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Breakthrough into Performance

A Touchstone Work of Late Modernist American Poetry

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I

The first public radio station in the United States, KPFA in Berkeley, California, began broadcasting in April 1949. A legendary counter-cultural enterprise, its initial program months aired a daily fifteen-minute performance of one of the most consequential literary works of late Modernist world literature, Jaime de Angulo's ethnopoetic masterpiece *Old Time Stories* (announced as "Indian Tales"). The musicologist, composer, and writer Peter Garland has justly called it a "story-epic . . . unique in American literature."¹ It is unique not because of its epic extent and ambition. It is unique because of its oral performance, which in its currently authorized but incomplete state runs for some twenty-two hours.

De Angulo performed the work from studio recordings he made between April 1949 until his prostate cancer ended them in March 1950 (he died the following October). The performances culminated a remarkable corpus of literary and anthropological field work and scholarship that de Angulo had been working on from his mid-twenties. All of it orbited around his central interest in language as speech. Though raised in Europe as a native speaker of French and Spanish, he made English—strictly speaking, American English—his principal language after he emigrated to the United States in 1905. His output from 1911 forward includes an impressive body of essays and monographs in anthropology, linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and Native American folklore, much of it still unpublished, as well as substantial works of fiction, translations from Chinese, French, and Spanish, and free verse poetry. His work pivots upon his extraordinary gift for—his

ear for—ancient and modern languages, and in particular his first-hand knowledge of some ten of the languages of western and southwestern American

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first peoples, especially the California first peoples, for which he produced grammars, lexicons, and editions.

The close relation between de Angulo’s language studies and his poetry has to be carefully parsed, however. The title *Indian Tales*, still commonly used for his masterwork, brings the problem into focus. It gained currency from the influential 1953 book with that title, an editorial selection put together in New York two years after de Angulo’s death. Widely translated and kept in print until the late 1990s, that book more than any other shaped and sustained de Angulo’s reputation during the last half of the twentieth century. But its print condition and the many other printings it spun off obscure the significance of the “breakthrough to performance”—the phrase is Dell Hymes’s—that de Angulo achieved in 1949–50. He defined the lifelong focus his work would take in a 1922 comment he made to his first wife Cary Fink. While his field work was helping him “to understand the ‘primitive mind’ [of California first peoples] better and better, . . . What I have really gotten out of my study . . . is less an understanding of the primitive psychology of the Indians than a clearer understanding of the primitive psychology of most of us.”²

It was the primitive lifeways of his Western contemporaries that he was tracking. The signal breakthrough came more than twenty-five years later in Berkeley when he went on air. He found revising his texts for performance very hard—as he told Dorothy Pound at the time, he had “never worked like that before [my] little brain almost snapped.” But in a letter to his daughter Gui written just after he finished his first set of broadcasts—she was living in Paris—he could see what he’d accomplished. Transmediation “has helped me to see deeper than ever into the significance of mythology.”³

From June 1949 through mid-1950 the *Old Time Stories* became an oral prosepoem that was also a self-conscious ethnopoetics for sophisticated Western poetic theory and practice *tout court*. It came through a global language he had grown fluent in (American English) but that was neither of his two mother tongues (French and Spanish). The work holds up the Western life-world for reflection in the distant mirrors—mythic and ultimately music-based—of a few native California languages and the cultural works they fed off and sustained. De Angulo learned how to tell stories about Time out of Clocktime Mind—stories desperately needed by a Western world spun out of natural balance—by beginning to learn about language again, this time from, so to speak, primary sources.

The making of the *Old Time Stories* extended over a complex history of twenty years. While that record is obscured by various fractures, one extremely serious, its salient features can be reconstructed. It began in the late 1920s as a work for his two children—what he then called “Indian Tales for a Little Boy and Girl”: the simple story of a family, half animal and half human, travelling from their home near Clear Lake California to visit family living to the west near the ocean. On their journey out and back they interact with various unusual people (Flint People, Grass, Water, and Fire People, Duck People, Antelope People, etc.), are joined by other quasi-mythic characters, like Grizzly Bear, his daughter Oriole Girl, and Coyote Old Man, learn about different lifeways and languages, and hear many strange and magical tales. De Angulo eventually illustrated most of these materials with a large set of highly dynamic line drawings done in an arresting style he developed from his practical study of Chinese calligraphy and illustration.

As it grew and changed over time, the work gained an underground celebrity because he was reciting and loaning parts of it to his large circle of friends from the Bay area and nearby Monterey County.⁴ In 1945, de Angulo set about preparing an illustrated fair copy typescript for print publication. It’s unclear from the massive set of surviving manuscripts and typescripts—fragments and discontinuous sequences—whether he ever brought this effort to any kind of conclusion. What is certain is the next decisive moment in the work’s passage: the shift in the spring of 1949 from a print conception to oral performance. Aware of de Angulo’s work, the KPFA program director Eleanor McKinney asked him if he would take it on air. When he enthusiastically agreed, he was assigned a six-day late afternoon slot, Sundays excepted. Between April 15 and June 20, 1949, KPFA’s first weeks of broadcasting, de Angulo was “working like hell” at the KPFA recording studio and “making permanent [taped] records.”⁵ In those few weeks he delivered a set of fifty-two on air “installments”—that was his term—that extended over some thirteen hours. Revising his 1945 typescript for performance, de Angulo broke open the work’s not yet realized expressive possibilities. McKinney urged de Angulo to do another set because the first proved so popular. Though not so momentous as the first, it was at least as significant, and not just because of its magnitude: a series of well over two hundred individual broadcasts that had de Angulo on the air for more than fifty-eight hours between June 1949 and March 1950. It was another integral performance that he got to repeat and, like the first, revise: “i repeated them over the radio 3 times and each time i made some variation, transpositions, etc.”⁶

When de Angulo was no longer able to broadcast after March 1950, he turned his attention back to his texts, a move that would help frame the subsequent reception of the work in textual rather than oral and performative terms. A related misfortune subsequently fell upon the actual broadcasts, which KPFA had preserved on quarter-inch tapes. De Angulo told the Pounds there were 100 of them and a close study of all the relevant surviving documents—manuscripts and typescripts, tapes, and the KPFA broadcast schedules—proves that there were certainly at least ninety-seven or ninety-

eight, though only a set of eighty-eight tapes comprising some twenty-two hours currently survives.⁷ This set was made by KPFA/Pacifica Radio in 1991 from the (now-missing) 1949–50 originals under the editorial supervision of de Angulo’s daughter Gui. Whether she edited out some material or KPFA misplaced some tapes, or both, is uncertain. But significant material went missing and other important errors, often large scale, were introduced.

II

Even before the KPFA broadcasts, de Angulo’s *Old Time Stories* were invested in a phonological approach to language and expression, which he laid out in “What Is Language?”, the unpublished linguistic treatise that he wrote in the early 1940s as a supplement to Sapir’s magisterial *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (1921). But the chief significance of his scholarly and professional writings is what their conceptual approach showed him they could not do. De Angulo’s tutelage in the songs and music of native California freed him to recover, for a sophisticated Western language, what Yeats called its “Living Voice.” The *Old Time Stories* turned the expository arguments and exempla of “What Is Language?” and the other professional writings back into performative demonstrations. The imaginative works that came before 1949—his text-based verse and fictions, his *Indian Tales* illustrations, his experiments with “composition by field,” and perhaps most important his exasperation with traditional orthography that drove his “fonetic” text transcriptions—all laid a groundwork for the KPFA breakthrough.⁸

Crucial as it was, that chance KPFA opportunity might have been missed had he not, by chance again, fallen into an extended conversation about poetry and poetics, which began in December 1948, with Ezra and Dorothy Pound. He could scarcely have chosen more apt persons, and the exchange would prove momentous for de Angulo when he revised his typescripts into prompt texts for his broadcasts. The Pounds were eager respondents as he passed along large parts of his fiction and poetry. The *Old Time Stories* was clearly “something more than children’s stories,” Dorothy wrote, while Pound registered the work’s striking coincidences with the *Metamorphoses* when he called de Angulo the “American Ovid.”

Most important, however, the correspondence spurred de Angulo to reflect on what he was attempting in the *Old Time Stories*. Admiring de Angulo’s work, Pound was aghast at his ignorance of traditional prosody. De Angulo pushed back in a splendid letter he wrote soon after he had begun his second, greatly augmented “installment” of the *Old Time Stories*: “You are a funny one,” he wrote, “discover[ing] the poet in me and get[ting] me rid of my sense of inadequacy” and then trying to school me in prosody. To pique Pound he invented a little skit in three scenes, what he called “the story of the horse prosody.”⁹

Scene one, Ezra and Dorothy in conversation: “look, Dorothy, nice horsy, real stuff, look at the gait, singlefeets and paces, nice horse, let’s buy him, a little rough, take a chance, take a chance.” In “Scene II” the equestrian master helps train the horse in proper technique and his instruction succeeds. But after the horse got “first prize” comes “Scene III” and the master’s “disconsolate” reaction: “That’s not a horse, that’s a cow!” he laments, “what have you done to my colt?” Although de Angulo didn’t have to state the moral, he did anyway: ““Ezra, don’t you realize that the day I start worrying about prosody I will cease being a poet?!” He didn’t worry about prosody but he did remember and reflect on where his work came from and what he was trying to do. His fascination with oral performance was long-standing:

My elder brother trained me—*he* was a BORN actor . . . and I always get my audience roaring with those tales of Don Gregorio but writing them down without the help of voice, accent, gestures, & & *is another story!* it’s very difficult.¹⁰

In another letter several months later, just after the second KPFA installment was launched, they asked him about one of the work’s standout motifs, the expression “tras tras tras” that mediates transitions as the Bear party (and the narrative) moves from place to place:

doroth & ezra: “tras-tras-tras” is NOT Indian . . . call it an onomatopoeia (for me it goes back to Don Joe Trigueros—he was Chancellor at the Spanish Embassy in Paris, hwen I was a litl boy . . . and Don Joe Tr. lovd to tell stories and we children lovd to listn to him saying tras-tras-tras to indicate that a person was going going going leisurely.

A recurrence of these “onomatops,” as de Angulo calls them, punctuate the work. They index an oral performance that is being regularly measured against the rhythms and soundscape of Native American song, much of it entirely wordless. Like the Free Jazz that would soon emerge in America, the musical language of the early California peoples that de Angulo worked with was piped to the spirited ditties lacking a tonic chord. At the sub-semantic level, the language does not run on traditional prosodic feet. The “primitive” music and languages that de Angulo became fluent in pointed toward a new conception of English poetry— more strictly, American-English. An undated letter to Dorothy—late 1949 or early 1950—is especially revealing:

Ezra is absolutely right about my complete ignorance of english prosody. It is complete. Not only english, but french also, and Spanish—and every other language. and that is why I never (or hardly ever) showed my poems to anyone [and] why I was never able to warm up to the reading of poetry. . . . i am not joking. . . . it was lucky if i even understood the meaning of the sentences.

Because his poetic work is shaped by his phonetics—his focus, he insists, is the “intonation,” “pronunciation,” and “accentuation” of “normal speech”—traditional prosody proved an obstacle rather than a helpful tool. De Angulo’s work with paleolithic languages helped him see why Don Trigueros’s performances were so spellbinding. If you want remarkable poetic feats, Ezra, do not train your colt in “singlefeets and paces.”

The English language of the *Old Time Stories* threw the issue of music and prosody into sharp focus, as he went on to point out in a brief, crucial passage of this letter. Though the stress-based character of English is apparent in “words of more than one syllable,” or “when the word becomes welded into a phrase of a sentence [t] he stress may completely disappear [as] in Mandarin Chinese in regard to tone (but not in Cantonese).” De Angulo is arguing that because stress can shift or disappear in English vernacular speech, its rhythmic order, its prosodic capacities, show their flexibility. To exploit that, intonation, pronunciation, and accentuation have to dance in the context of performance purposes and expectations.

California’s paleolithic “American Scene” was especially revealing because the linguistic landscape was so various. All the languages were strongly grounded in communal music and dance, some were tonal like Mandarin, others were not. The variety threw the rhythmic capabilities of language into the sharpest relief for de Angulo. While these were already operating in the “Indian Tales for a Little Boy and Girl,” the initial KPFA broadcasts pitched the work over the edge. Of first importance is the oral work’s key instrument, de Angulo’s voice and performance style. Punctuated by regular eruptions of strange song and music, a primarily English-language narrative gets built in a lightly chanted baritone register enriched by clearly audible French and Spanish inflections. The work’s American vocabulary and usage are radically polyglot—shifting from contemporary vulgar idioms to several more formal styles, some academic, some virtually archaic considering the work’s genre and performance context. Its foregrounded (Western) genre, children’s storytelling, was a crucial move because it plays its complex ambitions in a cunningly deceptive minor key.

Because all the tales draw from widely shared, if also differently worked mythic constellations, they constantly echo, overlap, and replay each other in various ways. That is one of the work’s large scale frames of reference: ultimately a prosodic frame since it’s a machine for generating multiple repetitions and motivic variation. The work’s two chief vortices, the tales of Loon Woman and Coyote Old Man, are pervasively reflected and reworked at different scales. Like the Matter of Troy for the ancient heroic world and the Matter of Arthur for European romance culture, their power for cultural expression seems limitless. Two other elaborate sets of material are only slightly less impressive as fractal generators: the Story of the Gilak Monster and the Pomo myth of the brothers Marumda and the Kuksu.

But those great narrative objects can obscure as much as they reveal about the work’s unusual ethnoprosodic breakthrough. They are so spectacular that they can distract from

the relevant minute particulars. We get a clearer view if we parse an apparently anomalous feature of de Angulo's greatly augmented second set of broadcasts. Several tale-tellings on the outward bound journey are repeated—verbatim—when the Bear party turns homeward. The significance of these anomalies might easily be mistaken as transmission errors, especially because the tales in question are relatively minor events in the overall narrative unfolding.

Let's consider two of these verbatim repetitions: the tale of Diniki, Weasel, and the Sausage People, which first appears at the end of the third hour of tale-telling and then again near the end of the twenty-first hour; and the story of a race between Porcupine and Coyote Old Man, which comes during the seventh hour and then later at the end of the twentieth.¹¹

That these events aren't errors comes clear when the work is given what Charles Bernstein has called "Close Listening." Because de Angulo's performance is not being laid down spatially as text but runs as a continuous sound event, it can be difficult to keep in mind exactly what we register as happening at each listening moment. How do we parse—do we even notice?—the verbatim character of such widely separated episodes? One needs a high-level acuity of the ear, the sort of knowledge and awareness one draws upon when listening to music, perhaps especially the verbalized music of opera. You listen and you think, "didn't I hear that before somewhere?" But the music keeps playing and while you are carried forwards, you are haunted backwards.

"Close Listening" calls out small but decisive phonetic differences between the two performances that signal the larger socio-linguistic issues being demonstrated. The first time Fox Boy asks Grizzly to tell the story to the children, but the second time the children overhear Grizzly telling the story to his brother and sister-in-law when the three are sitting together weaving. No one has asked for it the second time. In fact, at that point we know that everyone knows the story already, though they know it in different ways. It's a familiar story for the adults, one they've heard often, though perhaps—probably, in fact—in different versions since they come from different parts of their native California world. The children, however, are getting a first lesson in the pleasures of a certain kind of tale-telling and tale-listening: the kind when you decide you'd like to hear something over again. After all, if you can never hear all of what you're listening to you might well feel you can never get enough of it.

The internal listening scene, the social context for Grizzly's performance, is different in each case. But we are the audience and context for de Angulo's performances. The *Old Time Stories* have had you—us—on its mind, even in its sites, all along. We are being called to register a voice that has learned to perform itself, to make music—rhythmic order—from the sounds it can organize and articulate. Fundamentally it's simply theme and variation, rhyming and off-rhyming, being executed at all of the ethno-linguistic levels of the work. But in his telling de Angulo calls special attention to the most basic

phonological features of mode, tempo, cadence, intonation, pitch, and their moments of duration, pause, silence.

Or consider the two versions of the Porcupine/Coyote tale. Porcupine narrates his own story in the first instance while the second is a performance by Tsimmu, a young Achumawi, which climaxes a long discussion between Tsimmu, Kilelli, Fox Boy, and Oriole Girl about different languages and how they affect the telling of tales. Tsimmu's performance is slower and more carefully measured than Porcupine's. Speaking in his Wolf tongue at the outset, he articulates his language with such care because it's unfamiliar to his new friends. That opening demonstration is a runup to the English language performance that follows, a kind of brief overture, explicitly making his strange and beautiful language his subject. A psychological drama shaped Porcupine's comic performance but Tsimmu's mind and intentions are elsewhere.

While Porcupine and Tsimmu perform for their particular audiences, we make up the audience for de Angulo's contemporary performance. Realizing that, we understand why these tales are not "Indian Tales," an ethnopoetic raid on the myths and music-based languages of California first peoples. Folded into the translation of the *Old Time Stories*, those mythic materials are neither possessed nor explained in the enlightened Modern terms that de Angulo understands and could easily deploy. They are invoked rather for the light they throw on de Angulo's central subject—"the primitive psychology of most of us" who may have fallen asleep in our deceptively enlightened Western languages, like Coyote Old Man in his forgotten valley now called back to life again in a language and for people he never knew. *Old Time Stories* is a performance carried out under Western eyes.

Nor is it a children's story in the usual sense, as Dorothy Pound said, though that genre is imperative. As the "Preface" title to his 1945 typescript shows, it is a performance for "the Parents of a little boy and girl" because, unlike their Modern charges, the in-charge adults are most in need of it. That is the import of the pivotal event in the plot action, when the Bear Party meets a party of Antelope people traveling back to their remote northeastern California home. The collision of different languages that ensues defines the principal focus of what comes in the work's remaining two-thirds, where de Angulo laid in virtually all of the new materials for his "second installment." When the two parties meet, the children quickly "make friends" and are soon playing together "with ease." Not so the adults, as they themselves recognize. "It's strange," Bear says to an Antelope stranger, "how their children know our language but their parents don't." One of the antelope people then spoke in Bear's tongue, although with some difficulty: "Yes, we do a little, we have learned some of it on our trip. But children learn much faster than grownups."

The adults have much to learn. So here are the sorts of things we hear everyone talking about: what are your houses like (could we build one together?); what do you eat and how do you get your food; what ways and ceremonies do you share and what stories do

you tell; most of all, how do you talk, what is your language like? Because the questions need answers, dialogue and conversation dominate the work; and to get truly helpful answers, one rule rules the discussions: show me how, let me try. Those are the topics and problems that preoccupy the intercourse of the people in the final three-quarters of *Old Time Stories*, which is throughout a series of showings and retellings.

Let me change that figure. It's a menu offering Contemporary American English fare—which is also to say that the language is mongrel, cross-bred. The lexicon tells it all, swinging easily between downhome (“lickety split,” “tit for tat,” “you’re kidding”) and academic (“gloaming,” “magnesite,” “obsidian”) or outmoded (“cleaved him in twain”). The narrative can turn fussily correct (“They would all act as if each one of them held a pair of bones in his or her hand”; “There were quiet and silence in the ceremonial house”) or slip into an odd usage (“he commenced a net, and in no time he had it finished”). Some words and phrases seem altogether disoriented in the tale-telling company, like Bob Dylan’s dazed Mr. Jones (“thereupon,” “wherewith,” “Gather hither”). Coyote Old Man calls it “all a mixed up tale” for creating an unheard-of world, which de Angulo keeps literalizing: for instance, in the witty anecdote he spins around the phrase “wild goose.” Traveling in the direction of the sun,” Coyote

heard voices ahead of him behind the hill but there was no one there. Now he heard the same voices on the other side of the same hill. So he ran around the other way but he found no one there. Then he heard the same voices again on the other side of the hill. And again he ran around the hill in the other direction as fast as he could. But again he found no one. They were wild goose people. Silver Fox had made them come by his thinking just to fool Coyote. But Coyote never found them.

These wild goose people, like everyone else, live in the never-never land of de Angulo’s Onomatopia. Take “he commenced a net, and in no time he had it finished”: the commonplaces “in no time” and “in no time at all” keep coming back—thirty-two times in fact—to define the timeless world of these *Old Time Stories*. Simple deictics keep turning magical, like the word “here” (often a pun), “it” (“it will do it again”), and—as above—“there” (“there was no one there”). It’s often doubled up to make a striking onomatope, as in “down there there were dreadful things that snapped at him”). Or take this passage, which is surely more music than language with its torqued wordplays (“this world is all right now”), its internal rhymes, its swinging rhythms:

They said to her, “this world is all right now and things are growing. But we wish there were more light. We cannot see very well in this half-light, how is it in the upper air where you live, is there more light there?”

“Yes,” she said, “there is more light there but I don’t know where it comes from. However I will go back to my home and try to find out. When I have found out I will return. There is more light than here in my home in the air, but not much

more. There may be a way to fix it so there will be more light,” and then she flew off again.

This is music done “in no time at all,” in what Tsimmu calls “twist and stumble time. . . . [W]e twist and stumble somehow. Anyhow everybody keeps a beat and changes foot at some point in the song, I don’t know how to explain it.” It’s music that uncannily forecasts what Ornette Coleman would later call “harmolodics,” a music whose sound has no tonic chord.¹² Coleman often tried to explain that music but in fact—“really,” as we’re often told in de Angulo’s and Coleman’s magically real places—it can’t be explained. It has to be performed.

The most ambitious compositions that de Angulo wrote to this music were inspired by the music-based tale-telling he heard when he was doing his ethnolinguistic field work. As he remarked in the “Preface” he wrote in 1945 for the print version he was then contemplating, “some” he wrote out from memory, “some . . . I actually translated almost word for word from my texts,” and “some . . . I invented out of my own head.”¹³ The first installment of the *Old Time Stories* has examples of all three. As the work doubled in size in the second installment, nearly all of the new story materials were his own free translations from his field work with the Achumawi, Karoc, Pomo, and Miwok peoples.

Two exemplary sets of new tales come into several of the late recordings. They are performed by Kilelli, the “Easterner” who, with his sister Water Blossom and three other young Sierra Miwoks, meet the Bear party on the southern shore of Clear Lake. While these tales are all drawn directly from a set of Miwok myths, none of the *Old Time Stories* declare more clearly their Western focus. They are inventions drawing on native rhythmic and musical forms—sequences of reiterating narrative units, often as fractal extrusions, that Hymes discussed in a series of famous essays. Hearing these performances one thinks their music could have been written by Lautréamont, by Jarry, by Cendrars, or by any number of the Surrealists, and they anticipate the procedural compositions of the Oulipo group.

Unlike those equally remarkable textual works, however, these have to be heard to be recognized. Acts of homage to what de Angulo learned by listening to his native informants, they are oral performances played on a musical instrument made in the West. Kilelli’s tale of “The Water Spirit and the Married Man” provides a striking example. It comes to us in three “free” textual translations, one by Lucy (“Nancy”) Freeland, two by de Angulo. De Angulo’s prompt text was clearly his translation preserved in *Freeland’s Central Sierra Miwok Myths*¹⁴ But a comparison of that prompt text—or any of the three print texts for that matter—with the radio broadcast discloses the radical rhythmic differences. Indeed, it’s apparent that only the performance has realized a condition of musical expression. While “poetry” (prosody) is latent in the very nature of language, it has to be actually fulfilled. Neither Freeland’s nor de Angulo’s print texts have been shaped into a recognizably prose-poetical work.

Kilelli delivers two performances, each of five tales. The two series are interrupted by a tale performed by Tsimmu, which is a reprise variation on a Loon Woman tale we heard much earlier. The rhythm twists and stumbles on and out of itself because the transitions between the prosodic units are brief and fleeting—often no more than the gap between two sentences. So the prosodic units at each structural level of the tale—word, phrase, sentence, passage, and narrative event—“arc” and “interlock” like the “interlace” structure of Old and Middle English verse. The result are two extended, breathtaking performances of such extravagant tale-telling that the narrative registers as either high nonsense or pure music. The performance has turned so sensual that the words have stopped making normal sense. We *are* in never-never land: “Oh listen! For the Vale profound/ Is overflowing with the sound.”

III

Completing the work of the *Old Time Stories* also preoccupied de Angulo as he was dying. Because completion was no longer a performance possibility after March 1950, he turned back to his typewriter and the closure offered by posthumous print publication, the framework first and last of Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*. He worked at this into August, often suffering dreadfully from the cancer destroying his body. But then, with the work “almost finished,” he told Pound that “it does not matter very much . . . to bring [it] to an end.” He went on to explain why: “i intended to leave it sort of unfinished—it would please my shadow to think that the children who will be reading it wud continue the Adventures themselves.”¹⁵ That intention, that “sort of” unfinishedness, clearly recalls the many different ways his native friends and informants would recount “what happened” when they reperformed their tale-tellings. It reflects even more how de Angulo “continue[d] the Adventures” in the fantastical narratives that he assigned to Kilelli in the later episodes of the *Old Time Stories*.

Performing his work this way put him in a conversation with his audience. So the KPFA broadcasts struck hard at a leading idea he had advanced in “What Is Language?” in 1943: that it is primarily a means of thinking and only secondarily a means of communication. His performances and then their success with the radio audience called that conviction to judgment. Both counter-argued that the abstract distinction communication/thinking distorted the truth of language by attenuating its social function. Far better to operate with the distinction speaking/ thinking, which is what the broadcasts led him to. His view of language shifted slightly but decisively when he realized an audience as lively and involved as himself. Vernacular speaking, the sine qua non of interpersonal exchange, then began to reveal the reciprocity of its thinking function; and discursive performance, especially when its forms were soundly shaped, exposed that functional relation—a relation as deeply imbedded in paleolithic culture as in Modern enlightenment and the poetics of Modern enlightened literature.

The afterlife of the *Old Time Stories* thus delivered an ironical confirmation of what de Angulo wrote in that letter to Pound. Like his multiple investments in the work from

1928 forward, all the print and audial records deliver further stories—editorial remakings drawing on the original event. But none are complete in themselves, they live only by being relived, performed, and re-performed. Some seem to want to tell a complete story, like the twenty-two-hour performance on the 1991 tapes. Others, like the 1953 *Indian Tales* printed work, do not propose a complete story but an exemplary selection. In another particular response, Bob Callahan combed through the tapes to find what the 1953 *Indian Tales* book had left out. From that came the Turtle Island Press books *How the World Was Made* and *Shabegok*, the two volumes Callahan titled *Old Time Stories* (1976). If de Angulo set forth the model for those ongoing (re)performances, he took instruction from the native languages and music he loved, studied, and (re)performed in various ways.

But none of that is the whole story. The whole story is “sort of unfinished” by a fatality that is perhaps more wonderful, like the *Arabian Nights*, than it is majestic, like the *Oresteia* or *Clarissa*—though even they can be, have been, and will continue to be recomposed and replayed 1,001 times. If we found records of the more than one hundred hours missing from de Angulo’s 1949–50 broadcasts, we wouldn’t complete the story of the work but only make it more interesting and provocative. Pro vocative. Might the discovery shed more light on the matter? Indeed, but that would be natural light, the *incoherent* light bathing our unfinished world.

NOTES

1. Peter Garland, ed., *Jaime de Angulo: The Music of the Indians of Northern California* (Santa Fe, CA: Soundings Press, 1988), 10.

2. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, *Rolling in Ditches with Shamans: Jaime de Angulo and the Professionalization of American Anthropology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 100.

3. Gui de Angulo, *The Old Coyote of Big Sur: The Life of Jaime de Angulo* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Garden Press, 1995), 395.

4. De Angulo’s admirers were many and various, and his influence—especially on West Coast writers (or “Left Coast” writers, in Andrew Schelling’s witty reprise on a 60s expression)—was considerable. To name only the most notable: Ezra and Dorothy Pound, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Henry Miller, Robinson Jeffers, Allen Ginsberg, Jerome Rothenberg, and the writers of the San Francisco Renaissance, especially Robert Duncan, Joanne Kyger, Gary Snyder, Kenneth Rexroth, and Jack Spicer.

5. Jaime de Angulo to Dorothy Pound, May 1949. All cited correspondence between de Angulo and the Pounds is found in MSS 160, Boxes 1–3, Jaime de Angulo Papers, Charles E. Young Research Library and Special Collections, UCLA, Los Angeles, California.

6. Jaime de Angulo to Dorothy and Ezra Pound, [June or July] 1950.

7. In 1976–77, Pacifica Radio and Gui de Angulo loaned Bob Callahan and Turtle Island Press the original set of reel-to-reel tapes. Shortly afterwards Peter Garland had a set of cassettes made from the tapes that Susan Otori, then Program Manager for KPFA, used for her 1976–77 rebroadcast series advertised as a repeat of what went down in 1949–50. This series covered twenty-eight broadcast hours, although several sessions were devoted to, or included, interviews

and discussions of de Angulo and his work. Broken out into the original set of fifteen-minute performances, the series clearly reflects something close to the one hundred tapes de Angulo mentioned to the Pounds.

8. The phrase “composition by field” was introduced by Charles Olson in his influential essay “Projective Verse” (1950). It signifies how poets can organize the printed page space and a text’s bibliographical codes to score the dynamics of oral performance. See Rachel Blau du Plessis, “Composition by Field,” in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 287.

9. Jaime de Angulo to Ezra Pound, August 7, 1949.

10. Jaime de Angulo to Ezra Pound, undated [early 1949].

11. My point of reference here is to the twenty-two-hour version of the broadcasts that Pacifica Radio digitized and published in 1991. The tapes are freely available online. Jaime de Angulo, “Indian Tales,” *Internet Archive*, April 19, 2015, https://archive.org/details/canhpra_000044.

12. Ornette Coleman, “A Prime Time for Harmolodics,” *Downbeat Magazine* (July 1983): 54.

13. Jaime de Angulo, *Indian Tales* (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1953), 5.

14. Howard Berman, ed., *Freeland’s Central Sierra Miwok Myths*, Survey of California and Other Indian Languages, No. 3 (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), 28–33.

15. Jaime de Angulo to Ezra Pound, undated [summer 1950].

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