



Radical Affections: Essays on the Poetics of Outside (Modern & Contemporary Poetics)

Miriam Nichols

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In 1950 the poet Charles Olson published his influential essay “Projective Verse” in which he proposed a poetry of “open field” composition—to replace traditional closed poetic forms with improvised forms that would reflect exactly the content of the poem.

The poets and poetry that have followed in the wake of the “projectivist” movement—the Black Mountain group, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance, and the Language poets—have since been studied at length. But more often than not they have been studied through the lens of continental theory with the effect that these highly propositional, pragmatic, and adaptable forms of verse were interpreted in very cramped, polemical ways.

Radical Affections is a study of six poets central to the New American poetry—Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, and Susan Howe—with an eye both toward challenging the theoretical lenses through which they have been viewed and to opening up this counter tradition to contemporary practice.

Miriam Nichols highlights many of the impulses original to the thinking and methods of each poet: appeals to perceptual experience, spontaneity, renewed relationships with nature, engaging the felt world—what Nichols terms a “poetics of outside”—focusing squarely on experiences beyond the self-regarding self. As Nichols states, these poets may well “represent the last moment in recent cultural history when a serious poet could write from perception or pursue a visionary poetics without irony or quotation marks and expect serious intellectual attention.”

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