

The Body in the Room: Embodied Poetics and the Traces of Loss

by

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Abstract

"The Body in the Room: Embodied Poetics and the Traces of Loss" investigates poetic and artistic practices that seek to foreground the materiality of art and of the body, and examines the ways in which the products of these practices are preserved. Taking as its starting point the Charles Olson archives at Simon Fraser University, this project focuses on three twentieth-century figures: a poet, Charles Olson; a pianist, Sergei Rachmaninoff; and, finally, a painter, Carolee Schneemann. Each offer in turn a model of artistic embodiment and a method of material production. The spaces, both institutional and private, in which these bodies find their preservation, form, beyond a linkage between my examinations of separate artists, a call to further inquiry: while this project chiefly examines bodies, their rooms, too, bear exploring. These rooms are sites for a manner of reproduction facilitated by the material traces of embodied art – a process of reincarnation that is at odds with the alleged embodiment of these artists.

Keywords: embodiment; Charles Olson; projective verse; archive; reproduction; reenactment

Even when he was not thinking of the little phrase, it existed, latent, in his mind, in the same way as certain other conceptions without material equivalent, such as our notions of light, of sound, of perspective, of bodily desire, the rich possessions wherewith our inner temple is diversified and adorned. Perhaps we shall lose them, perhaps they will be obliterated, if we return to nothing in the dust... But, if so, we feel that these phrases of music, these conceptions which exist in relation to our dream, must be nothing either. We shall perish, but we have as hostages these divine captives who will follow and share our fate. And death in their company is somehow less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps even less probable.

Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time.

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for Ralph Maud.

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List of Acronyms

- SW Charles Olson, *Selected Writings*. New York: New Directions Press, 1951.
- CMI Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*. London: Cape Editions, 1967.
- AP Charles Olson, *Additional Prose*. Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons, 1961.
- MG Charles Olson, *Maximus galleys*. Held at Simon Fraser University.
- RMA Personal archives of Ralph Maud. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Prologue

Bodies are always too much, and never enough. I rely on my body to get me from here to there, to provide a stable platform onto which I can build my plots, my plans, my desires. I, too, rely on the bodies of others – bodies I care for, bodies that I wish sustained, that I wish *I* could sustain. Bodies appear to us the containers for whatever ethereal thing it is that we transact between them; yet the work of the mind is the work of the body. The body is a chemical reaction that depletes itself over time; our subjectivities the exhaust, the trails left by this reaction. "When fire dies," writes Charles Olson, "air dies." The body is a bottleneck, a troublesome, irritating mediator. We enter in an exchange with it, bargain for our sensorium, pay with pain and discomfort. When the body dies, its hostages die.

My work in researching and writing this thesis is indebted to the support of bodies. The bodies of my advisors, of myself, of my friends and family, all at different stages in our exothermic reactions. The origin of this debt is to one body which has reached its extinguishing end.

In the spring of 2014 I was chosen as recipient of the Charles Olson award, a scholarship hosted by Simon Fraser University. The award entailed access to a large body of archival material that has formed the fundament of my work here. Another source of information, informally included with the first, was the late scholar Ralph Maud.

Lateness will form a centerpoint to much of my thinking in the following pages, and it is a term that permeates my thinking as I write these pages. As Edward Said asks in the beginning of *On Late Style*, what does it mean to be late? Perhaps I can offer my own definitions. My acquaintance with Dr. Maud spanned a mere half-year; three of those six months I spent abroad, travelling Europe with my soon-to-be fiancée, desultorily thinking on and off of my research. In short, wasting time. In June, when I was given the award and asked over for a meeting with Maud, I had one foot on the airplane.

Distance, the distance between bodies in particular, recurs. June and July found me frantically delving into the wealth of material present at the scholar's Kitsilano office, minutes away from my apartment. I didn't realize then – and this is one of the many standard formulations of lateness, usually followed by "and now it is too late" – that those hasty, shorthand notes would comprise the entirety of my material.

Lateness, untimeliness; if anything could be said of my European sojourn, it was that it was ill-timed. I spent the summer and early fall abroad, thousands of miles from the archives, whose necessarily material nature prohibited any kind of virtual access. We departed in October, and under the excuse of regaining equilibrium, I let a month pass by without returning to my research. There was a cold picked up abroad to deal with, there was a wedding to plan... It wasn't until November, the holidays looming, that I gathered my notebooks and resolved to get some more archival work in before the seasonal hiatus.

Most of my objects of study here have something to do with, or are in some way touched by, lateness. Proximity to the end, whether knowing or unexpected, imprints itself upon work of criticism, upon painting or poem. Theodor Adorno and Edward Said are keen to trace the modulations in an artist's product as they grapple with their impending mortality, but not all of this lateness is forewarned. Said's *On Late Style* is itself the product of the forces it documents, a work truncated and fragmented by death, reassembled by the bereaved acquaintances of the deceased author. Here, lateness is not incorporated into the work as a muse. It is the destroyer of the work, the abbreviator of the text in the midst of its composition. Lateness is not always conscious. The body does not always announce itself.

My rush to complete my research in the Charles Olson archives in the winter of 2014 was put on hold by a prolonged bout of vertigo, a violent dissociation between my mind and my body that saw me unable to make much use of either. I was examined by a neuroophthalmologist and told that my eyes were disagreeing with my brain. Something in the intermediary space between retinae and cortex was distorting the signal, causing discrepancies. It wasn't clear which party was in the wrong, or what was causing the friction in that microscopic inner forum. I was given a prescription medication that would

reconcile the disagreement, and my mind rejoined my body. November drew to a close without any progress on my research.

December holds a semantically charged position in the calendar for many, and I am no exception. It is the month of birth – the birth month of Christ, most famously, but also of Charles Olson, the birth of my fiancée, the birth, I was pleased to discover, of Ralph Maud. At the same time, this month is the very symbol of lateness; the first month of winter, it marks the beginning of the end, the last in the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, fall, and winter. An unlikely romance between partners of disparate age, as Edward Said notes in his discussion of lateness, is after all referred to as December in May (6). If there is comedy in this untimeliness, there is also tragedy.

December is the month of decay, of fragmentation, of separation. The protagonist of "The Raven" is overwhelmed with sorrow for the lost Lenore specifically – Poe's word is "distinctly" – in "bleak December," when he must delve into his books for consolation. Trees are stripped of their leaves in Keats, Coleridge and Shakespeare. December is respectively "drear-nighted," "bleak," and "bare." In Robert Creeley's "The Door," it is the month in which "we change, / not multiplied but dispersed," "sneaked out of childhood" into "the ritual of dismemberment." These attempts to narrativize loss, like mine, organize themselves around this late month, around the theme of distance, disconnection.

Ralph Maud's office remains where it always was in the basement of a house a few minutes' travel from my apartment. I could walk there this afternoon, but there would be no use. My key to the office, its contained archive, the man, is no longer there.

In the epigraph to my thesis, Marcel Proust writes of our "divine captives," the hostage thoughts that "share our fate," join us as "we return to nothing in the dust." Ralph Maud was the vessel to a great many divine passengers. All that we now have at our disposal are the shadows, the refractions of these vanished thoughts, the imprints that they left on the page and on the work of other scholars.

I try to project myself back into his office. This writing is, like so many of the texts it studies, an attempt at recovery. The small room is walled by a selection of books

curated to represent Charles Olson's own bibliography, collected over the years with the goal of a complete account of the poet's textual life. Elocution manuals from the poet's childhood stand alongside autumnal reading.

Standing in this room, one feels that one is taking part in a synecdoche of Charles Olson's mental space. The effect is deliberate.

There is a plywood desk topped with a row of thick binders, each labeled with a set of years from the poet's life. Here are Charles Olson's fossils: a third-grade poem written about birds. A report card from middle school. Newspaper clippings. Correspondences between publisher and poet. At one point, I confuse Maud's handwriting for Olson's; the script isn't dissimilar. The contents of these binders give a kind of *gestalt* of a biography – the tracings of an organism moving through history.

Much of this ephemera is poised to decay, enacting the death that its archivization strives to stave off. With the loss of one memory we risk the loss of another – much of this material is unsorted, its significance and its place in the archive known by its archivist only, the abandoned tool of a lost Theuth who alone held the legend, the apparatus with which to decipher it. Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* makes much of the connection between archivization and forgetting, the archive and death; For Derrida, as for Plato, the archive will "atrophy" the memory, make those who make use of it "remember things by relying on marks made by others, from outside themselves [...] and so writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds" (Plato 78). I'm thankful that Ralph Maud and the other collectors of Charles Olson's literary legacy made use of this forbidden tool. If such a mnemonic prosthetic hastens the death of memory on an intra-subjective level, the traces it leaves for others to come upon might redeem this partial amnesia. For it is, against Plato's *Phaedrus*, another's forgetting that allows me to remember. If it were not for this tool all of this material would be, like Proust's divine hostages, shuttled away from us forever.

If the psyche as understood by psychoanalysis is an archive – in Derrida's terms, "a prosthesis of the inside" – this physical, material archive is a prosthesis of the *outside*, one that can, like an artificial limb, be removed from its host intact. The missing, greater element's absence will be felt, but as consolation the part remains.

Not to say that these materials remnants are eternal. It is not all so bad as Socrates' image of the man writing in water; nor are these documents' timespans as short as the writing that is recorded on Freud's Mystic Pad. The sun does not so easily evaporate the rows of three-ring binders, the meticulously curated books on the ceiling-high book shelves, the plastic-sheathed letters – but they, too, degrade. The compulsion to save, to archive, to try to preserve, is tied to another, antithetical drive.

"The death drive," writes Derrida, "not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory, as *mneme* [memory retention] or *anamnesis* [memory recall], but also commands the radical effacement, in truth the eradication, of that which can never be reduced to *mneme* or to *anamnesis*, that is, the archive" (11). If the post-structuralist stance is to state that writing kills the subject, is the assertion here the opposite: that death "kills" writing, and to write is to mount a resistance against death? Reconciliation between these two is taxidermic in image and melancholic in nature. Is preservation worth the death it enacts, the death it forces *us* to execute, to embody? Carolyn Steedman's *Dust* responds to Derrida's *Archive Fever* by literalizing it, describing the epidemiology of the archivist; if Derrida's fever is the fever *to* archive, the melancholy drive to preserve, Steedman's fever is the fever *from* the archive. Refracted through a layer of citation, she invokes Jules Michelet, the sickly historian who breathes in the arcane dust of the archives, who for Roland Barthes is the scholar incarnate, that eater of history.

I find myself poised between two models, that of Barthes' Michelet and of Walter Benjamin's librarian. Michelet, insufflating the material of history in the suffocating Archives Nationales de Paris, by taking in these spirits grants them temporary life; he embodies them by lodging them *in his own body*. "As I breathed in their dust, I saw them rise up. They rose from the sepulchre..." (qtd. in Steedman 27). This necromantic act is one of love, of communion. The mental symptomology of Steedman's archive fever is the injunction to "do these people justice," knowing that you will not be able to, that there will always be something or someone left unfinished (17). This excess of the archive – "You think: these people have left me *the lot*" – finds different expression in Benjamin's dust-speckled collector of "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting."

Michelet's toiling in the dust brings the dead back to life, but Benjamin's work is more vampiric than necromantic – it is the student, not the object of study, that is resurrected. The text of *Unpacking My Library* seems uniquely alive; it is written in the first person, and addresses its reader directly, asking you to "join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of wood, the floor covered with torn paper, to join me among piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again after two years of darkness..." (59). If the reader turns and flees from this invitation, delivered as it were from the depths of the grave, she is excused. But if we acquiesce and follow Benjamin into the study, we bear witness to a strange ritual amidst the dancing dust-motes and open caskets.

The library for Benjamin's narrator is a mysterious prosthetic. One thinks of the "thinking cap" worn by Lucky in *Waiting For Godot*, that transforms the mute hulk into a babbling, feverishly postulating academic machine: when the books start to work on him, Benjamin's narrator just won't shut up. He tells us his history as a collector, his battles lost and won at the auctions, his first books as a student, the need for creative flair when browsing a book catalogue, his own personal rules for buying books one has read versus that one hasn't yet read – he welcomes us into his study at noon, and by the time he has released us, "it is way past midnight" (67). What exactly is it that he's done with us in the meantime?

Benjamin's collector plucks books out of the world and "brings them to the light of night," the morbid night in which the owl of Minerva flies (66-7). It is only in this night of death that the collector can study his collection; only after the object of study gives up its spirit and is left a corpse can the method of examination, and preservation, begin. The collector, in order to enjoy his books, must first embalm them. Death, for the collector as for the taxidermist, is key for survival. *Thanatos*, the death drive, is for Derrida inextricably linked to the archive – but death need not be permanent, nor unproductive.

"[It is] not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them" (67). Benjamin's collector seeks resurrection, but it is not the books that are brought back to life by his spells, but himself; these objects act on their owner, calling up in him a "spring tide of memories" that "surges" with "passion" and "chaos" (60). "Ownership," he claims, "is the

most intimate relationship that one can have to objects" (67) – but who owns who here? Benjamin, at the end of the essay, finds himself amid the piles of books, lost in a flood of recollection, the afternoon having turned to twilight. Fatigued yet replenished, he bids us adieu, disappearing into his inner sanctum, a structure "with books as the building stones" (59).

I intend to follow him inside. What can we do with these inert objects, each hustling its way to dust? What are the contours of these prosthetics of memory, these amputated archives? These records and traces of bodies, what can we do with them?

In this work I will look at a set of bodies: a towering poet; a double-jointed pianist; an aging painter; a micro-organism; a porous artist; I will also explore a series of rooms: the writing house of a successful novelist; the attic of a college dormitory; the parlours of the wealthy Edwardian bourgeoisie; a fictional factory in Iliam, New York; a laboratory; an art gallery; a basement office lined with books. I will track these bodies' movements in these spaces, and follow the traces they leave behind.

Who takes up these traces? Who seeks to recreate, from them, the lost body of the artist, the poet, the musician? What precautions do these creators take in crafting their detachable selves, those that will be preserved? What kind of act is the act of encoding the limits of one's body onto a substrate, and what kind of act is the reconstruction of that body through the efforts of those who come after?

I will, in my investigation, discover something about these traces and those that engineer them. The products of embodied artistic practices are not simply records of the body; they are more than inert documents drifting towards destruction. They are the key pieces in a strategy of reproduction, one meticulously planned by a select few and engendered by our willing participation.

Chapter 1.

At the Desk: Charles Olson and the Physiology of Influence

The 1966 edition of Charles Olson's *Selected Writings* that sits before me on my desk has an illusorily posthumous aura about it. Or, I should say, preemptively posthumous; the collection's introduction, written by Robert Creeley in the fall of the previous year, tallies up the events of Olson's life, and it is some pages before the obituary tone diffuses into that of a critical introduction.

The reader may be confused. That the introduction is written by someone other than the main text's author is conspicuous, especially given the otherwise dominating nature of Olson's personality, his willingness to explain his own work. The introduction of a master written by his student implies an arrangement that the bulk of Creeley's text doesn't dispel. And, if nothing else, convention has it that the elegiac style Creeley initially adopts – "It is simple enough to note the main details of Charles Olson's background"; "I once saw a picture of him, aged about eleven" – should really conclude in a certain way, namely, with the end. The end did come for Charles Olson, but not until four years after his summarization at the hands of his student. His career, cut short by liver cancer, was indeed cut short, bifurcated by his death; his final work, the last volume of *The Maximus Poems*, was coordinated by Olson on his deathbed and published posthumously shortly after. But this was nearly half a decade after *Selected Writings* was assembled.

Why, then, the elegiac tone? There was no lengthy illness to presage the end and make urgent a compendium of Olson's critical and creative writing. Olson was only fifty-five years old at the time of *Selected Writings'* publication, with all plans of a robust longevity – indeed, "The Resistance" invokes "nature's original intention with the

organism, that it live 130 years" (13). He received the diagnosis of liver cancer on the first of December, 1969, and the disease took his life forty days later at the age of fifty-nine.

The introduction concludes, and the authorial voice switches over.

"This is eternity," declares Charles Olson. "This foreshortened span" (13). As a mantra this assertion seems as good as any; that these words form our opening here to Olson's thought is pivotal. This statement begins "The Resistance," which in turn begins *Selected Writings*, and it tinges the following critical work with intimations of mortality.

I argue that the opening text's morbidity, this sense of decay, is inextricable from the critical work that follows. If "The Resistance" is a call-to-arms that simultaneously announces the fragmentation of the human body while trying to postpone it, "Projective Verse" forecloses this battle entirely, taking the body as a stable ground from which to launch a poetics. Is this forgetting a necessary process, the censure of the body and its inconsistencies in favour of a gestalt of solidity and reliability?

Grounding a poetic practice in the body is to pluck it from the ethereal, from the abstract forms of convention, and to embed it within an organism that is falling apart at reckless speed – and Olson certainly buries it deep in the faulty flesh, "down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings" (SW 26). If the collection's first text stresses that we cannot forget the bodily horrors of history, "Projective Verse" seems to do just that: and not just the bodies of history writ large, but the individual body, untrammelled by atrocity, decaying all on its own.

Of course, this is what "The Resistance" is all about; the titular verb indicates the fight against fragmentation and against entropy. As this resistance is doomed to fail, it is by nature both romantic and naive, heroic and vain. It is also, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, personal.

Big Men, or, Olson in Hemingway's House



Figure 1: L: Photograph of Charles Olson, 1936; R: Photograph of Ernest Hemingway, 1940.

In the spring of 1945 Charles Olson, with his wife Connie, took up temporary residence in Key West, Florida, as live-in babysitters of the two youngest children of Pauline and Ernest Hemingway. The newly-married couple were given as lodgings the poolhouse that, before Ernest's divorce from Pauline and flight from the house on Whitehead Street, served as his study and writing retreat. Connie and Charles lived under Hemingway's roof from February to April of that year; the poems and correspondence penned by Olson during this time were written on the same desk, in the same room, in the midst of the same atmosphere, as many of Hemingway's most prominent works.

Olson, in addition to his para-paternal duties, was allowed ample opportunities to walk around in Ernest's shoes. He frequented Sloppy Joes, Hemingway's watering-hole

of choice, where he was praised on his physical size by a chorus of hard-drinking mariners, played poker with same, fell into acquaintance with Canby Chambers, one of Hemingway's drinking buddies, attended the raucous salon presided over in absentia by Hemingway's ex-wife, Pauline, and, in general, got the feel of the town.

But it was the guests' primary duty that holds the most potency, here. The children of Hemingway, Gregory and Patrick, were not infants to be dandled upon Olson's knee, but teenage boys, giving Charles' position a distinctively authoritative, paternal valence. Olson's role seems to be clear: to replace the absent Ernest – a man whose obsession with paternity is practically comical in its frothy insistence – to become, for a few months, "Papa."

What was Olson doing during his time off from playing suitor to Hemingway's Odysseus? He returned at night to the writing-retreat-*cum*-guest-house to work on his writing, to attempt to inhabit fully a literary career postponed by years of political work. The absent Hemingway had ten years on his lodger, forty-five to Olson's thirty-five, and had in that decade done much that Olson was yet to do – chiefly, to publish an acclaimed manuscript that would cement the author's status as an author. Olson had yet to produce his *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and he was pained by it. Writing in *Charles Olson at the Harbour*, Ralph Maud states that what had yet been absent for Charles were "the conditions that provided Olson with the heart to leave the path of career politician" – the majority of Olson's energy had in recent years been expended in Roosevelt's Office of War Information – "and stride off into the profession of writer" (56). Here are the conditions:

Olson sits at the broad desk, hemmed in by bookshelves, for all purposes hemmed in by the ghost of the room's past inhabitant which manifests itself in the room's furnishings, its collection of memorabilia, its library.

The Absent Archon

Why Pauline would have any respect for her adulterous ex-husband's belongings is anyone's guess, but the poolhouse of the Key West home was for all appearances a museum, an anticipatory mausoleum, to the departed Papa. Not so much a recreation

as a preservation, the bookshelves were left "largely as Hemingway had left them" (Maud 56), curated and authorized by the absent archivist.

As is the case for the latin *archivum* or *archium* [...] the meaning of "archive," its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded [...] On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. (2)

Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* dwells on the moment at which Sigmund Freud's house is institutionalized as a museum: "It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. This dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public" (2). The poolhouse and main dwelling at 907 Whitehead Street have yet to make this transition – it would not be until 1961, after Hemingway's suicide, that Pauline would leave the home for good and hand it over to archivists – but in the spring of 1945, as Olson sits at the desk in the centre of the room, the anticipatory traces of this archivization are already present. The house of the *archon*, he of authority, the collector and president of the documents, is already an archive before it is catalogued, gated, and mounted with plaques.

The catalogue of this particular archive in the spring of 1945 is still a roving one, at this moment in the midst of preparing for departure from London, where he was stationed as a celebrity war correspondent, to return to Cuba, his adopted home. Accounts of Charles Olson's life, which on the whole do not make much of this near-missed acquaintance, do not specify whether or not the paths of the two travellers intersected.

Tom Clark's biography states that Charles and Connie Olson left Key West in early April of 1945 (99); in Carlos Baker's 1969 biography of Ernest Hemingway, by the sixth of March the elder writer was en route to Cuba via the United States (445). Hemingway's correspondence indicates that he planned to stop by the Whitehead Street home to collect his sons for their spring vacation on March 14th; whether Charles Olson was present for that transaction is unclear.

What is the archive without its *archon*? These figures are foremost "the documents' guardians," not only ensuring "the physical security of what is deposited" but also the keepers of the catalogue, the legend, the "hermeneutic right and competence" (Derrida 2). "They," and they alone, "have the power to interpret the archives" (2). But curation is a form of interpretation, or at least is its precursor; from this necessary setting of the stage we must, in the abandoned archive, extrapolate the missing index. In the house of the absent *archon* we are like that intruder amongst Roman ruins who speaks to us from the pages of the 8th century Exeter book. We can stand amidst it, but we cannot understand it, for "the earth's grasp holds the builders, rotten, forgotten" — the earth, that other, impenetrable archive.

The curators of the house-as-museum fantasize that they can conjure up the lost inhabitant through a meticulous creation of his or her habitat, to reanimate the body by recreating its material life. These houses are sepulchres — the proprietors of the Hemingway House brag that, after half a century, the basement is still dry, the embalming not yet come undone. The house is a body that can be more easily preserved, the body that we can enter, inhabit, so that the spirit will come forth and *inhabit us*. Tom Clark, the first biographer of Charles Olson, is criticized by Ralph Maud for having "no interest in allowing that a mantle might have fallen from Hemingway to Olson; he has nothing on what it must have meant to Olson to be, if not possessed by, at least possessed of, Hemingway's spirit." (56)

In the final chapter of *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi turns in direct address to his object of study, Sigmund Freud, in a seance-like apostrophe titled "Monologue with Freud." In this act of necromancy, Yerushalmi acts as a medium to channel Freud, in a like manner to that which Freud himself channelled Moses in the writing of his own apostrophe, *Moses and Monotheism*, described by its author as a "historical novel" (81). The specter of Freud, for Yerushalmi a "fiction which I somehow do not feel to be fictitious," responds from beyond the grave.

When Derrida invokes this scene in Yerushalmi's text, he emphasizes its performative repetition, the recreation of the original relationship between Freud and his subject, Moses, refracted in the relationship between Yerushalmi and Freud. In doing so,

Derrida himself performs this repetition, even down to its nature as monologue: Yerushalmi is not present for this address – not deceased, but sick, unable to attend Derrida's lecture, nor give his own the next day (21, note 2). This repetition is due to the all-ingesting nature of the archive: "there is no meta-archive," Derrida states; "Yerushalmi's book, including its fictive monologue, henceforth belongs to the corpus of Freud (and of Moses, etc.) whose name it also carries." If Derrida evokes Yerushalmi's work as an extension of the Freudian archive, since through its interpretation of this archive "can only illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, *namely a given inheritance*, by inscribing itself into it," he wantonly creates, through his study of Yerushalmi's research, a fourth genealogical position, below Moses, Freud, and Yerushalmi, which he spontaneously occupies himself (67).

Charles Olson extracts a book from a shelf in the Key West home, but does not pull down a Hemingway novel. There is indeed little mention of Ernest Hemingway in Olson's correspondence during these months, nor in any years after. Olson made his major withdrawal from the Hemingway library, to all accounts unaided by its absent librarian. Olson scholarship makes very little of the influence of Hemingway; this although Olson had at that point read most of Hemingway's work, and had even reviewed *Death in the Afternoon* for a college publication. Yet it wasn't a piece of writing authored by Olson's host that provided the first step into the profession, but instead a book by one of his host's mentors; recommended, as it were, by the archive itself.

Hemingway has no official standing as a mentor of Olson; one of Hemingway's mentors, Ezra Pound, certainly does. And it is Pound's *Personae* that Olson retrieves from Hemingway's shelf. This book, vetted by Hemingway's authority as man of refined literary taste, makes its way into Hemingway's library, where it itself serves as a gateway to a new locus of authority for Charles Olson. As Derrida communes with Freud through Yerushalmi, Olson so it seems has reached *through* Hemingway to grasp Pound. Seven months after he leaves the house on 907 Whitehead Street, Olson is regularly visiting his new mentor at the cell at St. Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital.

This narrative reduces Hemingway's role in the formation of Olson's literary practice to a go-between, a helpful innkeeper whose total use was, besides putting a

roof temporarily over Charles Olson's head, conveying into Olson's hands a copy of a book of poetry that he could have just as easily found anywhere else.

I want to dispute the superficiality of this narrative, and to stress the impact on the aspiring writer effected, even in absentia, by the host. I agree with Maud that this scene is in many ways the primordial one that founded Olson's career as a poet, and I do not disagree with Clark's emphasis on the importance that Pound's *Personae* would play on Olson. I aim less to refute than to augment this claim, to add another guiding point to our received understanding of Olson's particular constellation of influence. The manner in which this influence was enacted effaces its own stamp — there is no lengthy and storied correspondence between Olson and Hemingway, no markings of poetic homage. Instead, there is a room.

If, as Derrida suggests, the stamp of the archive is the *archon's* name, it's worth noting two things. First, in a curious scattering of time — the kind of synchronicity Maud chides Clark for not following — Pound is to be ousted from Olson's pantheon by another mentor, Alfred North *Whitehead*, the homonym, if not the namesake, of the Florida street along which the Hemingway house still stands.

Charles Olson sits in a house on a street bearing the name of one mentor, in a room dominated by a second, where he discovers a third.

And Hemingway is that second mentor, whether canonically accepted or not. In the beginning of his poetic practice Olson had not yet begun in earnest his mentorship with Ezra Pound; this tutelage began after Olson had already made his first marks as a published poet. It is that interregnum mentor, Hemingway, who aided the hand that made the mark.

This brings me to my second item, curiously overlooked in Olson scholarship: a poem titled "A Lion upon the Floor," composed at Hemingway's desk, was the first published poem of Olson's newfound poetic career.

Playing Lion

Archaeologist of Morning, a collection of Olson's poetry edited by Albert Glover and published ten months after the poet's death in 1970, was the first posthumous retrospective of Olson's work. This edition was later criticized by George F. Butterick in the introduction to his own anthology as being exploitative, unfaithful to Olson's editorial wishes, and in short an "opportune" and "unreliable" text (xxii). A major target of criticism, proofreading errors and authorial infidelities aside, is the looseness of the anthology's chronological ordering of its texts. I share this criticism with Butterick, and find in it yet another erasure of influence on the part of Olson scholars.

In the only editorial appendix of *Archaeologist of Morning* is found an exhaustive list of the provenance of the eighty-odd poems gathered in its pages. Its goal as an anthology is both straightforward and daunting – to present the total of Charles Olson's poetic output, excluding the body of *The Maximus Poems* – and the detail given in this appendix speaks to the curators' efforts in seeking out and printing these texts. But directly off of the start of this list a bias is revealed in an unconcealed reordering of the anthology's poems. The first text in the collection, "Lower Field – Enniscorthy," is by the scholars' own reckoning actually the fifth poem Olson published. Why reorder? Does "Lower Field" offer something, in its documentarity, perhaps, or its elliptical presentation of unconnected images, quintessentially Olsonesque that could justify this infidelity? Why not put, as it were, first things first?

Determining the precise date of composition of a poem is not often possible; texts such as these form piecemeal, and often occultly, springing out whole in the pages of a periodical. "The K," cited by Tom Clark as the breakout poem of Olson's literary career, and certainly formative of Olson's break from his political ambitions, was penned in the same months as "A Lion Upon The Floor" (Clark 93). But whichever predates the other in composition, it is "Lion" that was published first.¹ Its secondary status in *Archaeologist of Morning*, and its diminutive stature in Clark's biography – it appears,

¹ To be precise: "A Lion upon The Floor" was published in Harpers Bazaar in January of 1946; "Lower Field – Enniscorthy" was published in April of the same year by Harpers Monthly Magazine; "The K" was published two years later, in February of 1948.

bifurcated, as an integrated quotation, in a single sentence that both introduces and concludes Clark's discussion of the poem – runs contrary to its importance both as indicative of a formative period, and as *the first published poem*, the first substantiation of Olson-as-poet, the first symbolic entry of his career.

Begin a song

Power and the abstract
distract a man
from his own gain

Begin a song of six cents (1-5)

Here, in the opening stanzas, we have the thesis of Olson's break from politics, an opposition between abstract power and concretized, individual – embodied – gain. We detect traces of not Pound but T.S. Eliot in the poem's narrative scatter, the haunting snatches of child's song that adulterate the poem's dominant tone.

Here we go round the prickly pear	Sing a song of six cents
Prickly pear prickly pear	sing a song of seven seas
Here we go round the prickly pear	give a girl to each man
At five o'clock in the morning. (76-79)	to put him on his knees. (23-6)

The interpolated singsong of both Eliot and Olson modulate nursery rhymes for some end; a reader of Eliot may trace his intertext back to its 19th-century source, noting the switch of "prickly pear" for "mulberry bush," the specificity of "five o'clock in the morning" replacing "On a cold and frosty morning." If we do the same for Olson's usage, with what remainders are we left?

"A Lion upon the Floor" is composed of two separate trajectories that alternate through the course of the poem. Stylistically, this will become a hallmark of Olson's poetry², but it is at the level of content that I direct my attention here. Isolating the first, or rightmost, chain of text from the poem yields a halting, stuttering variation on "Sing a

² See the use of quotations in, for example, "the Kingfishers," and Marjorie Perloff's excellent deconstruction of the overused standard in "Charles Olson and the 'Inferior Predecessors': 'Projective Verse' Revisited," *English Literary History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 285-306. This essay performs an excellent, visually juxtaposed analysis of Olson's "Projective Verse," which in spirit and technique I am indebted to here.

Song of Sixpence," a nursery rhyme of seemingly universal familiarity – at least in its first lines, which, it seems, are all Olson gets to here, before veering off:

Begin a song [...] (1)

Begin a song of six cents [...] (5)

Sing a song [...] (10)

Sing a song of six cents
Sing a song of seven seas [...] (17-18)

Sing a song of six cents
sing a song of seven seas
give a girl to each man
to put him on his knees (23-26)

Olson forgoes the nursery rhyme's childlike naiveté wholesale, instead of, like Eliot, preserving its integrity for a productive *frisson* against the bleaker main text. In doing so Olson shows his hand more than Eliot would, and the alterations are telling. Something can be made of the Americanizing of "pence" to "cents," and of the tone of "sing a song of seven seas," a song of adventure, and of experience – as we will find later in this chapter Olson did, in fact, go to sea, but not with Sinbad luck – but it is in the final added couplet of Olson's modulation that I find the underside of this poem and its belied connection to its genesis. It is by working at "A Lion upon the Floor" from the outside in that we get a sense of its philosophy, and it is a philosophy that is borrowed as the desk it was typed upon. Two nested declarations bookend the poem:

Power and the abstract
distract a man
from his own gain (2-4)

give a girl to each man
to put him on his knees (25-26)

These assertions evoke that tension between castrating, feminine civilization and primal masculinity that makes so much of Hemingway a bore. This binary, expertly diagnosed in Nina Baym's "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," interprets for us the

cavalcade of muscular, masculine imagery that fills "A Lion upon the Floor": "cut the heart open," the poem commands, "the blood will run with sun," among "the tall grass green" and "the muscle in the sea" (13-14, 19-20). The poem's title, itself an image of wounded masculinity, is as much a thematic statement as a transcription of the room in which the poem was written – Hemingway's Key West study, with its walls covered in mounted busts of hunted animals and paintings of safari heroism. The lion on the floor is an ambiguous image, either stalking or dead, hunter or hunted; the poem resolves this ambiguity by ending with a jubilant rejection of this castration: "Lion, spring!" (27).

Olson found Hemingway's house a potent aphrodisiac; he certainly expressed so in his journal, confessing that "my spirit, like my body and my potency, is fragile [but] Connie makes firm my genitals, the South could strengthen my muscles, and life will toughen my spirit" (qtd. in Clark 92). Indeed, even after ostensibly rejecting Hemingway as a mentor figure and landing on Pound, Olson does so in an almost uncanny imitation of the Hemingway hero, rejecting the "castrated ex-winner." Then, addressing himself in a hard-boiled interior dialogue, Olson asks whether, in his relationship to Pound, "Should you not best him? Is his form not inevitable enough to be used as your own?" (99). This rhetoric reaches its crescendo in the standard Oedipal pantomime, as Olson commands himself to "write as the fathers to be the father" (99).

This mimicry is, of course, excusable. Many writers have fallen into imitation in the depths of a Hemingway hangover. One can hardly blame Olson for emulating the elder, more established writer – he was, after all, ostensibly invited to do so by the ex-wife of the man – or for being influenced by what must have been a palpable, if spectral, presence. The ghost seems to have fled Olson's writing shortly after the composition of "A Lion upon the Floor"; subsequent poems, such as "The K," present imagery more complex than the rugged elementality of "Lion," even if they hang stubbornly onto issues of virility, the panicked need "to be tumescent I" (7). But can we reduce this influence to a single episode, a heady yet superficial intoxication brought about by temporary residence, as it were, inside the den of the lion itself?

Ralph Maud in *Charles Olson at the Harbour* suggests that Hemingway's offering to Olson was to serve, in a period of uncertainty, as an appealing example of the life of

letters. Clark seems to suggest that the main, if not only, thing that Hemingway offered to Olson was his copy of Pound's *Personae*. I disagree with both. This facilitating role cannot be the extent of the relationship between Olson and Hemingway, even if their acquaintance was limited via proxy with Pauline and the children. Nor am I willing to accept that Hemingway's influence on Olson was crystalized and exhausted in one poem, even if that poem served a particularly important role in Olson's poetic career.

"A Lion upon the Floor" is the token, the trace of a prolonged encounter, and not the encounter itself. It is the entry point, the ripple, the scar that marks the point at which Hemingway's ethos entered Olson's writing through the contact point of the room on Whitehead Street. The surface puncture of this interpolation is more visible than its inward trajectory, but it is the latter I want to follow. The path this line of reasoning takes through the writing of Olson is at first direct, straight, powered by the momentum of Olson's burgeoning career and the accretion of his poetics in 1950's "Projective Verse"; but this projectile does not stop there before its path is muddled, refracted, and bent out of orbit by the very body that it sought to ground.

Olson Reading Hemingway

My work in this chapter has as its impetus a set of synchronicities. In examining the material in the Charles Olson archives, then housed in Ralph Maud's office, I found myself drawn to the conspicuous chapter in Olson's life, between political and poetic careers, a sort of second primordial period in which Olson's attempts at re-fashioning were overt and examinable. Olson in the spring of 1945 had yet to write his major critical work, *Call Me Ishmael*; in fact, Clark suggests that it was during his Key West stay that Olson conceived of the Melville study. But if this publication was to cement Olson's critical style – a reader of *Ishmael* will find little difference in rhetorical strategy between this early work and Olson's later writings – the period before this substantiation presents a vacuum, a void negatively charged by the current of Olson's as-yet unconsummated ambition. It is then apt when Maud in *Charles Olson at the Harbour* expresses the need to put pressure on the particular conditions of this period; the fact that its setting is seen by Olson scholars as largely incidental, amusing in its conflagration of literary icons but a mere coincidence, is troubling.

When Derrida describes the relation between scholars Yosef Yerushalmi and Sigmund Freud as a kind of extension, and indeed his own *Archive Fever* as a further continuation of the same project, he puns on "thesis" to name this continuation a "prosthesis" (81). The reasons for performing this scholarly repetition, in fitting a new prosthetic to an old corpus, are diverse, but seem to be grounded in duty. Ralph Maud says, when thinking of those months Olson spent occupying Hemingway's library-*cum*-archive, that he "relishes" that synchronicity. In the brief time that I spent in Maud's study, I had not yet had my conviction in this synchronicity confirmed; or, rather, that it was not merely synchronicity, but something more causal. I had commented on the particular masculinity of Olson's correspondence during this period, and in general the connections between Hemingway's notions of prose economy and Olson's "projective" verse, but I had not yet probed this connection further. So it was with great reassurance that I found Maud's own confession of interest in the pages of *Charles Olson at the Harbour*; reassurance combined with something else, as it was then too late. I could, like Yerushalmi, write an overture to the absent scholar whose thoughts beyond the page are now inaccessible. If Maud appears to have relished this synchronicity, it is my aim to pursue it. I, after all, do not have *nothing* at my disposal; the archive continues to function without its absent archon.

In correspondence written between February and April of 1945 – written, then, on the desk of Hemingway, a physical fact I cannot overstress – Olson makes the following declarations. "The job," the vocation of his new poetics, "is to write a line which stops just this side of prose." If this is an anti-poetic statement, the second is decidedly anti-creative: "Accuracy of fact can make a line pure, intensity of record can keep it close." Reading these statements, I swore that I had read them before.

Marjorie Perloff makes some errors in chronology in an otherwise illuminating essay on Olson's influences. "Charles Olson and the 'Inferior Predecessors': 'Projective Verse' Revisited" examines Olson's tendency to erase his own trajectories of influence, even while those legacies lent him necessary material support for his own work. Perloff traces in particular the influences of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, both supporters of Olson's early poeticizing, and indicates how Olson's "Projective Verse" lifted ideas, even phrasings, from the work of these forbearers. Williams and Pound's

enthusiasm for Olson's critical writing, when framed by Perloff's meticulous comparison of the prose of mentors and protégé, appears, frankly, self-congratulatory – two parents fawning over the likeness of their child. Perloff doesn't muse on whether Olson, too, was conscious of this attitude, if not of his imitation, and aimed to work to free himself from this perceived indebtedness; she focuses mainly on sussing out the sources of Olson's critical prose. In doing so, she levels a charge of plagiarism, or at least severe debt, on Olson's part to text contained in personal correspondence between other poets. It is true that these epistles, as have Olson's, have been many times over collected and published for the public eye. However, Perloff's attribution of the concepts of "Projective Verse" to letters written by Ezra Pound overlooks the fact that this private correspondence, while indeed written decades before Olson's essay, was published in the same year as "Projective Verse." Either Olson was tampering with the mail, or he was through his extensive reading of Pound plugging into a kind of Jungian unconscious in which the material of this private correspondence was accessible.

I don't think that this conception of influence is incorrect; letters written by Pound are extensions of that same consciousness we can study through reading his work, or, in Olson's case, through personal acquaintance. This is why, after all, works like Maud's *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography* exist, along with countless other bibliographies, epistolary collections, and, indeed, archives. When in 1933 Charles Olson set out, as part of his M.A. work, to reconstruct the library of Herman Melville, or when Ralph Maud half a century later sought out copies of books that once sat on Olson's shelves, it is this same impulse. Perloff's essay, scathing of Olson's erasure of his own influences, seeks to find the texts behind the texts and restore this buried library.

But it is with this potential for anachronism and false causality in mind that I resist, at least in the first moments, the urge to connect these aphorisms of Olson's in a direct lineage with those of Hemingway. Instead, what I offer here is conditional linkages, possibilities of connection, extension – in a word, prostheses.

In *A Moveable Feast*, published some fifteen years after Olson set down these first tenets, Hemingway sits at his desk and transcribes, for the first time, the ethic of writing that shaped his entire oeuvre:

All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know [...] So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go on from there. It was easy then because there was always one true sentence that I knew or had seen or had heard someone say. If I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written. (12)

Accuracy of fact can make a line pure, intensity of record can keep it close.

The job is to write a line which stops just this side of prose. (RMA)

I've reprinted the lines from Olson's correspondence because the similarities bear direct comparison. Note the emphasis on truth, veracity. This is conspicuous at first given that these are both writers of fiction, if we can include poetry in that category, but an overview of each author's work shows a consistent and pervasive non-fictional or documentary strain: Hemingway's novels are unabashedly drawn from his life, whether it be memoirs of the "Lost Generation" or the experience of war, and Olson's *Maximus* project sought, too, to draw in and organize history. Maud notes in *Charles Olson's Reading* that Olson himself preferred Hemingway as a documentarian, lingering on those novels that adhered to the particularly favoured genus of "fiction that was also primarily documentation" (14). "Accuracy of fact," the faithful reproduction or documentation of experience, even the experience of other documents, gets at the content of "Projective Verse" as well as the impulse behind much of Olson's poetry. But this is a matter of content, not of form; one can be truthful as well as verbose. It's in cutting out this "scrollwork" that Olson's poetry draws closer to, adjacent to prose, but to a particular kind of prose. Much of the prose written contemporaneously with Olson's poetry is not known for its accuracy, economy, or its directness – this is the era of Durrell as much as it is that of Chandler. In wanting his poetry to tend towards prose, there is a particular kind of prose Olson has in mind, one evoked by the muscularity and elementality of "Lion on the Floor."

We cannot say for certain that *A Moveable Feast* was something that Olson read. It was published during the busy, final years of his life, in the same year as the greatest

tragedy the poet would experience, the death by automobile accident of his second wife, Betty. Had he found time to read the memoir, it would have come anyhow far after the ossification of his poetic and critical voice. We do know, as a result of Ralph Maud's meticulous reconstruction, what Hemingway Charles Olson did read:

Olson early developed a preference for nonfiction, witness the fact that he chose to review Hemingway's expository *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) for his college literary magazine. He had read all the preceding fiction, and mentions it: *In Our Time*, *Torrents of Spring*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Men Without Women*, and *A Farewell to Arms*. (COR 14)

One gets the sense that, had Olson indeed crossed paths with Hemingway on the steps of the Key West home in 1945, Olson would have been prepared. Such an exhaustive list of reading – including *Torrents*, Hemingway's juvenile, satirical novella, more or less derided and ignored by scholars – evidences something more than a dispassionate reader, and suggests something of the nature of Olson's stay at 907 Whitehead Street that is left out by most accounts.

The traces of a writer's thoughts can be found in their readings. This is a satisfyingly material thesis, and permits us to make inferences of a less spectral nature when talking about the origins of a writer's ideas. I want to ground my analysis of "Projective Verse" and Olson's embodied poetics in one particular text by Hemingway; while others will certainly work just as well, I am choosing *Death in the Afternoon* because it is, first and foremost, a critical, rather than a fictional work, and it makes concrete claims that remain ethereal and narrativized in Hemingway's novels. If Hemingway has a poetics statement, it is contained in *Death in the Afternoon*, allegorized through the figure of the matador.

The matador writes in space. Matador has its roots in the Latin *matare*, to subdue; the matador channels the boiling energy of the bull, making it precise, directed, artistic – a "plastic line," to quote Hemingway, a kinetic sculpture. A beautiful veronica, or pass with the cape, is one in which the straightness and purity of the bull's charge is preserved, controlled by the matador who "should measure the speed of the bull by the movement of his wrists" and "dominate and direct the bull's course" while keeping the purity of its line (144).

"It is the LINE," declares Olson, "that's the baby that gets, as the poem is getting made, the attention, the control, that it is right here, in the line that the shaping takes place, each moment of the going" (SW 19). The role of the poet is the same as the matador – to preserve the line, to direct and control it, to render sculpture from its energies while maintaining, always,

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? (SW 16)

How is the energy maintained? Hemingway's matador does so through efficiency, economy, and an art that is paradoxically anti-artifice. From the glossary entry for *veronica*: "A matador who is not faking the veronica will sometimes pass the bull so close that the horns will pick off the gold rosettes that ornament his jacket" (327). This is the truest, purest linework in bullfighting; sadly, it is uncommon, and "nearly all other passes with the cape are picturesque variations of the same principle or else are more or less tricks" (167). Fancy capework distracts the viewer from the absence of danger, and allows the matador to compensate for their lack of skill by concealing the impurity of their line. "No tricks" is the rule for projective verse, and certainly no picturesque pirouettes:

And when the line has a deadness, is it not a heart which has gone lazy, is it not, suddenly, slow things, similes, say, adjectives, or such, that we are bored by? [...] The descriptive functions generally have to be watched, every second, in projective verse, because of their easiness, and thus their drain on the energy which composition by field allows into a poem. (SW 19)

Olson's "Projective Verse" depicts the page as a field, an open ring through which cascade projectiles of energy along vectors that the poet must master. The poet must execute a veronica around the line. This is a material analogy, and an embodied one; the poem being written is *felt*, physically, "from the push of the line under hand" (20). The poem is expelled from the body, through breath that "allows all the speech-force of

language back in" as "the 'solid' of verse" (20). This materialization also comes from the assistance of the typewriter, which, like the matador's cape, is the tool with which this line can be tempered (22). Due to this materialization, the poem "can now be treated as solids, objects, things," and the line between material and immaterial evaporated (21).

But it is important to keep in mind that the typewriter, despite Olson's enthusiasm, still holds a subservient role in composition – it acts to transcribe the body, to "indicate exactly the breath, the pauses [...] to record the listening he has done to his own speech" (22). It all comes back to the body, as does the essay itself, whose closing paragraph ends in a critique of T.S. Eliot who

has stayed there where the ear and mind are, has only gone from his fine ear outward rather than, as I say, a projective poet will, down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs. (26)

The body is the rubric, both the house for and agent of the artists' genius. The bullfighter's body witnesses a perfect union of form and content, an uncompromised coextensivity exactly like the one called for by "Projective Verse." This elevates the body³ into the heroic register, a register dwelled in by both Olson and Hemingway, whose physical bulk seems to enter into any biographical depiction much the same way that a bull's bulk enters a china shop, and with the same amount of hypermasculinized triteness as that image suggests.

Olson embeds the source of his poetics deep into the body. This is where, for Hemingway, purity resides – not *truth*, but trueness, straightness. The line that has purity is straight, efficient, unadulterated by ornamentation: a direct "energy-discharge."

As the trigger finger of a rifleman is sensitive and educated to the tiniest degrees of squeezing to approach and release the discharge of his piece,

³ Specifically, the male body; "Projective Verse" treats the masculine form as *the* ideal form, an assertion whose problematic and aggravating gender politics are well-examined in Andrew Mossin's "'In Thicket': Charles Olson, Frances Boldereff, Robert Creeley and the Crisis of Masculinity at Mid-Century," an essay I will turn to in my analysis of Carolee Schneemann and Charles Olson's feud.

so it is with his wrists that a bullfighter controls and makes the delicacy of art with the cape and muleta. All the sculpturing he does [...] is done with the wrist. (Hemingway 77)

Embodiment is not without its risks. Practicing projective verse requires a strenuous physical regimen, a tuning of breath, ear, even heart (SW 19). What if the breath fails, or the ear? Grounding a poetic practice in the body drags it down from the eternal realm of Form, where Olson accuses Eliot of setting up shop, and buries it in the flesh. The body, like a machine, can break.

Collected in *Selected Writings* along with "Projective Verse" and "The Resistance" is a baffling composition titled "Apollonius of Tyana: A Dance, with Some Words, for Two Actors." There turn out to be far more words than "some" in this dance, and in its blatant disregard for the technical limitations of stagecraft, "Apollonius" approaches Beckettian levels of unstageability. One monologue spoken by Tyana, embodiment of the land, folds this limitation inwards upon itself:

TYANA: And yet is it not, strangely, what we know least about, this huge earth we know less about than we even know of the other, the larger one? of these mountains of kidneys which can suddenly crumble, of this Great Lakes of the liver, of this Tigris and Euphrates system the heart, which can so easily break and then there is death, of these Neocene bones, the geology of ourselves, which live longest, of this seed and strange cotyledon, the brain, of these flowers and grasses which can be cut off, the fingers? (138)

I find traces of Hemingway's heroism here, but rendered in an intra-corporeal way. Man – and, again, this is a particularly masculinized subject – must rise to conquer mountains, but these mountains are himself, his own body. What sort of ground is the body? "Projective Verse" puts great stock in the reproducibility of poems composed by its method, and in doing so overlooks limitations inherent to its own terms. What mnemonic tool could possibly carry the actor through the hundred-plus prose lines of Tyana's opening monologue? Can I map out my body onto that of Charles Olson when voicing his recorded breath? Can even Olson *himself* do so as he ages, as his body weakens? One of the most emotionally charged passages in *Death in the Afternoon* details the final performance of an aging matador named Maera.

He had trouble with his wrists [...] He picked up the sword with his right hand, and as he lifted it I could see the sweat on his face from the pain. He chopped the bull into position with the red cloth, profiled, sighted along the blade and went in. He went in as though he would drive through a stone wall, his weight, his height and all on to the sword and it hit bone, doubled, not so far this time because his wrist gave quicker, buckled, and fell. He lifted the sword with his right hand and the wrist would not hold it and it dropped [...] Anyway he died that winter in Seville with a tube in each lung, drowned with pneumonia that came to finish off the tuberculosis. (77-8)

Beneath the typical Hemingway tragedy of failing manhood is a real implication of the stakes of embodied art. The wrist, responsible for the sum of the matador's art, is crumbled by the demands of the art itself. If the pact of this art is its exhaustion of the body's resources, the beauty or trueness it produces is temporary, fraught. Hemingway's appreciation for bullfighting is grounded in the real-ness, the embodied, life-and-death tragedy, of the art form. Olson's projective poet, too, finds the source of his art not in the ear, or in the head, but where "all act springs," the sputtering fountain of physical vitality. (26)

The Great Lakes of the Liver

To have the full and free use of the voice in reading or speaking, the pupil must stand in an upright and easy posture. Throw back the elbows and shoulders so as to expose the chest and give the lungs room to act freely.

*Lessons in Elocution," Franklin Fourth Reader.
From the library of Charles Olson.*

The body seems to precede us. It waits, before birth, for the self that will come to inhabit it. It bears this self for some time, and then casts it off. Or, it produces this self until it runs out of fuel. The body is always too much – overbearing, tyrannical, inescapable – and always never enough in its fragile, finite unreliability.

As a young man Charles Olson wrote a poem that spoke to his particular difficulties as an incarnated subject. "Olson's Lament" tells the tale of the tough decision facing the boy every night: whether to sleep with his feet hanging off the bed, or his head. As a child, Charles towered over his classmates, and soon over both his mother and father; by young adulthood Olson was nearly six foot eight (Clark 14). His corporeal

magnitude wasn't entirely ungainly, however; his large frame gave him both gravitas and lung capacity to succeed in his first taste of glory.

Awkward in stature and social life, but confident in diction, Olson became Worcester Classical High School's leading public speaker and captain of the debate team (12). He ran, successfully, for president of his graduating class, and was hailed and praised by classmates and teachers alike for his "sterling character and keen mind" (12). In May of 1928 seventeen-year-old Charles won a semi-national elocution contest and became, at least in his own town, a celebrity. "17-Year-Old Giant Won The Declaiming Match in Troy," read local newspapers, praising "the magic of his voice and the forcefulness of his delivery" (RMA c.1).

For a young man who would later affect the grandiosity of Maximus, these headlines put in motion a mythologization that wasn't entirely self-imposed. Charles Olson became a "giant," riding home from his battle at Troy in triumph. In these headlines too is a kind of ambivalence that will define Olson's relationship to his body in future years: "He used gestures sparingly with all possible effect," an article reads, "the personification of ease and grace despite his unusual height" (RMA c.1). The backhandedness of this compliment, printed in public view, cannot have but reminded young Charles of his body's conspicuousness – still lamentable, even if vouchsafing him success in this particular field.

This same body with its natural gift for elocution would soon erect a blockage to Olson's ambitions. After his win at the regional finals, the young man was advanced to the national competition. In this section of *Allegory of a Poet's Life*, Tom Clark evokes a fragile, neurotically self-defeating side of Olson that the grown man will repeatedly try, and fail, to censure:

The pressure of the upcoming event exacerbated his natural tendency to demand too much of himself. After exhausting himself on anxious practice speeches delivered before his debate coach Howe and at home in his room, he fell ill on the brink of the contest and had to deliver his decisive speech through the effects of a bad sinus cold. (12)

Olson still managed to take third, and his victory, while truncated, was celebrated at home – and abroad, as the three medalists were treated to an all-expenses paid European sojourn. Newspapers in Worcester kept track of their hero by publishing snippets of his correspondence from abroad; his parents, shy and withdrawn, were interviewed about their son's childhood; and above all it was reported that, even while travelling to lands unknown, and with a debilitating head cold, young Charles was in good spirits and never missed a meal (RMA c.1). A photograph of Olson was printed and reprinted in the paper in which the recent high school graduate fit well "the part of the bookworm, his neatly combed hair parted down the middle choirboy-fashion, his owlish eyes encircled by steel-rimmed spectacles" – a giant, but a timid one, more out of Dahl than Homer (Clark 12).

Olson stood out no less in his college years. As a student of Wesleyan University he was teased endlessly by classmates, with his body bearing the brunt of their jokes. Clark identifies a shifting point, a crisis, in Olson's self regard around this time as evidenced in his journals – removed from the "womb" of his childhood community, Olson found the need to armour himself with a combination of competitiveness – "to show 'em, by prizes, positions, etc." – and renewed self-mythologizing: " It is the bigness of the Prometheus of Shelley that I want – and need" (qtd. in Clark 15). This dramatic inflation was entirely a compensation for serious, deep-seated discomfort with his own body; Olson confesses that he, like Frankenstein's patchwork monster, feels "somehow, not 'human'" (15). If internally he could adopt a mythic "bigness," externally he substantiated it by earning a letterman's jacket on the soccer field and, in a return to form, dominating at his university's debate club with massive height and "booming voice" (15). When he applied for a summer job as a mail courier, his heroic status was officially reinstated after the self-doubt of his first semesters: Olson was back in print, in the *Gloucester Times*, as "Carrier Force Adds College Giant to Fernwood Route" (Maud c.1). Olson's gigantism began to seem like it could be developed into a positive trait.

When Olson applied for a Rhodes scholarship, a curious amount of space in his letter was devoted to matters physical. One would think that the focus of a proposal for an academic scholarship would be to enhance the life of the mind, but the particular area for improvement identified by Charles was instead his body: "I had never received any

serious body development," he confesses; "I resolved to get it in college" (RMA c.2). Olson's graduate education at Wesleyan in the department of English saw his body no more developed, or at least not made more stable; the nervous self-sabotage that saw him fall ill as a teenager repeated itself again in the course of writing his M.A. thesis, during which he spent a week recuperating in the college infirmary (Clark 23). After finishing his study of Melville to great acclaim, it seems that he was determined to beat his body once and for all. Before enrolling in post-graduate study at Harvard, he enlisted on a commercial fishing vessel, aiming to submerge himself in the world of embodied men. The photograph of Olson that inaugurates this chapter is from these three weeks at sea. Dusted with a beard but still spectacled, Olson was a conspicuous hybrid; in size, he was the largest on board, but he shied away from the bawdy talk of the crew, preferring instead to quietly scribble in his notebooks. It seemed the main objective of his voyage was to embody the author he intended to study: "Melville," he writes in his journal, "saw to it I went swordfishing" (qtd. in Clark 31). He nonetheless enjoyed the manly bravado of his coworkers, within limits, and found something appealing in the "muscularity about them, not of the biceps, but of the whole stuff of man, the gut [...] a command and thus a dignity" (31). On the deck of the *Doris M. Hawes*, Olson found again the fantasy of embodiment that likewise made elocution the fixative between his ungainly body and his sense of self. This glue was a kind of corporeal heroism, not unlike the "grace under pressure" of Hemingway, that one could practice on the blood-coated decks of a fishing vessel, deep within the "physical, simple world of men without women" (33). The citation to Hemingway's book of short stories, published a few years earlier, is missing from Olson's journal, but we can provide it. In the heroic milieu of *Men Without Women* Olson could forget his body's fragility, or at least spin the struggle into something heroic – he became at once Ahab and Moby Dick, Kilimanjaro and the climber struggling up its cliffs.

Back on land, the fantasy dissolved, and with it the stable connection between mind and body. In September of 1936, Olson began his PhD at Harvard, and with the renewed pressure resumed his nervous ailments. In the archival material, the following years are marked by reams of apologetic correspondence. In a letter to his new mentor, Edward Dahlberg, Olson confesses that he is "seriously ill" with "a hideous trauma of my whole system"; in another, after he submits some writing for review, he states that he

paid for his efforts with "a tortuous stomach" (RMA c.4). It is to Ann Bosworth, a closer friend not in the position of mentor, that Olson is most honest about his own limitations⁴. In a letter to Ann in the spring of his third year at Harvard, he gives a report on his current condition: "I have been twice sick and still my nerves crowd all over me like horrible live things that can't be eased [...] I passed out twice in the afternoon." His body interrupts his work by circumventing his ability to read, to write, even to think; "sometimes," he confesses, "my own tortuous nerves snarl my emotions" (letter to Anne Bosworth, May 1938). His nerves, the very agents of connection between his brain and body, conspire against him.

As his scholarly career progressed, his health worsened. His illness would dog him during his post-graduate research, both culminating in a climax in the spring of 1939. Late that year in a letter to Dorothy Norman, editor of *Twice a Year* and a patient and long-suffering would-be-publisher of procrastinating Olson, the scholar writes of his simultaneous triumph and downfall. "For six months," writes Olson, "I was quite stupidly ill; actually in April suffered a nervous breakdown which put me to bed for three months." The event in April that triggered his nervous collapse was no tragedy, however, but a landmark of Olson's career and his highest honour to date: "I received the Guggenheim but it was the very day it was announced to me that I went to the hospital!" Olson's erasure of causality between his success and nervous collapse shows a lack of self-analysis that must surely be feigned. In all these letters Olson's struggles in maintaining a masculine, firmly embodied sense of self are displayed in a pattern of confession and erasure, disclosure and bravado.

When he does give in on the page to his own frustrations, the "college giant" has turned into something else entirely. In another sickbed letter addressed to Dorothy, Olson laments: "Aren't we all just Humptys trying to put ourselves together without the help of the King's men?" Candid moments like these are rare; Charles Olson preferred the role of Prometheus to that of Humpty Dumpty.

⁴ As a rule, Olson is more forthcoming with details of his weakness when he writes to female friends, perhaps finding in them motherly protection instead of the filial duty he seems to have felt to his supervisors.

There's an altogether different role that I believe Olson fits. Jules Michelet, a nineteenth century historian, author of countless encyclopaedic works, and eponymous hero of Roland Barthes' 1954 *Michelet*. In the chapter titled "Michelet, Eater of History," and under the subheading of "Migraines," Barthes summarizes well the tangible effects of Derrida's "archive fever":

Michelet's disease is the migraine, that mixture of vertigo and nausea. For him, everything brings on migraine: cold, storms, springtime, wind, the History he is writing. This man, who produced an encyclopaedic oeuvre of sixty volumes, inveterately declares himself "dizzy, sickly, empty-headed, weak." He writes constantly [...] but is always in a state of total collapse. (17)

Michelet's illness is a direct result of his scholarly work. He is damaged by his contact with history in the same way that a house builder is damaged by contact with asbestos. Migraines, dizziness, nausea: this is the cost of his communion with history. Through the archive, history transubstantiates itself into dust. As Carolyn Steedman writes in *Dust*, Michelet's duty as historian was to "restore" the dead and buried documents "'to the light of day' by breathing in their dust," by embodying the spectral, abstract History (26). Barthes readily points out the Christian tropes at play here; Michelet ingests a wafer of dust, and drinks "too deep of the black blood of the dead" (qtd. in Barthes 19).

I will return to Michelet, both in these pages and over the course of my research, as an icon of sorts. I think of my own experience, the vertigo I endure under the fluorescent lights of our department's hallways and the flickering screen on which I type these words. But I think, too, of Charles Olson, labouring to reconstruct the library of Melville, poring through maritime lore, sweating, breathing, ingesting the corpus of history, as Steedman puts it, "with each lungful of dust" (27). The transaction's terms are a conversion of bodily into mental resources – "some physiology, more psyche, but on that account no less sick," Olson writes to a colleague. Each day of writing must be offset with a day in bed: this diet swells Olson into Maximus, but it also sickens him. The air of Florida seemed beneficial to his health – in this archive, the house of Hemingway, the spirits that Olson inhaled emboldened him, made him, as he wrote in his diaries,

firm. The presence of the archive's absent keeper, evoked through the cultish gathering of Hemingway's possessions, allowed the once sickly scholar to turn himself, if briefly, into a masculine, robust poet. But Olson couldn't stay inside this house forever.

Charles was apparently able to get his "sea-legs" rather quickly aboard the *Hawes*, but working in the archives was another matter. His entire academic career is marked with bouts of nervous illness, particularly when deadlines approached. Each breakthrough – the publication of his essay on Melville and Shakespeare in *Twice a Year*, and the following publication of his critical monograph, *Call Me Ishmael* – was accompanied by a breakdown. Illness, in particular somatic symptoms like headaches, digestive issues, and dizziness, united Olson with his body, but in a negative way. The goal would be a positive union, not a way of embodying mental strife, but making the bodily in some way mental, intellectualizeable – to extend the dominion of the mind over the body itself. In "Proprioception," a set of notes collected in the posthumous *Charles Olson: Additional Prose*, Olson struggles to locate the self in its mortal shell:

it is inside us/& at the same time does not feel literally identical with our own physical or mortal self (the part that can die). In this sense likewise the heart, etc, the small intestine etc, are or can be felt as – and literally they can be – transferred. Or substituted for. Etc. (17)

This swelling and receding gap between self and body places the body and its organs at the end of a long tether of nerves, distant enough to be reimagined, "transferred," imbued with signification. The body as depicted by "The Resistance" is a collection of fragments, set to drift apart in order to be jerked back together. Projective verse effects this retraction, aiming for a fixative between the drifting components, a fantasy not unlike the sensation of speech. Elocution, the breath swelling in the chest, modulated by the mind, to exit the body as *logos* – this is the fantasy to which Olson clings. One can read this in his insistence on the pause, the dramatic distribution of poetic text in time; Charles Olson's poetic and critical voice instructs the reader to pronounce with maximal emphasis and gesture, to "give the lungs room to act freely" ("Lessons"). "Projective Verse" promises a poetics that will freeze, at least temporarily, these unruly parts. But the excessive body keeps driving itself apart, fragmenting anew, turning these poems that aim to preserve the body into archives of that same body's decomposition.

Chapter 2.

Player Piano: Artistic Disembodiment and Reproduction

When Charles Olson seeks to ground his poetic practice in the material, his choice of metaphors is telling. By the publication of *Projective Verse* in 1950, abstract expressionism was in the middle of its two-decade dominance of American art. Its emphasis on motion and materiality, as well as the muscularity and masculinity of its main practitioners, made it an ideal companion for a poetics as largely visual and vectoral, and heroic, as Olson's. Yet there is not a single mention of the iconoclastic art form in Olson's iconoclastic manifesto – not, in fact, a single mention of painting, sculpture, or any plastic art or artist, contemporary or otherwise.

At a time of much interplay between different artistic spheres, "Projective Verse" is as dogmatically resistant to the influence of the plastic arts as it is to the influence of poetic heritage—even if the former, where the latter failed, might have provided a workable compositional model.

Olson's manifesto positions itself against "closed verse," the poetic form "that print bred," and its reliance on the movement from the "ear outward," on the musical phrase, on the strictures of "listening" that confine T.S. Eliot to meter and rhyme (15, 26). But when Olson branches out to other art forms to show the way out of the musical, print-bred verse, he uses the metaphor of sheet notation—both musical and inherently print-based:

[D]ue to its rigidity and its space precisions, [the typewriter] can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and bar a musician has had. (SW 22)

If writing is immaterial, perhaps music is less so. What grounds music in the concrete is the materiality of sound, the percussion of air and the vibration of strings. If music as an artistic form is ethereal, that which produces music – bodies, of both instruments and performers – is not. Olson's emphasis on breath is a bid of allegiance with music, a proposal for a long-deferred union: "If I hammer, if I recall in, and keep calling in, the breath," Olson asserts in the opening movement of "Projective Verse," "it is to insist upon a part that breath plays in verse which has not [...] been sufficiently observed" (17). But it is not the metaphor of instruments, or even performing bodies, that Olson relies on here to ground his poetics. It is through the notion of musical notation that Olson materializes his breath, encoding the body into print. But it is not just the sheet music, the stave and bar, that the poet wants; simple lined paper would serve that demand. What is key for the encoding is a tool, or instrument: the typewriter, which functions as a compositional tool akin to the composer's piano.

Olson never played piano, but he certainly played upon it as a metaphor. In writing he liked to "hammer" on the keys, a frequent use of upper-case type serving to indicate, in the absence of a bolding function on the typewriter, a percussive increase of emphasis. If Olson is a pianist, he's a brash one – one can hardly get through a page of his critical prose without coming upon this fortissimo technique. But he also keyed notes softly, from time to time. A piece of typewritten personal correspondence shows Olson playing lightly on the keys – in the middle of a paragraph, the typewriter just barely imprints a sentence onto the page. *"If only,"* Olson types in a faint pianissimo, *"the typewriter could whisper."*

Playing the Typewriter



Figure 2: L: Photograph of Sergei Rachmaninoff, c1936; R: Photograph of Frank O'Hara, 1965.

In "Piano, Telegraph, Typewriter: Listening to the Language of Touch," Ivan Raykoff traces the genealogy of the typewriter back, through nineteenth-century telegraphic technology, to its source in the piano. The piano keyboard, with its alphabetized keys, provided a starting point for a system of telegraph communication more nimble than cumbersome Morse code. Early telegraphic machines were simply modified pianos, and, likewise, their operators were modified pianists. These technologies, whose users were pre-trained at the pianos in their sitting rooms, offered a much more rapid learning process than their rotary-keyed counterparts, and were able to quickly absorb and capitalize on a demographic previously alien to the workforce.

Raykoff makes much of the similarities between the instruction manuals provided with these devices and older instructive texts on proper piano technique. The prescriptions they make on the body of the reader, and their unquestioned assumption of the femininity of this body, are identical (172). "It may come as a surprise," an 1895 publication states, "to find a practical use for what has been become a veritable plague

across the country, namely, piano lessons for young girls: the resultant dexterity is very useful for the operation of the typewriter" (qtd. in Raykoff 174).

The more skilled the pianist, the better the employee; accuracy – that quality paramount to typists – at one keyboard was directly translatable to another. The nearness of this translation is apparent when one looks at the first keyed telegraphic devices.

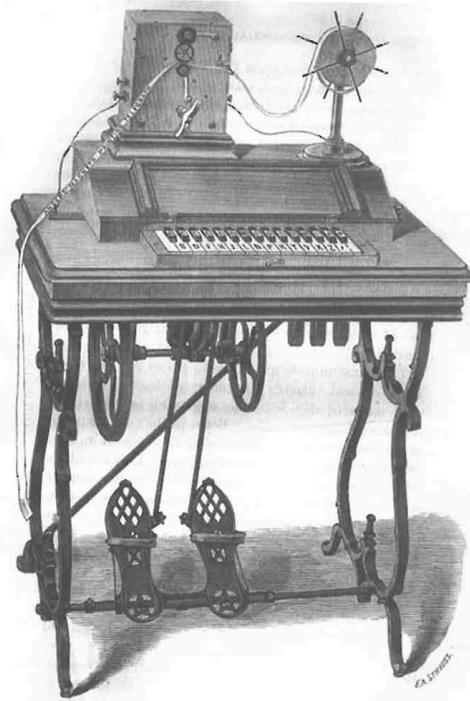


Figure 3: The Magneto Printing Telegraph; J.S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition, 1876*.

Piano-keyed telegraphs, such as the Magneto model pictured above, played out a large share of the world's telecommunication as late as the mid-twentieth century. Later piano-telegraphs incorporated chords – multiple simultaneous keystrokes triggering an impression distinct from the sum of each key – as well as an increasing vocabulary of symbols to use in the transmission and reproduction of increasingly complex messages. Raykoff misattributes a section of Olson's "Projective Verse" to Marshall McLuhan; both were, I suppose, interested in the transmission of information:

If a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time [...] If

he wishes a pause so light that it hardly separates the words, yet does not want a comma – which is an interruption of the meaning rather than the sounding of the line – follow him when he uses a symbol the typewriter has ready to hand: "What does not change / is the will to change" (SW 23)

The slash, as introduced by Olson, adds to the existing notation of pause available to writers much in the way *rests* in musical notation subdivide units of pause. To the comma, colon, semi-colon, em-dash, and period, Olson adds the slash, less of an interruption than a comma, in the same manner that composers shorten a *quaver* rest to a *semiquaver*. There is always the issue of interpretation – will the reader know what length of pause Olson indicates with his slash? – but training, necessary for musicians to recognize their host of symbols, is offered by Olson's manifesto. Perhaps pianists or composers will be more able to properly read projective verse, just as they would be more adept, as history indicates, at performing typewritten poems of their own. Certain exemplarily gifted composers might be able to hear the poem as the typewriter lays it onto the page, just as they are able to sight-read music – and like those nineteenth-century typists who were "possessed of such a wonderful power of memory and combination as to be able to read with facility from this instrument by the sound of the type-wheel" (Raykoff 168).

That these nineteenth-century inventors imagined that their machines would take advantage of musical tradition in the composition of texts, particularly in accuracy of transcription, suggests that Charles Olson's discovery in "Projective Verse" is a historically premeditated one. If the typewriter-as-piano conceit was new for poetics, in the history of both instruments the metaphor is far from novel. In fact, it is not even a metaphor.



Figure 4: "Literary Piano" by Samuel W. Francis, U.S. Patent Office Model, 1857.

If typists learned to read by ear, it is because they had to. For much of the history of telegraphic technology, operators typed blind – their messages not displayed to them, but to another individual at the other end of the line. What if these typists wanted to not only see, but save, their work? A patent issued in 1857 safeguards the invention of Samuel W. Francis, a kind of proto-typewriter Francis named the "Literary Piano." Earlier in the century musician-inventors had achieved a system known as "pianography," where the notes played by the instrument would be printed onto a sheet in real time. Francis removes the auditory element of the archiving piano while leaving its inscriptive capability.

This is not to say that there is no musicality left in Francis's typewriter. Leroy Anderson, a popular composer of American light music, wrote a song that included a part for the machine. "The Typewriter" was performed by the Boston Pops Orchestra in 1950, the same year that Olson published *Projective Verse*, and received similar acclaim. The composition, taken up by Jerry Lewis in his 1964 comedy *Who's Minding the Store*, features a modified typewriter with all but two keys disabled. Operating this device is not, as we would be led to believe, a virtuosic typist, but instead a drummer. Anderson said that the former's historically prescribed finger-dominated typing lacked the speed and force of the latter's wrist-dominant technique (Dowell). "The

Typewriter," with its rapid-fire percussion and precise timing of the carriage return bell, requires a certain kind of operator to meet its demands; the composer had to invent a new musician for its new instrument by, like our nineteenth-century inventors, appropriating and translating skill.⁵

A Natural Gift

Before this there were a couple weeks of foul depression, gnashing teeth, pacing and boredom, when I felt that I would never, NEVER (like in those movies about concert pianists who've been in an accident) be able to play the typewriter again. But the presence of this Steinway you all gave me has finally asserted itself, and now I stagger from bed, stride to the desk, and begin my scales each morning, or almost each.

Frank O'Hara, letter to Mike Goldberg, 16 February 1956.

Frank O'Hara's conflation of the two keyboards here betrays a personal history to match our technological one; the Steinway piano in the corner, and the typewriter on the desk, are not so far from each other. When the poet puns on the similarity of the two keyboards, he is joining a literary tradition that includes, beyond Charles Olson, Oscar Wilde, who assures us that "the type-writing machine, when played with expression, is not more annoying than the piano when played by a sister or near relation" (qtd. in Raykoff 174).⁶ If O'Hara annoyed his fair share of houseguests with his typewriting – often, as the legend goes, pausing in the middle of a conversation to go over to his desk and clack out a poem – he also surprised and amazed them with a his covert skill at the other set of keys.

Frank O'Hara graduated from Harvard in 1950 with a bachelor's degree in English Literature, but he entered the school as a student of musical composition. Drawn

⁵ The typists of The Boston Typewriter Orchestra, named, it seems, in tribute to Anderson's orchestra, have composed several albums worth of typewriter-punctuated jazz, and carry the tradition to this day. "The revolution," their website asserts, "will be typewritten."

⁶ The gendering of this machine, which Raykoff rightly interrogates, would not have been lost on O'Hara, whose office in the Museum of Modern Art would have had its share of female typists. If it did not concern him, it would have troubled many of his male contemporaries, like Charles Olson who was at pains to excise all but the masculine machinery of the typewriter in his description of projective verse practices.

to Harvard to study with music scholar Walter Piston, by the spring semester O'Hara was considering a change in vocations. Over the course of his first year at Harvard, the hours once spent composing at the grand piano in his dormitory's attic were gradually given over to another form of composition at his desk below. O'Hara had always dabbled in poetry, but now he typed in earnest, composing thirty poems between that spring and the next fall.

In a way, the piano upstairs never really vanished; the poet's continued association with composers, and obsession with classical music, suggests less of an about-face than a change in tack. Piano keys pop up in O'Hara poems across his career, and the instrument remained an active metaphor in his writing practice – perhaps in part because the mechanics of composing poems would always evoke the other set of keys.

Frank O'Hara was a typewriter poet, through and through. "Often," as the back copy of his *Lunch Poems* read, "this poet, strolling through the noisy splintered glare of a Manhattan noon, has paused at a sample Olivetti to type up thirty or forty lines," or composing perhaps after his lunch break at his desk in the Museum of Modern Art. The typewriter, signifying both the urbane and the everyday, was the modern tool for the modern poet. But did the typewriter also hold the similar functions for O'Hara as it did for Olson, this mixture of embodiment and transcription? Olson's 1950 "Projective Verse" would have been making its debut into the literary world at around the time that O'Hara, either recently or nearly graduated, would be planning his own entry.

O'Hara biographer Brad Gooch notes the brief transaction between O'Hara and Olson's theory of poetics, occurring, as much of O'Hara's interactions would, through an acquaintance. A poem written by O'Hara in the fall of 1957, dedicated to John Weiners, and titled "A Young Poet," sends lines skidding across the page in an open, projective array. This formal decision, writes Gooch, "was part of his homage to their friendship" – a self-conscious imitation, rather than an endorsement, of projective verse, meant as an affectionate nod to Weiner's enthusiasm for Olson. O'Hara would later mine some of the formal techniques of Olson's teachings, albeit in a desultory fashion. The typewriter was of central importance to O'Hara's poetics, but it seems the poet came to the machine for its speed of composition more than for the formal advantages of fixed-width font and

regularized spacing. It also seems that he was uneasy with the megalomania and grandeur of Olson's "Projective Verse."

O'Hara's own manifesto, "Personism," is as much of a statement of his principles as a mockery of the manifesto as a genre and the writers, like Olson, who too readily fall into the role of the "priest-prophet": "As for measure and other technical apparatus," O'Hara writes, "that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you. There's nothing metaphysical about it" (qtd in Gooch 301). Both poets land on the body in their theorizing of poetry, but Olson and O'Hara land, with greatly varying gravity, on very different parts.

Legend has it that it was matters corporeal that turned O'Hara from his studies in musical composition to a career in literature. Of the host of possible incentives that Brad Gooch gives for O'Hara's conversion – an alluring seminar on James Joyce, or the difficulty and emotional sterility of academic musical theory, or the saddening association in the poet's mind between his piano playing and the father, recently deceased, who taught him – I find this story, while likely apocryphal, the most satisfying. "During O'Hara's senior year," writes Gooch, "a story circulated at Harvard that he had played once for Rachmaninoff at the New England Conservatory and that the Russian pianist and composer had advised him that his hands were too small for ultimate success" (108).

Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff is a recurring figure in scholarship on Frank O'Hara. Over the twenty-odd years of his poetic output, O'Hara penned at least seven poems with the title of "On Rachmaninoff's Birthday." The Russian composer was something of an obsession for Frank O'Hara; a fraught obsession, if the story holds true, but an obsession nonetheless.

When Rachmaninoff criticizes O'Hara's hands, he is drawing an unfair comparison. The Russian composer's thirteen-inch hand span is the stuff of musical legend, even scientific inquiry.⁷ Many students are warned against playing Rachmaninoff

⁷ See Manoj Ramachandran and Jeffrey Aronson's "The diagnosis of art: Rachmaninov's hand span," published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 99:10; D. A. Young's

pieces because they, quite simply, cannot measure up. I can speak to the pain one feels in the joints of one's hands after struggling through his "Bells of Moscow." This tangible feeling of the gap between the composer's body and mine is a way in which embodied art manifests itself in a kind of failed metempsychosis – I prove myself an unsuitable host for the artistic spirit of another.

This gap can manifest in poetic performance, as well. For all of Olson's faith in the reproducibility of his projective poems, he doesn't consider the difference between the poet's body and the reader's. Projective verse, through the "stave and bar" of the typewriter, will enable the poet to "record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work" (22). But even if Olson can encode his body perfectly onto the page – in fact, *especially if the encoding is perfect* – the resulting text will be of such corporeal particularity that only the poet would be able to accurately read and perform it. Sheet music must take note of the limitations of the performer, just as it takes into account the constraints of the instrument; in projective verse, these are one and the same thing. Can my lungs fit the quantity of air needed to get through Olson's poetry? Is the range of my instrument higher, or more restricted, than his? Allen Ginsberg, too, took the breath as the unit of measure for poetry; most of us struggle to get through a line of *Howl*. Olson's reproduction gives room for silent performances of his work, outside the constraints of the reader's body – one must then ask whether it isn't the page itself, rather than the reader, that is performing the reproduction.

If we can be told that we don't have large enough hands to play Rachmaninoff, it is because his body maps out directly onto the page. And this is true. His compositions are marked by massive, claw-like chords that show as towering vertical stacks of notes. On the page, his body's breadth is clear. If critics find themselves unable to ignore Rachmaninoff's body, it's not simply because his peculiar embodiment is worth noting as trivia. His physical endowment is encoded onto his compositions – this is not ethereal music, divorced from the physical realm. This is material music.

"Rachmaninov and Marfan's Syndrome," published in the *British Medical Journal*, 293: 6562; and, Rachmaninoff's entry in the *Guinness World Book of Musical Records*.

In reading Olson's poetics, I seek a similar directness of connection between composer and composition. The body makes its unique print on the page, an impression irreducible to abstract terms. Scholars of Olson note his size, but tie it to his work through thematic routes – the scholarship on the poetry of this poet of the body is strikingly disembodied. While I will trace these impressions in their flight from embodiment to disembodiment, my model of this process takes a straighter path.

What does it mean that a text bears a record of the body in such a way as to facilitate that body's reproduction? And how does this problematize a poetics of embodiment, of materiality?

Ghost At the Keys

In my examination of the connection between artistic embodiment and reproduction, Rachmaninoff, as he did for O'Hara, continued to provide. Upon arriving in the United States in the late months of 1918, Rachmaninoff was goaded by a friend into attending a sort of séance where the spirit to be conjured was, apparently, his own. The American Piano Company had just perfected a new instrument that was to dominate upper-class fashion for the next decade: the reproducing piano. At a time when phonograph recording still presented only a scratchy facsimile of the original performance, the Ampico piano could recreate that performance, live, in one's own living room.

American Piano Company's product was, as their advertisements exclaim, not a player piano but a *reproducing* piano. The difference, here, is pertinent. Both instruments promise the performance of masterworks by relatively unskilled, untrained customers; but where the reproducing and player piano differ is in the level of that "relatively."

Player pianos require some finesse. The customer sits down on the bench, places her feet on a set of pedals and her fingers on a special row of keys just below the piano's keyboard. To activate the piano, she pumps the pedals that activate either a crankshaft or, in later models, a system of hydraulic bellows. As the notes are sounded, she uses her left hand to control the tempo of the music, while her right hand's keys adjust the expression, or dynamics, of the issuing notes. It looks like regular piano

playing: the hands move across the keys, the feet depress pedals, and music issues from the machine. And it would feel something like piano playing, especially to a customer who had never played before. It would also demand quite a bit of dexterity – keeping the pumping of the pedal to a steady rhythm while adjusting two different sets of controls seems nearly as difficult as playing a piano in the traditional way. But the value of the player piano is its function as a kind of prosthetic, transforming limited dexterity into a fully-formed pianistic skill. The basic anatomy of beginner-level piano playing is appropriated and extended telescopically: if you could play chopsticks on a regular piano, you could play Chopin on a player piano.

Eventually this cumbersome technique of pumping and modulating was felt to be too much of a demand on the owner, many of whom, we can assume, had more money to spend than dexterity to augment. The need for innovation in player piano technology is explained in an editorial printed in *The "Player" Magazine*, a publication which seems, both in its emphatic insistence on the value of culture as well as its condescension towards its reader, to have been written by Matthew Arnold.⁸ The magazine itself is an innovation, targeted to owners of a rarefied product and addressing music specifically through the lens of its reproduction – as a commodity one can buy, and then employ. Catalogues for player piano rolls are printed next to program guides for organizing listening parties for the cultural betterment of your friends and family. But cultural capital is only of value when it is transmitted correctly:

It has been felt, in fact, that the layman is usually too indolent or careless to acquire that complete command over the resources of his player-piano which is necessary to the work of good playing. Hence there have been produced various devices, of which the object is to attain automatically, through the agency of the roll, such accentuation as is called for from time to time in a piece of music. (1)

Enter the American Piano Company's reproducing piano. While player pianos left the dynamics and tempo at the uninitiated hands of the customer, reproducing pianos

⁸ For example: "There is no popular illustrated musical magazine published with the exclusive interests and *limitations* of the music lover who does not understand musical notation in mind" (Player 2, emphasis in original). And, for further evidence, the quotation marks around "Player" in its title, serving to remind the reader that their role in the playing of music is a limited imitation of the real thing.

seized control of these variables, making the piano's owner obsolete. These pianos replaced their customers with a prefabricated, built-in pianist, possessing skill and precision of a vastly superior degree. Now the customer could relax on the sofa and let the piano do the work.

There was a pushback from manufacturers of player pianos who published advertisements with slogans like "Slave or Master, Which?", pushing their readers to throw off their yoke as "the slave of automatic devices" and to become themselves the "master of the mood of each composition" (Player i). These advertisements struggle to at once emphasize the role that their customer has in the production of music against the automation of reproducing pianos, yet also to ward off any intimidation of their potential buyers by asserting the machine's independence. In doing so, they perforate the line between human player and inhuman machine: while the notes "all are at your command," they seem to "spring from the very *soul of the instrument*" (Player i, emphasis mine). But it seems that companies like Kranich & Bach, who rebranded their product as "artistic expression" player pianos, misread the desires of their customers. The reproducing piano was to dominate the market; the people had spoken.

First, the American Piano Company needed a human body to feed to the machine – a body whose virtuosity, as well as fame, would transfer well to the piano roll. Sergei Rachmaninoff, newly immigrated from increasingly hostile Russia, volunteered and allowed a specially rigged piano to feel the pressure of his fingers and the weight of his feet on the pedals. The pianist played, and his body's traces were archived on a tin cylinder deep in the piano's chest of valves and tubes. When afterwards the engineers switched on the pumps and his own music came rolling back out at him, the keys and pedals playing themselves, Rachmaninoff remained calm:

The story is that [...] Rachmaninoff made four test rolls, and that when he came to hear the proofs he sat impassively, smoking. At the end he got up and went to the door, still saying nothing. Then he turned and calmly remarked: 'Gentlemen, I have just heard myself play.' This one comment supposedly triggered off a sensational rise of Ampico stock on Wall Street. (Martyn 499)

His unfazed response here is baffling. Didn't he know that he was being replaced? One would expect him to have fled the room, or to have attacked the machine. Instead, the pianist proved to be an avid endorser of the automation of piano playing – and he was not alone. In the heyday of reproducing pianos, droves of pianists gave their stamp of approval on their piano rolls as "an entirely faithful means of recreating an original performance," even "appear[ing] in concerts at which live performances could be compared to re-enactments by the reproducing piano" (501). Famed musicians, just like the customers on the other end of the reproduction, willingly partook in their own obsolescence.

When Walter Benjamin diagnosed a shift towards mechanistic reproduction in the field of art, he left out in his examination the player piano; but here we have the reproduction of not only the work of art, but the artist himself. Here is the classically trained pianist ushering in the era of his mechanical reproducibility. The player's body is recorded and mechanically reproduced, and Rachmaninoff is an active and willing participant in his own replacement. Why would the artist take part in his own obsolescence? Benjamin offers a clue when he quotes a declaration printed in a Parisian magazine during the dawn of cinema. Abel Gance evokes a pantheon of artists, all vying for their reproduction: "Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films ... all legends, all mythologies and all myths, all founders of religion, and the very religions... await their exposed resurrection, and the heroes crowd each other at the gate" (qtd. in Benjamin 222). We can only think here of the pianists who jostled outside the door of the American Piano Company, each eager to be ingested by the machine.

I want to end by looking briefly at a novel that has haunted my writing of this chapter, Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. In the utopian community of near-future Ilium, New York, all necessary manual work has been mechanized. The novel's protagonist, Dr. Paul Proteus, is one of a team of engineers that made the automation possible; the book opens with Paul wandering through a warehouse and communing with his employees:

Paul arrived at lathe group three, the troublemaker he had come to see. He had been agitating a long time for permission to junk the group, without much luck. The lathes were of the old type, built originally to be controlled by men, and adapted during the war, clumsily, to the new

techniques [...] Paul unlocked the box containing the tape recording that controlled them all. The tape was a small loop that fed continuously between magnetic pickups. On it were recorded the movements of a master machinist turning out a shaft for a fractional horsepower motor. (17)

As the engineer examines the tape, he thinks back to the man whose labour it preserves: Rudy Hertz, a machinist who thirteen years ago had been hooked to a recording machine and put to work for the final time. "And here, now, this little loop in the box before Paul, here was Rudy as Rudy had been to his machine that afternoon [...]. This was the essence of Rudy as far as his machine was concerned, as far as the economy was concerned" (18). Putting Rudy on tape saved the wartime economy by eliminating all of the inefficiencies of the human body, and freeing it for infinite reproduction. Now, the factory "could make the essence of Rudy Hertz produce one, ten, a hundred, or a thousand of the shafts" (18). Paul puts the magnetic tape back on its spool in the reinforced steel box – a precaution against the attempted destruction of the tape by disgruntled, obsolete labourers.

Dr. Proteus sees Rudy twice that day: once on tape on the factory floor, and again in the flesh in a dive bar that Paul nervously ducks into to buy whiskey. Paul doesn't recognize Rudy, now aged and decrepit; he had only known the middle aged Rudy and the one printed on the magnetic tape. Rudy, however, recognizes the man who put him out of a job. When Paul realizes who he's talking to, he backs away, expecting violence; what he gets instead is gratitude. The ex-millwright shows Paul off to the bar's midday crowd and holds up his hands, now aged, that were once deemed worthy of reproduction. And why shouldn't he be happy? Rudy's body may grow old and die, but dozens of Rudy's are hammering out refrigerator parts around the clock. He was preserved in his prime, made immortal, his body archived by the magnetic tape, and all thanks to Paul. To celebrate the reunion, Rudy puts a nickel into the player piano in the corner of the bar. Paul takes this moment to free himself from the crowd and head towards the door.

"I played this song in your honor, Doctor," shouted Rudy above the racket. "Wait till it's over." Rudy acted as though the antique instrument were the newest of all wonders, and he excitedly pointed out identifiable musical patterns in the bobbing keys—trills, spectacular runs up the

keyboard, and the slow, methodical rise and fall of keys in the bass. "See—see them two go up and down, Doctor! Just the way the feller hit 'em. Look at 'em go!" (37)

Benjamin doesn't use this metaphor, but he should have. When a culture can find a means to reproduce not only the work of art, but the artist itself, what horizon of possibility does this present to the artist? Is it one of warning, or of temptation? Again and again I come across the figures of happy, obsolete artists, immortalized in the archive that has, by replacing them, freed them from their bodies.

Sergei Rachmaninoff recorded over thirty-five piano rolls for Ampico in the years between his arrival in the United States and his death in 1943, these piano rolls reproduced and distributed to households across the world. The owner of a reproducing piano could unwrap Rachmaninoff, open the lid, and bring him to life. Now, Rachmaninoff could play in hundred of rooms at once, freed from the limitations of space – and time. A long-lost Ampico roll containing a never-before heard concerto by Rachmaninoff was given its first public performance in 1983, forty years after its composer's death.

When gramophone technology was finally able to compete in fidelity with the live performance of a player piano, many of these piano rolls were recorded. The recordings of these piano rolls, authored by Rachmaninoff and played decades later by Ampico reproducing pianos, are viewed as highly authoritative, even more so than a gifted pianist playing Rachmaninoff live. What cuts through the mediation, even here, is the presence of the body: even a virtuosic interpreter of Rachmaninoff doesn't have his hands.

Crossing Over

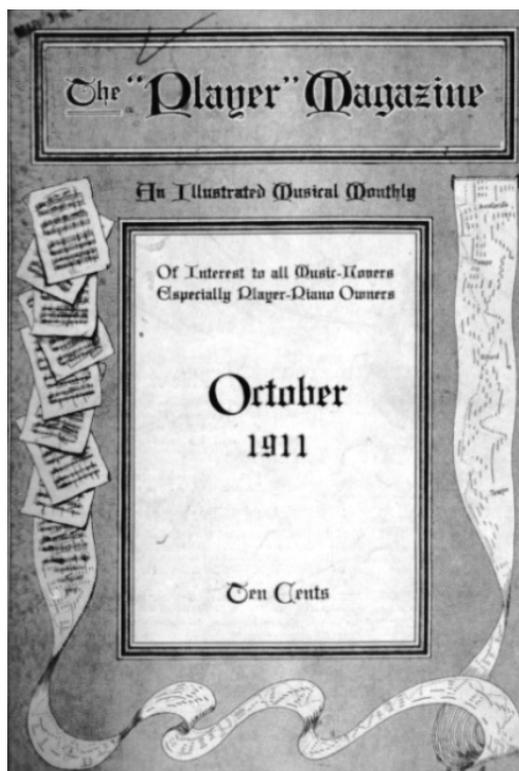


Figure 5: *The "Player" Magazine, October 1911.*

The cover of *The "Player" Magazine* is framed by an illustration that depicts pages of sheet music transformed into the ribbon of a piano roll. The directionality here isn't ironclad – the magazine does imply that, given sufficient exposure to music through the player piano, the customer may eventually cross over into standard musical notation. A section of the magazine presents movements from compositions with a kind of "facing translation" of sheet music and piano roll. But it is not a smooth transition: the visual differences between barred staves and perforated slots are, as the clumsiness of their intersection in the cover illustration shows, irreconcilable. No, the images of piano rolls that intersperse *The "Player" Magazine* look familiar to us, not in relationship to sheet music, but in their similarity to a different kind of text.

Skilled player piano owners may be able to read the piano roll as if it were sheet music, silently performing the work without the help of the machine. Here is my performance, my reading.



Figure 6: Un Coup de Dés Jamais n'Abolirai le Hasard, Stéphane Mallarmé.

This is a spread from Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés Jamais n'Abolirai le Hasard: Poème*, composed in 1897 and published in 1914. Mallarmé's poem anticipated the visual primacy of twentieth century poetic movements such as concrete verse; in its directness of diction and its deployment of space, it is projective verse *avant la lettre*

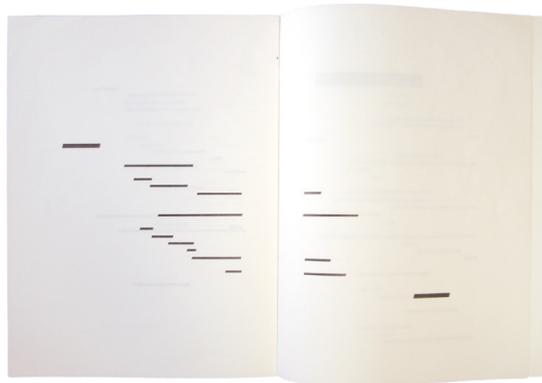


Figure 7: Un Coup de Dés Jamais n'Abolirai le Hasard, Marcel Broodthaers

In 1969, visual artist Marcel Broodthaers produced an homage to Mallarmé's text that stripped it of its lexical meaning while preserving the graphic footprint of the poem. The poem was reproduced in several variations, with black rectangles the length and width of each poetic line printed on paper, aluminum, and glass. The subtitle of the work was changed from *Poème* to *Image*.

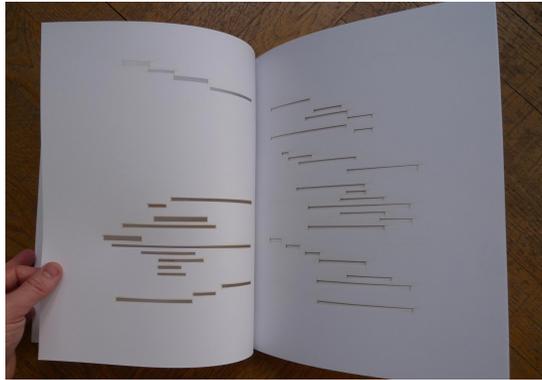


Figure 8: *Un Coup de Dés Jamais n'Abolirai le Hasard*, Michalis Pichler.

Michalis Pichler's 2008 version of Mallarmé's poem is subtitled neither *Poème*, nor *Image*, but *Sculpture*. Pichler's is a modification of Broodthaers' text, rendering the graphic marks not in black ink but in lasercut perforations in the paper itself. When giving a conference paper on the translations, or transmediations, of Mallarmé's poem, it was suggested to me by a colleague that I find some way of "playing" the poem. I had not yet found the Pichler variation, but the Broodthaers' version looked quite a bit like the digital piano rolls found in music composition software. One could simply assign a note for each line, and see what the computer played. I returned home and forgot about the project; revisiting these texts for this piece of writing, I found out that someone had beaten me to it. A video on YouTube shows a musical performance of *Un Coup de Dés*, rendered not, as I had planned, digitally from Broodthaers' graphical translation, but using Pichler's perforated text directly as a piano roll.

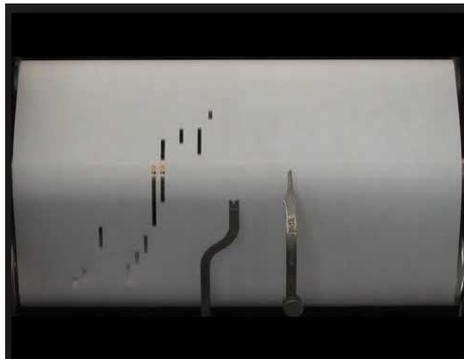


Figure 9: Karfas, Arthur, "Un Coup de Dés Jamais n'Abolirai le Hasard: Musique"

As I listened to the dissonant, atonal music, and watched as the lines of poetry emerged from the top of the piano roll's spool and, reaching the centre of the page, were

sounded by the piano's pneumatically powered keys, I thought of my body reading aloud a poem by Charles Olson — with my stylus eyes scanning the page, and my lungs articulating the breath of another. I am not quite a reproducing piano, however, and Olson's poems are not piano rolls. The American Piano Company prided itself on the precision and consistency of both its pianos and their proprietary rolls, but bodies, and printed text, are not precise. If the piano roll's perforations are flawed, is the song the same?

Chapter 3.

Skyrockets in Flight: The Body in Delivery

Can the poem record the body? Can the body be recorded?

Charles Olson's 1950 essay "Projective Verse" called for the retrieval of poetic form from the realm of the abstract and its transplanting into the most concrete of realms. The reach of the human body, not the restrictions of historical or conventional form, ought to express poetic content. The law of Projective Verse is the law of breath.

But breath, unlike meter, is unfixed. The human organism is inconsistent. Olson knew this, having struggled against his own body's inconsistencies. In the poem "The Kingfishers," Olson tracks the flight of his bird from its mythical narrativization back to its brute, unsignifying body. The kingfisher is not born, as legend has it, on the water; it is born in a tunnel clawed into the bank. Its mother lays her eggs on a pile of vomitous fishbones regurgitated by the parents:

On these rejectamenta
(as they accumulate they form a cup-shaped
structure) the young are born

And, as they are fed and grow, this
nest of excrement and decayed fish becomes
a dripping, fetid mass (52-57)

It is in this cradle of filth, not on the throne of mythology, that the body is born. Olson struggled out of his body's nest into a self-mythologizing poetics that sought to solidify the fragile organism. He styled himself as Maximus, a giant capable of inscribing his words onto the substrate of history. This is a fantasy of hardness born out of a fear of softness, of the natural malleability that the body threatens to lapse back into. We are,

as "The Kingfishers" states, forever poised "between / birth and the beginning of / another fetid nest" – a precarity that Olson's poetics first nods to, then flees from (131-33).

This flight is evident from the start. "Projective Verse," a model of poetry that strives to let the body lead, betrays its own terms. Olson heralds the typewriter as the tool that will allow the poet to encode his⁹ body onto the page, providing an appendage firm enough to imprint with mechanical regularity the body's movements, to record "the breath, the pauses" of speech (SW 22).

One wonders why a poet who wanted above all to express his body wouldn't land on a *handwritten* poetics, such as that of Guillaume Apollinaire.¹⁰ Isn't handwriting more embodied? The typewriter sharpens and hardens the body enough to leave a mark, but at a cost: you must only make marks that can be expressed via the prosthetic. If the loudest utterance of Olson's theorizing is that *form follows content*, aren't we seeing the opposite in practice? The typewriter's durability as a prosthetic attachment to the poet's body seems to undermine, at the moment of the body's inscription, the embodied-ness of that body. This is, after all, not the mark of a human but that of a machine. But this, for Olson, is a fair trade; if anything, it's an unexpected windfall. By discarding the humanity of the impression, one discards also the troubling constraints of that humanity.

A Better Body

Charles Olson wanted to live forever. In his middle age the poet became obsessed with Orphism, the belief that one will be born and reborn into sequentially better bodies until reaching a state of perfection and eternal life. But, as the first sentences of his *Selected Writings* read, "This is eternity. This now. This foreshortened span" (13). Olson's short essay "The Resistance" grapples with the human organism's

⁹ And, as I will expand upon at the end of this chapter, it really is *his*, and not *her*, body, that Olson is interested in.

¹⁰ The later compositions of Olson's *Maximus Poems* periodically devolve into the freeform handwriting of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, but these penned lines are diligently translated into typeset print by the anthologists of the final, printed compendium – no doubt because the cost of mimeographing these handwritten poems would be prohibitive to their reproduction.

knowledge of its dissolvability. The essay dwells on the bodily horrors of the Holocaust before settling on an assertion of resistance through embodiment – a resistance that, through the breakdown of grammatical structures and typographical convention, enacts against itself the body's own fracturing: "In this intricate structure we are based, now more certainly than ever (besieged, overthrown), for its power is bone muscle nerve blood brain – a man, its fragile mortal force its old eternity, resistance" (14). One gets the sense that, having evacuated from the "cathedral" of the body the draught of metaphysics, thereby leaving only the primal "ground, stone, wall" of its composition, there is not much else one can do other than pace the halls and shiver (14). The fragmentation of the body doesn't need help from historical catastrophe; simple time will pull down the edifice. If bodies are our site of resistance, they are not enough, at least not in their current, limited incarnation. Olson asserts that we will inhabit our ephemeral bodies more easily "when we regain what the species lost, how long ago: nature's original intention with the organism, that it live 130 years"; until then, we will have to work with the current organism (13). If only we could improve our bodies, make them more durable, more capable, less precarious – if only we could push against the limits of our physiology. Prosthetic augmentation provides both the possibility of an Orphic upgrade that one can enjoy in this lifetime and the extension of that lifetime itself: a better body, augmented and prolonged. What are the outlines of this extended body?

In an essay titled "The Disposable Rocket," John Updike muses on the relationship of the male mind to its body. And to space: there is an odd parallel between Updike's assertion that "the space that interests men is outer," and Olson's opening declaration of *Call me Ishmael*, "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America" (Updike 550, CMI 15). Women, Updike states, navigate inner space; men, outer. Updike's theorizing of gender is as reductive as the space he evokes is expansive – space, sublime and vast, ready for exploration, exploitation, by those, as Olson offers, who can "ride" it (CMI 15). Among the pantheon of hyper-masculine images Updike draws upon here – touch football, armed combat, automotive mechanics – the titular one is the most telling. A male body, Updike states, "is like a delivery rocket that falls away in space, a disposable means" (549). This image, at once intensely, laughably phallic, yet fragile, crystallizes the fantasy of hardness and propulsion that dogs Olson's writing and

materializes in his Orphic bent. Robert Wilson, in "Cyber(body)parts: Prosthetic Consciousness," expresses a prosthetic Orphism similar to Olson's:

When my penis begins to dysfunction [...] my personal physician will refer me to a urologist who will recommend a penile implant which will [make] me permanently virile. The implant may simply extend my penis [...] or it may involve a small hydraulic mechanism that will permit me to pump my penis into shape simply by squeezing a tiny plastic reservoir that the urologist will have tucked away within my scrotum. (240)

One of the last poems composed by Olson hangs awkwardly on the image of a mythical figure who challenges the gods by fornicating with a boulder and begetting a nine thousand foot rock-hard son. The poem, "From the Song of Ullikummi," is, as Marjorie Perloff notes, an embarrassing composition of locker-room adolescent humour, but I read it as expressing an, earnest, if reprehensible, wish: like Wilson, Olson yearns for a prosthetic upgrade – a phallus so hard it can penetrate, and co-opt, the rock of mythology.

Pocket Rocket

Cy Twombly, an American abstract painter who lived most of his life in self-imposed Roman exile, briefly attended Black Mountain College during Charles Olson's stint as rector. Twombly, as a painter and not a writer, was more interested in the other faculty, but the two artists had much in common, especially as their careers progress and both turned evermore towards the past. Olson's "Maximus" persona strode across history like a rough beast, collecting fragments of literature and history as he went; Twombly was the painter of works such as *Bacchus* and *Phaedrus*, and the creator of found-object sculptures with the detritus of Rome as his materials. Twombly was not born in Rome, just as Olson wasn't born in Gloucester. Both made their nests in the place of their imagined origins, and became permanent denizens of mythology. Both were spinners of palimpsests, scribblers on walls.

Twombly's paintings are often negatively compared to graffiti, an art form that the artist disavowed – either for its connotations of lower-class elements, something that would have rankled the self-ordained aristocrat of Gaeta, or perhaps for the association of graffiti with the ephemeral. But the graffiti Twombly lived among was of a different kind

than that of his American critics; while there is no shortage of spray-paint on the walls of Rome, this paint is only the topmost layer of a sedimentation of etchings that date back to the birth of the monuments themselves. Running one's fingers over these marks, fossils of a litany of passers-by scattered over millennia, will evoke the kind of graffiti that Twombly's paintings near.



Image not reproduced due to copyright.

Figure 10: L: Graffiti on wall of the Pantheon, photograph by author; R: *Untitled*, Cy Twombly, 1955.

What tool is sharp enough to etch into walls hardened by hundreds of years? Or do these surfaces become softer, more readily inscribed, as time passes? A turn towards history could be a turn away from the impenetrability of contemporary life, a blocking out of the "mu-sick, mu-sick, mu-sick" that, as Olson bemoans, pipes in over the speakers of modern streetcars (MP 1.3). Twombly's photographs of children's toys in the shop windows of rapidly-Americanizing Rome show, in the smiling face of Spongebob Squarepants, Twombly's his dread of the New World inexorably impinging on the Old.

The past always seems a softer substrate. The protagonist of Vonnegut's *Player Piano* pauses in his favourite of the many warehouses that shelter The Ilium Works' hyper-modern automated production line, a building originally maintained by Thomas Edison. He turns his gaze upwards from the chugging machines to the warehouse's brick columns, upon which, under layers of paint, are inscribed the initials of the original factory workers.

It soothed him to look up at the wooden rafters, uneven with ancient adze marks beneath flaking calcamine, and at the dull walls of brick soft enough for men – God knows how long ago – to carve their initials in: "KTM," "DG," "GP," "BDH," "HB," "NNS." Paul imagined for a moment – as he often imagined on visits to Building 58 – that he was Edison, standing on the threshold of a solitary brick building on the banks of the Iroquois [...] The rafters still bore the marks of what Edison had done with the lonely brick barn: bolt holes showed where overhead shafts had once carried power to a forest of belts, and the wood-block floor was black with the oil and scarred by the feet of the crude machines the belts had spun. (15)

History's surfaces – wood, brick – were soft enough to have traces left upon them; today, all traces are obsessively eradicated to serve the fetish of gleaming metal. Dr. Paul Proteus' reverie is cut short by an automated sweeping unit that rattles along its track, manically vacuuming up what little dirt is left by the immaculate modern lathes and presses – eliminating, too, the cat that leaps in fright from Paul's arms and lands in the path of the machine.

Modern tools lack the humanism of adzes; modern surfaces allow no identifying human mark. Old tools, and old surfaces, must be taken up. Olson and Twombly effect patinas of words and paint, etching into a borrowed substrate with implements of borrowed myth. The poet and the painter find one tool of particular use:

[T]he shape of the A has a phallic aggression - more like a rocket. It's pointed. [...] My whole energy will work, and instruments and things will have a very definite male thrust. The male thing is the phallus, and what way to describe the symbol for a man than the phallus, no? [...] I always make a direction that's pointed: it goes out and it's difficult to use sometimes, because it goes one way, from left to right, but it deals with subject matter that probably has a certain sensuality. (Twombly 178)

The critics who liken Twombly's work to graffiti have this element in mind – many of Twombly's paintings feature crudely, even aggressively scribbled phalloi. These pointers, these "rockets," propel in the manner of Olson's lines, "from left to right"; the "Projective" of the latter's poetic manifesto is subtitled with "projectile" and "percussive," both words of thrust and of impact (SW 15). They provide a hardened, sharpened point; Roland Barthes describes the calligraphic trace that Twombly leaves on the canvas not as writing, nor as painting, but as "scratching" (179). The phallus is that which enables

this engraving; it is prosthetically attached at the point of contact so that the energy discharge of the artist may leave its imprint on the substrate of history. But still this tool is borrowed, contingent: with the directionality and the propulsion of Updike's rocket comes its disposability, its fragility. "There is nothing," he writes, "like a hopeful phallus: its aggressive shape is indivisible from its tender-skinned vulnerability" (551).

Points can break off; upgrades can fail, leaving one more impotent than before. Attachment risks a loss more traumatic than the initial lack. Robert Wilson hesitates at the doctor's door, knowing that the hydraulic pump that charges his erections will eventually break, leaving him "with a piece of ruined machinery in [his] scrotum" (240). Plastic is still a relatively soft material, prone to degradation over time.

"From The Song of Ullikummi" was written by Charles Olson in the last decade of his life and read for the first time at a poetry reading at which Ezra Pound was the guest of honour. The poem is dedicated to Olson's former mentor, described in *Mayan Letters* as once capable of "driving through" time, or history, "by the beak of his ego," but now greatly diminished by a beak that is "bent and busted" (82). "From The Song of Ullikummi" presents Olson's fantasy of an unbendable, unbustable beak:

and with the rock he slept
and into her let his manhood
go five times he let it go
ten times he let it go (4-7)

This poem of "phallic aggression," with its depiction of a jackhammer erection that can perform and perform, never blunting or exhausting itself, is the last finished poem in Olson's oeuvre. Two others follow it in *Archaeologist of Morning*, but these are fragmentary, untitled works. "Ullikummi" is fixated on this image of man fornicating with rock, and, as Marjorie Perloff notes in her comparison of Olson's interpretation of the myth with the myth itself, excludes much of the content of the original in favour of "the fucking / of the Mountain" (25-26). A phallus so capable, that "went right through it and came out the other side," is Ezra's beak rendered in carbide steel; a fantasy of hardness, of corporeal solidity (27-28). But this percussive, projective member still has a flaw – is still attached to the body. And when your body succumbs to ruin, the prosthesis will be buried with you. The best phallic upgrade will be one that is not only, like Wilson's,

extendable, but one that is detachable – one that can, when the time comes, jettison the failing body of its owner, like Updike's booster rocket burning up in the stratosphere.. But a booster rocket must leave something behind. These phallic, propulsive markings, symbols that Updike and Twombly take as representative of man himself, deliver onto the reader or viewer the body of the maker of the marks. But what can we do with this body?

Projection and Reproduction

An embodied poet who desires eternal life must find a way to be born again and again; she will have a familiar method at her disposal. The braggadocio rhetoric of *The "Player" Magazine* extols the virtues of the player piano in the extension of musical culture into the homes and lives of the common-folk, an accomplishment "analogous to the achievement of the printing-press in spreading knowledge, culture and enjoyment throughout the world" (3). In line with the Matthew Arnoldian bent of the magazine, the interpersonal element of this cultural exchange is emphasized; if Arnold points us to books so that we may converse with kings, the owner of a player piano will "have become acquainted, musically, with composers whom he is glad to know" (3). The celebrity appeal of Rachmaninoff's piano rolls was grounded in the fact that, overlooking the mediation, it would be the famous pianist himself playing in your parlour – a phantom generated by the moving keys, readily summoned as long as the piano roll stayed intact and in print. A pianist's survival is, then, intrinsically linked to proliferation: without the reproduction and reissuing of piano rolls, your ghost will fade. One may seek immortality through the making of marks; but one then must ensure that these marks themselves survive. The answer is dispersion – a casting to the winds of the texts that bear your body's print.

"I have [a] bad history," writes Sandy Stone, cyborg scholar; "I am a person who fell in love with her own prostheses. Not once, but twice" (394). In "Split Subjects, Not Atoms: Or, How I Fell in Love with My Prosthesis," Stone tells of her life-long love affair with technology, a story that begins at childhood with a homemade radio. Two young friends at a sleepover probe galena crystal with a length of wire, looking for a conductive hotspot: "Nothing but silence for a long, long time, and then suddenly the earphones burst into life and there was a whole new universe raging in our heads" (394). The effect

was immediate. "I was hooked. Hooked on technology. I could take a couple of coils of wire and a hunk of galena and send a whole part of myself out into the ether. An extension of my will, of my instrumentality – that's a prosthesis, all right" (394). Through the radio Stone projected herself at lightning speed from the small, darkened bedroom to the AM radio transmitter in the next town over, refracting the bounds of her self, in a nanosecond extending her reach by miles. A cyborg, as well as a cyborg scholar, was born.

"Then," she writes, "I fell in love with somebody else's prosthesis" (394). The setting was the University of California, Santa Cruz, where students gathered on a field outside of a crammed auditorium in a Woodstock-style array of blankets to listen over speakers to a guest lecturer, Stephen Hawking. Wanting to catch a glimpse of the celebrity, Stone shouldered her way through the crowd and into the building until she could see the stage. "And then a thing happens in my head. Exactly where, I say to myself, *is* Hawking? Am I any closer to him now than I was outside? Who is it doing the talking up there on stage? In an important sense, Hawking doesn't stop being Hawking at the edge of his visible body" (395).

While I am uncomfortable with Stone's exoticizing of Hawking's disability, even if this othering is a gesture of her love, the questions she asks herself are provocative ones. Hawking's subjectivity is technologically dispersed, channelled through the speech emulation software that he relies on to communicate. Where, Stone asks, does Stephen stop? His physical body blurs into the haptic controls he uses to speak – speech that issues from the Votrax machine, his prosthetic vocal chords. At the point of attachment, the prosthesis extends into *us*. The Votrax sends the signal to the speakers distributed through the hall and outside. It is at this point of mediation – five levels from Hawking's physical body – that Stone experiences his subjectivity. Moving from outside on the field to inside the auditorium doesn't, in effect, bring her any closer. By an inversion of the same logic, the speaker cables could be unspooled and Hawking's reach extended to a different building on the campus. One could hook the cables to a wireless transmitter and, freed from materiality, Hawking could be present on the other side of the ocean from his body.

At the dawn of the invention of the telegraph machine, enthusiasts speculated that in the near future the technology could be harnessed to rig up multiple simultaneous iterations of the same pianist's performance, in venues across the world. Such an application of telegraphic technology never materialized, but in a few decades the player piano offered this extension of a pianist's body to far-flung lands. This disembodied reach, extended via prosthetic, allows the body of Hawking, or Rachmaninoff, to be brought into the living rooms of strangers. One simply unspools the speaker wire, or mails the piano roll, and the organism expands.

This outwards projection of self is the goal of Charles Olson's poetics, where the poem, too, becomes part of the organism: manifest in print, immortalized in the archive. An embodied poetics, through first inscription, then reproduction, becomes strikingly disembodied. The stakes of embodied poetry reveal themselves to be the preservation of the organism through its archive – a radical disavowal of the limitations of the body in an art form that seeks to use these same limitations as a constraint.

Olson's body, recorded by the typewriter and encoded into text, is printed on the pages of poetry anthologies, shipped to bookstores across the world, bought by undergraduate students, sold on Craigslist, scanned, and emailed; it is passed back and forth by satellites in low orbit and stored in hundreds of hard drives. His body is downloaded and uploaded, copied and pasted over and over again. The human organism is broken apart into bits, reassembled, and scattered, like living ashes, across the digital cloud.

Putting Together the Pieces

*Aren't we all just Humptys trying to put ourselves together
without the help of the King's men?*

Letter from Charles Olson to Dorothy Norman, January 15th 1939.

What is the aim of this dispersion, this seed distribution? The key is in the metaphor of musical notation that Olson relies on — the stave and bar. "Projective Verse" is rooted in performance, in the breath of the poet and the vibrations of the body, but performance is ephemeral and the mere transcription of performance is static. There

exist many tape recordings of Olson reading poetry, but he did not, like many of his colleagues, experiment with taped poetry as a medium. The medium of recording he preferred, and paid much critical attention to, was the page. But the page had to become something more: it had to become musical notation, a form of print whose primary purpose is reproduction, whose materiality only exists in order to facilitate the re-materialization, and re-embodiment, of the work of art. Olson was after more than just an accurate recording of the body. A recording is inert. What Olson wanted was reproduction. And to be reproduced faithfully requires an accuracy of transcription – like a faulty teleportation device that leaves your teeth and nails behind, a poorly typeset poem mutilates the recorded body.

Mutilation, or at least mutation, seems guaranteed – any fault in the transcription of the body will be doubled by the twin process of recording and reproduction. Accuracy must be painstakingly ensured so that one's descendants, once reassembled, resemble you. The last book of poetry that Charles Olson published in his lifetime very nearly never came to be. Olson sent out the first draft of the fourth, fifth and sixth set of *Maximus Poems* in the spring of 1964. Within weeks, his wife was killed in an automobile accident. Olson dove into work, returning to teach at Buffalo College while continuing to see his *Maximus IV, V, VI* through print. This process turned into another disaster.

Maximus continues to be such a total mystery that I am unable to generate much hope for it [...] I hope it is clearer with you than it is with me – and, apparently, with the Abominable Snowman of Fort Square, Glos.? (MG, Letter from Jonathan Williams to Eli Wilentz, 24 March 1964)

In a letter to Eli Wilentz of Corinth Books dated March 24th, 1964, designer Jonathan Williams bemoans the difficulty of their "abortive publication" and the constant friction of working with Olson. Eventually the abortive publication aborts, and Eli tries to find Olson a new publisher. They are turned down by James Laughlin of New Directions, who stays out of the path of the "Abominable Snowman" of Gloucester. The fear that Olson strikes up in designers and publishers is palpable: Laughlin states that he would "just be afraid of it, not having Jerry here any longer, who was so good in working with Charles [...] To

take on something where there would be difficulties with proof corrections, would be quite beyond us, I fear" (MG). Laughlin's hesitance is understandable.

"*Wrong wrong wrong*," Olson scrawls on the galleys of the Corinth Books edition of *Maximus IV, V, VI*. "Goddamn your soul Eli. – or whoever. God fuck you. Simply *obey* the poet's mss" (MG). The ink is red, the letters jagged and spilling over each other with a violence that is hard to approximate in type. This inability to translate is, in fact, the problem that provoked Olson's rage: he didn't account for the drastic difference in the appearance of the poems when transferred from the typewritten manuscript into variable-width type. Gerard Burns, a seasoned typesetter, in his "Olson and The Format of *Maximus*" goes so far as to describe the latter as "practically another medium" (1). Translated from fixed-width font into variable width, the long lines of the *Maximus* poems recoiled like snapped elastic bands into stunted compression. "Oh Jesus! Where again does such ideas – in the face of an incredibly careful mss – *go fucking hay wire???*" (MG).

Olson's vicious personal attacks on those who misprinted his poems, altering line spacing or indentation, sounded much like a man proofreading his own tombstone. A poet who once concerned himself with the vast spaces of the American continent became obsessed with the almost impossibly minuscule space between letters and lines of type. The pages of the *Maximus IV, V, VI* galleys held in the archives of Simon Fraser University are scarred by Olson's vitriolic hand; in the midst of personal tragedy and failing health, Charles Olson made a white whale out of his manuscript. The revised and re-revised *Maximus IV, V, VI* wasn't just treated with ire, however; in a tender moment in an otherwise businesslike letter to Eli on January 21st, 1966, Olson described their efforts towards the publication as "bringing it along like one might raise a child" (MG). Eventually, though much-deferred, *Maximus IV, V, VI* came to fruition in November of 1968, delivered by England's Cape Goliard Press. Olson had real children to raise, too and, acutely aware of his own failing health, thought that a successful publication might, aside from securing his own legacy, help with the financial support of his children. In a letter to Eli in August of 1969, months before he will be diagnosed with liver cancer, Olson bid his ex-publisher to try to use the buzz of the new book to sell more copies of

the old – an income he needed, for his children were "now in those educational years" and his time to provide for them was limited (MG).

This conflation of the manuscript and his children is telling. Both bear his name, contain traces of his body, guarantee his perpetuation. His *Maximus IV, V, VI* is still in print, and, given Olson's stature in twentieth-century poetics, it will continue to be in print long after his children have passed away, its longevity secured by the reproducibility of type, and his body's longevity secured along with it. But the pages of *Maximus IV, V, VI* would only do so if they were precise, perfect records of that body's breath and movement. Errors compound in reproduction; the first printing is the template for all others, so, as Olson knew, it must be perfect. In the final typeset galleys for his last book of poetry, Olson writes in a turbulent hand that degrades into illegibility, "I REQUIRE HERE UTTERLY AND ABSOLUTELY IDENTICAL SPACING TO ATTACHED XEROX [...] PLEASE [...] IDENTICAL [...]" (MG).

The final item in the archival collection is an envelope postmarked from Milan that arrived in the United States in the second week of January. Inside the envelope is the sleek business card of a publisher who Olson bade Eli contact regarding an Italian translation of his work. The name and address of Charles Olson, care of Corinth Books Inc., New York, is crossed out by the postmaster; next to this is written, in pencil, "Died."

When an aging Sergei Rachmaninoff lost his virtuosity at the keys, his piano rolls were there to continue the work of his body. *Maximus IV, V, VI* had its American publication in the same year as Olson's body expired – an archive jettisoned by the failing organism, sent out to preserve and proliferate the lost body. That is, as long as we will aid in this reproduction; as long as we are able to decode the archive, willing to fit the prosthetic onto ourselves.

Out of Orbit

To put oneself into the body of another, to facilitate this reproduction, is a gesture of dedication, if not love. To set foot in a human archive, to evoke the presence of another, to attempt even the briefest flicker of this metempsychosis, is to try, despite the

constraints, to feel as another. But what if the scale is expanded, if the rocket leaves our solar system to deposit its archive far from our orbit, far from the reaches of humanity?

"Poem Rocket," published in *Kaddish and Other Poems* shortly after the 1959 landing of an unmanned Soviet spacecraft on the moon, sees Allen Ginsberg moved to exhilaration at the new possibilities of humankind. The poem takes the form of an epistle addressed to whatever extraterrestrial creature might receive it:

Now at last I can speak to you beloved brothers of an unknown moon [...]
Will you eat my poems or read them
or gaze with aluminum blind plates on sunless pages?
do you dream or translate & accept data with indifferent droopings of
antennae?
do I make sense to your flowery green receptor eyesockets?
do you have visions of God? (27, 30-33)

This is a love poem to technology, a fantasia in "steel or cobalt basalt or diamond gold," in which the starry-eyed Ginsberg finds in outer space the eternity once sought in religion (38). In this heaven, too, one must leave one's body behind: boiled down into an "amazing chemical / more than my hair my sperm or the cells of my body," Ginsberg becomes pure essence, pure data (49-50). "Without myself finally," he can be converted into "pure thought / message all and everywhere the same" – freed not only from corporeal but linguistic constraints (40-42). "Poem Rocket" exits the earth's atmosphere like the Voyager probe would a decade later, bearing in ostensibly universal language the engraved records not of humanity but, in this case, of one human being in particular:

This is my rocket my personal rocket I send up my message Beyond
Someone to hear me there
My immortality [...] (35-37)

The Voyager probe has mounted upon its side a plaque depicting two human beings, one male and one female, as well as other pictographic and sonic representations of humanity. Ginsberg's probe has only one human being, himself – he alone will be communicated to the residents of the moon and Mars. A poet's solipsism is excusable, is part of their trade, and can be written off as mere rhetoric. Ginsberg isn't building rockets, after all. But what if he was?

To build a rocket one must find durable materials. Robert Wilson's plastic prosthesis granted only finite erections; Ezra Pound's beak was blunted and dulled with age; Charles Olson's phallus of rock would only be buried with its host body. Ginsberg builds his imaginary rocket of steel and diamond, nearly time- and space-proof, but not quite. His mineral fantasy is picked up decades later by another, more scientifically-informed, poet, one who aims to realize what Ginsberg left metaphorical.

It thrives in the acidic runoff from heavy-metal mines, depleted of their zinc. It abides in the shallows of the Dead Sea. It breathes methane. It can withstand temperatures of 333 °K, hot enough to melt phosphorus. It resides in a fumarole of scalding seawater, deep in the bathyal fathoms of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. It can endure pressures equivalent to 45 tons of force per square inch, six times greater than the pressure at the nadir of the ocean, one sixteenth of the pressure required to crush graphite into diamond. (Bök 2)

Christian Bök's "The Extremophile" is a rhapsody in seven parts on the theme of indestructibility. It describes "it," some *thing*, named in its title, an entity stronger than any known material, capable of withstanding not only the harshness of the natural world at its most violent, but the violence of mankind, as well. The "extremophile" not only endures at the bottom of the Mariana Trench or in the centre of a volcano, it also survives the "Nazi bonfires at the Opernplatz in Berlin" and the "hellish infernos at the Stadtbibliothek during the firebombing of Dresden" (2, 1). It is more than just immune to catastrophe – it thrives in disaster, feeds on waste, loves its own immolation. The poem, like its subject, is an orgy of extremism, vaulting ever higher into a practically religious ecstasy. If Olson was looking for a material with which to build his prosthesis, this is it. It cuts like a knife through inconceivably vast units of time. The fires of history only temper its edge. And, as Bök offers at the end of the poem, "it awaits your experiments" (7).

Deinococcus radiodurans doesn't grow on trees, however. Christian Bök has spent over a decade, and over a hundred thousand dollars – largely supplied by public arts granting programs – in his experiments with bacteria. Allen Ginsburg's poem calls for a new kind of poet, one suited to the space age, and, as it seems, to the fetishization of hard sciences under capitalism: "Scientist alone is true poet he gives us the moon / he promises the stars" (Ginsberg). In 2011 Bök announced a partial victory: he had succeeded in programming a poem into the cells of a microorganism. This microbe was

no extremophile, however, but pedestrian *E. coli*. He hadn't, and hasn't, yet found a way of writing his poem into the *Deinococcus* bacteria; this will likely take many more years, and many more tens of thousands of grant money, to accomplish. The announcement, made at the Birbeck Centre for Poetics on the fifth of May, 2011, was no less triumphant; and, as a published section of this speech shows, this triumph is a personal one:

The Xenotext is my nine-year long attempt to create an example of "living poetry." I have been striving to write a short verse about language and genetics, whereupon I use a "chemical alphabet" to translate this poem into a sequence of DNA for subsequent implantation into the genome of a bacterium [...] I am, in effect, engineering a life-form [...] ("Works")

While Christian Bök is no doubt conversant in genetic biology, he has had to rely on a team of scientists at the University of Calgary to do the laboratory work – a team that is systematically erased by his discussion of the project. I fed his press release into a text analysis program, which sorted and ordered the words by their frequency. The word that pops up most in Bök's announcement isn't *poem*; it isn't even *gene* or *bacterium*. It's *I*. *I* is the subject of all but one of the active verbs in the press release, regardless of the fact that the "Xenotext Experiment" is a collaborative project between Bök and a team of scientists. When the scientists are mentioned, their role is blunted by synecdoche:

The lab is now going to isolate the resulting protein in order to confirm that my molecule "Protein 13" has indeed folded according to my projections and simulations (but so far as we can tell, the poem is functioning without adverse effects upon the cells). ("Works")

They become, not co-inventors of this wondrous new organism, but furnishings; a necessary but non-influential mediator in the interaction between Bök and his extremophile. They are important, of course, he states; their work confirmed "my projections and simulations." These other researchers are mentioned twice in the report, and both times they are reduced by metonymy and made subservient to the "my" of Bök's agency – *my* being the second most frequently used word in Bök's report. *Our* is used once, and it is wedged between the assertions of the poet's ego and the *frisson* of scientific terminology. This project, one senses, is not about us. The "Xenotext Experiment" is grounded not in the universal, but the particular. Its variables assume,

almost require, our extinction. Its audience is not human, but an alien who will find the bacteria thriving on the post-apocalyptic earth, read the poem, and bring Bök back to life. If this is an archive, it is a latent one, and one that lacks the dispersion of Olson's many copies. For now, the microorganism "lives nowhere on Earth, except in one petri dish of agar agar, locked in a fridge at a Level-4 biocontainment facility" (7). And Christian Bök has the code to the door.

Who Gets to be Reproduced?

*he said we are fond of you
you are charming
but don't ask us
to look at your films
we cannot [...]
(I don't take the advice
of men who only talk to
themselves)*

Carolee Schneemann, "Interior Scroll"

I want to bring this chapter, and this project, to a close by questioning an assumption that underwrites much of the theory and practice of these writers and artists: when Bök, Ginsburg, Olson, or Rachmaninoff fire their respective rockets off into the stratosphere, they do so not as emissaries of our species, but representatives of a privileged, and disproportionately vocal, subset — those who have the keys to particular rooms.

Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" called for the primacy of the human body as source of poetic inspiration, but what bodies does this poetics deem worthy of exaltation? Andrew Mossin notes that central to Olson's emphasis on the centrality of the creating body is an equally strong emphasis of the *a priori* maleness of this creative body. Like Walt Whitman, Mossin writes, "whose emphasis on the male body as prima facie condition of writing Olson shared, one cannot easily stand outside the masculine context" — a context made unignorable, even unbearable, by the poet's constant equation of masculinity with a muscular, prevailing heroism not far from the rhetoric of Christian Bök's "Extremophile." The assumption for Olson and Whitman, and, as it seems, for Bök, is that the universal expression of humanity, the signal fit to send to the

stars, is masculine – male because masculine experience represents a directness, a concreteness, the ground of human experience that the feminine is built on and abstracted from. In this sense Olson wasn't simply for male creative expression – he was *against* female expression.

In the fall of 1960, painter and performance artist Carolee Schneemann sent a letter to Charles Olson in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The letter, co-authored by Schneemann's partner, James Tenney, expressed their wish to visit an admired poet and gain from him whatever knowledge he was willing to dispense. Written on a typewriter in the form of projective verse, the letter-poem reached out to Olson with humility and no small amount of flattery. It proposed a merging of two camps, the latter of which reads like a who's-who of late-twentieth century art and music – a role call, perhaps, even at the time, more culturally relevant and vital than Olson's crew of early-to-mid modernists: "Olson Creeley Duncan Williams Pound Stein . . . yours / and Ive Ruggles Varese Cage and / Pollock DeKooning Rauschenberg Oldenburg Brakhage . . . ours" (47).

The summit was approved, and Schneemann and Tenney made the long drive east from Illinois to Massachusetts. Olson was at first congenial and excited to have the interest of two young artists, but as Schneemann explained her own artistic ambitions, Olson seems to have soured:

And Olson had welcomed us. He was happy that we were there. We slept in what was the Tenney graveyard, near Gloucester. And walking with the great man he asked me what I did. And I said, "I'm a painter and I'm using dimensional elements and even movement and speech." And Olson, who was about 6' 6", hulking, shook his head, and said, "Well, you probably don't remember, but when the Greeks let the cunts begin to speak, theater was destroyed." And I thought, "Oh, this is something important." Amid all the other resistances, here's my cultural hero telling me again, "You can do whatever you imagine you should do, but don't expect us to respect it. And maybe, maybe you have to shut up." (Schneemann "Harvard")

Olson enjoyed his role of Maximus, strider of history who personally remembers the degradation of Greek drama; he has read, and he has conquered, and he bids you to be silent. Olson was used to silent women, having relied on them for sustenance – or, to use the term in its Marxist sense, *reproduction* – throughout his poetic and academic career: Constance working two jobs while her husband politicked in Washington, Betty supplying food and drink to colleagues who gabbed until midnight, both parables of the exploited, labour of women.¹¹ Olson, too, was used to his professorial authority as rector of Black Mountain College. Schneemann would prove steadfastly opposed to both of these tropes of male authority, as well as the entire notion of primal masculinity that Olson stood for.

Five years after her visit to Gloucester, Schneemann staged *Meat Joy*, a filmed dance that involved naked bodies, raw meat, and paint. This carnal riot was the first of many hyper-embodied Schneemann works, all of which strived to place the artist resolutely in the body. She was calling for, in painting and dance, what Olson's "Projective Verse" called for in poetry: a Dionysian, rather than Apollonian, art, one that let the contours and motions of the body in. Schneemann did not have very much luck getting her films and photographs, deemed vulgar or pornographic, into galleries. The "resistance" that she names in her interaction with Charles Olson was all-encompassing in the masculine art world that apotheosized Jackson Pollock. And the resistance of Charles Olson continued on from that October afternoon in 1960: in a late, untitled poem – the last in the anthology *Archaeologist of Morning* – Olson makes reference to an unnamed female artist who doesn't, in the end, seem that anonymous:

a lady
Poet who calls herself
an Artist: no cunt
is not free, my cunt
is not free, my poetry
is my cunt, you Dirty Man you
you won't let me have my cunt because
I am free, I am an Artist, I am the
Poetry (15-23)

¹¹ His fixation on the female reproductive organ as synecdoche for the whole belies much about the reproductive labour his wives undertook. As we'll see below, his linking of sexual appetites with gastronomic ones reduces women to either feeding him, or being fed to him.

The deeply misogynistic language of this poem, bursting with condescension for the woman who dares let her body speak, can't be dismissed merely as embarrassing late work. It was there all along. Andrew Mossin's analysis of the masculinist roots of Projective Verse begins with a poem penned six years before Olson's first publication: in 1940, the poet is chanting "fuck and bunt / cock and cunt," a violent exhibition of, as Mossin puts it, "manly display" and "sport jargon" (19). That a poetic career was founded on such language is only as mystifying as our willing naiveté allows; the literary establishment in which Olson thrived, just like the art culture in which Schneemann struggled, was one between men. "For women readers," Mossin notes, "Olson's posturing is perhaps harder to take than for certain male readers – who find in Olson's approach a singularly appropriate model of masculine bravado" (19). Olson learned much of this bravado at the desk of Hemingway, another irreducibly masculinist writer whose work presupposes the both maleness of its reader and the inferiority and childishness of women. The epigraph on the first page *Archeologist of Morning* clips a passage from an Olson poem that reads "you islands / of *men* and *girls*"; "A Lion Upon the Floor," read in my first chapter, asserts that one must merely "give a *girl* to each *man* / to bring him to his knees," and ends with a hyperphallic lion's lunge (25-6, emphasis mine). If Schneemann was to bring men to their knees, it was by other means.

Olson was afraid of what would happen once we "let the cunts begin to speak" ("Harvard"). He died before his ex-devotee could take him to task. In 1975, Carolee Schneemann performed *Interior Scroll*, a visceral work that saw her pulling a poem out of her body. Wound up in her pelvic cavity were fourteen stanzas that the artist proceeded to unspool, reading the text as it emerged, birthed, from the organ of reproduction. Photographic records of the performance show Schneemann, naked and elevated on the platform, singing the song of the body. And, in the archive, her body sings on, forever unsilent.

Endnote

The final days of writing this project led me one last time to the holdings of the Charles Olson archive lodged in the Special Collections at Simon Fraser, where, ostensibly, this whole endeavour started. It was this collection that set me onto Charles Olson, and Olson who, in turn, led me to Ralph Maud. Without the guidance of Maud I was unable to read much of Olson's handwritten notes on the *Maximus* galleys. His script is a sprawling one, often writ large on small sheets of paper. As I sat in the archives, copying down, or trying to copy down, Olson's writing, I understood anew why Olson's embodied poetics borrowed the typewriter. Handwritten script is marred beyond recognition by the body's presence. Cy Twombly's calligraphic line, writes Roland Barthes, "is inimitable," for "what is ultimately inimitable is the body; no discourse, whether verbal or plastic [...] can reduce one body to another" (170). But is language any more reducible, translatable, than the body? Olson never succeeded in having his *Maximus IV, V, VI* printed in Italian; Bök's poem-encrypted microbe, even were it to survive the apocalypse, would need to be accompanied by another microbe containing the encryption's legend, and so on ad infinitum.

Photography is forbidden in this archive; when I come upon words that I cannot read, I copy out the illegible script as meticulously as I can, in the hopes that later I will be able to decipher it. I am no graphologist – one of the tasks Maud passed onto me on a visit to his archive was to try to date a set of notes written by Olson; the assumption was that my capability with online research would have been of great use, but I couldn't get past the impenetrability of the handwriting. The hand-copied bits of Olson's galley notes in my notebook are still opaque to me, even after I put my hand through their movements. One leaves behind the notation of performance in the hopes that someone will come along who can perform it – somebody who has your dimensions, who can re-embody you. But do my attempts to mimic the contours of that body bring me, or him, any closer?

This morning, a fruitful – in any case, an agreeable – occupation: I very slowly look through a book of [Twombly's] reproductions, and I frequently stop in order to attempt, quite quickly, on slips of paper, to make certain scribbles; I am not directly imitating TW (what would be the use of that?), I am imitating his *gesture* [...] I am not copying the product, but the producing, I am putting myself, so to speak, *in the hand's footsteps*. (Barthes 171)

But the hand's footstep is not the hand itself. Our body cannot be perfectly reproduced by another, even if we were to find a ready participant who shared our exact dimensions – Olson in his reproductions of his poems varied widely between performances.

Embodiment, disembodiment, then reproduction, re-embodiment; this process requires a willing party on the receiving end, someone willing to put themselves "in the hand's," or in the whole body's, "footsteps." Olson found this, in part, in Maud, whose meticulous, even obsessive, archiving of his deceased friend and colleague manifested itself in a particular sort of room. I am growing familiar with these rooms, having dwelled in them over the writing of this work. In rooms like these, a body shimmers into being, is called, finds the materials of its life reorganized just so: the books arranged, the mechanism turned on, the code perfected; it appears, for an instant, for us. These are rooms such as the one in which I sat in the spring of last year, the bookshelves stocked with as many of the books that Olson had read in his life as Maud was able to track down in his. This room, this little archive, served as the entry point to many other similar rooms. It is, like that of Benjamin's collector, a room made of books. Along the desk, the row of binders, each representing a wedge of Olson's life, stand arrayed like a skeleton. It occurred to me then, though I did not have the nerve to say it, that if Olson fashioned himself an archaeologist of morning, Maud was supplying the tools for an archaeology of *mourning*.

It is possible that this archive will be soon installed in the house on Fort Square, Charles Olson's books – or at least, these simulacra of his books – returned at last to their home. In my first chapter Jacques Derrida called into our view the moment at which Freud's house is turned into a museum; in the future, perhaps, we can expect the same

of Olson's. Derrida's *Archive Fever* diagnosed, as well, a certain stacking of relationships between a scholar and his summoned subject of scholarship. For Derrida it was the mirrored evocations of Moses by Freud, and Freud by Yerulshami; for me, it seems fit that Charles Olson, who once tasked himself with the recreation of Herman Melville's library, should have his library in turn conjured up by Ralph Maud. And again, as, in my own personal efforts, my own archaeology of mourning, I try to recreate, albeit in air, that little archive on Maple Street that I last set foot in nearly a year ago.

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