A Bibliography for After Jews and Arabs

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1. The Long Haul, or “a saturation job”

I began compiling this bibliography in the late 1970s, as my interest was drawn, for a variety of reasons, to those parts of the world it encompasses. The process of thought, fieldwork, research, and writing that brought the bibliography to completion, and the writing that emerged from it (in the form of my book After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture, as well as various other books, projects, and activities), lasted somewhere between twelve and eighteen years, certainly enough to qualify for what poet Charles Olson called “a saturation job.” As he put it in what was later published as A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn, a document Olson originally prepared in the mid-1950s for his student, Edward Dorn, as a course of study for him at and after his studies at Black Mountain College:

Best thing to do is to dig one thing or place or man until you yourself know more abt that than is possible to any other man. It doesn’t matter whether it’s Barbed Wire or Pemmican or Paterson or Iowa. But exhaust it. Saturate it. Beat it.

1 Ammiel Alcalay, After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
And then u know everything else very fast: one saturation job (it might take 14 years). And you’re in, forever.²

Olson’s text first appeared as a pamphlet published by Donald M. Allen, editor of the ground-breaking and influential 1960 *New American Poetry*, an anthology that brought poets who knew of each other through letter writing but had only appeared in very small, often self-published magazines, to a much wider audience. Many poets and writers coming of age in the early 1960s discovered these poets through that anthology and themselves went on to become participants in the counterculture of the mid- to late 1960s. The 1964 *Bibliography* pamphlet inaugurated Allen’s Four Seasons Foundation and its Writing series, an important publication that would continue for decades and later grow into several other small press ventures under Allen’s editorship. All of this was part of a burgeoning revolt against the Cold War culture of containment and its particular manifestation in the academic administration of knowledge that was largely in service of state power and imperialist policies.

Right at the beginning of his bibliography, Olson wrote:

Assumptions:  (1) that *politics & economics* (that is, agriculture, fisheries, capital and labor) are like love (can only be individual experience) and therefore, as they have been presented (again, like love) are not much use, that is any of the study of the books about

(2) that *sociology*, without exception, is a lot of shit — produced by people who are the most dead of all, history as politics or economics each being at

least events and laws, not this dreadfull beast, some average and statistic³

Encountering this as a teenager in the late 1960s, I can’t say I’m sure I fully understood it but I somehow still knew what it meant. Unquestionably, though, if I thought of a “bibliography,” I thought of this very idiosyncratic document. And it was clearly a creative act, not simply a dutiful compilation. The question of “sociology” so boldly stated, was only fully clarified years later when I encountered the following astounding statistic in Christopher Simpson’s essential but almost unknown 1994 masterpiece, *The Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945–1960*, stating that a 1952 National Science Foundation “report shows that 96 percent of all reported federal funding for social science at that time was drawn from the U.S. military.”⁴

II. Identity, Kinship, Propaganda

What, one might well and justifiably ask, does any of this have to do with the first publication of an extensive bibliography that should have been part of a book published over twenty-five years ago, a book that, as I then wrote in the introduction, explores: “the relationships between Jews and Arabs on the literary, cultural, social, and political planes […] and the relationship of the Jew to the Arab within him or herself”?⁵ Coming of age in the late 1960s I was acutely aware, of course, that peoples and histories had been suppressed, that sources were ignored, that propaganda was meant to force people into acting against their own best interests in the most destructive ways imaginable.

As I participated in public life quite vocally, also imbibing all the sources of the times — from music and underground papers

³ Ibid., 3.
to pirated editions and small press publications—the cultural heroes I held close to heart came from another era but formed the basis of the one I was witness to and participant in: poets like Charles Olson and Vincent Ferrini, Diane di Prima and LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, musicians like Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor. Texts such as Olson’s *Call Me Ishmael* and Jones/Baraka’s *Blues People* showed me that history could not only be written differently but that, as Olson put it, knowledge could be “made active.” These texts themselves harkened back to the more idiosyncratic scholarship of W.E.B. DuBois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, D.H. Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature*, William Carlos Williams’s *In the American Grain*, Edward Dahlberg’s *Can These Bones Live*, and Muriel Rukeyser’s *Willard Gibbs*. Musicians like Ayler, Coleman, and Taylor enacted the upper limits of form, and recall—demonstrating that there were ways back to forgotten melodies one never knew. Later, I would be led to musicologist Victor Zuckerkandl through poet Nathaniel Mackey, and Mackey’s profound formulation: “Music is wounded kinship’s last resort,”6 a major theme of *After Jews and Arabs*, and all its related projects.

As the possibilities opened up by the mass movements of the 1960s were suppressed and assassinations piled up, full-scale structural readjustment brought deindustrialization, mass incarceration, and much deeper social atomization. With all the potential freedom built on the ground of those movements, to impose control, state resources and propaganda mechanisms steered the necessary undertaking of identity formation directed at the reinstatement of a more just historical equilibrium toward the very divisive free-for-all that identity politics now seems to have become. This was, by no means, a simple or straightforward process: it went hand in hand with counterintelligence operations (in the form of COINTELPRO, the counter intelligence

program initiated by the FBI in the mid-1950s, a series of covert and illegal projects meant to disrupt, subvert, and destroy certain US political organizations), and various other forms of coercion forcing people to divide along various lines of identity through disinformation campaigns and institutionalized forms of treatment according to category of person. But it was also self-imposed, even championed, by those very people justifiably seeking more representation. As the late Egyptian thinker and economist Samir Amin so cogently and repeatedly illustrated, the acceptance of “difference” in place of equality under the law and liberation is, ultimately, an anti-democratic subterfuge that perpetuates structures of subjugation.

From 1972 to 1980, as Melani McCallister brilliantly depicts in her 2005 book *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, the US media obliterated the Vietnam Veteran-led anti-war movement, turning the soldiers who had heroically resisted their roles into cowardly and disposable dependents while promoting the heroism of Israeli soldiers and forging new archetypes of hero and terrorist that would both create and inhabit the popular imagination before and after 9/11. As the rust set in and the industrial base of the country collapsed, people were taught to take pride in their ethnic heritage, and the example of Israel openly led the way, through the evangelical movement and various other means, in definitively shaping the parameters of US foreign and domestic policy, deeply internalizing and solidifying policies that had still been in contention since at least the beginning of the 20th century.

This was the context of the late 1970s in which I set out to investigate “my own” ancestral places and sources, since I was that very particular thing: first generation “American,” barely born in the country but embracing it like the home it certainly was, despite, despite everything. Part of the pull back to the Old World had to do with unrepresented histories, familial mythology, and those unique forms of propaganda that only families seem to generate: knowing that there was something back then and there in al-Andalus, but not seeing it represented anywhere. The
circle of that sense and sentiment was squared upon meeting Moroccan and Iraqi-born Jewish Black Panthers in Jerusalem. Over time, these early forays led to the “saturation job” resulting in After Jews & Arabs, and the worlds its formerly unpublished bibliography contains.

III. Worldmaking

The world I set out to investigate had no label, no category connecting to the present or tying various pasts together. European Zionist norms dictated and subsumed any other possibilities: Arab Jews were considered a folkloric category at best, a social problem at worst. Communities that had once co-existed in an autonomous space, who spoke the same language, were now simply assumed to be eternal enemies, whether they were called Iraqi, Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Algerian, Libyan, Tunisian, Egyptian, or Yemeni. The bitter irony of one of the region’s unsung optimists, Eliahu Eliachar, came out clearly in the titles of two of his books: Existing with Jews and Living with Palestinians. Having undergone a multi-year effort with polymath poet, biographer, and translator Edouard Roditi to create a massive anthology of writings by Jews from pre-Islamic times in Southern Arabia to the 20th century, only to have it rejected out of hand by a major university press because they didn’t see any correlation between its Arabic and Spanish-Andalusian aspects, I saw that if there were a stage to be set, I would have to set it. Much work needed to be done to even create the framework in which such obscured correlations could become more visible.

Since there was no extant discipline through which a project like that anthology or After Jews and Arabs could be undertaken, I set about familiarizing myself with a vast range of materials drawn from various subjects, including history and historiography; anthropology, ethnography, and ethnomusicology; political economy and geography; linguistics; philosophy; and the history of science and technology. In effect, I needed to seek both the training and a basic bibliographic outline to create scholarship for which there was, as yet, no clearly defined field.
At the same time, an endeavor of this kind inevitably bumped head on into the question of information overload.

One of the earliest articulations of this sense of overload comes in the 1903 introduction to *The New Empire* by Brooks Adams, a key source for Charles Olson, when Adams remarks upon the plethora of information that a researcher or thinker aiming to synthesize materials into general laws or concepts is confronted with: “the mass of material is accumulating rapidly. Libraries are no longer able to buy and catalogue the volumes which appear, and he who would read intelligently must first learn to eliminate.”7 After resigning from the Office of War Information in 1944, in correspondence with anthropologist and co-worker Ruth Benedict, and later poet Robert Creeley, Olson formed his unique concept of the “postmodern,” based very much on Adams’s concern with information overload and the need, as Adams put it, to move from particularities to generalities: “A fact in itself has no significance; neither have a thousand facts. What gives facts their value is their relation to each other; for when enough have been collected to suggest a sequence of cause and effect, a generalization can be made.”8 In a 1946 letter to Benedict, Olson writes: “It is my feeling that the record of fact is become of first importance for us lost in a sea of question […]. In New History, the act of the observer, if his personality is of count, is before, in the collection of the material. This is where we will cut the knot. I think if you burn the facts long and hard enough in yourself as crucible, you’ll come to the few facts that matter, and then fact can be fable again.”9 Olson’s sense of “fable” here goes directly to its root: to speak, say, narrate, create a narrative.

In this sense, the bibliography published here for the first time, and excluded in 1992 from *After Jews and Arabs* for space reasons, is an essential part of the narrative, not simply a refer-

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8 Ibid.
ence tool, but a constituent element, a creative act penetrating the fog to make available the ground upon which other realities can be imagined and enacted. In a lecture on Olson’s bibliography and its meaning for him, Ed Dorn comments that,

the value for a student in a well-conceived bibliography is not in the bibliography’s comprehension, or completeness, if such a completion were possible, but in the engagement of certain of its — I don’t want to say “genes.” But in the engagement of certain of its — I’d like to say here that the lighthearted depreciation of some of Olson’s sources on the basis that some of them are dated — for instance, I’ve heard this charged against the Pleistocene work — or not up to date, leave me cold, and unimpressed. The value of a working instructional bibliography lies in its net of connections. It isn’t concerned with the latest so-called “corrections” and insights of the latest worker, or the latest hot number. The value for a student in a well-conceived bibliography is not in the bibliography’s comprehension, but in the engagement of certain of its genes….

This passage describes perfectly why I’ve felt that pursuing publication of this “old” bibliography, purposely not updated but frozen in the time of its use, made sense to me and has further implications, given that it illustrates “the collection of the materials” and embodies the “net of connections.”

And that leads into further methodological issues: in a different context altogether, I recently wrote that the wars in the former Yugoslavia seem to me to be the last prominent wars to have taken place in print, and the coincidence between the completion of my bibliography and the date of those wars, 1992 to 1995, is not happenstance, given that I was working in both realms simultaneously. While this is not the place for an extended investigation of the implications of this assertion, suffice...
it to say that what characterized my work in both areas has been the relationship between experience and accumulated as well as emerging print knowledge, with the assumption of a relatively stable material archive. The relative nature of stability may be more obvious in one case, given the condition of war in the former Yugoslavia, but the same tension between what is lived and what becomes known through documentary sources is evident throughout After Jews and Arabs and its attendant offshoots, in which daily political events and relationships between actual “Jews” and actual “Arabs,” and my own experience in and of them, became the filter through which the historical knowledge I explored was sifted. Waiting in line at a tiny kiosk for music cassettes from Iraq and Algeria brought back from Paris; seeing a once great musician in tatters begging in the marketplace; watching smoke rise from burning tire barricades near Jerusalem’s grim housing projects; taking testimony from imprisoned Palestinian children, seeing people dragged in shackles from the torture chamber just a hundred yards from the Central Post Office; standing in vigil with friends whose relatives were starving in the Lebanese camps war because of an Israeli Navy blockade; seeing the collective courage of a truly popular uprising during the first Intifada: all had to be weighed in the balance—like the feather of justice—with every book or document I encountered.

IV. “the dance of freedom”

My sense, in every way, is that we now face acute challenges in the attempt to reinstate what Siraj Ahmed in his brilliant Archaeology of Babel: The Colonial Foundations of the Humanities, calls suppressed “discursive practices” that have been effaced and displaced by both centralized textual and state power. My own struggle to weigh textual and archival materials against the unfolding present I was experiencing is very much a part of these “discursive practices.” In moving across the textual/digital divide I think we also have to consider some of our own very basic discursive practices, as researchers, scholars, writers,
and artists. One of the primary methodological or procedural issues I now see among generations born digital is that, while it is much easier to find something already identified in particular, it has become that much harder to find something one isn’t looking for. Chance encounters leading down unknown paths have become exceedingly hard to experience. Without rarifying the pre-digital age, this process hearkens back to all kinds of different material situations: open stack libraries, antiquarian bookshops, personal collections, all of which must be physically looked at in markedly different circumstances rather than in solitary reception through a screen. In other words, in such a search for something one is looking for, one encounters many more things one wasn’t looking for but which may be of enormous use and value. Even the compilation of a bibliography such as mine would be that much harder now. Just perusing it in the present already marks it an artifact of an earlier era, curious, possibly useful, but very difficult to fully decode.

Initial reactions to suppress publication of After Jews and Arabs were fiercely ideological and explicitly racist. I wonder, at this remove, whether a book like mine would presently even reach the point of contention depicted in the next text in this volume, “Behind the Scenes: Before After Jews & Arabs,” despite this contention taking place behind the closed doors of anonymous reader reports. This is not to imply that I don’t believe such attempts at suppression no longer take place but I think the scene has shifted considerably, to the point where accommodation to certain more sanctioned forms of critique have not only become permissible but desired, as a means of managing difference through containment and limitation. In other words, self-censorship, compliance and, ultimately, the naturalization of generic codes, boundaries and limitations, have all helped obviate some of the kinds of ideological conflicts depicted in such raw manner in “Behind the Scenes.”

I know that, in my case, I haven’t published with a university press since, partly from choice but surely also because I had been thought of as a loose cannon, someone who might do something as rash as try to goad my censors into an open debate
by publishing their anonymous reports. The absence of such debate, not only in my particular case but in so many others, has truly been a loss for public discourse and the advancement or refinement of thought, and it allows the next best thing—the follower, the imitator whose door was opened by the innovator—to take precedence. All of this upholds the most superficial individuality by reproducing a kind of celebrity while militating against solidarity and the idea that such work is, of necessity, collaborative: such collaboration, of course, doesn’t just take place among the living.

And one can multiply instances of such processes in so many different contexts, forcing culture and thought to either conform, or turn in on itself. And this goes across every field of knowledge, perhaps most alarmingly, in the sciences. How much hasn’t been articulated or discovered because of these control structures? How many truly ambitious ideas have gone untried because of the internalization of so many codes of behavior? How many deeper and significant shifts have been thwarted? Clearly, the scope of After Jews and Arabs was not something one person could or should realistically have undertaken—and yet, I went ahead with it.

The stakes seem to me considerably higher than one instance, and my own efforts matter not just because they were mine, but because they were efforts. In one of my true and tried “textbooks,” Investigative Poetry, poet, journalist, and musician Ed Sanders writes about “Investigative Eleutherarchs”:

Lawyers have a term: “to make law.” You “make law” when you’re involved in a case or an appeal which, as in Supreme Court decisions which have expanded the scope of personal freedom, opens up new human avenues.

You make law.
Bards, in a similar way, “make reality,” or, really, they make “freedom” or they create new modes of what we might term Eleutherarchy, or the dance of freedom.11

My intention in writing After Jews and Arabs was also to make a poet’s book. But here, again, we have been subsumed, subjugated, and, finally, diminished by categories that do not serve our interests, our truly common sense. Poets have largely been made to think they no longer have the right to pursue anything bigger than themselves or can only lay the most partial claim to anything of the past, given the thorough indoctrination of “presentist” superiority. This kind of “progressive” ideology not only colonizes the past but severely limits what we allow our imaginations to activate and also curtails the unscripted alliances we might make with both the living and the dead.

While some version of the “commons” appears and reappears as an idealized and longed for site, it is too often simply a rhetorical gesture rather than a sustained intellectual or political practice. As poetry and poetics have become more and more institutionalized, and that institutionalization has become internalized, we have all but lost sight of the kind of disruption referred to by poet Robert Duncan when he wrote: “I have to break up orders, to loosen the bindings of my own conversions, for my art too constantly rationalizes itself, seeking to perpetuate itself as a conventional society. I am trying to keep alive our awareness of the dangers of my own convictions.”12

In some sense, by revisiting this bibliography now, situating its value in method rather than content while contextualizing it as having come from a previous technological age, I am also unsettling its prior specific use and trying to understand what I might have learned from it. Going back to Olson, specifically his class notes for a course at Black Mountain College in 1956,

the year I was born, and edited by Ann Charters as *The Special View of History*, we can see a definition of history embodying a kind of knowledge that almost seems diametrically opposed to the “saturation job.” As Olson noted:

There is no limit to what you can know. Or there is only in the sense that you don’t find out or you don’t seek to know. There is no truth at all, of course, in the modern velleity (the lowest degree of desire) that you can’t know everything. It is literally true that you have to know everything. And for the simplest reason; that you do, by being alive.13

This refreshingly empowering concept seems a far cry from the diminished capacities we have been subjugated into by such theoretical abstractions as “power” or “bio-politics,” and much closer to a concept articulated in an interview with composer and musician Cecil Taylor:

If you have the opportunity to play for people all in different countries, one of the things you begin to discover is that people are—you can find oppressed people all over the world, therefore somewhere along the road you get the idea that it is certainly not about yourself. Any gift that you have is not about that at all. It’s about a force that is about the ungiven, the uncreative. It is about the amorphous, and you are at best merely a vessel. And once you begin to understand that [...] So in our small way what we attempt to do is to look and see and receive and become a sponge and attempt to make anything that exists as part of the palette to describe whatever it is we think we want to do. And what you want to do is to be as beautiful and as loving and as all-consuming as possible, so that the statement has many, many different implications

and it has many different levels. The only way to do that, it seems to me, is to research.\textsuperscript{14}

V. Old Scholarship and its Future

As present conditions spectacularly move us into a future that jettisons more and more of the past, the activation of old scholarship remains a huge issue in the continuing transmission of knowledge and the sustainability of human relations outside models of consumption. Like the untapped energies of magnetic fields envisioned and made active by Nikola Tesla, the progenitor of electricity as we know it, our archives, libraries, personal collections, and memories contain vast resources that generally remain hidden, off-site, hard to access, intimidating. In the spirit of accessibility, the publication of this bibliography is an example and a record: an example of the kind of gathering that can create a new field of force, and the record of a struggle that, at least for the time being, ended in defeat but, nevertheless, may have much to demonstrate. The struggle depicts a historical juncture in which the political agency of a group of people particularly identified by their geographical and chronological commonality, embroiled in an untenable set of political constraints, made valiant attempts to mobilize themselves on the basis of the memory of that history. This is, of course, not an uncommon phenomenon but one that, in fact, is ever present across many historical junctures and moments, from uprisings and movements to revolutions and even counter-revolutions.

In \textit{Charles Olson: The Last Lectures}, a group of faithful students took notes since Olson did not want to be recorded, and one of the key concepts he returned to again and again is what he called “the new illiteracy.” At one point he says:

In our post-pre-literate period you must get close to illiterate to be a human being

Maybe his wish not to be recorded was also a means of forcing his students to face this very condition. One of the last notes transcribed reads as follows:

If you condition yrself to approach the mythology / poetry in words & letters & alphabets & the materials on which they are inscribed like you would a tree or a rock or a god

then you will have directed yrself toward the future.15

How, exactly, are we to interpret this oddly prescient approach? As I have learned from my son’s work in theoretical physics, cosmology, and natural philosophy, the cosmos is a place of infinite potential: it is only the imposed scarcity of planet earth under relatively more recent human reign that has made us think otherwise.16 But as this reign becomes ever more rapacious, cataclysm seems inevitable. As the excesses of a technological civilization geared only towards pure extraction hurtle us toward mass die-offs, perhaps indigenous peoples and those who have remained closer to the earth will salvage something out of the rubble. We can get some sense of this, in a completely different context, from the great geographer Carl Sauer’s “The End of the Ice Age and its Witnesses,” a text that was very important for Olson and his embrace of Sauer’s insistence that, to locate

any particular event, we must attempt, as faithfully as we can, to consider “the earth in all the time of human existence.”

Surely these bibliographies and archives and even the memories of them will fade like lost items from Babylonian libraries, the incinerated remains of repositories in contemporary Baghdad and Sarajevo, or from civilizations we don’t even know existed. While it remains crucial to study the history of things as they become institutionalized — through the habits of language, the political economy of social structures, and so on — we need to remember that it is people who make things, including machines, and people who also make choices, or at least have the potential to make them. My own experience has shown me that even academic scholarship — no matter the apparent level of detachment — is, in almost all cases, highly personal. My case is no different, even though I came to the conclusion — in a wedding of rational thought and emotional clarity — that my geographical ambitions were misplaced, that I had, actually, been “at home” all along. While this has been a startling realization and somewhat difficult to handle on a personal level, the journey remains instructive and it is that which I hope this mixture of old scholarship (in the form of the bibliography), exposé (in the form of the trials and tribulations of the politics of publishing in the next chapter), and current thought (through this introduction), can offer. In that vein, this project seems very much like an offering to some as yet undefined entity that may simply be a feeling or a premonition based on what I have experienced and come to know, and it is in that spirit that I hope it will be taken further.