

b r e a t h

from the

black

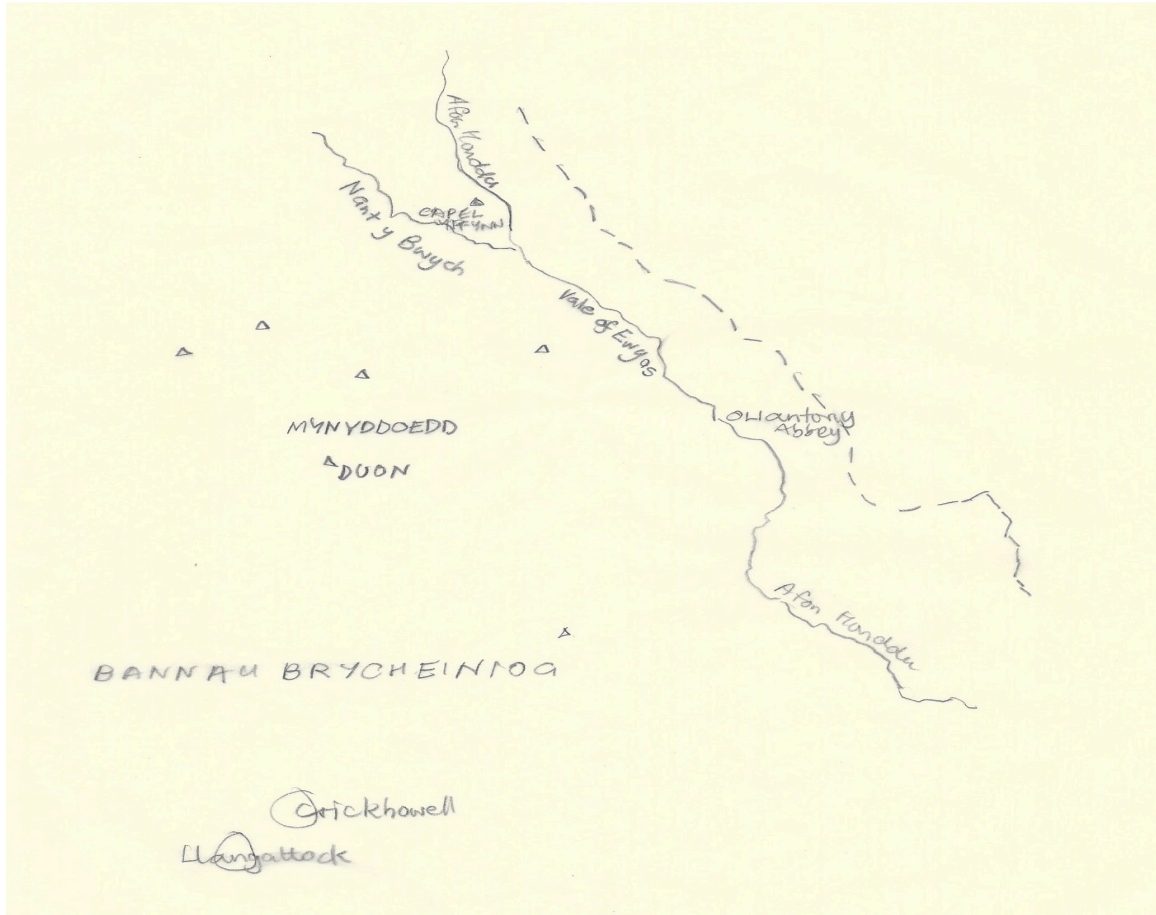
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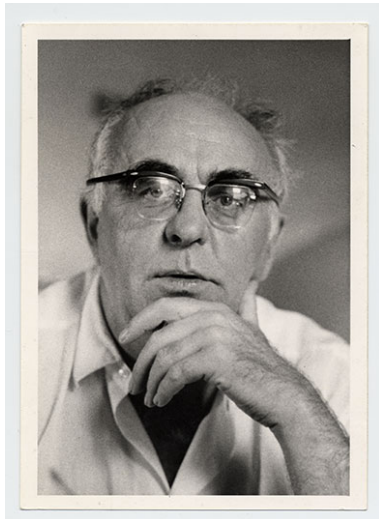


between the Marches and the uplands
glowering in distance
*Y Mynyddoedd Duon**
beckon
in the dark
 geological *form* and coal *measure*
 ‘composition by field’
 the fields small and irregular
 hedged by hazel

(**Y Mynyddoedd Duon*, ‘The Black Mountains’ in the eastern Brecon Beacons)

Regarding Olson's idea of the use of breath to determine line lengths, I am on the side of John Cage. Cage knew Olson from Black Mountain College but (says Fetterman (1996¹), when asked if he was using such a framework said that he did not really understand what Olson meant at the time but later said he liked it.

Before we look more closely at 'breath', it puts the idea in context to check out some life-line comparisons between the two writers who are the subject of this short exploration: Charles Olson who lived from 1910-1970, enjoyed some years parallel to David Jones' span of 1895-1974.



In this paper of slightly glissando comparisons between the authors I have not yet found any reference by either of them to each other's work yet I believe they were independently ploughing some similar furrows.

One life similarity was that they worked for some time in artistic communities. In 1924 (aged 29) Jones joined the community of Catholic craftsmen, run by Eric Gill where artisans could control their own tools rather than be enslaved by machines. It was also religious and adopted the Rule of the Third Order of St. Dominic. For some years, it was at Capel-y-Ffin (on the N.E. slopes of these Black Mountains about 4 hilly miles north of here as the crow flies).

¹ Fetterman, William 1996 *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances*. Google books (accessed March 3rd, 2018)



Olson (aged 38), joined the more progressive and democratic community of Black Mountain College, North Carolina in 1948 as visiting teacher and became its rector in 1951, a position he held until 1956.



BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE
BLACK MOUNTAIN, N. C. View of Studies Building north of lake. Erected with student and faculty labor in 1940-41. Contains student and faculty studies and classrooms. Background, Black Mountains (6000 feet) near Mt. Mitchell.

Both were in communities to exchange ideas and develop their making (writing); one an academic group including visual artists (i.e. de Kooning), the other a religious group including artist/craftsmen. At Capel, Jones developed his painting, etching and carving, showing his strong visual bias.

One of the strong parallels in their work, I suggest is the use of ancient history and myth. George Butterick wrote:

It was archaeology which broke loose the birth of new knowledge around 1875, it was the digging up of the past not the mere recording or repeating the history of it.
(1956)²

² George F. Butterick *Charles Olson and the Post Modern Advance*. Iowa Research Online Vol 11 Article 3, 1980 (accessed 15/05/18

<http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2641&context=iowareview>

In Jones' *Anathemata* Part II, though concerned with the waters around the Mediterranean and Britain, opens at Troy.

In *The Anathemata*, Jones' ships sail through the centuries westward from Troy to Rome, Europe and London. Drawing on archaeology and anthropology of the Island of Britain as a whole. Celtic, Imperial Roman, Western Christian and Saxon are a composite tradition.

Both poets give us a course in Western Civilization. Both sustain epic attributes to their themes. The *Anathemata* was published in 1952, *The Maximus Poems I-X* came out the following year.

Both poets use allusion, fracture, typography and write about their practice within their practice.

In a letter of 1950, Olson says:

One loves only form, and form only comes into existence when the thing is born.

In *I. Maximus of Gloucester, to You*, Olson this occurred as:

*one loves only form,
and form only comes
into existence when
the thing is born*

There are so many similarities between them in form, subject and impetus. So when, in *PROJECTIVE VERSE*, Olson says

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.

Jones wrote that he had decided on a 'fragmented, open form' such as he'd seen in *The Wasteland* and *Finnegan's Wake*. (Dilworth p 259)³. In 19p8 in a letter, he wrote:

it seems to me that if you just talk about a lot of things as one thing follows on another, in the end you may have made a shape out of all of it. That is to say, that shape that all the mess makes in your mind. (to Herman Grisewood. *DGC* 86)

DJ also said:

...making a work is...accomplishing an actual journey. (Preface to A p33)

while Olson, uses the word *istorin* to mean finding out for oneself rather than depending on hearsay. I think they were on similar tracks.

Paul Stanbridge has a study of the method of foliation Jones used on *The Anathemata*.; a paper cut-up version of cut and paste.

In the first stage of this making, Jones produced an original eight-page fragment and then, splitting it at page five, made a large 20 page insertion into that base text which he foliated '5A'-'5T'. After doing this, Jones split his text again, within that '5A'-'5T' insertion, at page '5F'. This second insertion was 33 pages long, and foliated '5F1'-'5F33'. Feeling perhaps that this foliation scheme was becoming unwieldy, Jones then re-paginated his manuscript from 1 to 7

³ Dilworth, Thomas, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet; A Biography*. Jonathan Cape 2016

Following this, he went on to make another five insertions to his manuscript, starting with a '37A'-'37Q' insertion, with the effect that the last insertion he made to the manuscript was foliated '37.P.5.O.B.1'-'9'.¹⁵ The 'centre' of the poem in manuscript is eight insertional stages from the outer parenthesis, which exactly corresponds with Dilworth's thematic reading of the text.

There is a physical, side to the creation of the eventual whole. Within one parenthesis, there is another parenthesis and another as the scheme of foliation proceeds to the centre and then reverses out again.

I From Olson, in *K*:

*There is a tide in man
Moves him to his moon, and,
though it drop him back
he works through ebb to mount
the run again and swell
to be tumescent I*

The affairs of men remain a chief concern

We have come full circle.

One of my favourite pieces of Jones is *A Map of Themes in the Artist's Mind*. of 1943. a veritable visual text using space and colour <https://goo.gl/images/VDs99C>

I was, therefore, pleased to come across Olson's "A Plan for the Curriculum of the Soul." It was a distinctive map with 223 names, subjects, ideas, topics, strewn across the page at all angles. In 1968, issue #5 of *The Magazine of Further Studies* published it. <https://verysmallkitchen.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/plan-for-a-curriculum-of-the-soul-1.jpg>

Facicles in response to it were published in 2010 and include Duncan, Grenier, Blaser, Butterick, Jarnot et. al.

Jones writes of his sojourn at Capel-y-ffin as a 'propitious time' (Hague Ed., 1980 (or Epoch & Artist p 30.⁴) and found:

...that circumstances occasioned my living in Nant Honddhu, there to feel the impact of the strong hill rhythms and the bright *counter-rhythms* which make so much of Wales such a 'plurabelle'.

⁴ Hague, René (Ed.) *Dai Greatcoat*. Faber, 1980 from Jones, David *Epoch and Artist* Faber, 1973, p 30.

I ask, - the breath of rhythm/the rhythm of breath? I suggest they are closely inter-moving. Jones appreciated the rhythms of Piers Plowman, he paused over the Honddu (stream) when fetching milk at Capel-y-Ffin; breath is not far away.

Tilla Brading 2018