

ecopoetics ↓

Essays in the Field

Edited by Angela Hume

and Gillian Osborne

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA PRESS,
IOWA CITY

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Visceral Eco-poetics in Charles Olson and Michael McClure

Proprioception, Biology, and the Writing Body

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Environmental writing today, between the abstractions of ecology it engages and its many experiential precipitates and barring some ecofeminist instances, can be as disembodied as Emerson's transparent eyeball. When not entirely scopic, the environmental body prefers phenomenological surfaces, an exchange at the skin that leaves the viscera untouched. The principal mode of environmental writing has been descriptive, where traces of the writing body are nearly always effaced, and where reading happens politely, in silence.

Yet the book that brought the word "ecology" into the mainstream, Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, focuses not so much on the environment, on nature or wilderness—even if ecologies of natural terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems play a strong role—but on the body, the cell, the viscera: "there is also an ecology of the world within our bodies. In this unseen world minute causes produce mighty effects," she writes.¹ In her study of the migration and induction of embryonic cells, Sandra Steingraber refers to the body itself as a "wetlands": "Organogenesis begins with three flat layers and, one week later, produces a

coiled, segmented object that looks like an architectural detail on the end of a stair banister. Three weeks and a few more folds later, a ‘grossly recognizable’ human being resides in the wetlands of the uterus.”² According to some of our most environmental texts, then, ecology and the environment begin with the body, at the depth of its viscera.

Ecology also can efface the body by withholding an observer from participation in the first-order systems of ecology. Able bodies that diagnose the health or imbalance of ecological systems rarely appear within those systems. Like their expressionist counterparts in the arts, certain of the New American poets wanted to return writing to the body for a more immediate access to its energies, whether they be libidinal, athletic, choreographed, dramatized, or even ventriloquized: the poem as direct extension or projection of energy. The following essay attempts to fill in some of the missing history of the development of ecopoetics by highlighting the relevance of projectivist process-based poetics, at the forefront of the New American Poetry, to poets seeking direct access to physiological energy in their writings to outline the basis of what might be called a visceral poetics.

Gary Snyder’s 1990 book of essays, *The Practice of the Wild*, may be the most influential title in the early development of ecopoetics. Yet eight years before, Michael McClure published *Scratching the Beat Surface*, a Gray Chair Charles Olson Memorial Lecture delivered at SUNY Buffalo in 1980 at the invitation of Robert Creeley. Whereas Snyder grounds his essays on environmental literary praxis in Poundian poetics, Asian sources, and the “deep image” school of ethnographic translation, McClure asks us to “step outside of the disaster that we have wreaked upon the environment and upon our phylogenetic selves” with findings based in fieldwork, biogenetics, and a thorough engagement with Olson’s so-called projective poetics.³

Part of tracing energy pathways between poetry and the body in what I am calling a visceral ecopoetics entails uncovering what has been an overlooked exchange between Michael McClure and Charles Olson. The collection of Olson texts gathered as *Proprioception*, rather than “Projective Verse,” sits at the heart of this exchange.⁴ Olson’s *Proprioception* informed ecopoetics-related practices by McClure and others but, as I suggest here, McClure’s early ecopoetics-related thinking and practices also influenced *Proprioception*. Thus this essay also recenters Olson’s work for our understanding of ecopoetics.

The “Beat surface” for McClure takes shape with the famous 1955 Six Gallery reading in San Francisco, where Allen Ginsberg, Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, and Philip Whalen read their poetry to an audience of about 150 Cold War refugees. McClure read biological poems that gesture toward a plant-based ecology, “the soul like a clambering / Water vascular system” (in “Point Lobos: Animism”), only to end with killer whales seen as “GIANT TADPOLES / (Meat their algae).”⁵ He notes, “I did not want to join Nature by my mind but by my viscera.”⁶ He also describes how Antonin Artaud’s poetry, via Philip Lamantia, offered “a way into the open field of poetry and into the open shape of verse and into the physicality of thought.”⁷ These poems already deploy McClure’s trademark centered lineation—a shape that, he suggests, resonated with scientists James Watson and Francis Crick’s work developing the double-helix model of DNA structure, well before it entered popular culture: “There was a surprising broadening of the field into substrates that were not earlier imagined to be there for the viable creation of poetry, and, strangely enough, into areas that did not seem to exist before poems were written about them. The poems defined new areas.”⁸ Although McClure was already shaping his poetry in relation to science, in a 1971 interview with David Meltzer he notes that he was not yet using the term “ecology”: “I met Sterling Bunnell in 1957 and before that I thought in terms of biology or natural history or physiology or morphology. Sterling introduced the concept of ecology to me.”⁹

McClure’s Six Gallery set emphasizes predatory behavior. In “Point Lobos: Animism,” he writes, “It is possible my friend, / If I have had a fat belly / That the wolf lives on fat”; and “Poem” notes, “The smell of the hunt’s / A stench”; while “For the Death of 100 Whales” depicts a massacre of “sleek wolves / Mowers and reapers of sea kine.”¹⁰ In an eversion of the garden, nonhuman animals enact human agricultural exploitation. The poem, alluding to D. H. Lawrence’s “Whales Weep Not,” cancels Lawrentian immanence: “Oh Lawrence / No angels dance on those bridges. . . . / No passages or crossings / From the beasts’ wet shore.”¹¹ The sentiment seems straight from Robinson Jeffers. Artaud’s “open shape” is ambivalent here—McClure will take to theater for a less inhibited “physicality of thought.”¹² But not without first consulting a powerful plant ally.

Scratching the Beat Surface opens with an account of McClure's first ingestion of peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) in 1958, thanks to a gift from artist Wallace Berman, his "peyote father." It also includes a section of his "Peyote Poem" (published first as a broadside issue of Berman's assemblage magazine *Semina*): "My belly and I are two individuals / joined together / in life." The poem continues, "THIS IS THE POWERFUL KNOWLEDGE / we smile with it."¹³ McClure notes how Francis Crick, who purchased the broadside at City Lights Books, used the above two lines as the epigraph to his 1966 book, *Of Molecules and Men*.¹⁴ For McClure, whose childhood career fantasy was that of naturalist, Crick's shout-out affirmed his own early interest in biology and his sense that Beat literature was marked by a "reaching out from science to poetry and from poetry to science."¹⁵ McClure's own work explores and reveals unexpected alignments and tensions between poetic and scientific inquiry.

Toward the end of the first part of *Scratching the Beat Surface*, McClure includes a letter he wrote to Charles Olson "in 1957 or 1958," curious about the latter's mention of the "peyote bean" in *The Maximus Poems* (in "The Song and Dance of"). In the letter, he responds to Olson's sense of animal individuality as set forth in the essay "Human Universe" and describes his own experience of the peyote high: "I have taken Peyote now and your Human Universe is more true. . . . Peyote puts you back within your own skin into the Human Universe. Into your own personal, animal, individual universe. And you look out into the physical universe and see it as only the physical universe."¹⁶ McClure's obsession with physicalism—"The room is empty of all but visible things. / THERE ARE NO CATEGORIES OR JUSTIFICATIONS!"—would resonate with the Olson who would seek to restore soul to a depth poetics of literal physical being and its "morphological elements" (or Jungian archetypes) located as physical organs: "The 'soul' then is equally 'physical.' Is the self. Is such, 'corpus.'"¹⁷

Olson would go on to experiment with hallucinogens himself, sampling psilocybin with Timothy Leary in December 1960 and February 1961.¹⁸ McClure's letter foreshadows Olson's own lesson from the psilocybin mushroom, as recounted in *Muthologos* and in his cryptic deathbed text, "The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum," that it "makes you exactly what you are" and "that which exists through itself / is what is called Meaning."¹⁹ For McClure, however, the peyote-induced conviction that "meat, spirit, and *gene* are one and there is no time or size," when

combined with unguided yogic kundalini exercises and Reichian orgone therapy, led (as he phrases it in his “fuck manifesto,” “Phi Upsilon Kappa”) to a “dark night of the soul.”²⁰ “I was overwhelmed by the sense of animism,” he writes, “and how everything (breath, spot, rock, ripple in the tidepool, cloud, and stone) was alive and spirited. It was a frightening and joyous awareness of my undersoul. I say *undersoul* because I did not want to join Nature by my mind but by my viscera—my belly. The German language has two words, *Geist* for the soul of man and *Odem* for the spirit of beasts. *Odem* is the undersoul. I was becoming sharply aware of it.”²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre details a similar experience in his novel *Nausea*, a crisis-inducing wave of animism, among other unpleasant psychic states, following an injection of mescaline he received in 1935.²²

In his quest for the spirit of beasts, McClure encountered “a fear that arose when I saw light radiating from the inorganic universe—the light that gleams from a plaster wall, or a brick, or chair, or old stool of dark wood. Constantly I saw all lights that flare and glisten stilly from objects.” The mute nausea of this “light-from-objects” along with the “knowledge that we have no minds and are only spiritmeat,” led to paralysis and a final epiphany: “I saw my soul and found that I lived once before and that I had been a killer whale. I have had but one life before. At the end of this one I shall be free of the chain of meat.”²³ The word “meat” first appears in the texts working through this crisis, the 1961 poem sequence “Dark Brown” and the essays such as “Revolt” and “Phi Upsilon Kappa” that would be published as *Meat Science*, with the disavowal, “I no longer believe these things as I say them here.”²⁴ While McClure never moves far from the “religious experience” he cites in his introduction to the first edition of *Ghost Tantras*, “meat science” is both a further step toward science (biology, ecology, cybernetics) and an opening to the process-based thinking at work, via Alfred North Whitehead, in the writings of Charles Olson.²⁵

F E E D B A C K

McClure’s correspondence with Olson, in which he developed his own response to Olson’s influential “Projective Verse” and associated poems such as “The Kingfishers,” occurred at the same time that he was writing the texts of poetic revolt

for which he would be better known. Noting his difficulty with the word “form” in Robert Creeley’s maxim that “form is never more than an extension of content,” he confronted a “writhing multidimensionality of thought” as he studied and wrote his way through Olson’s poetry: “a poem grew in my notebooks . . . a line would occur—I’d try it with other lines—more would accrue to it. . . . At the end, rather than a tortured and studied poem, it felt like my most sudden thought.”²⁶ Elsewhere he describes this method, discovered while writing the poem “Rant Block,” as “alluvials,” something he had picked up from Jack Kerouac’s “spontaneous bop prosody”: whenever you get stuck, you reread your draft from the top down and write the first line that comes into your head as you reach the end.²⁷

WILD ANGER MORE THAN CULTIVATED LOVE!

Wolf and salmon shapes free to kill
for food love and hatred.

Life twists its head *from side to side* to test
the elements and seek
for breath and meat to feed on.

I AM A FIRE AND I MOVE IN AN INFERNO

sick I smolder
and do not burn clear.²⁸

Unlike the projective poetry line that comes “from the breath,” McClure’s lines suck breath into their twisting vortices (“swirls,” as he likes to call them) of exclamation, observation, invocation, assertion, confession.²⁹ The poems hunger for breath as they chastise, challenge, goad, and question their own vitality. The opening and closing stanzas of “Rant Block” include the lines:

THERE IS NO FORM BUT SHAPE! NO LOGIC BUT SEQUENCE!

SHAPE the cloak and being of love, desire, hatred,
hunger. . . .

.....

These are the dull words from an animal of real flesh. Why?
Where is the fire in them?

Never let them stop until they are
moving things. Until
they stir the fire!³⁰

Revising Robert Creeley's form as "extension of content" dictum, McClure suggests that shape is the process of finding stability in an accretive, line-by-line composition, one that does not take top-down instructions but locates its organism via energy pathways in a recursive process of deep listening.³¹ In this way, the poem's growth and morphology resemble Goethe's "The Metamorphosis of Animals" (as described in an epigraph to one section of *Scratching the Beat Surface*): "the animal's shape is determined by its way of life, and the way of life, in its turn, exerts in all cases a powerful influence upon the shape."³² The energy invoked in Olson's "Projective Verse" is reactivated at every break and line, drawn in as core impulse, moving the poem down and up its central column.

Stability comes from "obsessive complication of meanings"—as in Olson's *Maximus Poems*, where George Butterick's "semistochastic, monumental collage" of the last volume was possible only, according to McClure, due to the stability of Olson's "systemless system": "It is not a bouncing, wild-eyed jitterbug full of undirectable, diffuse energy that writes the projective poem. The projective poem must come from a powerful, complex, informed—ultimately stable substrate; from a mind/body in physiological training, in resonance with an evolving systemless system."³³ The poetics of "Rant Block" are very much those pursued in Olson's landmark "The Kingfishers" (which *Scratching the Beat Surface* reprints in full): "On these rejectamenta [bones thrown up in pellets by the birds] / (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."³⁴ Waste feeds life, creating more waste, and so on. While Olson emphasizes change more than stability ("not accumulation but change"), McClure emphasizes the "systemless" nature of the system; it does not necessarily advance according to ecological truisms such as balance or recycling.³⁵ This emphasis can be read as a nod to the reflexivity of second-order cybernetics, embedding the observer in the system observed, which is partially constituted by the observer's own blind spots. Ecology had made the move to complex systems by midcentury, while literary ecology has

until recently remained fixated on the first-order model of self-contained ecosystems.³⁶ Eco-poetics is still catching up with what McClure proposed more than three decades ago and, by extension, with what Olson enacted two decades before that.

What both McClure and Olson share is the emphasis on building energy loops through feedback, a concept from cybernetics (“the feed-back proves, the feed-back is / the law”). From this process comes what systems theorists might call the “emergent order” of an “action poem,” one that McClure compares to Clyfford Still’s gestural canvases or Jackson Pollock’s action paintings.³⁷ He goes so far as to suggest that his poem “could even become a living bio-alchemical organism”: “I believed that Rant Block began to tug and pull and move like an organism—that like a wolf or salmon it could turn its head from side to side to test the elements and seek for breath.”³⁸ McClure’s simile belies the extent to which his pursuit of balance assembles a becoming-animal located in affect rather than semblance, an emphasis more fully explored in the beast language of *Ghost Tantras*.

Acting on his conviction that “poetry was about, by, and from, the meat, that poetry was the product of flesh brushing itself against experience,” McClure writes Olson another letter, objecting to what he calls the “anagogic” in Olson’s poetics: “I distinguish between an enacted tradition (mantic), and a concept (anagogic); the anagogic denies the objects of surroundings and intends to lead out to beauty that does not exist. . . . Not mimicry, but each writing a morphological existence independent except of myself. I do not duplicate the outside world but match my desires against it from my body.”³⁹ McClure’s experience of primal immanence grounds poetics for him, rather, in sensual perception and an affective response (working from “pre-anagogic desire centers” or from what he will call “meat”), so that “the field on which poetry grows is the *feeled* . . . the felt. The *veldt*.”⁴⁰ His pursuit of the “undersoul” or “the spirit of beasts” leads him toward something more like the sense of affect as assemblage explored in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “Becoming-Animal.”⁴¹

McClure’s own sense of field is anything but immanent. Just as he considers Snyder, Duncan, and Ginsberg to be workers in fields (of Zen, pedagogy, and consciousness), his own “Rant Block” “went through the crust of the verbal universe for a sea lion swim in the world of physiology. . . . Rant Block was floating on the field of studies. It came from field work.”⁴² Some of this fieldwork is in natural history,

some in states of consciousness. From Ginsberg's "Howl" to Olson's *Proprioception* to McClure's beast language, a changed consciousness convulses writing practices from 1955 to 1961. If, as I am suggesting, an eco-poetics emerges directly from McClure's engagement with Olson's process-based composition by field, one that finds guidance from theories at the nexus of the developing biological sciences of the cell and genetics—general systems theory, thermodynamics, and information theory—rather than from tropes based on closed ecosystems, it should be noted that a plant ally catalyzes this "powerful knowledge." Logocentric poetics cannot account for the visceral assemblage (more "gastric" than "gnostic," according to Ralph Maud) of belly and consciousness forged by the ingestion of a psychoactive plant.⁴³ The undersoul at work here may be more plant than beast. That said, the work of historicizing and detailing the role of plant allies in the emergence of eco-poetics, integral to a posthumanist history of visceral poetics, lies beyond the scope of this essay.⁴⁴

PROPRIOCEPTION: PLACING LOGOGRAPHY

McClure wrote Olson nearly twenty letters between 1957 and 1960. In November 1959, along with Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Donald Allen, and Philip Whalen, he paid a visit to Olson in Gloucester. Olson treated the group to a tour of Dogtown, prompting an on-site version of the tale of "Merry and the bull" and his composition of the first, breakthrough "Maximus from Dogtown" poems following his guests' departure.⁴⁵ "Maximus from Dogtown—II," written two weeks later, represents a notable break in style. These poems helped launch a turn in Olson's work ("turn yr Back on / the Sea, go inland, to / Dogtown"), a search for a new center visually invoked in his spiraling "Rose of the World" poem.⁴⁶ Olson would spend the next three years literally pacing the ground of Dogtown, a terminal moraine that was the site of what he surmised was an experiment in community ended by the American Revolution.⁴⁷ In the 1962 verse essay "Place; & Names," he makes it clear that this site is coterminous with the body itself: "the crucialness being that these places or names / be as parts of the body, common, & capable / therefore of having cells, which can decant / total experience."⁴⁸ In his 1963 "Under the Mushroom" discussion, he clarifies what he means by cells decanting "total experience": "what

seems to happen, for example, with the hallucinogens: they go directly to the cells involved. . . . there's a physiological unit in the cell similar or parallel to adrenaline, which . . . comes alive, light goes on and it comes out or it gets affected. And the cell then suddenly is both receiving and transmitting."⁴⁹ The mushroom experience confirmed the proprioceptive philosophy of immediacy, if not immanence, that Olson sought to articulate as early as 1959.⁵⁰ Without going so far as to proclaim unity of word and sense (pictographic or otherwise), he would have words speak directly to and from the body.⁵¹

If there is a strange attractor to identify, a kernel to this emergent eco-poetics, it would have to be the *Floating Bear* pamphlets issued by Leroi Jones, with the help of various collaborators (including his wife at the time, Hettie Jones), between 1960 and 1962.⁵² Jones's magazine *Yugen* and the better-funded magazine *Kulchur* also played a role. In those years, following the 1959 reissue of "Projective Verse" from Jones's Totem Press, *Kulchur* and *Floating Bear* put out, in installments, Olson's *Proprioception* writings and provided a forum for McClure's developing theater practice: *!The Feast!*—his first play and extended exploration of beast language performed in 1960—was published as a *Floating Bear* pamphlet in 1961. *Kulchur* also ran McClure's "sexual ode," "Dark Brown," in 1961 and his fuck manifesto, "Phi Upsilon Kappa," in its Winter 1962 issue.⁵³ McClure's "The Chamber" and Olson's "The Librarian" shared the pages of the same 1959 issue of *Yugen*. All this activity would cement, however incoherently at the time, a proprioceptive (visceral, embodied) eco-poetics to provoke and help McClure theorize the beast language that would dominate his writing and performances for the better part of a decade.

Jones's 1959 reissue of "Projective Verse" appended a recent "Letter to Elaine Feinstein," in which Olson proposes a scheme that would also govern the last decade of his poetics: "The basic trio wd seem to be: topos/typos/tropos, 3 in 1. The 'blow' hits here, and me, 'bent' as born and of sd one's own decisions for better or worse."⁵⁴ The penultimate deathbed poem of *The Maximus Poems*, as edited posthumously by George Butterick, restates this trio as:

the Blow is Creation
& the Twist the Nasturtium
is any one of Ourselves

And the Place of it All?

Mother Earth Alone⁵⁵

Over the next decade, Olson will reforge topos/typos/tropos in the crucible of proprioception to relocate theme (*topos*) as placement in the cavity of the body, concept (*typos*) as working with one's given bent, the disposition of one's organs, and metaphor (*tropos*) as twisting of phrases and imagery through visceral engagement with language. In *Proprioception*, he directs us to "the cavity of the body, in which the organs are slung," to "place" the unconscious.⁵⁶

The "Mother Earth Alone" of "the Place of it All" is less deep ecological fantasy of union with a primordial earth mother (Earth Day would not be founded for another four months, in the spring following Olson's death) than it is an appeal to the unknown of "self's insides," to the dark condition of self as "an impediment of creation"⁵⁷—what in *Proprioception* he calls "the intervening thing, the interruptor, the resistor."⁵⁸ Rather, the emerging eco-poetics of *The Maximus Poems*, as explored in *Proprioception* and enacted in the Dogtown poems, places what Olson calls logography with physical ritual, guided by an extension of writing into mapping, pursuing energy pathways back to the body. For McClure, impediment enables creation; with beast language, he attempts to connect to an environment (the field) precisely where the body interrupts.

BEAST LANGUAGE

Emerging from his own "dark night of the soul," McClure also wrote from darkness of self but differed in his vector of attention: "The use of writing is not to lead out but to enact and create appendages of the body, of personal physiology. Making a radiance or darkness into an actual morphological part, an extension even."⁵⁹ The poem is not a negotiation of physiology, not a placing of psychic energies, but is itself physiological, an appendage of the body. The most direct expression of this "gestural biography," McClure's beast language, including the ninety-nine poems of *Ghost Tantras*, emerged from this period.⁶⁰ "SILENCE THE EYES! BECALM THE SENSES!" begins *Ghost Tantra 49*—made famous in 1964 when McClure roared it to lions at the San Francisco Zoo—commanding an ascetic (or religious) turn inward.⁶¹

McClure works with a proprioceptive concept of image, of image as muscular activity, if not cellular in the sense of Olson’s cells decanting “total experience”: “I wanted to make poetry that didn’t have images in the sense that Shelley calls mimetic images, where the image describes something in the real world, but in the sense where the sound of the poetry itself creates an image in the mind, in the body, in the muscles in the body, and it created a melody that was also an image that imprinted itself in the body physically.”⁶² McClure’s poetry is rooted in “muscular music coming from the body and organs.”⁶³ In *Rare Angel*, “THOUGHT / is / a / muscular / sensation / pouring outward like / pseudopods with feathered hoofs.”⁶⁴ While most of the Ghost Tantras are almost entirely beast language, some also thematize the emergence of human from beast language that they enact, like the stanza halfway through the sequence that McClure highlights in his introduction: “Look at stanza 51. It begins in English and turns into beast language—star becomes stahr. Body becomes boody. Nose becomes noze.”⁶⁵

51

I LOVE TO THINK OF THE RED PURPLE ROSE
IN THE DARKNESS COOLED BY THE NIGHT.

We are served by machines making satins
of sounds.

Each blot of sound is a bud or a stahr.

Body eats bouquets of the ear’s vista.

Gahhhrrr boody eers noze eyes deem thou.

NOH. NAH-OHH

hrooor. VOOOR-NAH! GAHROOOOO ME.

Nah drooooooh seerch. NAH THEE!

The machines are too dull when we
are lion-poems that move & breathe.

WHAN WE GROOOOOOOOOOOOOOR

hann dree myketoth sharoo sreee thah noh deeeeeemed ez.

Whan eeethoooze hroh. ⁶⁶

Ghost Tantra 51 digs below machinery (of language and senses) for the moving, breathing, cooling “RED PURPLE ROSE,” addressed at the outset by an impulse to thought, invoked in a synesthetic blend of sound and vision (“ear’s vista”), shading to a phonetic transcription of meaning (“eers noze eyes”), and finally eaten up by sounds (“body eats bouquets”) of negation, expression, and desire with sighs, invocations, lingering strings of letters inviting “individual pronunciations and vibrations”—moving, breathing “lion-poems” whose all-caps “GROOOOOOOOOOOOOOR” would pierce the dull machinery of language.⁶⁷ “To dim the senses and to listen to inner energies a-roar is sometimes called the religious experience,” McClure writes in his introduction to the first edition of *Ghost Tantras*. The turn inward is also a turn toward the viscera and cells of the poet’s own body.

In his introduction to *Ghost Tantras*, McClure says that the poems “come from a swirling ball of silence that melds with outer sounds and thought.”⁶⁸ He discovered this “ball of silence” in the course of self-directed kundalini yoga exercises. Like Snyder’s work, McClure’s beast language poems look to the East, to Asian spiritual practices, and thus away from a European tradition of sound poetry.⁶⁹ In the documentary film *Rebel Roar*, he amplifies, “I discovered a ball of silence within myself. And in that ball of silence were roars, and human vocalizations and noises.” Later on in the same film, he notes that the rudiments of the beast language existed in his 1960 play *!The Feast!* The play enacts his search for the “mammal-personal,” as invoked in Hart Crane’s “A Name for All,” a poem McClure prints in *Scratching the Beat Surface*:

I dreamed that all men dropped their names, and sang
As only they can praise, who build their days
With fin and hoof, with wing and sweetened fang
Struck free and holy in one Name always.⁷⁰

!The Feast! processes the same “dark night of the soul” recounted in the fuck manifesto of *Meat Science*, a response to McClure’s animist vision of life moving through a “chain of meat”—a monist vision in tension with his postpeyote identification with Olson’s admission in “Human Universe” that “the individual who peers out from that flesh is precisely himself, is a curious wandering animal like me.”⁷¹

ORGANISM

McClure's and Olson's desire for a kind of universal individual presents a limit state for the New American (and abstract expressionist) gestural poetics. McClure later restates his emphasis on the "biological self" and on his sense "THAT POLITICS IS DEAD / and / BIOLOGY / IS HERE!" and his call to "come out of the closet— / OUT OF THE CLOSET OF POLITICS / and into the light of . . . flesh and bodies!"⁷² Both stances are equally problematic: Olson's in regard to the objectification of Mayan "flesh," McClure's in regard to the ideology of a science that transcends politics. But in McClure's version, "flesh and bodies" have become "light" rather than "darkness."⁷³ What has intervened is his turn toward biology and the information of systems thinking and its offshoot, the ecological sciences: "NOW / is / THE TIME / to learn to see / with the systemless system."⁷⁴ This essay has focused on the exchange between Olson and McClure to outline the emergence of a visceral poetics around 1960, arguably a point of emergence for eco-poetics. While McClure's poetics is ecological in its focus, it is not necessarily social; a properly social theory of the viscera remains to be articulated.⁷⁵

The period of McClure's *Ghost Tantras*, 1964, would overlap with the emergence of "ecology" as a mainstream cultural term and an explicit concept for poetics, a term associated most visibly with the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.⁷⁶ While Snyder, off in Japan studying Buddhism, would by 1967 take up the ethical and moral dimensions of ecology in "Poetry and the Primitive," as early as 1960 McClure was turning to Olson as a way to theorize his poetics of meat and "muscular music."⁷⁷ The proprioceptive *Floating Bear* nexus would energize his nascent eco-poetics and prepare it for the concepts that ecological science brought him in the early 1970s.

Scratching the Beat Surface outlines McClure's turn from proprioception to cybernetics. He notes how Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues* makes the poem a "channel for great energy. . . . The energy moving through the systemless system [acting] to organize the system with its own self-invented rules. . . . a much more stable system than sheer, shapeless automatic writing."⁷⁸ McClure's paraphrase of the systems-based understanding of the organic runs as follows: "the organism is, in itself, a tissue or veil between itself and the environment—it is also simultaneously

the environment itself. The organism is what Whitehead and Olson would think of as a point of novelty comprehending itself or experiencing itself both proprioceptively and at its tissue's edges and at any of its conceivable surfaces. There is, in fact, a central force in the organism and it IS the environment."⁷⁹ Biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela call this adaptive relationship between organism and environment autopoiesis and emphasize the importance of "operational closure" for the autonomy of the organism: organisms are "closed and self-referential in terms of what constitutes their specific mode of existence, even as they are open to the environment on the level of their material structure."⁸⁰

It is the very closure ("the veil") of the organism that enables it to multiply points of contact with its environment and to alter its own structural states. In other words, it is only through our disconnection that we are connected to the environment. In response to Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous observation, "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him," the systems theorist notes that it is precisely the muteness of the beast and the human inability to understand the talk of the lion that make communication not only possible but necessary.⁸¹ Most relevant to McClure's gestural poetics is systems theory's break with the representational model. His reading of *Ghost Tantra* 49 to caged lions at the San Francisco Zoo, as captured on film by Bruce Conner, offers a case study for the darkness at the heart of cross-species communication—in terms of both meaning and cross-species inequality.⁸²

McClure proposes an organic poetry, but one in tune with the emerging life sciences, focused at the time on cellular biology, that in their embrace of radical contingency dispense with the continuity and physical unity implied by "form" as "extension of content."⁸³ Rather, biologist Ramón Margalef's cybernetic exploration of boundaries between systems, boundaries that can be arbitrarily drawn, "frees us from the need to define ecosystems that are more or less closed."⁸⁴ For McClure, ecopoetics does not begin with an idealized picture of nature but with affective work at the boundary that the poem itself declares. Here is a section of a poem from the 1975 sequence, *Rare Angel*.

RAVEN'S FEATHER, EAGLE'S CLAW, EVERY
SONG EVER CHANTED
by the whale hunter

is a collector's item
and wafts like mountain fog
from node to node before becoming clouds.

EVERY

BACKWARD

LOOK

puts us in touch with sentiment,
and hurts less than peering forward,
for tomorrow is the shadow of today.

Even the blue jay
gloats over his stash
of brass buttons. See the octopus play
with the exoskeleton
of his prey.⁸⁵

Practically an *ars poetica*, this is a poem about energy. The sequence talisman, song, predation, collection, evapotranspiration links multiple systems. Hunting humans leave talismans and songs; the atmosphere collects these songs. Song hunts energy, and human culture is enmeshed in fog and flesh. The second sentence of the poem reverses temporality, as the footprint of present human culture, set on the future, appears in the emerging light of the Anthropocene. What we do now sets its footprint on the future. Is the affective play of song, the poem seems to ask, on the side of sentiment or of hard peering forward? Can song be as negentropic as bodies? The attempt to answer entangles one in the paradoxes of thermodynamics: is entropy undergone or produced? It's impossible to tell at the boundary. The poem sings ambivalence with visceral affirmation.

McClure's is a poetry of paradox and uncertainties, in the sense in which quantum physics makes uncertainty integral to knowledge, and in which it differs markedly from the certainties (if not pieties) by which science is known in so much of the work that has come to characterize ecopoetics: "so that it may accommodate," as he puts it in *Scratching the Beat Surface*, "both Negative Capability and agnosia—knowing through not knowing."⁸⁶ For McClure, ecopoetics does not begin with a known fact (such as anthropogenic climate change) but with felt "primate nature"—with a love

of killing big animals, the desire behind what he calls the slow-motion explosion of ecological catastrophe. “If we acknowledge that this is our nature,” he asks in an interview printed in *Three Poems*, “what other possibilities does our nature have? What else could we do that is natural?”⁸⁷ Possibility does not emerge through a positive knowing so much as through a communication of felt ignorance. McClure might be reaching toward the kind of ecological communication that sociologist Niklas Luhmann calls “shared knowledge of ignorance”—social networks linked in the blind spots our seeing constitutes.⁸⁸

For McClure, understanding the ecosystem as a cybernetic system (ecologist Ramón Margalef’s phrase) lays bare the structural basis both of predation and of the ecological concept of trophic levels in the food chain. According to a passage he quotes from Margalef, in *Scratching the Beat Surface*, “any exchange between two systems of different information content does not result in a partition or equalizing of the information, but increases the difference. The system with more accumulated information becomes still richer from the exchange.”⁸⁹ This kind of exchange that “increases to a greater extent the information of the party already better informed” is negentropic, the opposite of the process of cultural disintegration that Claude Lévi-Strauss proposes (in his punning entropology), where, as he puts it at the end of *Tristes Tropiques*, “Every verbal exchange, every line printed, establishes communication between people, thus creating an evenness of level, where before there was an information gap and consequently a greater degree of organization.”⁹⁰ For Lévi-Strauss, there is no assumed hierarchy of information—it is the gaps between cultural systems that shore up their organization. For McClure, whose focus is on biology rather than culture, mammals are the most stable, highly ordered organism, a form of life whose predatory ecology must be embraced rather than ignored: “Meat is the only known negentropic system.”⁹¹ Ignoring such ecology is the most dangerous thing we can do, he suggests.

In an interview with Harald Mesch, McClure discusses “being on the edge of the explosion” of the ecological catastrophe: “We’re looking at an explosion happening in slow motion.” Nevertheless, “it is our primate nature to enjoy what we’re doing.”⁹² McClure’s poem “Written after Finding a Dolphin Skull on the Gulf of California” works hard at this self-realization, turning a kind of memento mori into what he calls a remembrance of life. Here is the first section of the poem:

YEAH, OR MAYBE LIVE IN FANTASIES / WITHIN A DOLPHIN'S SKULL!

I

can

hold

it in my hand!

I can look in through
the foramen magnum. SEE
the huge chamber where
the lovely creature lived
(in part at least—where
information organized).

SEE THE BLOWHOLES WHERE THE BREATH

passed through and made
a faint cloud above warm / waves.

OR

IT

IS

POSSIBLE

to

cast

around

the Pleistocene

and see real mammal creatures
in the last nooks and crannies. THE EXPLOSION
IS ALREADY HAPPENING! WE ARE IN THE MIDDLE

of it! It is different! It is not a flare
of three seconds that envelops all
and leaves cinders. It expands
exponentially—in the use
of energy. And we / can't see it. BUT

LIFE

IS

BEING ROLLED

BACK WITH A ROAR
and it is best to think the war
IS LOST
and we are survivors
of the Future.⁹³

The poem thematizes more than it enacts entropology, a contemplation of materials in process over time. Nevertheless, its prosody is not contemplative but enactivist. Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela frame enactivist poetics in terms of “the need for a nonrepresentationist view of knowledge based on the sense-making capacity of an autonomous living system.”⁹⁴ Such poetics reaches for a materialism not focused exclusively on the entropic side of the energy exchange, not limited to what I have elsewhere described as entropology.⁹⁵ McClure’s affirmation of human (mammal) biology calls for a more comprehensive embrace of thermodynamics than the study of disintegrating frameworks can account for. This includes a consideration of negentropy, of what Alfred North Whitehead calls a “mysterious impulse” in biological matter for “its energy to run upwards.”⁹⁶ If entropology represents poetry’s closest dealing with matter approached objectively, from without, visceral poetics aims to activate matter from within: in the title sequence from *Rare Angel*, “power remains / in the frame / of new shapes.”⁹⁷ McClure turns proprioception toward genetics as his version of the *typos* that for Olson hearkened back to Jung—the powerful knowledge of molecular biology being for McClure a negentropic approach to typology.

“Written after Finding a Dolphin Skull on the Gulf of California” moves through the double temporality of the Anthropocene, caught between the instantaneous flash of the atom bomb and the less visible burn of an exponentially expanding human population: “It is not a flare / in three seconds that envelops all / and leaves cinders.”⁹⁸ At the same time, the poem exploits the very limitations of human imagination to solicit imagination of disaster: the posthuman thought that the world has “already ended” casts attention on an untimely moment. Can we, “lit,” as the last line of the poem puts it, “like flying turquoises driving through the flesh of time,” kill the future that is now our shadow awaiting us?⁹⁹ Such a throw requires visceral force.

to apprehension.”

56. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 239.

57. Oppen, *Selected Prose*, 136.

58. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 64.

59. *Ibid.*, 71.

60. *Ibid.*, 138.

3. VISCERAL ECOPOETICS IN CHARLES OLSON AND MICHAEL MCCLURE

1. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 189.

2. Sandra Steingraber, *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books, 2001), 15.

3. Michael McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), 21.

4. Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 179–199.

5. Michael McClure, *Of Indigo and Saffron: New and Selected Poems*, ed. Leslie Scalapino (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 29, 31.

6. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 26.

7. *Ibid.*, 24.

8. *Ibid.*, 43.

9. David Meltzer, ed., *San Francisco Beat: Talking with the Poets* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 158.

10. McClure, *Of Indigo and Saffron*, 28–31.

11. *Ibid.*, 32.

12. Douglas Kahn, “Cruelty and the Beast: Antonin Artaud and Michael McClure,” in his *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 322–358.

13. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 10.

14. Francis Crick would contribute to “Symposium on Michael McClure,” ed. John Jacob, *Margins* 18, no. 3 (1975): n.p.

15. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 11.
16. *Ibid.*, 97.
17. McClure, *Of Indigo and Saffron*, 44; Olson, *Collected Prose*, 182.
18. Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 292–294.
19. Charles Olson, “Under the Mushroom,” in *Muthologos: Lectures and Interviews*, ed. Ralph Maud (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2010), 88. See also Olson’s “Black Chrysanthemum” dream of June 17, 1958: “nothing is anything but itself / measured so.” Charles Stein, *The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1987), 167–169.
20. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman, eds., *The Poetics of the New American Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1973), 416–417.
21. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 26.
22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1938), 224–225.
23. Allen and Tallman, eds., *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, 416–417.
24. *Ibid.*, 417.
25. Michael McClure, *Ghost Tantras* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2013), n.p.
26. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 85.
27. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956), 3; and Jack Kerouac, in Allen and Tallman, eds., *The New American Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 414.
28. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 86.
29. Olson, *Collected Prose*, 242.
30. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 86, 88.
31. Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, *The Complete Correspondence*, vol. 1, ed. George F. Butterick (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), 79.
32. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 41.
33. *Ibid.*, 95–96.
34. *Ibid.*, 59.
35. *Ibid.*, 61.
36. See Michael G. Barbour, “Ecological Fragmentation in the Fifties,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New

York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 233–255. See also Bruce Clarke, “From Thermodynamics to Virtuality,” in *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 17–33.

37. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 91.

38. *Ibid.*, 89.

39. *Ibid.*, 100–102.

40. *Ibid.*, 45.

41. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 259.

42. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 96.

43. Ralph Maud, *Charles Olson’s Reading: A Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 158.

44. See Richard M. Doyle, *Darwin’s Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noosphere* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

45. Clark, *Allegory of a Poet’s Life*, 278–279.

46. Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, ed. George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 179, 479, 565.

47. Maud, *Muthologos*, 217.

48. Olson, *Collected Prose*, 200.

49. Maud, *Muthologos*, 90.

50. Ralph Maud notes that the *Proprioception* essays “were written between October 1959 and May 1962, and thus span the mushroom experience.” See his *Charles Olson’s Reading*, 161.

51. “Proprioception” is first recorded in the 1906 scientific work of physiologist Sir Charles Scott Sherrington, *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*, designating the perception of the position and movements of the body, the action of “proprioceptors”: “A sensory receptor which responds to stimuli arising within the body, esp. from muscle or nerve tissue,” from classical Latin *proprius*, “proper,” + “-ceptor,” “forming nouns denoting cellular receptors of the nature or for the type of substance specified by the first element.” Sherrington differentiates proprioception from exteroception (associated with the external senses)

and interoception (associated with the internal organs or viscera). See Eireene Nealand, “Beyond the Perceptual Model: Toward a Proprioceptive Poetics,” PhD dissertation, University of Santa Cruz, 2014, 7–12, for a helpful discussion. Despite his use of the adjective “interoceptive,” Olson’s sense of “proprioception” encompasses the visceral.

52. For an overview of *Floating Bear*, *Kulchur*, and *Yugen*, see Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips, eds., *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960–1980* (New York: New York Public Library and Granary Books, 1998).

53. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 75.

54. Olson, *Collected Prose*, 252.

55. Olson, *Maximus Poems*, 634.

56. Olson, *Collected Prose*, 181.

57. Maud, *Muthologos*, 247.

58. Olson, *Collected Prose*, 182.

59. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 100.

60. Kurt Hemmer and Tom Knoff, *Rebel Roar: The Sound of Michael McClure* (Palatine, Ill.: Harper College, 2008), 35 Minutes, Michael McClure Author Page, MPEG, <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/McClure.php>, 5 minutes, 45 seconds.

61. McClure, *Ghost Tantras*, n.p.

62. Richard O. Moore, *USA: Poetry, Michael McClure* (WNET, 1966), 5 minutes; Michael McClure Author Page, MPEG, <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/McClure.php>, transcription of excerpt on PennSound, 1 minute, 40 seconds.

63. McClure, “Introduction to the 2013 Edition,” *Ghost Tantras*, n.p.

64. Michael McClure, *Three Poems: Dolphin Skull, Rare Angel, and Dark Brown* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 101.

65. McClure, “Introduction to the First Edition,” *Ghost Tantras*, n.p.

66. McClure, *Ghost Tantras*, n.p.

67. In the “Introduction to the First Edition,” McClure suggests, “Pronounce sounds as they are spelled and don’t worry about details—let individual pronunciations and vibrations occur and don’t look for secret meanings.” His performances of *Ghost Tantra 51* draw out the “GROOOOOOOOOOOOOOR” with contours of pitch and timbre not indicated in the text.

68. McClure, "Introduction to the First Edition," *Ghost Tantras*, n.p.
69. See Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 344–345, 443 note 71.
70. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 49.
71. Olson, *Collected Prose*, 158.
72. Michael McClure, *Fragments of Perseus* (New York: New Directions, 1983), 39, 42.
73. See Heriberto Yépez, *The Empire of Neomemory*, trans. Jen Hofer, Christian Nagler, and Brian Whitener (Oakland, Calif.: Chain Links, 2013). For more on the cultural imperialism of U.S. abstract expressionism, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000).
74. McClure, *Fragments of Perseus*, 42.
75. For visceral poetics a challenge remains: is there a visceral articulation of the social (and vice versa)? For more on this, see Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011); Eleni Stecopoulos, *Visceral Poetics* (Oakland, Calif.: ON Contemporary Practice, 2015); and Robert Kocik, *Supple Science* (Oakland, Calif.: ON Contemporary Practice, 2013).
76. Buddhist philosopher Alan Watts was also popularizing the term in his weekly radio broadcasts for Pacifica Radio station KPFA.
77. Gary Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive: Notes on Poetry as an Ecological Survival Technique," *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969).
78. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 74, 92.
79. *Ibid.*, 44.
80. Cary Wolfe, "In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal," in his *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 36. Jed Rasula makes Maturana and Varela's concept of autopoiesis central to ecopoetics in *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

81. Ibid, 1–2, 45.
82. Moore, *USA: Poetry*, Michael McClure.
83. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 85.
84. Ibid., 95. In his discussion of the ecosystem as a cybernetic system, Ramón Margalef notes that his approach “makes unnecessary any concept of superorganism or of closed biocenosis, from which ecology has suffered so much.” See Ramón Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 4.
85. McClure, *Three Poems*, 93.
86. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 57.
87. McClure, *Three Poems*, 188–189.
88. Ibid., 94. Also see Niklas Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, trans. William Whobrey (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 100.
89. McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, 94.
90. Ibid., 17. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 413–414.
91. Margalef, *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*, 17.
92. McClure, *Three Poems*, 187–188.
93. Michael McClure, *September Blackberries* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 124–125.
94. Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, “Afterword,” in their *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, rev. ed. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992), 254–255.
95. Jonathan Skinner, “Thoughts on Things: Poetics of the Third Landscape,” in *Eco-Language Reader*, ed. Brenda Iijima (Callicoon, N.Y.: Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs and Nightboat Books, 2010), 9–17.
96. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Function of Reason* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1929), 19.
97. McClure, *Three Poems*, 103. For twenty-first-century visceral poetics, see Will Alexander, *Kaleidoscopic Omniscience* (Cheltenham, Gloucester, U.K.: Skylight Press, 2013); C. A. Conrad, *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness* (Seattle, Wash.: Wave Books, 2014); Brenda Iijima, *If Not Metamorphic* (Boise, Idaho: Ahsahta Press, 2010); Hoa Nguyen, *As Long As Trees Last* (Seattle, Wash.: Wave

Books, 2012); Angela Rawlings, *Wide Slumber for Lepidopterists* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2006); Jordan Scott, *blert* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008); Eleni Stecopoulos, *Armies of Compassion* (Long Beach, Calif.: Palm Press, 2010), and *Visceral Poetics* (Oakland, Calif.: ON Contemporary Practice, 2015); and Lila Zemborain, *Mauve Sea-Orchids* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Belladonna Books, 2007).

98. McClure, *September Blackberries*, 124.

99. *Ibid.*, 126.

4. PLAYING IN THE PLANETARY FIELD

1. Duncan's work does not fit well in critical rubrics that emphasize explicitly environmentalist poetry, such as those of J. Scott Bryson, *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Eco-poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), and Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Eco-poets* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

2. Here I follow Jed Rasula's *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002) in conceiving of Black Mountain poetry broadly, so that it goes beyond those poets associated with Black Mountain College or the *Black Mountain Review* to include poets such as Muriel Rukeyser, whose poetics is in the same ballpark as projectivism.

3. See Eric Keenaghan, *Queering Cold War Poetry: Ethics of Vulnerability in Cuba and the United States* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009).

4. Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose*, ed. James Maynard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 80.

5. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

6. Duncan, *Collected Essays*, 79.

7. Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 247.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Stephen Fredman, *The Grounding of American Poetry: Charles Olson and the Emersonian Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 100.

10. Olson, *Collected Prose*, 261, and Duncan, *Collected Essays*, 44.