



Olson
Now: Lang

guishing
Notes for a Speech

/ Anne Waldman /

some days in sept/ oct /08

Abu Sousveillance

“who can extricate language from action?”

Welcome to the Anthropocene. Man is controlling all geo-political changes rather than the earth or nature itself.

do the election shuffle...

highs and lows...lips moving on a quixotic screen...motive minds its own motives
up and down anticipation ladder...who's winning...how much more to do from the
desk...morphology all by itself before the meme tanks. *Pinnipeds* are descendants of
bear-like ancestors 30 million years ago who turned amphibious...

why?

meanwhile, over in Iraq...

that's when we do it, at night

*brown paper bags
of torture
& death*

*wiped
his
mouth
away*

1 out of 5 a crippling form of PTSD

or suicide

any pain?

certainly

slabs & slabs of it

a drooped code of light (body slumped over)

*ore exultant in civvies
wild laughter*

tuned on on what drug?

area distorted by the marines

where to hide

*Set teeth
To knuckles
In combat
wincing*

Lyndie brutality o avert

Abu Sousveillance

cold savage beatings

thumbs up
a blow to the stomach

“ cold savage beatings on more brown bodies...”

Atrocity+silence= more atrocity

link your memory to energy

& in your female body make an analysis of power divisions
first: get the world image on social DNA...

[Jaguar Paw]

not a Hollywood construct

Some consider the Zapatista movement the first “post modern” revolution . The Ejercita Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional is an armed revolutionary group born in Chiapas that has abstained from using weapons since 1994, when their uprising was overpowered by the Mexican Army. It's this policy of abstention that inspires the sense of poet-post-modern. A people, a movement, a Cause does need to display arms to shift the paradigm for its own empowerment.

EZLN went public the day the NAFTA agreement went into effect, NAFTA which only intensifies the gap between the rich and the poor in Chiapas, as many following the economics of our neighbors south of the border have witnessed. The EZLN does not demand independence of the Mexican government but rather autonomy. The aim is to gradually implement a socialist government, control one's own resources, particularly the land on which one lives and works, and work the land communally, share in the fruits of that labor. The ideology considers a range of models: Socialist anarchism, Libertarian Municipalism, Libertarian Marxism and indigenous Mayan political thought and mythos. Like future we hope president Barack Obama , the Zapatistas also understand the power of the Internet in their struggle for change.

[I think of Charles Olson fussing with scraps of paper, his multiple shards or *tesserae*, his hits of connective tissue. I remember Bob Creeley late in life taking to the Internet quite radically. He couldn't sit through lunch without having to jump up log on to get the news. How would Olson be faring on the information highway?]

From Ben Friedlander's Prologemena (presented at Olson Now, Boston in 2006):

OLSON'S PRESENT USE FOR POETS

In addressing Olson's present use as a model for writers, I want to focus on the last point

just made, that Olson abandoned the book as ultimate horizon and worked instead to produce an archive. This has long been described as a matter of dissipation or letting go, but in the age of the internet—of the automatically archived blog, with its comment streams and embedded links to listserv discussions, sound and video files, and online texts and websites—we are, perhaps, better situated to appreciate this turn in Olson’s practice as an achievement. One of the characteristics of an archive is that it exists beyond the control of any one person. An author can control the production of a book, as Olson himself did early on in his career, but archives are essentially collaborative. Letters are sent out into the world and the disposition of papers is entrusted to posterity. What might happen to our sense of poetry, then, if we came to think of books as but one term in a larger field of production and of writing as an activity that is essentially collaborative?

Feb 9, 1951: At one point in a letter to Creeley Olson complains that Mexico is so “god-damned oriental”, and that as contemporaries, the natives seem much closer to Mao and his gang. He writes: “that the fancy struck me that, shortly, a revolt by Indians here in Yucatan that would be an ‘excellent demarche’ [*diplomatic maneuver handled with finesse*] for any Chinese movement across the Pacific.”

Inordinate fear of the Yellow Peril. My own generation also inculcated with demons Russian and China. A dog tag would identify me when the “time came”. Melting down under our desks at New York City’s Public School 8. in a late 1950’s angst.

“The trouble is, it is very difficult to be both a poet and, an historian.” (*Selected Works*, 129-30). Get outside the building first...

[The first time I met Olson he was the center of attention, Berkeley 1965. Fragile he seemed in 1969 at Panna Grady’s mansion in London, in the throes of a love triangle.]

[Diana Hadley speaks of cooking for Olson huge amounts of food. And how he slept at her home with a bobcat before bobcats were illegal.]

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...in the Zapatista annals of struggle...

On May 3-4 2006 : A series of demonstrations protesting the forcible removal of unofficial flower vendors from a lot in Texcoco for the construction of a Wal Mart, turned violent when the Government bussed in 5,000 agents to quell the demonstrations. There were several days of violence – 216 arrests...reported rapes and some deaths.

(see rebeldia.org or indiamediachiapas.org)

Oct 2007: The Zapatistas invited indigenous people to Guaymas, Sonora. It had been 515 years since the invasion of ancient indigenous territories and the onslaught of the war of Conquest, which extracted enormous spoils and promoted capitalist exploitation. This was part of the Other Campaign, when the Zapatistas refused to vote and promoted their “decentralized consensus democracy”, a platform that includes validation of local kinds of democracy. This includes teaching in indigenous languages, developing indigenous schools, and schools that promote the arts of weaving, herbal medicine.

The Third “Encuentro of the Zapatistas People with the People of The World” was held later on December 28, 2007.

“The object of this meeting is to meet one another and to come to know one another’s pains and sufferings. It is to share our experience. Because each tribe is different”

- Subcomandante

Marcos

My real commander is the people” – Subcomandante Marcos

“Para todos todo, para nosotros nada” , a Zapatista slogan.
(*Everything for everyone and nothing for (just) ourselves.*)

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In January of 1951 Charles Olson left Washington DC for Lerma, Mexico near Campeche, where he spent 6 months living, writing and studying Mayan archeology, particularly the hieroglyphs.

In *Human Universe*, he describes the Maya as “poor failures of the modern world”, unable to pull themselves together to have water when the rains do not come in June. He romantically - and quite lyrically - focuses on the flesh. “When I am rocked by the road against any of them-kids, women, men- their flesh is most gentle. There is none of that “pull-away’, we have in the States.”

“The admission these people give me and one another is direct, and the individual who peers out from that flesh is precisely himself, is a curious wandering animal like me... It is so very beautiful how animal human eyes are when the flesh is not worn so close it chokes, how human and individual the look comes out of a human eye when the house of it is not exaggerated.”

These people, he imagines, stay connected through attention to animals, planets, the human face, eyes and hands...

...of hieroglyphs: “they retain the power of the objects of which they are the images”

“Value is perishing from the earth because no one cares to fight down beneath the glowing surfaces so attractive to all”.

Sousveillance (note to a Chinese journalist)

There's the activist/artist movement called 'sousveillance.' Besides having inherent meaning and value, *sousveillance* is an example of what I would call social movement with 'spiritual architecture' –meaning (in this case) that it emphasizes awareness, being mindful, recording the moment (literally with hidden devices), being both participant and observer at the same time. I always wanted to be an anthropologist or ethnographer. I think that's the notion-- *field poet*. Many of us have been involved with the activity and practice of "sous-surveillance" all along and am delighted to have it brilliantly named and articulated by Steve Mann. This was necessary after 9/11 with the increased surveillance and harassment of many individuals...racial profiling and the like.

[Jaguar Paw] 2

a Hollywood construct

Mel Gibson's epic movie *Apocalypto* 2006, is set in the Yucatan during the declining period of the Maya civilization. It depicts the journey of a Mesoamerican tribesman -Jaguar Paw – who manages to escape sacrifice. At the moment his heart is to be ripped out there's an eclipse which stays the priest's brutal hand. *Apocalypto* is the first film in history to include Mayan dialects (with subtitles). The publicity boasts that much scholarly preparation went into the movie. Gibson consulted the Popol Vuh, even studied textiles of the period. However, there's considerable unfortunate scramblings of sites and architecture. Although set in the post classical time, the central pyramid comes from the classic period. Temples are in the style of Tikal in the central lowlands classic style ,but decorated with PUUC motifs, including Baird's tapir and a black jaguar.

Gibson hired actors who were indigenous people of Canada and the US and there were even some young ones and elders "who knew no language but Maya and had never seen a tall building before."

The Maya are portrayed as savages. There's a colonial racism at play. Nothing about the accomplishments- artistic and otherwise of these peoples is really on display. Gibson has said the movie is an "exploration of primal fears".

"Spectatorism [think of Guy Debord] crowds out participation as the condition of culture".

"All individual energy and ingenuity is bought off- at a suggestion box or the cinema. Passivity conquers all. (Olson HU)

"Can one restate man in any way to repossess him of his dynamic?"

An early communique from the EZLN:

"The world is another world, reason no longer governs and we true men and women are few and forgotten and death walks upon us, we are despised, we are small, our world is

muffled, silence has inhabited our house for a long time, the time has come to speak for our hearts, for the hearts of others, from the night and from the earth our dead should come, the faceless ones, those who are jungle, who dress with war so their voice will be heard, that their word later falls silent and they return once again to the night and to the earth, that other men and women may speak, who walk other lands, whose swords carry the truth, who do not become lost in lies.”

“Look for men and women who lead obeying, those who have strength in their words, and not in fire, and finding them, speak and give them the staff of command, that they may return once again to the earth and the night, the faceless ones, those who are jungle. So that if reason returns to those lands the fury of the fire may be silenced, that the faceless ones, those who go by night may rest at last by the earth”

Thus spoke the faceless ones, and there was no fire in their hands and their word was clear and without olds. An before the day defeated the night once again they went, and on the earth one word remained: “Enough!”

Polis

Human Universe

I want

to

go

live

there

thrive, rive, dive, give, *quiver* there

I want to go live there.

Instead we go to the streets of Denver

protest

Torture

& the war

and at a public theatre to watch the Obama acceptance speech.

“We are ourselves both the instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition... Which is of course, why language is a prime of the matter and why, if we are to see some of the laws afresh, it is necessary to examine, first, the present condition of the language—and I mean language exactly in its double sense of discrimination (logos) and of shout (tongue).”

“dodges of discourse- the whole political scripted debate”

“The harmony of the universe is not logical”

“It is not the Greeks I blame”

“What it comes to is ourselves, that we do not find ways to hew to experience as it is, in our definition and expression of it, in other words, find ways to stay in the human universe, and not to be led to partition reality at any point, in any way.”

These are the false faces, too much seen, which hide and keep us from the active intellectual; states, metaphor and performance”.

“All that comparison ever does is set up a series of reference points: to compare is to take one thing and try to understand it... comparison, or, its bigger name symbology...”

Olson left his employment with the democratic party after Roosevelt's death, to get away from the “merchandise men”

“ it is comparison which has lain, from the beginning, at the root of humanism as one of its more evil characteristics. Image, on the contrary, denotes a much more active process, deriving as it does from the root of the Latin verb “imitare” “which Olson links to imitate, to mime, to dramatic action.

Polis is Eyes

In this frantic psychologically and psychically dominating election season Democrat Jared Polis, a civically minded, gay activist who quotes Allen Ginsberg at his rallies, just won the congressional primary in Colorado. For months we'd had the sign “Polis” stuck in lawns all over Boulder. Imagine the delight of this Olsonian – in a borrowed and expanded syncretic “zone” seeing this word, this “logos” and “topos” permeating the landscape. At every street juncture, I've thought why *still* Olson, why now? Language as a physical fact. The *polis* needs continual attention, obviously, as an urgent physical fact. What better meditation than the current red state/blue state split, or the morphing of that *mappemunde*, or the economic meltdown and bailout. We are voting on light rail systems, on whether or not life begins at conception and whether fetuses should be accorded full human citizen rights, which would by extension effect education and the teaching of creationism. We are voting on measures that subtly challenge evolution. Where indeed is Olson now? The culture needs its poets who obviate political master agon-narratives of the “demon box”. I attended the Denver Press Club's symposium on voting fraud, during the Democrats' Convention, and participated in the “Funk the War” march etc. CSPAN broadcast from the Mercury Café where Code Pink was holding its headquarters. But how much of St Paul's street action did we see? Or of the anti-Palin march in Alaska?

It's encouraging, inside or out the halls of ambition, what a poet may do, point to & I am thinking again, *epistolary virtual modalities*. I think of Olson's desperate civic letters re: the devastation of Gloucester, and what is lost to that *polis*. And yet the people I know who continue to work there, strive there in Gloucester megalopolis, I think of the *polis* in our

virtual space, what Barack Obama has spurred through the Internet. Are we all our own little “democracies” now? Hyperconnectivity begets mimeses begets hyperempowerment? Is this a good thing? So along those lines.... *the interactive view of the history of life on earth*....and all of us “hot for the world they lived in”, “another kind of nation” & send out a report....Apocalypto, the rapture? A governor who guns down baby wolves from airplanes?

3. Incapably Positive or Positively Incapable: A Letter to The Nation magazine

It's been a bit eerie on the streets of Denver with activists chanting “our streets!” in opposition to the security at an over-the-top maximum with national police, military and intelligence agencies, US Coast Guard, North American Aerospace and the Northern Command in play (from Peterson Airforce Base in Colorado Springs) and more. 500 million dollars worth of positively incapable Security cameras everywhere. Illegal arrests, pepper-sprays, baton bashes - while inside the corridors of ambition an exhilarating historic coronation, a gathering of the “tribe” as it were, coupled with the urgent imperative that all progressives must take part in assuring and accomplishing the election of the Obama/Biden ticket. One thinks of John Keats’ “negative capability” at times like these. The “both, both” of being able to dwell in the contradictions without an “irritable reach after fact or reason”. Yet we all need our facts and our reason. And we all need to work the inside and the outside without too much irritability. But the streets no longer seem streets, under such fascistic Homeland Security Control - certainly as they were in the days of Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady in the 1940s. Champa, Larimer, or what with the new condos/ apartments proliferating on the banks of the Platte River. Perhaps Five Points or the ballpark at 23rd and Weldon where Kerouac describes in *On the Road* still evoke some and of the old “neighborhood” of character, of place.... “the strange young heroes of all kinds, white, colored, Mexican, pure Indian...on the field, performing with heart-breaking seriousness. Just sandlot kids in uniform. It was the Denver Night; all I did was die!”, meaning it was soul-rending, it was poignant, had some echo of humanity, human *feeling*. Die: swoon. The racial shift is so powerful, potent, tremendous 1940s to now. And there's great humanity in the current Obama atmosphere, although I wish he would stop shouting about Osama Bin Laden and clean coal...in spite of the police and corporate presence blatantly apparent in the AT & T & Qwest logos everywhere (corporate sponsors of the convention) and the Lockheed Martin undercurrent. And women have come further and Code Pink is on the front lines. Diversity in the protest, and diversity inside the convention center, and in the mile high stadium...so “both, both”, inside and outside. And let's watch out for voter fraud, of real concern in these Rocky Mountain parts and elsewhere. And protest the continuation of the “oil and gold barons mentality” of yore. And visualize the “streets” as they were, before the 16th Street Mall, and the Cherry Creek Mall, and value the literary tradition that holds these vivid minute particulars.

Yrs sincerely & etc....

AW

Teacher, parent, poet, citizen

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News Flash: I realized during the Bailout procedures that Barney Frank has Olsonian eyebrows, not as naturally groomed perhaps, and that he is from Massachusetts sweetens the resonance! Barney Frank talking about “risks” involved without regulation. And the “fear now of the unknown”...

“The need now is a cooler one, a discrimination, and then, a shout [tongue]”

Symballein

*to throw
together*

& then *compare*

the average American baby represents
twice
the environmental damage
of Swedish child,
three times that
of an Italian
thirteen times that
of a Brazilian,
thirty-five times
that of
an Indian, and
280 times that
of a Chadian
or Haitian...*

who are the “poor failures” of the modern world?

* Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-first Century* (Random House, 1993)