

UNROOTING
Victoria Gray (2011)

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GET IN

In '*Projective Verse*' (1950), Charles Olson asks; 'by what process does the poet *'get in'*, and what energies propelled him to *'get in'* in the first place.

My *'get in'* into Olson, is versed in this OPEN question, 'Where lie the limits between body and text, movement and language?' (Lepecki, A, 2004: 124)

BODY LANGUAGE: An overused term. An over easy pairing for a complicated duet. **BODY LANGUAGE** forges parallels between the corporeal and the linguistic. According to Andre Lepecki; the moving body and language share the same ground; (dance) movement cannot be imagined without writing, it does not exist outside writing's space.' (Lepecki, A, 2004: 124)

In movement practices, this space of writing is manifest in the act of choreographing; **CHOREO/GRAPHING**, or, otherwise known as **CORPOREAL INSCRIPTION**. Another over easy pairing for another messy duet. Foucault's **CORPOREAL INSCRIPTION** suggests a process where the body is written onto, and not in a good way.

According to Foucault, this kind of writing potentially erases the body's autonomy and its ability to speak or write for itself. It implicates the body in an economy that is **CLOSED** and in order to **OPEN** that economy, movement artists have had to forcibly re-open the choreographic field.

WORKING IN THE OPEN

In order to let bodies breathe again and to become projective as opposed non-projective bodies; the form of this writing has had to change.

Bodies that choreo/graph or are choreo/graphed upon are no longer interested in '*inheriting the line*', or working from '*the old base*', as Olson has put it. The new and improved **PROJECTIVE BODIES** are interested in re-versing their route and re-phrasing their verse. Their *'get in'* is an active writerly process. **PROJECTIVE BODIES** are agents stretching out across a new, dynamic and spacious **COMPOSITIONAL FIELD**.

I want to use Olson's idea of working in the **OPEN** as a way of considering how the movement phrasing in my work '*Loop*' (2011) was **COMPOSED OPENLY**. I want to consider how this **OPENESS** allowed my choreo/graphing to venture away from what Olson describes as 'closed form' in favour of a more 'open form'.

LOOP

Loop was presented at Siobhan Davies Studios London as part of What Now Festival in April 2011. What Now presented artists working with expanded notions of choreographic thinking; challenging the form by addressing time, space, movement, and writing in new ways.

Privileging process over product, *Loop* was a live work that unfolded over the duration of six hours. Between 12.30 and 6.30, with eyes closed, my body sensed its way across the expanse of a wall. The wall's surface was punctured by a constellation of almost one hundred nails that were hammered into place according to a spatial score. Holding a reel of fine black thread in my right hand, my left hand continually looped the thread around each individual nail. In turn a web of fine black lines emerged; pulled taut in the space between each nail. (see fig.1)



Fig 1: Loop (2011) Victoria Gray

The spatial arrangement of the nails on the wall corresponded to punctuation marks extracted from excerpts of Sadie Plant's text, *Zeros and Ones* (1997), (see fig.2).

In *Zeros and Ones* Plant addresses the relationship between women and machines. She reaffirms the foundational impact of crafts traditionally associated with women such as weaving, on the development of digital technologies. The complex networks and interfaces that enable these advances are often disembodied or commonly attributed to men. *Zeros and Ones* rewrites the history of their development as embodied from a female perspective.

As a movement artist, my 'get in' for any text is always to somehow embody the ideas and the concepts in order to work them out. With *Loop* I tried to bring Plant's ideas out into the OPEN in order to make them more tangible, more visible and more bodily.

Therefore; the coordinates of the nails were not only a graphic re-presentation of Plant's text but a loose choreographic score for mapping 6 hours of movement. I imagined that with each looping and weaving of the thread, Plant's text was invisibly and implicitly re-written onto the wall and into the space. Plant's poetic verse was '*channelled through my body*' as Olson might like to put it.

More specifically I was interested in Plant's idea that '[. . .] *there is no difference between the process of weaving and the woven design, cloths persist as records of the processes which fed into their production*[. . .] *The visible pattern is integral to the process which produced it* [. . .]' (Plant, 1997: 65-66)

I saw the relationship between my looping movement and its woven result as inseparable. (see fig 3) The visual PRODUCT left behind by the thread was integral to the physical PROCESS that had produced it. Olson says; FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT. So, here, body and text, movement and language merge – writing is very bodily when inscribed with and through the potentiality of a SOMATIC ALPHABET (whatever that may be).

FEEDBACK LOOP

Like a feedback loop, conversational rather than didactic, the body became an extension of the thread and the thread became an extension of the body. Out of this conversation a choreography of materiality emerged. Each fine line of thread became the bones of a compositional structure; an anatomy of thread became a choreography that was not exclusive to bodies but was also performed by objects, by performing objects.

As a non-didactic strategy for choreo/graphing; the formation of the nails merely SUGGESTED a number of OPTIONS for moving through 6 hours. Choreographically, the nails HINTED to a compositional structure and acted as an OPEN FORM score for the performance.

The body's vocabulary, its directional pathways, its gestural range, its dynamic effort and its temporal phrasing became deliberately movable and unfixable. This contingency and lack of 'fully formed form' pushed my body; as Olson recommends in his Projective Verse; '*to behave, and be, instant by instant.*'

BEHAVING AND BEING, INSTANT BY INSTANT - is a very dynamic yet very risky space to occupy. To be OUT in the wild OPEN and to be writing with my eyes closed for 6 hours, is to be in a SITUATION where the body is always searching and grasping at empty space. The body is almost tripping and falling, launching itself into its next blind gesture.

By leaving myself OPEN in this way I was quickly found OUT. I was unraveled, I was un-composed and I was un-choreo/graphed. My movement verse was in-perfect and un-formed. This is - I think - the space where Olson's Projective Energy lives; and so this seems a very live space to be.

THE KINETICS OF THE THING

The most common question asked to me when performing for 6 hours is, 'aren't you exhausted.' Projecting in this way is both physically and mentally exhausting and uses up a lot of energy. In addition, I am always battling with the prospect that I might stagnate, exhausting all of my ideas before the 6 hours is up. Olson himself believes that *'the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge.'*

So here we get to KINETICS; Olson's '[. . .] *kinetics of the thing*'. The kinetics of *Loop* and its projective verse don't necessarily 'look' like a high-energy construct, nor is my PROJECTIVE BODY VERSE able to keep up with Olson's call to *'keep it moving as fast as you can.'* Olson says; ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION in order to keep projecting and to keep moving.

Over time *'Loop'* established its own rhythm and its own phrasing. The 'thing' projected itself at a slow (ish) and still (ish) pace; on a small(ish) and micro(ish) scale. But, the 'thing' was still dynamic. In the language of dance; dynamics is an interaction of force with time and so every movement is dynamic, whether it be hard and fast, or soft and slow. The perception might be that *Loop* adopted the dynamic of the latter.

Its outward sluggishness is simply a decoy for the frenetic action that was invisibly taking place in my head. Tripping, falling, jumping and reverberating, frantically trying to decide how and when to act on each new PERCEPTION.

In *Loop*, the changes and shifts in phrasing were deliberately slow(ish) and small(ish) inviting a *'microscopy of perception'* (Lepecki, 2001: 2). This mode addressed the phenomenology of the body in writing and the materiality of the objects used in the performance; privileging what the 'thing' feels like as opposed to what it looks like; a kinaesthetic as opposed kinetic experience. Working unsighted for 6 hours was a catalyst in the emerging soft and slow process; the kinesthetics of the thing.

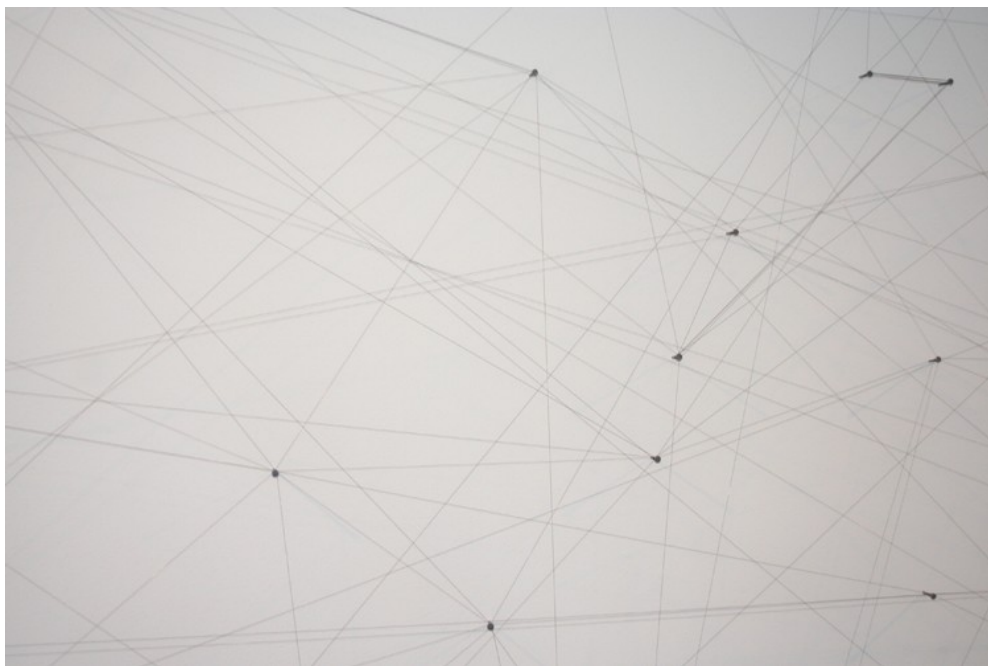


Fig 3: Loop (2011) Detail

THE KINESTHETICS OF THE THING

Loop was punctuated by breaths, some long and heavy as fatigue and boredom set in. Some were short and sharp as sensory disorientation set in. Further into the 6 hours I frequently dropped the thread and this caused me to be truly lost in the dark. Each time I was divorced from the line the thread of the work seemed to break. A vocal equivalent would be that I was left stuttering, panicking and gasping and often I would unconsciously hold my breath until I located the thread again.

These breathy pauses invoked by bodily pressures caused a leaning and a pressing against the nails and the wall for support. They troubled the continuity of the movement phrasing, but they were never full stops and never stillnesses. Dropping the thread caused a break in its taught line, we might say, similar to the line break in a poem. Here, the line of my movement verse was propelled and compelled to move along a new trajectory.

As places of emphasis these breathy pauses and breaks were the interesting bits. They were the ones to watch and watch out for. My breath underlined and emphasised the quibbles, mistakes and indecisions. They show the poetic body momentarily caught up on the precipice of the line. The projective body is caught in a space of in-decision and potential. Whether to project its energies forwards, backwards, side to side, up or down along the line of its somatic verse; or, to break with the continuum and perhaps remain still.

References

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