding. The action of the body is nothing but the act of will objectified, i.e., translated into perception.

The cardinal distinction which Schopenhauer makes here, between two aspects of the body—the body as it appears phenomenally and as it presents itself as it is in itself, noumenally, as an objectification of will—he believed was the key that unlocks the riddle of the world, the entire solution to which he presented to the world in his *magnum opus*, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819).

Schopenhauer's way of characterizing our awareness of the body tells us much about crucial phenomenological differences concerning our awareness of our own body and our awareness of other bodies. One way to indicate the difference is to state its nature extravagantly: while our bodies structure each and every act of perceptual awareness, they are only rarely, and never in their entirety, a thematized object of our own experience. When I watch a film, read a book, type at my word processor or allow myself to wander off in my thoughts or when I work with my body, doing carpentry or household repairs, or even when I take my film camera in hand and photograph in a manner that involves a great number of bodily movements (both large and small), I pay attention to the task at hand, not to my bodily states. For the most part, our own bodies are absent from our experiences at least as thematized objects, though their nature and condition affect every experience that we have.

Schopenhauer's distinction between our two forms of bodily awareness and bodily knowledge is one that must inform any deliberation on the topic of how the body figures in the advanced arts of our time, including avant-garde cinema. One feature of avant-garde film, much celebrated in the 1960s when its transgressive aspirations seemed to strike a resonant chord, was its assertion of its right to incorporate sexually-explicit imagery. But its engagement with the body took other forms as well—forms that, arguably, had greater importance. Like the poets and painters who were his contemporaries, the American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage attempted to ground his aesthetics in the internal awareness we have of the body. For Brakhage, a film is ideally a construction that conveys its maker's visionary experiences, and vision—or at least vision in its primal condition—he conceives it as a somatic activity. Though

living in society and being trained in its modes of experiencing makes each individual's unique way of seeing more like that of other people, at its origin and in its essence each person's vision is unique precisely because each person's body is unique, and seeing is a bodily act. The film artist, Brakhage insists, must attempt to recover, so far as possible, the forms of visionary experience proper to his or her own body.

Brakhage maintains, too, every change in one's bodily state affects one's faculty of sight; indeed, he believes that the organ of vision is ultimately the entire body. He consequently maintains that all emotional events register in sight. He advocates that the film artist should become aware of this interplay between emotion and seeing for, he points out, the interplay actually can be disclosed by a meticulous examination of our internal awareness of ourselves, though most of us do not take the trouble to conduct such a close study of our perceptual faculties. Brakhage has even argued our bodily nature shapes artistic forms; this is especially evident of rhythmic forms.

But there is an even deeper similarity between Brakhage's ideas and Arthur Schopenhauer's system, for both of them expound almost paradoxically, idealist notions about reality even while they maintain a view of consciousness that identifies consciousness with the physiological processes that are associated with activities of consciousness. Schopenhauer's Spinozistic claim (quoted above) that "The act of will and the action of the body . . . do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing, though given in two entirely different ways, first quite directly, and then in perception for the understanding" provides some clue as to his views on the matter of the relation of consciousness to matter, but he is quite expansive on the topic, and more in in the second volume that he appended to the second edition of his *magnum opus*. All that he says, though, comes down to the radical proposition that the body is simply the Will objectified. He states baldly that, if we consider self-consciousness objectively, we understand that the all mental processes are "nothing more than the physiological function of an internal organ, the brain." According to this position, our mental representation of a world of objects in space and time, is not a product of our brain function: it is our brain. But this rather odd position, that allows no ontological (or even modal) distinction between the physiological processes that underly a conscious experience and the conscious experience itself, is one that Brakhage to argues. In lectures and column "TIME . . . on dit" in the Canadian publication on experimental music, Brakhage insists that "the firings of the synapses" are actually experienced, and the project of much of his film work is to construct forms that will convey equivalents of that experience to the view.

There are more telling similarities between Brakhage's belief in the material nature of consciousness and Schopenhauer's systematic analysis of the topic. The purpose of Schopenhauer's philosophizing was to demonstrate the implicit unity of the self and the cosmos (to demonstrate, in Vedantist terms, the unity of atman and Brahman, to show as the Sanskrit saying has it, that 'That thou art' ('*Tat tvam asi*'). Thus Schopenhauer argues that all manifestations of the Will belong to a One, and that our individual belongs to the Will. Thus Schopenhauer integrates the individual back into the field of being from which modernity had separated him (consider in this regard Cartesian consciousness). But Stan Brakhage's methods of art making too are directed towards making contact with, and finally of integrating the maker into, the field of being, just exactly as Charles Olson advocates in his writings on poetics.

Perhaps more telling is that both Schopenhauer and Brakhage justify these efforts towards integration in functional terms. This aspect of Schopenhauer's thought is most evident in his discussion he offers in second edition of *The World as Will and Representation*, the objective view of the intellect. If we adopt an objective standpoint (that is, if we consider

consciousness not from within, but from the outside, as we might any other phenomenon) then, Schopenhauer asserts, we can discern that the configuration of our bodily part, and the assignation of their functions, expresses the Will—or, more, are manifestations of the Will, or, in other orders, aspects of the Will.

Just as the intellect presents itself physiologically as the function of an organ of the body, so is it to be regarded metaphysically as a work of the will, the objectification or visibility of which is the whole body. Therefore the *will-to-know*, objectively perceived, is the brain, just as the *will-to-walk*, objectively perceived, is the foot; the *will-to-grasp*, the hand; the *will-to-digest*, the stomach; the *will-to-procreate*, the genitals, and so on.

Stan Brakhage uses similar functional terms—in his case, specifically adaptational terms—to integrate the body to the field of being when he formulates evolutionary arguments. Charles Olson too attempts to find to establish contact with the field the being beyond the limits of the limited (lyrical or egotistical) self, and that alone would be reason enough to justify setting a third point on our map our map of the *Geist* that gives rise to Brakhage's work. He is enough of a modern (or 'postmodern') as he called himself, long before the vogue for the term that he accepts the reality is flux. He proposes a poetics that construes the creative process as one that begins beyond the self of the individual poet, and is affected by—in tune with—all the fluctuations in the circumambient field. Because representational language puts the outside world at a distance, Olson proposed to reconstruct poetic language, so that the poetic image would have its basis in rhythm (which seems to be Olson's term for the primordially that is a principle subject of this book). Thus the image is a vector, Olson states. The New Critics, and modernist poets they celebrated, conceived of the image as a transcendent entity, with a higher reality than the world of ordinary objects: the image is apprehended through a pure (i.e., bodiless) act of intuition; it does not address itself to reason, as befits an entity of another order of reality, it is insubstantial and non-material, and, most crucial of all, unchanging; and unchanging. All this is implied in Wallace Stevens well-known poem "Anecdote of a Jar." The great advance of Pound, Williams, Stein and Open Form poets was to have tilted against the conception that the image is a transcendent entity. To guarantee its meaningfulness, they ensured that that is connected with — indeed embedded in—the world (for, after all, they all believe that the world is the meaning of the image), one the great advances in Pound's writing, and that of W.C. Williams, Gertrude Stein's; and the real world is energy, then let the image be an active thing—"a vector," as Olson says.

Brakhage argues similarly, for a conception of *poesis* that takes place outside the limited (egotistical) self, and in touch with the field of being. Like Olson, he argues that it is rhythm, that is, a somatic pulse, that establishes contact with the larger field of being. Through the primordially of the body, evident in dynamic activity of all sort (but of which rhythm is the exemplar) we are attuned all the flux in the field of being.

Brakhage shares Stein's anti-Idealist interest in those contents of consciousness that we cannot name. His statements on Stein's influence stress the capacity of her writing to evoke experience that has not yet formed into nameable objects and events. One such statement appeared in one of his regular contributions to the Canadian periodical, *Musicworks*, Brakhage, though he introduces the topic not with commentary on Stein's writing, but rather, first, on Olson's and, then, on Chaucer's:

The very afternoon of his dismissal [from the circle that had gathered around Pound at Saint Elizabeth's], returning to his room in a state of dejection, Olson had a dream in which Pound appeared to him and gave him (what was to be a major cornerstone of Olson's aesthetic) the following:

Of rhythm is image.
Of image is knowing
And of knowing there is a construct.

What does this *mean*?

Taking it simply 'as one poet to another,' we can get a gloss of some of the aesthetic limits of Poetry—that imagery, for example, is dependent on rhythm, at scratch . . . (i.e. that that's the first impression one can be having of viable *picture* invoked by language).

We have seen that Brakhage insists that Olson meanings, like Chaucer's—indeed, we may suppose, all poetic meaning, since Olson seems to represent The Poet for Brakhage—relates to its capacity to evoke dynamic sensation: “The particularities of the strut of the cock, incorporated with the back/forth trip-rhythms of his counter-balancing neck movements, are ‘at one’ with the writ, so that Chaucer can be *felt* as if seen *in motion*, as well as occasionally poised, throughout.” This is ground of all knowledge, Brakhage suggests, by quoting Olson's “of rhythm is image/ of image is knowing” (a conviction that, of course, makes filmmaking a privileged medium for Brakhage. He suggests, in sum, that Olson conceived of real knowledge as the apprehension of movement, for movement belongs to a more profound realm than the static world to which conventional signs refer, is consistent with Gertrude Stein's Bergsonian view of understanding. Brakhage's art, like Stein's, strives to reanimate our primordial awareness of the Real—of what preexisted language and symbolic reference—and the Real is a protean realm, where lability prevails.

Though Brakhage concurs with Olson that knowing is “of image,” I believe that, again like Blake, Brakhage would hold that the sort of human experience that this knowledge is closest to—closest both as a cognitive faculty and as an object of knowledge—is emotion, or, just for that reason, that it is feeling that comes closest to informing us about this ever-changing reality that primordial awareness discloses. Furthermore, because this primordial form of cognition has a self-reflexive structure—it is (e)motion in the viewer/reader apprehending (e)motion in so-called external reality, it bridges the rift that Western epistemology has erected between the knowing agent and the object of knowledge.

Brakhage's interest in primordial awareness explains his famous insistence that real knowledge is preverbal. His claims regarding primordial awareness resemble those of such early modernist dancers as Isadora Duncan; this co-incidence of beliefs alone should indicate how corporeal primordial awareness is. The conformity of rhythm and feeling makes sound and movement the clearest manifestations of this reality. If our knowledge is primarily “of rhythm,” it is because, as the Blake's verse about the chimney-sweeper suggests, the objects and events that we see are manifestations of an underlying power whose nature is rhythm; all rhythmic and aural phenomena are modalities of an underlying power that the human faculties most readily comprehend. The point is really epistemological, not metaphysical—it concerns what humans can know about the reality's expression of itself, and not about the fundamental nature of reality. In this regard, the famous poetic declaration that Olson offers in “Equal, that is, to the real itself”

—“of rhythm is image / of image is knowing / of knowing there is / a construct”

Stan Brakhage’s conception of film, like Stein’s poetics, is characterized by a grand ambiguity around the concept of representation. Brakhage sometimes suggests, as he does in the interview with P. Adams Sitney that appears at the beginning of *Metaphors on Vision*, that his films are documentary films—indeed the most truthful documentary films that have ever been made since they admit to the subjectivity that informs them instead of pretending to an unattainable objectivity. They are documentary films because they do what the *cinéma-vérité* (see glossary) filmmaker, Ricky Leacock, claimed to be doing—presenting “aspects of the filmmaker’s perception of an event.” However, Brakhage’s documentaries foreground their first-person point-of-view as Ricky Leacock’s do not—by incorporating “memory images” and hypnagogic forms in his film Brakhage includes more of the filmmaker’s consciousness in his films than Leacock’s stylistics allow him to include in his films. Only through their use of the hand-held camera and the odd angles on events that the camera sometimes adopts do Leacock’s *cinéma-vérité* films convey that fact that we are seeing through the filmmaker’s eyes. Brakhage’s films are true documentaries of consciousness for they present the whole truth about what occurs in the visual consciousness of the filmmaker.

Brakhage had antecedents in the Emersonian tradition in American art who asserted the truthfulness of their works has a basis in the evidence they give of the artist’s personal encounter with reality. Thoreau, for example, complained of documentary that elides the self and vowed to do differently.

. . . In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; . . . We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men’s lives . . .

Like Thoreau, like Charles Olson, and (as we shall see) like Merleau-Ponty, Brakhage accepts the importance of acknowledging that we live within limits, that limits apply to everyone, that none of us can adopt a vantage-point that surveys the universe, nor any vantage-point located anywhere but where we actually are—“Limits/ are what any of us/ are inside of,” Olson writes in *Maximus* 25. Acknowledging that truth means acknowledging the inevitably perspectival character of our knowledge and perception. Brakhage insists on this with his invariably first-person point-of-view.

When expounding on the documentary character of his films, Brakhage sometimes seems to imply that his films are mimetic, that the flow of visual forms in film accurately represents the stream of visual representation in consciousness. Yet Brakhage also goes to lengths to disavow any claims that his films are mimetic and, as *The Domain of Aura* (a major, but as yet unpublished, text) makes clear, he opposes the picturing function of representational art, going as far as to propose that it is a potential source of evil (and that, in this regard, representational forms resemble dramatic forms). Of course, if primordial reality is something that no picture can present, then the use of words or pictures to convey ideas about higher things would invite a confusion between these unworthy “stand-in/representatives” and those entities or elements that actually belong to a primordial, preverbal reality, and so would prompt people to believe that they had real knowledge of these higher things when they are acquainted only with these inaccurate and misleading representatives. In fact, much of *The Domain of Aura*

offers a critique of “picture” similar to Bergson’s commentary on the picture form of perception, and celebrates another mode of awareness akin to what Bergson called intuition. Where it differs from Bergson’s analysis is in its extending a point already present in Bergson’s thought, which is that intuition resembles our inner awareness of our bodies. Brakhage extends this notion considerably, by arguing that we become aware of all those features of reality that Bergson claimed are disclosed by intuition exactly though developing a profound inner awareness of our bodily states.

Brakhage’s commentary in *Musicworks* on Olson’s famous pronouncement provides us with a way of reconciling these statements. Brakhage seems to believe that film embodies the energies—forces clashing rhythmically—that engender whatever we see, whether in nature (as independent of consciousness) or the mind. The rhythms embodied in a work of art engender in consciousness a resemblance (they “exact resemblance to exact resemblance”) which is “as exact as a resemblance” can be “exactly as resembling,” since the dynamics of consciousness reveal the *process* of the resemblance’s coming-into-being—they “exact resemblance to exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact as a resemblance, exactly as resembling,” as Stein had put it in “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso.” Surely many the films Brakhage has created by applying paint directly, by hand, to the film stock (for example, *The Dante Quartet*, *Rage Net*, *Loud Visual Noises*, *The Glaze of Cathexis*, and *Night Music*) present something equivalent of that field of energy that “exact[s] [a] resemblance the exact resemblance as exact as resemblance.”

But a major influence on Olson, and so at least indirectly on Brakhage, was the staggering metaphysical system of one of the great philosophers of the twentieth century, Alfred North Whitehead. The complexity of Whitehead’s system is legendary, and cannot go into any detail in it here (though you can read further on topic on *The Films of Stan Brakhage*, which presents the first extended analysis of influence, the importance of which is universally acknowledged, Whitehead exerted on Olson). Suffice it to say at this point that Whitehead’s analysis of the make-up of reality culminates with the proposition that the basic processes in the physical world are similar to perceptual processes, for the former are simple physical feelings, the latter complex, physical feelings. An important consequence of this proposition is that there is no ontological gulf that separates perceptual processes and physical processes. “A simple physical feeling,” Whitehead wrote, “is the most primitive type of an act of perception, devoid of consciousness.” Or again:

. . . There is thus an analogy between the transference of energy transferred from particular occasion to particular occasion in physical nature and the transference of affective tone, with its emotional energy, from one occasion to another in any human personality. The object-to-subject structure of human experience is reproduced in physical nature by this vector relation of particular to particular.

This principle is the basis of Charles Olson’s manifesto “Projective Verse” (1950), which expounds a concept of energy similar in character and role to those which the concept of energy has in A.N. Whitehead’s system. He proposed that poets not think in terms of time or rhyme or symmetry or form, but in terms of the complete Field (a notion that in most respects is analogous to Whitehead’s conception of the electrodynamic field; see glossary on ‘field’). About his method of ‘Composition by Field,’ Olson proposed this as the first ‘simplicity’:

. . . the *kinetics* of the thing. A poem 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. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high

energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. So: how is the poet to accomplish same energy, how is he, what is the process by which a poet gets in, at all points energy at least the equivalent of the energy which propelled him in the first place, yet an energy which is peculiar to verse alone and which will be, obviously, also different from the energy which the reader, because he is a third term, will take away?

This is the problem which any poet who departs from closed form is specially confronted by.

A poem, then, should have the force of a verb, the universal form of action and effect, and a reader should be "the receiver of the impact." Olson maintains.

There is provenance for these ideas in American poetics. In fact Ralph Waldo Emerson had proposed a similar idea in "The Poet," an essay that served its time somewhat as Olson's "Projective Verse" essay did in the 1950s and 1960s.

But the quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze. . . . Here is the difference betwixt the poet and the mystic, that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false. For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead.

What Whitehead added to this, besides rigour of demonstration, to demonstrate, as any viable poetics must, how permanence can be reconciled to this change, how order to emerge from flux. Whitehead's theory of creativity reconciles the many and the one, as well as change (the actual entity) and permanence (the entity transmuted into objective existence in the realm of Eternal Objects). A work of art, too, reconciles unity and diversity and, at least when it is conceived as a kinetic object, it reconciles change and permanence. So it is not surprising that Whitehead's manner of discussing reality as made up of perishing subjective moments that pass into eternal existence should have excited poets such as Charles Olson. For example, Olson made a clear reference to the Whitehead's idea of concrescence in "A Later Note on Letter #15" (*Maximus Poems II*, 79):

. . . the dream being
self-action with Whitehead's important corollary: that no event

is not penetrated, in intersection or collision with, an eternal
event

The poetics of such a situation
are yet to be found out

That Olson connects the idea of the intersection of the eternal object (permanence) and actual event (change) to the proposition that history's role is to discover the permanent that underlies change, and that he associates the endeavour of the new poetics with a new understanding of the relation between permanence and change, testify to the importance Whitehead had in Olson's life and thought.

Experience arises as an experiencer integrates data into a single, coherent experience. This process of integration occurs by synthesis, dismemberment and reorganization, and by the elimination of aspects of antecedent occasions that the experiencer cannot coordinate with the

conditioning features that the emergent occasion incorporates into itself. Significant experiences are clusters of moments, united by common values, into what Whitehead called societies. The simplest explanation of a society in Whitehead's metaphysics is that it is an historical route pervaded by a specific character, thus constituting an enduring object. Thus, for Whitehead, "An ordinary physical object, which has temporal endurance, is a society." In fact, he specifies 'an enduring object,' or 'enduring creature' is a society whose social order has taken the special form of a personal order; by this he means that it is a society whose genetic relatedness involves a serial ordering (that is, an order such that any member of the order except the first and last inherit from earlier members in the ordering, but not the later members). Accordingly, only a single line of inheritance constitutes an enduring object. Enduring objects, therefore, are strands (i.e., linked transitions) possessing a self-identical pattern. Whitehead tells us about the order that characterizes such a 'social order' or society:

- (i) there is a common element of form illustrated in the definiteness of each of its included actual entities, and (ii) this common element of form arises in each member of the nexus by reason of the conditions imposed upon it by its prehensions of some other members of the nexus, and (iii) these prehensions impose that condition of reproduction by reason of their inclusion of positive feelings of that common form.

Olson conceived of the actual world as a field of energies and of the poet (like every human—and in fact every existent, all of which we might consider in Whiteheadian terms, as actual entities) as route of concretions which preserves in individual character by grading the energies that act upon it (an activity that, according to Whitehead, requires Eternal Objects). Thus one of his most Whiteheadian remarks states

. . . I am not able to satisfy myself that these so-called inner things are so separable from the objects, persons, events which are the content of them and by which man represents or re-enacts them despite the suck of symbol which has increased and increased since the great Greeks first promoted the idea of a transcendent world of forms. What I do see is that each man does make his own special selection from the phenomenal field, and it is thus 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).

Whitehead's idea that an actual entity (reinterpreted the emerging being as a poem, and you get an inkling of what the Projective Poets took from Olson) is responsive to an enviroing field of occasions and develops, through its complex coordination of the influences of that field, gained widespread admiration among the poets of Olson's generation. He gave a concrete, definite and philosophically respectable form to the idea that a sensibility or perspective is constituted by its place within an aesthetic field and the relations it possesses by virtue of that location. Furthermore, he showed how this perspective noted the value, the aesthetic worth, of each occasion within this field and coordinates it within its own being. Olson's idea of a circuit in poetry, of the poet taking in energy, incorporating into it his or her own being and then projecting that value outward, is very close to Whitehead's ideas on the formation of actual entities. Olson's idea that the poem is a field of energy resembles one of the fundamental ideas of Whitehead's system. Furthermore, Whitehead's description of a society as an historical route,

that is, as a series of linked transitions, provided an extremely valuable model for Projective poetics' conception of the Open Form poem as an entity whose features emerge from the process by which it comes into being.

if we could align language with the processes of nature so that language did not impose its own order—that derives strictly from its own morphology—on experience, then we could say what we experience and mean what we say. A new linguistic order must replace the mimetic mode of our present language; a new language must replace our present language that is based on faulty abstraction from the object world. This new language must be, before all else, kinetic. Language must be used as action and speech acts themselves must become equal to the real by taking on the same energy.

Olson found in the Pre-Socratics a model for a non-mimetic discourse that avoids the discontinuities between the subject and objective order embedded in our present language. More exactly, he found it in the discussion of the Pre-Socrates that the Canadian philosopher and literary theorist, Eric Havelock, presented in his great work, *Preface to Plato*. In a review of that book Olson extols pre-Socratic syntax as an antidote to the present order of language and, more specifically, to the periodic sentence and its debilitating effects. Olson states that the poetry of Homer and Hesiod was on

. . . a wholly different syntax, to which Notopoulos (1949) has applied the word *parataxis* in which the words and actions reported are set down side by side in the order of their occurrence in nature, instead of by an order of discourse, or 'grammar' as we have called it, the prior an actual resting on vulgar experience and event. . .

Olson recognized as well that Pre-Socratic writing implied a different mode of temporal experience. In the same piece he writes:

. . . There is no while back at the farm sequence possible. The epic action is a stream and you are not free play around jump as though you was [*sic*] on the bank or the other [*sic*] or in the water—at your choice or privilege or pleasure, that you either is or you isn't, definitely . . .

These two passages, taken together, state some basic reasons that so many twentieth century artists have shown interest in paratactical form—just to take as examples the that are the present subject of discussion: feelings of transit, turbulence and stir shaped Charles Olson's mature poetry; they also had a role in motivating Brakhage's hand-held camera, his rapid editing and his frequent overlaying of visual forms.

Furthermore, Olson's interests in a language whose attributes corresponded to the dynamics of experience and his concern with the temporal modality of flux led him to conceive of a manner of speaking and writing that would engender attention synchronous with the experienced event—an form of attention that is given over to an experience that is actually occurring (in reality, not through memory or anticipation) at the very instant of apprehension—and, thereby eliminate all temporal contradictions in an uninterrupted, complete presence. This moving, ecstatic "now" is the time of Olson's later poetry. It is also the time of Brakhage's films.

Olson's investigation of hieroglyphic writing was propaedeutic to reconstructing language. Olson commented about the glyphs on Mayan stellae that ". . . the signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images." Because they have the power of the objects of which they are the images, they are poems in miniature. Her language does not float free of the world, nor does it substitute for the world (which was the fate of representational language); rather, the world constitutes the meaning of language. Olson's comment that glyphs on Maya stellae are miniature poems

reflects Olson's desire to find ". . . a way which bears *in* instead of away, which meets head on what goes on each split second, a way which does not—in order to define—prevent, deter, distract, and so cease the act of, [*sic*] discovering." Direct contact with concrete particular was thing. European languages, since Plato, have traded in abstractions: Western thinking has accorded special importance to the conceived relation between the universal and the particular, and in doing so has diminished the importance of the concrete particular in itself. After learning a European language, people begin to think in abstractions—to think in words and about words. Olson formulates this idea by saying that after acquiring language, one begins to think in descriptions. Further, he suggests that when one thinks in abstractions—that is, in words—one directs one's mental energies towards apprehending the similarities and differences between the object one currently observes (i.e., one word) and other objects one has experienced (i.e., other words). Against this, Olson adopted what Williams had advocated, that there be "no ideas but in things" (which Olson renders "not in ideas but in things," perhaps to stress that ideas/signs now are isolated from things). Language doesn't constitute meanings on its own (as logocentrism has it); only the objects of the real world make up its meaning, Olson insisted..

The Symbolists had provided a great lesson, that symbol, especially, but all signs (whether verbal or not) too readily withdraws into the inwardness of the cartesian subject, and so becomes isolated from the world. When signs lose is connection with an objective referent, they become (in a fashion that Jacques Derrida's writing has done much to explain) signs of signs, and signs about signs. Olson, working in the wake of Symbolism (and early modernists, who for various reason were unable to take the Symbolists' lesson), identifies the principal problem of language as its having lost its connection with the real. Olson's proposal for an Emersonian "natural" or "absolute language" turns on the contrast between presentation and representation. Whitehead's philosophy gave Olson the idea (or confirmed his idea) that reality is not made up fixed forms (i.e., objects); he concurred with Whitehead's idea that reality is a field of dynamic energy. Colour is not a property that inheres in an object—colour is rather the product of quanta, particles of energy that excite our nervous system as they impact upon it. We can find words (which themselves are bundles of energy) that, arranged appropriately, stimulate the nervous system of those to whom they are addressed in the same way that the poet's environing field—in our example, the colour—excited the poet in the first place. Olson is never precise enough, when proposing this, to analyse how an arrangement of words might have such an effect, or to describe how we might go about finding the words that will have this effect: what he does offer amounts to no more than a set of metaphors for the process.

Hence, the poem does not represent the energies that inspired it, but actually *presents* them.

Olson rejects mimeticism—he proclaims that he wants to re-enact reality, not reproduce it. Since the poem (as a conformal mapping of the energy of the original) contains the similar energies of the event, and since reality is nothing but a field of energy, the poem is "equal . . . to the real itself." Each quantum of energy in the circumstance that prompted the writer to write the poem has a corresponding quantum of energy in the poet's responsive body (though, of course, the quantum might differ in magnitude) and the relations between the quanta in the poem resemble the relations between quanta in the original. Furthermore, each quantum of energy in the poet's responsive body is propelled outward as a quantum of energy in the poem he or she creates in such a way as to homologically preserve the forms of relations among quanta of energy in the poet's body. Hence, each quantum of energy in the precipitating event has a corresponding quantum of energy in the resulting work of art.

That it possesses the energy of objects makes a poem an object, just as much as a foot that kicks is, so Olson called his poetic theory, "objectism." This poetic theory maintains that a

poem should be presentational, not representational. The metaphysics of energy, which Olson got from Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, is the basis for this proposition. Brakhage uses a dynamic conception of reality, and the associated view that sensation results from the discharge of electrical energy, to a similar end.

Olson's metaphysics of energy serves another purpose: it grounds his claim that the actual relation between a subject and world is much different than what European metaphysics depicts it as being. European metaphysics has traditionally portrayed the subject as a kind of "outside spectator," above the world and looking in on it; in truth, Olson maintains, the spectator is immersed in the world of flux.

Nothing was now inert fact, all things were there for feeling, to promote it, and be felt; and man, in the midst of it, knowing well how he was folded in, as well as how suddenly and strikingly he could extend himself, spring or, without even moving, go, to far, the farthest— he was suddenly possessed or repossessed [*sic*] of a character of being, a thing among things, which I shall call his physicality. It made a re-entry of or to the universe. Reality was without interruption, and we are still in the business of finding out how all action, and thought, have to be refounded.

Brakhage's rapidly evolving, perpetually regenerating forms suggest the same surrender of the ego, the same felt relation to the world, the same imbeddedness in flux, and the same sense that one's sensations really are the experiences of the universe experiencing itself from a particular vantage-point. In this "human universe," humans are both the instruments and the objects of discovery; here the invidious distinction between subject and object has no purchase on reality. Reality articulates itself in experience, without the intervention of the effects of subjectivity—it does so somatically or, as Olson puts, in ". . . the skin itself the meeting edge of man and external reality." Furthermore, both Olson and Brakhage suggest that immersion in the world and close attention to experiential events annihilate anticipation and recollection and bring the spectator into James' specious present, or what we could better call the living present.

Olson contrasts forms that depend on the mind alone with forms that derive from that place where the ear and the mind are at one—from the place "where the breath comes from"—the source of energy that connects mind and body and world. In doing this, Olson corporealizes the conceptions of rhythm, breath, dynamism—dimensions of art that traditional metaphysics tended to depict as spiritual. Brakhage picked up on Olson's corporealizing turn in poetics and carried it to its logical conclusion, in identifying vision with electrical discharges of the synapses.

To get rid of subjective effects is to give energies over to the body instead of the mind. The mind controls, the body impels. Hence, to experience bodily is to experience immediately, directly, naturally, to open oneself to the energy of event-objects. To speak bodily is to invest every word with force, to compose with words with power. The body imparts a blow to the letter of the word and empowers the otherwise inert terms of language; the dynamic force of enunciating body tears words away from abstractions and converts them into actual energies. Olson's term for the force of the enunciating body is "resistance," a term he chose because what "resistance" refers to is a life-force mobilized primarily against death, but also against the categorical, detached thinking that dominates Western cultures: "In this intricate structure [our body] are we based, now more certainly than ever (besieged, overthrown), for its power is bone muscle nerve blood brain [space in original] a man, its fragile mortal force its old eternity, resistance."

Olson also had a predilection for forms that allow instantaneous shifts in tone, syntax, diction, meter, rhythm, or whatever. Hence, the length of successive lines in Olson's poems

often varies widely. Following on Lawrence's dictum that a free verse is the "direct utterance of the instant whole man," Olson found a physiological justification for where he put line breaks. The division of a poem into lines should follow the poet's breathing, Olson counselled. Line breaks occur where the voice pauses for breath: the line "comes (I swear it) from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes," Olson proclaimed.

Olson strove to develop forms that allow the transitory conditions of the poet's physiology to decide the rhythm of the poem. If a poet is in touch with his physiology, he or she feels rhythm and "Whoever has rhythm has the universe," Olson averred. Being centred in one's physiology, one's *being*, is a key feature of the poet's make-up.

. . . the use of a man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of an artificial forms outside himself. But if he stays inside himself, 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.

Olson's idea of *tropos*— which he variously (and somewhat obscurely) characterizes as a tropistic drive, a dynamic energy, energy that is our response to the influx of cosmic energies, but generally means by it a sense of place and of the creative role one's environing field— also reflects the idea that human beings are participants in nature's life-force. Olson maintained that, in obeying one's own urges, one complies with cosmic desire. The very possibility of human action depends upon the world's eliciting the desire for action in the individual; consequently Olson claims that "the actionable is larger the individual." The cosmos, working through the body, impresses the intention to act upon the individual.

Life surging through the body registers the whole of reality. In the true poem, reality expresses its relevance to us through the poem's capacity to elicit and modulate the coursing and flowing, the ebbing and surging, of somatic energies. Contrary to the Romantics and the Symbolists (see glossary), who conceived of the image as a transcendent ideal, Olson considers it a vector, i.e., as directed energy—and energy that the poem can only re-enact, but cannot describe precisely. For, he points out, description attempts a false separation between the image, the instrument of the description, and the object of the description and, ultimately, leaves out the dynamics of their object:

. . . Here again, as throughout experience, the law remains, form is not isolated from content. The error of all other metaphysic is descriptive, is the profound error that Heisenberg had the intelligence to admit in his principle that a thing can be measured in its mass only by arbitrarily assuming a stopping of its motion, or in its motion only by neglecting, for the moment of the measuring, its mass. And either way, you are failing to get what you are after -- so far as a human being goes, his life. 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. And if 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 by his own powers of conversion, out again.

The ideas that the image is a vector, that human beings live in a field of energies, and that rhythm is primary are all poetic notions that Olson drew from Pound, and especially from the poetics Pound expounded during his Vorticist years, and especially, from Whitehead. From the proposition that artists live in a field of energies to which they must open themselves, and the conviction that true poetry must have deep roots in a sense of place and must be brought out of artists by their responsiveness to the place where they live, Olson drew the conclusion that space is the distinctive feature of American culture: "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now," Olson declares at the beginning of *Call me Ishmael*. "I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy." He means when he says "space," space as opposed to time: if you live in time, then you know in every moment of your existence that the past conditions and limits your present experience, while if you live in space, however, every point is a point you can move from, to begin anew. Olson praised Pound's *Cantos* for treating time and history as space and for the way he leaps from one point in that space to another. Brakhage's perpetually regenerating forms are, in this sense, spatial rather than temporal forms, for they allow Brakhage to cut from one condition to another, and to begin over and over again.

Olson believed that wilfulness, which he saw as the downfall of contemporary humankind, was a consequence of our failing to recognize the essential continuity between the dynamic of the world and that of the inner realm of experience. The failure to recognize that continuity, which the Romantics so celebrated, results in our conception that Nature is bifurcated. Olson argued, too, that humans often overvalue human action, and that when human action is good, it is

. . . the equal of all intake plus all transposing. It deserves this word, that it is the equal of its cause only when it proceeds unbroken from the threshold of a man through him and back out again, without loss of quality, to the external world from which it came In other words, the proposition here is that man at his peril breaks the full circuit of object, image, action at any point. The meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge. 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. If he does not, all that he does inside his house is stale, more and more stale as he is less and less acute at the door. . . . Man does influence external reality, If man chooses to treat external reality any differently than as part of his own process, in other words as anything other than relevant to his own inner life, then he will . . . use it otherwise. He will use it just exactly as he has used it now for too long, for arbitrary and willful purposes which, in their effects, not only change the face of nature but actually arrest and divert her force until man turns it even against herself, he is so powerful, this little thing.

Here Olson suggests the importance of recognizing that we belong to the field, that we are not above the world, but a part of the world, that our flesh is one with the flesh of world—the skin only the region of contact between the fused bodies. So in Olson's poetics, as in Robert Duncan's, care for the body is important. A poet must be able to sense her process from within, intact within the body, and then, through powers of concentration, project it out again. He argues in the passage above for the need for care of the body, the skin, and the senses and for the poet to open the skin (the senses) to the world in order to refresh and revivify the contents held within the skin. Olson stresses the skin, the surface of the human body, maintains the relation between the self and the world; the skin, after all, is only a porous membrane, not an inviolate frontier.

Many commentators have described Brakhage's cinema in paradoxical terms, both as a first-person cinema and as an objective document that registers the energies of the time of its making: we can consider *Dog Star Man*, in these terms, first, as a record of what Romantics called the Imagination, but also as an instantaneously constructed cosmology based on energetics, for it provides a record of the surge of energies through the subjective body. The difficulty we experience in attempting to reconcile these two ways of considering *Dog Star Man* (or any almost any of the films Brakhage made up to the late 1970s) evidences the conceptual difficulties arising from what Whitehead called "the bifurcation of Nature." Olson escaped that modern understanding of nature and so, like Whitehead, he could see the reconcilability—indeed the essential identity—of these two methods. Both drive toward the same end, of letting reality speak for itself, ". . . so to re-enact experience that a story has what an object or person has: energy and instant. . . . And the writer, though he is the control (or art is nothing) is, still, no more than—but just as much as -- another "thing," and as such, is in, inside or out."

The ambiguous status of Brakhage's visual forms reflects the Emersonian tradition's dual conception of a fact as reflecting simultaneous internal and external reality. Nothing reveals this more strongly than the extraordinary efforts that Brakhage has made to yoke films composed of photographic images and films with painted forms to a common cause. He has presented both the photographic images and the painted forms as conveying the contents of consciousness, and he conceived the primary difference between the two modes to relate to the different types of consciousness they present: The photographed films present a more superficial mode of awareness, inasmuch as they present a level of consciousness that forms pictures of things. These pictures, to be sure, are not completely formed by the photographic conventions of representation—the extraordinary amount of superimposition, out-of-focus shooting, blurs produced by rapid camera movement, the intensification of qualities of colour that make his films so sensuously appealing (v. e.g. *Creation* and *Made Manifest*), the cutting that does not respect the serial chronology of material reality wrest his visual forms away from being representations of the objective world, imbue them with emotional force, and most importantly, subjectivize them. However, we still identify and respond to the visual form's represented content—the darling, little boy of *The Weir-Falcon Saga* still affects us as a darling, little boy; that no one likes to see things come to point where children need to be attended to by doctors is a part of what shapes our response. And, while the photographed films present a later, more developed (and therefore more superficial) mode of consciousness, most (though not all) of the films Brakhage has created by applying painting directly to the film's surface, and the imagnostic films, present more archaic levels of consciousness—primordial levels that do not form stimuli into picture, levels for which the dynamic character of proprioception is central and that responds to all sensory stimuli kinaesthetically. The archaic character of their contents is, after all, the reason why Brakhage titled his imagnostic films after more and more archaic strata of Western civilization, regression from the Arabic phase to the Roman, to the Egyptian and finally to the Babylonian—by titling series of imagnostic films after each of these strata Brakhage offers schema that implies that ontogeny repeats history.

However great the differences between the photographed and the painted films, both consist of, literally, projections of Brakhage's consciousness. Thus, Brakhage has made films that combine photographic images and forms created by applying paint and dyes directly to the film's surface, to represent different levels of consciousness. Examples of this include: *Dog Star Man*, *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular*, *Through Wounded Eyes* (1997, with Joel Haertling) and, the film that goes furthest in this, *Ygdrasil, Whose Roots Are Stars in the Human Mind* (1997). The primary meaning of neither depends on what real-world events they depict (though the

photographed films also derive secondary meanings and secondary affective properties from what they depict). Nor do their meanings depend, at least immediately, on the cultural or conventional meanings of their visual forms, for if anything is evident, it is that these films are truly idiological.

The fact that two minor film modes mediate between these two principal modes proves remarkable demonstration of his belief in the continuities between these two modes of his cinema. One of these modes is the “collage film,” exemplified by *Mothlight* (1963) and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981), which, like the photographed films—even more than the photographed films—incorporate real world elements. *Mothlight* consists of moth wings and other evidences of the insect kingdom, pasted onto clear leader to form a three-part musical structure, while *The Garden of Earthly Delights* consists of petals of alpine flowers, grass and fragments of leaves pasted onto clear leader to form patterns of alternating movement. Although these films are composed of real materials, their dynamic qualities are closer to those of the painted films, as the entire contents of each frame varies from the next. Furthermore, although the materials that compose their visual forms are drawn from the real world, these films, even more than the photographed films, are formally autonomous from the outside world inasmuch as one cannot map the space within the frame into the space of the outside world (though certain textures do seem familiar).

The second minor mode that mediates between the two principal modes (of the photographed and the painted films) is exemplified by films such as *The Arabic Numeral Series* (1980-1981), *The Roman Numeral Series* (1979-1980), *The Egyptian Series* (1983) and parts of the *Babylonian Series* (1988). These films consist of visual forms produced by shooting through prisms, “imperfect” lenses and other such refracting devices. They are clearly photographed films, but their meaning clearly does not derive from what their visual forms depict, or from any representational features. The rhythm of these films reveals that what we see derives from shooting continuously (since they don’t exaggerate the flicker effect), and their optical qualities reveal that what we see has a photographic basis. But nothing in the films is nameable, aside from a few forms that seem to echo the numeral forms that mark off the sections of the films and that we could identify as numeral (if we wished to be so perverse). Because the frame contains no nameable objects, what we see on the screen is radically discontinuous with the world beyond the frame—or, at least, with the objective world, though perhaps not with the world that primordial awareness discloses. Films of the late 1990s, *Commingled Containers* (1996), *The Cat of The Worm’s Green Realm* (1997), *Self Song* (1997), and *Death Song* (1997) constitute a variant subform of these photographed abstracts, for they are works whose object matter is recognizable, but has been extremely distanced, by macro-cinematography (shooting with a “macro lens,” which creates an extreme form the photographic analogon of synecdoche), and pushed rather far in the direction of abstraction.

Brakhage’s efforts to hold these various modes of filmmaking together, in a continuum reveals that the principal significance of his films generally derives from primordial awareness. For in all these different modes of cinema, meaning depends upon how the dynamics of the visual forms affect us kinaesthetically and proprioceptively—or more exactly, through a primitive form of movement awareness that requires no concept of external spaces or any form of conceptual mediation, but is known strictly inwardly, through simple, direct awareness. The isolation of the forms of his painted films, his collage films and his “photographed abstracts” reveal that his visual forms have autonomous meanings, i.e., meanings that are fully disclosed in what they present—meaning inherent in their forms, considered apart from their relation to anything outside themselves. Some of his photographed films have a secondary level of

meaning that derives from what they depict, but even in them it is still the significance that derives from the pace of shooting and of the shot exchanges, from the intensity of the colour or the quality of the camera-movement, or the rhythm of the cutting—in sum, from the ensemble of the films' intrinsic qualities and relations which, by reason of the kinetic intensity that is such an outstanding characteristic of Brakhage's films, relate to our primordial kinaesthetic awareness—that constitute the films' primary meanings.

The continuity among these various modes of cinema also suggests the fusion of self and world that is the true end of direct perception. Adapting Hopkins' terminology, they show that the apprehension of inscape produces revelations about the self. The continuity thus reinforces the ambiguous status of Brakhage's visual forms. This ambiguity also characterizes Olson's notion of a document, just as it characterizes the poetry of William Carlos Williams. Whitehead's metaphysics undoubtedly influenced Olson in formulating his poetics. In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead summarizes how the picture of reality he draws differs from that of seventeenth century science (which he believed had its conceptual foundations in materialist philosophy and which, in its turn, founded modernity). As against seventeenth century science's conception of an empty event (i.e., an event in empty space, devoid of electrons, protons, or any other form of electric charge) as a habitat of energy, Whitehead notes ". . . that there is no individual discrimination of an individual bit of energy, either as statically located, or as element in the stream. There is simply a quantitative determination of activity, without individualisation of the activity itself." Setting aside "the lyrical ego" and entering into a stream of energy, allowing oneself to become "the qualitative determination of activity, without individualisation of the activity," is exactly the triumph of creativity according to Olson and Brakhage; Brakhage's description of efforts to embody the flux of electrical (synaptic energies) has evident relations to these Whiteheadian principles.

Whitehead goes on to show how an organicist philosophy construes events in occupied space (i.e., space containing electrons, protons, or any other form of electrical charge).

When we look into the function of the electric charge, we note that its rôle is to mark the origination of a pattern which is transmitted through space and time. It is the key of some particular pattern. For example, the field of force in any event is to be construed by attention to the adventures of electrons and protons, and so also are the streams and distributions of energy. Further, the electric waves find their origin in the vibratory adventures of these charges. [This was a point Bergson also made.] Thus the transmitted pattern is to be conceived as the flux of aspects throughout space and time derived from the life history of the atomic charges.

And Olson proposed that as the words that make up a poem (or, by an implication that Brakhage in fact made, the visual forms that make up a film) are effected by the field in which they originated, that they transmit pattern through space and time, that we should construe projected words or projected moving visual forms as adventures of charged monads that form of a stream of energy, and that the poem (or film) represents the flux of aspects on the field of energies registered by a sentient energy.

Olson's propositions about creative method and the relation between the creator subject and nature implies that the creative process endows its product, the work of art, with the status of a natural object leads to the view that, as Olson put it, "the thing [the artist] makes to try and take its place alongside the things of nature." The conclusion that artworks aspire to the same status as natural objects figures among Olson's motivations for making the comment that the

elements that enter a poem 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.” “Projective Verse” offered a method for overcoming the classical realist effort to reflect or reproduce reality as it is: rather than being a derivative of the real, the poem will be equal to the real itself. It will have the “actual character and structure of the real itself,” by which Olson means that it will have the fluxing, changing, relational, experiential character of reality as Whitehead described it. His concern with the object-like nature of the elements that enter a poem and of the poem itself and with the ability of a poet to overcome the ego, that hideous construct which humans have interposed between themselves and nature, and with getting in touch with “real objects” (i.e. with temporary patterns of relation between fields of energy, on the model of Whitehead’s actual objects) are undoubtedly, along with his belief that a human being is an object that takes its place alongside other objects, among the motivations for Olson to choose “objectism” as the name for his poetic theory. The term also declares Olson’s reaction against “objectivism” (of which Pound was an early advocate), a term which Olson interpreted as suggesting a dichotomy between objective and subjective aspects of existence and a detached and contemplative, rather than participatory and highly charged, consciousness. At the same time, the modernist idea of the objecthood of a work of art, which the term also invokes, was part of the polemic waged against mimeticism.

Though Olson was committed to the modernist belief in the objecthood of a work (for, as he have seen he insisted that a work of art has the same status as a natural object), Olson was no orthodox modernist. What distinguishes his poetics from much of modernist art theory was his concept of “open form,” a concept which acts as a dialectical dual of the modernist idea that the work of art has an autotelic character. This openness is the formal analogue, and perhaps the consequence, of the type of experience Olson wants poetry to engender, perhaps is best characterized as “ecstatic,” for involves “standing outside” (Gr. *ek*, out, *histanai* stand) oneself, of being lifted out of the quotidian ways of experiencing and coming to the realization that “. . . the projective act . . . leads to dimensions larger than man” and that the Projective Poet, in going down into the workings of breath will enter into that place from which “all acts springs.”

This celebration of ecstasy is an effort to reach beyond the comfortable half-truths of conventional knowledge and to get in touch in the actual reality of one’s situation. The American poet, after all, lacks a tradition which might validate his or her achievements. Lacking such a tradition, poets seek to ground themselves in the immediate reality of the present situation. Olson’s theory expounds these propositions, and Brakhage’s filmmaking puts them into practice. Brakhage’s emphasis on dailiness, with achieving a hard-won insight into the actual character of his immediate circumstances, derives as much from these Emersonian beliefs that Olson passed on to him as they do from Stein’s notions of the preciousness of every object and every moment (notions that, to be sure, are every bit as Emersonian). Olson reiterated Heraclitus’ statement that “Man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar,” and searched for poetic means to overcome this estrangement; the purpose of Brakhage’s creative method is similarly to put himself—and perhaps all humans—back in touch with the reality that lies the nearest in daily living. And just as Olson’s epistemology accords facts a dual function, so Brakhage’s aesthetics maintains a dual conception of “that with which [we] are most familiar.” Sometimes, especially in his earlier work, Brakhage takes his domestic situation as that reality, while at other times, especially in his work of the late 1980s and the 1990s, he gives his own thoughts and perceptions that status. His earlier works especially engage with objective reality (admittedly transformed by subjectivity) and in these works, Brakhage strove to establish a direct and genuine relation to the immediate circumstances of his life. This feature of his work,

too, has antecedents in New England Transcendentalism: Thoreau described himself as an “[e]xpert in home cosmology”; Brakhage’s earlier films show that he had acquired expertise in the same domain. As Thoreau embarked on many exploratory journeys in Concord, so Brakhage engaged in endless adventures in perception and imagination in the backyard of his mountain home near Rollinsville, Colorado. In his later works, Brakhage has taken a more radical interest in subjectivity—the radical natural of the enterprise is indicated by the fact the progression from each series of imagnostic films to the next is represented a sort of archaeological excavation, digging towards ever deeper, and more primitive layers of consciousness—Brakhage has attempted to rediscover the real nature of perception—with the raw material of perception that has not yet been shaped into conventional forms.

The desire for a spontaneous compositional method which commits him to allowing himself to be carried wherever the force field that impels this creative activity might take him—to following along a line of energy. This compositional method aims not at producing works that fit into traditional forms and possess the traditional values of timelessness, autonomy and intricacy, but at allowing a work’s form to evolve through the process of creation, in an interaction between the creator and the evolving form, of a spontaneous compositional method that respects -- indeed celebrates—the continual coming-on of novelty has become common in American art since midcentury. We can observe its influence in action painting, in the movement in documentary filmmaking of the late 1950s and early 1960s known as *cinéma-vérité* and especially in the improvised music (e.g., that of John Coltrane (1926–1967), Ornette Coleman (1930–2015), Pharoah Sanders (1940–), Archie Shepp (1937–), the Art Ensemble of Chicago).