PART III

SITUATING STEVENS

CHAPTER XIII

STEVENS AND THE POETIC TRADITION

Stevens' poetry opens up possibilities for a new poetics in which the traditional epistemological structure of imagination is replaced by an existential/ontological one, that is, the imagination is no longer conceived of as an attribute of the transcendent subjective consciousness but as a mode of being of the self that exists through imagination. Its task is not to manipulate the 'objective' world, to impose its own meanings upon it, but to open up space in the human world, at once strange and familiar, and thus to preserve and discover its essential mystery. Poetry which thus grounds itself not in absolute subjectivity but in the actual, historic existence deliberately moves outside the conventional duality of subject and object, and as a consequence, ceases to be either merely mimetic or reflective. It is rather seen as "Part of the res itself and not about it" (CP, 473), an existential act that brings into being the temporal world. If on the one hand this phenomenological poetics destroys the anthropocentric stance of the traditional poetics, it retrieves and thematizes on the other hand, the Lebenswelt, the 'life-world'

that is prior to the subject-object relation, and discovers the concrete world in its full presence, the being which resides in the temporal process itself, covered up and forgotten by the trappings of subjectivism. It does not claim to arrive at any abstract, apodictic truth. It seeks to be neither conclusive nor inclusive. Rather, it is an act of "finding / What will suffice" (CP, 239), a tentative, explorative, open-ended, and therefore, a fuller and more dynamic experience.

Such a radical restatement of the notion of poetry places Stevens beyond the earlier poetic tradition. The present chapter attempts to situate Stevens' poetics in the historical framework of Romantic and Modernist poetry and show how it moves beyond it toward a new beginning.

The distinguishing quality of Romantic poetry can be defined, broadly, in terms of the centrality of the subjective consciousness that views and interprets objective reality from its own vantage point. Instead of passively subscribing to external reality the self responds actively to it and endows it with its own subjective value. Thus conceived it becomes the source of all experience and knowledge. It is this creative activity of subjectivity which unites the inner with the outer that becomes the chief concern of the romantic poets. Following Schelling's belief that all knowledge rests on the unity of that which is objective, which may be called nature, and that which is subjective, which may be called self, Coleridge formulated his famous definition

of the imagination as a vital power which reconciles mind and nature, subject and object into a harmonious union. Coleridge distinguishes between the primary and/the secondary imagination. The primary imagination is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception,"[1] the simple act of perception that unites subject to object. The secondary imagination, which differs from the primary imagination in "degree" and "mode of operation,"[2] "coexists with the conscious will."[3] It is the creative faculty of the subjective self which orders and unifies : "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead."[4] What is significant is that for Coleridge and the Romantics the activity of the imagination is seen to affirm and underscore the subjective nature of man's knowledge.

Wordsworth too reposes faith in the mediating power of the imagination in uniting the self with nature. It is a reciprocal activity, as he says in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," which half-creates what it perceives. In such moments of interaction the self becomes aware of the divine spirit that surrounds the universe. It is in this experience of transcendental presence which unites the self and nature in an abiding harmony that Wordsworth's poetry finds its deepest fulfilment. The Prelude, Wordsworth's great poem of the self, is

both a re-enactment of and, what is more significant, an attempt to recover, moments of such visionary experiences, of what Wordsworth called 'spots of time'.

Wordsworth's quest for the recovery or 'recollection', described later in explicit Platonic terms in "An Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," of the divine origin or presence defines the central poetic vision of the great romantic poets. Indeed Wordsworth's poetry reveals a great love for palpable, concrete nature and it grounds itself initially in the visible world surrounding the self, yet its ultimate moment of experience resides in the 'tranquillity' of an atemporal, transcendent, permanence. Such an experience is certainly alien to Stevens, who being an heir to the post-romantic era which proclaimed the death of the gods, could hardly invest faith in any power 'beyond' or 'behind' nature. This loss of belief in a transcendent presence most clearly distinguishes Stevens, along with other modern poets, from the romantics. Unlike his contemporaries, however, Stevens returns to the earth, in the utter impoverishment of the loss of the spiritual inheritance. If his poetry seeks contact with the palpable, physical world, and finds order in the multitudinous chaos, it does so by reorienting its way of perceiving the world. It thus saves itself from the anguish of disintegration that corroded the Victorian poet, Arnold for example, who having lost the power to experience the divine spirit that wedded the self to the external world in harmony, was unable also to find a personal order in the world.

It is here that one locates Stevens' radical departure from the romantic notion of imagination. Critics on Stevens have often observed that he belongs to the central romantic tradition. Their most ardent advocate, Harold Bloom, even proclaims that this tradition finds its culmination in Stevens' poetry.[5] Indeed, the central preoccupation of Stevens' poetry is the relationship of imagination and reality, as it was for the great romantics. It therefore easily lends itself to such an approach. But the critics take for granted the notions of imagination and reality in terms of the binary subject-object opposition, which are themselves problematized in Stevens' poetry. If the search of the romantic poet is directed towards establishing the centrality of the subjective self which imbues reality with deep, transcendent value, the search of Stevens' poetry is directed towards the poem of "pure reality" (CP, 471), untouched or unimpaired by subjective overlappings. It seeks to discover "a land beyond the mind" (CP, 252), a realm of "mere being" where "A gold-feathered bird / Sings in the palm, without human meaning" (OP, 117). The supremacy of the imagination lies for Stevens in that it mediates or dis-covers this independent reality that precedes all human interpretations of it. Stevens' poetry makes what is indeed a revolution in the concepts of the imagination, because for Stevens it is no longer synonymous with the centralized, subjective self, since such a self gives not reality but a subjective reflection of it. Stevens thus discards the epistemological structure of the romantic imagination, that is, the

concept of the imagination that gives its own interpretations of reality. In its place, he introduces a more primordial notion of imagination as a mode of the being of man. As such it is coexistent with the primordial world, it moves in and through the world and reveals the ontological structure of the existential/temporal process. If Stevens' notion of imagination has affinity with that of any romantic poet, it is perhaps with Keats' whose critique of the 'egotistical sublime' and whose theory of 'Negative Capability', of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts..."[6] make him a true precursor of the contemporary, post-modern, poetic imagination which does not seek to exert the will to power over existence by reducing it to its humanized images but moves outward and participates in the surrounding world and preserves its essential mystery.

With the disappearance of the idea of divinity from the world that had sustained the romantic poet's belief in the harmony of the self and nature, the poets that came after the great romantics found themselves in a bewildering situation where the cleft between the self and the external world became suddenly all too apparent. If the Victorian poets were unable to cope with it, to create a personal order from what Arnold called the "poor fragments of a broken world,"[7] the Symbolist poets in France created a most daring poetics out of it by affirming the supreme value of the self in a disintegrated and

pristine universe of nothingness, in which impossible sphere, Mallarmé was sure, the essence of beauty is to be found."[10] It is this notion of nothingness or transcendent absence, of fixing the word in empty space that has endeared Mallarmé to the deconstructionist thinkers like Jaques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. Mallarmé's chief contribution, however, lay in bringing about turning point in the aesthetic tradition in radically separating the existential reality from the autonomous, autotelic world of art. And it is this new poetics that is inherited by a whole generation of poets, Valéry, Rimbaud, Yeats and Rilke.

The desire to negate the reality of the external world and create the fictive constructs of the imagination in its place becomes more urgently pronounced in Valery. Valery's formulations on poetry are directed towards the definition of what he calls 'pure' or 'absolute' poetry, a poetry which attains its purity and supremacy in creating its own formal space, while severing all connections with the external world. Pure poetry says Valéry, "is in fact, a fiction deduced from observation,"[11] "an artificial and ideal order,"[12] "a system of relations unconnected with the practical order."[13] In his dialogue Eupalinos, or the Architect which centres on the discussion of aesthetics Socrates asserts that "man fabricates.... through abstraction."[14] The dialogue is a celebration of the image of the constructor, the artist who triumphs over nature. Phaedrus speaks to Socrates of Eupalinos' praise of seaports, "those noble, half-natural constructions;"

and then his greater praise of the constructions of art as transcending the half-natural: "Admirable theatres they are, in truth; but let us abstract ourselves from the spells of life and from the immediate enjoyment."[15] It is the structural purity of the arts of architecture and music that Valéry's poetry aspires to attain. His envy of the musician who can work on "a number of possibilities.... without any reference to the world of things and people"[16] leads him to an insistence on form in poetry that annexes the supreme gains of pure music. He speaks of his own poems as having their "starting point in merely one of these impulses of the 'formative' sensibility which are anterior to any "subject or to any finite, expressible idea."[17] His most famous poem, "La Jeune Parque," he says, "was, literally speaking, an endless research into the possibility of attempting in poetry something analogous to what in music is called modulation."[18] Valéry's celebrated image of dance that leads nowhere, his distinction between dance and walking, between poetry and prose, also define poetry's own true sphere, which attains its purity in an autonomous, and yet instantaneous, rhythmic and dynamic order.

Valéry's insistence on form, on fictive constructs of the imagination that replace the experience of the immediate enjoyment of lived reality reveal the poet's need for a created gestalt that alone can make possible ideal order or unity. The transformation of the actual, finite things into the eternity of poetic

space becomes, for Rilke even a deeper spiritual need. The Duino Elegies focus on this task of the perpetual transformation of tangible and perishable things into the invisible vibrations of the consciousness, into the 'Whole' of a personal eternity. The earth and its objects must be saved from their transient, perishable existence, from the effects of time; they must be redeemed by transforming them into the invisible, essential reality of the consciousness. What is more, Rilke suggests, the external world has no other alternative but to become invisible in the inner realm of the self. The earth itself desires such a transformation as the Ninth Elegy puts it : "Earth, is it not just this that you want; to arise invisible in us?... What is your urgent command if not transformation?"[19] The necessary world, the actual, shared world is thus transmuted into "this interpreted world."[20] Rilke's celebrated saying that "Song is Being"[21] underscores his belief that things come to attain their essential reality only when transformed from their existential/phenomenological context into the ideal, invisible poetic space. This need to transform the visible into the invisible, the external into the interior, unchanging order of the consciousness leads Rilke to create a personal mythology in The Elegies, not unlike Yeats who also evolves a private system to sustain the eternal realm of Art, to sing like the golden bird of Byzantium which takes its form from no "natural thing" but from the goldsmith's immortalizing touch, so that it can sing "of what is past, or passing, or to come."[22]

What these great modern poets share is their intensely felt need to create a world of art that not only parallels the lived, historic world but, what is more significant, gains precedence over it. Here temporal reality is assimilated to atemporal forms. The ideality bodied forth in poetry is thus an abstraction from lived existence and poetry achieves a purified form that exists as a self-contained possibility, independent of temporality.

Stevens' poetry makes a near total break, as the present study has attempted to show, with this Symbolist/Modernist aesthetics in that it arises out of a need to retrieve the concrete, temporal reality. If he rejects the romantic belief in the transcendent value with which the self imbues reality, he equally rejects the modernist belief in the transcendence of art that either redeems or negates the independent existence of the temporal world. As with Romantic poetry, the break with modernist poetry is epistemological, for the imagination is no longer conceived in terms of the will to power over existence, as a "sovereign ghost" (CP, 27) that absorbs or reduces the inscrutable mystery of existence which perpetually renews itself into the abstract, atemporal realm of consciousness.

A paradigm that helps explain the tendency toward abstraction in modern aesthetics is provided by Wilhelm Worringer's seminal work Abstraction and Empathy. Man's approach to art, Worringer argues, is governed by his spiritual needs and it takes

basically the form of either abstraction or empathy. The urge toward empathy arises from "a happy, pantheistic confidence between man and the phenomena of the outside world,"[23] whereas the urge toward abstraction "is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world; in a religious respect it corresponds to a strongly transcendental tinge to all notions. We might describe this state as an immense spiritual dread of space,"[24] that is, of an existential space. Tormented by the unending flux of the phenomenal world, man feels a desperate need to seek tranquillity in the abstraction of form in which objects are wrested from natural time and opacity of space and attain an absolute value. Worringer finds in Modern Art the tendency to abstraction which is reflected in the absence of depth and the creation of the structure of planes. In doing so it neutralizes the dread of existential time by spatializing it into a transcendental form. The urge for empathy, on the other hand, leads to an "aesthetic enjoyment (that) is objectified self-enjoyment,"[25] "This implies," Worringer explains, "that the process of empathy represents a self affirmation, an affirmation of the general will to activity that is in us.... In empathizing this will to activity into another object, however, we <u>are</u> in the other object. We are delivered from our individual being as long as we are absorbed into an external object, an external form, with our inner urge to experience."[26] The imagination, in other words, grounded in existential intentionality, encounters actual, temporal beings

of the phenomenal world and participates in their being.

Inspired by Worringer's theory of abstraction, T.E. Hulme heralded for modern poetry a period of dry, hard, classical verse.[27] Hulme likened poetry to sculpture and focused on the creation of image in poetry. The image is not merely a visual impression reproduced but rather the whole poem that is experienced in the relation between the words. Defining imagism, Pound said that "an 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time... It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation... from time and space limits ..."[28] What Pound implies is that the elements of the poem are juxtaposed in space rather than seen as moving in time. Image is not a pictorial reproduction but a unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time. Eliot extended the Image, the 'objective correlative', to include myth which controlled, ordered and gave shape to the futility and anarchy of existence. He admired Joyce's and Yeats's use of it and favored the mythical imagination, in place of the objective, historical imagination as a step toward making the modern world possible. Joseph Frank in an important essay on modern poetry sums up the modernist position:

> Esthetic form in modern poetry, then, is based on a space-logic that demands a complete re-orientation in the reader's attitude towards language. Since the

> primary reference of any word-group is to something inside the poem itself, language in modern poetry is really reflexive.... Instead of the instinctive and immediate reference of words or word-groups to the objects or events they symbolize, and the construction of meaning from the sequence of their reference, modern poetry asks its readers to suspend the process of reference temporarily until the entire poem of internal references can be apprehended as a unity.[29]

What Frank says of Modern literature can equally be applied to the theories of New Criticism and Structuralism which are grounded in a similar premise that the literary discourse is self-referential, a self-enclosed system.

Stevens' poetry moves beyond this spatial poetics of the Symbolist/Modernist tradition towards what one may call a temporal, phenomenological, post-modern poetics in which the imagination no longer transforms the openness of/ever-renewing existence into enclosed, abstract, atemporal forms of art but, by the deepest necessities of its own nature, is driven to create such fictions as will permit it to capture and express living existence and finally to dwell amidst the environing mystery of our familiar world. In Effects of Analogy, Stevens distinguishes between two kinds of poetic theories; the "marginal" poetry practised by Valéry, and the "central" poetry that Stevens himself wished to write and which he accomplished most profoundly. The poet who writes the "marginal" poetry uses the imagination, Stevens says, "as a power within him not so much to destroy reality at will as to put it to his own use" (NA, 115). The poet

who writes the "central" poetry, on the other hand, employs the imagination "as a power within him to have such insights into reality as will make it possible for him to be sufficient as a poet in the very centre of consciousness" (NA, 115). He thinks "that there is enough and more than enough to do with what faces us and concerns us directly and that in poetry as in art, and, for that matter, in any art, the central problem is always the problem of reality.... (His) desire and all (his) ambition is to press away from mysticism toward that ultimate good sense which we term civilization" (NA, 116). The distinction between Valéry's modernist poetry and Stevens' post-modernist poetry, as Stevens has shown here, is that for Stevens the imagination is not conceived as an agency of pure formation, as it is for Valéry, which takes reality for granted that requires to be either negated or redeemed. Rather, he asserts the ultimate primacy of reality of the pre-objective, primordial spatio-temporal world, to which the imagination is accountable and to which it owes its final obedience. Stevens' large and robust doctrine of the imagination aims at creating "the poetry of the present" (NA, 115), of the "res itself" (CP, 473), of the world of which we are members.

The reality that poetry seeks to recover is, however, not to be misconceived as empirical, objective reality. Stevens' poetry must not be naively interpreted as naturalistic or realistic in the sense of imitation or reproduction.

Mimesis in the ordinary sense is not the primary task of poetry. In fact poetry destroys the traditional metaphysical concept of reality as a set of objects set over against a judging subject, a concept that both idealists as well as rationalists take for granted. The supreme task of poetry, as Stevens conceives it, is to suspend, or destroy this ordinary concept of reality, and, at the same time, unfold the primordial world that is anterior to subject-object relation, the "muddy centre" (CP, 383) that precedes us and has always already been there "before we breathed" (CP, 383). It is thus a world "That is not our own" (CP, 383), that is, not of our own making. It is wholly other, totally independent in respect to the human agent.

The virile and capable poet must then effect a phenomenological decreation, he must suspend all the preconceptions regarding reality, and the aesthetic forms that arise out of them, in order to retrieve and preserve the opaque mystery of the circumambient world. "The measure of his power," Stevens says of the poet, is "to abstract himself, and to withdraw with him into his abstraction the reality on which the lovers of truth insist" (NA, 23). The abstraction of reality is not the Symbolist transformation of it into an artifice of the mind but an epoché of our ordinary notions of reality, idealist or rationalist, which makes possible our discovery of primordial reality.

If the poetic decreation retrieves the primordial world for us, the poetic fiction, through its creation, helps us dis-

cover it in its true being, in its ontological plenitude. The supreme fiction is not an arbitrary invention, an "artificial order" of Valéry that replaces reality; but, as Paul Ricoeur has shown, the poetic creation "unleashes the power that certain 'heuristic fictions have to redescribe reality."[30] Poetry is not, in other words, an imaginative construct of the mind that exists independently of the lived reality, but which, through its structures, describes and reveals our known, familiar, shared world in its fuller dimensions. The aim of poetry is to know things as they are, to reveal the inexplicable mystery of their sheer actual existence. It does so, not by absorbing things into the enclosed space of the mind, but in the mind's opening out to them, paying heed to all the things of the earth as, in their concrete particularity, they take on the dimension of presence. Poetic transformation is thus seen not as a transmutation of things into an imaginary realm— of divinity or art — outside time and space, but as Gadamer argues it is "transformation into 'true being"[31] of things. "By means of it everyone recognizes that this is how things are."[32] It is an act through which the 'known' enters into its true being and manifests itself as what it is. The poetic act ultimately develops an experience of reality in which invention and discovery, creation and revelation coincide. In Ricoeur's words,

> poetic discourse brings to language a pre-objective world in which we find ourselves already rooted, but in which we also project our innermost possibilities.

> We must thus dismantle the reign of objects in order to let be, and to allow to be uttered, our primordial belonging to a world which we inhabit, that is to say, which at once precedes us and receives the imprint of our works. In short, we must restore to the fine word <u>invent</u> its two-fold sense of both discovery and creation.[33]

This is how Stevens resolves the paradox that poetry and reality are one, or "poetry is only reality, after all, and.... poetic truth is a factual truth" (NA, 59). Stevens' understanding of the identity of poetry and reality reaches far beyond the romantic belief in the union of the self and nature in an abiding spiritual harmony, or in the wedding of the self and the external world, of subject and object. In fact, the duality between subject and object disappears, as the self is no longer conceived as viewing the world from outside it, as a detached and abstract consciousness but as grounded within the very world it directs its creative energy to, in order to discover and recover it in its true being. The inexhaustible mystery of this circumambient world always eludes its every attempt to bring it to heel, to reduce it to conceptual frameworks. It resists intelligence most successfully. The mystery of the rock, Stevens' most powerful image of the impenetrable and inscrutable earth, "cannot be broken" (CP, 375) into the visible and the invisible, the transient and the transcendent. Nor is it "enough to cover the rock with leaves" (CP, 526), to cover up its mystery with subjective trappings, and thus forget it. The "cure" of the rock "beyond forgetfulness" (CP, 526) is caring for it, the 'care'

(Heidegger's Sorge)-ful, concernful paying heed to its mystery as it "becomes a thousand things / And so exists no more" (CP, 527). The mystery of the rock, its being, manifests itself in and through the flowers and fruits that blossom on it, through men who make a dwelling upon it, in short, through the world it engenders, brings into existence. The supreme task of poetry is, then, to discover that being resides in be-ings, that the ontological energy is not something other than, but inherent in, the phenomena of the world. Our having a "world" at all in any genuine sense is dependent on our recognition of this fact. Poetry makes this recognition possible. It is in this primary way that "the word is the making of the world" (CP, 345), as it is for the singer at Key West (CP, 128-130). It is this point in our experience where word and world, poetry and reality, poetic expression and living existence, coincide that Stevens' poetry seeks to capture and preserve for us.

Stevens' belief that poetry realizes the world that it creates is shared by other contemporary poets. His poetry bears a deep affinity with the poetry of the French poet René Char. Char's poetry is essentially the poetry of the earth. It is also the poetry of the violent rejection of all other-worldly roots, of divinity as well as of transcendent subjectivity, and of the celebration of the pure earth that is out there, of its visible mystery. Poetry opens up space which lets things come into their being and belong to each other. As Char says, "the poet

can then see things contrary come to their end... poetry and truth, as we know, being synonymous."[34] The German poet Paul Celan similarly describes his poetry as a kind of "homecoming,"[35] as a returning "to axis / of Earth."[36] It is deeply rooted in experience. Celan's poems, like Char's or Stevens', are not hermetic, or purely formal constructs, but open out to the impenetrable, the unpredeterminable mystery of things. Their poems are a process, a moving forward to the discovery of this earth.

Stevens' poetics of reality forms an interesting parallel to the poetic activity of his contemporary American poet William Carlos Williams. Both Williams and Stevens, together with their great contemporary Marianne Moore, concentrated their poetic energy in employing the imagination, each in their own way, to discover the reality of things. They thus mark a second beginning, as it were, in the native American poetic tradition inaugurated by Whitman. Whitman's celebration of actual reality, of things as they are, was sustained by the centrality of the prophetic self that expanded outwards to embrace the vastness of America. For him the sympathetic participation in things did not imply the loss of identity of the self. It rather suggested its strongest affirmation, its exteriorization into the expanses of outward space. Stevens and Williams, however, with their rejection of the transcendent subjective self, had to evolve an entirely new strategy to recover and celebrate things themselves. And each evolved

his independent strategy. Stevens' search for "things as they are" has an exact parallel in Williams' "No ideas but in things."[37] Stevens' belief in the identity of the imagination and reality is shared by Williams: "an identity - it can't be / otherwise - an / interpenetration, both ways."[38] Like Stevens' 'being' which is inherent in things themselves, Williams' poetry also directs itself to the discovery of what he calls "the strange phosphorus of life,"[39] the strange presence, in the actual, tangible things. Both Stevens and Williams overcome subject-object dualism and insist on the 'decreation' of the trappings of emotional and ideological associations. "Every thing that is must be destroyed,"[40] announces Williams. And the act of destruction is accompanied in both by an act of invention that liberates the hidden presence of things: "Invent (if you can) discover / or / nothing is clear."[41]

Out of these similar needs, however, Williams creates a new objectivist art in which a poem becomes the thing itself which it describes; in which the things are lifted into words and the poetic space becomes analogous to physical space. The function of the imagination is not to transform things into something else but to liberate them from their usual fixities and render them absolutely free and independent of everything else. "Words are (not) dissociated from natural objects and specific meanings but... are liberated from the usual quality of that meaning by transposition into another medium, the imagination."[42]

To take on force and reality, to gain its 'thingness', then, each word must "remain separate, each unwilling to group with the others except as they move in the one direction."[43] Williams thus creates a spatial poetics — not, of course, Mallarmé's empty space — but a space containing tension and life where "anywhere is everywhere"[44] and all times are one time, where the wheelbarrow, red and glazed with rain water, occupies its small spot in a perpetual present.

Against Williams' spatial, metonymic art, Stevens sets his temporal, metaphoric art in which the imagination transforms the actual existential things into their true being. For Stevens things do not acquire their thingness, do not come into being, in the spatial "field"[45] as in Williams; rather, the function of the imagination is to light up the very human, temporal space so that things are seen in their rich and inexhaustible plenitude.

The need to overcome the reflective and abstract stance that separates the self from the lived existence and to retrieve the temporal stance that roots man back into the surrounding existential world, the need so profoundly expressed by Stevens, is also deeply felt by many contemporary American poets. Charles Olson, for instance, in The Maximus Poems, sets out to discover the actual, familiar world in all its rich presence and thus to make it truly inhabitable for people, to "make the many share"[46] it. Maximus desires that "Gloucester people live in Gloucester"

not as "on a printed page," that is, not in a polis of artifice but, like Danes in Denmark, in having "something at least which belongs to the truth of the place."[47] Olson's poet, consequently, is the "figure of outward,"[48] not a figure of absolute and pure inwardness but a decentralized figure that moves outward to experience the world with the "old measure of care,"[49] with "the attention and the care,"[50] that is, with concernful phenomenological intentionality. Maximus decreates or destroys the detached and abstract attitude towards the world for he realizes that in so viewing the world he "stood estranged / from that which was most familiar."[51] He then adopts a more originary stance of "obedience"[52] to the familiar and the known. In thus reorienting himself in the world, he is able to discover and celebrate the rich splendours of the ever-changing world, "to find out how much / he is busy, this way, / not as his fellows are / but as flowering trees / turn several greens."[53] And overwhelmed and dazzled by this plenitude of visible and tangible things he finally "discovers / there is no other issue than / the moment of / the pleasure of / this plum, / these things / which don't carry their end any further than / their reality in themselves."[54] Olson similarly insists that the poetic language should be an "act of the instant" which involves a "direct perception and contraries which dispose of arguments."[55] Poetry, for Olson as for Stevens, is a pre-reflective act in which words retain the power of the objects of which they are the images, in which words and things coincide.

The poetry of A.R. Ammons, perhaps more than any other contemporary poet's, reveals a remarkable affinity to Stevens' poetry, both in its central preoccupations and in its lyrical meditativeness. Ammons' poetry moves toward a total celebration of the existential world without the least interference of subjectivity. It moves, as he says, "beyond the boundary of mind"[56] and steps "out into the great open."[57] The self is completely purged of its egotistical sovereignty over things: "I am he / said / nothing &/feel better that / way."[58] It delights in experiencing and discovering what the world offers with its fertile changingness. Ammons' poetry conveys a sense of tremendous freedom from the enclosures of mind that the self experiences as it returns to earth. The poem "Corsons Inlet" describes how, while walking over the dunes one morning, the poet suddenly feels liberated : "the walk liberating. I was released from forms, / from the perpendiculars, / straight lines, blocks, boxes, binds / of thought / into the hues, shadings, rises, flowing bends and blends of sight."[59] The poetic act involves for Ammons the perception of and the participation in the immediate familiar world. It seeks no absolute ideal, no "finality of vision."[60] The poet says : "I have reached no conclusions, have erected no boundaries, / shutting out and shutting in, separating inside / from outside : I have / drawn no lines."[61] The inside-outside, the subject-object duality dissolves and he is able to recover the primordial, pre-objective, temporal world, and discover the presence, the unity of the visible and tangible things. As the

poem "One:Many" explains, the poet fears and avoids "a too great consistency, an arbitrary / imposition / from the abstract one / downwardly into the realities of manyness" because this unity which is an abstraction is "unavailable to change, / cut off from the reordering possibilities of / variety."[62] Rather, he celebrates "the rhythm (which) is / diffusion and concentration: / in and out : / expansion and / contraction: the unfolding, / furling,"[63] the dis-closure of the mystery that hides itself in revealing all that appears, of being in be-ings. Poetry, then, does not impose a unity on things through its arbitrary mental constructs but discovers the unity inherent in things themselves. The poet does not transform the real world into enclosed designs of the mind. In fact he gives up the abstract, cognizing stance and adopts a temporal, perceptional stance: "the way I think is / I think what I see: the designs are there : I use / words to draw them out... I don't think: I see."[64] Poetic language, accordingly, must not deprive things of their existential context by reducing them to abstract images: "language must / not violate the bit, event, percept, / fact - the concrete - otherwise the separation that means / the death of language shows."[65] Words and things, poetry and reality are one. Poetry "points to nothing, / traps no / realities, takes / no game, but by the motion of / its motion / resembles / what, moving, is."[66]

Stevens, Olson and Ammons move decidedly toward creating a poetry that is capable of preserving and disclosing the mystery

of the earth. They aim their search at what Stevens calls "The poem of pure reality untouched / By trope or deviation.... straight to the transfixing to the object / At the exactest point at which it is itself" (CP, 471), that is, at the poetry which reveals things themselves, unfettered and unimpaired by the trappings of the mind. Such a poetic act demands a complete reorientation of one's way of viewing things. Things must be seen "with the sight / Of simple seeing, without reflection" (CP, 471). It requires the self not to reflect upon things, not to reduce them to its own images, but to immerse itself in them, "to step barefoot into reality" (CP, 423), to experience and discover and celebrate them. In thus 'decreating' or destroying the epistemological structure of the traditional notion of the imagination, of the subjective self viewing objective reality, this poetry accomplishes a radical break with the poetry and the poetics of the past. While rejecting the subject-object dualism, it grounds itself in the concrete richness of existence that is essentially temporal and thus suggests a genuinely temporal orientation of the imagination as opposed to the spatial, abstract thinking of the reflective self. For these poets the supreme task of poetry is to display this concrete, existential world in its full plenitude, in its being, and root us back in it.

This change of poetic sensibility that the new post-modern poetry of Stevens and some other poets illustrates is

reflected, as shown in the first part of this study, in the philosophical and aesthetic writings of the age, especially in those of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's phenomenological analytic of Dasein in Being and Time and his meditations on language and poetry define human understanding and language as revelatory not of the workings of solitary and autonomous consciousness but as the unfolding and disclosure of the world that is prior to consciousness and thus point to the ultimate identity of poetry and reality. Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of metaphor, his interpretation of the poetic act as displaying the world it creates underscores the ontological character of the creative process. Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics of the work of art which defines it not as an isolated object outside time and space but as being rooted in historical reality further supports the belief that poetry has immensely to do with life, that "the world of poetry is indistinguishable from the world in which we live" (NA, 31). What these contemporary thinkers and poets share is the need to break away from the abstract, atemporal, subjective stance and relocate thinking as well as the creative process in temporal existence. They thus open up horizons for a new, temporal, phenomenological hermeneutics which may perhaps influence our thinking and living. Their writings are, as Heidegger says, 'on the way' to this new understanding of self and world, of language and poetry, and they communicate, in the words of Stevens, "the portent of the subject" (NA, viii).

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