Poems to the Sea and Painterly Poetics: Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Cole Swensen

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POEMS TO THE SEA

and

PAINTERLY POETICS:
CHARLES OLSON, ROBERT CREELEY, COLE SWENSEN

by

PETER GILLIES

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Humanities & Performing Arts
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Acknowledgements

The genesis of this research lies in a visit to the exhibition *Starting at Zero: Black Mountain College 1933-57* at the Arnolfini, Bristol in November 2005. The show included some poems, on pages taken from the *Black Mountain Review*, by Charles Olson and Robert Creeley. The display cases in which the poems were placed were surrounded by the paintings of those Abstract Expressionist artists who had passed through the college. Having seen this wondrous juxtaposition, I soon discovered the lack of critical writing on the symbiotic relationship between poetry and abstract painting at Black Mountain, and so the seeds of an idea for my PhD research project were sown at this revealing exhibition.

I would first of all like to thank Plymouth University for awarding me a Faculty of Arts Research Studentship (2011) that has enabled me to undertake this period of full-time study. While the institution and source of funding have made the research possible, so members of staff, fellow-researchers and my own undergraduate students have enriched the learning process. My writing has been enhanced by many conversations at Plymouth, as well as at several academic conferences in the UK where I have presented papers or read work-in-progress.

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I would like to record my gratitude to Rupert Loydell for introducing me to the full range of Creeley’s collaborations with artists, and for continuing to publish my writing both on visual art and poetry in *Stride* magazine. I am most grateful to the staff at Woodlane Library in Falmouth, all of whom were especially kind and helpful while I was writing my thesis. I would like to thank all those who facilitated my research in the Doctoral Training Centre and Graduate School at Plymouth University, particularly Tim Batchelor and Sarah Kearns, who provided me with invaluable support.

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Finally, there is no one I’m indebted to more than my wife, Ann Gillies, whose encouragement, creative sensibility and loving care enabled me to see this project through to completion.
Author’s Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

Relevant research seminars and academic conferences have been regularly attended at which several papers have been presented. Seminars, symposia and conferences attended include the following:


2013 ‘Writing into Art’ Conference, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 18-19th June. Paper: ‘Scrawling Across an Open Field: Charles Olson & Cy Twombly’.


Word count of main body of thesis (including poetry collection): 60,093.
Peter Gillies

Abstracts:

Poems to the Sea
Rather than narrating or describing a work of visual art, the poems that form this collection show an accumulation, juxtaposition and realignment of material ranging from art historical detail and critique to a more personal, location specific response to works viewed in galleries and museums. Many of the poems engage with non-representational artworks and question how best to reflect, translate or expand upon their transformative effects. The first section, ‘Museum Notes’, explores Charles Olson’s open field poetics by giving artists and writers a conversational voice. ‘Sound Fields’, the second section, responds to individual works of art and reflects a systems-based approach. The authorial voice within ‘Poems to the Sea’, the third section, is that of an artist involved in making a series of palimpsest drawings to capture a sense of place as drawing and writing overlaps and intertwines.

Painterly Poetics: Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Cole Swensen
This thesis explores three American poets from successive generations to examine three related types of engagement with visual art. As literary models that have informed my own poetic practice, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley and Cole Swensen have theorized their own writing process to consider ways of using language to enhance the transmission and transcription of their visual stimuli and ideas. All three are interested in visual art as a model for the writing process: as a means of seeing, thinking and perceiving. After an introduction that surveys relations between verbal and visual art, a chapter is devoted to each of the three poets. In the opening and longest chapter, examples of Olson’s writing are compared to the approach of several Abstract Expressionist painters who contributed to the culture of experimentation and spontaneity that emerged under Olson’s leadership at Black Mountain College in the early 1950s. Following a discussion of Olson as a uniquely influential figure, the chapter on Creeley considers the role of visual art in his poetics. Swensen’s writing is subsequently explored for its extension of the Black Mountain legacy: how she builds upon established critical methods to achieve what she calls ‘a side-by-side, walking-along-with’ relationship between the poem and the artwork.
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PREFACE

Poems to the Sea

As a dialogue between the verbal and the visual, my collection *Poems to the Sea* reflects an interdisciplinary mode of research that is interested in the relationship between poetry and painting: the poems present the process of writing as analogous to the process of painting, in that the speaker is always concerned with articulating the procedures of creative practice and the experience of someone working in both disciplines. Building through a series of experimental phases of composition, the totality and openness of this approach has allowed me to constantly explore the interdependence of these two mediums in my own creative work.

The influence of specific visual artists on poetic forms dominates the collection while many of the poems consider the poetic enactment of painterly gesture. The range and scope of the poetry reflects my preoccupation with artists from the last seventy years, in particular those who have been involved with Abstract Expressionism, Colour-Field Painting and Post-Painterly Abstraction. The intensity of the relationship between visual and poetic forms of expression at Black Mountain College in North Carolina (1933-57) was the starting point, and my awareness of the painterly aesthetic of painters and poets associated with the college has continued to underpin my poetic concerns. In constructing *Poems to the Sea*, it is the process of making the artwork that provides the catalyst for writing the poetry.

Black Mountain poetics is the active force that propels the collection: Charles Olson’s concept of composition-by-field as expressed in his theory and practice of projective verse is ever-present. Although there are different kinds of poetic space and lineation
at work in each of the three sections, I wanted the sensation of open space to permeate

*Poems to the Sea* by creating three versions of an airy space that would collectively suggest the condition of being at the edge of an ocean, experiencing the spaces of the beach, the sea and the sky; these felt intensities that, despite being intangible and enigmatic, aim to provide a sense of place. The over-riding influence is transatlantic, for I am fascinated by the work of painters and poets that reflects an American awareness of space that is more open and expansive compared with traditional British conceptions within the literary and visual arts.

My intention was for the poems to connect with Olson’s sense of a boundless ocean continuing into infinity as he looked out from Gloucester, Massachusetts. Many of my notebook drafts, diagrammatic notes and preparatory visual studies make reference either to the rhythmic motion of the sea, or, to the play of sparkling patches of sunlight or moonlight on the surface of water, observed from staring out at the horizon line from Falmouth, Cornwall. Olson’s writing provided the verbal counterpart to the spatial and painterly qualities I was seeking in my own work: that within certain poems (for example, those focusing on paintings by Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee, Joan Mitchell, Richard Diebenkorn, Agnes Martin and Cy Twombly), I could open-up the white page to utilize a similar interplay of energies that is present in their paintings, notably their rendering of an all-over visual field that radiates spatial patterns of shimmering light.

In the poems that form the opening section ‘Museum Notes’, artists and writers are brought together in conversation to explore their correspondences in attitude towards the creative process. A further dialogue is produced by the sequencing of these
twenty-four poems to reflect the speaker thinking moment-to-moment as they move from image-to-image, artist-to-artist, gallery-to-gallery, as the objects of their attention both explain and conceal themselves in terms of their own making. As a way of constructing each poem through this accrued experience of looking at and responding to ‘process’, I wanted to establish and underline a personal dynamic in my practice where the mediums of painting and writing are shown to be informing each other.

Successive exhibitions of work by my favoured artists provided vital opportunity for working in-situ so as ‘to be with’ the original artworks for extended periods: shows such as those of Twombly in London (2011, 2014) and Liverpool (2012); Martin in London (2011, 2015) and St Ives (2011); and Mondrian in London (2012) and Liverpool (2014), enabled me to make frequent gallery visits during the span of particular exhibitions. The role of notebooks, journals and sketchbooks was vital to my process. Using them in the galleries, I worked on written and drawn responses to the physical and material presence of the work as an object, as it was essential to get a textual process in motion. Taking notes, making lists, drawing diagrams, I aimed to find phrases not as description but as equivalent to the dominant forms and colours, the marks and gestures reverberating through an image. To reconfigure and distil this raw material away from the gallery, the process then became about how to manipulate these properties in making the poem, while still preserving one’s initial emotional reaction when one was face-to-face with the actual work, absorbing the texture and qualities of paint along with the distinctive character of the brushstrokes.
In the development of these poems, the notebook activity in the gallery established an underlying ground to work on so that layers of text could subsequently be added to or removed in the same way that I would create an image on canvas. When making a painting, I obliterate and cast off parts of both the original and emerging image: similarly in constructing a poem, I will tear up, collage, ‘draw-into’ and ‘work-over’ with language instead of paint. Constantly revisiting the poems for the purpose of breaking up the lines and physically placing or replacing certain words and phrases, this approach of making a series of paper collages – a process where every element of text can be subjected to change through layering – was integral to the fabric of ‘Museum Notes’.

In writing *Poems to the Sea*, apart from conveying meaning, I wanted to acknowledge the materiality of language; that I was working with a medium that is sonic, visual and experiential. What began as a projective and spacial reading of Diebenkorn’s and Martin’s original paintings, especially their subtle atmospheric geometry loosely based upon the grid, shifted towards further considerations in the second section ‘Sound Fields’. My intention became to show more decisively how a poem embodies a relationship between the sound, the sense and the visual impression of words. The organisation of grids in this sequence allows for frequent repetition to intensify the physicality and presence of each unit of language so as to plot letters, words, phrases and sentences to be more ‘there’ on the page. Enveloped within the field, each component can act either as a descriptive or non-descriptive gesture, while contributing both to the sonic and visual rhythm of the poem.
One of the earliest poems in ‘Sound Fields’ was aimed at paralleling Willem de Kooning’s mode of making a gestural image. Concentrating on his stark calligraphic markings that have seeped into the weave of the canvas, in the poem these become elements of language transformed into pure sound. In the act of translating de Kooning’s adept painterly brushwork, one improvised sound races towards another as the content of the painting coalesces into tiny words, phonically emerging and disappearing as the poem moves along. As in other poems in the sequence, the emphasis on repetition through mirroring or multiplying a pattern for the sake of pace and rhythm, ‘pushes’ the poetic line towards a predetermined edge of a sonic and visual field. In some cases, the development of the grid depends upon the interplay of alternate lines running at two different speeds of travel in the same direction. As well as the visual image of the poem as a graphic work on the page, the entire sonic fabric of the poetic grid becomes charged by these rhythmically opposed but meshed forces of energy. This configuration allows qualities of sound and vision to merge with one another.

Attending to rhythmical and syntactical tensions within the grid relates to my study of paintings by Mondrian and Klee; both artists show how geometrical construction can be realized through intuition. The poems in ‘Sound Fields’ were also influenced by examples of procedural writing that I encountered in exhibitions of work by John Cage (Gateshead, 2010) and Carl Andre (Middlesbrough, 2013), especially the materiality of letters and words as ‘things’ that is evident in their poetry. Cage and Andre utilized cadences reminiscent of Gertrude Stein’s sound play: the way a poetic phrase can be used as a self-generating device. In ‘Sound Fields’ I adopted a similar approach to the repetition, inversion and different permutations of key words and
phrases; where each repeat becomes a new event that contributes significantly to the expressive density of the text, as well as a means of continuing and developing the poem.

Rather than remaining an almost anonymous observer of selected artworks, the speaker in the third and final section ‘Poems to the Sea’ adopts a more personal position. In moving closer to a lyrical mode, the struggle to make one’s own work through the handling of materials is at the core of every poem. ‘Poems to the Sea’ began as sketches, paintings and diagrammatic renderings of a beach setting. These studies fed into a process of exploration whereby each poem discovered itself through my work in the studio where, over several weeks, I let visual and written detail accumulate on large sheets of watercolour paper, allowing image and text to fuse together in the act of composition.

To achieve a more open osmosis of ideas between the verbal and the visual, between the hand-written and the painted, between the page and the studio wall, I then developed a vast wall-based grid consisting of sixty A3-sized sheets. By emphasizing the physical actions of reaching up, down and across the sheets to superimpose words and gestural marks upon each other, this practice-as-research directly addressed the process of composition: the way I was ‘making’ a poem and how it could carry the essence of my painterly operation. By refusing to separate the acts of painting and writing in this studio work, I adopted a self-determining experimental mode primarily concerned with the material presence of the poem as a visual object. These preliminary studies filling the four walls of my studio became the formative drafts of ‘Poems to the Sea’.
My study of visual art has inspired all three sections of the collection. In *Poems to the Sea* I have focused on constructing a sequence concerned with process and strategy; especially writing poems that ask what kinds of poetical response might be provoked by engaging with non-representational art, thereby continuing to translate and expand upon the transformative elements of such encounters in a gallery or studio situation.
for Rosa
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dead-ends / fresh starts & regrets:

*take a canvas  put a mark on it  put another mark on it  put another mark on it …*

forms veer from figurative to abstract but remain

spare / halfway
to equate

with objects:
relationships between them
with spaces:
that surround them

fast dissolving / evolving forms

around
*one aloneness to another*

that imaginary tone one positioned figure to another
temporal & spacial

verbal & visual become equalised resemblances
not so easily separated
in their greyness

each one less reliable than what came before
AGNES MARTIN – RENATA ADLER

her
undisturbed
state
maintained with paint

her
perception triggered
processed-in ruled-in to waves that

meander & flow sip & sweep over
the skins of everyday objects

of coming & going an impulse attracts
episodes to be recorded either as visual or aural mistakes
this is what matters … that all the rest is only motion
I said emotion?
he said motion
there we were

on a manhattan roof with INDIANA & KELLY
for the archival photo
to then spend ideas in the studio

often whole hours of improbable luck with
a metre of thread 2 or 3 pencils
tied together let the drawings be flipped over

let them crease & stream
upside down
time-lines ahead / illusions & echoes

throw them around

25.06.11 – The Minimal Gesture, Timothy Taylor Gallery, London
09.02.11 – Agnes Martin: Artist Rooms, Tate Modern, London
AGNES MARTIN – GERTRUDE STEIN

pale matrix: made to be tight / pencil traces refract multiply
sightlines to lighten the square / axial release inside
knows ROTHKO had reached for zero
so that nothing could stand in the way
she approaches wide on no fear of falling into it
reads dawn-leading / dusk-leaning ideas
sun-struck images becoming these waver all-over:
as TWO DIMENSIONAL: a series of lined linen sheets
as SCORE: to sonically mark-up each of 8 notes
as MATERIAL: absorbed into structure / left to action
as MIRROR: to capture surface parts / no histories repeat
as PRESENTATION: what becomes indicative of glassy sea
by
kaleidoscopic similarity

painted / drawn pages facing down each day
allows push sea push / sea push sea push sea
weeks later silvery
unruly notes written / regulated
with or without measuring
less rubbing out on an iridescent grid

03.09.11 – Agnes Martin: Paintings – Summer Exhibition, Tate St Ives
11.06.15 – Agnes Martin, Tate Modern, London
nuance / tone of every black square
monochrome re-emerges
as lessons elsewhere:

PLANE ENERGY = end point of a broad-edged pencil around it
SPATIAL ENERGY = uneven stroke of a full brush over it

introduces chaos / plays with instability

affirms at once
LINE & MASS FULL & EMPTY
not as contradiction to turn action into mark

FORMS DEFINE SPACE focusing on a breaking wave
skirting its movement
it was all endless return
& spillage
tones whole & half to gain / sustain
an elemental hold

involves intangible objects

where shapes rimmed red-violet
swim lightweight like

dripping rust low on blue lined eddies of wind
JOAN MITCHELL – JAMES JOYCE

full crimson & vermilion
cobalt set low on cinnabar coat

book-marking episodes in monet’s old river-home
at vetheuil dizzy when
the heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit
was a gift of glimpses slipping:

opposite – pinks – kiss
positively – opposite – pink – skiss – pinsky – inks

reckless astral reds next to gold ribbons tumbling
flickering
with mountains / clearings / solid points of reference
her
swimming vision
shifts bends to a butterfly beach
jagged
with
eo-cean-mist-streaks
left to veer out of sync
into
quilted
f-i-e-l-d-s
& ripple-effect grids

*i think of the midwest snow …*

*i cy blue shadows*
tide-marks clouds rain
call it voices or residues reached

blotched sand wet orange
spliced between

swirling
u. l. t. r. a. *M A R I N E*

*lapis lazuli*

not for nothing means beyond the sea

fetching flowers – making colours – learning
how light breaks diagonally

*i saw the appearances / and i named that half hour*

seeing now only the traceries are real
RICHARD DIEBENKORN – ROBERT CREELEY

reserve of strength in ocean park
tension beneath the calm
when light finds divisions
left o-p-e-n
that resume recognisable shape

faith to know when an edge is gaining through losing direction:

geometric complexity an occasion to act upon

sun’s intensity at the window much like the day it all began
crazy washed-out red not a pink but a white red

whose eye caught what was going on

-blue -to fine grey -to indigo rose watery light

gulfs of time between FIELDS
BLOCKS
SPACES aired as punctual surprises

but using contained yet limitless surfaces of water to make grids with:

abstract broken tri-coloured
FIGURES PATHS LINES

have to subside as they touch oblique / incomplete shapes
tilted yellow against plain white falling as in
angular currents owned by the wind

05.05.15 – Richard Diebenkorn, Royal Academy of Arts, London
balanced horizon the freest place to be

compelling
connection
next
breath
gestures the run of it no definition

writing back to wilder shores:
\textit{a thousand small explosions of glitter}

middle of the sea was dazzling

matters of space
matters of light
matters of noise

waterside
each crest of a wave connects threads through

reaches towards whiteness
three-quarters of the time

in that half-place between water & sky

resolves best
left undone
stumbling with roman animation

quest turned back on itself

disrupts image & text

\textit{P A I N T \ T I N T A D E N T R O L E P A R O L E}

reducing seascape detail to a few lines & edges

intensified by rushing miles & miles / unfolding in wrong directions

colouring in from all sides

13.10.12 – Turner Monet Twombly: Later Paintings, Tate Liverpool
not too late for escape
could find ways
to madcap
victory sp-ACE
other side of air

WIN-d-on-the-WIN-g
air victory ACE / to r-ACE
to es-CAPE on the winning WIN-g
of this MAD-ness

air victory
es-CAPER

air
outside felt thinner

as mad
as the other
amazing s-PACE

viceroy
victory p-ACE

false starts & fragments / quicksilver glances / blasts of makeshift flame
another side of air
charts / chants / puts out

arched fragments of ‘o’

held as schism

& what it evokes

as remnant:

orrheus

an unending trace of veins

in lilting profile vividly returning

of which every zero

maps an extra trace where one sees what one wants to:

short text on white bed

relentlessly overwritten

ringing that shatters

with

invention

in one side / goes out the other

improvising upon myth

with outsized

inscription

comes over

kicking back

in phonetic counting

dfilled with the sensation of white snow against black water

the way the whiteness erases all the detail

a phantom floored by

musical semblance

in low squares of light

26.07.12 – Turner Monet Twombly: Later Paintings, Tate Liverpool
circling
in a space of nothing: here a Sunday when light
is fall’s / whiteness
to sense or invent the pictorial words sluiced into sight recorded & recited
3 not 4 stick-up ships row in from botanic corners
6 pop-up barges plunge in broken rays of sunlight
more bobbing boats / domes / dunes slip slide to the right
 pressured
aerials that wave at
atmospheric
cloud types
daubed
oars as antenna to shake the sky
dazzle thrown over:
in lemon air capering charged with wildness
hinted-at-arcs / spoken word parts
home-made scatterings
clumsily trapped
in pictographic translation
embracing pieces of eight with cosmic / comic strolling
you may so in a circus night’s sleep:
it is just it is just about to it is just about to rolywholyover
not feeling its own weight edging lip bit split-edge / spit-take
in freefall linguistic-drenching

DAVID SMITH – JOHN ASHERBY

space could only hurt him / or agree with him
who toyed with ice-cold / oil splattered bits

graded to size

in spite of
no
compatibility

chalking their outlines on the floor
ready to rephrase pieces

heat-damaged & faded

walking
so
big a space to build it

all

hammered / beaten / wrenched
from beneath stacked sleepers

free of travel back & forth

between

albany & poughkeepsie
simple
weather-beaten

monuments that form
this american grid

as numbers

that break into entries /

headings / places
them
to
interchange them

*every time there is an exception there is an exception
& every time there is a division there is a division*

scrap iron found
from
along the tracks:

hooks
springs
bearings
carefully laid out

9 more displaced parts       stutter & resound
sideways
restored
jagged texture coated with sober
change
her gaze expands interior space like JOHN CAGE
wants a way of thinking about sound & vision
like the way thunder & lightning are
cathedral choir
going past
  glazed-over heads
  emblematic of the dead:
bare view reduced to
  chiaroscuro
    patchwork-grabs
demotic where the response takes up the call & pitches it back
colour disrupts as stop-go jabs
ghosts in a stained glass window
evensong as elegy
  stripped down & polished
    week after week
  bay-area jazz as haphazard warm-up act
black light pressed into a black surface

bends numerical sense / 7 boards in 7 days
as her sequence of wrecks:

1st chalk
storyboard 3pm / roaring 40s / same flux as an angry sea
breakdown of signs into more splintering account

numbers words letters
stretched / get width
to weigh
configure
narrate romantic depth with contoured shade

figures frozen out
in a milky shift of paralysis revered in
stills / their chronologies

of arms / hips & chins flying imperfectly across
bisect the air

mast coming apart
parking with a rhythmic thump as the binding breaks:

rising / sinking in time like the collective breath
of a wipe-out

where everything has the quality of a photographic negative

weird blacked-out lightships stand half-erased
go again tomorrow

will persevere / steer / whiten as though perilous in monochrome

so every stroke fights against its own disappearance
CALLUM INNES – JORIE GRAHAM

VISCOUS GREEN DOWN & OVER / GLOSS WHITE TOP SIDE / MATT BLACK WASH OVER CANVAS - TRAP TURPENTINE ON RIGHT SIDE / CENTRE-TO-LEFT MATT BLACK / CENTRE-TO-RIGHT VISCOUS GREEN / MASK DOWN SAME LINE FOR SINGLE BLACK PAINT - BLEED-IN TURPENTINE ON RIGHT SIDE / MATT PAINT OVER SINGLE GREEN TO RIGHT / MASK WHITE GLOSS TO BLACK CANVAS / LEAVE SAME VISCOUS GREEN ON TOP - WASH-IN TURPENTINE ON RIGHT SIDE / BLACK PAINT DOWN CENTRE / LEAVE ON VISCOUS GREEN SAME WAY / MASK OVER MATT BLACK TO WHITE CANVAS TOP - DROP-IN TURPENTINE ON RIGHT SIDE

SEA / EARTH / SKY  no longer deep in the shadows of themselves  joined by
a 3 millimetre sliver etched through the centre of a vast projective field

resonant choice of 3 distinct zones:

BLACK / OLIVE / WHITE  voices exposed slippery against it where it
never knows they are pressing  delirious accents trying to reach in  fit / in

rest in a dark red quarter  consigned  yet slowly warping

T-square green lake
escapes bifurcates making the painter’s labour visible

through ritual moves layers go

although ongoing hues
drift aside with each repetition

09.04.13 – Callum Innes, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
25.06.11 – Callum Innes: New Paintings, Frith Street Gallery, London
beginning in one place & finding yourself in another

*that every stroke one makes is violent*
*… you’ve got to move with*

the weight of red
burgundy stripe
*eve is land*
*is landslide*

eve is red
stepping
testament
of
burgundy
might

earth brown with zips
*adam / all slightly skewed*

this badly taped
central band provides feeling
*but*
*numbed by process*

painted *eve / evening*
starts here & finds uneven
change
*in human height*

*for in hebrew*
*adamah is earth*  
*adom is red*

while *dam is blood*

to be teased-out
in

gaps  
*lighter than water / lighter than air / lighter than lips*
PIET MONDRIAN – DON DELILLO

different in every kind of weather
whiteness
runs off horizons begins to act
cleansing white smoothly slides
facing
percussive white casting around outside of

his poetics:
scans wide
taking out space
measuring left from grey
to white
going right / going down all sides

L I G H T

T U R Q U O I S E
to green / grey

light -------------------------------
small square / opaque red

five colours

classified

catalogued this colour for that …

jutting

crisscrossing in streaks & tremors

refracting surfaces __________________ abstracting a seascape sky

07.08.14 – Mondrian & his Studios, Tate Liverpool
super 8 cameras placed where there is always surf
gets you obsessed with elemental encounters:

Atlantic buffeted
material
built into
short films

all fixated with magic
leaves body shapes filling-up
to spill over
with foam

margins giving way

she tracks
sea-water on shingle

what is exposed / what is folded-in
to water not catching
as a wave breaks churns & animates when

the swell has travelled great distances but only the energy is moving

herself the subject

moans windblown
gathering a precarious archive:

an ocean dreaming ghost with a catalogue of looming skies
PAUL KLEE – LEE HARWOOD

sensations     dreams     concepts     to render them visible
as imaginary scripts:

move your whole body / to make the marks   a flow of sorts
paint the character for ‘sea’ again & again

figure ways
to translate

a line losing itself /a line growing stronger

weaving in & out / your experience of space

of things incomplete or faint:

luminously strange
hint of horizon between sea & sky
dematerializes through looking

to track material     intervals     tentative limits
on
different
kinds

of paper size

to trace around pebbles

set them down as a series of fractional squares

before they dissolve

20.11.13 – Paul Klee: Making Visible, Tate Modern, London
be careful
not to squeeze the life out of it
to guard against this
by
incessant
recomposing

glimmers of self analysis in his grey zones /
an overdose of sourcing:

the brassy orator / laying my ghost in metal

handles
stark paint

for his forms escalate:
figures returning
grooved together

jostling each other a little

spontaneous strokes cajole /

anticipate them

in repetition deletion

faces
rotate
to jettison

ominous signs
hovering wide
ALEX KATZ – COLE SWENSEN

turn to
token stencils on
full moon

terrain stepping
towards nightly
fenced-in
prussian blue

medium range present tense present state
where we shatter / into patterns / counting threads

more dark walk past walk out observing stars

sky slanting throws a field to float
while holding

off-set edges
to trace / fake / take
less of
an insomniac’s mood

going into mineral / november time faced-as-skeletal

wrought through missing texture: relative & made with reason
corrodes
below
reflective
glaze

12.09.13 – Alex Katz: Beneath the Surface, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art
22.06.12 – Alex Katz: Give Me Tomorrow, Tate St Ives
channels / lakes / rivers
fleeting traces of wind
coaxed out of long exposures

& behind this emptiness

LINES  PLANES  POINTS

these are means

emulsified as borderlines
digested down dark & thick
from night & its

B L A C K
L I G H T
gently animates / agitates
imposes exposes
harsh geometry on smooth matt
seas searching for movement / countermovement

it lures us to abstraction –
eyes at a place
to put arms out:

on dogtown the other side of heaven
is ocean

though alert to all voices in between
PIERRE SOULAGES – JAMES JOYCE

as reminder all that experimentation

see stars fading into darkness:

stacked blacks those facts of cross-cutting grey by the second going blacker

time painting it = excessive before it

hints at a spoiled point of day

ill-defined & passing sleight of hand

throws up highlights & accumulates time

WHITENESS = A DOUBLE BIND

watch any moist heavy sea / coming from the blackness:

an emotive double blindness in eye-catching spotlights

OPEN FORMS SHORELINE WAVES RIPPLING SLATE TIDAL NIGHT

he would caligulate by multiplicables the altitude & malltitude until he saw by neatlight

therefore opposites respect

elemental offshore noise

25.06.10 – Pierre Soulages: Paintings, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London
SOUND FIELDS
JASPER JOHNS

Regrets, 2012-13
the four-story mountain / you will not think form-space-line-contour
just a suggestion of nature gives weight / light & heavy / light like a
empty form goes all the way to heaven / the observer makes the painting / an empty
feather / you get light enough & you levitate / the four-story mountain
you will not think form-space-line-contour / just a suggestion of nature
form goes all the way to heaven / the observer makes the painting / an empty form
gives weight / light & heavy / light like a feather / you get light enough
goes all the way to heaven / the observer makes the painting / an empty form goes
& you levitate / the four-story mountain / you will not think form-space
line-contour / just a suggestion of nature gives weight / light & heavy
all the way to heaven / the observer makes the painting / an empty form goes all the
light like a feather / you get light enough & you levitate / the four-story
mountain / you will not think form-space-line-contour / just a suggestion
way to heaven / the observer makes the painting / an empty form goes all the way to
of nature gives weight / light & heavy / light like a feather / you get light
enough & you levitate / the four-story mountain / you will not think form
heaven / the observer makes the painting / an empty form goes all the way to heaven
space-line-contour / just a suggestion of nature gives weight / light &
heavy / light like a feather / you get light enough & you levitate / the four

AGNES MARTIN
This Rain, 1960
The Islands, 1961
Night Sea, 1963
KAZIMIR MALEVICH

Black Square, 1915
Black Square, 1915

Black Square, 1923
cadmium yellow deep ivory black

indian red crimson over cobalt

venetian red

naples yellow

ochre yellow ochre

over crimson cobalt

RICHARD DIEBENKORN
Ocean Park 90, 1976
i have felt the Wind of the Wing of Madness

june

cT

VICTORY 90

outside as amazing space gaeta

as the other side of

AIR

the

c on quis ta
d ores

CY TWOMBLY
Untitled, 1992
felt wind of the wing where outside as amazing space other side of air felt wind of the wing where outside as amazing space other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air where outside as amazing space other side of air felt wind of the wing felt wind of the wing felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air where felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind other side of air where outside as amazing space other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air where outside as amazing space other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air other side of air felt wind of the wing another side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing meditation other side of air felt wind madness another side of air where the wing of madness felt wind of the wing felt wind madness felt wind of the wing another side of air the wing of madness another side of air felt wind of the wing felt wind madness felt wind of the wing another side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air other side of air felt wind of the wing amazing space other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing other side of air felt wind of the wing of another side of space amazing air the other side of space amazing where another side of air felt wind madness where other side of air where outside as amazing space on the other side of air have felt the wind of the wing of madness as on other sides of air where outside as amazing space felt wind of the wing another side of air

CY TWOMBLY

*Untitled, 1992*
only in that double world / orpheus when he first sang / we flutter in mid-air / voices altered
that outlasts these surpluses / she heard in shadow / we flutter in mid-air / edges shredded
in a gale now chattering Orpheus when he first sang / that outlasts these surpluses / only
one who can raise the lyre / she heard in shadow / Orpheus when he first sang / that outlasts these
surpluses / edges shredded in a gale now chattering / only in that double world / only one
who can raise the lyre / only in that double world / she heard in shadow / that outlasts these
surpluses ringing the unheard core / we flutter in mid-air / Orpheus when he first sang
only in that double world / Orpheus when he first sang / we flutter in mid-air / raise

CY TWOMBLY
Orpheus, 1979
words double $C$rossed

over surfaces $Y$et more condensed

phrases pic$T$ured imperfectly

for $W$ho can see

col$O$rts shot through with
cadences so $M$onumental

they are $B$ricolaged

on 2 sheets of $L$oose off-square paper

& in italian $Y$our gorgeous mimicry

---

CY TWOMBLY

*Petals of Fire*, 1989
content: window – cakes with neighbours – their southern drawl / next up: content / next: studio or cakes / hesitates / content: cakes – hesitates with neighbours cakes with neighbours / or hesitates with his cakes / content: neighbours watch his window or briefly next door / inside studio – draws / outside parks-up / content: door / hesitates – his content – draws / neighbours: next window – southern drawl / park-up with cakes / content: hesitates briefly – his studio for cakes – he hesitates / next: content – he hesitates / content: cakes – hesitates – cakes / content – hesitates – door – hesitates briefly / window: neighbours next door outside of studio – their southern drawl / park-up / next: draws / door: his content / door

neighbours – hesitates – draws – hesitates / content: his studio door – reads or he draws – hesitates – draws / content: reads – hesitates / door / or briefly hesitates – his content / next: reads – window – next southern drawl – parks-up with cakes / window: content – hesitates briefly – their cakes – hesitates with neighbours cakes or with neighbours at the door / hesitates – his cakes / content: neighbours watch his window or briefly next door / next-up: their southern drawl / neighbours park-up – buy cakes – studio window – studio door / neighbours: next window – next southern drawl – studio or cakes / hesitates / draws / content: his window / neighbours – reads / hesitates – or draws / content: his southern drawl

TACITA DEAN

Edwin Parker (16mm film), 2011
film as time made manifest: time as physical length

24 frames per second  16 frames in a 35mm foot --

-- as celluloid film-strip dense as stained glass with

sprocket holes on either side -- need the stuff of film

as a painter needs the stuff of paint - metamorphosis

or shadow play in portrait format -- rhythm & metre

from the material itself -- in the soft shove of a glass

globe’s curve of resistance --- shimmering of a colour

filter change ----- widens into steps & reconvenes as

as architectural play ----- flickering projected image

offers some surrealist surprise --- flash frames of over

exposure as the camera stops & starts -- make a late

party of fountains & light ------- montage shots inter-

weaving the real & artificial world -- cross-coloured

giants climb mountain-peaks wearing over-polished

shoes - flickers & fades phantasmagorically before us

as a barely moving escalator signposted with cerulean

dots --- those 24 gaps per second of blackness -- as a

shore-line musical ensemble vanishes under a dark &
crinkled viridian leaf ----- contains no post-production

TACITA DEAN

FILM (35mm film), 2011
white
white
white
white
ivory
black
white

CALLUM INNES
Ivory Black, 2001
relations of scale or just sensing / faced with
this special view:

it’s not that I’m bigger than the ocean
it’s that somehow I’m in that
I’m really involved in
it’s true

S P A C E
P
A
C
E

measuring
to gain
plain knowledge from
looking through & over
opening as vast expanse
band of colour = GAP
the sum becomes

poignant
parallel points
of the ZIP interrupt
to exaggerate SPACE / mark
height / width
as if
from a bridge
or cliff to create / inspire
the entire design of the painting

call them zips or strips
or strings
or glittering
flickering occasions

HER: bright cadmium orange with burgundy stripe running along right edge

HIM: earth brown with intervals 3 hues of red

BARNETT NEWMAN
Eve, 1950 / Adam, 1952
mock-up
of paris workroom to walk around | years before his new york grids
[ | ]
[ | ]
[in rue-du-depart go
past gare montparnasse]
where

green cross-pieces of ____________________________
starlit night became
pier en oceaan 1915

gained & affixed
| | ____
by ______ oval ascent

jazz ______________________ | | |
| | | waves | | | duration / rhythm |

2nd state composition:
| | | _____________
| | | ______________
| | | | | | the perpetual movement of changing oppositions

taking opinions for
double lines & yellow 1936-44
transatlantic from starting over / draws
inclined not to hope

but __________________________ | | | |
hoping for
| | | finish_______ | | | black-held-guide / contours
buckled

hosting
| | | |
no
grey (= eliminated colour) | | | 3 across | | rests against | | 3 more
incomplete

unrestrained charcoal tracks make a palimpsest

bound stripes & planes dissolve can’t quite copy themselves

Reconstructed Paris Studio of PIET MONDRIAN
after a photograph (1926) by PAUL DELBO, 2014
brown madder
scarlet lake
permanent magenta
alizarin crimson
red ochre
maroon sepia maroon
cadmium red deep
of identically sized blocks are columns of identical cedar / column units with cedar
titles sized identically / cedar identically sized simply arranged / cedar is to a degr-
CEDAR PIECE 1959 / MAPLE FRENCH CURVE EXERCISE 1959 / PYRAMID 1959 / PYRAM
ee cedar composed as columns / together are blocks sized into columns to vertical-
ly form simply arranged columns of identically sized blocks / cedar identically siz-
ID (VARIATION ON SQUARE PLAN) 1959 / QUINCY SLOT WORK 1959 / TIMBER SPOOL
ed & simply arranged / cedar is to a degree vertical columns / vertical forms put si-
mply vertical / simple cedar arranged into blocks / arranged units of identically siz-
EXERCISE 1959 / LAST LADDER 1959 / TIMBER PIECE (WELL) 1964 / FIRST TREE BONE
ed blocks of cedar arranged to size / with cedar titles sized identically / cedar ident-
tically sized & arranged simply / cedar is to a degree identically sized blocks / ced-
1969 / TIMBER PIECE (WELL) 1970 / REDAN 1970 / TAU & RIGHT THRESHOLD (ELEME-
ar identically arranged & simply sized / cedar to a degree is simply cedar with titl-
es arranged identically / cedar formed into sized blocks simply sized / identically
NT SERIES) 1971 / INVERTED HENG (MEDITATION ON THE YEAR 1960) 1971 / UNCA-
sized blocks are columns / cedar identically sized simply arranged are rows of ced-
ar columns titled & sized identically / cedar placed into rows of blocks simply siz-
ed identically / blocks identically sized as columns / cedar identically sized simply
arranged as rows with cedar titles sized & arranged identically / units as cedar blo-
1981 / BAUCIS 1981 / ROMAYTYR 1989 / PYRAMUS & THISBE 1990 / GLARNISH-STAR-
cks form columns simply arranged / blocks as columns in 90-degree rows / units in
columns composed together in rows / titled as cedar simply arranged & sized in ro-
URN 2001 / COPPER TIMBER 2003 / CEDAR SOLID 2008 / 9TH CEDAR CORNER 2007 / CE-

CARL ANDRE
Timber-based Pieces, 1959-2007

CARL ANDRE
Text-based Pieces, 1958-1976
KAZIMIR MALEVICH

4 Squares, 1915
KAZIMIR MALEVICH
Black & White Suprematist Composition, 1915
there is a guy lying in bed eating a bunch of french fries
imagining this pile of stuff above him

PHILIP GUSTON
Painting Smoking Eating, 1973
sienna
rose pink geranium lake
sap green
transparent yellow
burnt umber
lamp black

HELEN FRANKENTHALER
Fiesta, 1973
OPEN: the offshore plunge is elemental near the shoreline
it fetches leeward into long waves it even ebbs (as the moon does) into fusion
underneath that energises as if across slate
while our navigation is maritime a rippling
heavy sea might generate eye-catching spotlights other expansive night histories
range across tidal opposites
what we arrange as respect adds another lunar or solar emblem

OPEN: plunge near the shoreline
leeward waves across slate into fusion
across slate while rippling
might generate night histories
across tidal opposites as respect

PIERRE SOULAGES
Peinture 5th Janvier, 2008
slate rippling slate
------------------------
night tidal night
------------------------
slow grey graphite

------D E R E V N Y A------

subtracts colour – writes DEREVNYA across a drawing – makes something mystical out of it on small paper – frames a word as a thing among things – forming letters as sugared-up noir

V I L L A G E

… instead of painting huts & corners of nature it is better to write the VILLAGE & it will appear to everyone in great detail encompassing the entire village … … … … … … … …

------D E R E V N Y A------

PIERRE SOULAGES Peinture 5th Janvier, 2008 / KAZIMIR MALEVICH Alogism, 1915
POEMS TO THE SEA

after Cy Twombly’s suite of 24 drawings:
Poems to the Sea 1959, oil, graphite & wax crayon on paper, each sheet approx. 33 x 31cm
drawn-in map drawn blank

plenty of signs
riding
  against
  repetition

the repetitive on-shore breeze
to cross boundaries

marking
edges more
as borders that move

places merely to step through
these
changes seem too periodical
to hang on a wall

coming in last thing  bringing
the roundness of hills &
trees

to write ‘over the sea’ then ‘over the sea’
then ‘over the sea’ as poem nineteen
with its pale width-length-height

when everything is equal
  in the flatness of water
moving
in blue ink
sightline into ghost-line
ghost-line into note-line
note-line into song-line
full of 3/4 time
crooning
splintered-lines
to concoct a story
to reconstruct a beach
keep in touch with
instances of colour turning:
pictorial / psychological stances
become a place to wait

repeated motifs imply spatial meaning
so linger & consider
& contemplate

speak to here & now
of material objects in space:
forms one by one
open up the page

allow each intricate detail
to blatantly intercept / contravene
all known fields

break lines or halve words
rule-them-in then rule-them-out
of spaces actual
as well as virtual:

the sea is steep & tilted
the sky is a deep gap
held by a broken mark
task:
to record daily
& fast
white-grey-blue tessellated sea

10.05 / beach
this café is a lightbox
there to sit not with
but in front of
layers of dancing shapes
that interlock
to get the immediate effect

hope to show
that
colour floats to catch
the glow of water & light

4.25 / from the rocks
pale pink
jump-cuts to phthalo blue

7.10 / back home
working at night ocean-blown

beachcombing by starlight

by moonlight
whirlpools run

with acrobatic editing
look
deliberately done

9.45 / on pages soon creased-up
images leap / balloon out

a torch replaces the moon
on the HORIZONTAL:

\[ space \quad sea \quad waves \quad beach \quad shore \quad wind \quad cloud \quad sky \quad horizon \quad light \]

on the VERTICAL:

\[ space \]
\[ sea \]
\[ waves \]
\[ beach \]
\[ shore \]
\[ wind \]
\[ cloud \]
\[ sky \]
\[ horizon \]
\[ light \]
seawards a display of distance
points extend then retreat:

previously
  gathered
  numbers suddenly close-up
  *en plein air*
  perfect as minutes
    standing

fragments
  as a sum of light

  pencil-touch:
    dot carry one
    then dot carry two
    then dot carry three

gets the spread
  of ocean into it

    sand
  that empties  that fills

    confirms human scale
    slight against mass
    perceived as geological

date bottom left  initials bottom right
sea

day sea

grid day sea

edge grid day sea

tide edge grid day sea

light tide edge grid day sea

beach light tide edge grid day sea

wind beach light tide edge grid day sea

storm wind beach light tide edge grid day sea
to keenly look
  watch
  scan
  spin
  squinting as if through 3D frames

to slowly lean
  immersed in space
  clouds / sea / horizon
  tilting
  strong light to push on with

gometry to assist observation
  & understanding
  to be in conversation
  or land on its own
standing outside with traces:

walking into this quest
   with nothing less
      than energy driving it

leaning towards
   an incomplete edge
   on air

   crayoned
numbers crossing-in
   where
      torn-through letters get to:

   when
   a poem crosses over

   empirical proof gets erased
at this distance
abbreviated bathers
who call
    make whispers

4 figures
crossed-off
leaving 8
before spits of rain overtake

rows & rows numbered
tallied
    as if dishevelled disguises
will hide everything
passed left-to-right

    as if
every cancellation
which is vertical
gets overworked
    with
endless joined-up writing
too
pink

that hesitates
deviates
to sepia shades

& carbon-copied blues in waiting
WHITECAP HORIZON
9am

promise flows blue sky notes
upward path / narrow map / follow it down

sunlight is key

abrupt decision / incision
sea of sound

tracing framing
to render each thought & divide
adding up the means to multiply
although

towards
future / or

past
roaming subtraction is to zero
in crayon / gesso / pencil / pastel / biro

gometry assists / can test observation

to measure with:
  a human hand as a hand  an arm as an arm  a body
  as a body              as a field

different permutations will occur up & down in space
but on the horizontal all is intuitive

  entered    exerted upon
  from every side

  sky
  instantly onto the page

network of white wandering
  in a skein

  cumulus half-erased
4pm
caught between
weather
& some far-fetched book of maps
whether to subtract beyond black
or omit detail altogether

fault of failing precision:

a sudden jolt of storm clouds
swaying west overhead
this warm wind won’t widen the sea’s light
won’t widen its stripe of porcelain white

every texture & form
aiming at big effects
ascends gets
a silver thread
for reflected lightning instead

every aspect of scale
gets offset or dwarfed by the horizon

same as writers
revising their text

2 seconds into it when to acknowledge
2 red sail-boats as facts

float a crimson run it along
the serrated edge

6pm
caught unsteady
by bands of distant greyness
draw
contours outlines
or less
steer graphite back & forth
SO KNOWING TO ABSORB HAVE I
NOTHING SUCH A
ABOUT RAW FEELING
METHODS SENSATION THIS
OF THEN MIGHT
PAINTING TREAT JUST
THE IT BE
SEA WITH THE
I THE RIGHT
CAN GREATEST PLACE
BUT RESPECT AND
WAIT FOR TIME
this scattering
gets rewritten
as diagrams of air

even clean hands leave marks that are telling

arcs for numbers
held as confetti
or revised as petals
thrown
by diagonal weather

scale scope
open & generous for
on the shoreline:
stones
shells
sea-weed &
silver paper

on the page:
these gestures settle into patterns

or disappear-as-red

walk away

write / draw more in the hours left
warm wet sea air
fresh salt air
&
gradual

white light
ROSE white light
PEARL white light
CREAM white light
COPPER white light
MAGENTA white light

that shines COBALT
mood & matter inhabits
over & over

each state’s surviving trace speaks up

could say be careful
could be
careful
or could say cancel
& catalogue
what could
be careful or
could say cancel
or could be
careful &
catalogue
what
turns up

but

be
careful
simply with your hands
the unlikeliest shapes arrest

cancel & go beyond simply what
should cancel what will be differently heard

something signalling
something

something
disappearing to red

disappeared disappear-red
so close to broken ground

script in translation
quietly cursive

action of letters:
their crowdedness
their sound

in space where things shift
where
animations of light get pressed into
one breath of air
& the next
& the next

incongruous as letters torn out

impossible diagram
to write
draw

need to squeeze signs through it
words
to move
those erase about
grim E L the forming
rise IN EM version grids rain & tide create new surfaces each instant
& CL ENTS to last HORIZON by its nature not known
fall EMENT be arranged rumble as INCAN TA TION of
to new weather colour IN FIN IT IES felt
be deep & level as blurry sea water
each scrawl valid as if
   glazed / fired
      without the safety of blue
         inscription

   to finger tap & mime each new question
   while still running
      with a score

      atmosphere recorded
         then drawn wide as sea water

only perspective left
     is of minutes
with post-epic perspective
everything has to mesh at the level of myth

on this beach
something
rounded-up or rounded upon

zig zags
in a diary
becoming a maze
becoming a field circled about
or a field circled around

not just one angle to it:

a continuous sweep & tally
concentrated in an absurd document

mapping the territory
it goes right here:
any teller will tread a fine line
rounding the sun’s sparkle

refining performance it suspends

refusing contrivance it scatters

shapes overlap as forms change
both ways
they contradict:

as diagrams encased in waves

as co-ordinates that interlace & hide
can this debris reflect
psychic images washed up
always decaying
from the sea bed

accrued using
blurred printer’s blue
reversing green to obscure changes
that do come landing

24 frames produced earlier
imply long-shots whatever our concepts do
like rebels who reframe questions / messages / quotations:
fragments
for the sea to carry
over sand & stones looping
not only white & its relationship to light

that cancelled beach
that rampant slang
this perpendicular location
those dislodged number rows
their shuffle left-to-right
those wordless surfers
their abbreviated summersaults
this overtaking tide
these cross-listed players
these crisscrossing signs

in mid-gesture white underneath / white inside
POSTSCRIPT

Poems to the Sea in relation to Painterly Poetics – An Explication

I have used three American poets – Charles Olson, Robert Creeley and Cole Swensen – as literary models to inform my own writing process. In recognizing creative practice as a network of conversations, my approach was to contextualize the construction of Poems to the Sea with the disciplines of critical reading and critical writing, specifically drawing upon the spirit of literary experiment that emerged at Black Mountain College in the early 1950s.

The development of my critical thesis reflects how my creative energy has been concentrated upon insights gained from American predecessors, for Black Mountain enabled and put into action Olson and Creeley’s belief that poetry was capable of the ambition and sensibility of Abstract Expressionist painting. I identify with poets and painters associated with the college and its legacy, especially with their adoption of composition-by-field. I see them as companions in the creative process, producing work that reveals the inter-connectedness of artistic practice. Discovering equivalences between disciplines through close-reading of poems and paintings, I wanted to make my analysis of the actual process, in terms of a poet or painter’s means of seeing and constructing, of primary importance. Consequently, the poems and paintings I have chosen to consider within the thesis act as sites of formation and process, while I discuss them as always in a state of ‘becoming’. This understanding of openness that informs the symbiotic relations between poetry and painting was formalised not only in the teaching and creative activities that took place at Black Mountain, but also in Olson’s significant essay ‘Projective Verse’ (1950).
Olson is an instinctive writer: the example he sets in both his essays and his poems is to use language as an action, as I have tried to do in *Poems to the Sea*. His guiding theories such as ‘Projective Verse’ utilise the intuitive gesture as a cohesive means of research. Similarly, within the spatial flow of every *Maximus* poem, the content is made to hold its own position. In keeping with Olson’s pursuit, the Abstract Expressionist’s aim was to make the application of paint the experiential source of each work. The structure of the opening chapter on Olson is designed to elucidate this connection between the verbal and the visual. I situate Olson’s sense of gestural rhythm in relation to Jackson Pollock; his use of gestural scale in relation to Robert Motherwell; his understanding of history in relation to Cy Twombly; his awareness of proprioception in relation to the dancer Merce Cunningham; and his consideration of painterly process in relation to Willem de Kooning and Joseph Fiore.

In researching and writing *Poems to the Sea* I became increasingly aware of how Olson’s theories rely on his innovative interplay of disciplines and his ability to draw upon different bodies of knowledge. In terms of his influence on the collection, I have remained fascinated by the speech currents of language that drive Olson’s poems, revealing the vitality of each gesture. I am especially struck by the immediacy of his words, phrases or lines when seen and experienced as physical things on the page. These attributes of Olson’s poetry bear comparison to the intense energy of a painting by Pollock, de Kooning or Twombly, the painterliness contained within the surface of a specific work, especially when one is able to scrutinize the original painting in a gallery. Olson’s effect on my writing was pivotal when developing poems that reveal the artist’s physical activity and connection to their materials, the involvement of the body in creating an artwork.
Insights gained from Olson’s spontaneous open field poetics made me more aware of the role of the breath: how its instinctive expansiveness equates with the painter’s largeness of expression. This was supported by a number of artist statements I collected while viewing various exhibitions, declarations that affiliate them closely to Olson, such as: ‘active form is good … formation is movement, act. Formation is life’ (Klee); ‘it is really a matter of ending this silence and solitude, of breathing and stretching one’s arms again’ (Rothko); and ‘no limits, just edges’ (Pollock). Olson’s understanding of unrestricted gestural-bodily movement in any medium has been central to the writing of *Poems to the Sea*. Learning from his example and becoming more aware of the spatial and syntactical relations of the open-field, whereby images are answering to other images, has particularly influenced the form and development of the collection.

Olson and Creeley were engaged in a shared poetic project: both were concerned with the motion of the line propelled by the breath; one thought or observation shifting into another; the form of the poem discovering itself as it moved along. Contributing directly to Olson’s development of ‘Projective Verse’ through their extensive correspondence, Creeley (like his mentor) absorbed and responded to the energies and abilities of several visual artists, instigating and participating in a series of collaborations. In Chapter Two I consider the way that Creeley understood and valued visual experience. My focus on his connection with Philip Guston, Frank Stella and Robert Indiana – their methods of seeing and making – reveals in each case an affinity between poet and painter while emphasizing the respect Creeley accorded these and other members of first and second generation post-war American artists, including a number of them in his ‘company’ of aesthetic fellow-travellers and
explorers. Through the juxtaposition of poems and paintings I have chosen for
discussion, the chapter shows how Creeley endorses the experiential basis of
composition-by-field: finding the means to project the speaker’s dynamic attentive
presence where, at all times, every object and image becomes an unfolding event in
the poem.

Immersed in open field poetics while writing *Poems to the Sea*, I found myself
constantly adopting Creeley’s aim ‘to give account’ of the mutability that is
characteristic of the creative process. In common with Olson and Creeley, as well as
the painters I connected them with, I wanted to liberate these poems from any
presiding descriptive intention. Creeley’s surges of feeling that are often halted by
awkward or uncertain instances of expression perfectly convey the inhibiting effect of
moments of self-doubt, the incessant unrest that goes into the making of my own
poems. In writing the collection, I wanted to use the properties of the medium to link
the process of making a poem with that of making a painting: in *Poems to the Sea* I
searched for utterances equivalent to painterly energies and gestures, while at the
same time, tracking the speaker’s paratactic leaps of thought. The subject is always in
the act of making, involved in the act of reaching and struggling towards an elusive
image. From Creeley I have learned that emotion is implicit to the effort, and this
striving to construct a concrete image from something intangible informs the means of
each poem’s articulation.

Similarly aware of the possibilities of visual art, Swensen participates in the
actualities of the creative process: building upon Olson’s innovative use of the
extended line, she provides an immediate response to vision. In the third and final
chapter I discuss how, as a contemporary ekphrastic poet, Swensen explores the manner in which her subject begins to really ‘see’ and then continues both ‘seeing’ and ‘not seeing’; and in the particular case of the painter Pierre Bonnard, how Swensen examines his methods of organizing a composition and his approach to constructing a view. By concerning herself with contrasting ways of ‘seeing’ and ways of ‘making’, she tests the capability of language to enact the painterly and the visual. In a Swensen poem, what is seen within the frame is directing the speaker’s train of thought but, as with Creeley, there is often an instability and uncertainty attached to the speaker’s perspective, for their position is never static. Intervals as leaps of perception or gaps left within the poetic line create a tension between what is audible and what is visible; these leaps or gaps produce a tautness between what is being seen and what is being said.

Swensen integrates passages of prose with sections of verse that nevertheless maintain an open, spatial and rhythmic quality, the text adopting the motion of her specific nature as she sets each run of words into the white space. In terms of enhancing the visual aspects of the poem, she devotes great attention to how different facets can be variously placed upon the page. Swensen’s productive mix of construction and intuition to achieve spatial exactness in her layout has been a considerable influence on my own writing. The shaping and positioning of letters, words, lines and stanzas according to their rhythm and sound play, while simultaneously assessing their visual emphasis and sense of weight, has been vital to establishing a distinctive aesthetic appearance to each of the three sections of *Poems to the Sea*. I wanted every page of the collection to provide a visual as well as a verbal experience for the reader.
As a medium of exploration, writing the collection in conjunction with the analytical prose of my thesis on the painterly poetics of Olson, Creeley and Swensen has effectively revealed many of the intricacies and dimensions of my creative practice. This confluence of creative and critical work has resulted in a deep attentiveness to process. In an autobiographical sense, Poems to the Sea documents what became a powerful impulse in the studio to construct a specific series of non-representational images: painterly-diagrammatic-textual impressions of coastal light marked by an ever-shifting atmosphere. Inspired by Twombly’s series of the same title, I wanted to record sensations of light and air in a visual field where everything is moving.

With each image, I aimed to express vision and movement all at once and looking now at these palimpsests on the studio wall, I get the sense of being left with traces of action and sensation, fragments of feeling and thought. Changes of direction have been the catalyst of numerous transformations so that ideas submerged in the layering – which was sometimes transparent and other times opaque – have often re-emerged later on in the series. In Olson’s terms, every one of these foundational and residual images could be read as ‘a complex of occasions’.

The poetry of Olson, Creeley and Swensen addresses the kinetics of experience: through the resonances of their words, each poet demonstrates a concern for the association of objects in the open field of the poem, and the intense way these objects then inter-operate with one another on the page; each reveals how the exterior world becomes accessible to the writer in split seconds of consciousness. As in the case of the painters they admire whom connected directly with the properties of their chosen media, all three poets have treated language as an art material. Spatial orientation is
also a significant consideration: at various points in my reading of their verse, Olson, Creeley and Swensen have all facilitated in my writing process an acceptance of a momentary loss of bearings where disorientation occurs before the subject gains recognition and locates the self in space. Olson, Creeley and Swensen also convey an appreciation of geometry that can be simultaneously conceptual and concrete, a projective way of seeing the world only presently coming into view. This bringing together of what is intimate and what is situated far away, putting them equally against the arm’s length reach of the artist in the studio was crucial in the development of *Poems to the Sea*.

Acts of measuring and numbering involved in making a composition occur in several of my poems and often these are juxtaposed with the roaming consciousness of the speaker who, if they are to make progress, must avoid being distracted from the geometrical drawing, most usually a grid of some kind, that is their task under hand. The parallel poetics between visual artists and Olson, Creeley and Swensen that I emphasize throughout the thesis are intrinsic to the content of my poems. The painter’s focus on horizontals and verticals and how they might intersect chimes with the concerns of the poet; for both have to work with the effects of lengthening and shortening lines as the emergence of an all-over rhythm demands.

From studying Olson’s, Creeley’s and Swensen’s poetry, I have recognized that the drama of recurrence and variation critically depends upon individual line breaks. As with a painting, the poem is built of units and forces: the concentrations of energy contained within the intervals, as well as inside the actual lines. The process that drives the subjects in several of my poems is typified by Mondrian who simplified his
diagrammatic rendering of place (in the series *Pier and Ocean*, for example) into a partial grid-like structure, full of the kind of gaps and ghost-lines that Swensen refers to as either extending or abbreviating our way of looking at the world.

The writing of *Poems to the Sea* has been informed by Swensen’s ability to merge physical and ethereal realities, for her poetry is carefully packed with a wealth of both erudite and sensory detail. While historical and scientific knowledge is included in her poetic treatment of reflections, for instance, intangible factors are dealt with as they emerge into the field of view: she asks us to consider all of the uncertainties, instabilities and distortions experienced when staring either into bright sunlight or ambient lamplight; she asks what the acts of looking ‘at’ water or ‘through’ glass lead us to see or think; she reveals the constant happening of familiar images recalled in things seen for the first time.

This conversation between the verbal and the visual, epitomized by Olson, Creeley and Swensen, shaped the form and content of my collection of poems, enabling my investigation of the affinities shared between poetry and visual art. Throughout this body of work, the process of writing is seen as congruent with the process of painting. I distinguish various modes of expression in my own creative practice that encompasses both disciplines. Olson’s open field model that has influenced Creeley and Swensen continues to be an inspiration for me: its potential as immense as the limitless space of the open sea.