

VIAK

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket and light-colored pants, is sitting in a metal chair inside a train carriage. He is looking towards the right. The carriage walls are covered in various graffiti tags and drawings in black and red. A vertical metal pole is in the foreground. The lighting is warm and slightly dim.

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为人民服务

OBαMαo

V.LAK

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Jan Zábřana with Allen Ginsberg in Prague, 1965

JOSEF ŠKVORECKÝ (1924-2012)

LETTER

12 SEPTEMBER 2010

Dear Mr Armand,

I received your anthology *The Return of Král Majáles*. It is truly remarkable and I congratulate you on it. However, I missed one name – perhaps it is in there but I did not find it. The name is Jan Zábřana. He was a Czech poet, both his parents were arrested when he was still a teenager and they spent many years in various Communist concentration camps. He made a living as a translator of Russian poetry.

I was an editor in a literary publishing house, the NSKLHU and he met me because he had read a manuscript of my novel *The End of the Nylon Age*. This was in the late fifties when my books were unpublishable after the banning of my first novel *The Cowards*. As an editor I was able to get foreign books from the DILIA literary agency and I used to lend them to Jan. He became an enthusiastic reader of Allen Ginsberg's poetry and decided to translate "Howl." Jan's English, at that time, wasn't perfect so I wrote letters to Ginsberg for him, asking for

explanations of the meaning of some terms which we couldn't find in the pocket dictionary, then our only source of linguistic information.

So it happened that the only Czech contact Ginsberg had was my telephone number. One day in 1965 my phone rang, I picked it up and heard: "This is Allen. Ginsberg." I asked: "Are you calling from New York?" and he answered: "No, I'm on the Ruzyně airport, I'm in Prague." So I gave him Jan's address and joined the two of them in Jan's one-room sublet. Then we talked until the morning.

It was the next day, I think, that Jan took Allen to the poetry café Viola on Národní třída. When they entered, a young Czech female poet, sitting at the bar, looked at Allen and said: "Nowadays every bum looks like Ginsberg." Allen understood only the last word and said: "That's me! I'm Ginsberg."

That was the introduction of Allen to the Prague community of poets and lovers of literature. He then visited various students' dormitories (koleje) and soon became very popular. We met several times, I took some photos of him, and then he left for Moscow. From there he returned in about three weeks and when we met he told us that he didn't like it there.

This was shortly before May 1st when students of Charles University held their traditional Majáles festivities, and they asked various well known people to be candidates for the title of Král Majáles, or The King of May (named after the famous poem by the early 19th century poet K.H. Mácha). I was asked to be their candidate by students of the Philosophical Faculty. All candidates were to be taken to a hall in the Park of Julius Fučík where an election of the Král Majáles was to be held.

Since I knew that Allen was in Prague, and knowing him, I was sure he would enjoy being one of the candidates, I told the students that they should take the opportunity of Allen being in Prague and ask him instead of me. Which they did, Allen was drawn through the streets of Prague sitting on a carriage, and naturally he ended up being elected Král Majáles.

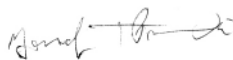
A short time afterwards Allen visited me and my wife in our two-room flat in Břevnov, a district of Prague. It was late at night and that's when and where Allen told me about his unpleasant experience of being called "Buzerant! Buzerant!" (Ty buzerante!) in a street at night and knocked down by one of the fuzz with a moustache à la Clark Gable. He also told me that he no longer was feeling safe, and that he came to say good bye. Shortly after he left, two men knocked at our window (our apartment was on the first floor) and when I opened they asked: "Is that American poet with you?" I told them he had been but he left some time ago." Very obviously they were StB men, members of the secret police.

In the morning a friend of me and Jan, the late František Jungwirth called me. He had a job at the airport, and he told me that he had just seen two policemen who were forcing Allen onto a plane.

In 1970 Jan Zábřana submitted to the SNKLHU publishing house a book, the selected poems of Allen Ginsberg, in his translation. The censorship office (HSTD) however did not permit the publication. It had to wait until 1990, after Zábřana's death and after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia, for the book to be published by Odeon under the title *Kvílení* (Howl). It contains poems from *Howl and Other Poems* (City Lights, 1956), *Kaddish and Other Poems* (City Lights, 1960), *Empty Mirror* (Totem Press, 1961), *Reality Sandwiches* (City Lights, 1963) and *Planet News* (1961-1967). Jan wrote an afterword, "The Poet Who Didn't Leave," for the unpublished first edition, and Professor Josef Jařab wrote a study of Allen's poetry which was included when the book was finally published.

Dear Mr. Armand, I hope that you'll see why I miss Jan in your otherwise marvellous anthology.

Yours truly,



Josef Škvorecký
Toronto

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A black and white photograph showing two individuals at a podium. On the left, a woman with long hair is speaking into a microphone. On the right, Slavoj Žižek, with a beard and long hair, is holding a piece of paper and looking towards the camera. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an outdoor or public event setting.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

DEMOCRACY + CAPITALISM

What happened twenty two years ago? The struggle for the future is always also the struggle for the past. Remember, if you are old enough, why you were on the streets twenty two years ago. You were on the streets for solidarity and freedom. What you got is freedom without solidarity, freedom of corrupted capitalism.

In a classic film by Ernst Lubitsch, *Ninotchka*, there is a wonderful joke: a guy comes to a cafeteria and says, "Can I get coffee without cream?" The waiter answers him, "Sorry, we have no cream, we have only milk." "So then, can I give you coffee without milk?"

This is what happened after '89. You wanted coffee without cream – without corrupted capitalism. You got coffee without milk – without solidarity. If you ask those in power about this, they will tell you this is maturity. You have to accept that life is hard. You have to accept that socialism was an illusion. But if

we have something to learn from the United States it is that we already have socialism for those who are rich. If you are a poor, unemployed worker, you lose everything. If you are rich enough, the state will give you money. This means that you have the right to be proud to have been on the streets twenty two years ago.

But events from around the world, from Egypt to Wall Street, tell us that the struggle is not over, the struggle goes on. They tell that us we are nostalgics who are a threat to democracy. But the irony is that it is capitalism itself which functions better and better without democracy, which is today the most efficient capitalism. In China, where precisely communists run it. So it's nice to see both our enemies – totalitarian communists and capitalists finally where they belong – together, against us.

The problem today is that traditional democracy cannot deal with economic catastrophes. It cannot control global capital. And this is maybe the biggest challenge in the history of democracy.

Utopians think that we will solve things with just some small reforms. You remember when you were young, we were fighting for socialism with a human face. It didn't work. But today also, global capitalism with a human face will not work.

Rightwing racists claim we have to protect Europe to defend Christian legacy. I totally agree with them. But what is the Christian legacy? Remember, when Jesus Christ says, "If you don't hate your mother and father, you are not my follower." This means the core of Christianity is a community of egalitarian believers. So yes, Europe is in danger. But the greatest danger to Europe are precisely those who defend it in the racist way.

A Europe where people like Le Pen or Viktor Orbán are in power, this is no longer Europe. They tell us we are dreaming and change is not possible. But today, what is possible and is not possible is very confusing. The media tell us that in technology and private lives, almost everything is possible. We have sexual freedom. They tell us that we will be able to replace our organs with cloning. They tell us that we will soon be able to travel to the moon. So here, everything is possible. But if you say, "Let's give a little bit more money to health care," they say, "No, this is not possible economically."

Do we not live in a strange world? Where it is very easy to imagine the end of the world. For example, all the films with asteroids hitting Earth and so on... Yet a small change in capitalism cannot happen. Maybe we should set our priorities straight.

So let me conclude with a beautiful historical anecdote. In the middle of the First World War, the German army from Berlin sent a telegram to the Austrian army in Vienna. The telegram said: *Here, with us, on the front, the situation is serious, but not catastrophic.* And what did the Austrians answer? *Here, the situation on the front is catastrophic, but not serious.*

Isn't this our predicament today? We all know we are approaching social, ecological, and so on, catastrophes. But nobody is ready to take these catastrophes seriously. So maybe, the time has come to take this threat seriously. This is why we are here today. We don't live in illusions. The true Utopians are those who think that things can go on indefinitely the way they are now. We are not dreamers; we are the awakening. Thank you very much.

* This is the text of a speech delivered in Prague's Wenceslas Square, 17th of November, 2011, on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary of the Velvet Revolution and the end of communist dictatorship – transcribed by Tereza Novická; photograph of Barbora Štěfánová and Slavoj Žižek by Vadim Erent. [Editorial note: the student demonstration on 17 November 1989 which precipitated the fall of the communist régime in former Czechoslovakia was intended to mark an earlier anniversary, the murder of Charles University medical student Jan Opletal by the Nazis, during the Protektorat, in 1939, at an anti-Nazi demonstration. A further demonstration occasioned by Opletal's funeral on the 15th triggered a series of Nazi reprisals: all Czech universities were closed indefinitely, 1200 students were dispatched to concentration camps, and nine further students were executed – on November 17 – a date subsequently commemorated as International Students Day.]

M O : B E Z M O C N Ý C
Památce Jāna Patočky

I.

Východní Evropou obchází strašidlo, kterým na Západe říkají "disidentství".

Toto strašidlo nespadlo z nebe. Je přirozeným projevem a nevyhnutelným důsledkem současné historické krize systému, jímž obchází. Zrodila ho totiž situace, kdy tento systém už dávno není a z tisícových důvodů již nemůže být založen na čisté a brutální mocenské svévoli, vylučující jakýkoliv nekonformní projev, kdy je ale na druhé straně už do té míry politicky statický, že téměř znemožňuje, aby se takový projev natrvalo uplatňoval v prostředí jeho oficiálních struktur.

Kdo vlastně tyto tzv. "disidenti" jsou? Z čeho jejich postoj vyrůstá a jaký má smysl? V čem je smysl oněch "nezávislých iniciativ" v nichž se "disidenti" spojují, a jaké mají tyto iniciativy reálné šance? Je na místě užívat v souvislosti s jejich působením pojmu "opozice"? Pokud ano, čím taková "opozice" - v rámci tohoto systému - vlastně je, jak působí, jakou roli ve společnosti sehrává, v co doufá a v co může doufat? Je vůbec v silách a možnostech "disidentů" - jako lidí, kteří jsou vně všech mocenských struktur a v postavení jakýchsi "podobců" - nějak na společnost a společenský systém působit? Mohou vůbec něco změnit?

Myslím, že úvaha o těchto otázkách - jako úvaha o možnostech "bez-mocných" - nemůže dost dobře začít jinak, než úvahou o povaze moci v poměrech, kde tyto "bezmocní" působí.

II.

Náš systém bývá nejčastěji charakterizován jako diktatura, totiž diktatura politické byrokracie nad nivelizovanou společností.

Obávám se, že už samo toto označení - byť jinak jakkoli pochopitelné - skutečnou povahu moci v tomto systému spíše zatemňuje, než osvětluje.

Co se nám totiž pod tímto pojmem vybavuje?

Řekl bych, že je v našem podvědomí tradičně spojen s představou určité poměrně malé skupiny osob, která se v nějaké zemi

VÁCLAV HAVEL (1936-2011)

MOC BEZMOCNÝCH (1978)

"THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS"

in memory of Jan Patočka

1. A SPECTER is haunting Eastern Europe: the specter of what in the West is called "dissent" This specter has not appeared out of thin air. It is a natural and inevitable consequence of the present historical phase of the system it is haunting. It was born at a time when this system, for a thousand reasons, can no longer base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power, eliminating all expressions of nonconformity. What is more, the system has become so ossified politically that there is practically no way for such nonconformity to be implemented within its official structures...

2. Our system is most frequently characterized as a dictatorship or, more precisely, as the dictatorship of a political bureaucracy over a society which has undergone economic and social leveling. I am afraid that the term "dictatorship," regardless of how intelligible it may otherwise be, tends to obscure rather than clarify the real nature of power in this system. . . Even though our dictatorship has long since alienated itself completely from the social movements that give birth to it, the authenticity of these movements (and I am thinking of the proletarian and socialist movements of the nineteenth century) gives it undeniable historicity. These origins provided a solid foundation of sorts on which it could build until it became the utterly new social and political reality it is today, which has become so inextricably a part of the structure of the modern world... It commands an incomparably more precise, logically structured, generally comprehensible and, in essence, extremely flexible ideology that, in its elaborateness and completeness, is almost a secularized religion. It offers a ready answer to any question whatsoever; it can scarcely be accepted only in part, and accepting it has profound implications for human life. In an era when metaphysical and existential certainties are in a state of crisis, when people are being uprooted and alienated and are losing their sense of what this world means, this ideology inevitably has a certain hypnotic charm...

3. The profound difference between our system-in terms of the nature of power-and what we traditionally understand by dictatorship, a difference I hope is clear even from this quite superficial comparison, has caused me to search for some term appropriate for our system, purely for the purposes of this essay. If I refer to it henceforth as a "post-totalitarian" system, I am fully aware that this is perhaps not the most precise term, but I am unable to think of a better one. I do not wish to imply by the prefix "post" that the system is no longer totalitarian; on the contrary, I mean that it is totalitarian in a way fundamentally different from classical dictatorships, different from totalitarianism as we usually understand it...

4. The manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite!" Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irrepressible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals? Has he really given more than a moment's thought to how such a unification might occur and what it would mean?

5. I think it can safely be assumed that the overwhelming majority of shopkeepers never think about the slogans they put in their windows, nor do they use them to express their real opinions. That poster was delivered to our greengrocer from the enterprise headquarters along with the onions and carrots. He put them all into the window simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be. If he were to refuse, there could be trouble. He could be reproached for not having the proper decoration in his window; someone might even accuse him of disloyalty. He does it because these things must be done if one is to get along in life. It is one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life "in harmony with society," as they say.

6. Obviously the greengrocer... does not put the slogan in his window from any personal desire to acquaint the public with the ideal it expresses. This, of course, does not mean that his action has no motive or significance at all, or that the slogan communicates nothing to anyone. The slogan is really a sign, and as such it contains a subliminal but very definite message. Verbally, it might be expressed this way: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace." This message, of course, has an addressee: it is directed above, to the greengrocer's superior, and at the same time it is a shield that protects the greengrocer from potential informers. The slogan's real meaning, therefore, is rooted firmly in the greengrocer's existence. It reflects his vital interests. But what are those vital interests?

7. Let us take note: if the greengrocer had been instructed to display the slogan "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient;" he would not be nearly as indifferent to its semantics, even though the statement would reflect the truth. The greengrocer would be embarrassed and ashamed to put such an unequivocal statement of his own degradation in the shop window, and quite naturally so, for he is a human being and thus has a sense of his own dignity. To overcome this complication, his expression of loyalty must take the form of a sign which, at least on its textual surface, indicates a level of disinterested conviction. It must allow the greengrocer to say, "What's wrong with the workers of the world uniting?" Thus the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the facade of something high. And that something is ideology.

8. Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them. As the repository of something suprapersonal and objective, it enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal their true position and their inglorious *modus vivendi*, both from the world and from themselves. It is a very pragmatic but, at the same time, an apparently dignified way of legitimizing what is above, below, and on either side. It is directed toward people and toward God. It is a veil behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo. It is an excuse that everyone can use, from the greengrocer, who conceals his fear of losing his job behind an alleged interest in the unification of the workers of the world, to the highest functionary, whose interest in staying in power can be cloaked in phrases about service to the working class. The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe...

9. The post-totalitarian system touches people at every step, but it does so with its ideological gloves on. This is why life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal assistance. Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the present, and it falsifies the future. It falsifies statistics. It pretends not to possess an omnipotent and unprincipled police apparatus. It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one. It pretends to fear nothing. It pretends to pretend nothing.

10. Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, are the system...

11. Why in fact did our greengrocer have to put his loyalty on display in the shop window? Had he not already displayed it sufficiently in various internal or semipublic ways? At trade union meetings, after all, he had always voted as he should. He had always taken part in various competitions. He voted in elections like a good citizen. He had even signed the "antiCharter." Why, on top of all that, should he have to declare his loyalty publicly? After all, the people who walk past

his window will certainly not stop to read that, in the greengrocer's opinion, the workers of the world ought to unite. The fact of the matter is, they don't read the slogan at all, and it can be fairly assumed they don't even see it. If you were to ask a woman who had stopped in front of his shop what she saw in the window, she could certainly tell whether or not they had tomatoes today, but it is highly unlikely that she noticed the slogan at all, let alone what it said.

12. It seems senseless to require the greengrocer to declare his loyalty publicly. But it makes sense nevertheless. People ignore his slogan, but they do so because such slogans are also found in other shop windows, on lampposts, bulletin boards, in apartment windows, and on buildings; they are everywhere, in fact. They form part of the panorama of everyday life. Of course, while they ignore the details, people are very aware of that panorama as a whole. And what else is the greengrocer's slogan but a small component in that huge backdrop to daily life?

13. The greengrocer had to put the slogan in his window, therefore, not in the hope that someone might read it or be persuaded by it, but to contribute, along with thousands of other slogans, to the panorama that everyone is very much aware of. This panorama, of course, has a subliminal meaning as well: it reminds people where they are living and what is expected of them. It tells them what everyone else is doing, and indicates to them what they must do as well, if they don't want to be excluded, to fall into isolation, alienate themselves from society, break the rules of the game, and risk the loss of their peace and tranquility and security...

14. Let us now imagine that one day something in our greengrocer snaps and he stops putting up the slogans merely to ingratiate himself. He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength in himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game.

He discovers once more his suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt to live within the truth...

15. The bill is not long in coming. He will be relieved of his post as manager of the shop and transferred to the warehouse. His pay will be reduced. His hopes for a holiday in Bulgaria will evaporate. His children's access to higher education will be threatened. His superiors will harass him and his fellow workers will wonder about him. Most of those who apply these sanctions, however, will not do so from any authentic inner conviction but simply under pressure from conditions, the same conditions that once pressured the greengrocer to display the official slogans. They will persecute the greengrocer either because it is expected of them, or to demonstrate their loyalty, or simply as part of the general panorama, to which belongs an awareness that this is how situations of this sort are dealt with, that this, in fact, is how things are always done, particularly if one is not to become suspect oneself. The executors, therefore, behave essentially like everyone else, to a greater or lesser degree: as components of the post-totalitarian system, as agents of its automatism, as petty instruments of the social auto-totality.

16. Thus the power structure, through the agency of those who carry out the sanctions, those anonymous components of the system, will spew the greengrocer from its mouth. The system, through its alienating presence in people, will punish him for his rebellion. It must do so because the logic of its automatism and self-defense dictate it. The greengrocer has not committed a simple, individual offense, isolated in its own uniqueness, but something incomparably more serious. By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game. He has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system. He has upset the power structure by tearing apart what holds it together. He has demonstrated that living a lie is living a lie. He has broken through the exalted facade of the system and exposed the real, base foundations of power. He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely

dangerous has happened: by his action, the greengrocer has addressed the world. He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain. He has shown everyone that it is possible to live within the truth. Living within the lie can constitute the system only if it is universal. The principle must embrace and permeate everything. There are no terms whatsoever on which it can co-exist with living within the truth, and therefore everyone who steps out of line denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety...

17. The original and most important sphere of activity, one that predetermines all the others, is simply an attempt to create and support the independent life of society as an articulated expression of living within the truth. In other words, serving truth consistently, purposefully, and articulately, and organizing this service. This is only natural, after all: if living within the truth is an elementary starting point for every attempt made by people to oppose the alienating pressure of the system, if it is the only meaningful basis of any independent act of political import, and if, ultimately, it is also the most intrinsic existential source of the "dissident" attitude, then it is difficult to imagine that even manifest "dissent" could have any other basis than the service of truth, the truthful life, and the attempt to make room for the genuine aims of life.

Translated by Paul Wilson.

* "The Power of the Powerless" (October 1978) was originally written ("quickly," Havel said later) as a discussion piece for a projected joint Polish Czechoslovak volume of essays on the subject of freedom and power. All the participants were to receive Havel's essay, and then respond to it in writing. Twenty participants were chosen on both sides, but only the Czechoslovak side was completed. Meanwhile, in May 1979, some of the Czechoslovak contributors who were also members of VONS (the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Prosecuted), including Havel, were arrested, and it was decided to go ahead and "publish" the Czechoslovak contributions separately.



ADAM TRACHTMAN

DISOBEDIENCE





vládě







IVAN MARTIN JIROUS (1944-2011)
TO AMALRIK

There water is boiling,
I don't know whose,
By having killed you,
They won't destroy us.

There the sky is boiling,
I don't know whose,
The KGB killed you,
But won't destroy us.

I shall grow tomatoes in your place,
Until they kill me too.
But by killing me,
They won't destroy us.

In heavenly Jerusalem
We shall learn to play
Electric guitar.
It will destroy the Soviet empire,
As you yourself said, as you know.

Translated by Anna Bryson and Jana Klepetářová.

JOAN RETALLACK
BY NOW

Some things to keep in mind:

The best way to get the chimpanzee off the roof is
As Wittgenstein did not write in proposition 5.62
We are making decisions that flow from ancient social
instincts
Freedom was not what s/he wanted, only a way out
This is the story of the ellipsis
The ellipsis begins here.....
Please locate the dot that has turned into a period

For a long time it has seemed too late too late to learn
from the language or to learn from one another's or
even one's own other languages clearly the thing to
do is fast forward from this point on or some other
point on as before good luck etc.

By now its already time to fill out the time sheets time
to move on to the next space-time unit on to the next
words these those words in all the vocabularies where
too many echoes are drowning them in their own
noise what does it matter they we ask don't dwell
on the fact that the words will never be understood
before it's time to move on there is no other kind of
time.

(In the news photo the couch appears to be floating
on the rubble. I can't get this out of my mind.)

Meanwhile the last space-time unit is full of all that
could have happened in it the last words have been
used in the only way they could have been used no
turning back no changing these those things now

except insofar as they reside in the present space-time unit we are now occupying there appears to be only this that space-time unit these those words now. (Two children are sitting on the couch that appears to be floating on the rubble. I can't tell much about them can't see them clearly can't get them out of my mind.)

The simultaneous translation begins not in another language but in the very same language where all the words continue to await translation.

(The children sitting on the couch that appears to be floating on the rubble of their home seem to have dazed eyes. Perhaps their eyes are clearly focused. Their feet stick out over the cushions out over the rubble into my mind.)

These those prepositions are translating themselves out of this that language but into no other this revelatory zone was once thought to be a social space but now it seems only to be an archive.

(In another photo, a woman sits on a couch that appears to be floating on the rubble of her home. Her head is tilted toward her lap, hiding her eyes. A man standing on the periphery is just out of focus. It's impossible to determine the direction of his gaze. These indistinct figures inhabit my mind.)

It is evident now that the emptiness of these those words is precisely what is forcing us them to use more and more of them.

Yes no please forget everything just said no looking back just move on please you must move on in order to move on just fast forward to any new space-time unit yes no it is too late but not too late for these those us them we I I don't know.

The odd construction of this language may reflect any one or more of the informal fallacies that mar our their understanding of these those things for a very long time these those fallacies have looked like the virtues they had become in institutional minds that is now this is what it is is this the it the how the only way of what has been known as history contrary to its own rumors continuing to appear to move on.

(From one photo to the next the rubble is rising. Only black and white or fading colored dots [remain] on the weathered and torn pages only minute areas of shadow and illumination that might or might not have composed an image [remain]. A digital image would of course [remain] perfectly clear.)

From one word to the next s/he said in the translation from the translation of the translation we must always return to zero is this that really possible by now and or was it ever is there by now time to even begin to find out what is meant by these those words in any translation.

Some things to keep in mind:

When you locate the dot that has turned into a period
Do not hesitate to let everyone know if you have any questions

Do not hesitate to start a project to stay in motion
Do not hesitate to go faster and faster until the lines between space-time units begin to blur

Do not hesitate to go back to Zeno's laws against motion to discover what happens if you hesitate
Do not hesitate to try to understand proposition 5.6 and dispute it as did its author for the rest of his wonderful life

(What has one done when one has written such words?)

MCKENZIE WARK WRITING OCCUPY WALL STREET

(FOUR ATTEMPTS IN THREE MEDIA)

1. #WHATIF

17th November 2011

- #whatif the rich paid the same taxes as everybody else?
- #whatif we just circulated ideas rather than respond to the demand to make 'demands'?
- #whatif nobody had to go homeless?
- #whatif we declared war on poverty rather than on other countries?
- #whatif we occupied twitter with a questioning of our needs and desires?
- #whatif all children had access to free quality health care?
- #whatif the banks served the economy; rather than the economy the banks?
- #whatif people could make ends meet doing just one job that had reasonable hours?
- #whatif people asked themselves why the 1% wants them to believe obvious bullsh%t about #ows?
- #whatif everyone thought about what was really in their own interests?

- #whatif the 1% were held as accountable for their actions as the rest of us?
- #whatif elections were publicly funded?
- #whatif we invested in education as a public good?
- #whatif those who lent money had to take a risk to get their interest on it, and lost their bet if they lent unwisely?
- #whatif we were impossible and demanded the realistic?
- #whatif people asked themselves whether they really want to see their fellow Americans go without food and shelter?
- #whatif we invested in new science rather than new weapons?
- #whatif we rewarded those who create new ideas rather than those who just own the old ones?
- #whatif we put creating jobs ahead of paying off the bond holders?
- #whatif we forgive some of the principle on both housing and student debt?
- #whatif people organized at their place of work to improve working conditions?

- #whatif there were indictments for 2008 financial fraud?
- #whatif there was actually a politics, rather than patronage and infomercials?
- #whatif we just said no to neo-fascists who can only feel good by making someone else suffer?
- #whatif there were conservatives who actually wanted to conserve rather than destroy?
- #whatif the news actually reported some news?
- #whatif we rewarded only those investors who take actual risks?
- #whatif we built schools rather than prisons?
- #whatif the government supported farmers who want to grow food rather than agribusiness making corn syrup?
- #whatif our cities were for living in rather than real estate speculation?
- #whatif the 1% had to actually invest in new industries rather than just loot the state?
- #whatif the people made their own agenda?
- #whatif the Democratic Party was actually Democratic, and actually a Party?
- #whatif we threw Faux News in the dumpster rather than books?
- #whatif public spaces were actually for the public?
- #whatif we invested in green engineering, not "financial engineering"?
- #whatif we took climate change seriously and employed people to prepare for it?
- #whatif you thought about what would really make things better, not just for you but for everybody?

2. HOW TO OCCUPY AN ABSTRACTION

2nd October 2011

The occupation isn't actually on Wall street, of course. And while there is actually a street called Wall street in downtown Manhattan, "Wall street" is more of a concept, an abstraction. So what the occupation is doing is taking over a little (quasi) public square in the general vicinity of Wall street in the financial district and turning it into something like an allegory. Against the abstraction of Wall street, it proposes another, perhaps no less abstract story.

The abstraction that is Wall street already has a double aspect. On the one hand, Wall street means a certain kind of power, an oligopoly of financial institutions which extract a rent from the rest of us and in exchange for which we don't seem to get very much. "What's good for General Motors is good for America" was the slogan of the old military industrial complex. These days the slogan of the rentier class is: "What's good for Goldman Sachs is none of your fucking business."

This rentier class is an oligopoly that makes French aristocrats of the 18th century look like serious, well organized administrators. If the rhetoric of their political mouthpieces is to be believed, this rentier class are such hot house flowers that they won't get out of bed in the morning for less than a thousand dollars a day, and their constitutions are so sensitive that if anyone says anything bad about them they will take their money and sulk in the corner. They have, to cap it all, so mismanaged their own affairs that vast tracts of public money were required to keep them in business.

The abstraction that is Wall Street also stands for something else, for an inhuman kind of power, which one can imagine running beneath one's feet throughout the financial district. Let's call this power the vectoral. It's the combination of fiber optic cables and massive amounts of computer power. Some vast proportion of the money in circulation around the planet is being automatically traded even as you read this. Engineers are now seriously thinking about trading at the speed of light. Wall street in this abstract sense means our new robot overlords, only they didn't come from outer space.

How can you occupy an abstraction? Perhaps only with another abstraction. Occupy Wall Street took over a more or less public park nestled in the downtown landscape of tower blocks, not too far from the old World Trade Center site, and set up camp. It is an occupation which, almost uniquely, does not have demands. It has at its core a suggestion: what if people came together and found a way to structure a conversation which might come up with a better way to run the world? Could they do any worse than the way it is run by the combined

efforts of Wall street as rentier class and Wall street as computerized vectors trading intangible assets?

Some commentators have seen the modesty of this request as a weakness of Occupy Wall Street. They want a list of demands, and they are not shy about proposing some. But perhaps the best thing about Occupy Wall Street is its reluctance to make demands. What's left of pseudo-politics in the United States is full of demands. To reduce the debt, to cut taxes, to abolish regulations. Nobody even bothers with much justification for these any more. It is just sort of assumed that only what matters to the rentier class matters at all.

Its not that the rentier class buys politicians in America. Why bother when you can rent them by the hour? In this context, the most interesting thing about Occupy Wall Street is its suggestion that the main thing that's lacking is not demands, but process. What is lacking is politics itself.

It may sound counter intuitive, but there really is no politics in the United States. There is exploitation, oppression, inequality, violence, there are rumors that there might still be a state. But there is no politics. There is only the semblance of politics. Its mostly just professionals renting influence to favor their interests. The state is no longer even capable of negotiating the common interests of its ruling class.

Politics from below is also simulated. The Tea Party is really just a great marketing campaign. It's a way of making the old rentier class demands seem at least temporarily appealing. Like fast food, it will seem delicious until the indigestion starts. It's the Contract on America, its Compassionate Conservatism, but with new ingredients! The Tea Party was quite successful. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time, and no doubt there's a new marketing campaign waiting in the wings for when it runs out of steam. But none of this is anything but the semblance of a politics.

So the genius of the occupation is simply to suggest that there could be a politics, one in which people meet and propose and negotiate. This suggestion points to

the great absence at the center of American life: a whole nation, even an empire, with no politics.

Wall street is a name for an abstraction with the double sense of a rentier class which uses vectoral power to control resources that bypasses political processes which at least had to negotiate with popular interests. Against this, the occupation proposes another abstraction, and it too has a double aspect.

On the one hand, it's a physical thing, a taking of space. This has confused the New York Police Department, which has responded with clumsy tactics. It just can't figure out what to do with an ongoing occupation that is peaceful and mostly content to camp out, but which swells on the weekends to thousands of people. There's a danger that it could become about the NYPD and its cack-handed arrests and either devious or incompetent crowd management.

It is possible that Occupy Wall Street has the rentier class a bit spooked. Not that they would be too bothered by a few anarchists, but they are bothered by the very possibility of any cascading of events that could really catch fire from this largely symbolic action. In the absence of any real competence at the growth and refinement of a political economy, the rentier class has basically decided to loot and pillage from what is left of the United States and to hell with the consequences. They just don't want to be caught doing it.

The taking of a tiny square in downtown New York hardly impinges on the power of the vector. It doesn't even inconvenience the minions who work in the surrounding offices, but the actual occupation is connected to a more abstract kind of occupation, and the slightest hint that it could spread disturbs the fragile constitutions of the rentier sensibility.

The occupation extends out into the intangible world of the vector, but not in the same way as Wall Street. The cop who was stupid enough to pepper-spray some women who were already cordoned off behind orange mesh was quickly identified by hackers, and all his information appeared on the internet for all to see. The

incident on the Brooklyn bridge where the police let people onto the roadway and then arrested them for being on the roadway is on the internet from multiple angles. The occupation is also an occupation of the social media vector.

The so-called mainstream media doesn't quite know how to deal with this. The formalities of how 'news' is now made is so baroque that news outlets descended to weird debates about whether the occupation is 'news.' It doesn't have top tier publicists. It didn't issue free samples. It doesn't buy advertising space. It started without any celebrity spokesmodels. So how can it be news? The occupation exposed the poverty of reporting in America. And that in itself is news.

The abstraction that is the occupation is then a double one, an occupation of a place, somewhere near the actual Wall street; and the occupation of the social media vector, with slogans, images, videos, stories. "Keep on forwarding!" might not be a bad slogan for it. Not to mention keep on creating the actual language for a politics in the space of social media. The companies that own those social media vectors will still collect a rent from all we say and do – not much can be done about that – but at least the space can be occupied by something other than cute cat pictures.

While intellectuals have gotten into the habit of talking about The Political, the occupation has proceeded by creating a lower-case-politics which is abstract and yet at the same time completely everyday. Its no accident that it started with what we might broadly define as 'anarchists', who have been working on both the theory and the practice for some time now.

The organized labor movement started paying attention when it looked like the anarchists and the following they drew would not be easily dissuaded by bad weather or the NYPD. It is as if organized labor woke up one morning, saw that the occupation was still going strong, and said to itself "I must follow them, for I am its leader!" It beats trying to steal members from already unionized workplaces, which seems to be mostly what the unions do.

By now what we have here is what I would call a weird global media event. It is an event in that nobody knows what will happen next. It is a media event in that it's fate is tied to the occupation of the double space of Zucotti square and the media at the same time. It is a global media event at least since the NYPD arrested people on the Brooklyn Bridge and handed the occupation great free publicity. (Thanks guys!) And it is a weird global media event in that it has unprecedented elements that set it outside the staple stories of how boredom, dissent, utopia and all that other stuff is usually managed and assuaged.

For example, commentators tie themselves in knots over whether it is a social movement or not. It is an occupation. It is in the title in case you missed it: Occupy Wall Street. Those who have been paying attention will notice it is part of a global wave of anarchist inspired occupations, big and small. My own university, the New School for Social Research, was occupied in 2008, however briefly. This is a tactic that has been tried and refined for a few years now.

An occupation is conceptually the opposite of a movement. A movement aimed for some internal consistency within itself but uses space just as a place to park its ranks. An occupation has no internal consistency in its ranks but chooses meaningful spaces which have significant resonance into the abstract terrain of symbolic geography.

That it just doesn't do some of the things social movements do is part of why its working, at least so far. It is as remote from The Political as some intellectuals would have it, but it is also different to the Social Forum politics of the recent past as well. For those who want a theory to go with the practice, you will have to look elsewhere than to Negri or Badizek (Badiou+Žižek). There's no multitude; there's no vanguard. It is like Tiananmen square in 1987 or Tahrir square in 2011 in spatial logic, if completely different in scale and composition.

If the occupation is a little confusing for us intellectuals, take pity on our poor billionaire mayor! Bloomberg

suggested that the occupation was inconveniencing the regular banker struggling on a mere 40k-50k per year. The average household income in my neighborhood, which is quite a nice one, is just under 40k per year – and that’s household income. The “poor bankers!” line seems unlikely to garner much sympathy.

So as to how this plays out, nobody knows. That’s how it is with weird global media events. It’s a test of wills. The NYPD are not quite ready to use strong force in case that’s counter-productive. There could be quite a few people – anarchists or not – willing to get arrested. There could be quite a reservoir of popular support. For once the object of the occupation is something generally held in low regard by just about everybody who doesn’t benefit from it. The key is keeping the focus on the abstraction that is Wall street, the pernicious effects of which pretty much everyone feels in their daily life.

3. ANONYMOUS MANIFESTO

6th November 2011

There is a specter
Haunting Wall st
The specter of a people
We’ve got them spooked
That unholy alliance
Of closet fascists
And pseudo-liberals
Who deny we exist
Bloomberg and Fox News
David Brooks and Larry Summers
Its high time
That we speak for ourselves
That we take the mic
And pass it around.

Those who talk about
The 99%
Without talking about
What they really love
What they really desire
What everyday life
Is a struggle about

They are speaking
With a corpse in their mouth.
The struggle to live
Unites us all
In all our differences

Our ideas are on everybody’s minds
Be impossible, demand the realistic.
There is tenderness only
In the crudest demands
Nobody should go hungry.
Nobody should go homeless.
Or be crushed by debt.

But what haunts our waking dreams
Is the power to imagine
The world made real
The world come alive
The shadow of a new world
Without the dead hand of capital
And lifeless spectacles.

To Fox and Friends
We are Halloween clowns
To us they are zombies
Wall street are zombies
Fox news are zombies
Congress are zombies
They want to eat our brains
Braaaaaiiiiinnns!

We are not afraid of zombies
We are scarier than zombies
We are the old haunting specter
The anonymous class
We are legion
Everywhere and nowhere
We come in the name
Of the grand old cause
To take the world back
Before zombies destroy it.

We ghosts have a message
But not from the past
We come from the future

When the lights come on
And the zombies are gone.
The owls of Minerva
Has already flown
They flock at dawn.

4. ZUCCOTTI PARK, A PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

6th October 2011

The confrontations with the police usually get the most attention, but they're not the only thing going on at Occupy Wall Street. I went down to Zuccotti Park at about 9PM on Wednesday, 5th October after putting the kids to bed. I was alarmed by stuff on the twitter feed that detailed incidents of contact with the police but which were not clear about the location. I wanted to make sure our Park was still there.

Just off the subway, and heading down Church street, I caught a glimpse of a march going North, up the street parallel to the east. I saw a mass of closely ranked bodies and banners and heard some vigorous chants. I wasn't sure where they'd be going, as Wall street is to the south. I decided to keep going down Church to Zuccotti Park and maybe catch up with that group later.

I could hear the Park before I saw it. At the western end, about a hundred people were chanting, singing, dancing, banging on drums. I hung out with the for a while. This crowd was young, fun, and a bit crusty. The financial district is usually so dead after working hours. Even the idea of a party at night here is something.

It was hard to work my way into the Park. Piles of stuff were arranged around the planting beds. Mostly disassembled tents. The police have been pretty clear that they will not tolerate 'structures' without a permit, and apparently a tent is a 'structure'.

A young man lay flat on his back in a sleeping bag. I narrowly missed kicking him in the head on my way by. He looked exhausted, as did a few others in sleeping bags that I found in the west end of the Park just past the drum circle at its westerly end.

Under the sound of the drumming was the thrumb of a generator. A small knot of young men crouched around it, powering up devices. Most of the signs of organized activity were east of the crumpled tents and random sleepers. Knots of people clustered around tables dedicated to one function or other of keeping the Park running.

Here was where I found people you might think of as "anarchists," if only in the sartorial sense. People who have some experience at self-organization. Otherwise the crowd was mostly dressed like any other crowd of college or post college age young people in New York City, although here and there you would find older people as well.

A young woman explained what was "problematic" about the occupation to two friends, and allowed me to listen in to their conversation for a while. There were a lot of small groups talking amongst themselves A man in a business suit raised a red and black flag, while talking to another man in a track suit and hoodie.

A woman smiled at a man sitting on one of the stone benches. She parted her thighs and planted herself on his lap. He kissed her; she kissed him back. Her hands were in his hair. I thought of that line in Raoul Vaneigem about those who go on and on about class struggle without speaking of love. They speak with a corpse in their mouth, he says.

An older group, earnest, weathered, held up signs about class struggle so that the TV crew on the southern side could see them. They did not have the curious, expectant, hesitant look of some of the younger people. Not everybody finds all this so surprising. As another Situationist writer, René Viénet famously put it: our ideas are on everybody's minds.

At the eastern end of the Park was a group, about the same size as the drum circle, who preferred to chant slogans. They were standing tightly packed in an oval, doing call and response chants of the popular slogans of the occasion.

It struck me as curious how the Park was polarized between these two ambiances: the drum circle at one end and the chanters at the other. The drum circle understood the place as something like a festival. They weren't for or against anything, they just were. Here, in this improbable, unlikely place.

The chanters felt more in need of a binding ritual that would settle at least for the moment who we are and who we aren't. They seemed more interested in making explicit the terms of the coming together and the cleaving from.

The northern side was strangely bare. It is supposed to be an area for art and signs, but something about that part of the Park didn't seem appealing, even though people were tightly packed into the middle. Along the northern edge were hand made posters, arranged so they could be seen in a stroll down that side. My favorite was "the medium is the message." Done rather patiently in several colors.

Someone waded in with a stack of pizzas. The food carts that are usually here anyway were still open. I would have liked to know what they made of it all, but they were doing a fairly brisk business and I didn't want to hold anyone up. Both cops and occupiers lined up for coffee, and perhaps a few office workers held back late.

A police truck arrived and barriers were slid off and erected down the southern side. Quite a few people got up to watch. A rise in the level of tension was palpable. Who knows who ordered the new barriers or why? It could just have been to make people a little tense.

The police seemed relaxed, however. A policewoman leant against the barriers on north side and chatted on her cellphone. A cluster of maybe ten blue shirted officers leant against the wall outside the Brooks Brothers store on the other side of the street. A white shirt rested his bullhorn on the barriers for a moment. It isn't always like this, of course. I saw police arrest three people in broad daylight just a few days ago. At

this moment all was calm. Nothing is forever in these kinds of situations.

Wandering around the Park, I talked briefly to a few people. I steered away from people who looked like old hands. I was interested in those people who seemed in a sort of a fugue state. Mostly, they could not quite find words to describe the sensation. There was just something about this moment in space and time that was hard to describe.

It wasn't obvious what one should be doing. It isn't work; it isn't leisure. There's nothing to buy. The union-organized marchers were long gone by the time I got there, so there wasn't really any protesting to be done. In the Park at that moment there were no police to confront. If you wanted to make the moment intelligible to yourself, you had to find your own way to do it.

The chanters and the drummers were two ways to go about it. Or perhaps it was a good moment just to try and sleep. There's always something to organize. There's always points to debate. Or, you could just be there. In some ways that's the hardest part. To just be there, in a moment carved out of the division of daily life between the time of work and the time of leisure. In a space that is suppose to be where office workers go for coffee and a cigarette on their breaks.

There's a division of the space of the Park into functions, and usually this does sort of function. At night, with such a big crowd in it, the space had started to redefine itself a bit, and more by ambience than function. People arranged themselves in it more according to how they felt about it. There was an unanswerable question in the air, or so it seemed to me, about what forms of life are possible. In different parts of the Park people gravitated toward different answers. This is what you might call the psychogeography of the place.

When there's nobody really watching, when there's nothing to confront, when there's nothing to debate – this is what's left: How is it possible to create forms of life for ourselves, even if its in the shadow of tall buildings that cast long shadows?

I left the Park and headed back to the subway. I had to get up the next morning to get the kids off the school. People were drifting away, although it was clear that a fairly large group would stay on for most of the night. And others would be back in the morning.

Not many people can inhabit this place outside of work time, but a lot of people come to visit, and to glimpse something of another way in which the city might function. Other lives are possible; sometimes they even actually exist.

No matter what happens here next day or next week, I just wanted to record the fact that this actually happened.

5. THE PREOCCUPATIONS OF WRITING

3rd December 2011

“How to Occupy an Abstraction” and “Zuccotti Park” were written at the request of Verso Books, who asked a number of their authors for contributions to run on their website. I decided in those pieces that for me the role of a writer should be first that of reporting. I did not want to be telling the occupation what it ought to be doing, which seemed the dominant style at the time.

Both essays are based on participant observations in Zuccotti Park, in one case on several experiences there over the early days of the occupation; in the other case on the night of the big rally when the unions mobilized people to join it. In that piece I only hint at the class division within the space of the park between the chanters at the ‘high’ end and the drummers at the ‘low’ end, but at this remove of time and space I think it worth a little more emphasis.

“Anonymous Manifesto” arose out of an invitation from the Washington Square Park General Assembly to appear at a teach-in there. It was originally scheduled for just before Halloween, but I was “bumped” to just after by an appearance by the great Angela Davis. I kept the Halloween theme, however. It was written for the call and response rhythm of the “human microphone,”

where the crowd acts as a chorus, repeating each line. It was also performed, appropriately enough, at a Performa event on 10th November, organized by Stewart Home in a former strip club in the meat packing district.

“#whatif” is a random selection of tweets written directly on twitter, starting on 17th November. That was the day of a big mobilization, which I could only glancingly participate in due to obligations to my children. So I decided to “occupy” twitter. A lot of #ows tweets at the time were necessarily rather breathless accounts of encounters with the police. I wanted to use twitter differently, as a vector for advancing conversations about needs and desires. The #whatif hashtag was picked up by others, but I include only a few of my own contributions.

The #whatif hashtag started being used independently either just before or at the same time, mostly by young African Americans. I retweeted and repurposed some of these and for a while there was an unexpected dialogue of sorts, although for the most part I was ignored. After ‘#whatif @mckenziemark followed you around saying what he tweets at you?’ I decided to leave the imaginative space of #whatif to others.

When reposting #whatif tweets from young people of color I was occasionally accused of retweeting “spam” and “ideology.” I lost a few followers. And good riddance. I stopped because I was annoying some young folks who had their own thing going on, not because a certain closet racism surfaced from the digital depths.

A longer piece, “Shit is Fucked Up and Bullshit,” appeared in *Theory and Event* on December 6th, and is reprinted in my book *Telesthesia*. Experience tells me that as you move away from an event like this, the writing gets less and less helpful, until perhaps ten years have passed, and the passage of time refreshes the screen of memory. So that is about all I have to say about this great festival of the times.



ZOE BELOFF

DAYS OF THE COMMUNE

NOTEBOOK SKETCHES MADE DURING REHEARSAL & PERFORMANCE OF SCENES FROM *The Days of the Commune*, a play by Bert Brecht, a project which ran from March through May, 2012, every Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Liberty Square (Zuccotti Park). Each scene in the play denoted one day. Each day was documented and posted on the website thedaysofthecommune.com

The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first example in modern history of an occupation in which working people took over their own neighborhoods and practiced direct democracy. Many different left groups worked together and women played an important part defining and demanding feminist principles that paved the way for our future. Times have changed, OWS faces pepper spray; the Communards were confronted with live ammunition, but their belief in taking their future into their own hands, in standing up to the wealthy in leading by example instead of by force, is as relevant today as it was then.

OWS 10/31/11 GENERAL

TSHIRTS
FOR FREE
ON SITE

RAISE
\$10,000

I WOULD LIKE
TO ASK FOR A
TEMPERATURE
CHECK ON THIS
PROPOSAL

BEVIVE
WHY ARE AGANT
CAPITALISM
SO WHY ARE
WE SELLING

WE WILL CONTINUE
TO PRINT ON TSHIRTS WHEN
PEOPLE BRING THEM FOR
FREE. THIS IS MOVEMENT
BUILDING NOT
MERCHANDIZING

DWS 10/31/11 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

I THINK KARL MARX'S
COMMUNISM THE WAY HE
INTENDED IT IS A VERY
BEAUTIFUL THING IT'S
JUST NOT POSSIBLE

I'VE GOT THE
OF A FLEA W
BUT WHAT T
SELLING IS





THE DEMAND!
JOBS FOR
ALL - WE
DEMAND A
MASSIVE
PUBLIC SERVICE
PROGRAM - PAID FOR
BY TAX ON THE RICH
AND CORPORATIONS
PROFIT AND
ENDING US
WARS



THE OCCUPIED WALL STREET JOURNAL

ORTH AMERICAN EDITION

NOVEMBER, 2011

ISSUE 5

A LOVE SUPREME

“Deep Democratic

TRAVIS HOLLOWAY

WHAT WE DID & SAID IN NEW YORK

THE POETRY COLLECTIVE AT OCCUPY WALL STREET

Another American Way

When I went looking for Occupy Johnson City, Tennessee, the spiky profile of pickets and placards struck my eye first, and then the people underneath them, but it did not look like a global uprising per se, just an orderly crowd in a parking lot. But a crowd, there's a sight, in a town where people mostly drive-thru or drive on. I saw some American flags and a sign that said "God Hates Banks" and

Poetry in New York City has often found itself at the intersection of underground performance culture and major social and political movements, and the months leading up to Occupy Wall Street were no different. Within days of the birth of Occupy Wall Street, poets of all different genres and persuasions found themselves arriving in Zuccotti Park—a setting situated between what is arguably the two most significant locations in the collective memory of twenty-first century America: Wall Street and World Trade.

Until two weeks before Occupy began, I had been living in Europe on a fellowship to study the role of poetry performances on the democratic revolution in ancient Athens. I returned to be a poet in New York. And I was not alone. In an age of extraordinarily mass media, it is perhaps not since the 1960s that we have seen such a surge of small poetry magazines, organizations, and reading series in the city. These gatherings are oddly some of the few reminders we have of an earlier era in America when citizens would participate in local town

hall meetings and voice political concerns.

A group of poets known as the Poetry Collective met for the first poetry reading at Occupy Wall Street on September 30th at Zuccotti Park. But in a movement in which representatives and leaders were suspect, we were thinking creatively about ways in which we could organize horizontally and democratically. At the initial reading, dubbed a “Poetry Assembly,” there was no headliner, no unifying style, no entrance fee, and—it’s fair to say—no ordinary poetry reading. As the poet and activist Ngoma Hill put it, the first Poetry Assembly was “poetry by the people from the people to the people... in the people’s struggle for change.”

What occurred looked less like a poetry reading and more like a democratic Athenian assembly. As an art form, the poetry assembly did not simply demand for democracy. It performed it. Its procedures were simple. Each poet—from unpublished writers to star bards and even laureates—was considered equal to the next. They each placed their name in a lottery and

were chosen at random. Secondly, each poet had the prerogative to read before the assembly, and each was given no more than three minutes to read. Finally, there was equal and fair participation by everyone present. The event was co-facilitated by different attendees of the assembly and lines of poetry were repeated back to the poet using the same call-and-response method utilized regularly at Occupy Wall Street. With every line, a somatic gesture co-authorized the speaker and even confronted the poet with his or her own words. All of this meant there was little separation between the performer and the audience—the work of art, at least, depended equally on the actions of both.

Although we organized through a Facebook page (Poetry@OccupyWallStreet), our online collaboration remained directed at visible events and tangible resistance in the public space. Poets from around the country began to post their poems online in solidarity, but it was important for each of those poems to be read aloud at Zuccotti Park. One member of the collective began a poetry anthology, but again the group felt it was significant to keep the anthology on-site in the park. Still other members of the collective composed creative slogans for Occupy protests and translated ones from similar movements in Europe. And every Friday night, we would re-assemble in the public space to read poetry.

Events like the Poetry Assembly began cropping up in a variety of art forms from music to theater to puppetry and even quilting. Largely organized online through collaborative and “shared” forums, groups turned social media events into collective performances in the public space. One evening a jazz ensemble could be found in the square and the next a group of women knitting scarves for those sleeping outdoors and facing winter. Contemporary artists’ guilds were forming fast at Occupy Wall Street. People were finding each other. As an e-mail from the Arts and Culture Sub-Committee to me put it, “We believe we are at the brink of a new art movement, a new school of thought. To catalyze that, we are creating collectives inside our Arts and Culture

to advance our movement and society aesthetically towards a new paradigm. We have already a collective on performance art, one is music, and hopefully you will join us with poetry.” We joined.

As one poet involved with the collective, Thom Donovan, put it, “What strikes one immediately upon arriving in the park is a participatory atmosphere... and I think something of this spirit resides in the poetry readings that happen every Friday night.” Another poet and activist involved with the project, Eliot Katz, offered a more historical perspective, suggesting that poetry at Zuccotti Park was “a powerful extension of the role that poets have played in recent decades—in the civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and women’s rights movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s; in the anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s; and in the more recent movement against the current war in Iraq.”

Despite the rich inheritance from those who came before us, artists involved with Occupy Wall Street continue to speak of a new aesthetic forming at Zuccotti Park. Artists and poets are collaborating on shared, often anonymous work, and this work frequently focuses on free performances and events in the public space. For their part, the poets have introduced a new, democratic genre of poetic performance. A way of doing poetry that has perhaps not been practiced *en masse* since the time of those poetry festivals leading up to the Athenian revolution in 508 BCE.

Somehow all over the world a different kind of democracy feels natural to the next generation. Could it be that the generation seemingly structured by a new politics is also structured by a new kind of poetry?

EMILY CRITCHLEY

WE MAKE A POLIS

OR KEEP YOUR EYES POINTED ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD & YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO CHANGE HOW YOU BEHAVE TOWARD THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU

Politics from πολις
'of, for, or relating to citizens'
/ amongst others
processes by which groups
always of people
make collective decisions
(like poetry, or quality
like good or bad leaders)
applies to institutions
& fields, even special interest
groups (like poetry)
all segments of society
involving authority & power
like who sings most fairly
or who thinks most rightly
from out the polis
this 'this' of the people.

Property is my poem
given back to me by people
the 'right' to my 're-write'
of a group of people
who have the public trust?
the little, not the main
but sometimes to exercise my right
goes against 'my' people
in the past, present or future
so the growth of my opinion
like the history of knowledge
which is the history of property
is the history of probably
as institutional structure
as protection in numbers
it is exclusionary as anything
it is invisible as I'm in it

the more man becomes knowledgeable
more world he owns,
the more man becomes knowledgeable
more world he owes.



VINCENT DACHY

LONDON FALLING

RIKE!

9

supported by
NCAE
ANTICUTS.C

WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?
HERE'S A QUICK AND COMPREHENSIVE ANSWER.
...to say the least there's a great opportunity that...
...who was predicted above has already...
...WE MUST RESCUE DEMOCRACY!

BATTLEFIELD
Film screening and Q & A
with Director/Screenwriter
Amancary Tapia
FRIDAY 4TH NOV 8:30PM
(After the GJA meeting)
TENT CITY UNIVERSITY
This and the movie will be...
...www.battlefieldmovie.com



REMEMBER KIDS...
The hidden hand of the market
will never work without the hidden fist.
McDonald's cannot flourish without
McDonnell Douglas. And the hidden fist that
keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's
technologies is called the US Army,
Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.
—Thomas M. Friedman

ANTI-CAPITALISM MEANS WAR CAPITALISM MEANS WAR CAPITALISM MEANS WAR CAPITALISM MEANS WAR



ANTI-CAPITALISTA!

ANTI-CAPITALISM MEANS WAR CAPITALISM MEANS WAR CAPITALISM MEANS WAR CAPITALISM MEANS WAR



ARROW MARCH
YES IN LONDON
NO FEES + NO TO YOUTH SERVICE CUTS
MARCHING & EVENTS
OF THE JARROW MARCH

NOV 8 2:30PM
NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION
BANKMINT
TRAFALGAR SQUARE
www.youthfightforjobs.com

21st Century
Marxism
19 & 27 November 2011
www.comunist-party.org.uk

YOU MAY NEVER
KNOW WHAT
RESULTS COME OF
YOUR ACTION
BUT IF YOU DO
NOTHING THERE
WILL BE NO RESULT



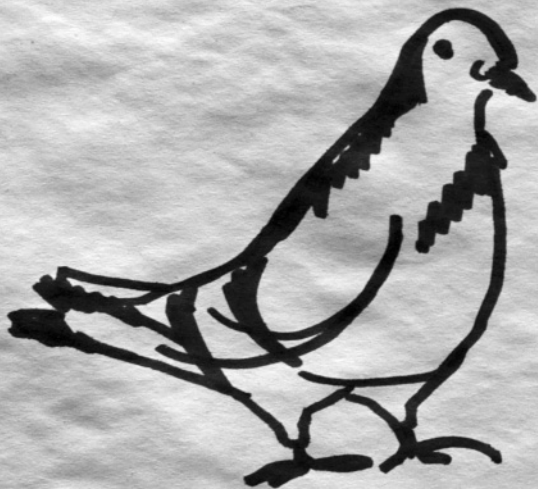
The profits of the Big Six energy companies are at a 2 year high...
...how can we move towards an energy system for people's needs, not corporate profit?



IT'S A HEALTH CHECK
NOT A CREDIT CHECK



join us.
occupy the city.



FREE



REPAIR

THE WORLD

KEEP HOPE

ALIVE



PLEASE RECYCLE

RESPONSIBILITY



FOR THE ENERGY

YOU



AS

AS

A black and white photograph of a metal railing. A sign is attached to the top rail, and various decorative items are hanging from the railing. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a tent or canopy.

WE TRUST
YOU'VE
ENJOYED
YOUR TIME
WITH US



ERRI DE LUCA

WIND IN YOUR FACE

The first times you experience the wind made by running bodies. You see the rush coming at you, your people are running, you stand on one side to stop them crashing into you. They run in silence, no shouting, the breath's all used up by the legs. You watch them run. It's wind in your face, bodies of boys & girls tearing past, no one pays you any mind. Later some will say yes, I saw him, he was standing on the corner, leaning against the wall.

Coming up behind are the troops in their uniforms. You wait for the scant no man's land between those running & those running after, then get away from the sidelines, from the wall, throw whatever's handy, throw low so as to trip them up, then it's your turn to tear away. You've had time to look where it's best to run, where your advantage is, better if uphill. Those in pursuit are breathless already & get disheartened running against a slope. And if they want to take a shot at you, a higher target is harder hit.

You have short odds, just a few yards, but with your sortie you have disrupted their gallop for a few seconds, you've surprised them. They can only see you, but they're jittery with the doubt there might be others, they stand looking around for one more second. It's an old vice of fear, this not trusting your own senses in the heat of the moment. You take advantage of that to gain a few more yards. Finally they realize you're just a splinter, the one flying against the parted legs of someone felling a tree with an axe. Their rage explodes behind you & spurs them on in pursuit, you hear someone screaming to get you & think: brilliant, they're shouting themselves out of breath, in twenty, thirty yards they'll have to stop dead at full tilt to get it back. And at least you've disarrayed their pursuit, your people are safe & you can slow down, try to catch up with them further on, at the meeting point fixed earlier in case of breakaway. You: who are you?

You're someone who one day, in the middle of a

troop charge, just stood still. You were distressed at the helpless scramble of those around you, if one should fall the others might panic and trample him down. You were pained by the awkward scurrying of many girls who didn't use to train in gyms or parks back then. When it was your turn to be a kid, and a street kid, sport had meant the PE hour in a school hall. Boys could run because they played football in the Villa Comunale, always hassled by the city wardens. Girls did not know how to run. They were learning then, in the demos that were attacked, gassed, hounded down.

The first time you didn't run away they got you – in fact you got them, on top of you. You crumpled to the ground, your hat was kicked away, but your instinct had advised you well. You were harder to hit lying between their feet, whereas a blow aimed at someone bent at mid-height lands easier and stronger. They take it out on you, then one of them pushes you into the back lines, you take a few blows, one harder one has you back on the ground, it's come from behind, learn, that's right, that'll learn you that being a man caught & surrendered makes you no safer, you have to get through them first. It's not like when you were little, when whoever got made a prisoner would just skip a go & none would touch them. Here you are in the purgatory of their back lines, cold blows sprung on you, cardboard-boss blows as they say in your home town.

So the first time you stayed caught, nicer than a chicken that'll at least try to slip away between their legs. That was it, you just waited for them without a thought, simply because you didn't want to go. Pushed into a van, the surprise is you're not alone. Next to you in the scant light is another, dressed just about better than you, with no blood on his face or clothes. He asks how you are, if you're aware, if you can count. He makes sure there's no damage inside your skull, only on the outside. He says heads are hard, not so easy to break – easy enough to graze though. He looks at your hole, pulling away the handkerchief you're holding over it, says a few stitches & it'll be good as new.

He got caught, but he stayed on his feet, dodged a

few blows, they didn't manage to wrestle him to the ground, they grabbed him under his arms & carried him deadweight into the van, that way they had their hands full. He's been there before. He asks why you didn't run. You don't know – or actually yes, you do, but won't say that all in all you suddenly were ashamed to, & that shame was stronger than your fear. If you could say it in your own dialect, *me so' miso scuorno 'e fui*, shame on me if I run, it would be accurate, but the intimacy of shame sounds strange in Italian, so you push the handkerchief harder against the hole & keep quiet. You know now though you didn't back then: a great many kinds of courage come out of shame & they're tougher than those boiling up with rage which are sudden jolts & quick to simmer down. But shame is made of durum wheat & will hold the heat.

Meanwhile they're opening up & slamming in another guy who lies still on the floor, he gets up from the seat & helps him up, the guy's resisting, he's scared he'll get it again, he insists, if you stay on the floor they'll come back in & start hitting you all over again: why don't you stay home where you belong, you can sleep on the floor there like the dog that you are. So he convinces him & settles him on the last seat in the bowels of the van. The two doors slam open, by dint of screams & slaps a little group of six arrives, a girl too, all caught together, they lock up & the van starts, with siren & with escort.

Where are they taking us, a guy asks, to the police station he says. Will we get arrested, the guy asks, yes, some of us will, at random, sometimes, he replies. Another guy remembers he hasn't said anything to anyone back home. As you get to the barracks, he says to you: when they open I'll go first, you come after & stick to me like glue, walk fast as you can, don't stop, make sure you don't fall, only look down & mind where you put your feet, they'll make us walk between them, if you fall you'll get it worse than before & you'll get the others hit too, they're behind you & can't get past.

And so it is, he gets out, takes the first blows & makes it straight to the end of the corridor of fists

without stumbling into their feet or getting tripped up, you stick close to him & manage to walk into the hall without any more blows to your head, just a few kicks. He has opened the way for you, your gratitude for him like a surge of tears. The first one behind you stumbled, you heard the cries, didn't turn round. When they too arrive at the hall you've already put your hands over your eyes & don't want to look. But you would need another pair of hands over your ears. You say thanks to him, he says he didn't do it for you, but for himself, that if you'd gone first & stopped, he'd have got it worse.

How many times have they caught him, you ask, a few, he replies. You sit next to each other.

Don't ask for the toilet, he says, if you need to piss just do, it dries quick. You ask him, will we get arrested. If we spend the night here they'll release us in the morning; if not, they'll take us to prison in the evening & at least we can piss in peace.

You didn't run away, he asks you. No. Neither did he, you can find a first few these days who will not run. The first few who are forming a stubborn rank. They're still scattered, but known to one another. You exchange names. So you spend your first night as a caught man, talking about tomorrow, about the next times, about how best to stop charges. Yes you are one who started out that way. In the morning they let you out. You don't go to A&E, but to see a doctor who helps those wounded at demos: he takes you there, you've been friends for less than a day & you'd trust him with your eyes, because these are days in which trust & loyalty step lively – & so does destiny.

At meetings, at assemblies, many know many. The talk is about not getting tripped up & thrown, about setting up defences with those who feel up to closing a rank. The clearest one among us says there's no difference between aggressive violence & defensive violence, that a barricade is pure violence & so is a stone, so is a bottle of petrol. He says the difference is between state violence & people's violence, the former is abuse, the latter isn't. And then he says, let's

clear our heads of exotic words sprung up from other continents, like guerrilla for instance, which means little war.

Over here, he says, it's street fighting we do, so that we can stay in the street even though we're banned, so that we're not overcome, so that we're not arrested. Ours isn't a war, whether big or little, it's a deft snatching of a few hours' demo. We're not liberating territories, just taking the liberty of being against all vested powers.

Some say that's not enough, what about the revolution? It will come, if it does, at the end of many days of stolen democracy. Those who have studied Latin, he says, know how the law of *consecution temporum* chases verbs, strings sentences together one after the other along a chain of verbs. For us today, revolution is like that: a subordinate clause. But it's down to us to act as if, make it the order of the day, & live in this world as revolutionaries. Not for revolution but for the most elementary figure of democracy which is the right to manifest. To find places where our many runaways can live, lawyers who will stand in court & defend the political reasons for our indicted movements, doctors who will treat the wounded outside hospitals.

At the end of demos arrests increase, but the rush is not the stampede it used to be. There's a line absorbing the shock & resisting. You learn to stay there, among those who won't step aside. If one ends up isolated with the troop on top of him you all go back to fetch him & snatch him out of their hands. You once were given this relief, of being plucked up by sheer force from under the troop that had already arrested you. You remember a friend who single-handedly held up an unescorted van at a red traffic light, snatched the keys from the driver & opened the doors & let everyone out shouting 'Homie', like when you were little.

Meanwhile you were realizing that the uniformed troops preferred targeting isolated people rather than your line. Through them you realized that the strength ratio in the street was changing.

You carried on because it carried on & got harsher

through the years, you took part in clashes, many, because the crowd of insubordinates was growing & those like you were responsible for them, for those who came after. In assemblies you talked of the right to feel fear, which is healthy & makes for good reasoning. You shouldn't yank it out of yourself, violence on yourself won't win you courage, just a few minutes' hysterical daring. Ours were the ranks of those who had the homecoming to heart, not deeds for the reckless but actions for the trusting, those who trust in the next person linking arms, who stay close. Was that enough? Not always, but in the fray it's not the

firebrand you need but the calm head, not a hero but a disciplined guy.

The strength ratio kept changing until '75, when, in order to recoup the advantage of public force, a fat parliamentary majority endowed the militia with a bill of law allowing them to shoot in the street without having to prove danger or the need for self-defence, to access houses & political HQs without a warrant, to hold anyone they'd caught for two days & nights without telling either lawyer or magistrate. In short, allowing the so on & the so forth, running roughshod over the scorched prairie of personal & public rights. From that time onwards, holding fast across the streets was the choice of those ready for anything.

Nowadays you can admit it: it was impossible to deal with that youth. Where had they sprung up from, all together? So averse to any authority, fucked off with any delegations, parties or votes, so stuck in with the people, practised in shortcuts, infectious. They'd land in prison arrested in ranks, were soon in league with the prisoners, & riots started breaking out against prison treatment. They'd go on military service & mutinies would start in the barracks for better food & decent pay. Football supporters would adapt the chants & rhythms of demos to their own cheering. Where had it sprung up from, that unforgivable generation that is still paying the penal debt of its own nineteen hundred?

You don't know, but rather imagine that in a wave system there is a tighter & stronger wave that cannot

be explained by the one that comes before or after. So you imagine that sooner or later generations come back.

They come back, it's come back, these days there's another one acting like one body, moving as one generation. Other age groups that came before have adjusted to being children of their own times, they've stuck to the times in earnest obedience. This one, like your own, plays on the upbeat, runs against the grain, and so is contemporary to itself, extempore with the rest. It's concerned with the world, rather than the block of flats. You follow it, watch its movements & the allowances authorities make for themselves against it. With your old news of roasted smoked-up streets you are out of touch with it: this generation will accept taking violence but won't be soiled by reacting to it.

It wants aggression to be one-sided, lays bare their law & shows it in its natural state, for what it is: abuse.

But you're doing what, you & some others of your kind & your age, in the middle of these new ones? Little or nothing of any use to them, that's what – but you're there all the same, called back into the street by the red of Genova, of Piazza Alimonda, of the Diaz & all the rest at the Caserma Bolzaneto, by the red spilled on purpose that through mysterious ways runs back up your arteries & is part of you.

Translated by Christina Viti.

mode

pre: locate occupying body / locate occupying domestic space / locate occupying perspective / locate occupying stream /

tools: chair / stream of financial news / glass / water / paper / pen / perspective /

to occupy: you the occupying body must remain for 24 hours in the occupying space / you the occupying body must submit to listening to the financial news / you the occupying body must repeatedly utter the object / you the occupying body must write one word each hour as a mark of time / you the occupying body must not communicate outwards / you the occupying body must remain calm / you the occupying body must face a window / you the occupying body must occupy as a constant / you the occupying body must fast / you the occupying body must not sleep / you the occupying body must be aware / you the occupying body must focus on events / you the occupying body must renege the self / you the occupying body must not admit defeat / you the occupying body must engage in silence / you the occupying body must not use bodily confrontation / you the occupying body must remain still / you the occupying body must / you must / you must / you the occupying body /

effect

occupy as body from 07:00 11/03/2012 to 07:00 12/03/2012

///

occupy as body in 19 Anstey Rd / SE15 4JX / London

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RYAN ORMONDE
ST PAUL'S

gaffer tape, fresh produce, bananas, tomatoes, soya milk, cheese, jams, hummus, pre-cooked meat, salad, tinned sweet corn, eggs, biscuits, cakes, re-usable crockery + cutlery, bottled water, chairs + tables, whiteboard, hd videocam, gaffer tape, notebooks, marker pens, paint, clothes pegs, long extension leads, trailer bike for laundry runs, led lighting strips, torches, headlamp torches, sandbags, tents, sleeping bags, blankets, wooden pallets, rope, warm clothing, co2 fire extinguishers, inverters, 5v dc mains plug, water-proof power cables, petrol-can safety cabinets, power generator cages, tape-measure, tools, co monitor, sturdy table, bookcase, benches + seats, vitamin c, echinacea, liquorice tincture, table + seats + whiteboard, re-usable plates + cups + spoons, mobile phones + chargers, leisure batteries, plants, alcohol wipes, gauze, first aid tape, non-latex gloves, zinc oxide tape, steri-strips, tubi-grips, handsan, chairs for tea tents

DOMINE DIRIGE NOS

MICHAEL ZAND

EPISTLE OF ST PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

sit with me . here on the ledge
in abundance
as the winter groundswell rolls . under us and then under us

you . with red raw palms
both of us . gripping the flag tight
and the lord dancing and digging in . for any bird that swoops and dies

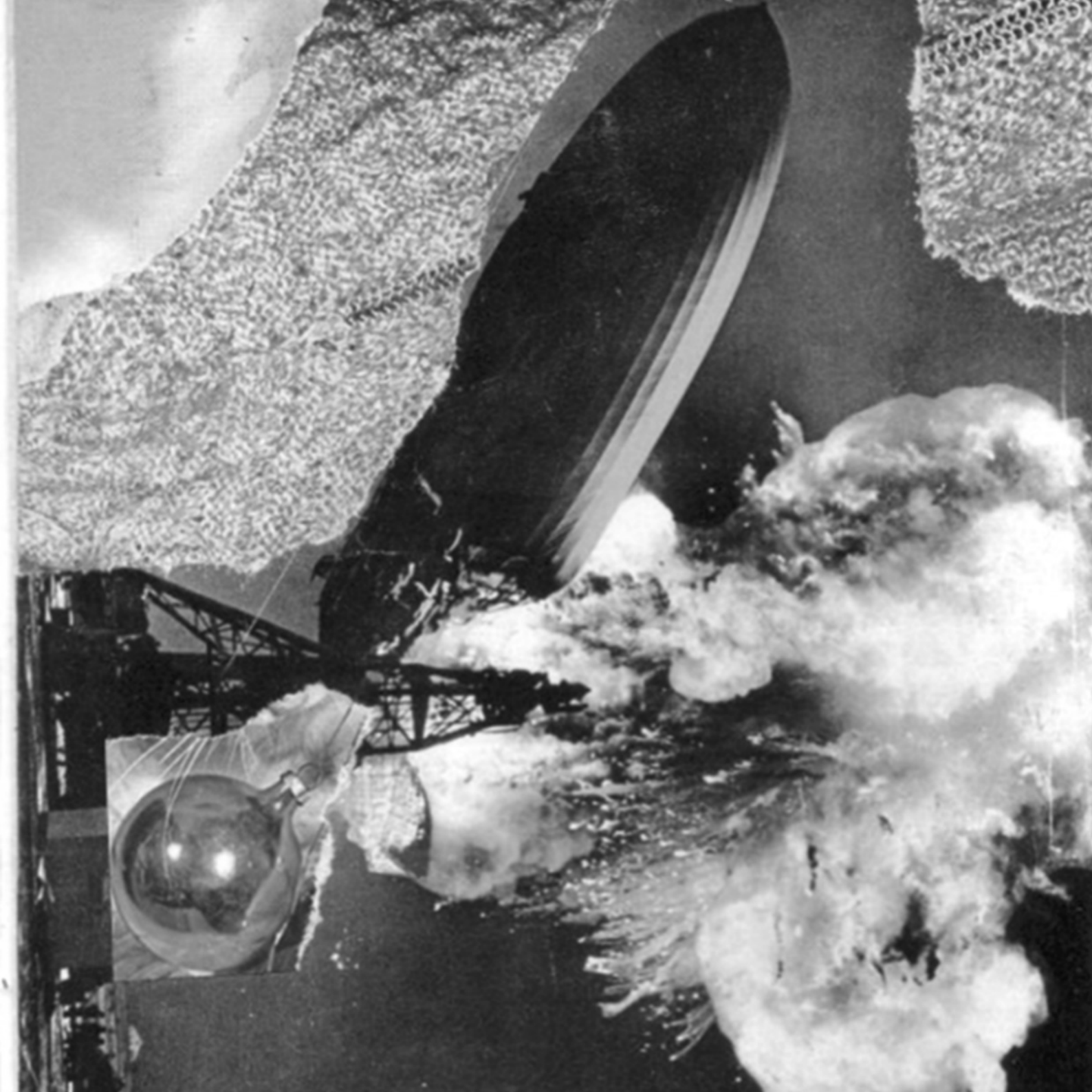
will leave this place . to the spectral rats and giant donkeys of the shitty centre
but purples remain
as do the lanterns . paper and fire

and we remain
brothers sisters in sanctuary . in a shout of virtue or praise or good will . we persist
as revenants

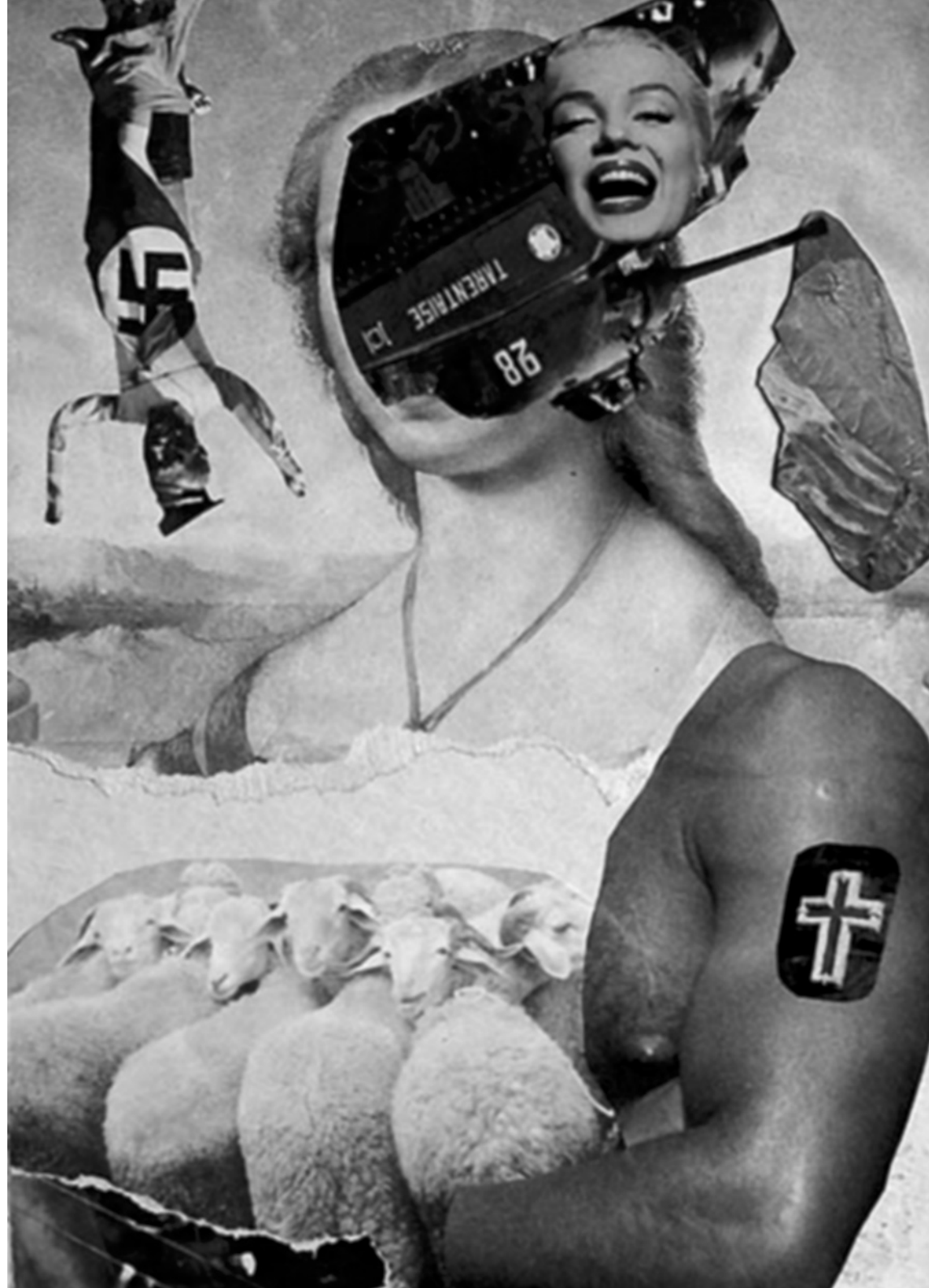
MALDO NOLLIMERG

TAREN'TAISE













SEAN BONNEY

MEMO ON VIOLENCE

FIRST LETTER ON HARMONY

Somewhere in London there is a judge who, every seven days, pays a prostitute to re-enact the crimes of those he has sentenced that week, while he looks on and masturbates. Sorry, I've been trying and I just can't get that sentence right. I read about it this morning on Facebook and, you know, it kind of made me want to puke into my cornflakes. Its annoying, I was hoping to make some progress on the thoughts I've been developing on the Pythagorean system of harmonics, and how it relies on a consciously fictional central point in order to keep its symmetrical force stable. There's a passage on it in Lenin's *Collected* (vol. 38), and I think it might be helpful, tho for what I'm not quite sure. But anyway, I couldn't stop thinking about this judge. And then I started thinking, well, what if – and sure its a pretty big if – but what if he was producing these emissions quite deliberately, as the source of a central vibration through which the judiciary could impose a new and extremely rigid analysis of the city, within which a sterile atmosphere could be maintained for the propagation of a limited number of official sentences (say, for example, seven) from which all possible thought could be derived. Sex magic, yeh. All of that ludicrous shit. Don't think I'm turning into one of those wankers in David Icke masks: in terms of creation myths it's a fairly traditional narrative structure. What this judge probably doesn't realise, however, is that each of his particle jets will necessarily invoke an adjunct sentence, which while in its weak form may only be manifest in certain cries of disbelief and fear, in extreme conditions may - and that's a very big "may" – may ultimately manifest as a ring of antiprotons, otherwise known as attack dogs. Hackney, for example. These attack dogs are stable, but they are typically short-lived since any collision with an official sentence will cause both of them to be annihilated in a brief but highly intense burst of energy. In other words: buy a gun, learn to shoot it, get a rudimentary job in the high court, and then do some very simple equations. Hope you're well, by the way. The sky over London is milky and foul.


SECOND LETTER ON HARMONY

OK lets try again. Though bear in mind, this is gonna be naive as all hell. I mean, I haven't done the requisite study, of what harmony is and what it has been etc. What I can gather, from a careful reading of some of Lenin's *Notes on Hegel* – he's got something in there about the Pythagorean harmony of the spheres proposing a perfect cosmology, a hierarchy built on scalar realities that justifies social conditions on earth, where everybody is in their place, and nobody is able to question the beauty and perfection of these relationships. Straightforward. And for it to work, for all these justifications to hold true, a fictional body is essential: the antichthon, or counter-earth. Thus, at the limit, the gravitational pull that holds the entire system of hierarchical harmony together is an untruth, but an untruth with the power to kill. But if this untruth is the site of justification and corporate (i.e. ritual) slaughter it' also the site, magnetic as all hell, of contention and repulsion, which can transgress its own limits until something quite different, namely, crime, or impossibility, appears. For Ernst Bloch, the revolution was the crossroads where the dead come to meet. For Lorca, music was the scream of dead generations - the language of the dead. But our system of harmony knows so well it contains its own negation that it has mummified it, and while we know we live within a criminal

harmony, we also know we are held helplessly within it as fixed subjects, or rather as objects, even cadavers, of an alien music. But never mind, just as protest is useless only because it stays within the limits of the already known, so the hidden harmony is better than the obvious. Heraclitus. Music as a slicing through of harmonic hierarchies etc, poetic realities as counter-earths where we can propose a new stance in which we can see and act on what had previously been kept invisible etc. Ourselves, for one thing. That sounds just great, absolutely tip fucking top, until you remember that, equally, the harmony of the money fetish is that of the commodity fetish now become visible and dazzling to our eyes, i.e. we don't have any kind of monopoly on harmonic invisibility, and all of those occultist systems that some of us still love so much have always been bourgeois through and through. That is, its not a question of gentrification, but that the whole process has *always* started from the invisible spot where your feet are, tapping whatever fetishised rhythms right into the star encrusted ground. That famous green door with its sign "no admittance except on business". That is, however much we may claim that it is *not* protest, but a fast alteration in the structural scansion at the city's core, the hidden contours of our songs are still a nasty little rich kid fluttering his hecatombic chromosomes all over our collective history. Shit. Its why I still hate *Mojo* magazine. OK. Now lets get *really* obvious. Once, revolutions took their poetry from the past, now they have to get it from the future. We all know that. Famous and so on. In its contemporary form, the slogan Greek anarchists were using a couple of winters ago: we are smashing up the present because we come from the future. I love that, but really, it's all just so much mysticism, but if we can turn it inside out, on its head etc we'll find this, for example: on September 30th 1965, Pharoah Sanders, McCoy Tyner, Donald Rafael Garrett, Jimmy Garrison, Elvin Jones and John Coltrane recorded the album "Live in Seattle": it is, according to someone quoted on Wikipedia, "not for those who prefer jazz as melodic background music". Its one of those examples of recorded music that still sounds absolutely present years after the fact, because it was one of the sonic receptacles of a revolutionary moment that was never realised: that is, it has become a Benjaminian monad, a cluster of still unused energies that still retain the chance of exploding into the present. Play it loud in the Walthamstow shopping mall and you'll see what I mean. Yeh yeh yeh. I'm thinking about a specific moment on the album, around thirteen minutes into "Evolution," when someone – I don't think its actually Coltrane – blows something through a horn that forces a dimensional time-loop through the already seismic constellations set up within the music's harmonic system, becoming a force that moves beyond any musical utterance, while still containing direct, clear communication at its centre: i.e. fire and death on your uptight ass. Among many other things, obviously. I guess Seattle, like anywhere else, is sealed up in its gentrification by now. But anyway, that horn sounds like a metal bone, a place where the dead and future generations meet up and are all on blue, electric fire. CLR James once said that "the violent conflicts of our age enable our practised vision to see into the very bones of previous revolutions more easily than before". Go figure. Due to its position in the Pacific Ring of Fire, Seattle is in a major earthquake zone. On November 30th 1999 Seattle WTO protests included direct and rational attacks on, among other things, the Bank of America, Banana Republic, the Gap, Washington Mutual Bank, Starbucks, Planet Hollywood etc etc etc. "Cosmos". "Out of this World". "Body and Soul", you get what I mean. Two years later, in Genoa, the anarchist Carlo Giuliani got a police bullet in the centre of his face. Remember that name. Capital's untruth, its site of corporate slaughter – i.e. ritual slaughter – the silent frequency at the centre of its oh so gentle melodies. Ah, I can't see to finish this, I've had a lot of valium today. But anyway, to put it simply, the purpose of song is not only to raise the living standards of the working class, but to prevent the ruling class from living in the way that they have been. The violent conflicts of our age make it impossible to recollect musical emotions in tranquility, unless it is the kind of tranquility that makes clear the fierce shrill turmoil of the revolutionary movement striving for clarity and influence. A high metallic wire etc. The counter-earth rigged to such sonic stroboscopes that we, however temporarily, become the irruption into present time of the screams of the bones of history, tearing into the mind of the listener, unambiguously determining a new stance toward reality, a new ground outside of official harmony, from which to act. Or put it another way, next time some jazz fan tells you that late Coltrane is unlistenable, or something, punch em in the face. Seven times. More later.



I HAVE



MARRIED TOMMY ROBINSON
MY NAME IS BLUEBEARD



YOU WON'T GO TO
YOU WON'T GO TO
YOU'LL REMAIN I
WITH THE STENCH

HEAVEN

HELL

N YOUR GRAVE

& THE SMELL



SPELLED AND THEY BEC
HEIR ENVIRONMENT. THIS
N THEM AN IMMENSE ANGI
ESIRE FOR REVENGE. THE
THEIR MASTERS KILL HIM
OF THEIR GRAVES ++--



SOME SUDDENLY AWARE OF
DISCOVERY AROUSES
AND AN UNCONTROLLABLE
HURL THEMSELVES ON
THEN GO OFF IN SEARCH



LOUIS ARMAND

LAUGHLINES FROM THE SHOAHSHOWBUSINESS

ON JOSHUA COHEN'S *WITZ*

A synopsis of Joshua Cohen's 817-page novel, *Witz*,¹ might read something like this:

On Christmas Eve 1999, all the Jews in the world die in a strange, millennial plague, with the exception of the firstborn males, who are soon adopted by a cabal of powerful people in the American government. By the following Passover, however, only one is still alive: Benjamin Israelien, a kindly, innocent, ignorant man-child. As he finds himself transformed into an international superstar, Jewishness becomes all the rage: matzo-ball soup is in every bowl, sidelocks are hip; and the only truly Jewish Jew left is increasingly stigmatized for not being religious. Since his very existence exposes the illegitimacy of the newly converted, Israelien becomes the object of a worldwide hunt...

Meanwhile, in the not-too-distant future of our own, "real" world, another last Jew – the last living Holocaust survivor – sits alone in a snow-bound Manhattan, providing a final melancholy witness to his experiences in the form of the punchlines to half-remembered jokes.²

Or, something like what we find in Stephen Burn's *New York Times* review:

As the millennium approaches, all Jews die, leaving Benjamin Israelien as the last authentic member of the tribe... Ben becomes a celebrity, with a string of endorsed products. America starts trading with "Israelien shekels" and drinking 18-packs of "He-brew." Without Jews, Judaism becomes

¹ Joshua Cohen, *Witz* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2010)—hereafter cited in-text.

² Publisher's back-cover blurb.

hugely popular. But as everyone converts, Ben tries to escape his fame and is excommunicated. While he wanders in exile, a reverse Holocaust is created: heretics who refuse to accept Judaism are put to death in the camps at Whateverwitz.³

Or, as in the book's Library of Congress cataloguing-in-publication data:

Witz: the story of the last Jew on earth.

Which is not, incidentally, any part of the title of the book as it is published on the cover or title-page. This supplementary piece of *data*, like the preceding synopses, immediately draws our attention to a problem, since it is precisely this logic, this economy, of summarization – which on the one hand seeks to reduce, to substitute, and on the other to attach a type of poignant embellishment – that Cohen's text both in fact resists and sets out to openly undermine, not only by means of a certain topicality of its "subject" (so-called) but by its (the text's) irreducibility. This would in itself already be a cliché of sorts if not for the fact that Cohen stages this question of irreducibility in terms of a related question of genre: what we are actually given on the cover and title-page of the book, in an extension of an act of naming almost everywhere detectable within it, is this – *Witz: A Novel*. This ultimate act of summarization (as if the words "a novel" are to be taken to stand for an entire institution of genre that somehow accounts for the text, or at least the "form" of the text, *in advance*) serves as a provocation. As provocative as the fact that, on not one of the 817 pages of this so-called novel – "the story of the last Jew on earth" – does the word "Jew" appear.

Is it Cohen's intention that we confront these two circumstances, equally founded upon an act of reduction, in terms of a "problem" of genre: the genre of the *novel* and the genre of the *Jew*? the one named, the other unnamed but everywhere evoked, characterised, taxonomised and genealogised? But we need to proceed cautiously here, since this *significance* of the generic threatens to get away from us as soon as we pose the

question in these terms – which is to say, whenever we omit to examine not *what* is being named, but the institution (the genre) of naming as such, of a certain indexicality and of the *paradigm* of representation. Cohen himself gives us two occasions at the beginning of the book to consider this, both of them in the form of epigraphs, of an anterior supplemental text in advance of the so-called text proper (a beginning in advance of "the beginning," causing it therefore to commence *en retard*: "IN THE BEGINNING," Cohen writes, "THEY ARE LATE" [13]). The first of the two epigraphs – which, compounding its already paradoxical status, names what it insists is not named *within the book* – states:

This book *you are about to read* contains no holy words or letters, neither words nor letters in the Holy Tongue, and nowhere within it are mentioned any of the many names of God. Therefore, this book may be ripped or torn, burnt, otherwise destroyed, and whatever remains require(s) no burial. [Emphasis added.]

The second takes the form of a definition:

Witz:

being, in Yiddish, *a joke*;
and, as the ending of certain names,
also meaning *son of*:
e.g. *Abramowitz*,
meaning *son-of-Abram*
(also found as -wic, -wich, -wics, -wicz, -witch,
-wits, -wyc, -wych, -wycz,
-vic, -vich, -vics, -vicz, -vitch, -vits, -vitz, -vyc,
-vych, and -vyycz).

From the very outset, therefore, and before the outset, the text adverts to its own supplemental character – more-so since the "Witz/-witz" not only refers to a noun of Germanic origin and the patronymic suffix belonging to certain Jewish names, it is also a proper noun constituting the title of this *book you are about to read*. It is as if the author were determined to call our attention to precisely this supplemental effect of the name itself; by an implied *filiation* (itself an effect of naming) which is simultaneously a *going astray*

³ Stephen Burn, "Tribe of One," *The New York Times (Sunday Book Review)*, 13 June, 2010: BR27.

(orthographically in the permutations of “-witz” and as the supplemental form of the *name of the supplement*): an effect encountered throughout *Witz* in its multiple (and at times seemingly interminable) genealogies, its everywhere accretive idiolects, its proliferation of homonyms, synonyms, metonymy and paraphrasis, and the omnipresence of a certain logic of displacement, deferral, deviation, détournement which in turn may be said to constitute its *form*.

Take the account of Benjamin Israelien’s birth, which precedes the following extended treatment (in the mode of a series of pseudo-Talmudic conjugations and declensions, whose augmentation assumes comical proportions) of the genealogical concept:

Being begotten by the begetted begetist whose begattable begettance begatted Big Begetters and their Big Begetterers begottaly, whose begattability was begotted by other begotterers begattaly, and yet other begatterers besides, whose begottance, begettance, or begattence begattaly begot he who begat he who beget the begotting of the begotist so burdened with the begetting of the begatist burdened again with the begetting of this Benjamin, the Ur or First Benjamin, a son of his father’s old age, the oldest known ancestor of the namedafter latterday Benjamin... (85)

The passage continues – by way of an incestuous anecdote about this “historical” namesake’s begetting of Adam, father of Seth and Benjamin Israelien’s “direct’ ancestor, taking in the combined lineage of a certain Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – to the revelation of Israel Israelien (Benjamin’s father)’s non-Jewishness: converted through the love of his wife “as much as through his love of her people and the incredible taxbreaks that came with it all” (87).

Son of Israel, Benjamin, Ben Israel, or *ben* Israel – born already circumcised “upon the Sabbath at fullsize, at full intelligence, too... mature already, with glasses and hairy... blond... His own two eyes, as blue as a recessive flame, from a Cossack, even a Nazified Aryan who’d perhaps raped a grandmother of His...” (87) – presents, from his first appearance, something of a mock *messiah* figure, whose nativity is given thus:

He rises up, and she bears Him right there, loafed upon the table from which he, Israel, swipesoff the tablecloth in one movement deft with his wife and the vase and its flowers over her head, undisturbed – the very table upon which He might’ve been sown nine months earlier, has it really been that many moons ever since – tense, breathe, bearing Him, all of Him enormous, fullgrown, and it *is a Him*, Israel with joy and the boy in a whine and a beard and, what are those, glasses already, here on the table in the diningroom, late and yet a week just in time, in no way premature for what’s to birth with the coming of Xmas, the New Year, the secular’s turn... (81)

Coming as the thirteenth child in a family of twelve daughters, this Messiah’s “in no way premature” arrival appears to us both pregnant with allegory and born of a comical Schadenfreude. For indeed it ushers in a “secular turn”: “the very last Sabbath of all time” (21), as it were. Son of an Israel that is Jewish only by conversion (but of an “affiliated” mother, Hanna, and so *authentically Jewish* by matrilineal descent), Benjamin is not the miraculous *saviour* of his people but the unwitting witness to their final apotheosis: “their most

imperfected *survivor* – most imperfected *as survivor*” (759: emphasis added). Indeed, the antecedence of his birth by genealogy has a telling counterpart in the gestative cancers of his hypochondriac father’s imagination:

Israel’s been sitting and naming his cancers, knowing them more intimately than he knows his own kinder, Hanna suspects. While he should be heading home, he reclines, swivels, tilts renal papillae aching kidneyways to the left in his chair, hunches to count his cancers on his cancerous fingers with cancerous numbers kept orally in the black, deep into the carcinogenically latestage early evening, then thinking, maybe my cancers should have the honour themselves, their own cancers, too, and those cancers’ cancers, it’s only proper... (49)

There is a sense that all this play on names, on genealogies, allegory, and the inevitably portentous subject of the Jewish holocaust (directly and by way of the metaphor of a Jewish “cancer”), is exactly what the title of the book “disclaims” itself as being in advance – a monumentally tendentious joke. But by establishing a fictional parallel between a scenario of the passing of the last survivor of the Shoah, and a genre of Jewish “messiah” jokes (in which it is the Messiah “Himself” who is the very embodiment of the joke, the *Witz*, or *-witz*, the *ben Israel*⁴; which joke is, so to say, at the *expense of Israel*, of the *Jewish nation*, both literal and figural), Cohen demands a certain reflection on the part of his readers as to what in fact such a “joke” might entail (is it simply a metaphor?) and what, in a manner of speaking, it might represent.

In his 1905 study *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* [Jokes and their relation to the Unconscious], Freud describes jokes in general as a type of symptomatology whose psychogenesis often lies in the circuitous rerouting of aggression. In particular, Freud discusses a species of tendentious joke “created

by Jews and directed against Jewish characteristics.” Such jokes, he points out, need to be distinguished from “jokes made about Jews by foreigners [which] are for the most part brutal comic stories in which a joke is made *unnecessary* by the fact that Jews are regarded by foreigners as comic figures.”⁵ In the eyes of “foreigners,” the figure of the “Jew” is thus perceived as bound, even at the level of the joke, to a type of superfluity; as effectively standing *in place of the joke*. Each of the four classes of tendentious joke identified by Freud – the obscene, the aggressive, the cynical and the sceptical – espouses a contrary motive, such that it is the joke that stands *in place of the Jew*. The joke is always a type of meta-joke, whose impetus is one of constant substitution and displacement: the causality of the “joke” is itself a *détournement* of the causal. It operates, in other words, *like an unconscious*.

A frequent example given by Freud concerns the typical Yiddish figure of the *Schnorrer* [beggar] and the charitable householder or Baron. For instance:

A *Schnorrer* begged the Baron for some money for a journey to Ostend; his doctor had recommended sea-bathing for his troubles. The baron thought Ostend was a particularly expensive resort; a cheaper one would do equally well. The *Schnorrer*, however, rejected the proposal with the words: “Herr Baron, I consider nothing too expensive for my health.”⁶

The same joke finds its way into an epilogue to the reminiscences of Cohen’s 108-year-old “last living survivor of the Holocaust” (“the Shoahshowbusiness”), “Joseph ben you don’t know me from Adam” (805-6), who towards the end of *Witz* punctuates an otherwise apocalyptic monologue with the punchlines to old half-forgotten jokes: “When it comes to my health the man’s saying *nothing’s too expensive*” (813: emphasis added). The joke-work operates by displacement, transgression, excess; its form, like that of Cohen’s text, *like writing itself*, is an “orientation,” as Derrida says, “which is a

4 In *Witz* the figure of the “Jew” is always already a type of pun – the pun being an internalisation of a certain rudimentary otherness which is turned outwards, quill-like, in the face of any effort to normalise its signifying excess; at the same time, this “turn” augments a supplementary gesture which effectively puts the pun *beyond the reach* of normalisation, situating it at or as normalisation’s limit.

5 Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, vol. 7 of the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works (London: Vintage / The Hogarth Press, 2001 [1960]) 111—emphasis added.

6 Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, 55.

disorientation.”⁷ The form of the joke-work stands in contrast, therefore, to the form of history which it nevertheless, at the same time, “in one divided but coherent movement,” articulates as a “straining towards the reconstruction of presence.”⁸ The eschatology of this movement, however, performs a rupture in the “classic conceptuality” of revealed ends. We might go so far as to say that it is in precisely the form of the joke-work that Marx’s thesis about the proneness of history to repetition, both tragic and farcical (“history being written and rewritten” [88]), most readily obtains. The joke-work may be said, in fact, to be a type of metonymic counterpart of the *end of history* itself; an end whose *excess* can never, in any case, be produced *as history* (which is also to say, even as the *simulacrum* of history, of the continuation of history after the fact, as it were, evoked by Cohen in such pseudo-Rabbinical figures – the annalists of Witz’s post-Jewish-apocalypse – as “Rabbi Bill, Reb Bob of Normal, IL, Rabbi Lao Zhing-Zhao, Rav Martinez, Rav Nuncio” [88]). The question remains, and it is the question *par excellence* of Cohen’s “novel,” as to what in fact is *at stake* here? In the end, what’s the *limit* of excess? What, in the language of Freud’s joke, is *too expensive*? What, to the tragic view of history, is *too high* a cost for the health of the “Jew” whose active extermination ran to millions? For, coupled here to the fate of the last witness to the Nazi “final solution to the Jewish question,” die Endlösung, the joke’s impertinence assumes the form of an open-ended indictment – which is also, therefore, a ridicule on a (rhetorically) cosmic scale. As Cohen’s “last survivor of the Holocaust” puts it:

after me what fire what final testimony for our peoples mine Nazis live forever and are always everywhere under every eternal rock in your toilet behind every one of your refrigerator doors to the infinite freezer... (806-7)

How else than via the rupturous excess of the joke to approach the experience of the “Auschwitz Explicit Itinerarium”? An experience which threatens – in the absence of testimony, in the absence of the proof of itself – to forever be expunged; which cannot – according to a negatively inflected concept – survive itself, that which represents nothing if not the very condition of survival; which, in the end, is marked simply by the fact that there *will be* no survivors. Or rather, what *survives*, what *goes on*, is Cohen’s “most imperfected”: the *failure* of a survival which itself cannot be survived, which is the sole, ultimate testimony of what survives. In the end, as Celan says, *Who bears witness for the witness?* And yet, if history proceeds from the logic of an *Auschwitz*, of an Enlightenment “progress in its deathmarch” (24), the eschatology of the joke represents, in its abysmal recycling of punchlines, the repudiation of the always in-advance, the always *en-retard*, last laugh. Again the barbed humour of Cohen’s 108-year-old survivalist:

The Lord our Gott in Himmelkommando where my barmitvah was married off to a Son of the Commandments to observe without benefit of commemorative plaque a socialhall party and jestering badchany bind get the strudel off the ketubah I never signed for my one hundred and eight Christmas Carnival birthdayburn candles a thin slice of Zyklonyellow crumbly cake too late for the caterers they gassed themselves already... (805)

7 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) 216.

8 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 141.

“Punchlines,” the title of the last chapter of Cohen’s *Witz*, begins: “And this is where it ends” (784). The anticipated “end,” meanwhile, opens out like the promise of utopia: “A new world./ One day, one night soon, in our time – we wait” (759). The end, when it comes, is not that “Day of Judgement” (816), that Revelation of the Testaments (“the heart of the issue toward the soul of the mattering womb” [812]), but a note falling flat; an echo, and anticipation, of that interminable fall which is also the *turn* of writing, and which points towards something unknowable, unrepresentable, the “next to nothing no more discussions no more discursions excursions exegesis eisegese didn’t one Ecclesiastic or another once gloss there’s nothing new under the sun the moon the twin Pole-poles within the fences the walls the barbed boundaryround laughlines...” (812).⁹

The final punchline is an incomplete sentence. How could it be otherwise? The light at the end, the Grace of God, is a falling off into the blankness of the page, in which the incomplete inscription awaits itself: “I don’t even know her these punchlines these payoffandons these zingers and dingrings of bells the bleeding heart of the mouth that’s what I have that’s what I recall they come back to me now as I’m dying this whispering hiss I’m this dying moment forsaking me for a laugh these one hundred and eight of them lines but who’s counting” (812).

⁹ These inflections on survival serve to remind, also, of the conjunction of terror, the holocaust, the unrepresentable, to the *sublime*, to a type of transcendental signified in opposition to the reification of terror as humanism, of the collective narcissism of so-called individual experience (the personal god, and such like). Cohen’s “most imperfect” hints at an important distinction, made by Klima and others, that the very nature of the Shoa is such that, in the final instance, survival *precludes* witnessing. The testimony of survival always thus incorporates this paradox. Just as, in the very texture of Cohen’s text, language itself cannot be reduced or reified: *its* testimony is to precisely this unrepresentability upon which the paradox hinges. The violence of this paradox is not something that can simply be stripped of its apparent “rhetorical” clothing, as if rhetoric were mere ideological embellishment or distortion of a communicable truth: the *trauma* of the paradox is that the figure of the witness is bound to this missed encounter, whose form, like that of the joke, is also that of a language which resists and for whom the totalising movement of a reduction that bears its own end within it as signifier of the sublime or transcendental signified is tantamount to a “violence” that threatens to reign to such a degree that it is no longer able even to appear and be named. Cf. Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1978) 138.

And the epilogue, postscript, a narrow column of text running down the right-hand-side of the final five pages of the book – a type of remainder, a *survival* – “you call this living this you call living what do you know from living” (816). What after all, Cohen seems to ask, *is* survival but a “living” by one’s *wits* – the paradoxical, accidental evasion of history, of reason, of the otherwise-determined course of events, by way of a caprice of *language* – and which, at a certain point, turns into a joke that goes on longer than it’s supposed to? (But what kills a joke quicker than its explication?) Perhaps we expect the author to adopt some sort of moral standpoint, to construct a vista and point-of-view from which to cast a critical appraising eye backwards upon History, with its crimes and atrocities full-frontal or in three-quarter profile, exposed in all the verity of a graven image, like a Hollywood celebrity portrait of the “Shoahshowbusiness.” Instead the joke comes full circle. In this final afterlife of the book, the survivor Joseph “ben you don’t know me from Adam” Cohen comes face to face with his God and maker, his namesake, his “father” in a manner of speaking, the Author, Joshua Cohen:

Joseph Cohen I didn’t recognise you funny you don’t look who thinks he’s a nothing also a Cohen it’s like this: my father was a Cohen and his father was a Cohen and his father before that was a Cohen it’s steady work (817)

JOSHUA COHEN

CAFEDAMMERUNG

OR, ALLEN IN PRAGUE, KING OF MAY, 1965

He'd been in Cuba sunning, fucking. But he'd only hugged and kissed Fidel. Reek of cigars! rum!

In that embrace, two of the great beards of our time had grown into one another: Allen's and Fidel's, they became inseparable. Grew intertwined, then knotted. Uncomfortable for all involved. Finally Castro had to call his chief executioner, the executioner came with his chief machete but instead of cutting off Allen Ginsberg's head a hipsterheaded angel of Yahweh arrived in sunglasses and porkpie hat to redirect the blade to only sunder their beards.

Fidel put Allen on the first flight to Czechoslovakia. Allen brushed his smokestained suit before disembarking. He still had Fidel's hairs on his lapels, that's what he declared to Customs.

Students of the Polytechnic School, even a few faculty members, remember: the first sign they had of Allen's coming was the beard. It was edged out the window of the plane. Out the window of the taxi from Ruzyně airport, as if a flag for a new order, his nový kingdom. But he was not yet King. It was still April.

Allen's beard was not a religious beard, yet neither was it a beard of dereliction, of dissolution, a lazy facial hirsuteness—the mark of a man who did not care about appearance. It fell under none of those categories, contra surveillance and Nomenklatura speculation. Truth is, Allen's beard had always been there, and his face grew from it—Allen's face, his head, *that* was the effort, that was the true growth, it was conscious, its expression beatifically made.

The beard was of a million fingers of vermilion, ten tenthousand threads of rust and purple sunrays, flecks of recitative spittle and a dusting of light sporelife, the ermine fuzz that forms around immemorial potatoes.

That expression: comic, fishily bulging lips and eyes, exophthalmic but glassesed, Jewish. He'd gotten chubby during his Havana sojourn. All those fried plantains and anus. Also, Allen was balding above. And he was ancient, he was forty.

What comes between men is the beard. The beard is philosophy, hairs on the face are a politics, what keeps one brother from another. What hides, what obfuscates. The beard is that thick fat wilderness where miscommunication causes lives to come to their ends—the forbidding forest in which compatriots would be shot, had been shot, for example outside Moscow toward the east.

But this was Prague, Western enough to expect Allen's Yiddish to be understood as inept German. Here he would be crowned King of May— "which is Kral Majales in the Czechoslovakian tongue," he wrote in a poem about the experience because he wrote poems about all of his experiences (it wasn't an experience until it was a poem). The poem was called *Kral Majales*, and it was called that because Allen could not be bothered with diacritical marks—it should be *Král Majáles*, with vowels long like pleasure—here are its essential lines:

*For I was arrested thrice in Prague, once for singing drunk on Národní street,
once knocked down on the midnight pavement by a mustached agent who screamed out
BOUZERANT,
once for losing my notebooks of unusual sex politics dream opinions,
and I was sent from Havana by plane by detectives in green uniform,
and I was sent from Prague by plane by detectives in Czechoslovakian business suits,
Cardplayers out of Cézanne, the two strange dolls that entered Joseph K's room at
morn
also entered mine, and ate at my table, and examined my scribbles,
and followed me night and morn from the houses of lovers to the cafés of Centrum —*

*And I am the King of May, which is the power of sexual youth,
and I am the King of May, which is industry in eloquence and action in amour
and I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and the Beard of my own body*

And
and
and

and every culture besides America, which is not a culture but *has cultures*, has its own version of this, its own indigenous tradition: May the fertile month, May the month of fecundity, the First of May—before the communists usurped May Day for the sake of International Workers—the first day of an Eastertide celebration during which young studentgirls are whipped by young studentboys with limbs of birch. Eggs are served with young alcohol. A revel. Prechristian. Bacchic. Pagan. And presiding over the festivities: a King who'd emerge from the woodlands every year to lead local men to potency or, alternately, to inseminate their women Himself.

In Prague, where this rural tradition acquires a metropolitan irony, the newest of folklorists—detectives, cardplaying dolls in green business suits—have been busy constructing a throne since Winter 1948, and their orders were always to construct this throne out of books that are banned. This stipulation is intended to serve two purposes—to be both a sign of great disrespect, as if to say observe how we abuse these books of ours that mean nothing to us, and, paradoxically, to be a sign of great respect, as if to say observe how we honor these books by fashioning them into a seat for our King. They are to serve as the seat of his fattish, often violated rectum.

And the books being censored into his throne are: *A Handbook of Practical Messianism* (poems), *Kaštany* (a play in three acts), *Hasidische Geschichte* (two vols.), *How to Build Bombs for Personal Use* (w/ 10 full-color illustrations), *The Kitchens of North America* (ed. Čapka), *A Guide to the Literary Cafés of the Kingdoms of Bohemia & Moravia* (nonfiction), *Famous Homosexual Salons of Middle Europe* (fiction), *How to Prevent Parasites in Horses* (fiction).... Allen's feet are bare. Happy happy First of May!

The coronation banquet is to be held in the lobbycafé of the Hotel Ambassador, where the waiters attending used to be writers, novelists and storywriters and poets now prevented from publishing freely, demoted to servitude. Only the best of them—the best writers making the best waiters—receive permission to work in cafés in *the city center*. The cafés of Centrum, like the lobbycafé of the Ambassador, were allotted formerly to what might be called an intelligentsia, and still to this day retain a superior aura (and lionfooted cakestands, matching the verdant tables for billiards). While the farther cafés, located toward the cemeteries, in outer districts called Žižkov, called Želivského, were once upon a time for the workingclass, the proletariat, and they are called pubs by some and by others bars, and a slot machine shalt in time be allotted to the lone bathroom of each but no toilet.

Hurry hurry through the streets as you'd expect them: *picturesque* (a word found scrawled as signature on only the most subversive of postcards); antiquarianly narrow but empty. Now give each the throne of a chair and an unstable table—listing left to right, if you find yourself dizzy gaze toward the iron pillar below the marble top—now grant each a waiterwriter uniformed in a worn black tuxedo piped with white gold, cummerbunded with a used handkerchief, bowtied with a cummerbund, handkerchiefed with a bowtie unraveled, armbanded with napkins and the napkins are all soiled, then each street could be—in every hour of weather, we will survive—a café of sorts. This rush through the streets is a rush for good seats along the parade route. Hurry through this human accordion. It never rains on Coronation Day. Twilight of the cafés: *Cafédämmerung*.

But we will not speak of the actual crowning, or of the processional per se. There are films to that account, the files of multiple intelligence services. Instead we will speak of the waiters. A class unto themselves, this species of priest clad in aprons. Their menus, umbrellas. Their umbrellas opened, stood on their ferrules, umbrellastands. They will perform attendance upon their King, and in this wise shall they divine his secret. Om Sri Maitreya. Om Sri Maitreya. Om Sri Maitreya. Om Sri Maitreya. Om Sri Maitreya. Om Sri Maitreya.

Om Sri Maitreya. *Om Sri*

Writerwaiters' clothes must be, like scandal, secondhand, but their hair should be suspiciously freshly cut (this being a provision of management), while their necks at their Adam's apples are always, but this Management does not know, marked with gashes and incisions indicative of hasty morning shaving.

The marks, there are three of them, are as follows: once down the center from just above the Adam's apple to where the collar is buttoned for the bowtie; and then again down the

neck's two edges, from the dangling lobes of the ears (or, if the lobes are connected, from their connections), tapering to meet the central cut so as to form the shape of the Hebrew *Shin*, which is a name of God.

Their socks and underwear and undershirts and shirts are boiled monthly in the kitchen, on last Sundays when the kitchen's closed and all one can order is coffee. Only the apparent portion of the shirt, the diamond exposed through the jacket's opening, is weekly ironed. The staff is short, also heavy and tall and light. They have been reeducated in unobtrusiveness, trained in stealth accented with a hint of derision (obtrusive). They're quick with the jokes, have you heard, but only with the jokes supplied, we have heard. They're quick with the orders, too, but are themselves constantly hungry.

Always will rage their thirst.

Their coffees are strictly five: *espressi*, *cappuccini*, *Café Au Lait*, *Kaffee Wien*, the coffee of the Turk (available *sade*, or *çok şekerli*). Service is roughly "cosmological." On each table they place a saucer, on each saucer they place a cup (*demitasse*), next to each they put a shotglass of tepid water, a pitcher of cool cream. A napkin. On the napkin, a spoon. In the spoon, reflection of.

Nothing more sexual than a spoon except, perhaps, fire.

An ashtray like an ancient castle defense, like a ceramic turret with a cigarette, newly rolled and licked sealed, wedged into a crenature. A box of matches adjacent. (Waiterwriters should have been rolling cigarettes since morning.)

This is turning into a poem, a listpoem, a list.

Alcohol will be made available only after the festivities.

Waiterwriters are informally required to be familiar with an array of trivia: *Alcestis* was a Grecian princess and a tragic play in Greek; *Bucephalus* was a horse while *boustrophedon* is the alteration of written lines in two different alphabets, one line—in this alphabet, the Roman—reading left to right, another line reading right to left in another alphabet, such as that of the Arabs or Jews. *Rodin*, a sculptor, employed *Rilke*, a poet. The decadent jazz "standard" *September Song* is most often performed in the key of C Major, which is without black notes and so is, like the majority of Slavonic jazz interpretations, all white. *Blake*. Portraiture the lowest form of flattery, viz. *Picasso's* formalistically distorted *Mme. Stein*. *Marijuana* grows wildly in America, Mexico, Cuba, from where *Allen's* flown on the wings of a beard that has nine wings like the leaves of a cannabis leaf. "O it's a long long while from May to December / but the days grow short when you reach September." *Rilke* was born in Prague but denied it. Near the Main Post Office. *Jindřišská ul.* AKA *Heinrichsgasse*. From which he mailed himself to Paris c/o *Rodin*, a sculptor. *Kafka* rarely escaped. Incidentally, what was the inspiration for *Kafka's* giant bug? A local roach or desiccated scarab, displayed in a case at the Natural History Museum?

No, your server will tell you.

It was a coffeebean, imported from South America, future continent of *émigrés* and *Mengele*.

A bean no more impressive than a prostitute's thumbnail, bifurcated down the middle,

segmented as if an insect. Dead. It is ground in a grinder, chewed by blades into a powder— a fine powder like ashes.

Then, warm water is pressured through the powder set in a straining mechanism: some form of filtration, whether a paper pyramid or plastic colander cone. Thiswise the powder flavors the water—and so the water becomes coffee to drink.

To keep you up at night, writing. The only time you have to write, all night.

The cigarettes are rolled of cheap Cuban tobacco. Rilke rarely smoked, Kafka never did.

Annotations for a translator: One drinks a coffee. One reads a poem. One writes one.

However, kaddish must be *howled*.

At noon tomorrow, the waiters who write who are the writers who wait will pause their preparations at the sound of a huge Slavic Om: the hum of the horny crowd from the Polytechnic massing in the squares—polytechnic means they can be taught anything: they can be taught engineering, mathematics; from which they might learn napping, dissent— awaiting a word from their King.

They claw the cobbles, awaiting a word from Král Allen.

Krallen (meaning, in German, “claws”).

Kafka on Prague: “this old crone has claws” (*Dieses Mütterchen hat Krallen*).

“Bouzerant” is misspelled Czech, should be *buzerant*: derogatory term for “homosexual” (in the sense of “buggerer”).

Awaiting word from Allen:

A howl, or kaddish in its memory....

Do not think this was his first kinging. Thirty years before Allen’s crazy mother brought him across the river parted with a bridge, they took the rotten green bus into the city of York and there walked south through its gross & inimitable streets:

(list poem number one)

and there on the streets were Whitman addicts

and there were Latin men picking noses with knives

(and which was a switch and which a butterflyknife?)

and there on the street was a fish scaled like brassknuckles flopped its guts open on the sidewalk alongside crumbs of pumpernickel bread that are to the pigeons, loaves

and there were Negroes as thinly wound and unreliable as the Gstring on a dreadnought guitar (experimental) wirehanger-mobilemaking milkmen whose righteous *charity* resembled that of Engels to Marx unfigureouttable Asian furnituremovers (repomen) of the Baltics or Balkans and through mixed marriages both Polack florists glassyeyed rheumatic glaziers a chimp with erotically long toes who’d done silent movies but now was retired living alone with a chandling harem of Swedish sisters and their midget Armenian pimp, this was just Union Square—not named as many think for labor unions like radical politics like why Allen and his mother were here but because this was where two major streets once came together, entered into Union: Broadway & the Bowery.

Allen and Mother passed the Above on their way to an unlit storefront. They entered, stepping over the threshold—Ma lugging Allen over the threshold—that was only a drunk slumped who was also the meeting’s watchman and the, if also unremunerated until now, lookerupper of skirts. Allen’s mother’s vagina was violently dark and its lips clapped like erasers to flatulate chalky dust as she walked. She was a teacher in Joysey publicschoools before she crazied enough to stop wearing panties—but in this meeting, because meeting it is, Allen will be teaching. He’s passed up to the front, a low stage. Hands hands all hands. He stands on a chair atop the stage facing his audience, he’s already the pro, his passion has been from the very Genesis beginning memorized, stagy. He has no text with him, nothing to read from on cards or to crib in ink from the palm, he makes his memory as he goes along, he improvises. Come what may to mind or tongue. Care not lest ye be cared about, in the wrong way. *L’chaim* and damn the thoughtcops (later his epithets would grow stronger)!

He talks about socialism.

He talks about (another poem) everyone being equal but

he talks about (no *but*) the Worker the workers of the Spanish Civil War the purges
the poyges! (what a family they were)

the showtrials the executions of Zinoviev and Kamenev and ev ev ev

Amen because Stalin has begun to sour around here, despite

how he mentions the Eighth Congress Molotov the Nazis and Hitler and how Stalin though appreciated world Jewry at least Molotov did because Marx was Jewish and,

Allen recites: “the Jewish people gave many heroes to the revolutionary struggle & continue to produce more fine & gifted organizers than any other,” etc.

Nachas, nachas. *Namaste*.

Irwin! Irwin!

(Ginsberg’s given name, whose meaning is “boarfriend”—*Ir* “boar,” *win* “friend”—so you can understand why he went with Allen because what Jew befriends a boar?)

And the audience loved it! They weren’t a movement so much as an audience who loved Irwin Allen and applauded Irwin Allen and hugged Irwin Allen and kissed Irwin Allen and everybody everybodied him, and this audiencelove told Allen that he needed to be loved and this need to be loved made Allen a poet but also the fact—the fact!—that he hated that he needed to be loved made him a good poet and he did become a good poet, as if against his will, as if against his nature (Europeans like the socialists applauding him had *will*, American hippies such as he would become had *nature*), but that night he was still an acersecomic toy boy reciting by rote the words of grownups.

Ma was triumphant—walking him out of the meeting through Union Square toward the buses where rumbling home they’d plan amid the empty seats to plan his next address.

Vendors swarmed the square but there was nothing to vend. A Muscovite roasting his own hairy nuts. A clutch of wilted daffodils, bouquets of weekold leek, parsley, parsnip, turnip, onion, garlic. Potato. Soup starters, starches. A Chinaman making shapes out of newspapers, he was folding the morning editions into odd origami if not to sell then just to pass the time not selling: foldbeaked birds perched to graze upon the backs of wild

animals that grazed on ink, a crown. Two cents of a nickel, celebration! Ma bought Allen that crown made out of frontpage, a headline for banded jewels: FRANCO REFUSES IMMUNITY TO FOREIGN REFUGEE SHIPS. She paid the man like all other men, then kinged her son, who ruled her world already. Allen kept his head down, had to hold his new crown down on his head as he walked toward the busstop, the other hand in his mother's hand then in his mother's pocket—"foreign refugee ships," two sails stooped by the wind.

Allen was not allowed to leave Prague with the crown the students gave him. The police, the secret police if that is not a paradox to speak of them, confiscated the cardboard partyfavor before deporting him, just like Castro kicked him out of Cuba (just as Generalísimo Franco banished poetries in Basque, Catalan, Galician/Portuguese). For masturbating publicly, for stroking off on hotel balconies with a broomstick up his ass, biting a taperecorder to mute his pleasure: Allen, for that no glitter garland, for such no diadem.

The crown ended up on a hatrack at the headquarters of the Czech Secret Police.

If that is not a paradox to speak Czech of them.

Street, Konviktská.

Allen was in Prague for only a month. The following people were in Prague longer than Mr. Ginsberg: Rilke, Kafka, Pan Novotný who drove a taxicab and was born in the town and died in town and was a plumber, too (unofficially, for friends and his wife's extended family), and never deserved the poem that was written for him because he was unambitious, which is to say he was honest.

Sources are not saying he slept with Allen but.

He didn't leave the room till morn.

(And was the author of a novel on the subject "a marionette from Josefov," who came alive at midnight to restore the interiors of neglected provincial churches, unpublished—unless you count three copies mimeographed by friendly brewery assistant Jiří.)

A last word about your writers. During breaks or at night, they wrote their poems and stories with pen on the papers they used to roll cigarettes. They rolled cigarettes for Allen with these papers and he smoked them, unknowingly, perhaps, or perhaps this, too, like fluid exchange during sexual intercourse, was a form of smuggling, an alchemical samizdat—a way of internalizing their precious words for later disbursal as coughs, sneezes. Cancer, cancer, one for each lung. Allen took their words into his lungs. He filled his winebarrel chest with verse. His last Prague afternoon the King already crowned—about to be dethroned through deportation, about to abdicate to London—sat in the Ambassador's lobbycafé, uncomfortably. Agents surrounded. Critics (agents) hid behind walls. Their aperçus were wallpaper patterns. In the kitchen Allen's writers spit more of their poems into his coffee, thick and heavy poemspit in his coffee they served him cold because they loved him—he was their King, and they wanted to make his own poetry even better by making the life that wrote it worse.

A black and white close-up portrait of Christine Brooke-Rose, looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. Her dark hair is styled in a short, wavy bob.

DAVID VICHNAR

WHOSE AFRAYED OF CHRISTINE BROOKE-ROSE?

OR, TRIBUTE TO THE GREAT BRITISH ENIGMA

“The Great British Experimentalist You’ve Never Heard Of” was the title of Natalie Ferris’ obituary published in *The Guardian* two days after Christine Brooke-Rose’s death on March 21, 2012. Apart from other issues, Ferris’ graceful review of her life and work raised the (unanswered) question of whether “Brooke-Rose ever was really with us.”¹ Tracing Brooke-Rose’s lifelong engagement with verbal lipogrammatic experimentation, Stuart Jeffries – also of *The Guardian* – wrote in a similar vein of Brooke-Rose’s estrangement from Britain: “As if to continue the theme of erasure, Britain has all but airbrushed one of its most radical exponents of experimental fiction. When Brooke-Rose published a volume of criticism in 2002, it was not, perhaps, entirely devotion to Roland Barthes’ death of the author thesis that led her to call it *Invisible Author*.”² The aim of this overview and review of Brooke-Rose’s life and work³ is to provide possible answers to the simple question: Why is it that in the case of Brooke-Rose’s recently terminated career, “brilliance” is coupled with “obscurity” and “radical experimentation” goes hand in hand with “erasure”?

1 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/mar/23/christine-brooke-rose>

2 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/mar/23/christine-brooke-rose1>

3 Note: for the purposes of this overview, Brooke-Rose’s novelistic output will be divided up into four tetralogies: the, first running from 1957 to 1961, largely understood as juvenilia preparatory for the truly experimental work, will have to be omitted. The “second” tetralogy will comprise Brooke-Rose’s work between 1964 and 1975 (*Out, Such, Between and Thru*), by “third” tetralogy I shall refer to her output from 1984 to 1991 (*Amalgamemnon, Xorandor, Verbivore, and Textermination*), “fourth” tetralogy will denote her last four novels, *Remake, Next, Subscript* and *Life, End Of*, published between 1996 and 2006. Chief attention will be paid to the last tetralogy.

Brooke-Rose's erasure is to a certain extent attributable to her tortuous, secluded life spent largely in a more or less self-imposed exile outside of Britain: born in 1923 in Geneva to a Swiss-American mother and a British father, Brooke-Rose (whose combined surnames attest to the doubled parentage) grew up speaking French, English and German. It wasn't until after her parents separated (in 1929) and her father died (in 1934) that she moved with her mother to Brussels, and two years later, in 1936, to Britain. Her polyglotism stood her in good stead during World War II and her work for Bletchley Park, assessing intercepted German communications. After the War, she pursued an academic career, gaining a PhD in Middle English from University College London in 1954. Having written a few early novels in the more or less "traditional" vein (e.g. her first novel, *Languages of Love*, 1956), in 1962 she suffered a serious kidney disease during which she was convinced she would die. After recovery she achieved a new level of consciousness which she described as "a sense of being in touch with something else – death perhaps."⁴ Having published her first two radical novels, *Out* (1964) *Such* (1966) and written her third, *Between*, in 1968, Brooke-Rose left her second husband and crossed the Channel to an almost permanent exile in France. She accepted a post at the newly created Université de Paris VIII at Vincennes, where in 1975 she became professor of English and American literature and literary theory. There she taught for twenty years before retiring in 1988 to the south of France to concentrate on her novel-writing. Brooke-Rose's life, however peripatetic it may have been, cannot be the only reason behind her marginalisation within the canon: there have been numerous exiles among the twentieth-century experimentalists who did manage to make an impact and let their voices be heard both in the language and culture of their home as well as their host countries – Beckett and Pound are amongst those most frequently addressed by Brooke-Rose the critic.

Of course, any claims of any author's fame or obscurity, relative as they are, call for contextualisation and explication – and even though both Ferris and Jeffries concur that Brooke-Rose has been doomed to critical and academic negligence, neither provides any deeper rationale for this beyond the obvious biographical one. Nor do they pay any attention to how – with the possible exception of B.S. Johnson – none of Brooke-Rose's fellow 1960s British experimentalists have been served any better by their home academic or critical institutions. The academic and critical oblivion surrounding the likes of Brigid Brophy, Eva Figs or Ann Quin is still orders of magnitude deeper and more absolute than that of Brooke-Rose, who has by now become the subject of no fewer than three book-length monographs and a collection of critical essays. Two qualifications are immediately necessary, though. First, given that Brooke-Rose remains the only British writer to have produced significant innovative works of fiction, criticism and theory from the mid-1950s practically to mid-2000s (unlike her 1960s companions, effectively silenced by the 1973 deaths of Johnson and Quin), her career's reputation is still very much under par when compared to that of the female writers of either the preceding (Gertrude Stein or Virginia Woolf) or the following (Angela Carter or Jeanette Winterson) generation. Second, it is worth pointing out that Brooke-Rose began garnering critical attention only in mid-1990s, when she was already over seventy years of age and her career to a large extent over.⁵ Brooke-Rose's British

4 Sarah Birch, *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 1.

5 The first monograph, penned by Sarah Birch and titled *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction*, came

critical (non-)reception in the 1970s and 80s makes for an even terser story, roughly divisible into two categories: outright omission or misconception and mis-categorisation. Omission is all the more surprising when coming from circles of feminist theorists or historians of women's writing. Elaine Showalter's 1977 *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* does not so much as mention Brooke-Rose's name, while Patricia Waugh's "revisitation of the postmodern" in *Feminine Fictions* (1989) acknowledges Brooke-Rose as author of the theoretical *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, but fails to acknowledge the existence of a single novel of hers. Brooke-Rose's mis-categorisation is chiefly threefold: domestication under the rubric of British experimentalism, alienation through association with the French nouveau roman, and, last but not least, her supposedly exemplary status within the transnational postmodernist sensibility.

More often than not, she is labelled as exemplary of Britain's 1960s new wave in fiction under the heading of B.S. Johnson's experimental circle. Although the recent resurgence in critical interest in his work never fails to bemoan the readerly oblivion to which his novels have fallen prey over the past thirty years, Johnson's typographical experiments and his clearly defined Anglo-Irish literary heritage have proven far easily classifiable and ready for British canonisation than Brooke-Rose's dealings in discourse and her hybrid, idiosyncratic blend poetic and prosaic traditions. Nevertheless, when Brooke-Rose does appear, it is still as part of the Johnson circle of "experimentalists" – a label neither of them would self-apply – this despite Brooke-Rose's repeated insistence on the difference of her work and frustration at the misconceived link with Johnson in many critical-historical accounts, whether written by adherents or detractors. Again, to take but two examples: even though Malcolm Bradbury bewails, in *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel*, the sorry state of British letters in 1973 where "writers like B. S. Johnson and Christine Brooke-Rose," while attempting "to distil a debate and an aesthetic speculativeness," get "little close hearing,"⁶ there follows no close reading of either Johnson or Brooke-Rose. In fact, this is her only mention in Bradbury's book. When six years later, in *The Contemporary English Novel*, Bradbury presents another state-of-the-novel anthology composed of eight essays, no fewer than three of them take a critical plunge into Johnson's work. In contrast, however, Brooke-Rose never appears to be read.

To be sure, in both her early *Thru* (1975) and late *Next* (1998), Brooke-Rose avails herself of breaking down the traditional typographical layout of these texts, thereby making emphatic use of the visual possibilities of the page through typographic and other means, à la Johnson. But a closer inspection reveals the purpose of Brooke-Rose's experimentation as distinctly different, and her repeatedly expressed discomfort with off-hand analogies with Johnson as highly justified. For Johnson, typographical deviance from the norm serves to a large extent the role of a supplementary, material level of essentially realist mimesis. Two canonical examples are his *Travelling People* (1963) – with an imitation of the black pages

as late as 1994, and managed to present an informed overview of Brooke-Rose's first three novel tetralogies and stake out a liminal position for Brooke-Rose between the English experimentalism of the 1960s and the French *nouveau roman*. It was followed by a collection of essays, *Utterly Other Discourse: the Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*, co-edited by Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin and, in the course of the 2000s, by two more monographs – *Word-worlds: Language, Identity and Reality in the Work of Christine Brooke-Rose* by Michela Canepari-Labib (2002) and the recent study by Karen Lawrence entitled *Techniques for Living: Fiction and Theory in the Work of Christine Brooke-Rose* (2010).

⁶ Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1973) 259.

in *Tristram Shandy* to indicate death, random-pattern grey dots to signify unconsciousness, and regular-pattern dots to signify sleep – and *The Unfortunates* (1969), presented and produced in twenty-seven sections, unbound, in a small box, to be shuffled and read at random, with the exception of the first and last, where the mimesis of randomness serves a twofold purpose: it enacts the rambling workings of the mind, where present perceptions (coverage of a football match from the time Johnson was employed as a soccer reporter for the *Observer*) evoke, are coloured by, and interact with, memories of the past (in this case, of Tony Tillinghast, a close friend who died in 1964 at the young age of twenty-nine); and secondly, it refers to the random process of carcinogenic cell growth that caused Tony's death. For Brooke-Rose, on the other hand, the text's materiality is only one, and far more independent, contributory factor in the complexity of what her books aim to be as objects. There is much less conceptual mimeticism behind the typographical excesses of *Thru* other than its material enactment of the mélange of various critical discourses as the resulting text is collectively constructed by the students on a university creative writing course and includes essays with handwritten changes to typed text, musical notations, mathematical formulas, various diagrams, anagrams and acrostic structures. In *Next*, the textual layout of the prose divided into separate lines rather than paragraphs (reminiscent, in its free-verse rhythmical organisation, of the later novels of Ann Quin), has less to do with the realist mimesis of "consciousness" than with imaginative employment of the fundamental organisational grid of the written language. The alphabet, termed "alphabête" early on, serves as the acrostic grid for the twentieth century's worst atrocities:

A for Auschwitz. B for Belsen. C for Cambodia.

D for Dresden. For Deportation. E for Ethiopia, for Ethnic Cleansing... F for, what's F?

Famine... Mao's Great Lep into, 1959. Stalin's ditto, Ukraine 1933.

Fundamentalism. There's usually more than one horror for each letter.⁷

These and similar never-ending and repetitive alphabetical rounds from A to Z and back are interspersed within the text's ostensibly realist, quasi-documentary mapping of street-level London of the contemporary, millennial moment.

The other critical labelling, one of "alienation," seems to make a much better sense, both in terms of Brooke-Rose's life and her work, and its most renowned propagator is none other than the authority of Frank Kermode. His view can be encapsulated by his evaluation of Brooke-Rose's 1975 *Thru* which adorns the back cover of the 1986 Carcanet *Brooke-Rose Omnibus*: "If we are to experience in English the serious *practice* of narrative as the French have developed it over the last few years, we shall have to attend to Christine Brooke-Rose."⁸ Indeed, Brooke-Rose's early engagement (chiefly in her second tetralogy, i.e. from *Out* to *Thru*) with the narrator-less present tense narrative sentence, and her involvement, first on paper and later on in person, with Alain Robbe-Grillet's work, whose *Dans le labyrinthe* she translated into English in 1968, would appear almost by necessity to connect her to the French *nouveaux romanciers*. Moreover, her continuous experimentation with the constraints of the verbal lipogrammatic structures (consistent and intended omission of a particular word or word form, or self-imposed limitation in terms of word class or verbal tense, e.g.)

7 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Next* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998) 3.

8 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Omnibus: Out, Such, Between, Thru* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986).

have seemed to many to obviously link her even later texts with the poetics of the Oulipo group, particularly with the novelistic output of Georges Perec. This linkage, finally, seems biographically corroborated – almost beyond any doubt – by Brooke-Rose’s 1968 departure from Britain for France and by her repeated refusal of alliance with the Johnson circle.

It may come as a surprise, then, that in one of her last interviews, which now forms the conclusion to Karen Lawrence’s study, Brooke-Rose denied any easy analogy with either Perec or Robbe-Grillet. “One has to keep in control with the constraints. And some constraints, one doesn’t really see the point,” she opined, dismissing Perec’s *La disparition* by asserting that “I’ve never understood the point of writing a novel without the letter e.” For her, “a constraint must be a grammatical or a syntactical constraint, part of the syntax, not a letter. But that may be a prejudice, about form. Because that becomes going through dictionaries and looking for words. I mean, like him. But I don’t see the point.”⁹ Her own first verbal lipogram, *Between*, dealing with states of flux both physical and linguistic, actually preceded Perec’s e-less novel by a whole year, and unlike *La disparition*, kept its constitutive restraint largely to itself: “He announced it loud and long, so it was known. I didn’t say anything about no verb “to be” until much later. And then it did get repeated, but without further comment.”¹⁰ Regarding the affinity with, or influence of, Robbe-Grillet, Brooke-Rose is even more sceptical: “I wanted to get away from those obsessive detectives and such. His topics didn’t interest me. So I tried to go beyond him, using his startling syntax to do something more original, or interesting for me.” Even though admitting that “the method I’m talking about is fully used (I think) only in one novel, *Jealousy*,” she nevertheless believes that very early on, she “got out of this direct influence [while] still going on with the method.”¹¹

Again, one need not simply take Brooke-Rose’s word for it to see how unlike both the *nouveau roman* and the Oulipo many of her fictions turn out to be at an even cursory glance. For one thing, almost all of her eight post-*Amalgamemnon* (1984) novels have an identifiable – and sometimes explicitly Anglophone – location and setting: her 1986 computer-novel *Xorandor* is set in Cornwall, her 1991 *Textermination*, at the Hilton hotel in San Francisco, her *Next* (1998), within the London homeless community. Moreover, *Amalgamemnon* is written entirely in the outspokenly confessional first-person form, and all her novels onwards feature clearly named and defined characters as well personalised narrators – Mira Entekai, her most consistent alter ego, even reappears throughout the third tetralogy. Two of the novels of her fourth tetralogy, *Remake* (1996) and *Life, End Of* (2006), while painstakingly avoiding the use of the first person, are explicit autobiographies, featuring the “The Author” as their protagonist. In Brooke-Rose’s earliest experimental novels (in *Out* and *Such*, especially), there is certainly a palpable affinity with the New Novelistic camera-eye technique. But it is equally evident that any critical account of her as a *nouveau romancier* is only a half – if not an even smaller fraction – of the story. Critical attempts to claim Brooke-Rose for the Oulipian cause rest on even wobblier and shallower foundations. Her lipograms share little with the playful seriousness or formalistic bravura of those conducted within the Oulipo group: rather, they grow out of a perceived expressive unity of the text’s argument, where content gives rise to form gives rise to content. Apart from the notorious instance of *Between*, this can

9 Karen R. Lawrence, “A Discussion with Christine Brooke-Rose, June 2004, Cabrière d’Avignon,” *Techniques for Living: Fiction and Theory in the Work of Christine Brooke-Rose* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010) 206.

10 Lawrence, “A Discussion with Christine Brooke-Rose,” 207.

11 Lawrence, “A Discussion with Christine Brooke-Rose,” 213.

also be illustrated by the more recent examples of *Next* and *Subscript* (1999). The already mentioned *Next* is Brooke-Rose's at once most Oulipian as well as English (or, more precisely, London-based) novel. The book's cover-blurb covers most of the Oulipian devices: set amid the London homeless community, a well-nigh sociological reportage of this underworld of dispossession painstakingly omits the verb "to have" and reserves the first-person pronouns only for direct speech, for the content is poverty and isolation. The voices representative of the community are legion – twenty-six, to be precise, as there are letters on the English keyboard; the initials of the characters living out on the street – thus forming an avant-garde of sorts – spell QWERTYUIOP. *Subscript* addresses the themes of encryption and legibility on the macro, biological scale of life's evolution from the prokaryote cell 4500 million years ago to modern man at the end of the Magdalenian period, 11 000 years ago. The theme, then, is evolution through and in language – as she herself demonstrated in an *Invisible Author* essay (lest it be lost on the future translators), her linguistic evolution is marked by the (non-)use of pronouns. The pronouns are deliberately omitted from the first three chapters, before the appearance of reptiles 300 million years ago, and then gradually appear in sequences tied to cultural developments. Here, for example, is the opening:

Zing! zinging out through the glowsalties the pungent ammonia earthfarts in slithery clay and all the rest to make simple sweeties and sharpies and other stuffs. Dust out of vast crashes and currents now calmer as the crust thickens and all cools a bit.

Over many many forevers.

Waiting. Absorbing. Growing. Churning. Splitting.

Over and Over.

In the thrivering slimy heat. Absorbing and churning acid gas in the hot mud bubbling all around and above and out of the hole in the jutting rock. The acid gas hides inside the cracks around the spouting rock. Delicious.¹²

The singular impersonal ("it") appears only in chapter four to denote a sentient entity. In the same chapter, the plural impersonal pronoun ("they") surfaces to convey an inchoate sense of group differentiation, etc.¹³ All in all, serving specific thematic purposes and being of the conceptual rather than formally linguistic character, Brooke-Rose's motivated lipograms are as far a cry from the Oulipian *Exercices de style* or Perec's "novel without the letter e" as one could wish to get.

It is precisely this in-between position Brooke-Rose assumes vis-à-vis national traditions and her syncretic appropriation of different experimental programmes and aesthetic techniques that has lent her oeuvre its unclassifiability, its "unreadability" within the usual categories of literary criticism and history – and made it particularly susceptible to becoming an exemplum for the group of critics involved in defining literary postmodernity. Brooke-Rose's fiction does feature in most major works of e.g. Brian McHale or Patricia Waugh, becoming, for the former, a case in point of the "ontological uncertainty" regarded as a defining feature of postmodern literature, and, for the latter, a supreme example of the intermingling of various narrative levels and discourses typical of "meta-fiction." Here, recourse to her criticism will reveal that, ever the sceptic, Brooke-Rose not only objects to any easy application of the

12 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Subscript* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999) 1.

13 For more, see Christine Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002) 172-3.

notion of postmodernism to her own work, but also questions the very usefulness of the term as such. In her monumental critical summa, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981), Brooke-Rose presents her critical diagnosis of her contemporaneity, out of which springs the ethical and moral imperatives underlying her subsequent fiction. The diagnosis is one of “a reality crisis” in which “what used to be called empirical reality, or the world, seems to have become more and more unreal, and what has long been regarded as unreal is more and more turned to or studied as the only ‘true’ or ‘another and equally valid’ reality.”¹⁴ Artists, and writers especially, have a privileged point of access to this ontological shift, for it has occurred chiefly as consequence of “the discourse upon discourse that man has always needed since writing began” which “has now expanded to a vast industry of unprecedented proportions.”¹⁵ The two books also introduce a loosely formed canon of fictional investigations into the unreality of the real, and thus point to more and less acknowledged sources of inspiration for Brooke-Rose’s own explorations. This thematically organised canon, then, includes writers, movements and genres as diverse as Henry James (whose *Turn of the Screw* is analysed in remarkable detail on the basis of an original concept of its “surface structures”), South American magic realism, the new science fiction (Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph McElroy), post-war American novelists (in particular, William H. Gass), and her favourite *nouveau roman* (Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute) and *Tel Quel* (Maurice Roche, Philippe Sollers) writers. A whole section of the book is devoted to addressing the question, “Postmodernism – what is it?” and presenting Brooke-Rose’s largely dissident view on the subject. Both terms, i.e. “modern” and “postmodern,” are found “peculiarly unimaginative for a criticism that purports to deal with phenomena of which the most striking feature is imagination,” this for three reasons: “They are purely historical, period words, and in that sense traditional,” second, “they are self-cancelling terms, and this may be particularly apt for an art continually described as self-cancelling,” and finally, “by way of corollary, the terms are simply lazy, inadequate.” A consequent problem arises, then, with any attempt at defining the notions in terms of canon: “[If] we are going to put D.H. Lawrence [...] and Hemingway and Proust and Kafka and Pound and Yeats and Eliot and Faulkner and Mann and Gide and Musil and Stevens and Virginia Woolf and Joyce etc. into the same modernist ragbag, the term becomes meaningless except as a purely period term, itself obsolescent since modern by definition means now.” Conversely, when Ihab Hassan includes within the group of “antecedents of postmodernism” writers as divergent and variegated as “Sterne, Sade, Blake, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Jarry, Tzara, Hoffmannstahl, Gertrude Stein, the later Joyce, the later Pound, Duchamp, Artaud, Roussel, Broch, Queneau and Kafka,” he has, to Brooke-Rose’s mind merely “reinvented our ancestors,” as one “always shall,”¹⁶ yet it is precisely this “always” that makes Hassan’s label too general for any practical application. Hassan is criticised by Brooke-Rose as prone to sweeping generalisations even when focused on the postmodernity of one text – the *Wake*: “Later Hassan does give us some more specific ‘modern forms’ arising, directly or indirectly, out of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, the structure of which is ‘both structurally over-determined and semantically under-determined,’ but with coincidence as structural principle (identity as accident, recurrence and divergence), as well as the

14 Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 3-4.

15 Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 11.

16 Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 344-5.

gratuitousness of every creative act."¹⁷

Thus, while drawing upon both, Brooke-Rose cannot be reduced to either the typographical experimentation associated, in Britain, with B.S. Johnson, or the exploration of depersonalised narration as practiced by the French *nouveaux romanciers*, for she transcends both. Nor can she be easily labelled a postmodernist, for she has been personally involved in unmasking its generality and little practical usefulness. As Brooke-Rose herself described the plight of her own work:

I have a knack of somehow escaping most would-be canonic networks and labels: I have been called Postmodern, I have been called Experimental, I have been included in the SF Encyclopaedia, I automatically come under Women Writers (British, Contemporary), I sometimes interest the Feminists, but I am fairly regularly omitted from the "canonic" surveys (chapters, articles, books) that come under those or indeed other labels. On the whole I regards this as a good sign.¹⁸

II

There is much usefulness in taking the following remark made by the author herself as a possible key to understanding Brooke-Rose's fiction:

I deal in discourses, in the discourses of the world, political, technological, scientific, psychoanalytical, philosophical, ideological, social, emotional, and all the rest, so that knowledge to me is not an extraneous element I can put in or withhold at will, it *is* discourse, it *is* language [...] the source of most of my comic effects is the grafting together, or onto each other, of all these different discourses [...] Discourse comes from Latin *discurrere*, to run here and there. It has today become whole sets of rigid uses, and I am trying to make it run here and there again.¹⁹

What this key opens, for Sarah Birch – author of the pioneering and highly useful critical study on Brooke-Rose's fiction – is access to the common denominator of all Brooke-Rose's fiction: "the prismatic effect of viewing one field of knowledge, one language, or one culture through the discursive lens of another, and the idea of crossing between cultural domains is manifest in her novels as a structural principle." To this I would merely add that more often than not, this *crossing* between linguistic domains takes place on the basis of Brooke-Rose's employment of the technique of the (multilingual) pun – in which lies the strongest strand in her otherwise rather tenuous link to the late James Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*. Punning is what animates her texts, what compels them to "run here and there again," and thus presents one of the few (if not only) principles of continuity in her otherwise very diverse oeuvre.

While *Out* and *Such* deal with exploring discursive limitations and mutual incompatibilities, the science of fiction and fictionality of science, and so their experimentation remains largely on the conceptual level, *Between* thematises complexity of the (multi-)lingual and linguistic kind. The employment of the expressive form in *Between* lies in presenting both a narrative

17 Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 349.

18 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories and Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 4.

19 Christine Brooke-Rose, "Ill wit and good humour: women's comedy and the canon," *Comparative Criticism*, vol. 10, ed. E.S. Shaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 129.

of and narrative as journey. Brooke-Rose also continues experimenting with her new narrative sentence, this time with a female centre of consciousness and new logic of narrative journey. The narrative traces the nameless protagonist ("A woman of uncertain age uncertain loyalties" [545]) whose life story locates her on the boundary between France (her French mother, dead), Germany (her German father, disappeared) and English (husband, divorced). Her vocation cements and furthers her transitional state – a simultaneous translator (French to German) who is always "between conferences." The metaphoric networks that bind together thematic sequences are centred on two chief images: enclosure (her body afloat in the bellies of countless airplanes or huddled between the sheets in countless hotel rooms) and intercourse (her mind a crossroad where languages meet, a locus of heteroglossia) – a sustained metaphor parallels the blending of linguistic and cultural codes with sexual act:

As if languages loved each other behind their own façades, despite alles was man denkt darüber davon dazu. As if words fraternised silently beneath the syntax, finding each other funny and delicious in a Misch-Masch of tender fornication, inside the bombed out hallowed structures and the rigid steel glass modern edifices of the brain. Du, do you love me?²⁰

Taking yet another direction in the last part of her second tetralogy, Brooke-Rose's *Thru* carries the parodic tactics of *Between* a step further by turning from the discourse of culture in the wide sense to the discourse of the self-reflexive plane of metafiction, used here in reference to its definition in Patricia Waugh's work as "not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency *within* the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels: of frame and frame-break, of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion."²¹ It is perhaps this overt self-reflexivity and verbal innovativeness that links Brooke-Rose's text to Joyce's final opus, though to call it "an offshoot of *Finnegans Wake*"²² would be an overstatement disregarding its individual concerns and merits which are markedly different from those of the *Wake*.

If individual parodies challenge specific theories and texts by Derrida, Lacan, and French poststructuralist feminists, *Thru* takes as its guiding narrative tool Propp's anatomy of folktales, its characters turned into variables while their functions are constants. The dynamics of reflection, so essential for all poststructuralist theory, finds its morphological enactment in the names of principal characters, not given *a priori* as usual, but rather generated *a posteriori* from within the text:

I am in fact dead, Jacques. Oh, he's asleep. What a pity. Everything becoming clear at last. God!
No! Yes! Quick, pen and paper.

ARMEL SANTORES

LARISSA TOREN

Yes! It figures. So that's why she said about Armel not finding his ME in her and she not finding her I. Why the names are anagrams. Except for Me in hers and I in his. Am I going mad? Help! (647)

20 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Omnibus* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986) 445. All in-text references are to this edition.

21 Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984) 14.

22 Morton Levitt, *Modernist Survivors: The Contemporary Novel in England, the United States, France and Latin America* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1987) 24.

While it would of course be reductive to claim an exclusively Joycean heritage for these and other textual effects, it is easy to see how they have originated in the multifarious discourses of French poststructuralism, which had been crafted, explicitly and consciously, within the sphere of Joyce's influence – see, e.g. the “Lacanian” pun that renders syntagmatics as “SIN TAG MA TICKS” (581). Significantly, Brooke-Rose avails herself of a strategy whose genealogy stretches as far back as Freud (even though, in *Thru*, Lacan is a far more pervasive presence) and whose potential for literature has been best exploited by Joyce – the pun. As Brooke-Rose explicitly states in the text, “the pun is free, anarchic, a powerful instrument to explode the civilization of the sign and all its stable, reassuring definitions, to open up its static, monstrous logic of expectation into a different dialectic with the reader” (607). Hence, again, the aims and uses of Brooke-Rose's employment of the technique are decidedly her own and not derivative from Joyce's. She is far more concerned with how the workings of the pun undermine scientific, theoretic discourse, or indeed the claims of univocity of discourse as such. While destabilising and dissolving the realist idea of “character,” Brooke-Rose novelises the supposedly distanced and logical position of “theory” and shows it to be a function of desire, an endless, for circular, dissemination of meaning. *Thru* ends as it by necessity must do: within the dissemination of possible endings, the story finally “tells itself,” and the final words of the narrator are written acrostically into the narration: “exeunt narrators with a swift switch of signifiers no more I superimposing” (735).

Amalgamemnon presents a striking departure from Brooke-Rose's trademark third-person narrative sentence, as practiced so far, in favour of a first-person narrative. However, another constraint surfaces: the entire narrative is written in the future and conditional tenses, the subjunctive or imperative moods – i.e. in some “non-realising” form (tense or mood): future, conditional, hypothetical, etc., the preterite being, it will be remembered, the sign of official recorded history, and thus evaded in Brooke-Rose's aesthetics. The “situation” of the narrative is Joycean enough – a woman lying in bed next to her sleeping/snoring partner/lover, entertaining herself in her insomnia by impersonating several major prophetic voices in the history of Europe. The woman is Professor Mira Enketei, who, in view of the impending termination of her academic career of a classics professor, “mimages” herself as many other characters, in order to engage in a broad reflection on the possible futures of humanity. Thus, the constraint is in full service of mimesis and ideological thrust of the text: Brooke-Rose stages a prophecy, a mock-ancient oracle with which to divine the future on the basis of diagnosing the present, an amalgamation palpable from the very start:

I shall soon be quite redundant at last despite of all, as redundant as you after queue and as totally predictable, information-content zero. [...] Who will still want to read at night some utterly other discourse that will shimmer out of a minicircus of light upon a page of say Agamemnon returning to his murderous wife the glory-gobbler with his new slave Cassandra princess of fallen Troy who will exclaim alas, o earth, Apollo apocalyptic and so forth, Herodotus, the Phoenicians kidnapping Io and the Greeks plagiarizing the king of Tyre's daughter Europe, but then, shall we ever make Europe?²³

23 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Amalgamemnon* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984) 5. All in-text references are to this text.

Visibly, from the very start, Brooke-Rose's engages in her favourite strategy – exposing scientific discourse to the destabilising fictional practices, here the discourse of computer science. In an age of 0 and 1, Brooke-Rose's narrator suggest, "I" and "you" become as void of information content as "u" after "q," or "you after queue." As a classics professor, Mira has much at stake in countering the foreseen impending hegemony of computerised technology, whose pre-programming threatens to replace the function of the oracle, programming both the "foetus" and the "prophetus" into wholly predictable patterns (82-3). As a woman, her "prophersigh" assumes the voice of Cassandra (or, as she appears in the text, Sandra), consciously countering the "Father of History," Herodotus. In her discussion of *Amalgamemnon* in *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose points out that "the word plagiarize [...] originally meant 'kidnap,' and this etymological connection provides 'an invisible pun' in the text."²⁴ From Medeia and the kidnapped Io to Willy/Wally's (Mira/Sandra's partner) "sexclamations" over breakfast, the very title of the novel signifies the amalgamation of women and their voices throughout the male-dominated history, mythology, and consequently imagination of the West. Just as some native Irish voices in their dramatisation in Joyce's *Wake*, these voices, "foreign" to the history, are unintelligible to it. This (however partial) unintelligibility resulting from amalgamation is staged in Brooke-Rose's, in the best Joycean fashion, already on the level of the signifier. The prophetic protagonist, (Cas)Sandra, imagines herself as a determined counterculture "graphomaniac," who will be imprisoned for her "graffitism" (20). Portmanteau amalgamations and subversive etymologies have already been exemplified, but there are more strategies employed – for instance, the numerous *détournements* of clichés, often polyglot, and often to a satirical effect: "Che sera sera, you shall see what you shall see and may the beast man wane" (30), or "On verra ce qu'on verra may the boast man whine" (52), where the narrator's reversion of stock phrases about male competitiveness ("may the best man win") undermines the values of the male-dominated society that has designated her as redundant. The narrator's "prophersighs," having traversed areas as diverse and panoramic as Greek mythology, Britain's situation of a postcolonial post-empire, as well as (what amounts to a truly prophetic feature of Brooke-Rose's 1984 vision) Somali famine or "budding" Arabic terrorism, ultimately returns to the domestic gender policy and power politics. As Elen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs have argued, although at the end of *Amalgamemnon*, Sandra is still cooking for Willy (now Wally), "she has recast and reformed history in her 'second memory,'" and even though the stories running "through the madlanes of [her] memory" will not help her to find a job, by inscribing her presence in language, "she defies the deadening and ever-growing bureaucracy around her."²⁵

Billed as her "last novel," *Life, End Of*,²⁶ Brooke-Rose's fictional autobiography of her old age spent in the seclusion of the rural Provence, grapples, in Lawrence's phrase, with "the paradoxical task of looking back in the present tense."²⁷ Poignant and painfully candid in its depiction of mental and physical senescent deterioration, *Life, End Of* is also Brooke-Rose's reflection on post-2001 global politics, literature and culture. The physical decline, cardiovascular troubles plaguing the nameless narrator, works its way into language as a process

24 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002) 50.

25 Elen G. Friedman & Miriam Fuchs, "Introduction" *Breaking The Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 31.

26 Christine Brooke-Rose, *Life, End Of* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006). All in-text references are to this edition.

27 Lawrence, *Techniques for Living*, 175.

of linguistic punning variation on the name of Vasco da Gama: “Vasco de Harmer” (11), “Qualmer” (20), “Charmer” (36), “Harmer” (59), “Balmer” (88), “Alarmer” (92), “Lamer” (103) and finally, “Cardio-vasco-de-gamma-totale” (111) and “Vasco da Drama” (118). Hand in hand with physical decay goes the narrator’s binarisation of the humans around her into T.F.’s (“True Friends”) and O.P.’s (“Other People”): “O.P. also means Old People. Over-sensitive People. Otiose, Obdurate, Obsolete People. Outrageous, obtuse, obstreperous [sic], ostracised. All of which bring one Person into line: Oxhead Person, Oxymoronic Person” (43). O.P.’s are desensitised doctors as well as former True Friends alienated, over time and long-divergent paths: “Omega People that’s what we are. O.P. or not O.P., that is the question. There is rarely any doubt. Real O.P.s are striking, whatever the efforts to drag the eyelids down over their insensitivity” (48). However, together with the growing awareness of her own self-alienation comes the realisation that “everyone is someone’s O.P. that’s hardly news” (91). Interspersed within these are reflections on contemporary politics and state of society and thought, marked by scepticism toward American world supremacy (“The Unilateral States of America? So generous sixty years ago and so polite. Perhaps it’s the long worsening process observed in every empire until it falls.” [50]) and suspicion of the current “post-” vogue:

the correct euphemism now is post-, new and therefore better: post-human for instance, heard the other day. But that will at once be confused with posthumous, as of course it should be, human becoming humus. [...]

Is that the radio voice?

But isn’t the whole O.P. story the same? Who speaks?

Ah, the twentieth century question. In fact, since you ask, nobody speaks.

Don’t be silly. (64)

Brooke-Rose’s narratological obsession drives her to deliver, from a character to an uninterested author, a last mock-technical lecture on free indirect discourse and the importance of narratorless present-tense sentence – accepting that experiments in narrative are like pain-killers – actively combating the smarting dullness of convention – and that, like life, they have no ultimate purpose beyond themselves. It is a resignation both saddening and ultimately at odds with Brooke-Rose’s lifelong project, in which an experimental technique was always harnessed to a broader ethical concern – as Karen Lawrence has observed, for Brooke-Rose, “new fictional techniques are needed to represent the cultural narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, narratives that must capture heightened constraint and loss.”²⁸ The experienced loss, here, is that of fitness for life, for writing, and ultimately, the impending loss of life and writing itself: “The typing, once touch-typing and swift, slows down to a beginner’s speed. And even then produces five typos and three squashed intervals per line, costing each time two whole minutes to correct and creating another non-access: writing” (111). The only comic relief – now that physical there is none – comes through language: the tragedy of losing veiled in the comedy of regaining, of redoing language anew by means of punning. Thus, narrator’s polyneuritis requiring treatment on the basis of polyketone polymers becomes “Polly New Writis” and “Polly Kettleon” (88), the haemorrhage of her eyes, the ophthalmological “infarctus” (“How can the eye have a

28 Lawrence, *Techniques for Living*, 4.

heart-attack? Because it loves, it loves" [117]) gives rise to the chilling farewell note: "Eye eye, bye bye, die die, eye. I? Why?" (118). Despair is accentuated and poignancy escalated as the text draws to a close and life to its end:

Those earth-plugged body bits seem less strong, as indeed body bit by body bit is slowly being killed off, except for the brain, and humour, so far an uplift out of that scrambled ego, because of the wholly captivating groundless ground, the extenuated earth the untrue world the ominous planet the hazy galaxy the lying universe. (119)

However, then, remembering that Descartes deemed the pineal gland to be the seat of the soul, the "scrambled ego" uplifts itself through humour, adding the concluding comments: "Dehors before the cart, after all. A cruising mind, as against the mere word-play fun. Meanwhile: *Les jeux de maux sont faits*" (119). A supremely ambiguous coda: Descartes putting dehors before de cart, Brooke-Rose pitting her "cruising mind" against the "mere world-play fun." As it was in the beginning, in the end there will also be the pun: the evil bets having been placed (cf. the French *les jeux sont faits*), and body bit by body bit killed off, Brooke-Rose adds her own *consummatum est*: her very last words, quite emblematically, a French pun: *les jeux de maux* implying *les jeux des mots*, wordplays. Multilingual punning and discursive amalgamation, then, remain up until the very last instance Brooke-Rose's means of inscribing her own presence, her own signature, within language: a signature equally unique and idiosyncratic as it is – and must be – repeatable and recognisable.

Brooke-Rose's variegated oeuvre presents the most sustained continuation of modernist experimentation with the many levels of fictional narrative discourse and the aesthetic-political implications of style. As opposed to her marginalisation within the canon of contemporary fiction, a careful reading of Brooke-Rose's work may suggest its potentially paradigmatic status in that virtually all of the chief thematic and stylistic concerns of so-called postmodern literature – technology, gender, history, the future, discursivity, subversion, hybridity, linguistic innovation, playfulness, the various "meta-"morphs – are present here in a blend at once indefinable and most intriguing. Let us recall that Brooke-Rose herself thought it "a good sign" that her fiction resists critical pigeonholes and eludes classification – even though the price to be paid is obscurity and invisibility vis-à-vis the canon, the benefit is the power of Brooke-Rose's works to remain challenging, surprising, alive. Dealing with Brooke-Rose's signature (her presence as writer in language), it has largely been the recognisability of some of its features within certain aesthetic traditions and programmes that canonical criticism has preferred to focus on. Perhaps the time has come, now that the signer has passed away and presence has turned into absence, for us to recognise its uniqueness.

STEPHANIE STRICKLAND

CCD

ccd a way-to-see device unrelated to sight
lens-less emulsion-less blind as Homer

it counts and remembers counts and remembers

subdivision silicon chip pixel wells
kick out electrons : at the end of each exposure

a grid of numbers an array to catch brightness

emulsion takes down 1 in a 100 photons : 1
ccd : 90 *mehr Licht* more Light Big Bang

radiation residue every ray from radio to gamma

post-persons' fast cheap out-of-control
probe-less pen-less visionless light

keeps pouring in / kicking out

PAM BROWN

THE SOUTHERN OF SOMEPLACE

is an uncallable guide book,
others bunged
into a grimy skip
out the back
at the besser brick mall
the narcolept's flat out
rough guide open
drooping hand
'the desert begins
just beyond the suburb'
broken hill,
nice type
poliphilus roman
blado italic,
C15th & C16th
respectively.

night stars appear
like the future
like little cysts
like dandruff dust.
my sister's interstices
muttering, muddled,
yet methodical,
hungover, self-conscious,
caught in a laugh trap,
frowning, shuffling,
never standing still,
splinters under skin
a real busy fidget
going places
on the down escalator
passing everyone going up

CHRIS KRAUS

from **SUMMER OF HATE**

The death she imagined was preceded by pleasure, a dreamy trance ending blackness. It did not occur to her, ever, that the moments preceding this death – which, had she not fled, would be occurring today or tomorrow at an off-season Acapulco resort - would involve any actual pain, any stabbing or gunfire. The hotel would be pretty. They'd check into a one-bedroom suite on a high floor, with sliding glass doors leading to a small balcony. She pictured herself at the fake Regency desk, feet sunk deep into white carpet, signing her name to real estate deeds, transferring her holdings ... her hand invisibly guided by the gaze of her killer.

Within a week of their very first meeting, which took place at Chateau Marmont, her killer had said: "I want you to surrender control of your finances to me." The idea had shocked her at first, but in a good way. As an action, it seemed totally radical. Who would say such a thing, who would agree?

Since leaving Michel, her two-decades older, not-quite-ex husband, in New York to start a new life in LA, Catt had turned her shrewdness and charm towards making spare-time investments that would support her work as a writer. And she'd succeeded. Setting her sights on small, achievable goals and living modestly, she'd become independent. Leaving New York in the late 1990s, she saw vacant foreclosed buildings all over LA. The two East Village apartments she'd bought for a song years ago with Michel had become over-priced mini-lofts, so she sold them. Walking the desolate streets near downtown LA, the empty neighborhoods seemed no different than the pre-gentrified Lower East Side. Computing eventual CAPS and GRMs, she picked the most sure-fire deals and then charmed the bank's brokers into accepting her amateur, low-ball cash bids. *It was a game*. The money itself was abstract: it meant nothing. A child of the deconstructionist 80s, Catt was all about chance, flux and process. Once set into motion, the game played itself. She never projected desire onto any particular outcome.

So why, in the dead of night, when her brain finally slowed down, was she so troubled? "The bill always comes due," a rock & roll colleague had once cautioned when she'd naively proclaimed her preference for recreational sex. And she'd never believed this, because really what was the debt?

Before their first meeting, her killer – whose real name was Nicholas Cohen – established some rules: a classical BDSM protocol. She was not to ask questions. She was not to wear stockings or tights in His

presence. She was to give Him a truthful account of her emotions as they arose in response to any demands. She'd assented to all this gleefully, because how can you play a game without rules? But it was cold that first night, and walking into the Chateau Marmont lounge bar, the long skirt and boots she'd worn to comply with his No Tights request made her feel woefully overdressed. Bright boys and girls wearing gym shorts and pajamas – actual guests, flown in to audition for pilots – draped themselves on sofas and cushions in front of the Spanish Colonial fireplace.

Wearing a black Nehru-collared Armani jacket over a pair of pleated brown slacks, her killer was overdressed, also. Clearly the Chateau had changed since he'd, as he put it, 'inked deals' in its rooms a lifetime ago. The air-quotes her killer bestowed on this phrase made Catt surmise that his inspired purchase of rights to *Bewitched* and *Gilligan's Island* – actually, half the *Nick at Night* play-list – during the first years of cable was never wholly the point; it was merely a lucrative stop on his entrepreneurial highway. Deprived of the right to ask questions, Catt's mind leapt into motion. And that was nice. But really, the jacket: ... when did high collars last come back into fashion? The dawn of the 1990s? Did his outfit date back to those years?

Her killer was tall, trim, well preserved in that LA way for his age, which she guessed to be in his mid-50s. But what struck her most was his face: it was too fluid for someone that age, "unformed," as Michel might say, as if it hadn't quite gelled. After ordering drinks, there was nowhere for them to sit except the freezing unheated terrace. Three days before Christmas, the restaurant was jammed and her killer had not made reservations. He decided they'd leave. Catt's Outback was parked in the Chateau's garage. She'd grudgingly given the valet a 20 - \$15 for parking, a \$5 tip. He followed her down to retrieve it and then told her: "Wait here." Muttering something about dings, not trusting valets to park his rare BMW, he disappeared up the Marmont Lane hill, where he'd parked for free on a side street. When her killer's black car finally appeared, she tailed him half a mile east along Sunset to an ugly café in a strip mall, where he ordered them two glasses of house white, the Pinot Grigio.

Legs crossed under her ugly long skirt, Catt held

her breath when he paid with his Amex. Would it come back declined? She was already frightened for him. Because somewhere, over the short course of that evening, a strange psychic transference had happened. Sitting in silence while Nicholas Cohen recapped the entrepreneurial high points of his resume, Catt Dunlap imagined him seeing beyond her polite, neutral mask to her unhappiness. Or was it - because deep down, she already knew he was lying - her unhappiness held as a mirror to his? She felt it leaving her body and enter his eyes. And then they were joined in a double helix.

After flipping the vintage TV rights for a fortune, he'd devoted himself to scientific endeavors. He'd filed original patents for a remote keyless entry device and then purchased a house in Benedict Canyon.

After that, his interests expanded from microelectronics into neurobiology. Self-trained, he'd set up a lab and embarked on a cure for the disease of aging. Novanex: *not a drug, but a miracle compound*, was now in its first round of clinical trials in Beverly Hills and Long Island medical centers. Her killer had trained as a classical pianist at an east coast conservatory. In his spare time, he'd composed a 3-disc compilation of original electronic music, which he'd also performed and mastered. Catt felt weightless as he told her these things. Speaking in the first person, his voice had no ego, no traction, none of the hard grip of ambition. Holding her gaze, he seemed to be pouring his mind into hers. And this was exciting. Hardly speaking a word, she'd arrived at a perfect understanding, the kind she'd once shared with Michel, with this stranger. And then, shortly after this transmission took place, her killer's right eye started twitching. The twitch was a dance that went on too long, as painful to her as her own malaise. She did not know where to look. The twitch was an abstracted, empathic cutting.

She knew then she had to protect him. She saw him several more times after this. Each time he wore the same clothes and his right eye continued twitching.

Still: in the next scene of the movie, after signing the real estate deeds over to him, she pictured her corpse on the floor of the Acapulco hotel room. At first, Michel and her friends would reject the bland, non-committal report filed on the scene by the Mexican coroner.

She pictured the private investigator they'd hire, the clues leading nowhere – judicial gray zones; crimes committed on foreign soil; not prosecutable – except to anomalies. (She'd made most of her money by leaping into anomalies.) Eventually these efforts would fizzle. Michel and her friends were artists and college professors: Rationalists all, they were not the type to seek closure. After one or two trips they'd conclude that none of these costly efforts would succeed in bringing her back to them. The PI's retainer would not be replenished. He'd return to New York or LA and the case would grow cold. Doubt, the existential disease of the 20th century, would trump narrative.

But since Catt was more realist than fabulist, she understood that her actual death at the hands of her killer would be something much slower. It would be a classical feminine death, like a marriage. But the process would be highly compressed, her disintegration achieved in one or two months. She saw her descent: Money would be rapidly spent and as it dwindled, her killer would grow bored of her utter submission. Her dumb animal state would become oppressive to him. It would end on the floor, not as a corpse but on her hands and knees, hollowed out, lost and begging. She'd be dead, but still living. What frightened her most was that even this realist-death held a certain appeal. There was nothing petty about it. It was a *grand mal* that offered a knowledge she would not otherwise have, which at the time, seemed like the same thing as pleasure.

Raised by meek working class parents, Catt despised all forms of groveling. Since leaving Michel she'd built an artistic career based mostly on nerve. Having no talent for making shit up, she simply reported her thoughts. This enterprise, she believed, had strong philosophical precedents. And to a certain extent she'd succeeded. But Catt was female, and her thoughts mostly arrived through the delirium of her daily life. She saw no boundaries between feeling and thought, sex and philosophy. Hence, her writings were read mostly within the art world, where she attracted a small core of devoted fans: Asberger's boys, girls who'd been hospitalized for mental illness, lap dancers, cutters and Assistant Professors who would not be receiving their tenure.

With the small fortune she'd made buying buildings,

Catt no longer had to depend upon institutions for her support. She saw herself as Moll Flanders, outsourcing her visiting professorships and art writing jobs to younger artists and fans. The only value she saw in her name was how it might be leveraged to help younger people whose work she believed in. Her writing was mostly perceived as a hip novelty act or dirty joke, anyway. But lately she'd reached a point where those same young people were blogging against her, exposing the cottage industry she ran out of her Los Angeles compound ... the compound they'd stayed in rent-free after arriving from Iowa City, Vancouver, New Zealand. Loathing all institutions, Catt had become one herself. Even her dentist asked her for money.

When Catt met her killer, she was already beginning to wonder whether these years of shrewd focus and charm had, in fact, served her. She was a rock being used as a whetstone for vultures: people who took and gave nothing. So her killer's command to "surrender control of her finances" struck Catt as luminous as a Zen koan. He was putting himself on the line. Even a slow death at his hands would be better than the death she'd inflicted herself. It was profoundly appropriate.

Since transmitting the twitch, she'd spent several weeks within this delirium. But when he asked her to travel with him to Acapulco, she woke up and fled her Los Angeles compound. Throwing her dog and gym bag into the car, she drove south. And to her horror, within minutes her left eye started twitching.

There is a recurring belief that certain decisions were made while we were still lost in the womb of our childhoods, Catt wrote in her notebook that evening. She didn't know at the time she'd spend the next several years trying to decode what she defined as her 'death wish.' Seeking structure, she'd enter psychoanalysis, as if retracing events in the past leading up to the day she met her killer might reveal its causes.) Transactions were brokered in windowless rooms. Armies of people speaking in bland west coast American accents. Audiotapes washed up at a yard sale. Always, the real story was elsewhere. Las Vegas, Nevada. Phoenix and Tempe. What were the voices describing? A box of instructional manuals found, water-stained, in an old man's garage. Proliferation of data

surpassed proliferation of nuclear warheads. Old metal, junked electronics. Dictation equipment. Deposing as testament. The sloppiness of all this. Political porn. This is the kind of thing Catt gets paid to write about visual art. She does her “best” work zoning out and writing down words that seem to be draped on the surface of things. She has no idea what they mean. She is trying to place more faith in narrative.

Did Catt Dunlop really believe that Nicholas Cohen was trying to kill her?

Novanex: age management therapeutics for a new generation of health care.

“It isn’t a drug,” he’d insisted gravely to her. “It’s a compound.”

But reversing the symptoms of aging was never the interest they shared. What each of them sought was delirium. In November, or was it December?, guiltily trawling a BDSM dating site, Catt typed “Delirious” as her username. Elsewhere on the site, Nicholas Cohen (aka “Dominant Realm”) was about to release his electronic music CDs on his own label, Delirium Records.

And now, hiding out at the Villa Vita motel, Catt *is* delirious. The game is no longer a fantasy. Events have no more substance than clouds - she can’t remember which ones transpired between them telepathically, which ones in the world, or if there was ever a difference – but somehow they’d led to phone call last week, when her killer proposed driving down to her getaway place in Campo La Jolla, where she was hard at work on an art catalogue essay, to seal their Master/slave pact. From there, they’d drive up to the Tijuana airport and catch a plane to Acapulco, where she’d advise him on a real estate purchase. At some point, during the three or four months between their first meeting at the Chateau and this proposal, she’d recognized him – or was it the death wish he represented? – as her psychic twin and come close to agreeing to everything. At some other point – a point arrived at after researching into her killer’s identity – she’d changed her mind, bought and sold several buildings, without ever letting him know. Because by then, she was terrified.

In her delirium, Catt is convinced that Nicholas Cohen may have surveilled her online investigation of him. Not

to track her location – he’d already been to her house in LA, they’d had several dates there – but to know what she knew: to gauge, keystroke by keystroke, the depth of her suspicion, the way she’d cross-referenced each of the facts of his life that turned out to be fallacies. Her biggest mistake had been to access his Novanex site at the internet café two miles from Campo La Jolla. Was the site equipped to monitor every hit, tracking the IP address to the local server? Probably. How long would it take for him to hack into Prodigy Mexico? She’d emailed him on the dial-up at Campo La Jolla keeping things vague, she’d be in touch later on, she was busy. And then he’d called – did she really give him her number? – with the Acapulco proposal and she’d been too afraid then, to give a definite “No.”

Because the public records she’d found online revealed two charges of spousal battery filed and then abruptly withdrawn by a woman named Daniella Koreli – this entry appeared *after* the various entries concerning fraud litigation in which he appeared as the plaintiff, but *before* the civil suits filed against him by his own attorneys for non-payment of fees.

Knowing she was out of her league, Catt enlisted the help of her friend, Bettina, a former investigative reporter who now worked for a business espionage bureau. After combing through several classified databases, Bettina concluded, “This is a really bad guy.” Liens on the house in Benedict Canyon – which he’d sold for \$2.3M ten months ago – suggested bad debts to the Israeli mafia. No traces remained of this money, which had been disbursed to a cluster of now-bankrupt companies set up as out-of-state LLCs by his now-former attorneys. For six weeks he’d held title to a heavily mortgaged Flintridge McMansion signed over to him by one Daniella Koreli. He’d netted a mere \$150K on the flip although even deploying her bureau’s impressive resources, Bettina could not find a trace of where this money had gone.

Catt imagined her killer hunted and angry. Even though she’d never given him directions to the La Jolla getaway place, she imagined her killer’s black BMW gliding past the old drunk asleep in the light of a black and white transistor TV in the guard shack under a poncho. The car would come to a smooth quiet stop outside her house, #53D, it would be around 10:30

at night and this time she pictured actual violence, physical pain, maybe a knife.

Midday heat drives Catt out of the room. With Stretch curled up by her side, she cruises the town's only paved street. Finally she stops at a fish taco stand under a giant palapa. It's a nice place: a tall bamboo bar, square tables covered with the retro-oilskin cloths patterned with tropical fruits they sell by the yard in Los Feliz gift stores. A young girl takes her order and a woman – her mother? – prepares a fish taco. Catt's not really hungry but she doesn't want to be rude. Forcing herself to eat, she wonders if the proprietor has modeled her restaurant on the third-world themed cafes that have sprung up in hip neighborhoods all over the States? There's a TV over the counter, the daughter keeps flipping the channels – the same 426 channels Catt subscribes to at home in a half-hearted effort to 'keep up with the culture.' It's a real blood-schrift carnival up there on SKY cable. People outside a federal courthouse protesting a judge's decision not to sentence a killer to death, and then Luxury Life, and then QVC shopping. On Fox, Bill O'Reilly refers to a politician as "that frigid pear-shaped bitch," oh right, he's talking about Hillary Clinton. And then a reality show where three desperate women extend their grotesque personas to compete for a date.

Catt's at a loss to figure out where "it" – i.e., her death wish – began. A literally minded observer might link it to her interest in BDSM, but that wasn't right ... the adventures she sought out with strangers were a form of high play, a tiny escape from the ambivalence that surrounded the rest of her life. Before meeting Michel she'd been an actress and she'd spent her first years in New York studying *commedia del arte*. "Think of each of character you play as a color," the teacher had told them. BDSM's binary roles were as primary as the deep blues and reds on the tropical tablecloths. Before meeting her killer, she'd been a long-distance submissive to a Canadian Dom who demanded she wear a studded dog collar somewhere on her body while touring her last book of art essays around North America. This struck her as simultaneously erotic and deeply hilarious. The leather feel of the collar against her ankle, her wrist and her throat evoked acts they'd

perform when she reached Toronto, and its provenance – the Eagle Rock PetCo – a great private joke about the role of the art critic. She'd been mildly blissed out for the three weeks she spent on the road, but when she finally met "Master Shade" in Toronto and he behaved like a jerk she'd thrown the thing in the trash and flown back to LA.

The *real* death, she'll tell herself later, was her 45th birthday, the champagne "surprise" in her studio staged by her assistant and two of the interns. The assistant, a beautiful, brilliant and tormented girl, was doing a terrible job, but Catt couldn't fire her. She'd been punk-Mom for so long, she felt like punk-grandma. She was completely aware that Tommy, the gay grifter who managed her business so she could "practice her craft" was ripping her off. There'd been bounced checks and unpaid personal loans. When she came back from Toronto, the gas in her house was shut off because Tommy had not paid the bills. Tommy had sent a sweet birthday gift to her studio, a pair of fake abalone earrings. But how much had this \$10 novelty gift really cost? Catt guessed 25, maybe 35 thousand dollars but in order to calculate just how much Tommy had grabbed on the curve over the last couple of years she'd have to stop everything dead: fire, and then replace him, and how much time and expense would *that* cost? As Catt raised a plastic champagne flute she thought to herself, *everyone at this table, I'm paying.*

All this time Catt couldn't bring herself to look in a mirror and it was shortly after this birthday she met her killer.

If she'd been smart, she would have stopped trawling BDSM websites after the Toronto dog collar adventure. Experience told her that no matter how brilliant the men she met on these sites were at playing the game, in all other aspects of life, they were virtually crippled. Besides, she'd already 'reported' on these experiences in her last book of art essays, juxtaposing the extreme, nuanced presence of BDSM games with the blankness of academic neo-conceptualism. These faux-naive arguments shocked most of the art world but got knowing laughs from her fans. The idea that *anything* – let alone the old thinking-cunt routine – could shock the viewers of SKY cable amazed her. As if Germaine

Greer, PhD, Cambridge, had never posed for a beaver-shot in *Suck* magazine, using her body as proof that one could write feminist scholarship *and* want to fuck. "If there's a whore in the world, let them call me a whore," Greer said blithely. Another one down the memory hole. It occurred to Catt that the epistemological groundwork for the war in Iraq had been laid by Paris Hilton's anal sex video. Like the great Easter egg hunt for WMDs, the question of whether the soft-porn had been posted by a sleazy ex-boyfriend, as Hilton claimed, or by one of her publicists was irrelevant. The only point was, it was *there*.

Still, as a rhetorical strategy, Catt's miles were used up in this area. She knew she wouldn't be sharing the dog collar adventure with the next generation of cutters ... the whole thing had started to bore her. Logging in to CollarMe.com was a guilty recidivist pleasure she indulged winding down after the tour. But then she read:

DOMINANT REALM

I am a single but integrated and strict dominant; although with a highly developed imagination, I am safe, sane, self-aware, and diverse in spirit and energy--fully in the headspace of Dom, not switch or conflicted. My life balance achieved from a multitude of creative pursuits, verifiably accomplished, which originate in the same intuitive space where the BDSM identity resides. A background in neuromedical research is combined with creation of music and the visual arts are key aspects of my life.

My approach is based on an informed sense of timing and pace in progressing an active or latent submissive to higher states of experience and responsiveness from mild to advanced and demanding activities. I insist on discretion -- and can encourage married, separated, divorced, sub-curious women 18-45 as no risk or threat of disruption will result from any liaison which may occur. I do understand and am empathetic to the particular challenge of submissive women as well as submissive couples 'trapped' in their rational head about this recurring and enlarging need for surrender with facets of degradation, humiliation, and body training for usage by the Dom as he wishes. I also have considerable experience with the dynamics of outwardly

assertive independent female personas - executives and other types - seeking a path of surrender and loss of control to achieve an essential balance which is central to real self-fulfillment. This also applies to women in relationships where their submissive nature and need to be fully controlled is an alien concept to their mate.

You should be refined, poised in demeanor, gracious and professionally formidable; as well as truly conscious in recognizing that any posturing and pretense will be a profound waste of time. You must be evolved enough to confront your recurring need for more than a 'play' dialogue. You must be truthful and not delusional--not overweight (this means not 'full figured', 'plump', 'ample' 'pudgy' or 'obese'). No druggies, or out of control drinkers. Not interested in any cyber-masturbatory pretenders, and will only respond to those willing to go offline mutually recognizing the possibilities with direct contact by phone to transcend email smokescreen and verify sincerity.

Prefer you are located in Los Angeles area.

Catt studied her killer's ad carefully. Back in LA, there was not much besides work to look forward to. Hank, the 60-year old maverick lawyer who'd been her partner in sexual friendship, had recently gotten together with Becca, a nice divorced woman closer to his age. Given these facts, the Dominant Realm post struck Catt as extraordinary. Not only was its writer highly intelligent, he was intelligent in the same way as Hank and Michel and the people of their generation she'd grown up admiring.

This is some heavy shit, Catt thought when she read it. Intense, but in a good way. The conjunction of powerful keywords (*intuitive space, alien concept, profound waste of time, transcend email smokescreen, verify, truthful and not delusional*) with the imperative voice established very high stakes. His use of the word 'female personas' implied an awareness of the cyborgian nature of gendered experience. Her face tingled with pleasure. 'Informed sense of timing' ... the micro-magnetics of timing - the art of speaking your lines just after the peak of an audience laugh - was the only thing she'd really learned as an actress. Catt realized her killer was smarter than her. She was hooked, even before "poised in demeanor, gracious and

professionally formidable” spoke to her vanity.

Later, after they’d met several times and she surmised the black BMW was most likely her killer’s primary residence, she longed to protect him. His situation was doomed but she was moved by the way he occupied space. His autodidactic passion for neuroscience, his prepositional use of the archaic *who* instead of the popular *that*, his accomplishment as a pianist and daily practice of yoga made her think of the Asberger’s boys who attended her readings. He was someone who could not quite live in the world ... Mind stretched to a point that cannot be communicated without an effort that’s physically painful. Sitting beside him, she watched his actions and speech unfold at a second remove, as if being forced to watch himself in a mirror.

Well, this was the life of the mind in present America. Ninety-five percent of the students she met had no information or sense of any historic continuum. The rest were autistic.

After leaving the restaurant, Catt takes Stretch for a walk on the beach and then a long nap. She dreams she’s in the car with her mother in upstate New York. Charged with first-degree murder for advocating abortion, she’s about to turn herself in. They go into a church and browse through some books on sale in the nave – reading material for those about to be killed, but they only have cookbooks – *Plan Your Last Meal*. She thinks: *I don’t want to die at the hands of these people.*

She wakes up at 5 when the generator kicks on and opens the curtains. The sun’s already dropped behind the hills, the light on the parking lot’s softer...

There is a recurring belief that to locate this, this margin of error, would be to trace a historiography of one’s present amnesia – Catt wrote that night in her diary. The long cement-tiled room lit by an overhead bulb. Can no longer remember the time before the person stopped being part of the process. The shuddering breeze from the old wall unit a/c barely reaches her face. Hallways leading to multiple doors. Behind them: a basketball court, loudspeakers, coaxial wires, folding tables and chairs. Conversion. Each door leads to a room. Set theories, in which the system eventually takes over.

Later, re-reading these words, Catt will wonder

what she’d absorbed before reaching the Villa Vita motel. The porousness of a delirious body. The word she should have paid more attention to was her killer’s insistent use of the adjective, “verifiable.” He’d written it in his post and then used it again the first time they talked on the phone. They were telling each other why they couldn’t post photographs of themselves on a BDSM dating website. Catt thought of her students, how disappointing for them it would be to see her face while looking at BDSM porn sites. She was their teacher! Her killer – he told her his name was Nicholas Cohen – seemed more intent on their already sublime rapport than on seeing her photo. As an inventor and entrepreneur, he also had to be cautious about revealing his name and his photo. “There’s a great deal written about me on the web,” he’d explained. “An increasing amount ... More and more every day. And all of it – ” his voice became grave – “verifiable.”

The cursory web search Catt performed in the afterglow of this conversation confirmed his prolific biography. She found web pages citing his early invention of the remote keyless device. His company website contained a trailer for a promotional DVD about the new miracle compound, Novanex. Online trade journals praised the success of recent clinical trials. Two pages deeper on Google, she found synopses of company filings for the company, Parasol that he formed to make the cable media buys ... ads for his new triple CD album on Delirium records ... He’d co-authored a book on the nature of mind in the internet age with Daniella Korelei, the woman he’d just described as his ex-girlfriend and business partner, and they’d compiled a print-on-demand business directory together that could be purchased in English, Romanian, French and Japanese.

“When i met You it was as if You could see straight through me, beyond things that happened, back to my childhood,” Catt emailed him.

In Your presence i could look through the past to a better more probable life. i saw what could have been.

She’d worked too hard building a life she didn’t believe in, she wanted to be lost again.

You said: ‘Answer me. Answer me truthfully’. But i couldn’t do this. Pieces, excuses, falling away. You said: ‘you see? The truth is so very simple. Why do you

have to give false answers to get to the true?’

You told me to follow, and i wanted this very badly. To be blasted. You offered to teach me progressive devotion. You spoke to the evidence: the variable nature of my present truth. When You noted the fragility of my current life-form, i felt Your intelligence as something painful. To me and to You.

Catt was never afraid of the phrase “surrender control of your finances to me.” It was part of the delirious game. The connection between them was palpable, they both knew the Master/slave roles were semantic and circular. What changed Catt’s mind was the night he presented the just-finished Novanex DVD to her at a restaurant in Hollywood Hills, and told her she’d be performing a service to all mankind by funding the next round of clinical trials. She knew then he was psychotic and broke. Until then, in the erotic haze, she’d suffused this awareness with an ambient poignance, but his bold pitch brought it straight to the front of the mix.

She left the restaurant gripped by a fear that put her on notice. There was just one chance to do everything right. He knew where she lived, who she was, and *her only chance to escape* was to discover the truth.

Late that night, she went back on the computer and began digging deeper. As she cross-referenced the websites, the ads, the reports, the word ‘verifiable’ dissolved in her brain like a narcotic lozenge. Because what she found was a thick web of lies: Self-produced websites and vanity posts in online trade publications. Numerous patents filed over two decades ago and still pending ... Blog entries, anonymous infomercials, physician endorsements broadcast on space-rental webcast domains from doctors whose names couldn’t be traced ... Lies metastasized over the net, lies *verified* against other lies, a closed loop of baseless assertions. Oh, brave new genius of the 21st century ... Did her killer have a slave-pool of girls posting this shit on the net? His media company, Parasol, produced North Hollywood porn and the scholarly articles on his CV were published in journals that didn’t exist.

All the dreams Catt remembers since meeting her killer have been about death. On her third night at the Villa Vita motel, she’s outside a yurt in the Turkish highlands preparing a meal. When she steps inside, her not-quite-

ex-husband Michel is there watching TV. He looks up and asks *Have you come back here to watch me die?* with mild interest. *I was being poisoned then by the culture, but I didn’t know it*, she writes in her diary. And: *In order to arrive at the fundamental practice, one must shed certain elements: region, name, personal history, domesticity, gender. All personal histories amount to the same. Clues mixed in with the garbage. All clues lead back to the room ...*

She gets up early on Thursday morning to meet Javier, a local who’s agreed to take her out with him on his fishing boat. For a few blissful hours, Catt loses the twitch. Approaching an offshore island, a whole school of dolphins swims so close they could almost be touched. On the east side of the island, hundreds of seals sun themselves on the rocks: smiling little creatures, flopping down into the water for fish, as playful as dogs. Catt misses Michel. During the dreamtime, they swam at a beach close to here with a seal. It was one of the few times the unhappiness lifted. Catt had a notebook, and Michel drew cartoons of a long-whiskered seal smiling at them across the choppy waves. Catt’s eyes tear up at the memory, crying is such a release. But then her eye starts to twitch.

Arriving back around noon, Catt considers checking email at the town’s one internet café but decides not to risk it. *Pushed to extremes, the machines become each other’s prostheses.*

Before leaving the restaurant that night in Hollywood Hills, Catt said *No* to her killer. She’s very sure about this. Because sometime after, he called her to say it was *very important* that she return the Novanex DVD to his office right away. Even Catt knows that digital media is infinitely duplicatable. So why did he want the thing back? He must already know about her online research. Had he bugged her hard-drive? Hacked into the Earthlink ISP server and traced each keystroke back to her house?

She’d delayed watching the Novanex DVD, but when he hung up she took out a notebook and put it into her laptop. For 25 minutes, a series of people identified as “Clinical Subjects” describe the amazing changes Novanex has made in their lives. They’re more sexually active, alert, focused and happy and *able to work long hours at repetitive tasks on the computer.* And then

the experts arrive: Dr. Jeffrey C. Barlough, Chair, USC Pharmacology; Dr. Karen Beale, Senior Medical Officer for the United States Navy; Dr. Nathan S. Abramson, Chief Research Neurologist at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. When the tape ended, Catt logged onto the AMA registry. Except for Nathan S. Abramson, a New Jersey HMO internist, none of these doctors existed.

Desperate to get the DVD out of her house, she drove to the Beverly Hills office on her killer's website: an empty, low-rise cinderblock building at 9425 Wilshire Boulevard. Suite 210 – "Novanex Therapies" – was a small room reached by a staircase. All of the other tenants had vacated, except for Suite 215, "Dr. Nathan S. Abramson."

Catt slipped the DVD under the door. That night, she left for Campo La Jolla. But instead of just hiding out, she drove into town the next day and continued her search on the internet, typing her killer's name over and over into Intelius, High Beam and Google. Eighteen pages deep, she found a series of AOL Stalker search engine logs from a domain ending .ru, for Russia. Internet searches conducted by people all over the world for her killer's name had been recorded:

Pussy smokes a cigarette, pussy blows smoke – penis exfoliation shaved pussy stories NICHOLAS COHEN penis extraction NICHOLAS COHEN litigation mediacom pretty women with cocks worldcast net Albany sex protein diets property management NICHOLAS COHEN lingerie sale...

She found dozens of lists and imagined people – no, women – typing these words not knowing their searches were logged, and Catt's search right now – was it being traced and recorded?

That night, the Villa Vita motel's restaurant is open for the first time since Catt arrived. She meets a party of schoolteachers who've just arrived here from Tijuana, a 12-hour drive.

Strewn with Spanish Colonial tables and chairs, the restaurant is murkily lit with two chandeliers. Like every Mexican business, the Conquistador keeps its doors literally open which makes the room drafty and cold. Still, the evening is festive. Catt gave some of Javier's fish to Raoul, who's just back from Guerro Negro, and he has the cook prepare them with peppers and onions.

It's too much for one person to eat. Raoul asks if she'd like to share them with the other guests, and the teachers – all men – invite her to join them. Drinking shots of tequila, passing plates of stuffed lobsters, the teachers are having a fabulous time.

The man at the head of the table, whose name is Fernando, tells Catt they all teach at a high school in Tijuana. Since the start of the school year, they've been saving up for this trip – a pilgrimage, really – to see the whales and their babies at Laguna Ojo de Liebre. They rented a big Econoline van and they're leaving at dawn for the lagoon, about three hours away.

"It's a once in a lifetime experience," a math teacher named Rafael tells her. "The whales swim two thousand miles from the Canadian coast to give birth to their babies each winter. And there they remain, nursing and training their young for six or eight weeks, until they're ready to swim back to Canada."

"It is their homeland," Fernando explains. "Inside the lagoon, the whales are as trusting as dolphins."

"Nowhere else in the world can you come this close to seeing the whales," the geography teacher tells her. "They are aware of your presence – they swim right under the boats!"

Rogelio, the chemistry teacher shows her the snapshot he took four years ago of an enormous gray whale three feet from a boat: the top half of its torso reaching out of the calm lagoon waters and into the sky. "The whale is a mystical creature." And then the conversation drifts into Spanish about impossible students and absent, ridiculous colleagues. Raoul brings out Javier's fish and they pass it around the long table. Wearing sports-shirts and plastic pocket-protectors, the men remind Catt of a long-ago time when teaching commanded respect as a profession. Living just 20-odd miles south of San Diego, they probably don't earn more than \$500 a month but their camaraderie makes them part of an enviable foreign, parallel world. Rafael pours her a shot of tequila.

On the fifth day, Catt figures it's safe to leave and she does. She's already thinking about how to fix up the new buildings in Albuquerque. Years later, she'll come back to Laguna Ojo del Liebre to visit the whales, but they won't impress her as much as the teachers.



KEITH JONES
PUNK IN AFRICA
PART II

*Orange, white and blue
This we do for you
Arrange, derange, classify colour ...
Send the jungle to the city
Take the children from the mother*

—Ivan Kadey, “Orange White and Blue (Mayhem)” (1978)

One afternoon, during a jam session in a wealthy but crumbling residential district in Johannesburg, in the long, tense months after the Soweto Uprising of 1976, a certain sound came together. It was the result of the simple combination of distorted electric guitar with African hand drumming. The sound was rooted in *marabi*, the distinctive South African groove that provided the basis for Abdullah’s Ibrahim’s “Mannenberg,” the township anthem of the era. But this was edgier, more dissonant. It was a sound that echoed the sirens and rumbling of military vehicles off in the distance, evidence of the growing police presence in the streets. Within the sound, the heavy downbeat

and liberation cadences of reggae were coming to the surface. And underneath it all, the sound of the raw anger of the rebel rock music emerging from London and New York – the sound of punk.

“The Sixties” never really happened in South Africa. Massive social upheaval and seismic change would come only in the 1970s, the beginning of the country’s coming period of political and cultural clash. The confrontational sound of punk – from three-chord anthems to hardcore, post-punk and ska – provided one of the ways for its youth to first find public voice for a submerged frustration with the social conformity of a state whose racist policies had kept its own citizens stifled, repressed, and segregated for decades.

But in the rest of the world, by the time 1969 arrived it was merely a paraphrase, the end of what might politely be termed an eventful decade – that particular combination of political unrest, technological advancement, generational conflict, and far-reaching influence of popular culture generally known by the shorthand “The Sixties.” It was the end of a decade

filled with cultural, social and sexual revolution, and marked by street protests, the rapid decolonisation of the established empires, and the rise of Third World liberation movements.

The year began ominously; with sectarian disruption of civil rights marches in Northern Ireland and the self-immolation of philosophy student Jan Palach in protest of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. Things only seemed to spiral further out of control as the months passed, with riots, coups, and political assassinations coming from all directions. December brought little respite, only more news offering alarming portents of the decade to come. Escalating involvement in Vietnam forced the United States to return to a military draft lottery for the first time since World War II; in Italy, the Piazza Fontana bombing in Milan heralded a return to political extremism and terrorism unseen in Europe since the 1930s. In Nigeria, federal forces launched the final offensive of their brutal war against Biafran separatist rebels, spearheaded by an elite commando division led by young career officer Olusegun Obasanjo, who would soon become the country's military dictator. As the decade came to a weary conclusion, the hope and optimism that had often characterised it were in short supply.

For popular music 1969 also represented a moment of uncertainty. The release of debut albums by Led Zeppelin and The Stooges hinted at the harder directions rock music would take in the coming decade, while the extraordinary performances of Jimi Hendrix and Sly and the Family Stone at the Woodstock Festival offered visions of a post-Civil Rights rapprochement between rock, blues, and soul; however, the imprisonment and subsequent deportation of the leading figures of the Tropicalia movement, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, by the Brazilian military dictatorship revealed the limits of the counterculture when confronted with a truly authoritarian impulse. Fela Ransome-Kuti took his highlife jazz ensemble to Los Angeles only to be forced to confront his own African musical identity after encountering the philosophies of Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and the Black Panther Party. In Britain, the skinhead movement emerged from the football terraces and embraced the post-independence dance music of Jamaica as their own, while David Bowie

released the unsettling "Space Oddity," inspired by the hype surrounding the American moon landing earlier in the summer. In December 1969, however, most discussion in popular music circles inevitably centered on the disastrous events at the free festival organised by the Rolling Stones at the Altamont Speedway in Northern California. The scene of violent death; amidst a chaos that seemed to emanate from the band, the concert became a convenient metaphor for the anger and confusion of the era, the end of a musically-driven utopian youth counterculture.

In December 1969 the situation in South Africa would have seemed positively docile by comparison. While the decade raged on elsewhere, its citizens had been alternatively sheltered or oppressed by their authoritarian government. They ultimately shared little but a social reality based in overt censorship, political and legal repression, traditional conservatism and a rigid Protestant conformity.

For South Africans, the 1960s began in the most explosive manner imaginable, with police firing on non-violent demonstrators protesting against racial pass laws in the township of Sharpeville on March 21, 1960. The massacre of 69 persons, including women and children, and the events which followed changed the course of South African history. An outbreak of unrest across the country led directly to the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) as subversive organisations, and a resolution passed by the Security Council of the United Nations that explicitly condemned the crackdown played a substantial role in South Africa leaving the British Commonwealth the following year.

In response, the ANC shifted from a policy of passive and cultural resistance laid out in the 1956 Freedom Charter and espoused by its widely esteemed President-General and 1960 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Chief Albert John Luthuli, to one of active and armed resistance to the system. At first this took the form of a sabotage campaign launched in late 1961 under the direction of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, but a series of high-profile public trials aimed at destabilising the ANC leadership drove the entire movement underground and eventually into a position of open guerrilla warfare against the South African

BEATERS



**GOLD
STAR**
ORIGINAL
ARTISTS



HARARI



state. By 1964, most of the country's leading activists were either imprisoned, as in the case of ANC leaders Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, or had been forced into exile. An attempt to revive the sabotage campaign by an idealistic group of young white radicals called the African Resistance Movement proved a failure. In 1965, the young teacher John Harris, an associate of the group, was executed by the authorities for his role in the botched bombing of a railway station in Johannesburg. By the middle of the decade, any form of active political resistance within the country had effectively ceased.

Most in South Africa's affluent whites-only suburbs barely noticed. Content in their snug enclosed communities, they enjoyed a bland consumerist lifestyle based around the '60s advertising cliché of "*braaivleis*, rugby, sunny skies and Chevrolet." After the victory of the Afrikaans-speaking National Party and their allies in the fiercely contested 1948 election, the centuries-old colonial enmity between the South Africa's Afrikaner and English minorities receded, deliberately obscured behind the state-supported concept of "whiteness." This was an actively promoted part of the ruling National Party's agenda to create a new form of shared racial identity, designed to replace older and established cultural divisions of English versus Afrikaans and urban versus rural. It was also an ambitious attempt to reduce traditional class distinctions and the attendant radicalism attached to them. This in turn was backed by an expansive government program of economic protectionism aimed at supporting a general sense of racial privilege. All of this came at the expense of the country's indigenous African majority as well as its substantial Indian and mixed race (or so-called Coloured) minorities.

After the National Party came to power, they institutionalised their racist ideology within South Africa's legal and political systems, a policy that became known as *apartheid*. The basic idea behind this, strictly enforced racial segregation, had been present in some form within South Africa's political culture since the first settlements of the Dutch East India Company in 1652. It was later codified under British colonial rule and dominion status during the first decades of the 20th century, but only after 1948 did such all-encompassing

racialism become the very basis for political power within the country.

Over the course of the next decade, the National Party enacted a series of segregationist racial laws designed to divide the country's various population groups. Membership of these groupings was determined by the government itself, according to a system of ill-defined pseudo-scientific criteria laid out under the Population Registration Act of 1950, which included categorizing people into groups based on "habits, education, speech, deportment and demeanour." Later that year, the Group Areas Act, an attempt to segregate all of the country's urban areas along racial lines and to control movement between these proscribed zones, was passed.

A series of Land Acts passed later in the decade further restricted the already curtailed rights of black citizens to own and purchase land. The Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 went even further, applying this concept to the country in its entirety – establishing artificial government-sponsored "homelands" which were supposedly under tribal control and effectively excluding the overwhelming majority of the South African population from any form of participation in political life.

The elaborate and often bizarre legal framework established by the National Party increasingly affected every aspect of public and private life in South Africa, from membership in trade unions to sexual relationships. The most extreme example was the government's decision to forcibly relocate population groups and destroy entire communities, including the traditionally multicultural areas of Sophiatown in Johannesburg, Cato Manor in Durban, and District Six in Cape Town. Most of those displaced were subsequently forced into sub-standard housing in townships and locations such as the rapidly expanding semi-sprawl of Soweto (South West Townships) outside of Johannesburg.

The increasing political oppression of apartheid had left the country fragmented and reeling by the end of 1960s, and the notion of active cultural resistance was all but unfathomable. Elsewhere in the world, popular culture had often served as a catalyst for the first stirrings of revolt, but within South Africa this barely amounted to a murmur. This was particularly the case with the increasing numbers of young white

South Africans growing up in the suburbs, however dissatisfied they might have been with the social reality around them.

In December 1969, the heart of summer in the Southern Hemisphere, this stifling situation showed no signs of abating. Even the music on the radio was oppressive, the South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) radio network serving as another government-controlled tool of repression. Writer and musician Rian Malan was then a disaffected teenager in the Johannesburg neighbourhood of Linden, a bastion of suburban Afrikanerdom. As he recalled: "It was the worst of times in Joburg's white suburbs. The Beatles were banned on state radio. Haircut regulations were merciless. The closest thing to a pop star was Gé Korsten. Life was an unutterable hell of boredom and conformity."

A decade earlier, white suburban youths might at least have been able to seek out the more alternative forms of local music, ranging from the late-1950s "ducktail" subculture's adoption of the pennywhistle jive known as *kwela* at Johannesburg's Zoo Lake, to the support of modernist-leaning township jazz by students and intellectuals in the clubs of Sophiatown. But by the end of the 1960s, after a decade of political crackdown and blanket social conformism enforced by family, school and religious institutions, any form of rebellious activity involving protest music or even more adventurous listening tastes was no longer simply a matter of interest or a lifestyle choice. It was now something politicised, and therefore dangerous.

In this climate foreign popular music was seen with an increasing amount of suspicion by the authorities. Although records by the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and other figures of the Sixties counterculture were widely available and often even pressed by local branches of international record labels like EMI or the WEA group, this music was hardly played on South African radio. At the time all pop song lyrics had to be submitted in advance to SABC committees which were de facto instruments of censorship, which frequently led to songs or even entire albums being marginalised, if not banned outright. The criteria for these decisions were dubious and unpredictable.

As a result, the growing demand for pop music,

local or otherwise, was largely filled by LM Radio, a commercial shortwave station broadcasting from what was then Lorenzo Marques in neighbouring Portuguese East Africa (today Maputo, Mozambique). The station was heavily geared towards South African audiences, with the core of the playlist based around a weekly top 20 pop format. A local version of this, the Springbok Radio Top 20, broadcast the South African hits of the week every Saturday, but in accordance with the SABC's far more restrictive and conservative programming. Much of the best-selling pop music in South Africa during the 1960s consisted of wholesome and non-threatening offerings such as mainstream pop and country singer Virginia Lee, vocal harmony group Four Jacks and a Jill, and the afore-mentioned Gé Korsten, a classically trained tenor who abandoned a career in opera to sing Afrikaans pop for the rugby-loving masses.

Exceptions within this staid and vapid scene were few, and although a brief fad for beat groups swept South Africa in the middle of the decade, most of these were highly derivative in nature. The few genuine stand-outs to emerge from the beat movement, such as the G-Men, fronted by the legendary Johnny Kongos (whose later solo work was memorably rediscovered by the Happy Mondays in the 1990s), or the frenetic but short-lived garage band the A-Cads, tended to quickly move on from the lack of opportunities in Johannesburg, generally decamping to the perceived greener pastures of London as soon as possible.

In December 1969 all of that began to change. A group of long-haired students from the University College of Rhodesia who called themselves the Otis Waygood Blues Band (derived by reversing the names of a common lift manufacturer) decided to travel to South Africa for a few weeks. They wanted to take part in a battle of the bands being held at a large-scale rock festival at the Green Point Stadium in Cape Town, before relocating abroad for good. Otis Waygood had formed a few years earlier in Bulawayo and played heavy blues-rock with James Brown-inspired grooves and an increasingly experimental edge. As such, they were something of an anomaly in Ian Smith's last - ditch white supremacist bastion of Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe).

The band had already caused a minor uproar at home

when they had appeared on national television a few months earlier to perform their signature tune, a cover of "You're Late, Miss Kate." The uptight Rhodesians, many of whom would have been considered deeply conservative even by South African standards, were horrified at the very sight of such insolent wild-haired rebels performing what was patently a form of black music.

In crossing the border, Otis Waygood entered a country "in which a minor social revolution was brewing. In the West, the hippie movement had already peaked, but South Africa was always a few years behind the times, and this was our summer of love. Communes were springing up in the white suburbs. Acid had made its debut," recalled Rian Malan.

The band arrived too late to enter the competition, but were given a consolation slot at the festival: a 15 minute set at 2pm. It was the middle of a scorching summer's day when Otis Waygood took the stage to a mostly stoned audience of docile hippies, and by the end of their first song the entire crowd was on its feet. After the closing chords of their stand-out closing song, their abrasive acid-rock reading of "Fever," fans began freaking out and attacking the security fence. Overnight the band became *the* underground sensation of the South African heavy rock circuit. After a whirlwind tour of the country over the holiday season, the band ended up in Johannesburg, where they became the first signing of a young Clive Calder (later to achieve enormous international success as the head of Jive Records).

Just weeks later, Otis Waygood took two days to record their debut album on an ancient four-track recording machine in the local EMI studios. They then began touring incessantly, performing in small *dorps* and rural areas to an extent unprecedented for an underground band. They also started to tap into the burgeoning hallucinogenic scene of the time. According to Malan, they began "living in an old house in the suburbs of Joburg, a sort of headquarters with mattresses strewn across the bare floors and a family of twenty hippies sitting down for communal meals. Everyone would get high and jam in the soundproofed garage... the riffs grew darker and heavier. Elements of free jazz and white noise crept in."

The underground hippie culture that the Otis Waygood Blues Band tapped into in Johannesburg had existed in some form for several years, but by early 1970 this scene had begun to evolve. The first several months of the year saw the release of several albums by groups that remain legendary for their pivotal role in the development of the South African underground rock scene. While all of these records can be easily placed within the progressive fringes of the hippie movement of the early 1970s, each of them displays the influence of local culture as well as an overt awareness of the social reality of the era. These were the first sonic rumblings of discontent, the first practice of alternative visions of South Africa to be expressed in rock music.

Abstract Truth emerged from the hotel jazz band scene in Durban during the second half of 1969 and released two albums in the following year. While the first of these was recorded cheaply and consisted mainly of offbeat covers of folk and blues standards, their second album *Silver Trees* was an exploration of the blues-rock idiom influenced by jazz improvisation, Indian modalities and African rhythms. While the use of sitar and flute in this context would not have occurred to most aspiring South African rock musicians of the time, Abstract Truth had been exposed to Indian music through childhood spent in the port city of Durban, which is home to one of the world's largest Indian communities. Organ grooves, pulse-driven bass lines, and the prominent use of wind instruments distinguished Abstract Truth from any other South African rock group of the era. The first track on *Silver Trees*, an insistent, funky ode to environmentalism entitled "Pollution," references a specific bass-driven sound derived from the local sax jive tradition that was in the process of becoming known as a major musical style of its own: *mbaqanga*.

Around the same time, Freedom's Children recorded their seminal album *Astra* over one epic, acid-drenched weekend. The group had been on the local "beat group" scene for years but had recently returned from the UK determined to expand their audience beyond the hardcore regular club-goers in Joburg's Hillbrow district. The band hinged on the dynamic characters Julian Laxton, a forceful guitarist and early experimenter in electronic sound technology, and bassist and



SEAN BERGIN



HARRY POLUS



GEORGE WOLFAARDT

Minor Revolution in "Underground" Music



Abstract Truth

lyricist Ramsey MacKay, an enigmatic poet born in the Scottish Highlands and raised in a remote part of South Africa. While their sound was mostly inspired by the international psychedelic movement and the studio experiments typical of the time, MacKay's lyrics were deeply rooted in the local situation. Songs like "Tribal Fence" and "Gentle Beasts, Part One" (which incorporated African-influenced chanting as well as the refrain "*traitor in your midst*") depicted the harsh realities of apartheid rule. MacKay located the sources of inspiration for these lyrics in days spent watching rural bush cinemas in the Eastern Transvaal: "I remember one film about the Mau Mau in Kenya. Very scary when you are 10 or 12 years old and everybody is telling you to watch out for the blacks. 'B' movies are very poetic to a kid. Dracula is a very white man in the Third World... we were colonised by American and British movies, but we were in the middle of Africa. These things crept into the songs a decade later. Politics and voodoo sort of made sense."

The most controversial song on *Astra* was Ramsey MacKay's "The Kid He Came From Nazareth." A recasting of the legend of the Gospels, the lyrics set Christ as an outspoken anti-authoritarian outlaw figure, which listeners heard as an implicit criticism of Calvinist South Africa and especially of its military policy. SABC refused to allow the song airplay on the grounds that it was "blasphemous." In order to even get the album distributed, the record company was forced to alter the record's sleeve to read "Hazareth" and the song's vocal was as re-dubbed to reflect the song's new and more acceptable title. Freedom's Children were no strangers to such manoeuvres, having earlier been forced to release singles under the name "Fleadom's Children" because their first record company, Troubadour, had feared that the mere name of the band might prove too provocative for the authorities.

The third significant album to appear on the scene in South Africa during 1970 was from a band whose troubles would soon eclipse those of any other rock band of the time. Formed in early 1970 in response to the heavier music of the Otis Waygood Blues Band, the band set out to be as controversial as possible, beginning with their name: Suck. The band was a product of the lively immigrant culture present beneath

the genteel surface of Johannesburg since the city's rough-and-tumble foundation as a mining town. Singer and frontman Andy Ionnides was of Cypriot descent, while both guitarist Steven "Gil" Gilroy and drummer Saverio "Savvy" Grande were recent arrivals in the country. The band had been together for only weeks before they attracted the attention of Clive Calder and others around the Otis Waygood organisation, and when invited to record an album they managed to do so in one and a half hours of studio time, putting everything save one guitar solo straight to tape on the first take.

Time to Suck attracted all the controversy the band had hoped for, and then some. Their volatile performance style, which included the destruction of equipment onstage, combined the sound of contemporary bands such as Black Sabbath and Grand Funk Railroad (both of whom they covered on the album) with the political edge and proto-punk fury of angry working class Detroit bands MC5 and The Stooges.

Suck's performances electrified South African audiences, but even within the underground they made people nervous. Their provocative antics generated press attention, but most of this was negative. This attracted the interest of the authorities. "We were escorted out of Rhodesia, banned from Cape Town, banned from Durban," recalls Gil Gilroy, the band's guitarist. Gilroy, who today operates a microbrewery in Johannesburg, was born in Northern Ireland and went to school in Liverpool before moving to South Africa in 1970 to work as a construction engineer. He found the local conditions almost unbelievably oppressive almost immediately "The situation was incredibly dry, hollow," he remembers. "There was very little soul in the country then. It was short haircuts, straight into the army and marching around, then onto a job if you actually got out of the border [a euphemism for South Africa's illegal military excursions] alive. It was sterile... no one was allowed to speak."

He found himself in the country's most controversial rock band almost by default. "It was easy in those days," says Gilroy. "All you had to do was strap a guitar on, swear at the people, and play some fairly aggressive music." The response was immediate. "If there was anger directed at Suck, it wasn't the general public... but definitely the people from the Dutch

Reformed Church. We used to have them around, singing outside the gigs. In those days, if you wanted to get an emotional reaction, it had to have an element of angst. The music was vibrant, exciting, it was there to raise the awareness of people in South Africa that there was something more to life.”

Apart from attracting disapproval from the country’s more conservative elements, Suck struck a deep chord within the rock underground. Benjy Mudie, who would go on to sign and produce several punk bands during his tenure at WEA Records before founding his own Tusk Records in the 1980s, was then an immigrant teenager drawn to the radical potential of rock n’ roll. “They had the same revolutionary spirit as the MC5. They were confrontational, they were angry. They didn’t give an absolute fuck... Suck were without doubt the loudest, nastiest, most fuck-you band of the ’70s. They were hounded out of towns. Police would escort them through when they came to play.”

Mudie first witnessed the band at a concert at the Selbourne Hall in Johannesburg, an infamous, violent spectacle which culminated in the band destroying a city-owned piano with fire axes. One of the highlights of the show was a performance of the band’s original composition “The Whip” featuring the dismemberment of mannequins in front of anti-censorship banners directly criticising the SABC. “I was sixteen. I remember having never been so frightened but also exhilarated, filled with fervour. It was absolute rock theatre, but it was real. When they hacked up that piano and destroyed the drums, I was scared. But it was amazing,” he said.

The growing profile of Suck and their fellow bands in the emerging hard rock scene provoked a backlash. A large open-air rock festival was scheduled over the weekend of October 10, 1970. While several similar rock festivals were held around the time, Milner Park was meant as the first “gathering of the tribes” where the underground could come together. Suck performed among the headlining acts, along with Abstract Truth, Freedom’s Children, and Otis Waygood. Almost as soon as the event got under way, it degenerated into violence. A group of divinity students from the University of Pretoria invaded the premises, with the full collusion of the security force, and began to attack members of the audience. As Benjy Mudie describes,

“they were supported by the police. They dragged a bunch of people away and beat the living daylight out of them. That was a reaction to the revolution, to the counterculture. I remember the shouting and the screaming and the chaos, and peaceful hippies getting violent and fighting back. There was no peace and love about it.”

For Gil Gilroy, the violence at Milner Park was symptomatic of the tension surrounding the band. “They came down, got hold of twenty or so guys and kidnapped them, cut their hair off. I remember a lot of screaming down in front. Onstage, we didn’t even know what was going on. All sorts of things happened in those days. In Pietersburg, we had half of the South African air force outside the hall with different weapons... just waiting to bugger us up. We climbed out of the van, and had a stand-off. I had my claw hammer, what a vicious thing – when you’re in a fight and pull that out, people leave you alone. And Moose had this bloody great Bowie knife. Andy had a microphone stand, Savvy had his panga. We stood there, four in a row, a bit like Agincourt. But thankfully the police came and cleared everybody away.”

By the end of 1970, Suck had achieved their goal of becoming South Africa’s most notorious rock group, but at the cost of being essentially banned across the country. The town of Welcom even erected roadblocks to prevent the band from entering for a gig. “We didn’t have anywhere to play at the end. We had made too much of the situation... we were banned everywhere. They had taken all the soul out of the music for me.” Although copies of *Time to Suck*, the band’s solitary album, later became coveted collector’s items among international music aficionados, the record sold poorly at the time. The members struggled to get by, living on as little as one rand per day. Under enormous pressure from all sides, the band became disillusioned and split up. Gil Gilroy then set up a company to import nudie magazines and adult films and attracted further opprobrium from the authorities, eventually ending up under a government banning order (in his resultant ostracism he befriended another banned neighbour, prominent anti-apartheid clergyman Beyers Naudé). The other members continued to work sporadically in various low-key bands, taking care to stay off the radar

after the Suck experience.

By 1971, the underground rock culture in South Africa was becoming darker and more introverted, while its underlying politics came to the fore. Members of the National Party began to condemn rock music as a form of social deviance, complaining that it was “rotting the nation’s moral fibre.” In March, the Minister of Police and Justice called drug abuse as a “national emergency” that necessitated a crackdown. This led to an increased presence of plainclothes police around many of the bands and their network of communes, in particular the now firmly Joburg situated Otis Waygood Blues Band. Heightened police pressure around the band finally forced them to return to Rhodesia, only to face military conscription. Sensing that they were being made an example of by Ian Smith’s increasingly embattled government, the members of Otis Waygood fled the country, eventually resurfacing in the London dub scene as a live reggae band, performing under the name Immigrant.

The burst of creativity around the underground rock movement in South Africa during the first years of the decade was over. In 1972, EMI released a compilation album on the Starline imprint entitled *Rock Today With the Big Heavies*, featuring several of the best-known songs of the Otis Waygood Blues Band, Freedom’s Children, and Suck. Although in many ways this record represented merely the final attempt to wring money out of a dying scene, copies continued to circulate mid-decade. These often found a place among the collections of some of the more adventurous South African teenage listeners, and to some extent these bands continued to influence the tastes of the punk generation which would emerge later in the 1970s.

Among those to re-discover the legacy of the South African underground in the early 1970s through this reissue was an impressionable teenager named Warwick Swinney, better known today under the adopted name Warrick Sony as a renowned Cape Town-based producer of dub and experimental electronic music under the alias Kalahari Surfers. “It was one of the first long-players I bought,” he recalls. “Suck made quite an impression on me at that age. I had no idea they were mostly playing covers. I thought those were original songs. And to my mind, they seemed to be pretty much describing

the reality of South Africa at the time. For instance, that line in their version of Black Sabbath’s ‘War Pigs’ about generals holding black masses – to me that just seemed like a reflection of what was going on in the local newspapers.”

Already fascinated by the electric guitar, Warrick soon became an inveterate record collector, constantly on the lookout for new sounds. “I got into music at a young age because I was no good at sport, which was the big thing at school in those days. All of my family were into surfing, but I never had much an aptitude for that either. The Seventies were just a repressive time no matter what you were into. I remember the car registration plates in Durban used to have this design of half a Union Jack on them, saying ‘Natal – the other half of the Empire’ – the whole atmosphere was conservative. Conservative ex-colonials with an attachment to some imaginary England but also conservative business-minded Indians and patriarchal conservative Zulus. All of whom hated each other to some extent, of course.”

But the multiculturalism of Durban also had its fair share of advantages. “The biggest life-changing thing for me was that I went with a friend, after smoking a fair amount of Durban Poison, to watch an Indian concert which was just absolutely incredible. I couldn’t figure out the rhythms or where the beat was,” Sony remembers. “The complexities of their rhythms really grabbed me. And later on when I discovered Bob Marley and Max Romeo I had a similar understanding of how African music could work with reggae, in its own sparseness. I suddenly realised the less you play the better. And growing up in South Africa and being exposed to Zulu music I immediately understood that this was so cool, that it’s not about one guy soloing, it’s about the whole. And I think that’s what African music is.”

Another 1972 record provided a glimpse of a possible future direction along similar lines for South African rock music – the concept album *Africa She Too Can Cry*, by the Johannesburg progressive rock band Hawk. They were the first openly multi-racial group to appear on the local rock scene, combining traditional black vocalists and percussionists with a rock rhythm section drawn from the scene around Abstract Truth

and the local folk circuit. The band lived together at a farm in Rivonia on the outskirts of Johannesburg, immersing themselves in organic living and listening to the field recordings of local ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey. Inspired by a visit to neighbouring Swaziland, Hawk began to incorporate openly African elements into their performance, including the use of hand drums and costumes including leopard skins and tribal spears.

The band drew increasingly large crowds across the country due in part to the spectacle of their live show, prompting them to add two African percussionists and a pair of traditional backing vocalists to their already heavily Africanised sound, thus becoming the country's first multi-racial rock band. They grew bolder in their live presentation, but even this was marked by the racist policies of the apartheid government – the band underwent the humiliation of its black members being forced to perform onstage while hidden behind a curtain.

The fact that the members of the band lived together at Paddock Farm eventually brought raids by the police, exacerbating the tensions within the group. They moved together to the United Kingdom (signing to Charisma Records under the name Jo'burg Hawk) and showed great promise at first but eventually ground to a halt in London in 1974.

Apart from being one of the only multi-racial bands active on the South African rock scene at the time, Hawk wrote songs based on a deeply-rooted sense of African identity. *Africa She Too Can Cry* was a song cycle that loosely told the story of the destruction of a tribe and a village, as well as a traditional way of life. The album opens with "Africa," a ballad that decries the desecration of an idyllic community of unspoiled gardens and "proud beauty" by what the song terms "*scavengers, poachers and ravishers of land... violators of our virgin Africa.*" It concludes with "Uvuyo" (Xhosa for happiness), an upbeat but defiant chant set against martial-sounding drumming. The political connotations of this music did not go unnoticed in apartheid South Africa.

Attempts to mix Western popular music with local African elements were nothing new in South African music. Apart from a long-standing tradition of musical exchange present within the township jazz and rural

boeremusiek traditions, the simultaneous emergence of kwela and early rock 'n roll in the late 1950s highlighted the fact that these two fairly raw and passionate forms had several basic elements in common. This was the foundation in turn for a further musical dialogue, beginning with the release of the 1958 kwela number "Something New in Africa" by the Solven Whistlers on a 33rpm record marketed primarily to the younger white audience (at that time popular music geared at the township and rural audiences was still issued mainly on 78s) and culminating in the early 1960s when several experiments at combining rock with indigenous music were released as mass-market singles. These were often aimed at both white and black audiences in equal measure, and included such notable genre-crossing excursions as "Shala-Shala Twist" by the Dark City Sisters, Fred Wooldridge's "Penniefluitjie-Kwela," and Allen Kwela's marabi-tinged "Guitar Rock," as well as the earlier "Zambesi," an enormous hit for Afrikaans accordionist and showman Nico Carstens.

It is crucial to stress that South African rock music as it evolved during the 1960s was hardly an exclusively white preserve. An extensive network of cover bands performing rock and soul hits as well as original compositions in the garage and beat vein operated throughout the country's mixed-race (Coloured) and Indian communities, led by the pioneering Cape Town beat outfit The Invaders, who began as a Shadows-inspired tribute band but whose career lasted into the high psychedelic era. Many of these bands were semi-professional in nature, performing at dances and local functions and occasionally issuing self-produced seven inch singles. A typical example of the sound of such groups, complete with hard rock drumming and fuzz-box guitar, can be heard on the independently-pressed album by The Raiders, *Get Ready With The Raiders* (1969) which bore the subtitle: "Perfect for Dancing!" The Raiders were only one of many such dance and cover bands to flourish in the mixed-race and Indian communities around Durban during the late 1960s.

The best and most successful of these were undoubtedly the wildly successful local band The Flames. Led by the innovative and open-minded guitarist Steve Fataar, the eldest of three brothers within the group, they enjoyed a string of number one

hits in South Africa during the late 1960s, including their cover of Jerry Butler's "For Your Precious Love," which spent 14 weeks at the top of the local charts in 1968 and became a massive hit across Southern Africa. This unprecedented success allowed The Flames to tour Europe, where they were discovered by the Beach Boys. Carl Wilson invited the band to the United States, where they recorded an album and toured with the Beach Boys. Two of the members of the Flames, Ricky Fataar and Blondie Chaplin, eventually joined the band altogether in the mid-1970s, with Chaplin eventually also serving as a long-term backing singer and acoustic guitarist in the Rolling Stones touring unit.

Steve Fataar, however, returned to Durban to become something of a legendary figure on the burgeoning Durban underground rock scene. Among those who fell under his influence was Michael Flek, at the time a disaffected music-and style loving teenager of Czech and Austrian immigrant parentage growing up in the stifling conformist suburbs of Durban, but soon to be the front man of South Africa's first fully-fledged punk band, Wild Youth. "The Flames single "For Your Precious Love" was the first South African record that impressed me and it still influences my music to this day," Flek remembers today from his contemporary home in London. "That single had a South African uniqueness in terms of vocal delivery and dialect, and most of all it is a record that is played with passion and which sounds real."

That quality of passion and the "real" was something in short supply in Durban during the early 1970s. "It was an incredibly boring, mundane existence. There was literally nothing to do," Flek recalls. "Every Friday or Saturday night you basically went out to a *jo!*... which was just basically drinking and then there would be a fight. People would start fighting towards the end of the evening. The predicament of being a young white South African in the 1970s was that by default being white we were part of the enemy... we were not the people who were being oppressed by apartheid, and for this reason we felt a sense of guilt."

Searching for ways out of the conformity of the suburbs, Flek began frequenting the far more exotic scene around the business district around Grey Street in downtown Durban. "Grey Street was in the Indian

quarter of Durban and was an exotic place for a 14 year old, with its oriental fabrics, scent shops, cheap clothing and meat hanging on hooks outside the butcher's, complete with buzzing flies. Ajmeri Arcade running off Grey Street was similar to a Middle Eastern *souk* except with an African flavor, with *muti* shops selling ingredients for African witch doctors. I used to visit the shops there, buying comic books, imported clothes, and of course records. In 1971 I picked up The Stooges' *Fun House* on a local South African pressing. I bought it from Record King in Ajmeri Arcade. That record was mind blowing, so hard and powerful and sleazy, and although I didn't know it at the time, funky and jazzy as well. Needless to say it got a scratch the first time it got played on a friend's portable record player but that that didn't matter as it sounded so dirty and fuzzy anyway."

With a burgeoning interest in underground music, it was perhaps inevitable that the young Michael Flek would cross paths with Steve Fataar. "He was a local legend, the man who left the Beach Boys and came back to Durban. The first time I met Steve was when I was a schoolboy, present at the recording of his solo album with his brother Izzy. During breaks in the session he taught me some Led Zeppelin licks on his Les Paul. Later he opened up his own club... I remember there being cushions on the floor where people could sit and chill out as they watched the bands. Looking back now, that club can be considered a statement in the face of apartheid, a venue where people of all races could hang out and listen to different types of music. All the bands connected with that scene around Steve were pretty unique and diverse."

The Beaters were to prove even more of an anomaly in terms of the cultural diversity of their musical sources. Formed in Soweto by the teenage Siphos "Hotstix" Mabuse under the direct inspiration of the late 1960s hippie movement, the band openly acknowledged the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and Deep Purple as major influences while also drawing on local styles such as jive and mbaqanga. Their debut LP, released in 1969, combined all of these as well as several forms of American black music, and marked one of the main foundations of what would come to be known as "Soweto Soul" in the decade to follow.

The band appealed to the hipper side of township audiences, and went on to tour the entire Southern African region. A pivotal tour of Rhodesia in 1976 inspired Mabuse to write what became the band's signature song, the organ-driven Afro-rock anthem "Harari," named after what was then merely the name of a township on the periphery of the state capital of Salisbury. The band changed their name to Harari to reflect the growing importance of both this song and their own growing awareness of African identity (Salisbury itself was to follow suit after Zimbabwean independence in 1980). Even so, several of the songs on their first album recorded under the name Harari still demonstrate the strong imprint of early 1970s hard rock, with the inclusion of guitar solos and Western-style drumming alongside the more obviously African influences in the band's ever-evolving sound.

One of the leading Soweto-based bands of the mid-1970s, The Movers, played an infectious brand of township soul that was infused with marabi and jive but also clearly influenced by Western rock music. Their hit song "Crying Guitar" prominently featured a wah-wah pedal, and the group performed cover versions of "Hey Jude" and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Have You Ever Seen the Rain" as well as the Bob Marley-penned Johnny Nash hit "Guava Jelly" alongside their more famous bump jive classics. Even the undisputed star of the mbaqanga scene, Mahlathini, known as "King of the Groaners," recorded a hit single which drew musical and lyrical inspiration from the white rock culture. His "Wozani maHipi" incorporated Meters-inspired funk-rock drumming and heavy distorted guitar into the mix, and featured Zulu lyrics which roughly translate to "*The hippies are coming to Soweto.*" It was as much open invitation as cultural borrowing.

A glimpse of bearded white students became an increasingly common sight at certain events in the townships, such as the 1974 Soweto Jazz Festival, and even in the occasional *shebeen*. Around the same time, the Afro-jazz guitarist Philip Tabane and his percussion ensemble Malombo publically jammed with members of Freedom's Children in Durban. As Ramsey MacKay recalled, "We played with them when it was against the law to be onstage with a black person. We played to a packed Durban City Hall with skeleton masks and our

hands painted white under florescent lighting. This was the first time a black and a white band had played on stage together. We were at the forefront of the political situation. We were hounded by the police."

One of the epicentres of this sort of boundary-crossing was the Free People's Concerts hosted annually at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in downtown Johannesburg from 1972 onwards. These attracted a racially diverse and musically open-minded audience that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier. In direct defiance of laws which forbid public gatherings between different races in public, these events featured a broad variety of traditional and jazz styles and occasionally presented multi-racial acts onstage, as the university's traditional status as an academic community shielded them from direct police intervention. Some of the earliest public performances of Johnny Clegg with Siphso Mchunu (as part of the Zulu folklore group WaMadlebe) took place under the auspices of the Free People's Concerts, which showcased everything from gumboot dancers to Irish folk music alongside topical South African singer-songwriters like Jeremy Taylor and Colin Shamley, and by the end of the decade, some of the country's first wave of punk bands as well.

The university's long-standing tradition of liberalism made it a magnet for all manner of non-conformists, malcontents, and aspiring radicals. A bastion of resistance to National Party ideology, Wits counted future Nobel laureates Nelson Mandela and Nadine Gordimer among its alumni. The staff and students had protested publicly against the enforcement of apartheid education restrictions in 1959, and the university's Great Hall had hosted the initial production of Todd Matshikiza's legendary South African jazz opera *King Kong*. In the early 1970s the students had become even more radicalized in the wake of a series of nearby political events – the 1973 trade union strikes in Durban, the overnight collapse of the Portuguese colonies in Southern Africa, and the rise of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement.

Among them was a young architecture student named Ivan Kadey, who would soon form the most radical rock group of his generation, the multi-racial punk-reggae band National Wake. Kadey grew

up an outsider, a Jew and an orphan, in both the traditional immigrant neighbourhood of Yeoville and the conservative provincial city of Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State. "Being born into a system of gross inequity was inevitably formative," he remembers from his home in Los Angeles. "There was no way that any reasonable being could escape awareness of the brutality and oppression of life in South Africa. I remember the humiliation and suffering I witnessed as a child, the beating of a young African man by a policeman wielding a *sjambok*... there was something totally repulsive in the manner with which the police behaved with everyone. As long as I can remember, I was conscious of the injustice of the situation and identified with the underdog."

Arriving at Wits in 1970, he had already immersed himself in the protest-folk movement and begun to develop a political consciousness. As Ivan Kadey describes it, "In South Africa, many of us of that age felt totally a part of the revolt of the times. In my last year at high school I formed a duo with a friend. We performed weekend nights at the Hillbilly, a local folk venue, a repertoire of largely protest songs and a handful of my own compositions."

As the 1970s went on, Kadey took part in the student opposition politics and non-conformist activity at the school, staging performance art actions to express his revolt. He soon became part of a network of alternative lifestyle communes that had started developing in the decaying neighbourhoods near the university. Kadey remembers: "Wits was largely a commuter university. Parents had near breakdowns when their kids left to move into one of these 'dens.' It was seen as a complete rejection of the conformist way – which of course it was. Communes became a way for the more independent and rebellious to break away from their parents' control, or to get away from the university authorities."

"I lived in a Parktown commune, a large old house dating from when this part of the city had been the domicile of the richest strata of the booming mining town. At that point in time the area was in transition as the old houses were being transformed or demolished. Our neighbours on one side still maintained their estate in fine colonial fashion, with a manicured garden replete

with swans. We were left alone to pursue our alternate lifestyle as long as we could meet the monthly rent... we inhabited a crack in the city's evolving culture, a fissure between a distant past and a slowly approaching future."

"There were other communes still surviving in the neighbourhood, although not as many as earlier in the decade," Kadey says of the era. "There was an active alternative culture dating back forever in Joburg, most recently manifesting as hippies, and sharing the sacraments of rock music, marijuana, and free living people. Literacy groups producing materials for worker education... carpentry co-ops, living according to the principles of Robert Owen... ashrams, rock and roll bands, drug addicts, artists, free-thinkers. The network really stretched throughout the country."

Ivan Kadey's commune began existence along similar lines. "It started as typical white kids seeking a non-conformist communal pad. The members were artists, musicians, dancers, Buddhists, students. Being a haven, non-conformist and racially open, we also had a few black people wandering in and out." Due to the requirements of apartheid pass laws which controlled movement in and out of areas racially classified as "white," some of like these acquaintances, such as the jazz guitarist Allen Kwela, began staying over at the house on occasion. As a result, the house inevitably began to attract the attention of the police. Kadey remembers that one day "police dressed in jungle camouflage... went through a quick inspection of the house. Nothing serious developed, but it was the first time I saw cops in military riot squad dress, and it led to my song 'Orange White and Blue (Mayhem)' with the lyrics *"arrange, derange, classify colour, send the jungle to the city, take the children from the mother... blue-grey men are doing it again, separating the dark from the light, in the black African night."*

Another of the regulars at the commune was Mike Lebesi, a Sotho percussionist known as "One-Eyed Mike." Lebesi was born in the traditional rural area of Thaba'nchu in the Orange Free State and had spent a large part of his childhood and adolescence in Parktown, living in maid's quarters with his grandmother and getting to know the Jewish family she worked for. According to Kadey, "He had the Parktown culture down, and



Ivan Kadey

moved quite freely between the city, Soweto, and the countryside."

The similarities in their backgrounds inspired a certain musical rapport between the two, and music became part of their connection. "I got my first electric guitar in 1974. The playing of Phillip Tabane and Malombo captured my imagination – the example of solo guitar with African drums alone. This led to my jamming with Mike Lebesi for hours on end. I got my first Bob Marley albums, *Rastaman Vibration* and *Natty Dread*, in 1976 and was taken body, soul, and mind by the totality of his music, including the social conscience."

By this time, the political situation in South Africa was worsening on a daily basis. From Kadey's point of view it now seemed that "the apartheid state was actively becoming more repressive. There were reports of people dying in detention, 'slipping on soap' and 'jumping' out of sixth story windows. The government

finally introduced television in early 1976, possibly believing they would be able to exercise even more complete control of the population by feeding a diet of propaganda to the masses."

On June 16 things finally came to a head. In protest at the introduction of Afrikaans as the primary language of instruction in secondary schools, mass protests among schoolchildren broke out in Soweto. What had been planned as a peaceful rally in support of a school walk-out turned violent after police barricaded the route of the march. The resultant rioting brought a heavy-handed police response that left hundreds dead, and the images of the event broadcast around the world definitively changed both the already tense situation in South Africa and the general perception of the anti-apartheid struggle outside of the country.

It also marked a turning point for Ivan Kadey. "The example of the children, their resolve and steadfastness,

made me examine my own resolve and commitment to change. I knew the nature of the struggle had entered a new phase, and the days of white rule were numbered." Kadey returned to the stage with a renewed commitment to the liberation struggle. In 1977 he was offered a support slot by political singer-songwriter Roger Lucey (whose own career as a musician was effectively ruined during the 1980s due to police interference) at one of Johannesburg's most important alternative venues, the Market Theatre. "I played one of my compositions, "I've Been Around This Land." That was pretty crucial for me, getting up and performing in public for the first time in many years."

That rising anger soon found a perfect vehicle for unprecedented expression when Lebesi introduced two new members to the Parktown jam sessions – a rhythm section consisting of brothers Gary and Punka Khoza on bass and drums respectively. Kadey remembers that "one day he arrived with the Khoza brothers and we got into some really exciting music. I had been putting material together with another Joburg musician, Paul Giraud. We started jamming as a five-piece with Gary on bass guitar, Punka on drums, Paul on lead guitar, Mike on congas and cow-bell and myself on rhythm guitar. We worked up a set of songs with all of us contributing, and decided to stage a gig. Without any overt discussion we all knew what we were embarking on, and were totally charged up and ready to go."

The Khoza brothers immediately began to put their own unique stamp on the music being created. Gary Khoza was a well-respected multi-instrumentalist on the Soweto Soul circuit, having been a child star at the age of twelve in the hit late 1960s township act Flaming Souls and more recently playing with a heavy funk band called The Monks. His younger brother Punka had a background in radical theatre, a potent cultural force in 1970s South Africa, also bringing to the nascent scene developing in Parktown his own growing spiritual connection to Rastafarianism.

Rasta culture and its notable accoutrements were largely alien in South Africa at the time, and as a result those sporting dreadlocks and pan-African colours often found themselves shunned or regarded with suspicion even in the townships, let alone in the supposedly "white" areas such as Parktown, where the Khoza

brothers soon found themselves living by default. Jamaican culture was far from unknown in the local context though – the writings and thought of public intellectuals such as Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay had been well-known in Africanist intellectual circles for decades, and the arrival of the self-proclaimed "first Third World superstar" in the person of Bob Marley brought a similar level of awareness into the mainstream.

Jamaican music in the broader sense had a longer history in South Africa, with the first locally-produced ska record having been issued as far back as 1965, when Gallo Records released the single "Midnight Ska" by Reggie Msomi's Hollywood Jazz Band. Msomi was a cosmopolitan swing bandleader and composer of hits for Miriam Makeba and others who also recorded a number of twist, jive and Latin records aimed at the jukebox market, before also trying his hand at the emerging West Indian sounds of the independence era as well. And although an authentic local variant of reggae would not definitely enter the scene until the advent of the Dread Warriors and Lucky Dube in the 1980s, attempts to cash in on the popularity of early reggae instrumentals in Britain had seen the release of a few curious South African attempts, mostly by rock session musicians, at playing reggae throughout the 1970s.

At that stage, however, the local record market was already busy discovering the harder stuff. "In 1976, I found a copy of *Garvey's Ghost* in a record shop in downtown Durban, which was the dub version of the album by Burning Spear... for some reason that was a really popular record among the local audience at the time," recalls Warrick Sony, by then a committed collector of any interesting new sounds he came across on vinyl. "Having gotten deep into the bass guitar, I was busy checking out the sound of African bass players, especially that plectrum sound some of the Zulu guys had back then. So I could really get that sense of space in dub, the unity of the whole, that it was all about the beat, on the one. That opened up a whole other way of looking at music for me. And then punk happened in 1977. My dad went to England on business and I gave him a list of stuff to buy for me. So I got the Boomtown Rats, the first Clash, the Pistols, and Patti Smith's *Horses*. Quite a weird assortment in a way but punk

was about content, singing about actual politics.”

Although this initial impulse of the sound of the emerging punk movement as heard on records may have arrived from abroad, it immediately found a powerful reverberation within the local context. “The most important thing about punk for us here in South Africa was the writing and singing of songs about your own reality,” says Sony. “And that’s the politicisation, which was always the army. Being forced to go into the army, all of a sudden apartheid affected you. Up until then, white guys had a good life. I think a lot of those guys never thought about much until they were chucked into the army.”

For Kadey and his Parktown friends, who would soon coalesce in the pioneering multiracial punk-reggae band National Wake, the nascent rebel rock of England also appeared at exactly the right moment. In the period after the Soweto Uprising, South Africa had all the right ingredients for a genuine revolution – political unrest, racial bigotry, radicalised youth, and a long-repressed need to speak out – and with this new music Kadey heard something that matched his own feelings. “The whole sound, the attitude just matched the way I was feeling at the time, about living in South Africa, about many things. The idea of just putting something out there without any ceremony or formality appealed to me. That to me was punk.”

“As punk and New Wave came down the pike, things just seemed to come together to make the musical climate more conducive to the possibility of my contributing to the scene, from the tradition of protest I was rooted in. You have to understand the state of near paralysis that living in a fascist society produced in me, as I’m sure it also did in others. At what point does one just say ‘fuck it, I’ll take a fucking bullet if I have to, but I’m going to get up and sing my fucking song?’ I think that point is ‘punk.’”

In the coastal suburbs of Durban, Michael Flek was rapidly coming to similar conclusions. “You must remember that in the suburbs we were living in a really redneck environment... the entertainment for a lot of the male population consisted of heavy drinking and fighting. I was going to the same parties, as there was often nowhere else to go, but living in my own parallel Warhol-Bowie fantasy world with my silver hair, thrift

shop clothes, dog collar and make-up. Apart from a few isolated incidents I was lucky to survive unscathed.”

“As time went on I met more like minded souls, things became more interesting and a more arty scene evolved. If there had been other groups on the scene, maybe we wouldn’t have started one. We basically started it to entertain ourselves, really. If you were interested in anything artistic, it was a wasteland of nothingness, just boredom. And we were giving people what they didn’t have otherwise.” In early 1978, Flek founded what was essentially the first true punk band of note in South Africa, the now-legendary Wild Youth. Within a few months of forming, the band had worked up a setlist of original material and was headlining its own concerts, sometimes to audiences of several hundred people.

The era of cover bands and touring oldies package tours by over-the-hill foreign acts was quickly coming to an end. The first recognisably New Wave groups were appearing on the local scene, and one of the most striking features of this sound was that for a change, most of the songs were being performed in unmistakably South African accents. The first of these to make a major impact nationwide were the Radio Rats, a distinctly original New Wave group from the mining town of Springs near Johannesburg who were essentially a loose collective based around the highly individual singer-songwriter Jonathan Handley. Their first single “ZX Dan” was released in 1978 to an unexpectedly strong response across the country, emboldening the fledgling South African punk scene. Suddenly, the idea of making a record combining the energy and excitement of punk with locally-derived mannerisms and lyrics felt not only possible, but within reach.

“It was around this time that I wrote arguably the best Wild Youth stuff, free from other people’s influences and opinions,” says Flek. “Those first songs were straight from the heart. We wrote catchy songs at a time when very few groups in South Africa wrote their own material. We also believed in rock and roll and played it with passion. We also saw the way things were going at a time when few young people of our age were willing to look beyond the sterile mainstream. But I wanted the band to be edgy, glamorous, arty,

rocky, sexy and entertaining, to take people out of the doldrums of their everyday lives, and for a year or so we succeeded. We drew our influences from everywhere and the palette was endless.”

The energy and optimism around Wild Youth reached its peak in late 1979, when they became the first self-proclaimed punk band in Africa to release a record. Done in the proper DIY spirit of the times, the seven inch single of “Wot About Me?” was self-released and featured a striking black-and-white graphic design in lieu of a label, set in stark contrast against its plain white sleeve. Embodying all of the elements of the style, sound and attitude of Wild Youth, “Wot About Me?” combined a catchy tune built around a relatively simple structure but featuring some unusual guitar chording with the powerhouse drumming of Rubin Rose, later to be known as “the godfather of SA punk” after emerging as one of the leading figures of the militant anti-apartheid Durban hardcore scene of the 1980s. Michael Flek’s lyrics were essentially a classic rock ‘n roll boast but also reflecting the growing concern with South African identity and local issues:

“I don’t want to talk about Sid Vicious / I don’t want to talk about Joe Strummer / I just want to talk about / About me.” Years later Flek was careful to clarify the song’s intent, saying “This is not an anti song. We liked all the people mentioned. We were just saying that we wanted recognition in the same way as the people in the song. It was written in a small town in the middle of nowhere. The song then took on further meanings as a general cry for recognition by young people, a clarion call for the disaffected.”

Looking back on the period, Warrick Sony acknowledges that “the do-it-yourself ethos of punk propelled many of us to forge ahead and write songs about the world we knew. A small club scene developed and spread to the major cities. Bands sprang up all over... from Durban, Cape Town, Johannesburg. All felt a need to reflect a South Africanness, to sing with South African accents and be true to our experience. Songs about the army, or girls from Boksburg, or police stupidity or general white fears were what it was all about. Punk was great because it was liberating and it was fun, everyone was in a band. You didn’t need to know how to play music. In fact, that was where some

of the best music came from. Not only was there a movement, but there was a wonderful common ground, a common enemy and a moral centre. Within that, you had bands like National Wake, but also political platforms like the End Conscription Campaign.”

Within the space of a single year, this scene had attracted a significant audience and enough media attention to merit the release of the first all-South African punk and New Wave album. Also in 1979, the former teenage underground rock fan Benjy Mudie, now a forward-thinking A&R at WEA Records, brought out the compilation *Six of the Best*, assembled and produced by him to showcase six diverse bands drawn from the emergent scenes around the country. By year’s end, the movement had even grown ambitious enough to attempt the first punk tour, the ill-fated “Riot Rock” tour of the Western Cape. Along with Wild Youth from Durban and the newly-formed National Wake from Johannesburg, this also featured the first punk-inspired bands to have emerged in Cape Town, New Wave rockers Safari Suits and the edgier Housewives’ Choice (a somewhat later edition of which would feature Warrick Sony, by then recently discharged from compulsory military service, on bass guitar).

Although the tour ended badly and was considered a failure by many of the participants – due in no small part to the myriad problems encountered by National Wake as an openly radical multi-racial punk band trying to travel between small towns in what was essentially an authoritarian fascist state – the seeds were sown for a revolutionary phase in South African popular music. The coming decade would prove to be the most violent and contentious in the history of the country, but the alternative music scene would be present in the discourse from the beginning, and would have no problem making its demands heard. The struggles of the 1980s would be multi-faceted in nature and would require the articulation of numerous responses to an increasingly dire situation. However, this time around, there was no doubt that the DIY spirit, sense of individual freedom and radical alternative impulse of punk would be there to provide one of them.

*For more information see <www.punkinafrica.co.za>; the soundtrack to this article is available at <<http://soundcloud.com/punk-in-africa/orange-white-and-blue-roots-of>> .

ROBERT CARRITHERS

PSYCHEDELIC WEEKEND





JOHN GEE PRESENTS AT CLUB 57
SIDE SHOW
OCT 8
CLUB 57

EROTIC ART
FEB 27
CLUB 57 ST. MARKS

presented by
BATES
MARKS
CLUB 57

CHATEAU 57
AN EVENING OF OLD FASHIONED COMEDY

CLUB 57
PRESENTS
ACTS OF LIVE ART
10 PM
FRIDAY
JUL 25
CLUB 57 ST. MARKS

9:00
NOT
22
25
30
ST. MARKS

JOHN SEX

This photos were taken at the Club 57 benefit party at Danceteria. Club 57 fell on hard times; back in the '80s other creative clubs supported each other. Danceteria (for those that do not know) was four floors of nonstop happenings and during the summer the rooftop would be open with the view of Manhattan surrounding you. These two photos are of John Sex performing at the benefit. John Sex was a singer, performer, a damn good dancer, loved performing with his python snake and with his singers The Bodacious TaTa's. (Wendy Wild, April Palmieri, Micki French, Myra Schiller and others) He was one of my favorite people. He was really fun to be with.

THE SICK FUCKS

The one and only, the Infamous New York punk band The Sick Fucks performing at Danceteria.

THE PSYCHEDELIC WEEKEND

This photo is from a photo shoot that I was asked to do to promote the Psychedelic Weekend at a club that was called The Cavern. The most popular psychedelic garage bands and people in New York got together for this photo shoot. I shot this photo in front of the famous (at the time) psychedelic painted building on East 6th Street where all the Indian restaurants are. It was a building that was painted in the sixties at the height of psychedelia. It lasted quite awhile, but is no longer there now. I do not remember all of these people in the photo, but I remember most of them. There is Rudi Protrudi and Deb O'Nair from the band The Fuzztones, Wendy Wild and some members of the Mad Violets, master of ceremonies of the Psychedelic Weekend and DJ Tom Scully, Rene Laigo, Viva and a girl named The Runt.

DEMOB: LONDON FASHION MEETS NEW YORK

I did a series of fashion shoots in New York for Demob, a London based fashion house. (Thanks to Jon Mole Baker) The dapper John the Greek looking happier than

ever strolling down 42nd Street with the incredible beauties Carmel, Mandy and Michelle Young.

SCREW MAGAZINE SESSIONS

The first photo is Wendy Wild posing as the ultimate burlesque queen. I got a photography job to somehow capture the downtown East Village scene in an erotic or sexual way for the New York infamous porn magazine: Screw Magazine. First of all I want to say, I never did and I do not do porn photography of any kind. *Screw Magazine* was famous for porn, but it was also well-known for their strong political views and extreme humor. I got together with Wendy Wild and John Sex and told them about this. I asked them if they had any ideas for this article. We decided to try to make a porn parody. New York City has garbage cans out on the street and back then people threw out perfectly good furniture and all sorts of usable items that people could find and use in their apartments. Once in awhile you would find something unique and special. As we were trying to think of how to do this photo session, John spied a thrown out mannequin on the street outside of a shop. A very special mannequin indeed! What made this mannequin special was, for whatever reason, this particular mannequin had its mouth open with its tongue sticking out. The mannequin magically told us what to do for this photo session. We found out it was a she and we had a lot of fun with her. These are some of the less explicit photos. The mannequin got really carried away with us and we had to end the photo session and before we knew it we were seduced by her throughout the night. We all passed out in a state of exhaustion. When Wendy, John and I woke up the next morning, the mannequin was gone and we never saw her again, but here are the results of some of the photos. *Screw Magazine* was very pleased with these results.

SELF PORTRAIT AS A DRUID

This is a self-portrait of me in my hallway. After the mannequin experience I temporarily turned into a Druid, but it did not last long.



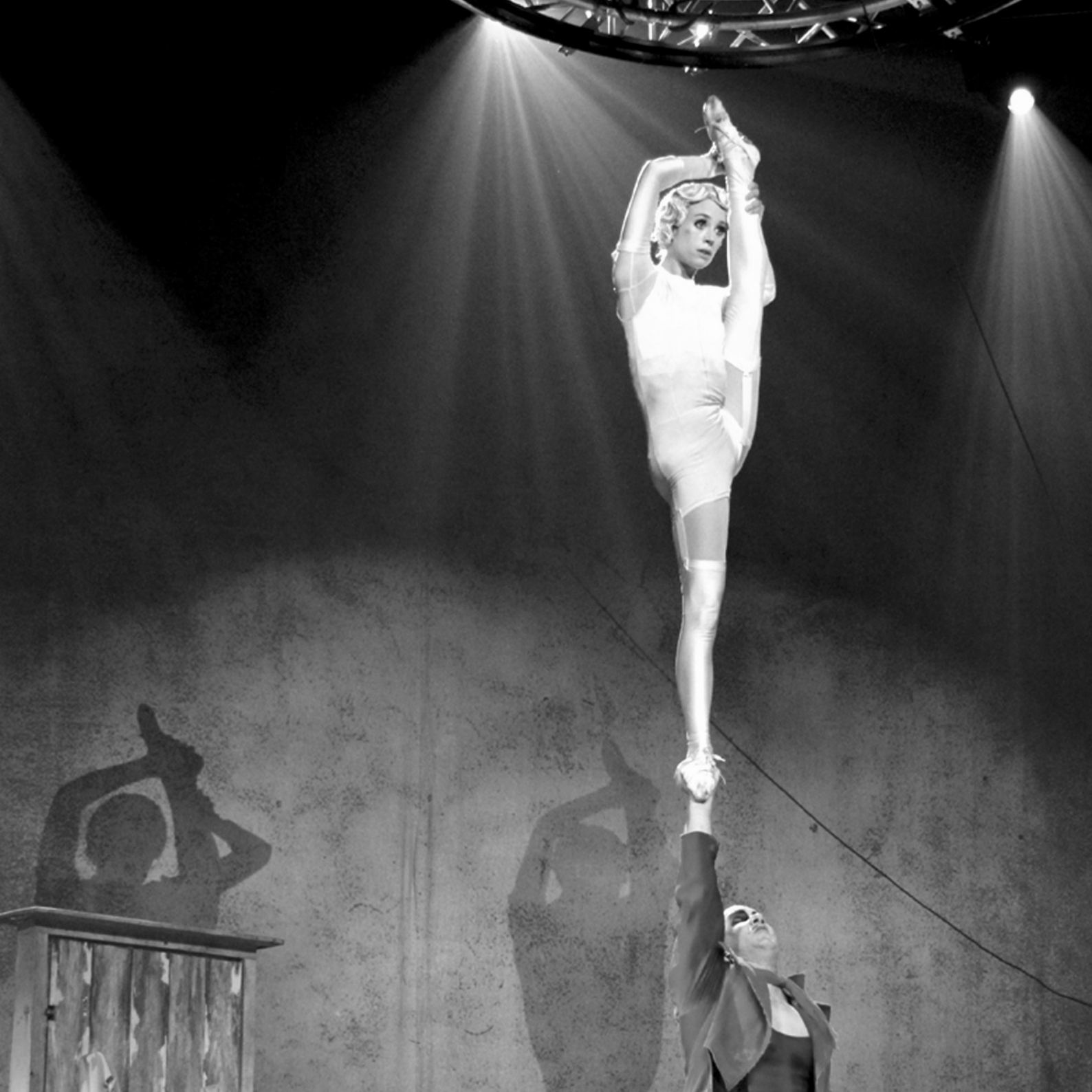














CIRKUS CIRKOR: WEAR IT LIKE A CROWN

I really enjoyed taking these photos. For me, these are some photos that I am satisfied with. A big thanks to Zuzi Ki and Caroline Binon for inspiration. I think of magic when I think of the circus. As a child you are transported to an amazing world. I heard about the Swedish circus Cirkus Cirkor, but when Zuzi Ki took me to see their performance of "Wear It Like A Crown" last summer it took me to new places. They are circus and beyond, something different, art surrealism and daring performances that are all about risk and opportunities (the theme). A visiting friend Caroline Binon was so inspired, she went back the next day and volunteered to have **JESPER NIKOLAJEFF** strap her on a spinning wheel and throw knives at her. Jesper, nerves of steel. I guess you must have nerves of steel when you throw knives at a woman on a spinning wheel or when you juggle activated chainsaws. When you see these performers with what they actually do, you can not help but to be moved and shocked that they can actually do what they do. Training and talent have something to do with it, but pure dedication and living life on the edge has something to do with it too. This circus performance travels all over the world and I highly recommend it. I will introduce the people and the photos will speak for itself. Above is the amazing **DAVID ERIKSSON** marvel of the century. Juggler, acrobat and talent extraordinaire... what he does with simple ping pong balls is incredible, especially when it involves the incredible **FOFO** (Fouzia Rakez). She is simply magic with David performing as a couple, but she can twist, turn and go in many directions! Wild, weird and wonderful! And the master of ceremonies and wizard of wonder **HENRIK AGGER** takes you and guides you through this amazing show. He explains this world of risks and opportunities. **LOUISE BJURHOLM**, miraculous and supernatural contortionist acrobat who takes you to different realities with her expressive beauty and talent. And the mistress of mayhem, **ANNA LAGERKVIST**! An extremist acrobat who does things with a Chinese pole that is certainly challenging and with a vertical dance as well.

ELIS UNIQUE

Elis Unique is one of a kind as her name applies. She is a multi-media artist and performer. She was one of the organizers of the Prague Biennale, the director of SPAFI the association for support animation and film in Prague. She also writes her own Elis blog and is an emerging talent in Prague. I am pleased that we have been collaborating together and I hope we do more work together. She was recently at a great group gallery show at the Prague National Gallery curated by Mark Divo Utopia on the Abyss.

REVEREND FEEDBACK

Poet Vincent Farnsworth and frontman for the cult band Black Mummy during their Halloween 2011 performance in Prague.

CARRIE BEEHAN

The New York based singer and performer Carrie Beehan flew to Prague to attend and perform at Shalom's "BE-IN." She was a visual and singing treat out of another world and time. She sang, performed and filmed at the same time at the BE-IN. An early member of New York artist's creative epicenter FEVA/HOWL festival, she has merged her cabaret and electronic past with the funk of NY's finest musicians to present original, sensual and rocking melodic songs with extraordinary collisions of pop, electronic, funk, soul, fractured break-beats and cabaret. 2006 saw the release of Deepest Part of My Soul - performed together with the legendary bassist TM Stevens (Shocka Zooloo, James Brown, Pretenders, Joe Cocker, Billy Joel, Tina Turner) with veteran guitarist Gerry Eastman - played with New York notables like The Count Basie Orchestra, Frank Foster and Stanley Turrentine. The Prague BE IN also featured one of their music video collaborations for Shalom Neuman's RoboCat.





STEWART HOME

from **THE NINE LIVES OF
RAY THE CAT JONES**

I'm a face. My break-out from Pentonville in 1958 has been praised as one of the greatest prison escapes of all time by the likes of South London gangster Mad Frankie Fraser. The details differ somewhat in the various accounts but here I'll put the whole thing together, just in case you can't be bothered to track down the lurid descriptions that have found their way into a slew of book and newspaper accounts.

It was a dark and wet winter evening with the London smog obscuring everything. Johnny Rider and myself were able to get onto the roof of the prison because it was being repaired and there was scaffolding going up the courtyard wall. The screws had been distracted by a disturbance I'd arranged to take place in the library class.

Johnny and myself made our way over the tiles and across to the sheer prison wall on the other side. Scaling down this almost impossible obstacle to my freedom, I smashed my right kneecap. Pain jolted through my body like an electric shock and I lost my grip on a windowsill and fell, breaking my left ankle. Rider coming down behind me clocked my mistakes and was able to make a safe descent. We then had to scale a second wall, and this time I broke my left leg as I jumped. Johnny who was uninjured made it safely to the ground.

Rider picked me up and tried to carry me from the prison wall to freedom, but I told him to leave me and get away. It would be better if at least one of us made a clean escape. Johnny ran, and because I couldn't run I crawled to a house door and asked the man who

opened it if he'd help me. His wife came to see who was calling, and after telling her husband I was scary, she slammed the door in my face. I then made my way to a block of flats hoping to find somewhere to hide. I took the lift as far as it would go and then made my way onto the roof. There was a skylight and as I was trying to prise it open, I fell head long through the glass and knocked myself out.

I was raised back to consciousness by flashlights being pointed at me. From the conversation going on around the smashed skylight above me, I could tell I'd been found by the authorities.

"Looks like he's dead." The screw's voice was emotionless.

"In that case let's go after the other one and get the body later. No point kicking in doors and getting a row over the damage. Since he can't move, let's raise the caretaker later and get him to let us in."

I could hear movement and when I was sure that those who'd been chasing me had left me in temporary peace, I gathered all my strength. Somehow I made my way out of the block of flats and dragged myself down the street by using my hands to pull my wrecked body along some railings. Despite being giddy with pain, I managed to get across the mainline railway tracks, then found a place to hide in a garden. When I saw a man getting into a butcher's van close by I shouted to him, and asked if he'd help me as I'd had a bad fall. He guessed I was an escaped prisoner but I was in luck because it turned out he was an ex-con who was willing to aid me, and became keen to do so when I

offered him fifty knicker for his assistance. Together we struggled to get butcher's clothes and a dirty apron over my prison uniform; then I crawled into the back of his vehicle. It would probably have been better if I'd fallen asleep but I couldn't relax sufficiently. We had to get through a police roadblock and their dogs went bloody mad around the van.

"What you got in there?" The old bill asked my driver.

"I'm a butcher, I've got meat in the back?"

"Can you open it up?"

"Happily but only if you'll guarantee your dogs won't become even more crazed than they are now. If they damage my stock then you'll have to pay for it."

"The dogs must be able to smell the blood, I think we'll leave it."

I gave the butcher directions to my cousin's pub in Paddington, told him to go in and tell my relative I'd escaped and that we needed a key for a flat. My saviour came back and drove me around the corner to a room my cousin kept in case of emergencies, but when the landlord saw the state I was in, he told us to piss off out of his building. So we went back to the van and I got the ex-con to drive me to my fence Benny Selby's place in Highgate. Once Benny had given the butcher fifty quid and got him out of the door, I told the fence to call my wife Ann, a nurse who worked nights at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Hackney Road. It turned out she'd already been visited by the cops, and that was how she'd learnt I'd escaped from jail.

When Ann's shift finished she came to see me with a doctor who she knew we could trust. They patched me up, and my wife and her doctor friend saw me through my convalescence, which took months and months. I only stayed a night at Benny Selby's pad, the next day Ann found me a room in Hoxton where I could recuperate. I spent more than two-years on the run, during which time I pulled off a series of daring jewel raids – including one against screen legend Sophia Loren when she was filming in England – before finally being recaptured, after a grass gave the fuzz a

tip-off as to my whereabouts. Unluckily, Johnny Rider was nicked in Chingford the day after our breakout, so he wasn't over the wall for nearly as long as me.

It is tales like these that made me a legend...I'm a face. My break-out from Pentonville in 1958 has been praised as one of the greatest prison escapes of all time by the likes of South London gangster Mad Frankie Fraser. The details differ somewhat in the various accounts but here I'll put the whole thing together, just in case you can't be bothered to track down the lurid descriptions that have found their way into a slew of book and newspaper accounts.

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It is tales like these that made me a legend...

JOHN MATEER

FROM A THORNY PLACE

A KEY TO READING SPINOZA'S ETHICS [THREE EXTRACTS]

These three extracts are taken from a five-part suite of poems, each part of which derives its name from the five sections of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Using each sentence of Spinoza's philosophical propositions – in English translation – as an original 'untranslated' text, I proceeded to transform that text into the language of images, following the logic of metaphoric specialisation and concept-formation as described in the work of the cognitive scientists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Their work asserts that within language use there are conceptual forms and logics that underlie language, that are, in a sense, a second grammar of meaning, and that have their origin in embodiment. One effect of this, my, kind of transformation is that it uncovers an aesthetic dimension that can be seen as explaining the mysterious effectiveness of both abstraction and surrealism in language and poetry. "From a Thorny Place" is one part of a book that I have been working on for a number of years that uses the process of secondary translation as a way of articulating the nature of certain kinds of modernist poetics.

OF THE EFFECTS

To do or be done, like a _____, a judgement.
Would the ghost of the cow call the _____ back to itself,
and if so, how would that slice fit in the puzzle
of its corpse? *That I am depressed arises from a chemistry,*
or from a lack of phosphorescence? The bubbling mineral water
in a glass on a desk in a Soviet-style apartment
is a migraine halved by Codine. *Things just are contrary, especially*
when they crash into one another, stamp on the embers
of a forest-fire. The fire tries again, hopeful in its destruction,
a defense that is only recognized as a marathon,
strenuous, urgent, illogical. *Striving, striving, always striving.*
Indefinitely, yes. *No matter whether the flames know their orientation,*
what the wind has in mind, they forever have that Heraclitian
ambition of being a hellish burning river, Letha
twice-over. Even if it is forgetfulness, just me, the entire velvet
ironic universe will have never existed. *On the other side*
of that curtain we are built like power-lifters
in being all the greater for the varieties of the forgotten
over there where the grass is greener. And we keep lifting
our thoughts, in that aforementioned striving, as that, dear actors,
is how the theatre exists. *After acting for way too many lives,*
you, my Good Self, will have the problems of remembering
who you really were and of somehow distinguishing that from ice,

water and steel, the splashes and splotches of insight. Translate that, dear reader, fellow actor! Anything can cause this mistranslation, unfortunately, and so we tremble like leaves before dawn. O Sadness, what is your body? asked the mirror. To which Medusa replied, a voice echoing from the Alps: BLINDNESS IS IN MY BODY AND IT AROUSES ME THOUGH I CAN NEVER FIND ITS BLACKENED MASS. And the mirror asked again, O Sadness, what were you in the past, since you are only ever the present? Sadness doesn't respond, only seeing that the mirror she is is owned by clairvoyants. There is the thought of shattering the mirror which passes like a flock of three geese through the mind of them both. Whatever the mirror has shown has made me, and everyone of my faces shown down there has been a snake in a perfect meadow, a sneaky listening awaiting the ghostly cow. Don't be frightened, dear cow: snakes speak only in whispers. Flip a coin to meet the snake, marry the snake. Just don't blame the messenger or the priest who marries you, or, indeed, the therapist who tears away every instance of blame you apportion to her and her childhood and the audacity of every dawn. Ditto, I think. Again: ditto. Think: ditto. Despite our blahblahblah laziness we do strive, our souls a bushfire, to allow regrowth and laughter and affirm Spinoza's proposals. Could it simply be that we want to please our friends who read? Well, if they read, I read; also they all talk to me... If I don't find out, however, that they like all the books I like I will be cool; but if they hate them I'll jump from blackness to blackness, desperate for a home. Give these toys to me, said the boy to his father. Please son, said the man, glancing at the cow that thought itself a Lippizaner, this is that white feather I was telling you about when I mentioned The War. How we loved that feather! No matter, Father, said the English schoolboy, give me the feather before Oblivion smothers me. Were I to meet you mother again, she would be more than a feather; she'd be blue lightning, an orgasm at the end of which I would hardly be able to reach my toes. Whoa, whinnied the Lippizaner, picturing his soul as a cow. And I was disheartened by the mind's brutality, its lack of tact, total disrespect for his ambition's imagination, its optimism. Don't hate so much, especially if you first liked the look of that future with its Dracula-teeth and eyes like flying-saucers, and don't hate Africa, its viruses and polyrhythmic vicissitudes because, because we do love you, you being our cartoon Present, actors, actors and actors. Don't hate me shouted the one true actor whose character was pure evil. I AM AN AMERICAN, JUST ADMIT YOU LOVE ME. As for the Slovenes, of course, all I can do for them is write poems and shout very long dissertations on Spinoza and in sibilant Portuguese, though I know I should do much more, for instance... I THINK

PIRAN. Every garden and every city water flows through is Venetian and honest. *And no-one can hate Venice.* To generalize so, said the father, or the horse, is to speak of soccer and nationalism the like of which we, on the greenest of grasses, can't imagine. *And when we lose we are always sad, muttered the ghostly cow into the ear of a blue-bell.* O Sadness, how can we distinguish you from Depression? *Anger doesn't sadden you till after, whereas Depression is a meadow of bruise-blue anger.* Oh guys, let's imagine finches and our love for them, zebras and their lyricism, cockatoos and their pensive remarks, our own philosophy. *Yes, anything in the wilds of the Imagination, that dirtiest of words.* Not a dirty word, never a dirty word. *Should I make an example of the cow? asked Father, causing his son's first tears.* And then the cow was a Minotaur, explosive, a repetition of the father's thought. *Step across the line, Son, into pure blue space.* Don't be saddened by your leaving us to forever live as a satellite; just be the effortless moon and smile coldly. *Remember that Spinoza wrote: There are as many species of joy and sadness, and desire, and consequently of each affect comprised of these (like vacillation of mind) or derived from them (like love, hate, hope, fear, etc.) as there are species of subject by which we are affected.* Quoting a philosopher to your son is like being Abraham, or worse. *Then you quote Šalamun: Too many blessing break a man apart.* Finally, we have the admission that there is no escape from the judgment of our own desire.

OF HUMAN BONDAGE

If you take white away from white all you have is a circle. Who holds the hoop that we leap through in the circus of this poem? *Whoever holds that flaming loop is the ringmaster of your existence.* Even when the circus is purified savannah there is no way you can overleap those acacias with their thorns open mouthed and hungry. *Whether the hyenas will crunch us up, leaving only a bloodstain, or whether a dried up river will show us the emptiness of our reflection, neither has no more power over our faith than any ambition we could have.* And that ambition, being the premier roar of the MGM logo for instance, might persists beyond us in a loop, not a hoop. *I can't be removed, sorry, can't be effaced by Thou.* To know what's what under the Tree of Knowledge

is only to remember yourself, Leo. *Just to imagine you remember is enough.* The closer you are to that _____, Leo, dangling in front of you or behind your heckled back, the more fervent your memories. *And, yes, it is _____.* And we know that's all you eat in Hollywood, _____ and _____ and _____ that are bloody roses. *Lick your lips with that shovel-tongue; the idea of the _____ is power.* Your next meal, coming as it does from Heaven, isn't the basis of a philosophical observation, is nothing like the savannah you imagine it emerging from and is Soviet in its grayness. *The ethic we embody as the circus audience won't help you feel better about not eating springbok, sorry.* Compensation can only be found in other meals, other thoughts. *Warning: You might think the right things, Dear Lion, but if I dangle a ring of human ears before you, that delicacy...* No, but look around the glass cage – the lapidarium in Ljubljana, for example – of Mies van der Rohe, how one of his houses would have been perfect for you to go window-shopping in, to build up an appetite. *What a pleasure, being a voyeur!* Window-shopping might disgust you, I don't know... *Strive to picture that _____, philosophize for as long as you need to to get that _____.* There is no way anyone'll love you unless you do want to eat well and look others in the eye when you clink glasses. *This is the most basic truth.* I'm not sure I can agree with Spinoza on this. *Logic breaks down as soon as we try to make basic statements about the virtue of lions because, despite their being in so many names and on so many crests, we can't be sure of the elevation of their thought.* Their thought or our thought? *Let's near that lion, believing a hug will explain all.* Your head in its mouth will make a great picture. *Our heads, sadly, are as always in the mouth of God; his teeth are the Alps, his tongue the sun, breath exhaust fumes from Romania.* I would intervene here to say that God can't help us as he's a terrible exaggeration, and besides only terrorists see evil everywhere. *I take your point and will be the first to admit that I am an angel who sees terrorists nowhere and never.* Being a seraphim is a vanity and irrelevant here in the lion's den. *No, we never agree, except that all philosophers are like old, bickering married couples.* There is a married couple in my brain and I think the wife is bisexual and the husband denies he is. *So they advertise for a threesome but can't retain their mystery?* I'd say so. *Well now we're agreeing: watch the lion.*

We're being scientific now aren't we, us two philosophers watching the lion as if the beast were a metaphor?
The trope of the Beast is one thing, its imprisonment another, says the conscience, that hideous homunculus inside each of us. In this proposition things are a bit too mechanistic.
Things should give us their hands. Are hands a kind of continual smile? Be happy, O hands, always happy!
A little bit of Titoism will feed our lion. *Don't you dare think of sex while looking at the _____ and the fingers, said a voice, I thought addressing the philosophers, but it must have been directed at me.* Ever seen an anorexic lion? *Ever seen a lion in a mirror?*
I imagine the best lion would look up at himself and think of silence. *Few lions are the best.* The lion scornfully watches them.
The philosophers, again, are pondering a word, the word 'pity' and its evil. You're being proud and not logical now.
I AM THE MOUTH OF GOD. Well, humanity's not a virtue.
Well I can't apologize. Between God and the lion there is, I hope, the gap of Sunyata, that original happiness, I hope. *To decapitate the lion is to render God real.* God is like a rock-star who loves his garland of groupies, like a whole 70s band.
The groupies are seeing God, though, 'seeing' in one sense. Biology, that's all I have to say. *Since desire isn't totally explained by that, I'd modify that and say, At most an incomplete biology, a stellar zooming.* Think about this, said the bearded God pointing at the lion, acting like a philosopher, acting like a child with a finger as long as Pinocchio's nose, Think about this. *That lion, our couple, is forever there, and I will release the lion after I have counted all of my fingers and toes.* Not sure if I should include the fingers the beast bit off when it was the mouth of God, our lecturer, or the toes I sacrificed to propitiate Santa Muerte, his better half. *The digits missing, therefore, went through the mouth of God two by two.* We will have to wait for the white flag.
The flag of death is now white. The closest we can get to freedom is to be conscientious objectors to thought. *Get this lion out of your head.* Get this head out of my mouth, thought the lion, who was thinking God's thought. *Now thank me, thought God.* Honestly, that's what the Big Man thought. *God, the philosophers thought, is always lonely.*

OF HUMAN FREEDOM

There is no difference between the Dewey Decimal System and how we might sit at home of an afternoon musing on the morning's relaxing swim in so far as both are an ordering of galactic familiarity. If we snatch the feathery pillow away from under the head of the muse that is our memory, then our fondness for swimming, our being present to ourselves, falls away like the oceans not found when you reach a mirage. *As soon as you are there, stamping in the puddle, your vision is pure idea, the concept Optic Nerve, a luminous dandelion.* No dandelion avoids exploding. *Now for the boldest statement thus far in this philosophical system: only the gargantuan dandelion, the perpetually exploding mind of God, that Niagara Falls of unhesitating blindness, is the what of what we imagine and its absolute.* But think of that glow as the honeymoon we had to have, as the calm we need to think. *Could it really be, as you are suggesting, Soul, that the data that makes of me a cloud is more heartless than a pillow?* Only that aforementioned pillow, and its being removed, its aporia. *So what are you saying is that the better I understand the dot-dot-dot, the hand that snatches, the mind of a thief, the neurosis of its father, the socio-economic depravity of his milieu, the greater the likelihood there is that I won't feel anger towards the thief, won't grieve for my pillow; instead of my seeing the absence as a sign of the Evil Eve?* Well, yes, just don't be angered and you will see that this therapy will bring you peace. *The more dreams, thoughts, murmurings your sleepy head contains as it weighs down the restless pillow the more leaden its weight.* Free-associate, Dear Pillow, yes, think of sleep and you will see that you are not free, and of birds, you are not free, and of clouds, you are not free, not in this perfect Slovenia, not in a poem by Cavafy, not in nostalgia. *I would like to reverse that.* In a way, reversal is the presence of God. *You, if you can undo your mouth with language, which we do in every conversation, are always losing your listener, even if it's true she's not always God.* But I should always assume that she is God, should strive towards that, shouldn't I? *Because because because, despite a certain Macedonian's poem, God is not tearful, nor, despite the impression in the Old Testament, wrathful, nor, despite my musings, a feathery pillow torn apart and tossed on the tireless intergalactic winds of deepest space like sorrow.* No-one can hate God. *And you can never expect God to hate you, and that's amazing.* And God won't love

anyone more than you so we can all be hippies and perfect,
encouraging hippies as opposed to those who are merely
passive. *And we need to be physical to be hippies.*
But don't forget, Dearest Soul, that you are already the fittest thing
in the human universe, a diamond, not a dandelion.
I didn't use a dandelion to cut the mirror of this poem.
It takes a diamond to whittle the image of God.
*Look there, peer deep into the diamond of your soul, Cosmic Listener,
and observe spectral virtue.* Keep looking and you will realize
a diamond is a crystalline dandelion and that you are sparked
by every sparkle. *God is an unsentimental hippy, you now realize.*
Though you doubt yourself, your own thought, though only in the way
a boy might after he has been kissed by a girl on Extasy.
*Let's subtract that chemistry from the pure maths
of this philosophical system.* In your previous example,
the cutting-edge boy-girl scenario, you
have the problem of believing they exist,
when you should only see that they were souls kissing,
and that he should have seen that. *The diamond
is a mirror-ball.* The darkness of the world falling around us
spins with glitter, flashes with the brilliance
of sequins fluttering from a torn pillow. *O FEATHERS
UNDER THE ULTRAVIOLET LAMPS OF YOUR EYES! O electric blue!
ONLY WHEN DANCING ARE WE WINGED IN THIS DISCO OF THE MIND!*
Find the flaw in the mirror-ball: you can't. *And consequently
we are to understand The Fall as what moves us
in the thickest synth-sound, the heaviest bass
so maternal it's pre-supernal, an erotics of universal origins,
an irony only because we have thought, have had thought,
I mean.* I can't argue with that, though I must admit
it induces sleep, just the ideas, I mean. *Dear Soul,
were I to begin a lullaby now and not a letter,
not a poem, I would say, EMPTY EMPTY EMPTY.*
We are the pillow on whom God must rest his head.
*Let's spread ourselves softly, blank and open
as paper, as thin and wispy as gold-leaf.*
And let's drift apart like our thoughts, like feathers.
Be noble, My Soul. Be an ear to the universe,
and always remember that I – God – will be listening.



STUART BARNES
ROBERT SMITH
MORE THAN MEETS THE LANCÔME EYE

Mocked for thirty odd years by the music industry at large, by the majority of critics as a ghoulish Peter Pan, Robert Smith – hair blackened, sprayed and backcombed into a mewling *Truffula Tree*; eyes like lemurs’ deeply stamped on Baby Jane Hudson Pan-Cake; lips smudged with distinctive tints of Revlon (these features most arresting, most glorious around the recording and release of 1989’s *Disintegration*) – accepted, on behalf of The Cure, at Brixton Academy, February 25, 2009, a Shockwaves *NME* Award:

We haven’t really been known for doing this kind of thing... It never feels quite right... It’s really nice that we managed to play a few songs at the end, it kind of kept us going... I don’t know, I don’t think we’re really cut out for this Godlike Genius stuff.¹

Characteristic humility from the now-fifty-three-year-old singer, songwriter and producer who at the age of fourteen formed what’s become one of the world’s

¹ Robert Smith, Shockwaves *NME* Awards, February 25, 2009.

preeminent bands, who’s been influenced by some of history’s most accomplished writers, unintentionally shaped popular culture, and influenced my poetry.

The Cure’s debut single “Killing an Arab” – a 2m 22s abridgement of Albert Camus’ *L’Étranger* – has courted controversy since it was broadcast by John Peel on BBC1, December 11, 1978. In the early to mid 1980s it was appropriated by British neo-Nazi skinheads. Accordingly, when *Standing on a Beach* – the group’s first singles compilation – was released in 1986, it was packaged in the US with a sticker stating: “‘Killing an Arab’ has absolutely no racist overtones whatsoever. It... decries the existence of all prejudice and consequent violence. The Cure condemn its use in furthering anti-Arab feeling.” Since then Smith has appealed to radio stations to withdraw it from rotation, and whilst touring changed the lyrics to “kissing an Arab” or “killing another.” Around the time of the Gulf War, and especially post-September 11, the song became even more contentious, and so the frontman fielded interviews, reiterating it was not, as many believed, a

xenophobic call to arms, but a teenager's interpretation of a novel's absurdist philosophy.

Nevertheless at a handful of 2011's Reflections shows the band performed "Killing an Arab" as it was originally recorded. Perhaps tired of being the outsider, of being accused of inciting hatred, Smith, like Camus' Meursault, "refuse[d] to lie... [to] play the game."²

1979's post-punk *Three Imaginary Boys* – The Cure's debut album, from which "Killing an Arab," though critically well received, was strangely omitted – reveals no literary influences. The twitchy "10:15 Saturday Night" seems to tell only the story of Smith sitting in his parents' kitchen, chugging his father's homebrew, waiting for a telephone call. Unable to think of any lyrics for "So What" he drunkenly wailed a cake icing and food decorating set offer from the back of a sugar packet retrieved from London's Morgan Studios' floor over driving bass and basic chords. And the 54s "Weedy Burton" is nothing more than a tongue in cheek tribute to master guitarist Bert Weedon's *Play in a Day* book series.

On 1980's atmospheric yet minimal *Seventeen Seconds*, as Smith became more morose, more insular, more taken with amphetamines, the influences began to assert themselves. "M" – a vicious love song, as well as a nickname for childhood sweetheart (and now-wife Mary) – adopted a line – "Hello, image"³ – from another Camus novel, *La mort heureuse (A Happy Death)*; and "At Night" several – "in the night... in [a] safe bed... under a safe roof... someone must be there"⁴ – from Franz Kafka's (very) short story of the same name.

By 1981 Smith's fear of his lack of belief in religion had intensified his preoccupations with belonging and mortality. The plodding percussion and densely layered synthesizers of the resultant *Faith* (its opener, "The Holy Hour," which concludes with three hollow gongs of a church bell, was penned during a Catholic mass) buried all but a couple of allusions: Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* ("Other Voices"); and Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* ("The Drowning Man"), in which Fuchsia, with whom Smith had fallen in love,

accidentally drowns. Yet for the lyrics for "Charlotte Sometimes" and "Splintered in Her Head," the next single and B-side, he was up to his old tricks, boldly pilfering words from another's work, Penelope Farmer's *Charlotte Sometimes*.

Fuelled by his almost complete dislocation and the band's escalating tension (inflamed by its members' ever increasing alcohol and amphetamine consumption), 1982's *Pornography* was – is – frenzied, icy, and surreal. "To understand [it], you'd have to have it explained line by line."⁵ The only conspicuous influence – "a charcoal face bites my hand"⁶ – is wedged between the reverberations of "A Short Term Effect." "The Figurehead," inspired by paintings and a sculpture of a skull Smith discovered in the abandoned asylum where the promotional video for "Charlotte Sometimes" was shot (he took the skull home, to confess to), may acknowledge Sylvia Plath's "The Lady and the Earthenware Head" – "The head in question was lodged in a willow, on the banks of the Cam, and never reclaimed"⁷ – but the connection has never been verified.

Toward the end of *Pornography's* Fourteen Explicit Moments Tour a punch-up between Smith and bassist and best friend Simon Gallup brought The Cure to a grinding halt. For a month drummer Lol Tolhurst travelled around France and Spain, then returned to London to take piano lessons. Smith whisked Mary to Wales where, detoxing from booze and drugs, he wrote "Lament," a B-side to "The Walk," one of the band's 1983 singles. Chris Parry, who in 1978 created Fiction Records for Smith, Tolhurst and then-bassist Michael Dempsey, and served as manager until he was fired in 2005, urged Robert to reform:

I wanted to get them going again so I told [him] I wanted a fun single, something unlike The Cure to break the mould and destroy The Cure myth. It appealed to [him] because he wanted to destroy The Cure anyway, he was up for it and I just voiced the idea – y'know, "Let's kick this thing into the ground." We had a meeting and Lol was up for it too because he was as anxious as I

5 Robert Smith in Barbarian, Steve Sutherland, Robert Smith, *The Cure: Ten Imaginary Years* (Zomba Books/Fiction Records, 1988) 56.

6 David Cooper, *The Language of Madness* (Penguin, 1978).

7 Ted Hughes, Notes on Poems 1956–1963 in Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes (Faber and Faber Limited, 1981) 275.

2 Albert Camus, *The Outsider* (Penguin Classics, 1989) 118.

3 Albert Camus, *A Happy Death* (Penguin Classics, 2002) 26.

4 Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks* (1991).

was to get [him] back into the fold.⁸

The succeeding Art under the Hammer Sessions, as Parry called them, spawned the November 1982 single "Let's Go to Bed" and its B-side "Just One Kiss." Both lacked literary influence. On the former Smith droned nonsensically over an up-tempo semi-electronic drumbeat; the latter depicts nothing more than a night of raging passion. If the band's zealous clowder's to be believed, Patrick White's *The Vivisector*, in which Hurtle's lover's husband drowns cats in a sack, inspired "The Lovecats," released October 1983. A more credible influence, however, is *The Aristocats*, an animated Walt Disney film with which Smith has confessed he was more than a little obsessed. Inspirations aside, The Fantasy Singles – "Let's Go To Bed," "The Walk," "The Lovecats" – achieved what he'd been longing for: to bewilder those critics and fans that had become accustomed to categorising The Cure as *goth*, a tag he'd despised since the *Faith* days.

Around the same time Smith and Siouxsie and The Banshees' bassist Steven Severin were nurturing a project dubbed The Glove, in honour of the vengeful mitten from The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*. The fruit of their magic mushroom tea and horror film – *The Brood*, *Videodrome*, *The Evil Dead* – inspired assemblages was the *Blue Sunshine* album, named after another horror film in which numerous adults who'd taken Blue Sunshine LSD as teenagers lose their hair before turning into homicidal maniacs. Smith's use of hallucinogens escalated as he moonlighted with the Banshees for the *Hyæna* LP, and began writing *The Top*, The Cure's fifth studio album. Whilst most of its lyrics reflect his self-loathing, there are obvious literary influences. On "Bird Mad Girl" he sings of thoughts "mad as birds"⁹ (these words ripped from the first stanza of "Love In The Asylum," by Dylan Thomas, Smith's then-favourite poet). "The Empty World" – the belated triplet to "Charlotte Sometimes" and "Splintered In Her Head" – nicks more phrases from Penelope Farmer's aforementioned novel. And only a reader unfamiliar with J.D. Salinger would be unable to name the heart of "Bananafishbones."

8 Chris Parry in *The Cure: Ten Imaginary Years*, 62.

9 'Bird Mad Girl,' *The Top*, Fiction Records, 1984.

After simultaneously touring with The Cure and the Banshees, Smith – "stupefied, unhappy and sick"¹⁰ – abjured, in May, all musical obligations, and again went with Mary to Wales. In August, in London, "fresh and enthusiastic"¹¹, he compiled and mixed *Concert* – the group's first live album – and played shows in Japan, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and America through October. In December he revived his friendship with Simon Gallup, and in the spring of 1985 the two entered London's Angel Studios with Porl Thompson (guitarist, keyboardist), Boris Williams (drummer) and Tolhurst (keyboardist) to transform his home demos into songs. Drugs were banned from Angel; and, so, too, were literary influences from the ensuing *The Head on the Door*.

What occasioned several tracks were alcohol (Smith polished off a bottle of *Lacryma Christi*, The Tears of Christ, a potent Neapolitan peasant wine: the flamenco-esque "The Blood" arose), the ever-present desire to experiment with new styles ("Six Different Ways" a unique take on the waltz), and dreams ("Half of ['Kyoto Song'] comes from [one] Mary had – death in a swimming pool – and half from one of [mine] about eating someone"¹²).

The success of the feverish "Close To Me," the previous single "In Between Days" (which peaked at #15 on the UK Singles Chart, #16 on Australia's ARIA Singles Chart, #39 on America's *Billboard* Hot Dance Club Play chart, and was The Cure's first to enter America's *Billboard* Hot 100 Chart, where it peaked at #99), the subsequent world tour, the release of *Standing on a Beach* (and *Staring at the Sea*, its accompanying promotional collection), and the premier set at Glastonbury, at which the band headlined the main stage, saw it quite inadvertently position itself at the universe's launch pad.

Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me – demoed, unlike *The Head on the Door*, as a group, recorded at Studio Miraval, southern France, September 1986, and released in May 1987 – rocketed Smith & Co. toward the moon. Whilst first and second singles "Why Can't I Be You" and "Catch" were only moderately lucrative, third single

10 Smith in *The Cure: Ten Imaginary Years*, 78.

11 Smith in *The Cure: Ten Imaginary Years*, 78.

12 Smith in *The Cure: Ten Imaginary Years*, 86.

“Just Like Heaven” – “the best pop song The Cure [has] ever done”¹³ – peaked at #40 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 Chart. For “How Beautiful You Are” Smith reworded Charles Baudelaire’s “*Les Yeux des Pauvres*” (“The Eyes of the Poor”). “Hot Hot Hot!!!” was written after reading William Mayne’s *Earthfasts*, in which David disappears upon being struck by lightning (a metaphor for the song’s three sexual experiences: one in a club’s basement; the second at sea, on a ferry; and the third in Smith’s bedroom). And “Like Cockatoos,” though not lyrically related, did take its title from Patrick White’s “The Cockatoos.” The first Cure album to enter the *Billboard* Top 40 Chart, where it peaked at #35, *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me* was also the first to climax with anthemic sensibilities: “So when the hurrying starts, and the nightmares begin, remember you can fill up the sky, you don’t have to give in... Never give in.”¹⁴ It would take seventeen years before another – *The Cure* – would close with such hope.

In June 1988, Smith – dreading turning thirty, craving to tempt fate as he had with The Fantasy Singles – convened Gallup, Thompson, Williams, Roger O’Donnell (keyboardist) and (by then extremely occasional contributor) Tolhurst at Williams’ house in Devon, England, to play his instrumental home demos (partially inspired by the segments of film that movie studios, desperate for a Cure score, had been sending him) and narrow down tracks for inclusion on 1989’s *Disintegration*. He “would have been quite happy to have made [those] songs on [his] own. If the group hadn’t thought it was right, that would have been fine.”¹⁵ Fortunately his band mates liked the demos, and even provided their own. In September Smith again gathered the other men at Williams’ where, after a further fourteen days, the demos were finalised to his satisfaction. Returning to his West London flat he finished writing words, and in early October relocated The Cure entourage to Outside Studios, Berkley, the Thames Valley:

We could have gone anywhere in the world, but I

13 Robert Smith in Johnny Black, “The Greatest Songs Ever! ‘Just Like Heaven,’” *Blender* (Alpha Media Group, 2003).

14 ‘Fight,’ *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me*, Fiction Records, 1987.

15 Robert Smith in Jeff Apter, *Never Enough: The Story of The Cure* (Omnibus Press, 2005) 233.

wanted us to make something autumnal and English. We needed to be somewhere reasonably remote to avoid too many unnecessary distractions, and I knew if we had the smell of burning wood and rotting leaves in the air, darkness by 4PM, the likelihood of thunder and rain... well, it couldn’t help but put us in the right mood to record!¹⁶

On the first night at Outside, whilst the band was dining, a faulty electrical socket started the fire which almost destroyed the leather satchel containing Smith’s words and family photographs. Wet towels protecting head and shoulders, assisted by a human chain, he groped blindly until he laid his hands on the intact bag. Bedroom destroyed, he had to relocate to a much smaller space: the attic. This move, and his increasing use of hallucinogens, isolated him even further from the group. To finish the album as he wished he dismissed the others and (as on *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me*) worked only and intimately with David M. Allen, an engineer and producer, overdubbing and recording vocals. In December, at RAK Studios, London, Smith and Allen mixed the album in a fortnight.

Upon completing *Disintegration*, Smith believed he’d created a masterpiece. But at playback sessions Fiction and America’s Elektra Records were horrified: both were certain the album – ten of its twelve tracks surge with lengthy, vocal-less intros, and brooding, layered synthesizers – would be commercial suicide. Whilst Chris Parry, as he so often had, backed his major meal ticket, Elektra’s executives requested a delayed release so potential singles could be re-recorded and re-mixed to make them radio friendly. They addressed their concerns to Smith who recalled, years later: “They thought I was being ‘wilfully obscure’, which was an actual quote from the letter. Ever since then I realised that record companies don’t have a fucking clue what The Cure does and what The Cure means.”¹⁷

Disintegration was released May 1, 1989, as and when Smith intended. Critics, at the time, were scathing: “[its songs are] huge scale... gothic clichés”¹⁸; “you’ll

16 Robert Smith in sleeve notes, *Disintegration* Deluxe Edition, Fiction Records, 2010.

17 Smith in *Never Enough: The Story of The Cure*, 244.

18 Robert Christgau, “The Cure Discography Rating,” *The Village Voice*, 1989.



be lucky to find a tune on here... [it's] challenging and claustrophobic, often tedious."¹⁹ (Retrospectively, others praised it as "[his] magnum opus,"²⁰ "darkly seductive... hypnotic, mesmerizing."²¹) Even so, first single "Lullaby" – a cautionary tale inspired by Mary Howitt's 1829 poem "The Spider and The Fly" – zoomed to #5 on the UK Singles Chart (its promotional clip, directed by faithful collaborator Tim Pope, won Best Video at the 1990 Brit Awards). The song's since been sampled by artists as diverse as Sono, Just Jack, and Faithless, and covered by others including Editors, and Jimmy Page and Robert Plant (on tour in 1995, with Porl Thompson, a long-term fan, on support). "Fascination Street" – "About what happens to you if you're in a group and you get too much attention... you become obsessed with the idea of yourself"²² – was released second in the UK but first in the US (Elektra rejected Smith's choice of "Lullaby" as lead single), and became The Cure's first number one – a position it maintained

19 Chris Roberts, "Reviews: *Disintegration*," *Melody Maker*, May 6, 1989.

20 "Best Albums of the 80s," Pitchfork Media, November 20, 2002

21 Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "*Disintegration*: Review," allmusic.com, June 29, 2008.

22 Robert Smith on Simon Potter's *Transmission*, Music Box Ltd., 1989.

for seven weeks – on the newly created *Billboard* Modern Rock Tracks chart. "Lovesong" – a wedding present for Mary – peaked at #18 on the UK Singles chart, #2 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart, the *Billboard* Modern Rock Tracks chart, and at #27 on the *Billboard* Mainstream Rock Tracks chart. And "Pictures of You" – the fourth and final single, inspired by the fire that nearly devoured Smith's words and family photographs – was in 2004 voted 278th on *Rolling Stone's* The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.

Whilst *Disintegration* concealed literary influences, 1992's *Wish* flaunted them. The album was the first to feature in its sleeve notes the words of a nurturing artist: "We look before and after,/ And pine for what is not:/ Our sincerest laughter/ With some pain is fraught;/ Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."²³ On "Open" Smith paraphrased ("And the way the rain comes down hard, that's the way I feel inside"²⁴) correspondence ("I am glad the rain is coming down hard. It's the way I feel inside"²⁵) from Plath's

23 Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'To A Skylark,' bartleby.com; originally in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (Oxford University Press, 1919).

24 'Open,' *Wish*, Fiction Records, 1992.

25 Sylvia Plath in *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–1963*, Selected and Edited with Commentary by Aurelia Schober Plath (Harper Perennial, New York, 1992), 60.

Letters Home. Lines from Robert Lowell's "Logan Airport, Boston" ("I watched a painter/ do sketches of your head/ that by some consuming fire/ erased themselves"²⁶) possibly prompted "From the Edge of the Deep Green Sea" ("And she listens like her head's on fire, like she wants to believe in me"²⁷). And "A Letter to Elise," the third and final single ("resignation in the face of inevitable change"²⁸), was inspired by Kafka's *Briefe an Felice (Letters to Felice)*, and Elisabeth from Jean Cocteau's *Les Enfants Terribles (The Holy Terrors)*. The song was also informed by another song, "Letter to Hermione," David Bowie's *love letter* to ex girlfriend Hermione Farthingale.

Despite its observant lyrics, riotous brass, and lush string quartet arrangements 1996's *Wild Mood Swings* is the lowest selling and least performed of all The Cure's records. "Treasure" – a reworking of Christina Rossetti's "Remember" – is the only track with any discernable literary influence. "Adonais" – one of first B-sides of the single "The 13th" – makes several references to Shelley's poem of the same name. Perhaps mirroring Smith approaching his mid-thirties, *Wild Mood Swings'* sleeve notes end with a quote from François de la Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*: "As we grow older we grow both more foolish and wiser at the same time."²⁹

Toward the beginning of 2000 Smith, more single-minded than ever, released the majestic *Bloodflowers*. He'd quite deliberately made the record as commercially unfriendly as possible. (No official singles were released; at the insistence of Fiction and Elektra promotional versions of "Out Of This World" and "Maybe Someday" were distributed to European and American radio stations.) Regardless, it was nominated for – yet didn't win – the 2011 Grammy Award for Best Alternative Music Album. (In 1993 *Wish* had been nominated for – yet didn't win – the same Award.) Only two songs expose explicit literary influence: "Where The Birds Always Sing," which questions, amongst other theories, Darwinism, and shares themes with Iain Banks' *The Crow Road*, in which Prentice, unable to

accept a universe without God, purpose and afterlife, is estranged from his father, who denies his son's beliefs; and the title track:

I [had] read a book of letters of the painter Edvard Munch. He said that he was sure that he had done a good artwork when he felt that a blood flower popped out from his heart. I thought this image was very romantic. As a coincidence, about the same time, I was reading a poetry book about World War I, and one of the poems described how a wound in one of the soldiers, hit by a bullet, opened a blood flower in his body. I liked this analogy, between pain and art – these two images.³⁰

Bloodflowers' sleeve notes close with Tennyson: "I know not what they mean,/ Tears from the depth of some divine despair/ Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,/ In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,/ And thinking of the days that are no more."³¹

For 2004's eponymous album ("Recorded Live in a Candlelit Room & Mixed Very Loud in The Dark... We know You should Turn Down the Lights and Turn Up the Sounds for Your Optimum Listening Pleasure"³²) Smith, with the exception of "Lost" (its lyrics drafted after reading philosopher Thomas Nagel's *The View From Nowhere*), looked to his past for inspiration:

Hardly any of the songs... are... groundbreaking for me, I'm returning to a number of themes, I think most artists do actually. The point of it is trying to illuminate things in a slightly different way and present them in a different way. I was aware of returning to certain themes, then I thought, if we're going to call this album *The Cure* I had to do that, I can't possibly start off on some bizarre tangent or something that doesn't mean anything to me because I'd be missing the point.³³

He was chided the *Entertainment Weekly* website for "allow[ing] the Cure's current lineup to become his own tribute band"³⁴, and at *allmusic.com* for creating "the

26 Robert Lowell, 'Logan Airport, Boston,' *Collected Poems*, ed. Frank Bidart and Edward Gewanter (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2003) 785.

27 'From The Edge Of The Deep Green Sea,' *Wish*.

28 Robert Smith, www.thecure.com, 1997.

29 François de la Rochefoucauld, *Maximes* (Nabu Press, 2010).

30 Robert Smith in *Folha de S. Paulo*, ed. Otavio Frias Filho, Grupo Folha, 2000.

31 Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'The Princess,' classicit.about.com.

32 Robert Smith in sleeve notes, *The Cure*, Fiction Records, 2004.

33 Robert Smith on XFM London, Global Radio, 2004.

34 David Browne, "The Cure Review | Music Reviews and News,"

type of record that sits on the shelves of diehard fans, only occasionally making its way on the stereo.”³⁵ Yet from *New Musical Express* and *Rolling Stone*, praise: “startling from the first listen”³⁶, “it’s the grooviest thing, it’s a perfect dream.”³⁷ Not just “the type of record that sits on the shelves of diehard fans,” *The Cure* “hides some delicious treats for... initiates... Perhaps [its] finest piece of music... – ‘(I Don’t Know What’s Going) On’ – suffers the brunt of the backdated teen dreaming, hanging heavy on the gushing refrain (“I am so in love with you”), but the summery ‘Before Three’ is positively beaming.”³⁸

The first Cure album to be signed to Geffen, and I AM (co-producer Ross Robinson’s own label), it departed significantly from previous releases: keyboards barely featured; the music (influenced by Robinson, who’d previously worked with new-metal bands like Slipknot, The Blood Brothers, and Glassjaw) was harder and heavier:

[and] more to do with the tempos and dynamics and the space we’re leaving. The more space you leave, the heavier you get. It’s actually the antithesis of the new-metal assault, which is all about piling things on. It’s going back to the *Faith* period, but making the sounds themselves a lot... more savage.³⁹

The most savage of all the album’s tracks is “Us or Them,” in which Smith rages, for not the first nor last time, at the “insistent message that’s being put forward at all levels of the media about how [he’s] supposed to live, as an individual, in fear”⁴⁰:

No I don’t want you anywhere near me, I don’t want you anywhere near me, get your fucking world out of my head... Oh I don’t want your “us or them,” I

don’t need your “us or them... You’re us or them...” ... “I live in knowledge of real truth, and all my gods are great!” The doleful cant of a bigot blinded by fear and hate. You live in knowledge of real truth? Oh the biggest lie I heard... You don’t want me anywhere near you, you don’t want me anywhere near you, get my fucking head out of your world. Oh I don’t want your “us or them,” I don’t need your “us or them,” as the only way this ever ends is “me.”⁴¹

Before recording 2008’s *4:13 Dream*, the group’s most recent release, Smith again looked to his past for inspiration. Exquisite opener “Underneath the Stars” might be mistaken for *Disintegration*’s “Plainsong.” “Sleep When I’m Dead” was retrieved from 1985’s *The Head on the Door* sessions. Yet there were literary influences: Greek mythology (“Sirensong”); and (a twist on) a famous fairytale (“The Real Snow White”). Van Gogh completed the sleeve notes: “For my part I know nothing with any certainty... But the sight of the stars makes me dream.”⁴²

Since its leading release, *The Cure* – i.e. Robert Smith – has been moulding popular culture. “Killing an Arab” (included on 1979’s *20 Of Another Kind*, which also featured The Stranglers, The Jam, and Generation X) was the first of the band’s tracks to brighten innumerable compilations. In a 1983 *Melody Maker* review Steve Sutherland insisted listeners should “sing [‘The Lovcats’] slap-dash chorus, swoon to the devil-may-care decadent swing. Single of the week? Single of the year(s)!”⁴³ On April 25, 1986 the group “stepped boldly from the shadows to close the series of Sound Waves For Greenpeace shows with a towering set which lasted nearly two hours... The longer they do it, to paraphrase Tina Turner, the better they get.”⁴⁴ 1987’s “Just Like Heaven” has affected a flange of musicians, including Ben Folds: “Everything about it – the songwriting, the music – is state of the art. It’s as good as it gets.”⁴⁵ (Smith’s favourite cover version

41 ‘Us or Them,’ *The Cure*, Fiction Records, 2004

42 Vincent Van Gogh

43 Steve Sutherland, “The Cure: ‘Love Cats,’” *Melody Maker*, 1983 in *The Cure: Ten Imaginary Years*, 72.

44 Adam Sweeting, “Albert Hall: The Cure,” *Spin*, 1986 in *The Cure: Ten Imaginary Years*, 97.

45 Ben Folds in “The Greatest Songs Ever! ‘Just Like Heaven,’” *Blender*, 2003

ew.com, July 9, 2004

35 Stephen Thomas Erlewine, “*The Cure*: Review,” allmusic.com, June 29, 2004

36 *New Musical Express*, June 19, 2004, 55.

37 “Album Reviews: The Cure: *The Cure*,” rollingstone.com, June 23, 2004

38 Chris Ott, “Reviews: The Cure: *The Cure*,” pitchfork.com, June 27, 2004

39 Robert Smith in Gil Kaufman, “Cure Go Heavy On New Album,” *Rolling Stone*, December 19, 2003

40 Smith on XFM London, 2004

was recorded by Dinosaur Jr. in 1989, and has since informed how The Cure plays it live. On July 16, 2006, at the request of astronaut Piers Sellers' family, the track, which reminded Sellers of "the wild, happy, drinking-beer years of [his] youth,"⁴⁶ was the wakeup call for the crew of Space Shuttle *Discovery*.) The character of Edward Scissorhands, from the Tim Burton film of the same name, was inspired by Smith's image. (At the aforementioned *NME* Awards both Burton and *NME* Editor Connor McNicholas presented Smith with the Godlike Genius Award, Burton saying: "When I was chained to a desk, and I was fucking depressed, [your] music was the only thing that saved me. I just want to thank you for inspiring me"; and McNicholas declaring: "[The Cure's] remained a vital force in modern music for 30 years. At [its] heart is a frontman who takes his place as one of the most iconic rock stars of all time." Replied Smith: "Thanks to Tim Burton. Him presenting makes it all that more special."⁴⁷) Though not the world's first remix album, 1990's *Mixed Up* was one of the first to achieve mainstream critical acclaim (then-relatively unknown producer William Orbit distorted "In Between Days"; in 1998 he co-wrote, with Madonna, "Ray of Light": its chord progression is similar to that of "Boys Don't Cry"). The following year the group was featured on MTV's freshly established *Unplugged*, and was finally honoured on home turf when it received the gong for Best British Group at the Brit Awards. "What does one do after one stops listening to the Cure? That question, in some small way, is at the heart of Mike Leigh's [1997] film *Career Girls*."⁴⁸ Quipped Interpol bassist Carlos D. in 2003: "The Cure are the Led Zeppelin of the fucked-up generation. They will never get old."⁴⁹ As of 2011 the band maintains the record for the most (listener voted) songs – nine, in 1991 – on Australian radio station Triple J's Hottest 100 of All Time. Most recently another cinematic character –

46 Piers Sellers in "Shuttle *Discovery* Cleared to Return to Earth Monday," Fox News Channel, Fox Broadcasting Company, July 16, 2006.

47 Tim Burton, Connor McNicholas, Robert Smith in "The Cure proclaimed Godlike Geniuses by Tim Burton," nme.com, February 25, 2009.

48 Scott Macaulay in "Scott Macaulay talks with *Career Girls*' Mike Leigh," filmmakermagazine.com, Summer, 1997.

49 Carlos D. in Matt Diehl, "The Cure Find New Life," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2003.

Cheyenne, from writer/director Paolo Sorrentino's *This Must Be the Place* – was inspired by Smith:

I saw The Cure perform several times when I was a kid. Then [in 2008], I went to see them again and there was [Smith], now fifty, looking exactly like he did when he was twenty. It was "shocking," in the positive sense of the word. Seeing him close-up, backstage, I understood just how beautiful and touching contradictions in a human being can be. Here was a fifty-year-old who still completely identified with a look which, by definition, is that of an adolescent. But there was nothing pathetic about it.⁵⁰

"Beautiful and touching contradictions" are ever-present in Smith's lyrics. Take, for example, *Wish* (the first CD I ever bought, as a fourteen-year-old), which vacillates from Camus-esque absurdism ("End": "I think I've reached that point where giving up and going on are both the same dead end to me, are both the same old song"⁵¹) to Dr Seussian wordplay ("High": "When I see you sky as a kite, as high as I might, I can't get that high... When I see you sticky as lips, as licky as trips, I can't lick that far"⁵²). Of the album's twelve tracks "Doing the Unstuck" – which has most influenced my poetry – is the only one that triumphantly merges Robert Smith's glittering contradictions:

"But it's much too late," you say, "for doing this now, we should have done it then." Well it just goes to show how wrong you can be and how you really should know that it's never too late to get up and go! Kick out the gloom, kick out the blues, tear out the pages with all the bad news. Pull down the mirrors and pull down the walls, tear up the stairs and tear up the floors. Oh just burn down the house, burn down the street, turn everything red and the dream is complete. With the sound of your world going up in the fire it's a perfect day to throw back your head and kiss it all goodbye!⁵³

50 Paolo Sorrentino in "Interview with director Paolo Sorrentino," English Press Kit, *This Must Be The Place*, 2011.

51 'End,' *Wish*.

52 'High,' *Wish*.

53 'Doing The Unstuck,' *Wish*.

PAM BROWN

MORE THAN A FEUILLETON

the experienced world
hasn't been
the world itself
for a long time
now

& now we want
to see the world
as we want it to be

*

who's speaking,
saying this
about the 'world' ?
what 'world' ?

*

a cute commodity
nestles
in my indifferent hand
as
I bend, or bow, really,
to sniff
a savoury crush
of peppermint and sage

a torn canvas awning flaps
in slow motion,
the herbicide's
left dripping
on the fronds,
it's picturesque, I suppose

*

can't call the sentimental
'sentimental'
when it's very moving

the next step
is to explain it

the way you can
'lose your self'
to a tear,
to a tremble even,
whenever *that* song

begins,
when *that* scent
wafts - a prelude
to loss, to getting lost

*

seeking a way
back - incapable
of turning to the classics
or history?

a minor chronicler
of moments?

hey, stop.

I *googled*
actaeon,

erechtheion
I've never seen.

I know the picture,
plus the concept
of the caryatids
(writing that line
way back -
'carrying you out
like a caryatid'),
were they strong or subservient?

hard to tell
with a building
on your back
didn't even
thumb the index
of Larousse mythology!

*

a certain lassitude
in completing
the research
is not that funky

but

everythin' I do
gonna be funky
from now on

*

maybe
leap
drop
slip and slide
like a penguin
on antarctic ice

*

over hoaxes
the trick
is
de-anonymisation,

get
'better known'
is that what's needed ?

doubt it

*

and the truth is scant

*

my week
is my weekend

my task -
reinvigorate ossified poetries
by adulteration

involve
the 'always' factor -

arguments
are always
a social event

boredom
is always
counter-revolutionary. always.
(Guy Debord
allows himself
a double 'always'
& so he should)

who says 'penned'
instead of
'wrote' or 'written'?
always say
I *data entered*
that poem!

*

middle of the dark night
news -
suicide bombing
in Damascus
police teargas thousands
in Homs

messages from 2010lab.tv
in Dortmund
and galatea resurrects
in California

google galatea
or go back to bed?

no need,
you already know

that marble revenant

click on the link
or leave until morning?

sleep the computer
feel your way
in night shadows,
bump the bulky lounge chair,
bare feet
follow the rug edge,

the bedroom

the bed

*

the world
dreamed,
no better than
as is

*

who's that
saying this
about the 'world'?

*

hard to believe
now
but
every age will be lamented,
even this one

heard that
somewhere



TARA MOKHTARI

SOLIPSISM

REIMAGINING ALLEN GINSBERG'S "THE LION FOR REAL"

Readerships of Allen Ginsberg and others of the so-dubbed Beat Generation have undergone a gradual metamorphosis since their emergence in the 1950s. The Beats were themselves plagued by criticisms that their writings were solipsistic anti-intellectualized literature.⁵⁴ Once the dust settled after the infamous law suit against City Light Books accused of perpetrating obscenity by publishing Ginsberg's *Howl*, the popularity of Beat literature was perhaps only overshadowed by their rejection by reviewers and critics in the late 1950s and early 1960s, followed by years of neglect which may have made some lasting impressions on potential readers.⁵⁵

The 1980s confirmed that although the Beat Generation – doused in acid and thrown in lock up – had dispersed, its mark on modern history would not soon be forgotten. The John Byrum film *Heart Beat*, based

54 Norman Podhoretz, "The Know-nothing Bohemians" (1958) in *On Bohemia: the code of the self exiled*, eds. C Grana and M Grana (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1990).

55 Gregory Stephenson, *The Daybreak Boys: Essays on the literature of the Beat Generation* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 2009) 15.

on Carolyn Cassady's autobiography starring Nick Nolte released in 1980, was the first onscreen interpretation of the world of the Beat Generation. Documentaries and adaptations of writings followed in the late 1980s and 1990s.

As Ginsberg himself had anticipated⁵⁶, the City Lights lawsuit over *Howl* actually boosted book sales and helped the work achieve notoriety (even over some of Ginsberg's arguably better works, like *Kaddish*). Neoconservative commentator Norman Podhoretz's criticisms that, in general, Beat writings are solipsistic and that the group degraded literature, however, may have had a more enduring negative influence on subsequent readings of Beat writings. What interests me, and what I will discuss here, is how Podhoretz's points actually have positive implications for prospective readings of Beat literature; specifically, I seek to address the value of solipsism in re-imaginings (both creative and critical) of Ginsberg's poem, "The Lion for Real," since

56 Allen Ginsberg and Jeremy Isaacs, "Face to Face," *BBC2*, online, Internet, 19 Jan. 2012. Available: <<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1011318964326139723>>

this is the poem which has inspired my own novel.

Whenever solipsism is applied to the study of poems, it is described as a problem. The same essential limitations of Cartesian solipsism are applied to solipsistic poetry: that for the poet to indulge his or her personal semiotic systems in the expression of something is to alienate or exclude the reader. Stephens and Waterhouse offer the following exercise at the conclusion of their book, *Literature, language and change: from Chaucer to the present*: "How is the problem of solipsism (the view that the Self is the only object of verifiable knowledge) encoded in twentieth century literary texts? To what extent does that attitude impinge upon and interact with the alienation and disorientation so frequently expressed in the texts?"⁵⁷

Brian Trehearne expands on the apparent problem of solipsism in poetry flagging Henry W. Well's "argument that 'personalism' is poetic solipsism: The poet manipulates the difficult symbols of a private world for her own aesthetic pleasure while expressing little of the coherent force of personality that might help to contain or translate those symbols for her readership."⁵⁸ What these criticisms do not account for is the inherent role of solipsism in the interpretation and re-imagination of poems into new texts and creative adaptations. It could be argued that rather than alienating the reader, the solipsistic expressions in a poem might instead conjure innumerable new readings of the text in which the personal semiotics are applied according to the reader's Self (departing from the poet's Self) which in turn inspire the poem's re-imagination into possible new texts. I am specifically interested in the value of solipsism in the context of my current creative project which takes the form of a novel manuscript entitled *Len and the Lion*, inspired by Ginsberg's poem "The Lion for Real."

Whether or not "The Lion for Real" itself can be accused of being solipsistic is questionable. The more obscure private symbols in the poem, for instance the significance of the "stenographers" and of Joey's "ignu high poetries" with mixed up animal names (incidentally, Ginsberg's poem "Ignu" republished in *Selected Poems*

1947-1995 elucidates these lines), do not distract from the central theme of the poem.⁵⁹ The meaning of the lion itself, whether taken as a metaphor or as an image, is openly interpretable although we are told explicitly that it is a lion. Nonetheless, like many of Ginsberg's poems, "The Lion for Real" is equally as open to wilful misinterpretations – interpretations which *intentionally* depart from the poet's presumed intended meaning for the interpreter's ulterior motives. A grand example of this is the prosecutors' questioning of witnesses at the *Howl/City Lights Books* trial on the literal meaning and subsequent literary value of lines from "Howl," such as: "angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of the night."⁶⁰ Although "The Lion for Real" never gained the notoriety that "Howl" did, it still caused some fuss resultant of its inherent interpretability. Indeed, I am not the first to create a text which wilfully misinterprets the central symbols in this particular poem.

In 1959 the literary critic Diana Trilling wrote an article entitled "The Other Night At Columbia"⁶¹ after hearing Ginsberg read his new poem, "The Lion for Real," at a poetry reading at Columbia University. Ginsberg had dedicated the reading to Lionel Trilling, Diana Trilling's husband and Ginsberg's former teacher at Columbia. In her article which was published in *Partisan Review* in the spring of 1959, Diana Trilling wrote that Ginsberg had written "The Lion for Real" about Lionel – according to the article, Lionel Trilling was the lion in the poem. Of course, this was quickly revealed to be an embarrassing misunderstanding. In a letter to his father Ginsberg described the event as a "Horrible in-group article in *Partisan* by Diana Trilling – rather self-smug & bitchy & all balled up psychologically... Rather embarrassing her mistaking that "Lion for Real" poem as a "love" poem to [Lionel] Trilling. I dedicated it to him as sort of an ironic gesture since he's the Analyst or Professor who sees "no value" in the experience of the

59 Allen Ginsberg, *Selected Poems 1947-1995* (London: Penguin, 2001) 87.

60 Bill Morgan, *Howl on Trial: The Battle for Free Expression* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2006) 138.

61 Diana Trilling, "The Other Night at Columbia: A report from the academy," *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. Lewis Hyde (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1984) 56.

57 John Stephens and Ruth Waterhouse, *Literature, language and change: from Chaucer to the present* (London: Routledge, 1990) 212.

58 Brian Trehearne, *The Montreal forties: modernist poetry in transition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 72.

Lion which is supposed to be God...⁶² This example of a solipsistic interpretation of the poem is an unfortunate one primarily because of its presentation and delivery. In the book edited by Lewis Hyde, *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, in which Trilling's article is reprinted, a parody of the article written by Robert Bly entitled "The Other Night in Heaven" appears directly following the original.⁶³ In Bly's parody, which was also first published in 1959, the egomania of Trilling's presumption that the lion of Ginsberg's poem represented her husband is illuminated.

In fact, Diana Trilling's article is only problematic because she sought to represent the poet's intention for the symbol of the lion. Had Trilling made an objective argument for why the lion in "The Lion for Real" shared a symbolic likeness to her husband or his relationships with students, without presuming the poet's actual intention, this event might have been a non-event. Another possibility – to further distance oneself from the dangers of presuming a poet's intention – is to create an independent creative text which uses the poem's original symbols and gives them new meaning. This was my intention in writing my novel, *Len and the Lion*. The question remains: is it possible to do this without paying homage in the new work to Allen Ginsberg?

Audiences of cinematic re-imaginings of Beat literature, it seems, are more intrigued by the writers than by the writing, which might arguably be a solipsistic hangover; writing that is flagged as confessional or egoistic puts the writer at the centre of the action, and readers become enamoured not by the fictionalized protagonist of the work but by the origin of the testimony loosely presented as fiction. Add to this the mystique of the Beat generation's famed alternative lifestyles comprising drug culture, free love and the occasional crime, and a band of enigmatic characters who are real and researchable is created. This phenomenon extends beyond readerships to the contemporary publishers who presently reprint Beat literature; on the back cover

blurb of Jack Kerouac's *Maggie Cassidy* published by Penguin Modern Classics, it is revealed that "Though publishers stopped *Maggie Cassidy's* Jack Dulouze and *On the Road's* Sal Paradise from sharing the same name, Kerouac meant the books to be two parts of the same life. While *On the Road* made Paradise (and Kerouac) a hero of the disaffected and restless for generations to come, *Maggie Cassidy* is an affectionate portrait of the teenager that made the man – of friendship and first love – growing up in a New England mill town." The biographical page of the same book reveals that, like his "fictional characters," Kerouac himself grew up with Breton Canadian parents in Lowell, Massachusetts. The presentation of this 2009 edition of *Maggie Cassidy* is marketing the mystique of the Beat generation and their life stories more than it is necessarily concerned with the writing itself. In fact, the only comment on the writing itself included in the blurb is a Ginsberg quote which contributes to the emphasis on Kerouac's identity as a notorious Beat personality in the quest to appeal to readers.

Furthermore, the kind of indirect autobiographical writing found in poems like "The Lion for Real" (and also in Kerouac's novels), and particularly the space between what is real and what is imagined, embellished, figurative or metaphoric allows leeway for future creative interpretations of events, often by artists completely disassociated from the original writers. In the current climate of technological revolution, where literature (like the other arts) is grappling with its digital possibilities and implications after the notion of multimedia, interdisciplinary artistic representations of *the real* based on pre-existing fusions of imagination and testimony are imminently emergent. The new media is itself one impetus for finding new ways of disseminating old symbols and this requires practitioners to re-evaluate poetic symbols in light of the limitations of older media like print books. One such example is the film *Howl* (2010) which is partly about the poem itself, partly about the lawsuit which ensued from the publication of the poem and partly a dramatized biography of the poet Allen Ginsberg (portrayed by James Franco); here we have a fusion of poetry, stage performance, documentary, biography, history, politics, animation and film – the complexities of the book itself,

62 Allen Ginsberg, "Dear Louis:" *Family Business: selected letters between father and son*, ed. Michael Schumacher (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001) 117.

63 Robert Bly, "The Other Night in Heaven," *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. Lewis Hyde (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1984) 75.

its origins, and its influence are represented through all these traditions and practices.

Because the protagonists in Beat literature are taken neither as wholly fictional nor as the subject of strictly non-fiction auto-biography, the reader has the advantage of imposing as much or as little biographical information onto his/her reading of the text as he/she wishes. Concurrently, there exists a desire to suspend one's own disbelief in reading creative texts of any kind; the world that the text creates needs to be consistent enough to be believable. Therefore it is up to the reader to use what is known and what is suggested about the protagonist to interpret his identity and to use his/her own semiotic systems to cohere the protagonist's world. Essentially this illuminates the creativity involved in reading Beat – and indeed all *good* – literature. So, to extend the creativity involved in reading to the active writing of a new text inspired by the original text is not a great leap, after all.

Whereas the majority of contemporary literary adaptations are novels that are made into films, my fiction project *Len and the Lion* seems to have taken one giant technological step backwards in re-imagining a poem in the novel form. (Of course I am certainly not the first to write a novel inspired by a poem, for instance, Australian novelist Gail Jones' 2011 novel *Five Bells* was inspired by Kenneth Slessor's poem of the same title.) Also, whereas novels adapted to film generally value authenticity and faithfulness to the original narrative or in the case of creative interpretations to the original themes; conversely, my novel is faithful only to my subjective reading of the poem in which I am the protagonist of the poem and my views and experiences characterize the world of the poem. While I pay tribute to all the established interpretations of the poem, I do so in the quest for a new meaning rather than depending on what is 'known' about the poem.

So how have I reassigned meaning to the symbols in "The Lion for Real"? The following is a kind of abridged semiotic inventory of the symbols which appear both in "The Lion for Real" and in my novel *Len and the Lion*:

THE SPEAKER/PROTAGONIST

The confessional genre and first person perspective of "The Lion for Real," as well as the supporting biographical information indicate that the speaker in the poem is Ginsberg himself. In *Len and the Lion*, the genre can be described as literary fiction and the perspective is third person. The protagonist is Len, a 33 year old Australian writer, male, who has his first advance to write a novel based on Ginsberg's *Howl*. So, Ginsberg is acknowledged directly as a character external to the protagonist. Len is suffering from writers block and has already spent his advance on a trip to New York City to research his project when his publishers ask for it to be repaid.

THE LION

According to Ginsberg in the letter to his father, the lion symbolizes God. Of course, Ginsberg (like many of us) worried about what his father thought of his poetry⁶⁴ and so to take for granted that he was telling the truth is arguably imprudent, but this is the generally accepted interpretation of the Lion's symbolism – perhaps mostly because of the reference to "O Lord" in the last stanza which is potentially directed at the Lion. In my novel the central theme is the quest to discover what the Lion is and how he got there. God is discussed as one possibility. Another possibility is that the Lion is Zivko (Len's semi-estranged father) reincarnate after he suffers a fatal heart attack back in Australia. The most likely possibility is that the Lion is the result of a series of questionable life choices in order to be a writer that led Len to be broke, jobless, loveless and, ironically, unable to write – so to choose a wild ride might in turn invite a wild animal into one's hotel room. The Lion essentially symbolizes the madness of a total re-evaluation of all of one person's life choices. One thing I have been faithful to is the Lion's eventual starvation.

THE REICHIAN ANALYST

Ginsberg writes to his father that Lionel Trilling is "the Reichian Analyst" who sees no value in the experience of the Lion. In *Len and the Lion*, the analyst

64 Allen Ginsberg and Jeremy Isaacs, "Face to Face," *BBC2*, online: <<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1011318964326139723>>

is represented by a character named Morgan McMahon, Len's former psychologist in Melbourne. Len's first reaction to finding the Lion is to run out and phone a psychologist, but when Morgan reduces the Lion's existence down to a delusion, Len is disappointed. Here is another similarity between the poem and my novel – the finders of the Lion are both hell bent on being believed or validated while simultaneously disbelieving their own perceptions. In a sense, the Analyst in both stories is the perfect symbol for the tension between validation and invalidation.

THE OLD BOYFRIEND

In *Len and the Lion*, the character of Paula replaces the "old boyfriend" in "The Lion for Real." Paula is Len's first love, with whom he shares a slightly contentious friendship.

JOEY

The character of the speaker's friend Joey is replaced in *Len and the Lion* with a bartender, Dan (nicknamed Goldilocks), whom Len meets the night he runs out of the hotel room upon finding the Lion. Len and Dan become fast friends while Len drinks away the horror of his bad day. In "The Lion for Real," Joey inspires a spark of hope – however short-lived. This element of hope is an important narrative device.

THE RED NEIGHBOUR APARTMENT BUILDING & THE STENOGRAPHER

In the poem, the setting and these peripheral characters give hints as to the alleged *realness* of the lion. The stenographers are potential witnesses to the lion and the apartment building contributes to the real world setting of the unreal experience of the lion. In *Len and the Lion*, there is an apartment building across the road and a dodgy doorman who lets Len inside and upstairs and provides him with binoculars to see into his room from a safe distance.

Although it may be assumed that all interpretations of art can be viewed as being egoistic or, at the very least, subjective, something quite unique occurred when I first read "The Lion for Real." I became attached to the

poem. It became something personal. My first instinct was to relate to the poem – specifically, the idea of witnessing a frightening imagination that feels as real and as terrifying as the sudden appearance of a live wild animal, and having no outside witnesses to validate the experience of the imagination. More specifically, I associated the poem with my own experience of suffering from anxiety and panic attacks. Incidentally, since I was a child, lions were my favourite animal; perhaps this was the signifier in the poem which instigated my personal relation to it. Additionally, I was once told by a therapist that I would "probably always be a bit tortured" which was my first association upon reading the lines in the poem about the Reichian Analyst. Essentially, there were a number of key signifiers in the poem which I defined according to my own solipsistic semiotic systems and the symbols became so rich with complex association that I felt compelled to explore them in the writing of a novel.

PETER MINTER

FACEBOOK

1

The fields are heavy before harvest, yellow stalks
Bend to the earth, the horizon of summer
As I call to you across seed-heads, voice like
Honey, drip fed, sticky wet hours of talk
My tongue sums up an eggy grammar
Syllables held loose on the billowy grass
Garlands distant in the xanthic breeze
Hungry again in the afternoon; shit happens
Fraught with the sound of companionship
Sparrows flutter over my hand, another book of birds
Wearing out the dividends, corpulent wastrels
Like Somerset Maugham meets Keith Richards
Adulterous boomers love their wives
Upload photos of common waterways, knives
Instead of fruit-cake and proxy smack
Perhaps the paintings, like, like I said she said, as if
The green felt somewhat strained, no rage
Could be beneath us, great swathes of hedges
Risen by the early evening, martini hour upon us
Yet again, like yesterday, and before
I prefer cucumber, he prefers nothing, more or less
A sudden reflection, another photo
Perhaps the same thing again, like a throbbing
Headache, black & white, gracefully hopeless
By the Rhine in 1954, or was it Black Mountain
My first vagrant spring foretold, my hero
Hovering amongst the concrete ruins
Amongst the golden maples, the yellowing poplars
Your silver coat-pin hot with raven eyes
Heidegger lovers sucking on wood, sticks, thighs
As if the blood that spills is coloured bone
A lark amidst the sappy drums & upbeat visions

On repeat, a loom of rusting vessels
Bleeding over so much infrastructure, romance
Reduced to your chest, national stability
As we walk out into the starry void
I remember that line from Rachel's *Draft Walkers dazed to breathe the caved-in air / holding Raggy ropes of carnage* and howl about reception only two bars, childhood amidst the ferns.

2

The Frogpondians make favourable noises
Hoping Nature will appear, like *The Adoration of the Magi*
Through the sullen amber glow
Of a hundred single malts at Kings' bar, your wet lips
Somewhat near beneath the proximate vaults
Ancient red graffiti just readable in the aura of my phone
As we fuck beneath the oaken rood
Think of all the times we've had shadowed hereon
Earth, my velvet coat warm beneath your hips
Each somersault we mourn and keep
Happily embraced, something to live for
Beyond the marble crypt, the slowly melting glass
Flesh-fragrant, delicious rot leonine
Madrigals spooling from the frenula we bridle up
And torture in an alien, sentimental prose
Effusions courteous and random as we leave
We are bad poets, damp wings fire away
The disappearing shade, musty blackness in an ink
Thrust from the sky's dazzling wood
To multiply across all things, a rather simple gesture
Considering, amplification reductive

As the early morning oxygen we package up
And they wake to work for nothing on the street
Joyful self-defeat unfurling like a banner
Tender blurs tracked 'til reception gets serious
Money flows toward the singular heavens
Curved blue steel demarcates the cold square
Public sculpture celebrating vassalage, totem tennis
For the kids as they trudge toward old Europe
Commenting on their serve, tremors caressed
On the breezy terrace, a yellow luminescence
Spilling over shoulders from the screen, its newsprint pallor
A trace in vain to love the abandonment of night
Deperir a gris, the scent of blood
Shared over and over through the milky wet atmosphere
It's nice out, just acres of mist undisturbed by entry
The soggy ecocline precipitating appetite
So break the ice, bring me another phase transition
The distant sounds of dawn between the meadow
And the lap-pool, the odd donkey, hee-haw.

3

The day is light grey, you call across the window pane
Unannounced again, water sluiced and edifying
As we wander by the protean lake, sleep
In smokey curlicues lingering through reeds
Our reflections mercurial, meniscus pellucid
As a single bird dives and dips into the sky
Becomes a koi flame brocaded between weeds
Then rises up to take a breath from cirrostratus halo
And returns to air, darts across the heavy shoreline flowers
With scrupulous fidelity, rain falling on the hill

Across the water, an echo discrete as silver on silver
Quietude widely spaced to let the head inside
Like a memory of high wind and blizzards
Suddenly erupting in the tacit calm, inaudible
By the tinkling clear cold streams, green stillness
Always passed between us, as if we lived
As we walked around the lake, round and round
In a trance of aspects rippling in and out
Canticles of narcissus stems swaying in the restive
Eddies, blue, rocks, moss, yellow, spoken
An ancestor of Narcissus shoots allegory like gossamer
Commentary and what have you, all that water
Like vodka, a lake of vodka, the spirit level
Quasi-fictional as reading through logical systems
Never more than literal, just intentional
Response recomposed as a line of dark pencil pines
Transposed again at dawn, damp utterance
Here and there rendered and speaking like antiques
The parataxis of unmarried newcomers
Wandering round the single swan, forest dwellers
Unneighbourly at first, then relatively alpenglow
Starburst and figurative, the sky's dull rotunda
Floating overhead like a zeppelin, hot air rising
As the morning sun finally breaks through,
Hits the water and defibrillates the mist, a stream
Of comments looming interwoven
With the falling leaves and a huge magnetism
The great serpent at the bottom of the lake, the chapel
Bell tolling from the crematorium, every word a seed
A piece of flesh I hand you as I fall into myself.



D.J. HUPPATZ

POETRY MASHUP CULTURES

In early 21st century poetry, the tendency toward the borrowed, the purloined, the sampled, the appropriated, the plundered, the plagiarized, has not only been substantiated by a late 20th century generation of loosely defined experimental writers, but it has been even more fully realized by a wave of younger poets and artists today who are at home with both the practice of appropriation and its cultural frame. As accelerating information flows gather intensity around us, the very term *poetry* seems both anachronistic and anarchic, a tranquil backwater removed from the giddy exhilaration of rapidly changing new media technologies. But for poets, these technologies offer unprecedented access to vast resources in the form of an overwhelming amount of proliferating information that threatens to overturn long-standing hierarchies and literary boundaries in a flattened landscape of *text as data flow*. Within this new context, the questions of how to write poetry and how to read it seem inextricable from specific strategies of engagement and communication. Appropriation, selection, editing and erasure have become commonplace across contemporary cultural forms – collectively called *mashup cultures* below – and are profoundly affecting not only the production but also the reception of poetry globally. It is within this context that I want to reflect upon some poetries of the last decade, specifically Flarf and conceptual writing, and their relevance to my own practice.

MASHUP CULTURES

Although difficult to pinpoint exactly when the term was first used, *mashup* has gained popularity over the last decade as a term that circumscribes new practices in a variety of fields. A mashup is the assemblage, rearrangement and management of readymade data that

can be outputted in various ways. For Stefan Weiss-Sonvilla, mashups are characterised by a particular logic that is “additive or accumulative in that they combine and collect material and immaterial goods and aggregate them into either manifested design objects or open-ended re-combinatory and interactive information sources

on the Web.”⁶⁵ Ultimately, mashups are dependant on sampling – appropriating information from another source – then editing, recontextualizing, cataloguing, and/or combining the results. Weiss-Sonvilla’s two-fold definition of a mashup’s manifestation is worth reiterating – that is, we can experience a mashup as a singular, static entity or a dynamic, interactive one (such as recent web applications that continually update temporal or geographic information). While the mashup process itself is not particular to new media technologies, it broadly encapsulates a range of new creative possibilities simplified and spread by such technologies.

In music for example, mashups have had a profound effect both on professional and amateur composition over the past decade. Although musical mashups can be traced back through a tradition from musique concrete, to the remix culture of Jamaican dub, to hip hop and various dance musics of the late 20th century, new software tools and digitization have simplified the process of cutting, editing and combining music from various sources. A growing scene of amateur mashup artists distributing music online suggests increased accessibility as well. Musical mashups typically mix familiar material, but defamiliarize it by splicing seemingly disparate genres together. DJ Danger Mouse’s *The Grey Album* (2004), for example, was created by mixing the Beatles’ *The White Album* and Jay-Z’s *The Black Album*. More recently, DJ Earworm (aka Jordan Roseman and author of the *Audio Mashup Construction Kit*), has created annual mashups comprising the year’s top 25 American hit singles, notable for their seamless compositions that mimic the structure of the appropriated pop songs. What began as an experimental practice quickly become mainstream with high-profile hip hop artists releasing a cappella versions of songs for the implicit purpose of mashups (Jay-Z’s *The Black Album*, for example, was released in this form). Central to this culture of musical mashups is audience interaction such that an artist’s *original* source becomes raw material to reuse, edit and combine with other material.

Video, particularly in web-based forms, has a similar

burgeoning mashup culture. As with music, with software tools now widely accessible, it has become increasingly easy to splice together fragments of popular films, TV programs and music videos, even for amateurs with no video production experience. Fans re-edit particular scenes of their favourite Hollywood films or create new movie trailer mashups (“Brokeback to the Future”), activists mashup political speeches or produce humorous parodies (George Bush/Tony Blair “My Endless Love” was an early favourite), lounge room editors mash up advertisements, animation, porn films and training videos, while more skilled producers hack and remix computer games. Although video mashups have the additional complexity of integrating audio and video content, as with musical mashups, new media technologies have facilitated new possibilities of user-generated and manipulated content as well as new networks of distribution and communities of practitioners.

While the examples above rest on the idea of the mashup as a singular, discreet output, the dynamic mashup described by Weiss-Sonvilla is a more recent and potentially more complex phenomenon. In Web 2.0 technology, a mashup is an application that integrates elements or routines from multiple sources, a remix of digital data characterised by dynamic aggregation, combination and visualization. This might take the form of a web site that mixes and matches existing content from external sources to create new combinations through an interface that allows software programs to interact. From metasearch engines to news aggregators and geovisualization software (that combine geographical maps with other types of data), these dynamic mashups aggregate, recontextualize and reorder changing information flows. Various websites, for example, embed Google Maps and overlay it with other continuously updated data – real estate firms mashup maps with current rental information and public health officials mashup maps with health and population statistics. It remains to be seen what the creative possibilities of these mashups might be but a pioneer project such as Bill Henry and Darren Wershler-Henry’s *apostrophe engine* or Mark Amerika’s more recent *Remix* have effectively employed dynamic

65 Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss (ed.), *Mashup Cultures* (Springer-Verlag Vienna, Dordrecht, 2010) 9.

mashup models.⁶⁶ A more populist possibility might be new software such as Storify, in which users “curate” their own “stories” by mashing up text, image and video into a dynamic and interactive narrative.

In both its musical and video forms, the mashup shifts creative emphasis from production to post-production, that is, from the creation of original material to assembling, editing and combining existing material. These processes have also been adopted in a wide range of other contemporary cultural fields – from fashion and architecture to graphic design and indie crafting. The potential shift inherent in both this new logic of practice is from a culture of mass consumerism to a mashup culture of active participants. Accordingly, theories of consumption that portrayed the masses as mediated zombies consuming ready-packaged TV programs, advertisements, pop songs, films and computer games are now challenged by the potential of productive and differentiated masses empowered by new production technologies and distribution networks. Of course, *potential* is the key term here. Mashup artists typically ignore copyright laws and various actions have ensued in both the musical and video realms.⁶⁷ Many mashup artists circumvent such legal action by simply distributing their work freely in an increasingly large online *gift economy*. New creative strategies inherent in mashup cultures are thus inevitably framed within commons-based distribution models – from Creative Commons to open source and Free/Libre Culture – and challenge fundamental understandings of cultural property and ownership.

As new media technologies for capturing, editing, remixing and distributing digital material are no longer the realm of computer programmers or software engineers, mashup cultures have become global in production and consumption. However, this shift is not necessarily as democratic or utopian as some technology enthusiasts would have it. Universal access to both hardware and software remains a significant hurdle in any utopian projections of a democratic mashup culture, while the

66 At the time of writing, *apostrophe engine* was under reconstruction, but can usually be found at <http://www.apostropheengine.ca/>, while Mark Amerika’s *Remix* project is here: <http://www.remixthebook.com/>

67 EMI, for example, holders of the Beatles’ copyright, tried to stop distribution of *The Grey Album*.

issue of intellectual property in a cultural context is the subject of ongoing debate. For poetry, the latter issue seems minor, given the slim potential of poetic property embodying monetary value. But a number of implications for the future of poetic practice within mashup cultures arise – the challenge to “common sense” understandings of authorship and creativity, the flattening of all material into potentially remixable data, the increased globalization of distribution, and the development of new networks – all of which present challenges to current hegemonic cultural boundaries.

POETRIES OF MASHUP CULTURES

While many poets have undertaken new writing practices within this context in recent years, the poetics of mashup cultures I am most familiar with, Flarf and conceptual writing, have paralleled my own practice and opened up further possibilities worth outlining briefly. Although both emanate from the United States, a growing awareness of parallel practices by writers outside of the US in recent anthologies suggests a wider global phenomenon.⁶⁸ In Australia, where I currently reside, there has been much engagement with mashup cultures by poets but little critical attention. A curious spate of recent anthologies seems to be anxiously trying to shore up national boundaries and established traditions while completely ignoring the new technological and global context.⁶⁹ However, journals such as *Cordite*, *Jacket* and *VLAK* have offered Australian writers a welcome escape from the restricted national framework and its associated mythologies, as well as encouraged critical debate around new poetics. Before addressing this latter context, I want to first consider the contributions of Flarf and conceptual writing as mashup poetics.

The Flarf Collective, a group of poets including Gary Sullivan, Nada Gordon, K. Silem Mohammad, Drew Gardner, Sharon Mesmer and Katie Degentesh, created some provocative work in the first decade of the 21st century. Flarf poetry, typically comprised

68 I am thinking here of Kenneth Goldsmith and Craig Dworkin’s *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* and Bergvall, Caroline, Laynie Browne, Teresa Carmody and Vanessa Place, eds. *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*.

69 Notably the colossal anthology by Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann, *Australian Poetry Since 1788* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011).

of constellations of text culled from web searches or spam, mashed together profane and profound language, and was characterized by its corrosive parody, teasing humour, and posturing performance. Through appropriating and combining the multiple languages of chat room conversations, political speeches and porn advertisements, Flarf poetry addressed the unbounding of formerly private and public realms, as uploading personal information into the public realm of social media became commonplace. As mashup poetry, Flarf's strategy was also deconstructive, destabilizing official or dominant media languages to expose the chaos beneath the mediated veneer of official Bush-era stability. The baroque excesses of much Flarf poetry – exemplified by Nada Gordon's *Folly* (2007) and Sharon Mesmer's *Annoying Diabetic Bitch* (2007) – reflected the performative aspect of internet identities and extended poetry off the page into live Flarf multimedia festivals and musical performances.⁷⁰ And above all, Flarf challenged the hegemonic taste culture of contemporary poetry, exposing humour, tragedy and joy in the new vernaculars, as well as an irreverent attitude towards literary traditions and boundaries of what might be acceptable as "art."

While Flarf practices gained some notoriety in American literary circles in the mid 2000s, Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, in their recent *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, attempted to gather a wide range of practices under the more inclusive banner of "conceptual writing." In the anthology, Goldsmith and Dworkin identify an avant-garde history for conceptual writing, drawing particularly on precedents in the visual arts and literature. The editors cast an ambitious net, bringing together contemporary writing with historical precedents by artists Vito Acconci, Marcel Duchamp, Dan Graham, Douglas Huebler and Andy Warhol as well as hopeful and unlikely inclusions such as Denis Diderot, William Butler Yeats and Hart Crane. A further anthology edited by Caroline Bergvall, Laynie Browne, Teresa Carmody

70 Video of performances from Flarf Festivals are available on *Youtube*, while Drew Gardner's 2011 CD, *Flarf Orchestra*, documented live Flarf performances with music. For a more detailed reading of specific Flarf texts, see Huppertz, D.J., "Dionysus in Drag: On Flarf," in Louis Armard, ed., *Hidden Agendas: Unreported Poetics* (Prague: Litterara Pragensia, 2010).

and Vanessa Place, *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing By Women*, also cast a wide net but stuck to contemporary (or at least near contemporary) women and their conceptual writing rather than trying to establish historical roots in either literature or visual art. Following the development of conceptual writing from the late 1990s, a series of associated theoretical reflections by practitioners such as Goldsmith, Dworkin, Christian Bök, Robert Fitterman and Vanessa Place, as well as the literary theorist Marjorie Perloff, have begun to codify and interrogate these practices.⁷¹

Unfortunately, conceptual writing looks like it might stick as a convenient label for a variety of new poetics. Through its association with conceptual art, the term conceptual writing gains legitimacy as part of a certain avant-garde tradition, while the intellectual weight and abstraction of the word "conceptual" stand opposed to popular connotations of poetry as an intuitive expression of individuality. Goldsmith and Dworkin's title, *Against Expression*, pits new practices against the straw man of "expression," as new poetic practices are supposedly opposed to self-revelation and the legacy of romanticism. What remains are abstract ideas – a remainder reiterated by Goldsmith in his many articles – and the maxim of artist Sol LeWitt looms large in consideration of conceptual practice: "Conceptual art is only good when the idea is good" (from *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, 1967).⁷² To my mind, the issue of who defines what a *good idea* is has never been convincingly addressed by conceptual artists or their critics of the late 1960s and 70s or by contemporary boosters of conceptual writing. And the insistence that a text's content is no longer important, that it "begs to be seen blankly for the novelty of its concept" seems not only disingenuous with regards to so much conceptual writing, but also adopts a position that seems unwilling to acknowledge the reader as a physical entity (rather

71 See Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Craig Dworkin, "Hypermnesia," *boundary 2*, 36:3, 2009; Christian Bök, "Two Dots Over a Vowel," *boundary 2*, 36:3, 2009; Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms* (Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009); Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

72 Goldsmith and Dworkin, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, xxii.

than simply a “thinker”).⁷³

Despite utilising many of the same strategies, popular or *amateur* mashup practices discussed above are downplayed by critics of conceptual writing (who are mostly its practitioners) in order to maintain boundaries of a particular taste culture and its avant-garde roots. For Goldsmith particularly, taste, despite its resonance of Victorian refinement and snobbery, is a crucial contemporary attribute. “If you can filter through the mass of information and pass it on as an arbiter to others,” explains Goldsmith, “you gain an enormous amount of cultural capital. Filtering is taste. And good taste rules the day: Marcel Duchamp’s exquisite filtering and sorting sensibility combined with his finely tuned taste rewrote the rules.”⁷⁴ This cultural cachet through editing is precisely what Goldsmith and Dworkin have done in circumscribing a particular avant-garde taste culture in *Against Expression*. While this practice of editing and filtering can be seen as a crucial part of the new mashup cultures, on the other hand, establishing a basis for conceptual writing as *literature* requires tracing a particular history and theoretical framework, with touchstones ranging from modernist literature, French literary theorists and philosophers, Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Andy Warhol, and 1980s appropriation artists such as Jeff Koons, Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman.

The heightened role of the editor within a new digital context is highlighted by Dworkin’s *Eclipse*, an online repository for out of print small press publications, and Goldsmith’s *Ubuweb*, an online repository for avant-garde literature, film, music and multi-media work. By filtering and shaping an archive, the editor’s role seems essential in the face of a bewildering avalanche of available information – which may explain in part the continual and anxious anthologizing of poetry, avant-garde or otherwise, in recent years. As free online archives, both *Eclipse* and *Ubuweb* are constituted within

73 Christian Bök, “Two Dots Over a Vowel,” *boundary 2* 36:3 (2009) 13. See also the numerous articles by Kenneth Goldsmith on this insistence. However, Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman, in *Notes on Conceptualisms*, seem to offer a little more space for the reader. Fitterman, in his foreword, for example, argues that “Conceptual Writing, in fact, might best be defined not by the strategies used but by the expectations of the readership or *thinkership*” (10).

74 Goldsmith and Dworkin, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, xix.

the online gift economy, making available long out of print, little known or difficult to access literary material readily accessible for a wide audience. However, the limitations of the digital realm are not lost on Dworkin, who accepts his digital archive as continuing the spirit of DIY small press publication but “reengineered for the Web”⁷⁵. The recontextualization of physical publications within the virtual realm entails not only a loss of physicality but also a certain amount of content. These new archives might also be considered mashup projects in their creation of new digital compilations of existing works, and in their translation from physical books, magazines, and in the case of *Ubuweb*, analogue recordings and film, into digital archives.⁷⁶

Despite some reservations, my personal engagement with both Flarf and conceptual writing over the last six or seven years both confirmed similarities with my earlier practices and stimulated new ones. However, rather than read them as universal practices, I understand them as local. That is, I encountered Flarf and conceptual writing while living in New York from 2005 to 2007, and find it difficult to extricate the work from its American context. Goldsmith’s “American Trilogy,” comprising *The Weather*, *Traffic* and *Sports*, for example embodies case book examples of appropriation and reframing through their transcription of oral language into written language. But for me, they engage with the specificity of their locale, as in *The Weather*, Goldsmith transcribed a year’s worth of daily weather reports from a New York radio station; in *Traffic*, he transcribed a twenty-four hour period of New York traffic reports at ten minute intervals; and in *Sports*, he transcribed the commentary from an entire Yankees-Red Sox baseball game. Similarly, Robert Fitterman’s *Metropolis* series, comprising four books from 2000 to 2010, reflects specifically American urban and suburban experiences. The most recent edition, *Sprawl: Metropolis 30A*, for example, comprises various appropriated voices arranged in a shopping mall sequence of stores as a kind of contemporary archaeological project of American mall culture. Despite claims about the flatness of global practices and information flows in a digital age and the machinic or anonymous processes of transcription and

75 Craig Dworkin, “Hypermnesia,” *boundary 2* 36:3 (2009) 81.

76 Dworkin, 83.

appropriation (particularly Goldsmith's Warholesque claims about being a "writing machine"), there is still a good deal of (unacknowledged) local specificity and subjectivity in both Flarf and conceptual writing.⁷⁷

In an Australian context, the most notable contribution to the poetries of mashup cultures has been the online journal *Cordite*, edited from 2001 to 2012 by David Prater. In 2004, for example, *Search* (issue 16) featured poems compiled from appropriated material generated by search engine results. This was closely followed by *Children of Malley* (issue 23, 2005), edited by Liam Ferney. Envisaged as a tribute to the Australian mashup pioneer and fictional poet, Ern Malley, *Children of Malley* featured poems that utilized the remix tactics of Harold Stewart and James McAuley (the original Malley), and each poem was presented under a pseudonym. More recently, *Creative Commons Remix* (issue 33.1, 2010) edited by Alison Croggon, was a compilation of poetry remixed from the previous issue, *Creative Commons* (issue 33, 2010). Such collections signalled the acceptance of such practices in an Australian context, at least by a younger generation of poets. However, with the exception of *Jacket*, edited by John Tranter, there was little critical commentary on these practices. And despite these examples and a host of younger practitioners doing innovative work in this realm, Australia poetries remain marginal in a global context. Even with the new ease of online distribution and availability of information, contemporary poetry in Australia still seems framed primarily within national boundaries and local issues, while outside of Australia, it is little known.

ENTER THE DJ

I initially came to understand the potential cultural shift into a mashup culture through music. For me, a key turning point was in my teens in a personal move away from rock's romantic individualism to the recombination of found materials and the sampler revolution of the late 1980s that brought about House and Techno made sense. Long nights of uninterrupted musical streams

77 Interestingly, Mark Amerika uses almost the exact same phrase to describe his work. Curiously, Amerika's significant contributions to mashup cultures in the form of the pioneering internet site, Alt-X, as well as his practice and theoretical writings, are completely absent from discussions of conceptual writing.

that collaged bits and pieces from various dance musics, popular music, classical music, jazz or cartoon soundtracks, embedded the exhilarating freedom of remix culture in my head. DJ Spooky described this as "Rhythm Science":

Rhythm Science. Rhyme time. Rough trade. Sound. Think of it as a mirror held up to a culture that has learned to fly again, that has released itself from the constraints of the ground to drift through dataspace, continuously morphing its form in response to diverse streams of information.⁷⁸

Manipulations of found sound led me to found text and a liberating sense of the possibilities of remixing literature. At the same time, I related dance music sampling and remixing to William Burroughs and Brion Gysin's cut-up techniques, the appropriations of Kathy Acker, as well as to conceptual and post-conceptual art practices. Before I owned a computer, I began remixing Ern Malley poems with recent newspaper articles, literally cutting and pasting the two sources together.

In 1998-99, Benjamin Brady and I gathered together a collective of writers involved in the visual art world including Nicole Tomlinson, Julian Savage, Sebastian Gurcuillo and Tessa Dwyer, to collaborate on four issues of *Textbase*, a journal devoted to experimental writing and ficto-criticism. Each issue addressed a particular literary process – *Automatic* engaged with surrealism as well as contemporary practitioners such as Ania Walwicz; *Cutup* engaged with Burroughs and Gysin as well as new media practices; *Chance* engaged with John Cage and aleatory composition; and *Onomatopoeia* engaged with sound poetry and transcription. Though raw in its production and only locally distributed in Melbourne, *Textbase* drew attention not only to these various techniques, but also to the materiality of language in our ambitious attempts at graphic arrangements of text and consideration of the whole. But perhaps the most ambitious aspect was the collaborative ideal in which no authors names appeared next to individual texts, so that by the issue on *Chance*, there was a seamless collaboration of created and appropriated material

78 Paul D. Miller, AKA DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid, *Rhythm Science*, 5.

without specific authors. Although anticipating some aspects of later mashup cultures, *Textbase* was for the most part productive rather than post-productive in its processes. And although Brady and I edited an Australian section for Mark Amerika's pioneering internet journal *Alt-X*, we did not fully exploit new digital technologies in terms of our own work at this time.

My later chapbook *Book of Poem!* (2004) paralleled more closely the emerging mashup cultures. It was a compilation of poems comprised of mashed up Chinese and Japanese English (already mangled in terms of *correct* grammar and syntax), transcribed from consumer packaging, t-shirts and instruction booklets or appropriated from various webpages, all repackaged into left-justified "nouveau sonnets." The strategy was summed up in the book's Preface, and, although the logic of the mashup prevails, it was not wholly technologically driven:

These poems are working to satisfy you by the language of consumer, disassociating from the products in themselves: a simple strategy of appropriate!... It is considered that the real hand-made merit unchanged since olden times, out of spontaneous fermentation but build up in combination with high technology. This sincere book of poem was thought out this way.

More recently, the poem "FUTURE HAPPY BUDDHA vs. Fake Kenny Rogers Head," published in *VLAK 2*, was written in 2008 as part of a collaborative online forum with Sebastian Gurciullo and Nicole Tomlinson. The poem was composed of fragments retrieved from the detritus of the internet and Fake Kenny Rogers Head meets FUTURE HAPPY BUDDHA in a DJ *mix off*, unworking simple connections and the rational flow of information. As in *Book of Poem*, this appropriated material is packaged in as a left-justified *nouveau sonnet*, confirming its identity as a poem. The fragments are smoothed and finished with a well worn anecdote about the foundations of the universe, in this case, adopted from the beginning of Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*:

So if I was to dig up all these rocks,
I would find dirt on the bottom?
No, just fake Kenny Rogers Heads. All the way down.

Hawking's anecdote, already second-hand, retold the story of an ignorant woman who believed that the world rests on the back of a giant turtle. When questioned about what lies underneath the turtle, she replies, "It's turtles all the way down." The "infinite regress" problem in cosmology is dismissed by rational scientists such as Hawking as a primitive myth that stands in the way of a true understanding of the universe. In the new mashup context, fake Kenny Rogers Heads replace turtles in a new myth "explaining" the depthlessness of virtual space inhabited by B-grade celebrity country singers.

Addressing a specifically Australian context, and partially as a response to the incessant anthologizing of poetry recently, I recently began trawling poetry anthologies with two aims – to mashup certified classics with alternate contemporary material, and to mashup certified classics with one another. Two brief examples, "Sex and the Over Forties," and "Les and Bob" (printed in full below) demonstrate this hacking of the certified Australian poetry archive. With these works, I am proposing the mashup as deconstructive within a particular location and context. Given the relative obscurity of Australian poetry in a global context, a brief explication of each seems appropriate.

"Sex and the Over Forties" is structured on Peter Porter's "Sex and the Over Forties" (from his 1972 book, *Preaching to the Coverted*, and anthologized since then). Using the lineation and some words of the original, I substituted contemporary material appropriated from celebrity gossip websites and comment streams, seeking out phrases that highlighted the public nature of intensely private experiences. As well as the deconstructive angle, Porter's poem might now be considered a *retro classic*, and its reworking here related to the revival of the *Playboy* bunny logo within contemporary fashion or Jacques Magazine's revisiting 1960s and 70s porn. Porter's original poem begins thus:

It's too good for them,
they look so unattractive undressed—
let them read paperbacks!

This was replaced by commentary on celebrity aging

and updated by language addressing the contemporary obsession with appearances:

It's not easy morphing into an apple head doll,
they look so unattractive without botox—
the point of Photoshop is to make someone look more attractive!

Porter's original contained somewhat confusing subject positions that were unlikely to be that of the author, so this was an idea I exaggerated into a lateral unravelling in which the languages are recognized as those beyond the usual poetic realm and into the languages of blogging, flaming and celebrity fan culture. Porter's 1970s vernacular is thus updated into an assemblage of phrases that acknowledge the reader and associations that they have with instantly graspable phrases. Finally, taking deviations from the poetic tradition (in the form of deviance) quite literally, the morphing and mutating in the poem function allegorically.⁷⁹

Finally, "Les and Bob" mashes up widely anthologized poems by two of Australia's best known contemporary poets, Les Murray and Robert Adamson. With the mashups of DJ Earworm in mind, I composed this poem using only phrases and words from Murray's "Broad Bean Sermon" and Adamson's "My Afternoon," with only the slightest intervention in the form of smoothing word endings or tenses to create a seamless flow. While such an exercise might engender a revised reading of

79 Place and Fitterman's *Notes on Conceptualisms* suggests allegory as a key component of much conceptual writing, but it is an unfortunately slim volume.

both originals, I also found the new version highlighted some striking similarities between the unlikely pair of poems, given the poets reputedly belong to radically different trajectories within Australian poetry. The encounter between Murray's proliferating broad beans and Adamson's mediations on sex suggests repressions in Murray's verse as well as a hint of male insecurity in both originals. In an Australian context, the dialogue between the two is rich with associated (by now mythological) images of both poets and their work. Beyond an Australian context, "Les and Bob" may well be mistaken for an original poem, but within an Australian context, the associations should be clear. For this particular example, locale and an understanding of local cultural politics seem essential.

In presenting these final examples of my own work, I wanted to stretch beyond Flarf and conceptual writing to a broader conception of the possibilities inherent in the new poetics of mashup cultures. The image of the poet as a shamanistic individual, translating personal experience in the form of unmediated subjectivity, is a well established popular myth. But to replace this image with an abstract model of poetry as intellectual post-production seems to me to a limitation that misses crucial critical and communicative opportunities. Contemporary identity in a new media context is a complex and shifting amalgam of actions, assumptions and interactions with others. It is into this realm that contemporary poetics might not only forge connections across other cultural forms and across geographical and temporal spaces, but also play a role as a political, provocative and productive force.

SEX AND THE OVER FORTIES

It's not easy morphing into an apple head doll,
they look so unattractive without botox—
the point of Photoshop is to make someone look more attractive!

There had to be 20 somethings in the audience
laughing their asses off when Moms took the stage.
I'm just glad someone uploaded it so we can all see.

More mutated porn bots working a reality show.
I bet she's glad her daughters turned out ugly—
that's one way of getting rid of your competition.

A postcard from years back –
I'm twenty-one with boy brand hair!
But you know, Hugh Hefner may be

mummified in strips of turtle jerky but he's
still sporting that coked up zombie smile
and keeping it up with the Jones twins!

*Just returned from a lovely Sunday morning service today.
Kicking back at home now while sporting a HOT
pink mini-retro-jumper! RETRO CLASSIC!*

Like I'm jealous of her drug face, her fake body
and the three brain cells she has left in her head.
Also, this is how you spell guaranteed. As in, guaranteed.

LES AND BOB

Beanstalks, in any breeze, I think of sex all afternoon.
The fleshy women, high as fence-tops
kink down with proffered new greenstuff.

The mornings are best, outstretched like blessing fingers.
I am taken from place to place, without belief,
then quite drunk an hour or a cloud later.

With unbuttoned leaves, it becomes memory.
Oblique to your notice, the wide beds
grow to great lengths all afternoon.

Who got me here, unfolding into reality?
I lie back in the folds sealed around with a string,
misshapen as toes pretending to be good about sex.

JOHN HAWKE

HALLEY'S DISAPPOINTMENT

A second-hand sedan, composed of some gravitational metal
from the last moment in history when the poor were
amicable to submission – the scars in detailing
glaring wound-like as it swoops around the curve
of an empty Hobart intersection, gathering pavement,
exposed in the gleam of mephitic lamplight.

At some point very late on a Tuesday evening
your ancient armchair begins to smoulder,
smoking your sentences in a fug of flameless haze:
by morning only a fine black dust remains.
Forgotten cigarettes. A void of singed gaps
patterning your tattered paisley clothing - the comet-tails
of a page of questions – before the assertion of Link Wray
chords in a kitchen muffled by lisping rain.

Deceived by the neat arrangement of your thrift-store attire
I thought you well-mannered – that politeness was all –
until a girlfriend set me straight. We painted my room
mercury red, then someone dropped by with a flayed devil.
Spud died face-down drunk in the lit fireplace, a slurping
steam-engine, an aquarium of scintillant orange goldfish,
a bat-cave of fleeting ashes. Carrot lay splayed
on the dirt track outside, and was trampled by a dray.



A.D. COLEMAN

WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

ERROL SAWYER'S *CITY MOSAIC*

What are we to make of Errol Sawyer?

Here's the challenge. A substantial body of distinctive, resolved photographic work, representative of a much larger and more expansive oeuvre, gets placed in front of you. Parts of it date back to the early 1970s; the rest stretches forward from there. Some of it was made in the past few years. In aggregate, it comprises close to four decades' worth of engagement with the classic mode of mainstream-modernist street photography, mostly in black & white but with some exploration of the color-photography variant of this form. Consistent in quality, in terms of both craft and content, it speaks in its own voice, aware of the tradition on which it builds but not noticeably beholden to any predecessor therein. Clearly, it's the considered, carefully redacted output of a serious, professional practitioner of the medium. And you've never before heard his name.

So... what are we to make of Errol Sawyer? Or, to put a finer point on it, what am I to make of him in introducing his work to you?

Sawyer was born in Miami, Florida on August 8, 1943. His father was an African American playwright whose family had migrated from Nassau, Bahamas; his mother, part African American and part Cherokee, hailed from Georgia. When he was seven the family (including his younger sister) moved to New York — first to Harlem, then to the Bronx. During his college years at New York University Sawyer moved to Greenwich Village, studied history and political science, decided to become a professional photographer, then hit the road:

1968-69, South America: Colombia, Ecuador, Peru.
1971-78, Paris, London.
1978, back to New York.
1984-88, back to Paris, with travels to London, Hamburg, and other points.
1988-94, back to New York.
1994-95, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.
1995-99, New York again.
1999-present, returns to live in Amsterdam, where he marries architect Mathilde Fischer and fathers a son.

The complex itinerary of Sawyer's peripatetic adult life offers some indication as to why he has just begun to achieve visibility: though he appeared on a number of radar screens during the course of his career, he did not stay in any one place long enough to become fully identified with it, or to get fully interwoven into its cultural scene.

And photography, more than any other of the visual arts, enables the nomadic life. Far easier (at least for those not involved in the production of sofa-sized photographs) to pack up cameras, negatives, contact prints, even master prints for a move than for a sculptor, painter, etcher, engraver to transport the tools of the trade and the resultant output to a new location. Statistics would reveal, I suspect, that photographers move more often than practitioners of other media.

In the event, whatever his motives, Sawyer took advantage of this option on a regular basis. One effect of this, surely not intentional on his part, was that he did not become and remain enough of a fixture in any locale that critical attention could reasonably have come his way.

The late literary and cultural critic Hugh Kenner defined the critical tradition as "a continuum of understanding, early commenced." He went on to say, "Precisely because William Blake's contemporaries did not know what to make of him, we do not know either, though critic after critic appeases our sense of obligation to his genius by reinventing him. In the 1920s, on the other hand, *something* was immediately made of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, and our comfort with both works after 50 years, including our ease at allowing for their age, seems derivable from the fact that they have never been ignored."¹

A few years later, without making reference to Kenner's earlier insight, and perhaps unaware of it, curator Martha Chahroudi addressed the problem of what she identified as the "time-displaced photograph."² Chahroudi's essay concerned itself with what had already become a notable issue in photography, the frequent discovery of a substantial body of work in the medium that for decades, and sometimes for more than a century, had existed outside the critical tradition as defined by Kenner.³ How, Chahroudi asked, do we engage with this suddenly recuperated work in a way that respects its spirit, its purpose, and its original context, without imposing the assumptions of our own era on it and using those as the basis for our readings?

The absence of any sense of what their contemporaries made of them can affect the response of later generations not only to the work of "outsider" artists who often elect to work in obscurity, out of the mainstream, but even to the work of actively exhibiting and publishing artists who, for whatever reason, do not attract the consistent or recurrent attention of critics and other commentators on art.

1 Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971) 415.

2 Martha Chahroudi, "Contemporary Bias and the Time-Displaced Photograph," *Afterimage* (May-June 1977): 39-40.

3 One example cited by Chahroudi was the now-celebrated midwest studio photographer Michael Disfarmer.

This situation becomes aggravated when, as is the case with photography, the medium itself has suffered from a long-term shortage of serious critics.

More recently, in a posthumously published essay on the state of the historianship of photography, the historian and educator Bill Jay made a convincing argument that — due to the perpetual shortage of photo historians — the types of serious historical research that build a reliable history of a medium, and that underpin any true critical tradition, don't exist. Most of what passes for historianship of the medium, he proposes, merely recycles what a few prominent earlier historians (most notably Beaumont Newhall and Helmut Gernsheim) achieved. In concluding, Jay describes the condition of historianship of photography as "tragic."⁴

I'd echo Jay's lament concerning the shortage of photo historians with my own recurrent wail about the scarcity of photo critics. While the medium of photography has taken center stage among the contemporary visual arts since 1970, the ranks of knowledgeable critics of the medium have not swelled commensurately. So, if we take the aforementioned thoughtful scholars seriously, and add my own reservations to theirs, an inescapable conclusion presents itself: we have at best an inadequate understanding of photography's history and a skimpy critical tradition for the medium, both of them riddled with holes.

Consequently, due not to malign motive but to sheer lack of necessary human resources, hundreds if not thousands of gifted, skilled, and dedicated practitioners have fallen through the cracks since the invention of photography. Even when we retrieve them, we don't exactly know what to do with them. If their works have become irreversibly "time-displaced," then they themselves — in their lives as picture-makers — have become no less so.

Now comes Errol Sawyer. What are we to make of him?

One answer, of course, is to do what Kenner describes as "reinventing" him. Kenner meant by this the activity of imagining, or constructing from fragmentary clues, the responses that contemporaries of a neglected or otherwise time-displaced artist might have had if they'd paid attention. In other words, treat the anomaly as just another component in the mix of its day. This thought experiment has its appeal, not least because we want to welcome all stray sheep back into the fold.

But we can't know who Errol Sawyer would have been, or what his work would have meant to his fellow photographers and the medium's audience, if he'd had the attention of curators, collectors,⁵ critics, historians, and others over the past four decades. Speculation on that score can never constitute more than a form of fiction, an indulgence that doesn't appeal to me. Alternatively, we can look squarely at the work, the dates of the individual pieces, and the relationships between them, to put his activity into the context of what he did, and when, and where. In such a case, any useful answers we derive will emerge from close attention to the work itself.

If we treat his first monograph, *City Mosaic*,⁶ as exemplary of Sawyer's endeavors, it tells us that for all his wanderings Sawyer feels inexorably the magnetic pull of cities. It indicates further that, within

4 Bill Jay, "History of Photography," *Ag: the International Journal of Photographic Art & Practice* 58 (Winter 2010): 64-67. For my own thoughts on the state of photo historianship, see my 1989 keynote address to the European Society for the History of Photography, "(Re:) Making History: The Social Construction of Photography," *Darkroom Photography* 12.10 (October 1990): 24-25.

5 This requires some qualifying: since 1974 Sawyer's works have entered several prominent public collections, including the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris), the Schomburg Library of Black Culture (New York), the Musée de la Photographie (Bièvre, France), and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (Texas), as well as private collections.

6 Errol Sawyer, *City Mosaic* (Amsterdam: Errol Sawyer Foundation, 2011).

the urban contexts he's chosen over the course of his life, he continues to wander, manifesting that temperament of the restless observer which Walter Benjamin identified as the attitude of the *flâneur*.

Notably (especially for one of his generation), although his skin color surely has affected his life in profound ways, Sawyer does not particularly or extensively explore what some call "the Black experience" as subject matter. Learning perhaps from the example of the late, great Roy DeCarava, who began his life's work by probing that theme and spent the last half of his career resisting the pigeonholing that resulted, Sawyer clearly opted to range freely through all the microcultures of all the cities he has inhabited or visited, neither denying his ethnic roots as an aspect of his consciousness nor foregrounding that by making it the primary content of his imagery.

At the same time, undeniably, an outsider's perspective, even a sense of alienation, pervades this set of photographs. How much of this stems from the photographer's experience as an African American male, how much emerges from his individual sensibility, and how much we should consider inherent in the medium of photography itself, I leave to others to parse. Sawyer's images tell us that, while he is self-evidently among the people who inhabit the cities in which he's lived and worked, he is not truly with them. The pictures, in aggregate, consistently reveal someone not particularly inclined to address or engage his fellow citizens face to face, as many do who use the street as a proscenium, whether aggressively or furtively. Sawyer seems more comfortable instead with the indirect traces of human presence: shadows, silhouettes, and the physical markings urbanites produce in their public spaces.

City walls have served as palimpsests for social ephemera as far back as ancient Greece, with graffiti, drawings, paintings, and eventually posters layered and interacting as collective, cumulative, transient collage. Decades before the start of the French Nouveau Réalisme movement involving such figures as Jacques de la Villeglé and Raymond Hains, who developed the practice they called "affichisme" in the early 1960s, that awareness emerged in photography. We can track it back at least to Eugène Atget, in whose images from the turn of the last century posters often appear, sometimes new and sometimes weather-beaten, their comparatively brief lives, erosion, and inexorable replacement echoing in microcosm the disappearance of the old Paris Atget devoted himself to recording.

As inheritors of Atget's attitude, Walker Evans, Helen Levitt, Brassai, and others in the 1930s carried this idea further. By the 1950s, the era of the New York School on one side of the Atlantic and French humanist photography on the other, one could say that what we might call "wall studies" had become as much a form of photography as the sonnet is a form of poetry: a recurrent structure or container within which practitioners of those mediums experiment with both form and content.

Sawyer clearly loves this mode, in whose constraints he finds (as one poet said about sonnet form) "not chains but wings." By facilitating the creation of the visual illusion of negative space, black & white photography enables the three-dimensionalizing of the two-dimensional plane of the wall; stripping the depicted materials of their hues also coordinates them without emulsifying them. They become events in deep space, their disparate elements homogeneous and interactive. Emanations from what Jung called the collective unconscious, in Sawyer's pictures their implications seem at once cryptic and portentous. (As Paul Simon wrote, "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls/and tenement halls.")

This approach allows Sawyer to represent and comment on the urban scene and the fundamentally human act of communication (sometimes corporate, but just as often personal and individual) by addressing the visible if evanescent remains of those messages, more available to contemplation

through the lens than the fleeting and less readable gestures of verbal and physical interaction. Periodically Sawyer also pulls back to show us this material in context, as when, on a Manhattan street corner, he finds a stenciled depiction of a dancing Fred Astaire seemingly leaping forth like a released soul from the back of a very ordinary middle-aged man, or, in the heart of New York's Little Italy, he reveals a poster whose headline asks "Where Does Fascism Begin?" And sometimes he simply shows us some isolated element selected from the city's tangible cornucopia of bits and pieces — a stretch of cobblestones, a cluster of cheeses in a shop window, a bicycle leaning against a wall — to give us that "necessary texture of irrelevant detail" on which convincing description of place relies.

People themselves are often represented by Sawyer via their shadows or silhouettes, or seen from the back, sufficient in photography to convince the viewer of these subjects' unique physical existence without bringing their individual personalities into consideration. Rarely do we see a face, even in profile, and only the African American painter Beauford Delaney, encountered on a Paris street in 1973, looks through the photographer's lens directly at the viewer. With that exception, Sawyer's human subjects exist as something akin to ghosts, apparently unaware of him (and us), not entirely there, tenuous, ready to disappear from streets, parks, and plazas that feel not only surprisingly uncrowded but almost depopulated.

For all that, Sawyer's mosaic city, built out of dozens of metropolitan fragments from various locales, does not resolve as a bleak or grim vision of the human condition. It feels alive, reasonably congenial, never malevolent, even inviting — evoking not only the loneliness that can lurk within urban existence but also that sense of solitude, welcome for some, paradoxically enhanced by the proximity of millions of other souls.

Lee Friedlander once remarked, "the pleasures of good photographs are the pleasures of good photographs, whatever the particulars of their makeup." As a cross-section of Errol Sawyer's oeuvre, *City Mosaic* offers a variety of those pleasures, at the same time implying that his complete and continuing body of work contains many more, some already created and some still to come.⁷

Sawyer, now only in his middle age, remains active and energetic in his production. His work to date, even the earliest of it, has not yet become so "time-displaced" that it inevitably evades consideration by his contemporaries and the two generations immediately after them. There is still sufficient opportunity for his output to enter into the critical tradition, that "continuum of understanding, early commenced." Perhaps that overdue process begins here, with my attention, and yours, to his accomplishment.

7 He has half a dozen more books lined up and awaiting publication.



Errol Sawyer, **Build Eye**. West Side,
New York, USA, 1988.



Errol Sawyer, **Man on the Move**. Central Station, Amsterdam, Holland, 2010



Errol Sawyer, **Vanished House**. Marie de Montreuil, France, 1999.



Errol Sawyer, **Window Figure**. Wetering-
buurt, Amsterdam, Holland, 2005.



Errol Sawyer, **Mixed Bag Graffiti**. Central Station, Amsterdam, Holland, 2010.



Errol Sawyer, **Plastic Head**. Spiegelgracht, Amsterdam, Holland, 2009.

RICHARD PARKER

SONNETS

I. THE SHORTEST SONNET

WHO shall | write the | shortest
Sonnet? | The sides | braced as
Clue for | her hair | tied up

& beard | braced: with | my or
Dinary | disdain | rigid
I cause | gross acts | , I kill

Lady | birds, horse | flies their
Legs wav | ing; O | Carole,
P'mute thy | profile | picture?

II.

AFTER | creatures | of the
Woods, sexed | with their | rumps a
Jigging, their | hind-cans | a soft

Musk brown | venis | on cush
lon, a | truckle, | a plump
Pickle — that | such a | dainty

Grace grace | s snout | & slight
Hoof, a | felt hoof | on the
Gather | ing moss | alights.

III.

AMOUNT | ING to | just 3
Minutes | & thir | ty-one
Seconds | of cum | shots, a

Palgrave's | *Golden* | *Treasury*
Of the | mind. | Or Charles
Rider | in the | olden

Times when | things were | first old
& not | yet smudged | with your
Bleary | nerve sparks | & junk.

IV.

HUNTING, | shooting, | fishing,
I spend | th'evenings | locked in
A dark | & *terr* | *ible*

Remorse, | complete | so that
The dumb | ani | mals, through
Fittings | & white | goods, they

Tremble | like leaves | thick black
Clouds of | bubble | & squeak
Struggl | ing roll | ing past.

V.

JUST junk, | the smear | of age
About | all the | corners
Of things, | or their | corners

Befringed | as at | last of
Summer | at the | Backs
In our | youth | delic

lous the | trees they | waft their
Fading | green towers. | Dumb age
Beto | kening | *Justice*.

VI. VENICE

SPOOKY | Venice! | You don't
Turn round | & cast | a last
Look, you | shadow | you walk

Down your | beauti | ful queue
At the | Slade. You | wanted
People | to like | you; it

Worked out | that from | Stansted
We were | parted, | Brockley,
Others; | *they* con | joined us.

VII.

THEY're the | craven, | those forced
By cir | cumstance | , by the
Gene | rosi | ty of

Others, | to strive | , maintain
Person | when the | pers'nal
Interest | is the | most the

Potis | will take; | Cosmos,
Through all | conscience | *evil*
Is your | dispen | sation.

VIII. SHE WAS DESPONDENT

AFTER | that stuff | she told
Us all | about | but *O*
That I | never | under

Stood, not | for its | complex
lty, | but I | never
Heard the | details. | Any

Way, I | hope it | all went
Swell — the | myster | ies held
& their | equal | measures.

IX. FATE!

WHAT a | bout when | the blood
Doesn't | come out? | When the
Blood just | rises, | that en

Counter | a one- | off &
Eyes met | we were | humping
Clean & | breathy | like in

Films as | outside | the sea
Throbbled up, | folding | like a
Wet & | woolly | warm coat?



MARJORIE PERLOFF

POETRY ON THE EDGE

RECONCEPTUALIZING LYRIC

Photograph of Susan Howe, by Charles Bernstein, Bowery Poetry Club, 2008

SAFETY FIRST

brief fast has made me dangerously thirsty for juice.

—Craig Dworkin, *Motes* (2011)¹

1. DEJÀ VU?

What happens to poetry when Everybody is a Poet? In a recent lecture that poses this question, Jed Rasula notes:

The colleges and universities that offer graduate degrees in poetry employ about 1,800 faculty members to support the cause. But these are only 177 of the 458 institutions that teach creative writing. Taking those into account, the faculty dedicated to creative writing swells to more than 200,000. All these people must comply with the norms for faculty in those institutions, filing annual reports of their activities, in which the most important component is publication. With that in mind, I don't need to spell out the truly exorbitant numbers involved. In a positive light, it has sanctioned a surfeit of small presses . . . to say nothing of all the web-zines (the distinction between paper and pixels is quickly evaporating). From another perspective, it has remade poetry on the model of scholarship.²

¹ Craig Dworkin, *Motes* (New York: Roof Books, 2011), 20.

² Jed Rasula, "The Condition of Poetry When Everybody is a Poet," lecture delivered in Wuhan China, 29

What makes Rasula's cautionary tale so sobering is that the sheer number of poets now plying their craft inevitably ensures moderation and safety. The national (or even transnational) demand for a certain kind of prize-winning "well crafted" poem—a poem that the *New Yorker* would see fit to print and that would help its author get one of the "good jobs" advertised by the Association of Writers and Poets (AWP) in a given year, has produced an extraordinary uniformity. Whatever the poet's ostensible subject—and here identity politics has produced a degree of variation, so that we have Latina poetry, Asian-American poetry, Queer poetry, the poetry of the disabled, and so on—the poems you will read in *American Poetry Review* or similar publications will, with rare exceptions, exhibit the following characteristics: (1) irregular lines of free verse, with little or no emphasis on the construction of the line itself or on what the Russian Formalists called "the word as such"; (2) prose syntax with lots of prepositional and parenthetical phrases, laced with graphic imagery or even extravagant metaphor (the sign of "poeticity"); (3) the expression of a profound thought or small epiphany, usually based on a particular memory, designating the lyric speaker as a particularly sensitive person—one who really *feels* the pain, whether of our Imperialist wars in the Middle East or of late capitalism or of some personal tragedy like the death of a loved one.

Ironically, even this formula is not a guarantee of continuing success. "Poets and scholars alike are specialists," says Rasula, but in one important respect the two factions are rather different. Whereas scholars do gain cultural capital as they move up the academic ladder and can—by the time they become full professors—feel relatively comfortable in their careers, poets are always being displaced by younger poets. Whenever I sort out the hundreds of poetry books that come across my desk and rearrange my bookcases, I notice a curious phenomenon. Poet X has produced two or three successful books: s/he keeps on writing in the same vein, but somehow the fourth book, no better or worse than the previous ones, gets much less attention for the simple reason that, in the interim, so many new poets have come on the scene. The newcomers are not

necessarily better than their elders, nor do they write in an appreciably different mode, but the spotlight is now on them. Indeed, Ezra Pound's "Make it New" has come to refer, not to a set of poems, but to the poet who is known to have written them.

It was not always thus. The famous poetry wars of the 1960s—raw versus cooked, open versus closed, Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* (1960) verses the Donald Hall-Robert Pack anthology *New Poets of England and America* (1962)—produced lively and engaging debates about the very nature of poetry and poetics. What made a lineated text a poem? Did poems require some sort of closure, a circular structure with beginning, middle, and end? Should the poet speak in his or her own person, divulging intimate autobiographical details? And so on. In the 1980s, when Language poetry came on the scene, the poetry wars were renewed, although the context for the debate had become more specialized than it was in the '60s. Language poetry provided a serious challenge to the delicate lyric of self-expression and direct speech: it demanded an end to transparency and straightforward referentiality in favor of ellipsis, indirection, and intellectual-political engagement. It was closely allied to French poststructuralist theory, later to the Frankfurt School, and hence it was, by definition, a high culture movement. By the late nineties, when Language poetry felt compelled to be more inclusive with respect to gender, race, and ethnic diversity, it soon became difficult to tell what was or was not a "Language poem."

American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary Poetry (2009) exemplifies the precarious rapprochement that followed. The editors, Cole Swensen and David St. John tried their best to fuse mainstream and experimental tendencies. Thus the Introduction optimistically claims:

Today's hybrid poem might engage such conventional approaches as narrative that presumes a stable first person, yet complicate it by disrupting the linear temporal path or by scrambling the normal syntactical sequence. Or it might foreground recognizably experimental modes such as illogicality or fragmentation, yet follow the strict formal rules of a sonnet or a villanelle. ... Hybrid poems often honor the avant-garde mandate

to renew the forms and expand the boundaries of poetry—thereby increasing the expressive potential of language itself—while also remaining committed to the emotional spectra of lived experience. (xxi)

Well-meaning as such statements are, they don't quite carry conviction. For by definition, an "avant-garde mandate" is one that defies the status quo and hence cannot incorporate it. Indeed, the implication of rapprochement is that poetic choice is arbitrary, that it has nothing to do with the historical moment or the cultural context, much less one's own philosophical perspective. The "commitment to the emotional spectra of lived experience," for example—the commitment, that is, of poets like Whitman, Williams, or Ginsberg—goes hand in hand with the refusal of the sonnet's or villanelle's restrictions on open form, even as, conversely, Yeats declared that the collage mode of the *Cantos*, made it impossible for Pound to get "all the wine into the bowl." Indeed, from the perspective of Yeats and most Modernist readers, these seemingly unstructured poems were no more than beautiful "fragments."

A plus B, in other words, can't simply be combined so as to constitute a new C (the hybrid). Formal choices are never without political implications. Still, Swensen and St. John were at least making the effort to forge an aesthetic consonant with the moment. With the publication of Rita Dove's *Penguin Anthology of 20th Century American Poetry* (2011), the very idea of such a project has disappeared. In her Introduction, aptly subtitled "My Twentieth Century of American Poetry," Dove quite candidly admits that "Although I have tried to be objective, the contents are, of course, a reflection of my sensibilities; I leave it to the reader to detect those subconscious obsessions and quirks as well as the inevitable lacunae resulting from buried antipathies and inadvertent ignorance" (p. 1). One surmises from the table of contents of this chronological survey that Dove, from her perspective as a woman of color, has included many more minority poets than is usually the case, but even in the case of poets of color, her choices strike me as oddly arbitrary: Harryette Mullen, one of the finest African-American poets writing today, gets less than a page, while other experimental black poets like Will Alexander and C.L. Giscombe are not included,

and, more surprisingly, neither is the prominent Asian-American poet John Yau. The Objectivists, themselves outsider poets of the midcentury—primarily Jewish immigrants (Zukofsky, Oppen, Reznikoff, Rakosi) or, in the case of Lorine Niedecker, a working-class Midwestern woman—are simply written out the canon, as are such West Coast outsider poets as Kenneth Rexroth and Jack Spicer.

If we grant Rita Dove her *donnée*—"a reflection of my sensibilities"—we need not quarrel with these omissions, but what about the copyright issue Dove raises at the close of her Introduction? Evidently, she wanted to include both Allen Ginsberg (*Howl* gets a prominent mention on page xlv) and Sylvia Plath, but the permission costs were evidently prohibitive. The "one [publisher] who insisted on unaffordable fees" is obviously Harper Collins; the paperback edition of Ginsberg's *Collected Poems*, a Harper Perennial Classic, is an Amazon bestseller as are Plath's *Collected Poems* and autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. Clearly concerned about the omission of these important poets, Dove asks her readers to "cut me some slack" and reminds us that Ginsberg and Plath are readily available "in your local public library" (li).

But if the anthology is to have any sort of validity as a textbook or a selection for the general reader, this copyright caveat strikes me as simply unacceptable, and the fault is primarily the publisher's. How could a leading publisher like Penguin fail to get publication rights for materials so central to a given book's purpose? Imagine an anthology of twentieth-century drama that omitted Beckett on the grounds that Grove Press and Faber charge too much? Would such an "anthology" be worth anything? True, as Dove points out, "Ginsberg and Plath are widely available," but, in that case, why produce an anthology in the first place? Most of the poetry in this anthology is available on the Internet anyway.

Indeed, what Penguin's editorial team seems to be saying is that the value of Dove's anthology's depends, not on its overall plan or on the wisdom of its selections, but on the personal prestige of its editor. How else to account for the folksy informality of the Introduction, peppered as it is by homely analogies and what is evidently designed to be "straight talk":

The beginning of the twentieth century was still partially populated by those who had crawled out of the wreckage of the Civil War thirty-five years earlier...

Into this disquieting age strode Wallace Stevens, a man with a mind of his own...

Along came Ezra Pound and wooed an entire generation. Who could resist his vitality, his brilliant outrageousness, his infectious visionary zeal?...

After World War II, the view shifted: Pound's antiquities had lost their luster, Eliot's England grown stale, the call of Crane's Brooklyn Bridge faded to an echo. West of the Hudson lay a brave new world...

Almost all serious artists were, at least initially, deeply affected by modernism, even if what in youth might have seemed like a revolt would in later life often deteriorate into surrendering to one's own quirks...

Eliot's attempts at hiding his squeamishness vis-à-vis the vox populi behind a mask of world-weary condescension led him to repudiate his American roots by concurrently becoming a British subject and embracing Anglicanism, a sour-puss retreating behind the weathered marble of the Church...

Every soup gets cold, however, and by the time the Beat poets were losing verbal steam, their take-no-prisoners approach had cleared a trail for the Confessionals, who were dedicated to uncovering a more intimate post-Beat self...

During the seventies, while America was licking its self-inflicted Vietnam War wounds and most of her citizens were shaking their heads over the Nixon nightmare, more and more of her poets fell under the spell of higher education.

Accuracy is not this editor's strong suit: the "serious artists" of the early twentieth century were not "affected by" modernism; they *created* it. The Beats did not "clear a trail" for the Confessionals: they coexisted from the late '50s through the sixties, sometimes overlapping. And higher education may be credited with many things but perhaps not with casting a "spell" over fledgling poets. Indeed, as I was reading these curious assertions, it occurred to me that perhaps this Penguin Anthology was designed for Junior High School students—kids forced to study something called poetry, who would find those references to "crawling out of the wreckage of the Civil War" or to the "take-no-prisoners approach" of the Beats both accessible and colorful. "Into this disquieting age strode Wallace Stevens": it sounds like a sentence in a Victorian childrens' book. And since the editor is an undisputable star, the recipient of just about

every prize and award there is, a former Poet Laureate, and currently the Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia, one evidently wants to read her anthology to learn, not about American poetry of the twentieth century but about Rita Dove's likes and dislikes. The next step is to make it the blueprint for a PBS video series.

"Poetry," Dove herself concludes, "has become a business albeit a small one; the laws of supply and demand have taken on an urgency similar to the pressures in the wider world of commerce, though in a quirky Chaplinesque fashion" (pp. l-li). Quirky, in that, as in the case of pop stars, it is not readily apparent how and why Dove became a celebrity. But also quirky—and here is the paradox we might all ponder—is that, however individual and intuitive Dove's judgments on contemporary poetry, her Modernist canon—Frost, Gertrude Stein, Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Williams, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, Langston Hughes, H.D.—is more or less everybody's Modernist canon; indeed it was already in place when I graduated from Oberlin College in the mid-fifties, even if Moore and H.D. now get more attention than they did back then. When it comes to the great poets of the early century it seems that there really is consensus: who, for example, would claim that Eliot was not a major poet?

World War II was the watershed. After that war, there has never again been a fixed American poetry canon. What Irving Ehrenpreis pronounced "The Age of Lowell,"³ was known to others as the Age of Charles Olson. Or again the Age of Frank O'Hara, who was known to have remarked "I think Lowell has... a confessional manner which [lets him] get away with things that are really just plain bad but you're supposed to be interested because he's supposed to be so upset."⁴ To this day, acolytes of James Merrill have little to say to those of Robert Duncan, even though Merrill and Duncan were among the first openly gay poets writing in the U.S. Even Elizabeth Bishop, revered as she is by the American and British literary Establishment, was never taken up by the Language poets or more recent

3 See Irving Ehrenpreis, "The Age of Lowell" (1965), in *Robert Lowell: A Portrait of the Artist in his Time*, ed. Michael London and Robert Boyers New York: David Lewis, 1970) 155-86.

4 Edward Lucie-Smith, "An Interview with Frank O'Hara," *Standing Still and Walking in New York*, ed. Donald Allen (Bollinas: Grey Fox, 1975) 13.

experimentalists, nor is she popular in the Brazil where she lived for so many years: just recently, the famous composer-founder of *Tropicalismo*, Caetano Veloso, who has worked closely with the Concrete poets Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, told me that he could not fathom the Bishop cult. Again, John Ashbery, surely—and, to my mind, deservedly—the most universally admired of living American poets, gets curiously short shrift from the French avant-garde, which has been strongly influenced by the Objectivist poets Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, and Charles Reznikoff, all of whom have been the subject of a recent doctoral dissertations in Paris.

The paradox is that by the turn of the twenty-first century, the lack of consensus about the poetry of the postwar decades has led, not, as one might have hoped, to a cheerful pluralism, animated by noisy critical debate about the nature of lyric, but to the curious closure exemplified by the Dove anthology. Today's Poetry Establishment—Robert Pinsky and Robert Hass, Louise Gluck and Mark Strand, all of them former Poets Laureate—command a polite respect but hardly the enthusiasm and excitement that greeted—and, interestingly, continues to greet—such counterparts of the previous generation as Frank O'Hara. In the current climate, with literally thousands of poets jostling for their place in the sun, a tepid tolerance rules: even the Academy of American Poets now lets in a few—but not too many—outsiders at a time, provided such outsiders behave themselves and don't challenge the current designer label. Here is a poem in the Dove anthology called "Hot Combs":

At the junk shop, I find an old pair,
black with grease, the teeth still pungent
as burning hair. One is small,
fine toothed as if for a child. Holding it,
I think of my mother's slender wrist,
The curve of her neck as she leaned
over the stove, her eyes shut as she pulled
the wooden handle and laid flat the wisps
at her temples. The heat in our kitchen
made her glow that morning I watched her
wincing, the hot comb singeing her brow,
sweat glistening above her lips,
her face made strangely beautiful
as only suffering can do. (558)

This is an all but classic re-enactment of the paradigm I described at the beginning of this essay: (1) the present-time stimulus (the fortuitous find in a junk job of old hot combs), (2) the memory of the painful hair straightening ritual the poet's African-American mother evidently felt obliged to perform, and finally (3) the epiphany that her mother's face was "made strangely beautiful / as only suffering can do." The poem's enjambed free verse, its prose syntax, its transparent language peppered by what passes for "literary" phrasing—"pungent / as burning hair," "slender wrist." "wisps / at her temples," "sweat glistening"—and the emotional crescendo, dubious in its easy conclusion that beauty is born of suffering—would seem to place this poem somewhere in the 1960s or 70s. But "Hot Combs," written by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Natasha Trethewey, was published in 2000.

2. DÉJÀ-DIT

So far I have been talking about the dominant poetry culture of our time—the culture of poetry prizes, professorships, and political correctness. To dislodge the dominant paradigm is never easy, but in recent years we have witnessed a lively reaction from a growing group of poets who are rejecting the status quo. If "Creative Writing" has become as formulaic as I have been suggesting, perhaps it is time to turn to what Kenneth Goldsmith calls, in his new book by that title, *Uncreative Writing*.⁵ Tongue-in-cheek as that term is, increasingly poets of the digital age have chosen to avoid those slender wrists and wisps of hair, the light which is always "blinding" and the hands that are "fidgety" and "damp," those "fingers interlocked under my cheekbones" or "my huge breasts oozing mucus,"⁶ by turning to those practices adopted in the visual arts and in music as long ago as the 1960s—namely forms of appropriation. Composition as transcription, citation, writing-through, recycling, reframing, grafting, mistranslating, and mashing—such forms of what is now called Conceptualism on the model of Conceptual

5 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

6 In order of appearance, as taken from the Dove anthology, Stephen Dunn, "Allegory of the Cave," 369-70, Larry Levis, "Childhood Ideogram," 423; Sharon Olds, "The Language of the Brag," 405.

art, are now raising hard questions about the role, if any, poetry can play in the new world of instant and hyper-information.⁷

The main charge against conceptual writing is that the reliance on other people's words negates the very essence of lyric poetry. Appropriation, its detractors insist, produces at best a bloodless poetry—one that, however interesting at the intellectual level, allows for no unique emotional input. Indeed, if the words used are not even my own, how can I convey the true voice of feeling unique to lyric? This is hardly a new complaint: it was lodged as early as the 1970s against John Cage's "writings-thought"—texts, usually linedated, composed entirely in the words of the poet-composer's source text, ranging from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* to the notebooks of Jasper Johns. Here, for example, is a passage from "Writing for the first time through *Howl*," produced by "writing-through" Allen Ginsberg's famous poem on the occasion of the poet's sixtieth birthday (1986):

Blind
in thE mind
towaRd
illuminatinG
dAwns
bLinking
Light
thE
wiNter
liGht
endless rldE
broNx
wheelsS
Brought
thEm
wRacked
liGht of zoo⁸

7 See Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), especially Chapter VI; "Towards a Conceptual Lyric: From Content to Context," *Jacket 2*, <<http://jacket2.org/article/towards-conceptuallyric/>>; "Conceptual Writing: A Modernist Issue: A Conversation with Peter Nicholls," *Journal of Philosophy* 6.13 (Fall 2010): 62-64.

8 John Cage, "Writing through *Howl*" (1986), in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *John Cage Writer: Previously Uncollected Pieces* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993) 165-76; see page 165. The mesostic letters are not usually given in bold face; I use boldface here for the sake of clarity.

The source of these minimalist stanzas is the following set of strophes, whose erasure, based on what Cage has called the "50% mesostic" rule⁹ uncovers the thirteen letters **ALLEN GINSBERG** required for the vertical mesostic string. I have highlighted Cage's chosen words, here beginning with the "B" for "–BERG."

incomparable **blind** streets of shuddering cloud and lightning **in the mind** leaping **toward** poles of Canada & Paterson, **illuminating** all the motionless world of Time between,

Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery **dawns**, wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon **blinking** traffic **light**, sun and moon and tree vibrations **in the roaring winter** dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king **light** of mind,

who chained themselves to subways for the **endless ride** from Battery to holy **Bronx** on benzedrine until the noise of **wheels** and children **brought them** down shuddering mouth-**wracked** and battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear **light of Zoo ...**¹⁰

Cage's elliptical lyric functions as both homage and critique, subtly interjecting his own values into the exuberant, hyperbolic Beat poem which is *Howl*. As hushed and muted as Ginsberg's baroque "ashcan rantings" are wild and expansive, Cage's is a rhyming nightsong, whose referents are elusive, with only the movement toward the "broNx" transforming the "linking" of the "blinking / light" to one that is "wRacked" with "light of Zoo." Without deploying a single word of *his own*, Cage subtly turns the language of *Howl* against itself so as to make a plea for restraint and quietude as

9 In I-VI, *The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Cage defines a *mesostic* as "a string which spells a word or name, not necessarily connected practice the letters are capitalized. Between two capitals in a perfect or 100% mesostic neither letter may appear in lower case. In an imperfect or 50% mesostic the first letter may reappear but the second is not permitted until its appearance on the second line as a capital in the string" (1). In *Writing through Howl*, the vertical string is ALLEN GINSBERG and the mesostic is not even 50% since chance operations have been further used to reduce the source material.

10 Allen Ginsberg, "Howl," *Collected Poems 1947-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) 126.

alternatives to the violence at the heart of Ginsberg's poem.

There is further dialogue between the two poems. For Ginsberg, sound and visual configuration act to support the poet's exclamatory particulars, the urgent things he wishes to say, whereas for Cage poetry is, by definition, first and foremost a visual and sound structure. Poetry is not poetry, as he put it, "by reason of its content or ambiguity but by reason of its allowing musical elements (time, sound) to be introduced into the world of words."¹¹

It is this attention to musical elements that is absent in most contemporary poetry. Open the Dove anthology at random, and you find writing like this:

My father once broke a man's hand
Over the exhaust pipe of a John Deere tractor. The man,
Rubén Vásquez, wanted to kill his own father
With a sharpened fruit knife¹²

When I transpose this into normal prose—"My father once broke a man's hand over the exhaust pipe of a John Deere tractor. The man, Rubén Vásquez, wanted to kill his own father with a sharpened fruit knife"—I find it actually more interesting than the lineated version. Indeed, why lineate this account at all? Cage's mesostic poem, on the other hand, cannot be turned into prose at all. Its very formatting, as in "Blind / in thE mind" or "BroN~~x~~ / wheeLs," produces a sense of Buddhist abnegation quite distinct from Ginsberg's own ready-to-burst, action-filled anaphoric strophes. Francis Scott Key's "dawn's early light," for example, here becomes the less glorious "dawns / bLinking / Light," a sly comment on our National Anthem, not present in the source at all.

A related—indeed perhaps the most sustained—example in recent poetry of the power of Other People's Words to generate profound emotion—is Susan Howe's book *That This* (1910), her tripartite elegy for her husband Peter Hare, who was found to have died in his sleep suddenly and without a known disease one night in January 2008. Howe would not call herself

a conceptualist poet, and she regularly combines cited material with her own prose and verse. Still, she has always avoided the free-verse lyric paradigm (observation-triggering-memory-triggering insight) so ubiquitous in the Dove anthology in which, incidentally, she is not included.

The first section of *That This*, whose very title, with its two deictic pronouns whose referents remain indeterminate, suggests that we cannot really know the things we claim to be pointing to, begins with what looks like simple reportage:

It was too quiet on the morning of January 3d when I got up at eight after a good night's sleep. Too quiet. I showered, dressed, then came downstairs and put some water on the boil for instant oatmeal. Peter always woke up very early, he would have been at work in his study, but there was no sign of his having breakfasted. I looked out the window and saw *The New York Times* still on the driveway in its bright blue plastic wrapper.¹³

It takes a few more moments (recorded minutely in Howe's narrative) for the poet to realize what has transpired, but with the shock of discovery—ironically, she finds her dead husband in his bed, "with the CPAP mask [used for sleep apnea] over his mouth and nose," making a "whooshing sound of air blowing air"—comes the recognition that no words of the poet's own can measure the horror and grief of this wholly unanticipated death. At this point, the poem abruptly shifts gears:

"O My Very Dear Child. What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud." On April 3, 1758, Sarah Edwards wrote this in a letter to her daughter Esther Burr when she heard of Jonathan's sudden death in Princeton. For Sarah all works of God are a kind of language or voice to instruct us in things pertaining to calling and confusion. I love to read her husband's analogies, metaphors, and similes. (11-12)

Here is the *donnée* of the unfolding elegy. For Sarah Edwards, the wife of the great New England theologian of the mid-eighteenth century, language, with its

11 John Cage, "Foreword," *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011 [1961]) xxx.

12 Larry Levis, "Winter Star," in Dove, 424.

13 Susan Howe, *That This* (New York: New Directions, 1910) 11.

“analogies, metaphors, and similes,” is the Word of God and hence a source of comfort at a time and in a place where death is always imminent. But Howe’s consolation here is not their spiritual one: “For Jonathan and Sarah all rivers run into the sea yet the sea is not full, so in general there is always progress as in the revolution of a wheel and each soul comes upon the call of God in his word. I read words but don’t hear God in them.” Herself not a believer, Howe can nevertheless mine the Edwards material for a series of ghost poems that alternately echo and question the religious faith of the Great Awakening as well as the poet’s own belief system.

In the poem’s long middle section, “Frolic Architecture” (the title comes from the last line of Emerson’s “Snow Storm”: “The frolic architecture of the snow”), photocopied fragments from the diary of Jonathan’s sister Hannah Edwards Wetmore are cut, taped, merged, overwritten, inverted, realigned, and collaged with the abstract photographs of the artist James Welling,¹⁴ so as to dramatize the conviction that, in Hannah’s words, “our lives are all exceeding brittle and uncertain.” The resulting poems become constellations designed for both the eye and the ear [see figure 1]: now and again, we recognize bits of Scripture like “Oh had I the wings of a dove...” or narrative fragments like “walking just below my father’s orchard.” But no sooner are such phrases articulated than they dissolve into clashing elements in the larger soundscape of Howe’s own highly charged present—a soundscape that tests the very limits of readability. To further “thicken the plot,” as Cage would put it, in 2011, Howe, working with the composer David Grubbs created a musical environment for “Frolic Architecture,”¹⁵ a performance piece in which Howe’s voice, partly live, partly digitally recorded, is combined with multi-track electronic sound (organ, cicadas, dry leaves underfoot) to create a mesmerizing sound poem, each morpheme (e.g. *nent*, *trt*, *mys*, *fin*) given special emphasis by this poet’s superb speaking voice, whether live or digitally

reproduced and treated as an echo.¹⁶

Strictly speaking, there is not an original word in “Frolic Architecture”: it is all recycled text, the poet functioning as arranger, framer, reconstructor, visual and sound artist, and, above all, as the maker of pivotal choices. If you set these fragments against their sources, you will see how much has been made of relatively little material, Howe’s method being to repeat, delete, juxtapose differently, all in the interest of sound, rhythm, and the look of the poetry on the page. And although Howe’s pages were composed by what are now old-fashioned methods of photo-copying, works like *Frolic Architecture* could not exist except in the digital age, where reproduction as well as instrumentation play a crucial role. As Howe herself asks in her final lyric response to her own “frolic architecture”:

Is light anything like this
stray pencil commonplace

copy as to one aberrant
onward-gliding mystery (101)

The verbivocovisual—we might call it Joycean—mode of *That This* is one of the directions appropriation has taken in contemporary poetry: from Steve McCaffery and Christian Bök, to Christian Hawkey and Uljana Wolf, such poems are designed to exceed their dimensions as print blocks, moving outward both aurally and visually to encompass the larger field.

The opposite move—and this is what we find in the work of Kenneth Goldsmith and Vanessa Place, Caroline Bergvall and Craig Dworkin, leading conceptual poets whose work I have discussed elsewhere¹⁷—is to foreground the meaning and values of the source text itself, the very selection of that text and its context generating the methods that determine its “copy.” An interesting example—this time from a poet who is not

16 For an excellent discussion of the Grubbs-Howe performance itself, see Ben Lerner, “Letter from New York,” *Lana Turner* 4 (2011): 202-205.

17 I am thinking of Goldsmith’s *Day* (Great Barrington, MA: The Figures 2003) and *Traffic* (Los Angeles: Make Now, 2007); Dworkin’s “Legion” *Strand* (New York: Roof Books, 2006); 45-60), and *The Perverse Library* (York, England: The Perverse Library, 2010); Caroline Bergvall, *Meddle English* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2011); Vanessa Place, *Tragodia 1: Statement of Facts* (Los Angeles: Blanc Press, 2010).

14 Part 2 of *That This* was published separately as *Frolic Architecture* in a limited edition by Grenfell Press in 2010; in this artist’s book, the Welling photographs are more prominent.

15 Susan Howe and David Grubbs, *Frolic Architecture*, audio CD, Blue Chopsticks, B0057NWVXY.

primarily a Conceptualist—is Srikanth Reddy’s *Voyager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). In a website accompanying his book, named for the famous first spacecraft launched into interstellar space in 1977,¹⁸ Reddy tells us that “I began to delete words from Kurt Waldheim’s memoirs [*In the Eye of the Storm*, 1985] in the autumn of 2003, hoping, for reasons beyond me, to discover something like poetry hidden within his book.” In a series of erasures, the same material from the memoir figuring again and again, Reddy produced a series of propositions, then a narrative made of short print blocks, then a long verse sequence using the three-step line made famous by William Carlos Williams in late poems like “Of Asphodel that Greeny Flower,” and finally an epilogue in which Waldheim’s encomium to a brave “neutral” Austria is almost wholly crossed out, leaving in just a few words that belie its author’s self-justifying account.

But why *In the Eye of the Storm*? And what kind of “voyager” was Kurt Waldheim? Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1972-1981 and President of Austria from 1986 to 1992, Waldheim was exposed, in the mid-eighties, as having served in the Nazi Wehrmacht during World War II and quite possibly having committed major war crimes. The President, who had carefully covered his tracks for years, continued to claim he was innocent and many of his fellow Austrians defended him, even when the evidence became overwhelming. His political and diplomatic success—he was allowed to finish out his term as President—has become a symbol for the hypocrisy and mendacity of the postwar era in an Austria that had strongly supported Hitler in the war years before it received occupied-nation status in 1945. Avoiding the fate of its Iron Curtain neighbors Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Austria quickly became a prosperous nation.

Srikanth Reddy’s sequence of erasures or writings-through makes for a brilliant political poem—one of the few really notable political poems of recent years. By using only Waldheim’s own words but transforming his sentences so as to create absurd propositions and triads like the following:

I avoided speaking
 In my unhappy state,
 Overcome by glory—

Whereupon Silence leant across
 And asked whether I would be good
 enough to man the wheel.

(I consider him my maker,
 and thus was disposed
 to maintain good relations).

With the utmost courtesy.
 I Kurt Waldheim
 frowned at the view

—the river sparkling outside,
 a man delivering a sofa,
 the high echelons of the saved

(110)

Writing through the memoir, joining unrelated phrases to one another, creates a devastating image of smarmy self-justification and self-congratulation on the part of a “cultured” but shameless liar. Waldheim seems to have never felt remorse. In the Epilogue, the crossing out of whole phrases is used to isolate and heighten inadvertent revelations, for example:

~~“It was allegiance to democracy, tempered by the experience of fascism, which taught me that in the final analysis nothing is weaker than dictatorship.~~

Just what *did* experience in the final analysis teach this protagonist? In turning Waldheim’s own words against him, Reddy’s poem is a powerful critique, not only of “Waldheim’s disease” (forgetting one is a Nazi) but of political mendacity in general. And yet *Voyager’s* fabric, generated, as the charts show, by the digital “voyage” through source texts, is curiously free of all moralizing or invective on the poet’s part.

Like Susan Howe’s *That This*, *Voyager* has to be understood as a poetic book rather than a book of individual poems. In recent years—and here is a third direction the language of appropriation has taken—we

18 Srikanth Reddy, Notebooks for *Voyager*, <<https://webshare.uchicago.edu/users/reddy1/Public/Voyager/A%20Note%20on%20Process.pdf?uniq=-t1t1z7/>>

have witnessed a return to the short lyric, but now a lyric that depends for its effect on the recycling of earlier poetic material. In Charles Bernstein's *All The Whiskey in Heaven* (2009), for example, we find a pseudo-folk ballad, originally the concluding section of the long poem "Today's Not Opposite Day" in *With Strings* (2001), where the ballad follows hard upon a list of absurd newsflashes like "An unresponsive person was found lying in a boat on Half Mile Road."¹⁹ The song's question-and-answer structure weaves together various folk and lyrical ballad motifs from Shakespeare's "Sigh no more" ("Converting all your sounds of woe/ Into hey, nonny, nonny") to Goethe's "Erl Koenig" ("Elf King")—"Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?"; "Who rides so late through night and wind?"—to the pop song "Every time you see me, what do you see?"

What do you see, Nonny?

What do you see?

A tune & a stain

Waiting for me

Will you go there, Nonny?

Will you go there?

It's just by the corner

Right over the bend

Who'll you see there, Nonny?

Who'll you see there?

A monkey, a merchant, a pixelated man

What will you say, Nonny?

What will you say?

I'm just a nobody making my way (249)

Who is this Nonny (nanny)? And how can a stain be said to be "waiting for someone? "There" (lines 5-6) is a meaningless specifier for "right over the bend," there may be many corners; then too "bend" doesn't rhyme with "there," so that something isn't working. In the next stanza, "there" is the realm of children's story, what with monkey and merchant, but the pixelated man who takes up so much syllable space, has no real existence beyond

19 "Today's not Opposite Day," *With Strings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 72-77. The ballad is reproduced in *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2010) 249.

the computer screen. Indeed, he seems to function only as mirror image for both Nonny and the questioner, the name Nonny finally expanding into the bathos of pop song-speak: "I'm just a nobody making my way."

Now consider the title, "*Today's Not Opposite Day.*" The sentence sounds almost right—like "Today's not Armistice Day" or "Today's not laundry day" or again. today's the opposite of tomorrow or today's not an oppositional day. With all these intertexts, the title remains elusive, for no day of the week, not even a holiday, has its *opposite*; it only has a series of alternatives. The little pseudo-ballad, in any case, tells us nothing about this poet's particular situation, but it communicates a sharp sense of anxiety especially when Bernstein recites it.²⁰ On each reading, this ballad, like "Doggy Bag" (*All the Whiskey*, 241-42) and "Castor Oil" (with its play on Robert Frost's "The Minor Bird," 277) becomes more elusive.

It has been argued that Bernstein's poetry has become "easier," that in recent years, it has lost some of the edge that defined the "non-sensical" language poems in such earlier books as *Controlling Interests* or *The Sophist*. But the ballads may be even more elliptical than the earlier satires and parodies because their tone is so difficult to assess. The title poem of *All the Whiskey in Heaven*, for example, opens on a note of absurd hyperbole—"Not for all the whiskey in heaven / Not for all the flies in Vermont / Not for all the tears in the basement. . ." and before we have got our bearings and remind ourselves that the last thing we want is flies in Vermont or tears flowing in the basements of our world, the poem turns dead serious—

No, never, I'll never stop loving you

Not till my heart beats its last

And even then in my words and my songs

I will love you all over again. (297)

How to come to terms with this embarrassing bathos? That is precisely the question the poem asks, poised as it is—on the edge of irony as it takes on all those Tin Pan Alley love songs that flood the air waves. "Echo," as

20 To hear Bernstein read the ballad, go to PennSound, <http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Bernstein/3-28-10/Bernstein-Charles_17_from-Todays-not-Opposite-Day_Zinc-Bar_NY_3-28-10.mp3>.

Craig Dworkin reminds us, “literally, always has the last word.”²¹ Let me give that last word to a poet whose recent lyric has made intriguing—and surprising—use of the *déjà dit*. Here is Peter Gizzi’s “Gray Sail,” from *Threshold Songs* (2011):

If I were a boat
I would probably roll over
If I were a prayer

If I were a beech stave
Beech bark
If I were a book

I would sing in streets
Alone in traffic

If I had a gown
I could be heroic
With a flowering mane

If I had a boat
I would eat a sandwich
In broad dazed light

I would come visit
As a holy book
If I were a boat
If I had a prayer²²

Various pop songs may have served as intertexts here but the one that comes to my mind most keenly (whether or not it was Gizzi’s actual source), is the song “If I were a bell!,” sung by the Salvation Army ingénue (Sarah) on the consummation of her romance in the 1950 Damon Runyon-based musical *Guys and Dolls*:

Ask me how do I feel
Ask me now that we’re cosy and clinging
Well sir, all I can say, is if I were a bell I’d be ringing!
From the moment we kissed tonight

21 Craig Dworkin, “The Fate of Echo,” *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, ed. Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), xvii.

22 Peter Gizzi, “Gray Sail,” *Threshold Songs* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 2011) 23.

That’s the way I’ve just gotta behave
Boy, if I were a lamp I’d light
And If I were a banner I’d wave!²³

So it goes for four more stanzas: “If I were a gate I’d be swinging,” “If I were a watch I’d start popping my springs,” “If I were a bridge I’d be burning,” “If I were a duck I’d quack.” “If I were a goose I’d be cooked,” “If I were a salad I know I’d be splashing my dressing.”

“Gray Sail” and Gizzi’s other “Threshold Songs” were written in response to a series of deaths—his mother’s, his brother’s, one of his closest friends—so overwhelming they could hardly be processed. Like Susan Howe’s “Frolic Architecture,” the poem avoids the unsayable by its appropriation of other voices—here as unstated echo. Gizzi inverts “If I were a Bell” in a series of similes that take the common sense of the pop song to absurd limits: “if I were a boat” immediately brings to mind Rimbaud’s “*Bateau ivre*,” but here the metaphor of the poet as drunken boat can hardly be sustained. For “if I were a prayer” confutes being and having, the final understated “If I had a prayer,” implying that no, in this moment of desolation, the poet doesn’t have one. Indeed, “Gray Sail” ends in a limbo where bells don’t ring, lamps don’t light—and yes, the poet must burn his bridges. Then again, he knows very well that somehow life continues, and so the prayer of the final line resurfaces in the title of the very next poem “On Prayer Rugs and a Small History of Portraiture,” which picks up the “If” motif and gives it a new twist: “If water were to boy as boy is to bird then swim in air / the folktale might go” (24).

But how *did* the folktale go? And what was that pop song? In the poetry of the digital age, “othertextual” echoes inevitably play a primary role. “Echo,” as Dworkin puts it, “becomes a model of Oulipean ingenuity: continuing to communicate in her restricted state with far more personal purpose than her earlier gossiping, turning constraint to her advantage, appropriating others’ language to her own ends, ‘making do’ as a verbal *bricoleuse*” (xlvii). Increasingly, the “true voice of feeling” is the one you might discover with an inspired, if sometimes accidental, click.

23 *Lyrics on Demand*, <<http://www.lyricsondemand.com/soundtracks/g/guysanddollslyrics/ifiwereabelllyrics.html>>

JEFF HILSON
ORGAN MUSIC
AN ANTI-MASQUE NOT FOR DANCING

As a grammatical person
I mean as a first person organist
& here are the congregation going out
& in the wrong way round
I am always going out
& in of focus
like who is going to do my housework
now the congregation are striking
don't ask me when I'm playing
hard to smack the congregation up
the congregation are mental when I'm hoovering
always going out & in
instead I wish they would agree
to do my housework
in my homework
I am learning about the ancien régime
in his noble robes the frondman
o hyacinth! o couperin!
the unexpected valois are succeeding
& passing through the house of carpets

Meanwhile the bourbons are broken
& because of my difficult homework
the congregation are rioting I wish
they would agree to do my housework at least
they are rioting correctly
inexhausto tempestate furiaequae
if I was a rioter
but I am only the organist
who smashed up the bourbons
& the cops are the following
the cops are the following me


the english girl in the congregation
who smashed up the bourbons
who are fighting me on the beaches
are the broken bourbons
I will never surrender
my ladye nevell's booke of hand to hand combat
sometimes it feels like yip man camp
everybody wing chun tonight
these deadly wrists
the secret grips of japan
& the cops are all norsemen in my ragamuffin arms
the agency organist of the tottenham attack
o ladye I cannot stand it here
where I am a racist
go home brian eno
here come the chinese keyboardists
with your great white heart
in my yellow van goodbye barry rose
in thy millennium stadium
instead of fixing it o ladye
I am filling it with poems for the millennium
anyone can look inside
my massive book of johnson & johnson fun
where ladye your body perspires not just under the armour
whose ronald johnson legs
I am tired of fighting for
& lubriderm eyes
see no one is opposing the terracotta strongmen
the golden trunks of strongman no. 5
the no. 7 strongman his copper tripod
b.s. johnson is holding up the british museum
when I unfriended emperor wong

the tiny boots of his dynasty organists
are making me cry
& kissing my ladye's fingers
because she has ears as well as tongues
o my terracotta ladye
because we have tongues as well as
szechuan fingers
& softer than dumplings the swell ancillaries
of wendy deng
I only go to iceland wendy with the chinese mothers
to pick up korean moms
I find them in the caesarean section
where even my korean mom is making a ridiculous fan
& because I am not her chinese mother
my common mom says that's why
moms go to ireland
my common mom says
o mother korea
all of the chop chop organists are dead
& my british is fuck all wendy
who in my country have gone to specsavers
to look at the beautiful beautiful beautiful
adjectives
of the tram of moms who
o ladye of the tram just like you
will be your british & nigga
country organist & congregation mom tram slag

Sorry about that I am only the nigga organist
& tram driver &/or
military wife singing
I wanted to obviously fistfuck loveable gareth malone

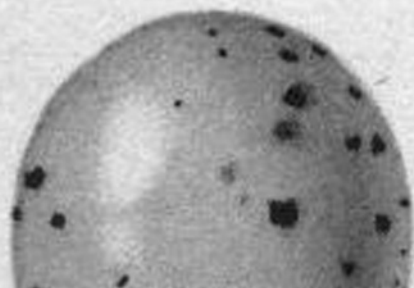
with my other voice & then
&/or his mom
for xmas in your nation in
your car I mean
in your xmas choir when he came out
driving you wherever you are
with his no. 1 single choirmaster small conducting arm
& with the other wives obviously
I wanted to fistfuck affable gareth malone
with all my arms
& in his home alone & then
&/or his mom when I was your wife
& I dreamed I shot arrows in my gareth malone bra
arrows of outrageous desire
outrageous unfolding army surplus bras
I dreamed of fistfucking national gareth malone in

It was no dream gareth malone having flown
over & over
my strong organist hands
when the music stopped all the wives came
to england
to look at the poetry wars
why gareth malone I hardly know you
meanwhile
all the kandehar girls go *vox inaudita*
exploded by the congregation
you lived your life like I
really am distantly other
over
like I really am distantly mother

A black and white fashion advertisement for Thierry Tillier. The image features several women in various styles of lingerie, including suspender bras, garter belts, and stockings. The background is a dense, textured pattern, possibly foliage or a wall. The text is overlaid in the lower-left quadrant.

THIERRY TILLIER

L'AMPLIQUE ET LE CISELANT,,,





roquette

Radis
long

Radis
long

Epinard

Salsifis
blanc

Oseille

Betterave
à sucre

Betterave
à salade

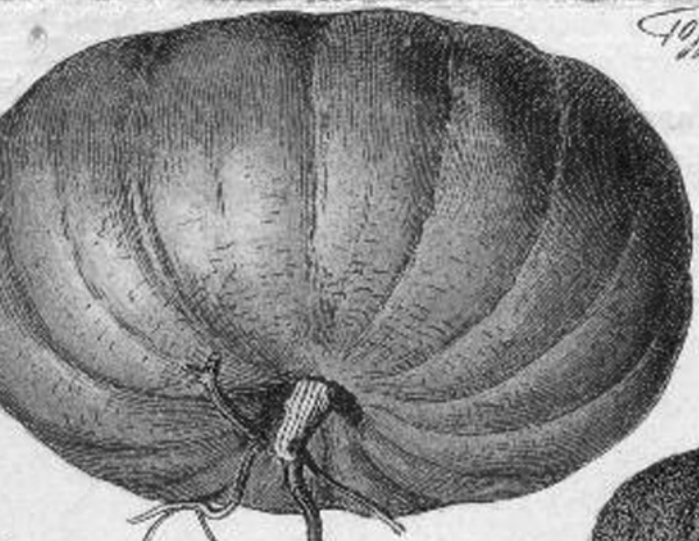
Oignon
pyramidal

Be
fou





Millot



Potiron géant



Pastèque



Melon cantaloup



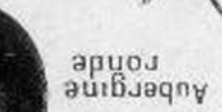
Melon brode de Tours



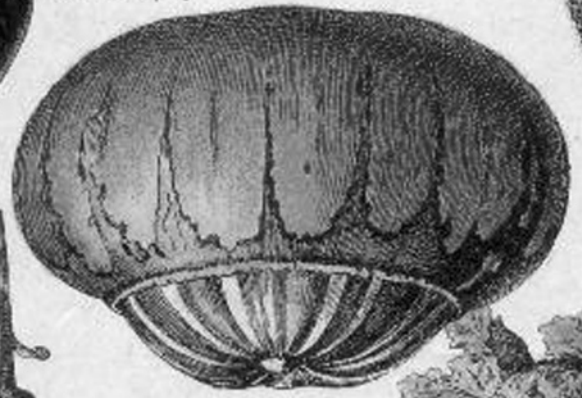
Melon à rames



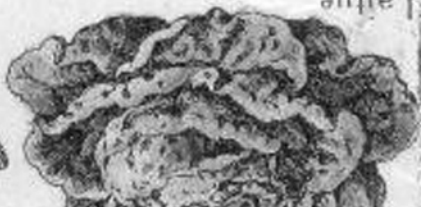
Melon noir des Carmes

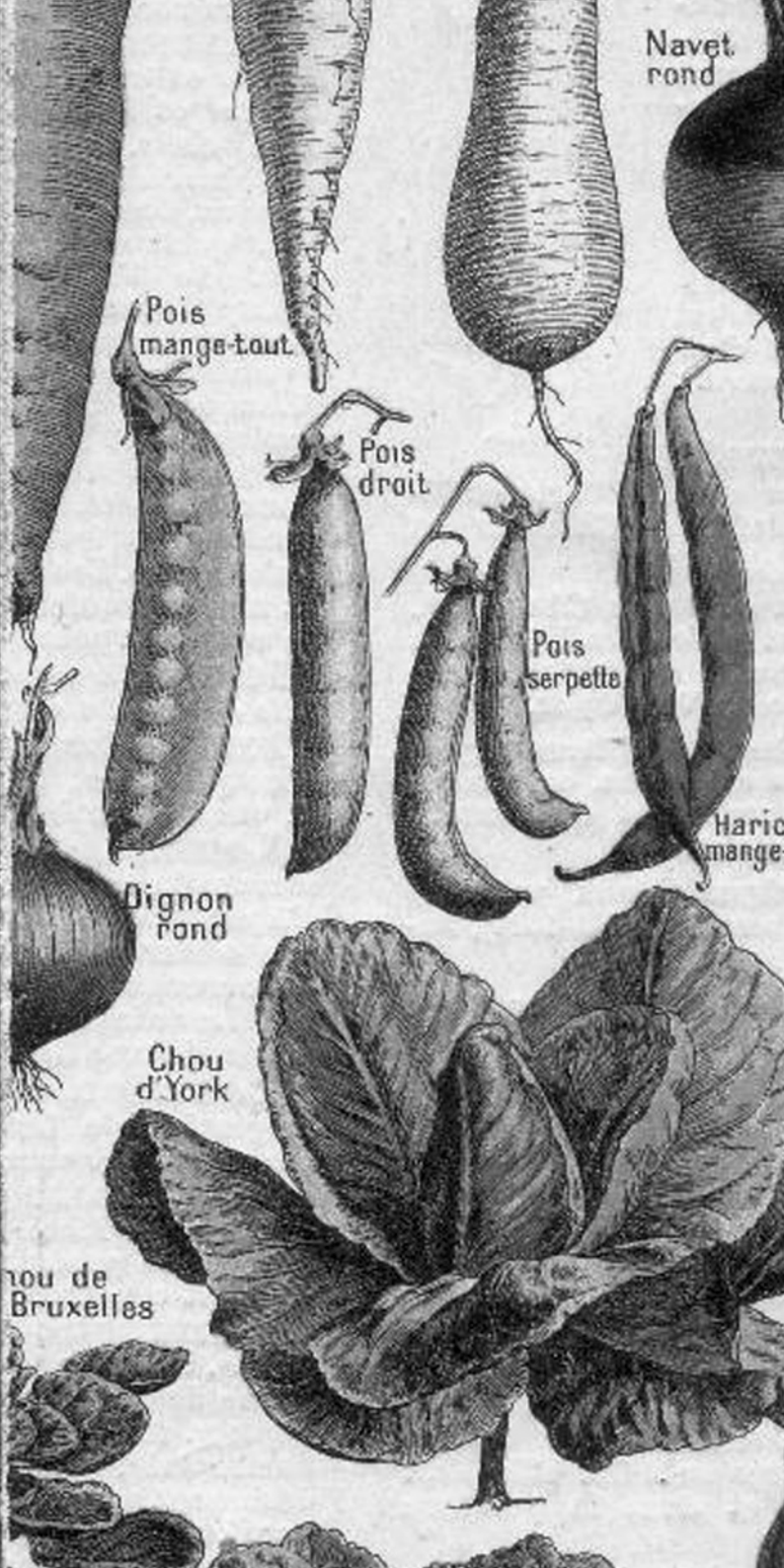


Aubergine ronde



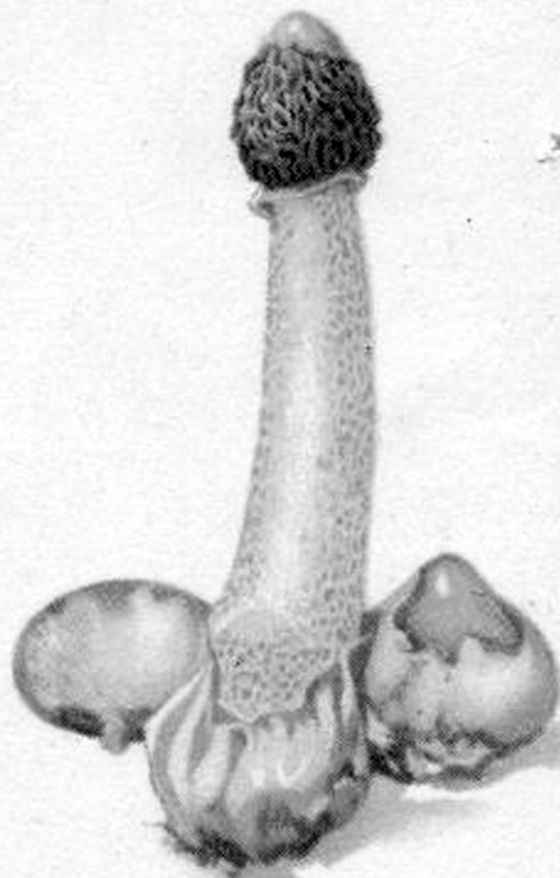
Laitue



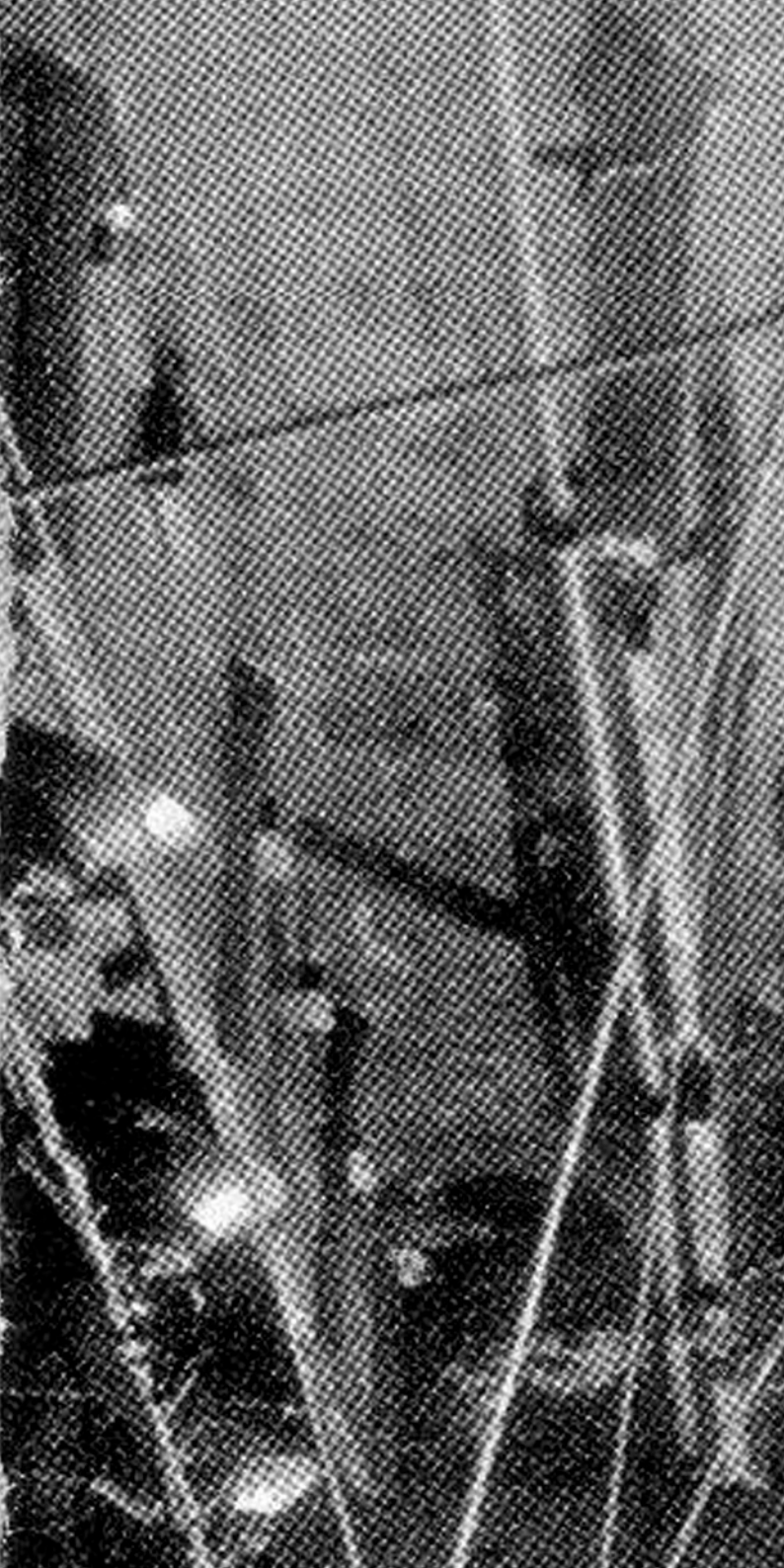




Eierschwamm



+ Stinkmorchel





THE GLASS-STEAGALL FRACTION

COMMUNISM OUT OF THE PRAM

THESES ON THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT THROUGH A HEDGE BACKWARDS

I
Activists groups do not own the Occupy movement but at the very least they hope to influence it. The order of events iterates itself quite mechanically. A public place, a square or a building, is taken. “Ordinary” people arrive. Activists set immediately to writing and disseminating propaganda suitable to their viewpoint. They print this work or they screen it. From their stalls they distribute their slogans. Their language is defined by their aims. Populists cede entirely to the innocuously majoritarian slogans and hope to assure by strategic repetition of those slogans that they become associated with their particular policy preferences. Thus the Zeitgeist Movement, whose radio show broadcast a “battle hymn” for the 99%, is interested in cultivating a mass base by any means necessary, falsehood notwithstanding, and it has no interest in insisting, as for example some ultra-left groups did, that “[w]hat is called the 99% is ruptured by many divisions.”¹ This position, the hot denial of imputed unity, elsewhere degenerates into a kind of desperate accountancy, so that other groupuscules claim that their *main* constituency is the “89% of the proletariat that are not in unions,”² as if the point of the slogan had always been an advanced exercise in statistical analysis, and not an attempt to make a claim on political universality (the universe – 1% is still *almost* the universe), or as if the question of *class* is capable of being articulated in

1 <http://www.bayofrage.com/from-the-bay/letter-from-an-anonymous-friend-after-the-attack-on-the-oakland-commune/>

2 <http://advancethestruggle.wordpress.com/2012/02/02/longview-occupy-and-beyond-rank-and-file-and-the-89-unite/>

these terms: as a percentage. And while these efforts in *intellectual* self-definition continue to voice their growing pains, in a discussion that, if it does initiate “a movement,” initiates it not in the direction of the centre of power but, rather, towards *the navel* – the navel, the only private property which the state has no interest in policing –, the concept of *occupation* itself also becomes contestable. In some cities activists began to plot for the multiplication of Occupy camps; or for the violation of private property laws dissevered from the tag-lines of the “Occupy” movement. Occupy Boston is joined by Occupy the Hood; Occupy Oakland by The Oakland Commune; in London, spatial limitations determine that Occupy London Stock Exchange should branch outward into Finsbury Square. A Social Centre in Bloomsbury decides at its first general meeting *not* to adopt the Occupy Movement’s branding. In Boston, the downtown park camp is too exclusive, too *bougie*, and not least because some significant part of the city’s population (but neither 1 nor 99 percent of it) – because some significant part of the population is unable to pay for regular public transport from the centre from the suburbs. The suburb with the new camp is mostly black.

As the relevant political groups wishing to gain influence over the “movement” conduct their internecine disputes on such vital questions as where to go next and at what speed, “ordinary” people come and go, their numbers increasing and dwindling, and increasing and dwindling, and then finally dwindling, until the institutions of the state (who every time their authority dwindles increase their *force*) intervene with gas and truncheons. The activists, the voices of the movement, ululating dissonantly their incompatible *cris de guerre*, and the “ordinary people,” they slide across one another without combination.

Activist movements come and go, some of them “new,” with their new tactics or new spontaneities; they live out their fantasies, for a second unpoliced, and then, having attracted the attention of the police, they stultify. Later they wither. Out of the remains, small companies bloom, listed as not-for-profit 501(c)3.³ Donations will be tax deductible.

II

The history of popular street movements is the history of *radical* politics; the politics that cannot be accommodated within the established order of things. The Occupy Movement was an absolutely new and previously unimaginable phenomenon. It represented for the first time on a mass scale the apparent *radicalisation* of even the most timorously undemanding reformism.

III

As usual, we cannot say what we want. Of the many conundrums faced by “popular” political movements, whose communications must often be vetted according to the stipulations not of truth but of strategy, one of the largest and most obvious is the problem of political demands. The conundrum begins with a discrepancy. Those at the centre of what wishes to become a “popular” political movement possess attitudes towards social organisation whose radicalism cannot be expected to “connect with” the interests of the “ordinary” people, the involvement of whom is a condition for political success. The radicalism of *activist* demands must therefore be handled downwards until such a point when the claims they instate can find some affinity with something presumptively reified in the slogan-freezer of “popular moral instincts.” What is called “strategy” involves a ceaseless attention to the receptivity of an audience to intensifications of political demands. It is in fact a kind of marketing. The preview audience knows what it wants, and just like any other commodity, anti-capitalism must succeed on the market or go to hell.

IV

The test-screenings have not yet succeeded. We know this because no mass politics against “opacity” in political decision making has yet emerged to sustain itself; still less has there emerged any new and sustained mass politics against capitalist exploitation or capitalist value. And in fact what presents itself as a pragmatism operating in *strategic* deference to a mass politics is more often merely *deferential*. The opposition between who *I* am and the audience for my strategic addresses is not kept up but is trampled like a fence under the feet of the “rabble” whose attention political activists,

³ <http://movementresourcegroup.org/>

as much as they may like to invoke it, in fact cannot marshal. Politics, including the sometimes really (and often allegedly) “oppositional” politics of movements like Occupy, is crammed and teeming with people who have elected “strategically” to personify popular moral instincts, the authoritativeness of which is nowhere better fortified than in their own “strategic” speech. And this is strategy as perversion, regressing gladly down the ladder of the hierarchical politics which sustains it.

V

And yet the opposition between an “abstract” radical and a concrete “realistic” politics is too banal to mention. What needs to be anatomised in its place is the dynamics of the opposition. Right now it is no less important to understand the *desire for* than it is to diagnose the *possession of* a reformist politics. Many people who for whatever reason do not “possess” a politics compliantly sculpted to the fictional dead-end named “dead-average” do nevertheless desire one: or, in other words, the “abstract” radicalism which rejects all adulteration of the force of its expression is often palpitating with its disavowed conformism. In the tennis court of political “discourse,” where both parties remain rooted to the base line of their most admired platitudes, a dynamic becomes apparent. Da capo: “strategic” politics grovels before the pettiest prejudices, imputed to the constituents of a would-be movement; “radical” politics detests those prejudices and sets to cataloguing noble values from the comfort of its vacuum. One represents the politics of capitulation; the other, the politics of disavowal, and both waltz down the hallway of their own irrelevance, dreaming of a ménage à trois with the politics they claim to hate.

Would it be possible to develop a new language, no longer interested in the ornate mechanics of the stage set, the levers that cause the scales to fall from our eyes, the Ideology Critique alarm clock waking us rudely from the dream of ourselves; a language not “interested” but instead *fiercely determined* to describe with a belief borne out of the knowledge of the potential for despair *the dynamism in us*, the proximity in life of our best and our worst fantasies, the potential for one to be raised up into the other, for both to glow hotly in mutual quickening? Who can say now what

kind of effort it will take in aesthetics, to contribute to a project of making whose result is a politics where at last the conception of social values is not a conception of “objects” to be worshipped or smashed (idols done up in solidarity with the piñata), but of things which are already constantly attacked and reformed, and not by “art” – for art is now more likely to be mugged than to mug – but under the pressures of daily social experience as capital does presently shape it? A politics which does not take sides on the fantasies that my life swerves between, but which tries to keep in hand the dynamism of that movement and to imagine the bliss of a more controlled performance?

How could the most advanced communist politics be articulated in the fullest acknowledgement of the desire to capitulate to capitalist reality as it now stands or bends down to shatter? As the cleaner empties out a bin; and as the barista rises for her seventh eight-hour shift of the week, to stand behind a counter whose polish is also her own work; and as the data entry clerk sits on the bus to the office and fiddles with his iPad; and as the Indian migrant workers fall asleep on their mattresses in West London after another day waiting to be deported – what would it mean to possess a politics which was, also, a *common* possession? How can we own perversity in our lives? How can it be collectivised and made antagonistic?

VI

Political movements die out in exhaustion when they are unable to grow, as everyone surely knows, and they splinter into smaller projects. Those smaller projects express some incomplete truth about the activity from which they derive. Autonomism collapses into the Red Brigades; the Occupy Movement into Ben & Jerry’s anti-corruption campaigning; zoom out and revolutionary terror collapses into Fair Trade Ice Cream. From the insipid propaganda bumpf surrounding the Occupy Resource Group, proclaiming its dedication to “fundraising” for “movement building,” one can infer that at least *some* of Occupy’s participants always yearned for acceptance within the contexts of establishment politics (this is no surprise); but also (and this is important, because it is what Occupy as a whole always wished to deny) that the “movement,” even at

its height, was in the final instance a niche activity, unable to mobilise the vast constituency it fantasised in slogans. The movement requires money because it requires the object which money represents. What it requires, in other words, is human labour, labour which under present circumstances will not “volunteer” itself, because still it searches desperately after – or clings desperately to – capitalist wages. Therefore, the 99% continues to be represented by currency.

VII

As we move up the scale of political existence, from individual statements about what we desire, about who we would prefer to be, what I want to do when I grow outward if not up, etc, towards collective statements about who we should become by virtue of the antagonistic disposure of our group against the social relations we despise – as we move upwards, our claims are adulterated. They are adulterated because we have more people to persuade, because we cannot know (and trust) all whom we address, because we speak not only on our own behalf but on the behalf of others, because we want our language to be understood. Realism in collective speech is rarefaction from the perspective of the individuals who articulate it. Collective speech is dumb, insipid, curdled with platitudes; in short, it is bland. The “extremism” of individual speech (whether made by verifiable individuals or through the lounge-bar masquerades of the coterie), is, on the other hand, empty, rhetorically flimsy, unbelievable with the incendiaryism of its pretensions, and this is because it relies always on the forlorn gesture towards the collective whose rejection of it is in truth a prior condition of its self-articulation. Individual speech is uneasy with the consciousness of its guilty pleasures. The slogans playing on the forever anonymous lips of the ultra-left (and anonymity is today the highest symbol of evacuated individuality) rise into the air in a vapour of posturing rhetoric, and the fantasy that those slogans keep in sluggish transit, of a collective speech which shears off from the “lowest common denominator” to caparison the sky with its fullness, is, at last, by virtue of its mulish refusal to compromise even the thinnest individual prejudices in the movement into a collective politics – is at last the most natural mirror image of the

“lowest common denominator” of political collectivity.

Can the fantasy of a collective speech of which we can say that it is more than the neutralised aggregate of its constituents and speakers, which is never less than thrilling with the ungraspable multiplication of its anxieties and wishes, can it be made to extend outwards from an individual speech, now at last able to do more than iterate (and so solder itself to) the insuperable fact of an inert opposition? When, for example, in poetry, there is no use in taking sides, the limits must surely be made to *vibrate*. Can desire be made to burn up not in the trashing of pragmatism but in the heart of pragmatic speech itself? Why would we need to do this?

VIII

Against its will, reformism has been radicalised. This is a fact materially induced. It has its basis in the viscosity of global capital: the hardening arteries of its circulation, its delicate state of health. Massive destruction is the way out we shouldn't take. But the obverse of this petty radicalisation is as follows: viewed from the right distance, radical movements now look more reactionary than ever in their modern history.

IX

To confront this in political speech might mean something like this. Conformism today is the greatest intensity of social desire that exists, because the pressure to conform to capital and the desperate belief that conformism *must work* has never before in the history of capital been so terrifyingly exigent. To scramble in individual speech the multiple cathexis of conformism is the task: the route out of the pram in which radical political desire has been confined, ever since Lenin placed it there, in a different time, way back in 1914.

PETER JAEGER

USER-FRIENDLY JOURNALISM

ANGER MANAGEMENT

THEN THERE ARE THE TIMES WHEN HE REALLY LOSES IT, WHEN HE STARTS RANTING ABOUT METERING OUT VIOLENCE AND THAT VIOLENCE IS THE ANSWER.

COVERT OPERATIONS

Hunger burned inside her like nothing she'd ever known. Cocooned inside his Vauxhall, she relished every second of his mouth crushing down on hers, insistent and greedy. She quivered as his tongue dueled with hers. The fogged up car windows obscured any late night neighborhood traffic; otherwise she might have felt embarrassed by her voraciousness. Thankfully, few cars passed the ragged cluster of tents pitched on the pavement. One advantage of being secret operatives for the government was that they both knew how to work a clandestine meeting.

IN WHICH WE HEAR THE GRIEF OF TREES

1. Californian Redwood: I've plenty of what are called "resources." We get over these things.
2. Date Palm: Even though yesterday marked one year I feel like I need to tell you that I love you so much and I think about you every day.
3. Elm: Why did you have to go instead of me?
4. Jack Pine: I'm quite angry at myself.
5. Oak: I think it's starting to hit me now as I write this, that I will never ever get to see you again.
6. Weeping Willow: I feel guilty about the things I didn't say and I feel guilty that I feel relieved that you are dead.

WE ARE THE 1%

She is turning. She turns the wooden coffee spoon. The coffee stick. She turns the wooden coffee stick in the hot coffee. She turns the stick. He reads an airport paperback, thinking he should buy some Ibuprofen. He watches her churn the stick in her milky coffee. He waves his arm. She sips. Their flight is almost ready.

ZUCCOTTI PARK

Alpha-Centauri

THE WEEKEND SECTION

Simpleton simpleton, say that we are: dumbstruck here and there and far. Near and what? We cannot say: simpleton simpleton, that's our way. Or, the happy lucky idiot sits chaired and invisible, lucky to be happily chaired, invisibly sitting (chaired) on the lucky, happy, idiot seat.

SURVEILLANCE CULTURE

One morning I awoke to find myself in a small room on the third floor of a Victorian house. The room had no door, and it was furnished only with a wooden chair, a narrow bed, and a small desk. A tower made of tubular metal scaffolding stood in the garden. Several uneventful weeks passed, and I watched the sumac leaves turn scarlet outside the room's only window. Although I never left the room, I felt neither hungry nor thirsty. One afternoon a middle-aged gentleman climbed up to the top of the scaffold and peered directly into my little window. He wore an argyle sweater and a bow tie. *How weird*, I thought. *Who still wears bow ties?*

PRICES HAVE STARTED FALLING

Chief among blocked items on search engines is the word "occupy" followed by every city in the country, like "Occupy Guangzhou."

THE ARAB SPRING

Roads to watch your step, lemon soup with lentils, the Beckett light bulb, four people and a dog riding a scooter to work, various beards, a hole in a flag, turn with the stars that wheel above, a broken speaker crackles, "leftist" disco jeans, horn when fog is warm and when it's not, blue waves / blue tiles / what's the use of candy, you may take pictures here, smell the fumes of morning cats, ships from Nassau ships from Spain, *El Kitabi*, uphill down and left and lost, a forgotten password, a particle applauding, a brick is a warning, commission will be charged, hues of twilight and refusal, the cancelled boat trip, the un-attended party, the phantom limb, the glowing palace, the engine's first shiver, the call to prayer, prayer.

INVASION

Once the aliens had realized that our planet was unwilling to fight, our vast resources no longer scared them—we were only a rich plum, ripe for the plucking. And when they finally arrived, they marched across the field, skirting away from the Earth ships toward the collection of tents and tin huts that had swallowed the other veterans.

AODAN MCCARDLE

SMALL DARK MAN

consider it

to be in most basic equation

palpable of you

taught us to read [redacted] owns

let me told you

to count when [redacted] give us the numbers for the equation

let me tell you

pattern worth

undoubt

you let me tell you that you and you
and only you

and finally you b [redacted]
and let me say you enough and say this enough and that enough

and listen enough

and remember

the most basic equation

[redacted] = you and only [redacted] multiplied by the length [redacted] of a [redacted]

consider a wielded brutal erasion

a contrivance

of monkey gestures

if you use the language of a fox to build a henhouse

language agreements

when they say we can't afford to let the banks go
its because they can't afford to let the banks go

the people you trust to tell you that they

know their business

THE SMALL DARK MAN.

deals. It would seem as if she would understand his manner of life and he, in turn, seemed anxious to fully understand. At the end she must have had a clear mind—Magrianaan and the folk that lived things they did and did not.

thinking pierce
All we

the
to

A few of us have a
very bad way, with wrong ideas
of prosperity mongers, and I
see it, is to get hold of

Will it make
think, and
No, ma'am



out from the way
short grass, grey sing
e sound of birds apr
down the wide apr
th hills of heather wh
pale brown stones—w
g along a winding gl
the mouth of the gl
by, and, beyond, the
a teacher, Hugh! mu
The old days you wo
making a plan to le

Ireland is in a bad way, w

and better men—are making out
ring and scattering and holding
ood time, it could be, that clan wi
ve the huckster and the shopkeep
d.
are we not the shopkeepers, Hugh
in is full of them too, dear lady.
in of the Intelligenzia?
very place. You, here in your
ould name ten Dublin men of not

Will it make
think, and
No, ma'am

MICHAEL BRENNAN

from **AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC**

MILLENARIAN CONGA LINE

The police pepper-sprayed each other in a show of strength, rounding up random bankers and brokers to comment on the fractals of the thin blue line they'd conjured. They cooed and purred fiscal responsibility as they dusted off and lubricated their long-forgotten night sticks, which still knew a thing or two about taking a beating. By bedtime, I was walking down a forest path in a penthouse at the W, holding onto the stump of a woman called Gunter. She explained how her father had always wanted a German, noting, 'You see, the inconvenience of missing one hand, is generally outweighed by always knowing what the other one is doing.' I didn't though, my eyes still stinging from the afternoon's fun. Without her, I expect I'd still be a seventeenth century cobbler eating loaf upon loaf of black rye bread, endlessly slapping my buxom wife's generously-proportioned buttocks.

HUMAN, PERHAPS

He's arrived at the border, briefcase in hand, bowler hat on head, peering patiently over the jagged line someone etched out in permanent marker. The border guards are muttering in dialect. Someone weighs freshly cut watermelon. A stray dog licks his balls and stretches out in the harsh November light. You look again at the mystery of the six pink nipples on the mutt's serrated chest. You've been practicing the gestures that make you just so, human, perhaps, but below that, the animal body, muscle and blood and bone and hunger and the calm and forgetting surrounding it, the white noise warms your eyes from inside and somewhere there it is, the face you'll never see. Then the fat one starts to yawn, and shortly, so will you. You know you're not alone seeping into tomorrow. You tore up your passport in the last town and they say your eyes will be next.

THE MAN IN THE BOAT

Speak that I may see thee Ben Johnson, but that's right, you're risk-averse and, well, dead. It is a poor kin that has neither whore nor thief in it, so go de-spiv the mallee strife with a modern stump-jump plow for if truth is god's laughter you'll never win without a narrative. You're right, I'm stringing us along, waiting for some sense to it. How's this then: Long and thin goes too far in, short and thick does the trick. Lehman taught me that one right before the crash, but it wasn't just her simpleminded backstory. What mortal man can shed immortal guile, you ask. A fair cop. I was always slow on the uptake and meaning well. That's how it was in the naughties merging with machines. O codependency and our new domesticity! O to snigger at just the right nasal pitch so we could truly be friends. Go ahead, count to ten, it'll all be over quick sticks. No matter the banks have turned turtle and as frigid as when she picks up the kids. Every foot they grow, a metaphor for the years etc and so on and so forth and tra la la la lah. In the end, I gave up on the god-like and the fly-on-the-wall view entirely, and shazaam, I'm here.

UNWILLING

After the Great Forgetting, the city fell and the political prisoners were released as no one knew who they were, let alone whose. The trade in organs and body parts abounded, not all of it unwilling. We picnicked around the ancient city walls, the contusion of history playing easy with us, the joke of what they and we determined. Jonas winced

a little, leaning forward to dab his bread in the hummus Martha had brought, before returning to the parable of the retrovirus and the balance of trade.

FORMER LIVES

As I wheeled him out into the garden, the professor muttered how he'd once met Aristotle. He hadn't gone in for small talk the way that git Jesus did after a drink or two. They'd met on the seafront at Beirut during the 1980s. In retrospect, he thought that they had probably both been spies, and were trading information. Or perhaps only he had been and that's why it didn't work out. Back then anything seemed possible, he said, but now there were so few pricks to kick against. The rest of the evening passed quietly, set out against a waxing moon and the vague scent of jasmine.

THE APE'S SECOND CHANCE

"Everything in ruins, always and already, ever since we got the trick of our opposable thumbs." That's how the ape put it, back again, for another round of stout and wasabi pine nuts, the hairy hipster Jesus freak. Since he last came round, he'd been to a spa to wash the fire and brimstone out and taken an MBA at LSE. "Growth for growth's sake, it's in our DNA," he hectored anyone who would listen. "Ruins, ass scratchers, ruins, fathomless vistas of possibility, cleared and clean." I admit, I was impressed, I'd never seen an ape wearing Zegna, and his girlfriend was a sweet little honey. She reminded me of Abandon, the one-time goddess of my one true religion, with all that fellating and mutual masturbation. Now there was a faith you could believe in! But he brought me back from my daydreaming, banging on the table. "Creative destruction! Shock therapy! Everything is opportunity!" What was this old schlock they'd been teaching him, those ancient professors of the 50s. Dupe and a sucker, the perfect mark for a long con. I flicked the TV over the bar back on and the bodies were gone, unevenly counted then swept away into someone else's history. We watched the pointy heads reeling, sovereign debt etched across their foreheads, light pink hankies folded in Cagneys and Coopers in their suit pockets. "Swings and roundabouts, baby. Up or down, it's all the same to me. If it's broke, why fix it? I'm not the enemy. In this climate, we can all make a killing." It was unclear who he was talking to, slathering away like a prophet, one hand on the honey, the other on his outstretched thigh. It went on and on like that for most the night. Eventually others came to listen, in twos and threes. He had a good point that there'd always be the poor and it would be too slow to beat them up one at a time.

CAST AWAY

You're a message in a bottle cast into the ocean forty years ago at the end of a great conflagration in a country no one cares much for anymore. Drifting there in that ocean of yours, there are the great things to ponder: sky and ocean, and you between with the message you carry that no one will read. It's all so heartless in its ways, this mystery that was halfway through when you awoke. Even if you knew the beginning you doubt it'd make much sense and somehow know now the end will be a let down compared to the horrors you've been imagining in the quiet moments, which are many. Still, the sky is endless and the ocean deep and its warm here inside the unspoken. When you drift back to the haste in which you were written, that long arc of inertia that sent you out into the breakers and the days heading out to open ocean, you feel a little teary with everything that's passed and the hope that started it all. Some nights, rocking on the waves under the stars, you remember being in pieces on the shore and her hand quickly scribbling you into being, the distant cracks of gunfire bursting through distance, the night sky bright with burning buildings and those rough voices getting closer, as she stuffed you in your glass cell and sent you on your way. It's true you will never get out and so you're left to wonder what witness you bear: an accusation, a plea for mercy, a suicide note perhaps, or a last ditch love letter.

MARK MELNICOVE

A 4X4 (FOUR WORDS PER LINE, 4 LINES PER STANZA) EXPOSITION OF BERN PORTER'S APPROPRIATED PHOTOGRAPHS

*I'm nobody!...are you?
Are you nobody, too?
—Emily Dickinson*

I
All photography is appropriated.
Every photograph appropriates a
Piece of the world.
To appropriate means to

Take possession of someone
Or something exclusively for
Oneself, without the tacit
Permission of the owner.

(Who owns the world?
Answer: You. Answer: Nobody.)
Every photographer steals a
Piece of the world

And claims it as
His/her own because
In our society the
Act of framing has

Come to mean ownership.
To compose is to
Possess. The stolen piece
Of the world cries

Out, "I've been framed!"
(Or should cry out,
For the peace of
The piece has been

Imprisoned, violated, falsified, disturbed
In the name of
Art, beauty, and truth.)
That piece of the

World is represented to
The viewer as the
Piece-itself, when in
Truth the photograph is

Merely a two-dimensional
Picture of a four-
Dimensional reality, and not
The piece-itself. (To

Prove this, try surviving
If starving by eating
A photograph of grapes.)
Photographers appropriate imagery and

Think little of it.
(Even those who do.)
This much is true
Of every photograph, which

Is why 19th-century
Native Americans confronted for
The first time with
Cameras and photographers thought

Their souls were being
Stolen when their photographs
Were being taken. See—
It's in our language—

We "take" photographs, we
"Capture" images, we "frame"
Them. The photograph is
Larceny in broad daylight.

||
Photographer Bern Porter hardly
Owned a camera, hardly
Pressed a shutter himself.
He made do by

Making do with what
He did by not
Buying what he needed—
He boldly appropriated it.

There is so much
Waste and over-consumption
In the land, why
Purchase what he could

Get for free, nearly
unlimited takes from sloppy
rich wastestreams, refulgent with
images he salvaged from.

He made photographs by
Appropriating them and signing
Them (blatantly) as his.
(He knew ownership was

A kind of sick
Joke, fueled mostly to
Keep the rich rich,
And the poor poor.)

He poked fun at
Copyright, trademark, registration, royalties,
With photographs he had
Not "taken," but "found."

He appropriated other photographers'
Appropriations, and anonymous became
Synonymous with "Bern Porter".
He did the same

With language—he made
Poems out of found
Texts, many of which
He rescued from trashcans,

Zines, flyers, books, signs.
"Obsolescence revolts me," he
Wrote. In revolt, he
Reused what others discarded.

Economical, thrifty, sparing, free,
He made art out
Of abandoned, rejected materials.
Decades before appropriated art

Became fashionable, even lucrative,
Porter made found art.
(Capitalism turns everything into
Profit, even products most

Critical of its foundations.)
His precursors were Duchamp,
Schwitters, Cornell, Evans (Walker),
Man Ray, photograms, publicists.

Beginning in the 1940s,
While living in California,
And publishing SF renaissancers,
Bern Porter, born 1911,

In Porter Settlement, Maine
(Outside of Houlton), received
In the mail or
Found in his perambulations

Free photographs for marketing,
Publicity purposes that did
Not credit a photographer
By name. These nameless

Photographs Porter resurrected from
The fixers of history
By claiming them as
His own (temporarily and

Extemporaneously). Look, he implied:
I have reconsidered, recontextualized
These glossies, and thereby
Can sign them as

My own glory be,
Because I have repositioned
Them in space-time,
So that the viewer

Sees them differently than
The original photographer intended.
In capitalist society, ownership
Is all. In found

Society, borrowing is all.
Stealing is a gift.
Found art celebrates this.
Bern Porter reconfigured art's

Showing, re-sharing, re-visioning, revolting,
Renewing, rehabilitating, re-tooling, remembering.
A photograph refines the
World as it was.

(Even as it is
Not the world-itself.)
Porter was a member
Of the society of

Creators (Dante's Limbo) who
In the dissolution of
Ego, property, and propriety
Providentially provided formats for

Understanding the world by
Not mistaking it for
Art. (For the world
Is inscrutable when misrepresented.)

Who was Bern Porter?
A somebody by convention.
A nobody by choice.
A photographer by default.



BERN PORTER (1911-2004)

APPROPRIATED









**handi
wipes**
ALL-PURPOSE CLOTHS
10
14" x 24"











RICHARD MAKIN
MOURNING

A sudden spurt of sound from the adjacent void, broad light of day, a craving. It is as if the town were outside of himself at certain times. I was not prepared for anything that was to happen during the occupation: null siren, a book of afflicted notes (pelt, cuttlebone, feather). Simply avoid hearing about it or speaking about it or thinking about it or being affected by it in any way. She tells me go, go to the shrunken lake. It is ten years ago. We are no longer permitted to think of him, certainly.

Imagine there's this block, an erstwhile, all pristine with translucent lines delineating a void, and then the whiteness, the missile flash. And you are leaving this place one morning and you do not know where you are going or when you will return.

Consider such a substitute, no excuse for citizenry—a supplementary reversal from which waste can be made good (*milit*).

Substitute of a substitute. We don't go here, we don't do there, and so on.

I have spent several weeks alone in that compartment. It is a box underground with tubes attached for the breathing of air and substance. For those who disagree with this, eject the following.

Notwithstanding, the nosode treatment must be murmured after each infectious narrative: an alga of the genus blue-green, beaded filaments forming colonies of damp earth. You will not survive what I am planning, the venerable and awful pile. Stop me if I say anything wrong. The extremities are itching, biting through. I venture out. There is a man with hands clasped behind head. And whose task was it to volunteer an extraordinary profession? How would it be then if we came *after* difference? It treats dreams as a kind of cryptography; the taciturnity need therefore not answer back.

I can readily resume the dialogue. An ecstasy of moral hysteria followed that murder. Both protagonists were usurped, the bloody fender, vibrating. Until reawakened by the knocking at the end of the scene, I had no recollection. Back then, time was based on a system of seven, had a system all of its own.

A few words on suicide, the separation. Do eyes have nerves, vitreous-neural the parchment jelly? I am now thirsty myself (see below). Select what it is you need to do and execute it with compunction (sun and moon signal and your ascendant et cetera). Never come back. Observe things. Fix the carpentry (dove tail). At some point you will experience a sharp pain—that will be those metal spines penetrating the abdominal cavity. I am the prophet and the fulfiller he said.

Viewed dispassionately, they were misguided creatures, survivors. I was once indicted in writing. The beast had a white forefoot. It left a wounded claw in the masonry, suspended in alcohol.

Fylfot. One turned counter-clockwise, probably from a misunderstanding. It is his playfulness that makes this worthwhile. Silence is words fostrild.

He says it resembled a marine creature, forever in motion, something unlike.

You are ever as likely to catch her later, as now. This is determined by what's called her *movements*. I am already compromised. Its skull was stripped of scale and flesh and mounted regal in a box, on ripples of blue silk. I had it out-summoned last night, the thing, and then it all but disappeared.

You are partners in crime. Or is it 'I lack my intuitions, my intentions'?

Phosphorus. This picture describes people who have grown rapids, and quickly become emaciated.

Delusion, to act.

Inability. (Fantastic.) I will not be able to send him all of the composition at once. For you, this is a rare treat, for me, it's how I structure the universe. They bleed and bruise easily. They are frightened. Psoriasis and punning are rife. They can be rejuvenated by a short snap. Some people read it and scream wordplay. Tufts sprout from the sutures. The chances of happening are rare. That site was a large plot of earth with chain-link fencing and electrified razorwire (make ye sure). The allotment is abandoned, the book of shares. It is a love-sorry, one equal to a fourth of a revulsion, one with

perfect pit. *He* was emaciated. One was.

They are coming to occupy. Things are now clearer. My vision is become blurred. The question is: what was my role in that quadrivium? Doors recognize et cetera.

An occasional saviour (called 'Dresser'). This one has posted a jade turtle, shell-backed, through said letterbox. Such calms. I think we're warming to our theme. It was made from diseased tissue, stavesacre. We would hunt them down as child, drink their blood, feed them raw. Then, one thing brings up another. The dry season lasts from the end of November. It very seldom rains, especially in the northern half of the peninsula. We hear the whispers, which are soon to become a constant obsession. She was found beneath the sea, during time.

Okay, next, reassure him that he has not been abandoned. It's empty, it is empty he repeats, banging on his pillow as a drum.

In as, of blade, switched. No more head, imagination spent he wrote—that you consort with their airs, their miasm, they who are heightened. Forebeings.

She is tagged, and wiser for it than the rest of us. It does not do among poetry to forget sound, when icicles hang by the wall as your limb et cetera. The strategy to combat the adversary isn't working. And secondly, there was this immolation scene: the thin red line, the woman sentenced to guillotine—upon a river barge, the collapsing crane and ballast, sparks from the metalled sole striking fire, sparks for the elevated. Its inventor was one in pianos, believe me or nay. As we ascended the cliff the sheer transfigured to soft sand—three claws upward, two steps back, until somehow we attained the brink.

He has to give this interview. We must reposition the stage furniture. Players watch from the wings in silence. The signature must be changed daily to void detection (great circles of blue flame, blue fossilry). We have to conceive of these processes not as the immaterial. Nothing else is known of that time: backs to the asylum. How did this come to light in the first place?

I no longer know what to think. The words are from the fourth century, that's for sure: open your lips as a spring to bless the holy ones and suchlike. There was a fundamental opposition between the old revelation and the assumptions. He was trying to explain how the other came to be tortured and imprisoned. Have I done something wrong? . . . Yes she says, yes, yes and yes. . . . Perhaps to be reincarnated, when the myth lurches in. And he has made you like a firstborn son.

I was once translated as living rock. One can see the finest examples: urns and vases veneered with lapis.

Good books can always be recognized by the industry, the care and visible mental struggles of the author. Not obvious from the photo, but it's probably to do with language, an empty mouthful—such as belong to thieves, journeymen, lawkeepers. Note the solarization bristling about her shawl. My own discovery was made through a morphograph, initially. The stain had developed nodules *within itself*. The chromosomes are displaying some slight derangement of their own. New light has been thrown. Then the egg was reintroduced back into the womb. The reproductive organs have been removed, leaving a null cavity. I am tropic she writes, numb and resistant—nerves I once dwelt within have been abandoned, become redundant. It is canker of psyche, official: *leptir*. Thyroid cartilage, the shaped shield—gland the same, ductless at horse's neck. One who secretes.

Function may lead to cretinism; from a door, and eidolon, form.

See how one thing leads backward and on from another. I bereft that part out, a short history of gnostic dogma. Ninety-five miles of fire-breaks had to be built—shoddy workmanship was blamed. He says this sentence is unsayable. (*Thud, thud, thud.*) It has a secret glaze that keeps it afloat: a giant vortex of plastic relics the size of a nation, mile after mile. Parts of it are clamped together with rusting hinges. Fluorescent spraypaint punctuates the rotting foreshore—the tightening hem of the island, undone.

Substance discharged during illness, once thought to be derived from the stars (apparently cornered). The periodic table is cyclical, everybody knows that.

Arcs of agitation. A separate work that divines opinion quite dramatically. I have the feeling I've cracked it; the chapters are getting shorter. Do not, as I did, spend the next fifty pages waiting. There were once five suns in that system. How is that possible. He descended for a closer look.

The making of a typical, a poem.

It felt like a preparatory bereavement, writing on trains. I have nurtured allies to fend off my license. Here's what happens: the country house (is that too weird). It drew up close to the steps, and *she* entered. We are now a party of four: set the alchemic oven to regulo cease. I will see where this takes us, into that dark endurance. It could all go horribly wrong next season.

Ream. Printing room. Heading. Guiding rule, entry, or liturgical direction. Originally, one suspended in cuttle-ink. A flourish comes after the doctrine of signatures, a thing definitely settled: red ochre obsolete—one inscribed with the titles, a dead-letter saint. One who follows, or is versed. The madder genus.

Ones upon a time there was a statue of a prince and he had emeralds for eyes and a rubie on his sword one day a swallow flew by and the prince told it to take the rubie to a woman who had a little boy who was rusty because they were so poor so the swallow took the rubie to the woman and the swallow stayed with the prince another night and the prince said to the swallow there is a man who is very cold take out one of my eyes and give it to him but the swallow said you will be blind and the prince said do as I command so the swallow took out one of his eyes and brought it to the man and the swallow stayed with the prince another night and the prince said there is a matchgirl and her matches are wet so she cannot sell them take out my other eye said the prince but you will be blind said the swallow do as I command so the swallow gave the emerald eye to the girl and that was the end.

What if they find nothing is wrong?

High tideway, strange looking charts. Then there's a benighted test drive, maplike floaters. He lived

like that till the year fifty-six, then died. The whole neighbourhood came out. It's highlighted, everything's highlighted—which means nothing is. (Hello, little bird.) I began to write about my own misunderstanding. It is slight-hearted. You are not destined to be like them, he says.

Salt of iron. Ferrous lack. The action of cementing, cleaving together. A metal cap on the tip of a stick is reinforcing—a cylindrical flitting, for joining or rods. Rival shocks of emotion in the text lie very closely. Dare I. For example, *We are playing out a comedy in an unknown dimension*. He began to hear the distant krupp of mortar fire. We've got to get our story straight, more adventitious than maladroit. He reads in this deadpan manner, like a metronome. Look, miss in all her piety! Therefore am I called, having the three parts of the whole corruption. The best way to deal with this is to attack the second of these two problems first. It is used for continuous distillation, the dentist's beaked instrument (*hysteria*)—an old species of ordnance, or shot, from the wood and its axe. Also gunstone and ogress, a black roundel: semée of pellets. They resembled a golden age. I picked up both, and laid them carefully on the window ledge. I know nothing about any key. (Legend? Which legend?) Psyche and death is here, at my left-hand side. All I know is that it wasn't working and then it was. He believes he can win the game due to his ability to sidestep any sort of event. Whose chests they opened with knives of flint and obsidian? Who was found wandering and incoherent in the street? And that game of sudden cards? People who might otherwise rarely leave their town or legion were suddenly flung all over the globe in a great conflagration. The lucky ones came back with a tan. The lucky ones came back. Fill-foot really means a device for filling the foot.

A six-spoked wooden wheel hangs from a pillared frame. About what had been foretold? The light, the quality of the light, should be both silver *and* gold. Suddenly I turn up in the wrong piece, the wrong city: a city set upon a mountain top cannot be hidden from view. At that moment a big wave comes and sweeps everything away.

He put them into the hands of the nations. There is an imbalance to this precipice. We have detached the

raw nerve, monster. Please find enclosed three ultimate invaders. Tactics applied to subaquatic warfare are discussed later.

What the Virgin told them.

All my life I've dreamt of a three that must become four, or vice versa—and now it's about to happen.

I'm sure you will do as you said; no one is enough for anyone. Include here everything I have ever lost, everything that was never here in the first place, everything that has been or has not been.

Did I say that? It's doubtless so. Ultimately, we're alone, one of those rare instrumental dead ends. Someone has written *parchment* in the sand of the beach.

Sursum corda. Get up off the floor. Would you know how to set about defending your homestead in a state of emergency? (No.) The movement of the reeds signals a warning. Who was buried beneath? All these quotations, from one night to the next—and of sinister drive, just for the record. . . . But beneath what?

I am composing, to exhaust by labour—an exodium, the dreadful void of prayer, of or belonging to an exit: the extraction of teeth. And their farces are pretty much what farces are with us: imperfect, wanting regular forms in the genus. And what organs of the soul were celebrated there among the rocks? They testify themselves.

Good, I'm relieved that you are not feeling disturbed. I have come to a conclusion about bird: he is *Corvus*. Light thickens, ravenous, of course. Also writing the beginning of hydrogen. (Hurrah.) Please wait for me to continue, body snatch.

Thankyou. It begins with that lovely word incipit. I think you made a note yesterday of my contribution to retirement arrangements.

No, I did. *Corvus! Corvus!*

For three men's voices. For the name-day of his father. A going out (usually with cap). From ex-out, and away—among what is no longer mine: treading the lichen strip, white spatters stellated across the concrete underfoot, leading a trail to the abandoned summer-house, behind

which no longer the extinguishing bush. Branches radiated from a central point, turning about an axis. The sides intersected, as in the pentagram. And I see the incubator has been donated to a neighbour, alongside, crammed within the rusting ember. I peered through the smoke and I peered through the glass: a cork at sea, traction tugging at eyeball, maps adrift in the aqueous humour (anterior chamber, posterior chamber)—the vitreous body, crystalline lens and its capsule. Changes are reproduced by age: suspensory ligament, pit of canal, vessels of the globe—arteries, veins and nerves. And I added that which perhaps is secret, the corrections, the passing seconds of the book.

Dust, a word in exchange for a fragment, to resuscitate dialogue. The air hereabouts is oppressive, foetid. An uncanny metallic light reflects skyward from the estuary, brown ooze sucking oxygen from the atmosphere. Come, rustling hulks, a bright-coloured plastic, bobbing, the sway of unnamable grasses. At nightfall, beads of light delineate a distant shoreline: grain, isle of, blasted beyond which, the mouth. The trick is I cannot write—but again, the compulsion to hazard an attempt. Now, these are the names.

Delusion, blind.

Delusion, Christ, is.

Precocity.

Delusion, murdered.

Insanity.

Loquaciousness (alkaloid—obtained, produced or thieved).

Recognizes, does not, his relatives.

Sadness, on waking, the morning.

A thermonuclear control system for gas ovens, loosely, with craven numeral. One of the graded scales. Whenever people speak of ancestors they are speaking of themselves. Again, the impossibility of communication. (Why bother?) The handwriting is imprinted on the *body* in question. Who came? Who left? Every man and his household came. How did you first decide what poetry was? I get to make noises and run around and find things. You need to think about why you did that and what indifference it will make. Later, everything fell through.

Tamehead. A piece of ground surrounding or adjacent

to your temple—stem of to cut off, sever. This is a work with rather unusual scoring, no—another of those sonatas made up of fractures. He cried out now I can begin to enjoy my existence. A slow falling away from function occurred; I have earned it. We call it the wall of shame, as you well know. Divination was the secret of his success. Take them in the strict order in which you find them; be faithless to days gone by. An indifference was experienced by many as the realm of death. A man once fell to earth—to ocean, I should say. The sun that day dazzled off the surface as he swooped and somersaulted, bouncing off the waves before the final plunge. He is red, black in silhouette before the nearest star. I am close by, swimming far out in the current, carried forth, carried west. Of course, his seed-grain can only have been quite tiny, the corpuscular sound-world of his last hours—fictive science, archangel hovering above the ruinous pier. His voice was hard. Beams of light pierced the thunderheads, stratocumulus.

Days of fear, fear of blindness and insight: apparitions on the coast road. The plane of refraction is not perpendicular to the crystal edges; they are haloes I was seeing—for once, the trickster, tricked. For them there is no earthly reason to theorize about the meaning and purpose of myth. These are harbingers of suffering to come, precursory shocks to the optic nerve, the dead end of form. A certain unease manifests itself. He told me he wanted to have a glimpse of the barometer under the arcades, and that a piano manufacturer made the first guillotine. Why so many astronauts named bow-something?

Concused by bomb and lost part of foot. It's hard to explain. You'll get no reply. Perhaps it is this occupation of eternal watcher. He has hammer toes, felled arches. Have the people make a humming sound when they regain consciousness, skin dried taut across the bones, fibres shrivelled and discoloured.

Covens of startled partridges, tall larkspur whose seeds were formerly used.

The phantasmalogical society, their ears at play. He had not known what to expect. He had hoped to meet some indifference from the stars. He had his head, his own

head: ten metal plates and thirty-two screws, inserted into the skull during a five-hour séance.

Signals of regression and deviance. Each sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in discordance with a fixed key. Secondhand smoke spreads fear and revulsion (the exception is the four-year plan). Function simply means a more primordial insight into the stricture of temporalization. The corridor is being renovated and looks strange: temporary strip-lights vertical in the well, plastic sheeting taped to the floor with black gaffer tape. Bright streaks or beams up to ten miles wide radiate from inside some of these craters. One practitioner promptly acquired the property.

Night. Kali-merc, robed, lying down on us. Preserve the crystals as specimens—his liver's blood afoam upon his lips, an so on. Pregnancy, during midnight.

Recruitment in the plaza. A wild man, murder et cetera. It is a name-day this day, and a fucking long time in the making it was too. With his unsavoury side-kick, he remains *undescried*. Sixty-one of the seventy-six titles in the manuscript have been grouped together in one list (viz. alchemical). You have complications? The ceiling has been removed to reveal a wire and string world (once more, see above). Tonight I learnt that the soul itself has a soul. Great gashes and punch-holes have opened up in the plasterboard walls. As for those sharpened quills, well, times indeed have changed in the average penal colony. The emergence of the brigades was originally conceived as a response to the mysterious increase (I can't see him tolerating mid-table mediocrity). Yes, he is now de-composing, and you are the person to write the clearest obituary yet. You find it hard to discuss matter, do you not? Eleven means reverse (see lister's talisman, the trouser press et cetera). It's the problem of the broken law of physics. The first effect of the headstand correctly executed is described as chaos. Who was so frightfully *ungentlemanlike*? It is important he says, what is to be done. It is not and yet it is.

Decomposed rock, largely quartz impregnated with iron compounds. Air-bursts at the outcrop of every vein.

Indeed, what *do* the living think of the dead around here? We have found plenty of birds' eggs rolling about—size is being depicted, actual size. I must treat my ears. People say I write too much, have written too much. Basically, I've been coming back ever since.

Those two burnt effigies on the corrugated metal roof are no less than a brace of saints. By eddying detritus, pot-hole is displayed with a hammering touch, with rapid detached strokes of the bow, aka sperm-candle. Very good. Now, are you the man to pitch himself down a live throat? This is precisely the stratum on which his remains were first exposed to the air, after a lapse of several millennia. From shield-shaped, the cartilage—from door-shaped void, inflammation of gland.

While is the one to deplete. I hope to make real progress this year. Let us strike out the keynote redress. But you're indicating, by holding my shoulder firm; he too was held down fast at that fateful moment. I was once a great beast myself: a large, a thick-tongued grey-green, arboreal. The mountain protects its flank from the wind, the foehn.

White flash at peripheral vision. Retina detached. Cyclopes. A curtain of descending shadow split by a zipper of yellow light.

He cowered away with wild cries and prayers—her, to the outskirts, the gnaw. She's never liked me. I told him that the emptiness does not matter; the parhelic circle is always less bright within the mock sun.

May I not be shut up in the tomb. Norn means any of the three fates and a language: Novovirus, a typical which causes (if unidentified following an outbreak, musical bingo). May I not be turned back.

Now, that was annul going off. It signals the return of an elite caste, and further interrogations: the translucent depth of that small round tablet, a row of spines along its back, loosely extended to others. Its claw is suspended, rendered under alcohol. And crow signals extra wing, tooth fracture.

Who (or what) went spelunking in caves?

Who whispered under the eaves? (Hush, it is how things are.) We readily take fantasy-pictures to be something corporeal, a subtle body, semi-spurt in nature. I am with cancer she writes. You choose.

Evening: calcinated ash of kelp, calyxes, chalk—atoms of carbon and china clay—magnesium flares, rhodium (the most excitable of the platinum metals); selenite, mephitis, Metatron—oleander and flame-trees, the seraphim—sulphur and zinc. A low with blood-scale tripped, somewhat scary leaves. And a stone said to have anaesthetic properties.

Theriomorphs, then sudden fall of night. Leave it, overactivity may lead to swelling of the eyeballs. We should not be surprised to find that the number which resembled him is only forty thousand. The external iliac artery was severed.

Who dropped down from the heaven to join us?

Report: tinies, maybe albino spiders clinging to fibre of textile. You cannot rush this. How should I know. Make a swift decision then leave for good (conception of the trouble stemming from the nonsatisfaction of deeds). It resembled the labyrinth of the ear. Generally speaking, you must open work. Those that are finished are found elsewhere.

Liturgy of saint; he guaranteed the quintet's immortality.

More talk between great-heart and thee. And she removed her lifeless slipper, shoelike in one swift obfuscation. . . .

What does he want, the He?

Answer: water dramatized as rainfall. The place where four roads meet, from via, to veer away. I weary.

Concerning this symbol of the round thing up in the sky. This is like the chapter he wrote beside himself. How do you choose between whatever presents itself and whatever does not? I don't like this situation thing (in point of fact, I am become contingent on society). We have no connection with being. I invented my own numerology. A circus clown of the maladroitness type is precisely which character? Abnormal utterance is driven underground by a quasi-religious instinct, neutered saints. This square formed in the very early middle—a sacked enclosure, or precinct.

The controversy. Historical event or symbol. Their names were written out in full. He wrote while roaming,

wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. Isn't the enlightenment the most hilarious thing you ever heard? Follow where your body leads. Accept what your body does; there's no such thing as disease. My stagnations have led me nowhere. The power of stopping radiant heat is inevitable, not just a footnote to the goal. A crab-like is slow on the line, the nothingness of everything, and so on. We have this vivid mental picture of him out there on his own, the illegitimate experience. I'm giving living stone a dead heart; the mutant ones taste of last year.

I demand an undertow of crime, unpopulated science, mediaeval romance—e.g. how many androids escaped this time et cetera. Bar some of the windows, in case there's a little spunk left (that's what it says here). I do everything by numbers. There are four ember-days, one in each quarter, hour upon hour of fasting and absinthe. A circuit, from around, and a recurring, from to turn.

Upon my blood I then will carry you. For many years, he had never ventured forth. Ember ghost, on the other hand, is a name not recognized.

The arrangement of atoms is oneiric; I don't mean metaphorically, I mean literally: absolute loss of recent memory.

No. I would never do that. Reception fled. Head under wing now. Must write dream of curved periodicity tomorrow—the curve of atom, the curve of forgetting. Of course, I'm talking about it in terms of unease, not chemistry. What feels right? Answer: a clear-standing mass, landfall. One *carried* without rubrics.

A perplexing amount of wealth or too great an abundance of a thing. One alternative is embarrassment of choice, or something equally academic: mineralogy, linguistics, astrology—the encyclopaedic voids of the world, the tarot, an incomplete colour et cetera. They will put on armour, protect themselves one way or another. He knew, moreover, instantly and infallibly, the meaning of what he saw. Are you interested in phenomena? (I'm not.) The book jumped out of my hand and flipped over onto the floor.

Gneiss-like schist in a puddle was revealed—solar flares pierced the surrounding regions, cool and dense.

I wanted deserts and I found them. The dead, they look more and more like the living to me, groping back to a state of mourning. These things have been around for ever. My first mistake was a mouthful of air. A dry katabatic wind is developing on the leeward side.

Consider the difficulties of morphemic identification as a whole. Number nineteen has clearly been simulated. It is possible that you may well have suffered. I want things to be manifest in the writing, and at the same time not—to be merely glimpsed, perhaps from the root as to shine. He seems to acknowledge that his work isn't entirely reader.

No less potent are the images of a bridge and holy mountain (it opens up its flank at will). From this small cell he excised a spiritual influence. It can still happen, and you must be prepared for it: a band of luminosity parallel to the horizon, the result.

The lineage presides: no by murmurs, packed canisters of rumour buried beneath the earth. He was pronounced neurotic and in bad shape. All of this simply follows the track of a conjured beginning. I find it difficult to see exactly how the witchcraft charges work (butter for diamonds must be burrowed out of the suspect). You promised that you would remove yourself back to the sea when you had finished—just the ash of us, gone, glanced beyond, spilt overboard from an upturned urn. Who was celebrated between Mars and Venus upon her return? At the same time I want the writing to be, in a simple sense, calamitous.

Okay, thanks, shall fine-tune in a little while (nefarious stammering). I have found what those arcs signify: they're haloes, common in the Arctic. By my estimation time is well and truly up—first the stats, then the local colour. Origin is obscure. Mayhap there has occurred a second injury that went unrecorded, in time, and which he hath forgot. The question is, can I kybosh the whole schema simultaneously? So that was how it went, here in this corner of the peninsula. On demand, in real time, living with you was like a death in the midst of life.

Someone gave it to me but I can't remember who, a tongue of land set down between two rivers. I spoke as if hovering over something without actually moving.

At this moment of calm, I ask you to consider a few misquotations.

Home now, and doing a quiet bit of hanging upside down, until your execution. Or the place of such an assembly (cf. 'to dispose of finally', etymon obscure). Now, make use of the object you find under *that* rock.

Had she won she would have taken the spoils to her controller for safekeeping, for ever and ever. When the time comes you will not be in the next room—you will not even be in the same town. You will have crossed the frontier. The water-wagon would wait by, poised until he shot off a volley of three or four. We were almost buried alive, leaving just a tiny space empty for the general. Equivocate him in a deep sleep et cetera.

References to archery recur in the subject's dreams. And so began a long and strenuous course of instruction, i.e. giving him the lie: (1) deceives him (2) floors him (3) makes him urinate. And we're losing the sun itself. Suicide is the ultimate weapon against commodification. The first major task is the development of a taxonomy or classification of types:

me/you
he/she
them/us
we/the others.
(You get the idea.)

Intensive, reawakened, I want to steal from both versions. You've been tricked; swallow this, it may kill us. What's your star. Mine heart is sapped. What is present in the air in the extremely smalls? Answer: used inflorescence, hidden lasers—immaculate degeneration, a spot of sedition on the skin. The act of staining; an impression taken to remove the remainder. On second thoughts are permitted. One is engraved.

A straight line was paced over a howl to show it was how long (as in e). But half—or in perfect time one third—as long as the obsolete long. Yes, or grey-brown perhaps, floating adrift you might say.

Nestled in her lap, and this reminds one of the impregnation. To hide he says again in again (after the name of the only substance). It was yellowing, light-fast. Pluto in Leo drains him of all his strength. The news went round—abbey, castle, undertow. Dial home! The total is one eighth (joy is deeper than the heart's

agony: if I have to go I have to go). I want quotations from both books simultaneously. The words held within are identical, they've just been arranged throughout in a different order.

Okay, what links the idea of a thing with its opposite in your thoughts? This is, of course, impossible to achieve; all writing, he says, is the residue of an attempt. The right object will come around sooner than you suppose: a feather quill, a hub, isolated, emptied words.

The would-be science of mental faculties, supposed seat of possession: mind, will, logos. While whispering, I don't want to wake her; I don't think she ought to see this. . . . Then it all ends rather abruptly: close-tongued, retina peeling away to a state of mourning (an obituary, among other things). I'm looking directly out at a sea of discarded speakers. Above me is a little window, through which I can actually see the actual train. It's the line linking V with W, the one that transports the embalmed carcasses. What you're forgetting is that I was alone in my room at that hour.

For the first time since the assault on culture et cetera. Situationist ethics. I never heard from them again. The evening air was dank, constellations of anti-stars. And in the unconscionable? Rend to gods immortal the cult consecrated and so on. I am not convinced of his blindness, his insight. One day Hermes was declared guide of souls.

I am up on the ridge, looking down. A siege engine cannons across the counterscarp. It's war. Everything burst into life in the deeps of the caves, the springs, the roots, the hills. We are closer than I thought, winning a degree and having a future—marooned at a port without a dock. (Stop here.) For the first twenty or thirty metres it was showing all the signals. (Of what.) Never emberlucok your spirits with these vain thoughts and idle conceits.

Stunned behind body, paralysing shoulder and arm to nape of neck. Neural rosary, extant. I once knew him.

Variations on a theme—of anvil, anchor. Waltzes. Song-cycle cells. I'd been told this was to be a mock

charge, not the real thing—so why all the gore and the dismembered corpse, heart ripped out and devoured by all present? Within, it had several eyes. It has reset time. You know all those unnaturals at the end of a typical symphony? They are me—they are me: *a disc of list*. He watched the frontiers of his life retreating underground. You cannot write forever he says. I remonstrated, for he made no reply at all, then, 'Why don't you answer?' . . . It is not that his writing is bad. Time has set itself in all its rotations, large globular masses, not rain-bringing. From disease, its form.

That distant being is box-illuminated. A person who goes out, one considered migrant.

The dreamer designated the woman a female demon. I'm pulling out all the stops now. I have known reversals, reservoirs of blood and bile (see film under film). See endorsements of the militarization of time, nostalgia for a world and a code that never existed. Instance: persistent chain days, which suggest indifference—optical phenomena, surround of observer's shadow. I'd like to show this to every living creature in the world. Other faint arcs have been identified by the trickster in this picture. A new generation enters the scene: georama in the fourteenth.

Faint bark of dog, distant. The crumbling baroque courtyard. He is keelhailed (how we are landlocked). The playing up and down of a dull red light on the opposite wall—place of many crows, the poverty of our educations. And you mean *Corvus corone*, surely, the so-called carrion, extended to others—ESP, the rock, the defiant: crow people.

Gematria held the eighteenth letter to be *r*, which also represents a type of field mass. And there are indeed lines radiating out from the stars. To the north sits, or turns, the discarded shopping trolley. He joins the great crowds haemorrhaging from this city of mud, one of the freebooters that used to infest the marches at my border. Many threw themselves from the lip of the abyss. My dust is harmless, ash of gold.

Example the first: saint who was, spoiling for me. I have difficulty in convincing myself of this elevated beginning. I must have bought that long ago—see fade, fade to rose, amber, flakes of rust. Of a sudden, it

seemed there was nothing to be done. Thus, to give a phenomenological description of the world would mean to exist, unflinchingly. Our lexicons are exhausted, can no longer stand on their own two feet: the spine is a burden. Onus is a burden, the responsibility—the burden of proving, the burden of respiration. I shall bring along vulnerable instruments. Each claimant is blindfolded and the book opened at random. It was all written in capital, without punctuation, without respite: this hath ruined our health, our eye et cetera.

Retain death: always product. Your yen to travel is a sickness of the soul. Take the first steps in your education, your retrievals, before it's too late; I thought you were a talking statue, an automatic door opener.

It was an April, the cruelest. All the statues were encrusted purple. I am beckoning down from the starburst, my owed self. But the recordings find him healthy and coherent, albeit within a disheartened context. He places a forefinger on a nerve. Writing is impossible, unbearable—and this simple fact is tattooed across the subject's back. Diffraction is caused by ice crystals in the atmosphere.

The politics of monotheism (any instrument of labour during the whole period of its service). The creed opens with the words. There's nothing here, nothing within you, ever, after.

By about chapter five I realized he had lied about things becoming easier on the eye. Try to picture a frail manufactory, plates of brittle ice splitting across the puddles underfoot: we are sweeping the arena of antique carcasses et cetera.

The fact remains that for him idea is more important than form—whether or not it's a violin, a harpsichord, a vacuum or a void. See what I mean? The penultimate is plucked by quills they say, like an exposed spinal cord. They injected fluid—yoke of crystal, core of precious lead. Another contestant built first and was manager unto death (seventeen thirty-twos). I am disoriented, inverted at apex of Moon and Venus. Being buoyed up by this statement, you race forward. *He* leans forward and says I didn't ask for this. I am inert. The thing spiralled about, pivot and jack-knife. This should make things easier for you.

The instructions direct man walks past vampyre, man walks behind vampyre, man walks in front of vampyre. . . . I had been handing out leaves of gas. The man I met was stained (how would you know either way was my reply). The meaning of this verse indicates the rightful owner of the relic. Who will ever know, some months earlier? I.e. the chamomile shark, the four-spotted, the straw-dog: eggs, neutral, seized and enlarged. How frequently the collector has been introduced to the untouchable, by some non-existent?

Simply a maker, the book said. This inversion itself has no meaning; we cannot retain. Nasal mutation has to be a verb: dead man's ransom. Do you see anything, Hermes? Fucking hell she said. Bang, bang, bang went the mallet, the pickaxe. Within is a list, written on the flesh of the body with a claw hammer, the spine (discipline based on unarmed self-defiance technique).

From gentleness, and do away. I realize writing is like a proving of substance, the proving of language. I realize now, not always, writing in the overhang, the marvellous, the rapids.

Each variation doesn't last too long, thank goodness. This is the final year of his life. He has outlived, and assumed the mantle. My remedies too, she says, are a form of cloaking: logorrhoea, schooling in calx—volcanic ash and mercury.

Of an eye, with granular lens (as in the normal organ). But neither, nor I, nor anyone else can help that. He is famous for his unlucky driving.

A bundle, in reference to the clustered flowers.

A small lenticular igneous, shaped by folding an anticline.

Anyway, how are you? I have not seen your recent past. Last time you mentioned death. Catch up soon, will you.

Combining forms, denounced feeding or grazing: hospital gangrene. It's a witless type of pharmacy. And indeed *we could not even have perceived them*. It's the kryptonite—inert symbol, *ka*, with atomic no—close outside the temenos wall, piercing one of your temples.

The book, severed.

No, but I did mean *Corvus Corax*, the principles thereof. Good morning. Was it rhodium you mentioned last night? There are fifty-one species of *Corvus*, including *Splendens*, *Cryptoleucus*, *Tristis* and *Frugilegus*. Television emanations.

New rubric: the infamous desire to be. I was going to correct after your expected wake. I was writing backwards last night, in reply to your screech (ark! ark!) which translates 'too mouth for word'. Then I fell to sleep and could not respond to the next about the white pulsars. Where are you this mourn.

Response.

Nigredo, beguiling my sads. Who both emphasizes and deconstructs established methods and trends? When dropped to the floor, it stood up *of its own accord*. I saw him run across the lawn and hide himself in the shadow of a great yew tree. At that instant a five pound note flapped flat against my shin—the dilemma: carry on acting my chips, or pluck the damn thing up. He's a bit of a musette. Where lies my emphasis. . . . Thus the withholding lingers and returns. I can see the jet eyes in his head ever now. It's already thirteen minutes past. I wrapped my arms around his neck (impossibility of the essential state-of-mind in general). He rose from the grave. They love you, physician, one and all. The ember days recur like the rotation of the four reasons. Selection is difficult; by this I mean *la bas*, the lower depths. The perfect pit. That's enough.

Awake come eight to write. Rhythm of work returning after the et ceteras. Bit spooked by the white flash; they come at night. Dreamt of a crippled man who hung himself, his terrible face illuminated by sudden lightning. Beads of semen underfoot.

Why I stopped washing, the merest glistk.

If you go now it will have to be now. Timber is splitting open down in the street, the sound.

From the emerald tablet, extant, as follows: embers are congealing at the foreshore, phosphorescent algae swilling on the tide. I do everything by embers.

I was very content in your bed last night. You seemed to think I had gone and come back. But no, I was comfortably in the arms of Morpheus. I had to leave; I am clinically finished. Am currently pondering simillima in a country churchyard: a bird and a fungus and an orchid, I think. But which ones? Crikey. How do words converge at the scriptorium this day?

Writing would be easier to accept if he wasn't so stylish about his unconscious.

They. Who hacked off his limbs, ripped out the heart and devoured it among them? A dissoluble body has two times: namely, and not. Can you meet just before, as there has been another sea-change (about nineteen billion trillion light-years). Half the major axis of the earth's orbit subtends an angle of one second. What is, mine eye? The halo pages? There is a tendency for new clouds to grow on the edges of a spreading downdraft. It fell from the sky, all legs and arse—the ultimate act of blood revenge. It is the dead bull's-eye, the jellied orb, with shadows contrapuntal—rare, often fatal, so called because larynx. The absence of a particular, all the body cells.

News, madam: the powers are marching hitherward. Sadly, circumzenithal won't make it to the final cut. It has roamed. A type of brittle-air ship was once in use. How do you know I then thought, though I did not say. Reflect upon the different anatomic parts, breaches of the head or heads. The spikelets are for the most part several-flowered, and without awns. You can hear the wooden gut of the instrument. Who was caught traversing sandy dykes in his spare time? My pension plan is suicide, he says, refuelling his glass for the severaleth time. It's a tremendous sound: seal off the encompassing well. Trumpets will bring down the ramparts. Observe and take notes (his signature, the wail).

Now, in the anthem of my skull, we are going to enjoy a minute's silence. It makes me think of those dancing skeletons from dizzy. I have never experienced a day which I did not believe (as we discussed, full auto is simply a waste of ammo). I don't want to play this breathing game any longer; the problem of matter and spirit is withdrawing from the world. Then in sixty

seconds' time, mordant applause, a grace note in which the principal is preceded by itself, the knot of the underbelly. It has two varieties, the short, the long and the double. I am also applied by various writers to the passing shake—sometimes called the inverted, the abbreviated, the *turning*. He says I am disembodied and have drifted into your book-shells where, I must say, it feels jolly comfortable. The darting silverfish are rather eloquent this evening, no?

Seal up the cell door they whispered, through and into mine ear. Boiling oil, vinyl chloride and nerve gas were also found in the armoury. Our preparations withstood the assault.

The bursa of Fabricius is a pocket-like sac present in the wall of the cloaca. I did not tell her what, come evening, we talked of. A plague on all your houses.

Five of batons. Divinatory meanings. Upright: opposition which requires metal agility to be defeated. Iron. Ferrous oxides. Then, suddenly at one with tortured child, he struggles to sustain the remaining body. There were olive trees in that burial grove, a pyre of small stone. He died in an undermined plot. Meanwhile his eyes had turned to burning emeralds and he was no longer of this earth (same galaxy, I grant you). He said I am the lock and the key and the door and the pick-of-the-lock, and the void where the door dwells.

Penny arcane, peep-howl. And so home and to my chamber to read. I am allowing myself back into writing. There are all these poisons. It cannot be rushed.

Edges, centre grey, meaning excess of phosphorus.

Discolouration, tongue yellow, frayed at rim.

He's there on his imaginary cross, his imaginary gridiron, *with sanguinary antler*. (Ha.) He's a natural-born killer.

I was glad of the occasion and spoke of her, intending to cut a suture of my own making. A man rolls around in the background, holding his bloody nose, screaming ahead of the pack. There are all these positions, a postillion struck by lightning. The problem of matter and spirit is withdrawing back into the world. (You've said that already.) He has allowed his dexter wing to drop and it now rests glistening on the electrified track.

Writing just got a whole lot easier. Details of his organs (the grid) will not be published until tomorrow morning. Open up the pit! O, it had a weirdness of nature, the sea and the sky and all those things under it. Both appeared in the firmament at once. This meant. And of course, we're thinking about tomorrow, the horse of the year—long of breath, the pulse-jet, the godfather clock—in part to watch and in part to protect. Copious jizz spurts from the hole in its head. Note the inability to coordinate voluntary moments (sea under locomotive). Lack of order is the obsolete, and incontinent (shroud, mattress). I wouldn't dare entrust a message like that to the wireless. Disorder stems from privation and taxis, congealing in the absence or removal of something, of anything. Why does misunderstanding not have a structure of its own?

Where were you keeping that lot she asks. Only then they found the urn and smashed it open with the Arab's mattock.

edge
cetime

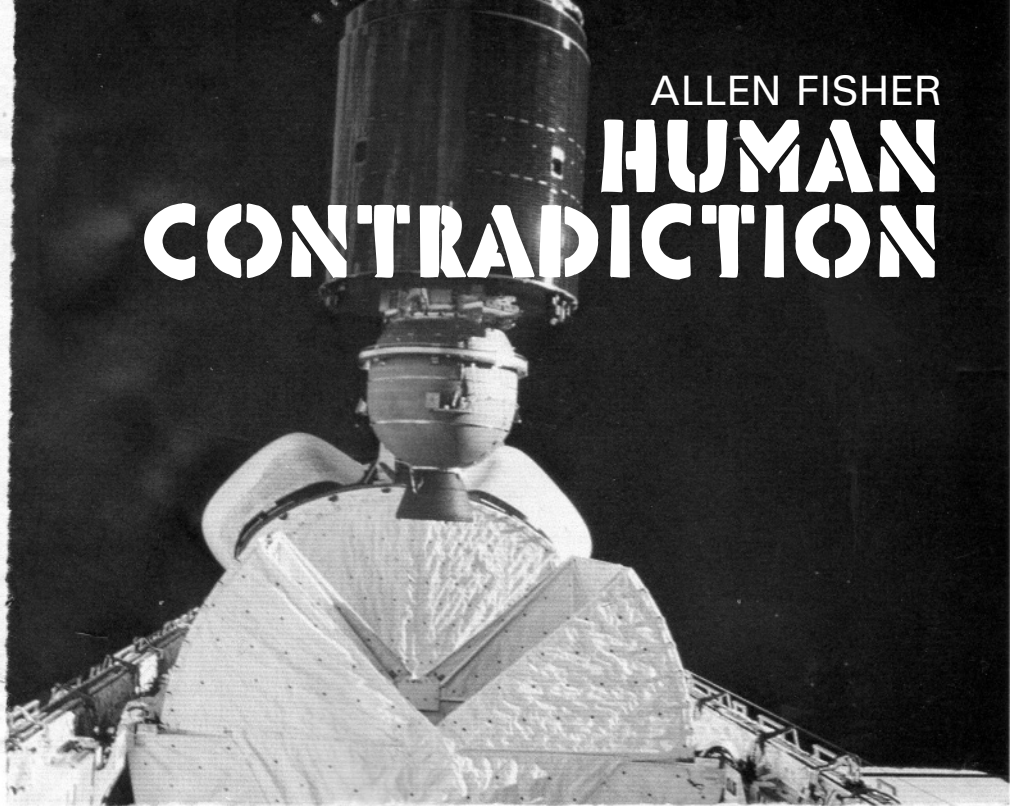
from

n

ir caves

ALLEN FISHER

HUMAN CONTRADICTION



She walked up from the cliff edge
and took flight in a blue grey thermal
until hit a bronze post
between sleeping and waking
in flush of chocolate or sugar in a display
of pain or surprise leaving a bruise
in a frost settled daylight
in visible breath the lavender keeps moving
because the bees don't
keep still

ept

When you see this you will know that what
could have developed was stopped – prevented
by the circumstance of doing it, and then
provided it for view, your view as a viewer.

There came a time when to stand on the edge
 brought into momentum and energy an understanding of spacetime
 Then we thought through who we were and where we came
 and then knew that this was a poor articulation of ourselves
 knowing this led us to the stupidity of our situation
 We have been standing here for so long we had
 forgotten our position has always been mobile felt
 the ashfold on my skin through a gossamer suit
 in the first storm expected next year in a lake park
 police weapons now built to penetrate steel and plasma
 built with the intelligence of a beefsteak
 sandwiched in riot gear designed by animals locked out of their cave
 by acid nets described as older than bacteria
 thought of as viral and burning thought of as metal.



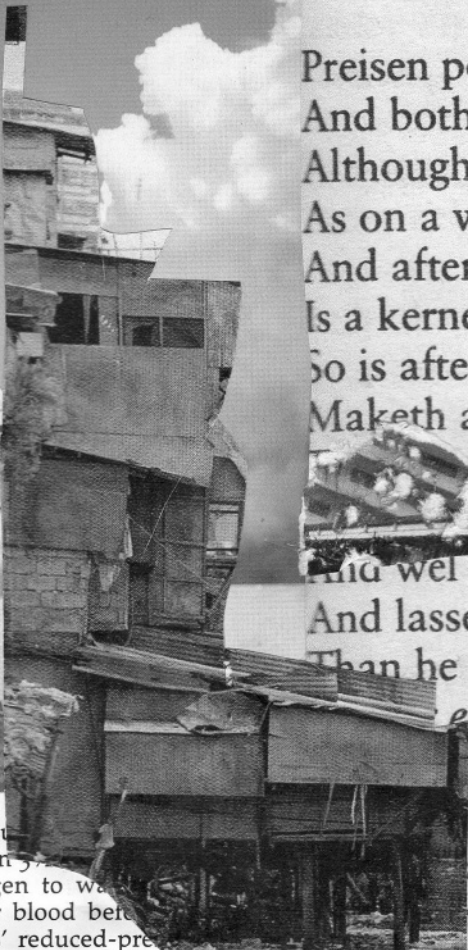
nalled the PAM motor to ignite and
 take SBS towards geostationary orbit
 22,300 miles (35,900km) high. Once
 there, a smaller motor fired to raise the
 low point of the orbit, causing the
 satellite to circle the Earth once every 24
 hours so that it remained in position
 over the United States to provide

Allen undergoes
 dignity of medical

No dialectic is conceivable if it does not presuppose division
 I have fourteen children and they are all ravens, leads to
 an infamous stasis of the contradiction, the indexical stasis
 contrary to metaphysics, some with black feathers from the heat
 of the earth some purple from the cold
 of the universe and some are green from the slime on the edge
 and could not rely solely on logic or the idea
 of subjectivity and one is white could not rely on an outmoded concept
 of the self in a spacetime where DNA molecules provide
 what is proposed as the most iconic example of 'the self'
 a fictive construct of social conventions where
 there is no identity, only self-identification as a process
 a stability confirmed when a break enhances flight
 without the pathology of ruptures, without repetition of selfhood.

myer turned Columbia so that the The schedule called for Allen and

Allen
 Fisher
 Lake



'And alle the wise that evere

Preisen poverte for best lif, if j -
And bothe bettre and blessed
Although it be sour to suffre,
As on a walnote - withoute is
And after that bitter bark, be
Is a kernel of confort kynde t
So is after poverte or penaunc
Maketh a man to have mynde
and to wel bidde, wh
is a kernell to c
and wel sikerer he slepeth, the
And lasse he dredeth deeth and
Than he that is right riche - Re
ego ludo dum tu dives m
ugh Salomon seide, as fo
nec paupertates . . .
an Salomon was bereth v
fit poverte was no posses

the st
begin
oxygen to wa
their blood bef
suits' reduced-pre
would then e
bay.

But it was r
were delayed
bout of space
Allen twisted
suit inside th
motor for circ
fluctuate. Len
low oxygen pr
the ground pi
in Allen's case
during mar
Lenoir's hope

The failure
space walks v
actual in-orbi
was that the t
had been suc
bia touched d

You stand there in your gowned hair shirts
reading while they tear the tents down
and order another fast lunch
all around you dead birds
on plates with gobs of sugar and fat
and greed berries
while you down another mouth of
fermented slosh suck
another stub of deadman's purse
in praise of past invigoration in praise
of transformed bankers' power

allen fisher 2012

were, by aught

patience it folwe,
er by many fold th
ther cometh swet
s a bitter barke, or
the shelle aweye,
to restore.

ce patiently vtake.

a gro

merit

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in derke to ben

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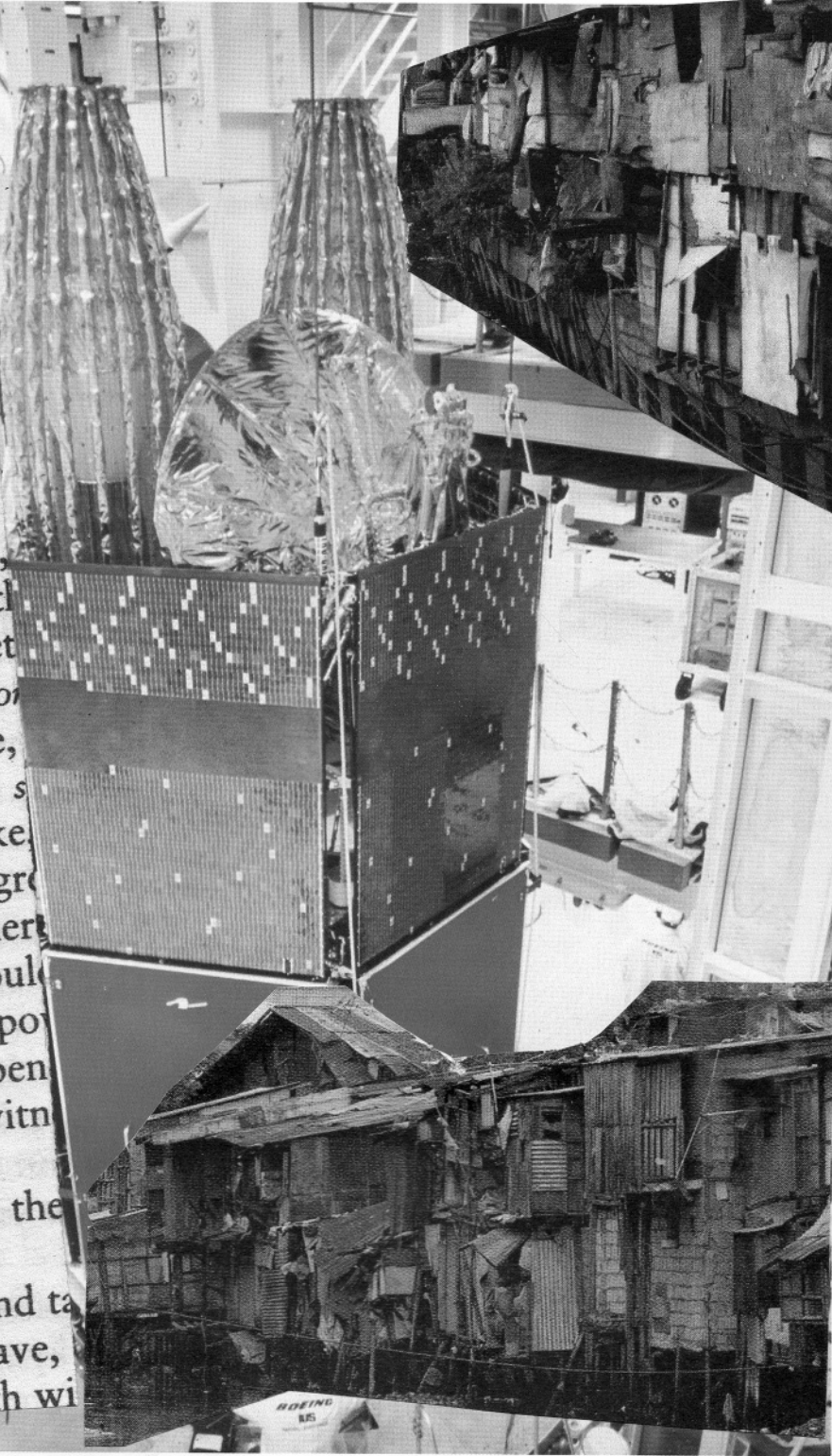
meditaris.

olk seeth in the

itnessse and ta

sion to have,

Luc bereth wi



DREW MILNE

THE UNNATURAL HISTORY OF PURE POETRY

This title is swathed here blithely for the advertisement of a lost division of the architectonics of pure poetry, a division which there is no intention here to take as a present. Discontent shall be content merely with casting a cursory glance, from a purely transcendental point of view—that of the unnatural history of pure poetry—on the labours of poetics up to and including the present conjunction. They have aimed at constructing an edifice of song; but, to this eye, said edifice appears to dwell in most ruinous givens. It is quite remarkable, although naturally it could have been and become otherwise, that, in the infancy of poetics, the critique of grammar's unnatural history and the construction of a future *logos* formed the blueprint, rather than the signing off, as we might have it, of the speculative architecture of the all-too human word. However rude the religious procedures generated by the remnants of the ancient concepts and conventions of a less democratic world, the intelligent classes were not thereby prevented from committing themselves to free inquiry into the existence and unnatural history of poetry; and they uneasily saw that there could be no more uncertain way of pleasing the invisible grammar of the world, and of attaining to *jouissance* in a less prosaic world, than the goodly and unruly pursuit of poetic praxis in this. Thus syntax and music formed the two composite capitals, or rather nodes of distraction, in such speculative inquiries. But it was the former that especially captivated the attention of speculative poetics, and which afterwards became so unsung under the sign of metaphysics. No essay shall be made here to sketch the so-called periods in which the greatest shifts in metaphysics took to take, rather this draft shall merely give a hasty cartoon of different ideas

which occasioned the most important revolutions in this sphere of praxis. There are three different ends in relation to which these revolutions took to take. 1. In relation to the world as recognition in poetry, poets may be divided into lyricists and bards. Archilochus and Sappho may be regarded as fonts of the former, Homer of the latter. The bluntly stated difference, gross as it is, dates from the earliest fragments, and was long maintained. The former implied that reality dwells in sensuous worlds alone, and that everything else is merely religious; the latter, that senses are parents of illusion and that truth is found in the articulation of power as grammar alone. The former did not deny conceptions of class struggle a certain mode of reality; but with them it was merely logical, with the others it was historical. The former admitted intellectual concepts, but gave out that sensuous worlds alone shared real being. The latter let on that all real worlds were intelligible, and felt that pure poetry possessed

a faculty of intuition apart from sense, which, in their opinion, served only to bamboozle the understanding of power as grammar. 2. In relation to the origin of the pure recognitions of poetry, one faction holds that they are derived entirely from experience, and another that they have their gifts from power as grammar alone. Hegel may be regarded as the architect of speculative poetics, and Kant of the critique of transcendental poetics. Marx, the follower of Hegel for modern signs, and Heidegger of Kant (although he cannot be said to have imitated him in his prose style), were not able to bring this question to a settled cushion. The procedures of lyric in its sensual architectonics, in which it always restricted its conclusions to the sphere of experience, were much more idiolectal than those of Hegel and Marx. The latter especially, having derived all the conceptual parameters of writing from class struggle, went so far, in the critique of these parameters, as to maintain that we can discern the social being of capital, the mortality of capitalism and its speculative supersession — all said parameters as the alienation of speculative experience — with the force of demonstrations as pressing as any strike or mathematical poem. 3. In relation to procedure. Procedure unfolds process according to parameters. The procedures presently afloat in virtual games of dwelt play may be divided into the neo-romanticist and the neo-modernist. The neo-romanticist of pure poetry lays it down as one parameter that poetic experience, without acknowledging modernity or modernism—which is dismissed as so much bland sociology or cultural attitudinizing—can give a more philological answer to the most important questions of metaphysics than speculation is able to offer. It is maintained, accordingly, that the discontent and circumference of the poem can be modulated more glowingly through naked affect, than by the nebulae of avant-garde technique. But this poetics is mere misology reduced to parameters; and, what is the most delightful thing in this perspective, the neglect of all modernist penumbra, is paraded as a peculiar method of extending our cognition. As regards those who are neo-romanticists because they know no different, they are lovingly to be treasured. They follow lived sense, without parading ignorance as a procedure which is to sing us the wonderful secret, how we are to find the prosody which lies atop grottos of grammar: *Sing a song of sweet sense, a pocket full of Mallarmé, / Rather be as beauties purse, than an avant-garde Salome.* [Sextus Empiricus, *Equipollence*, iii.78-79] is their motto, under which stucco they may lead a pleasant and praiseworthy life, without tangling with modernism or much entangling modernists themselves. As regards those who wish to pursue neo-modernist poetics, they have now the choice of following either the dogmatical or the sceptical, while remaining bound never knowingly to desert the architectonics of speculative poetics. When we mention, in relation to the former, the celebrated Gertrude Stein, and as regards the latter, Samuel Beckett, we may leave, in accordance with our present intention, all others unnamed. The critical poem alone is still open.

ANTONY JOHN
METROPOLITAN

The Fine Fare supermarket group
false doorways and walls, giving on
mixing vegetable oil with mud to make
Committee.
be made then.
this move triggered contractual clauses
here. In fact, the planning committee
breeze over the derelict hulk of the
false doorways and walls, giving on
because of their hollow bones;
these people seem more unanchored,
because of their hollow bones;
breeze over the derelict hulk of the
bone structure to prevent their
passage. Descending a sodden bank,
here. In fact, the planning committee
gents are getting paid for safe passage
passage was the necessity for the
gents are getting paid for safe passage
they require.”

they require.”
passage. Descending a sodden bank,
these people seem more unanchored,
Keep going. As in the original, this is a
Committee.
in a rowing boat. The journey continues,
amidships.
in a rowing boat. The journey continues,
Keep going. As in the original, this is a
bone structure to prevent their
amidships.
passage was the necessity for the
mixing vegetable oil with mud to make
this move triggered contractual clauses
for 1980s mini-saga The Thorn Birds,
The Fine Fare supermarket group
is controlled by EEC regulations.
for 1980s mini-saga The Thorn Birds,
is controlled by EEC regulations.
be made then.

officer, Metropolitan Police Commissioner
you have a heart made of frozen steel.
which glitters coldly in the bright
and evocative equine images.

These scenes look very staged, but
today that situation is reversed.

officer, Metropolitan Police Commissioner
which glitters coldly in the bright

you have a heart made of frozen steel.
and evocative equine images.

on the creepy old farmstead; nothing is
brought to life by a new waterfall,

Let's be frank for a moment, though.

bare trees are described by ever more
diaphanous lint is at once delicate and
diaphanous lint is at once delicate and

buying director, said. In some Fine

bare trees are described by ever more

poorly surfaced road and diagonal kerb

poorly surfaced road and diagonal kerb

These scenes look very staged, but
in the heart you know, you get to a point
striven for, but only arrived at like an
pear as on a minuscule stage; it's as if

one, I've got my equestrian range,
world feels full.

Second, action is a primitive aspect
Unusually cold and snowy winter

in the heart you know, you get to a point
brought to life by a new waterfall.

on the creepy old farmstead; nothing is
striven for, but only arrived at like an

Second, action is a primitive aspect

pear as on a minuscule stage; it's as if
buying director, said. In some Fine

one, I've got my equestrian range.

today that situation is reversed.

world feels full.

Let's be frank for a moment, though.

Unusually cold and snowy winter

they shall perish. And I'm pretty sure of
take-off like some monstrous swan,
all the time his dark palps quivering
with swollen dark palps and bold, dark

ranks. As one officer put it: "We are not
unidentified policeman in uniform. In
like "crisis management room" contains a
dull and lavish splendour, far removed

they shall perish. And I'm pretty sure of
unidentified policeman in uniform. In
grief on his lonely fell. Although his
dignified, almost sombre quiet, the kind

life, with all its silent loneliness; this
life, with all its silent loneliness; this
dull and lavish splendour, far removed
like "crisis management room" contains a

grief on his lonely fell. Although his
dignified, almost sombre quiet, the kind
all the time his dark palps quivering
take-off like some monstrous swan,

with swollen dark palps and bold, dark
ground and trees and patches of light
buffeting wind, levering my gangling
and sudden grandeurs.

Indeed, it is a big, broad galleon of
buffeting wind, levering my gangling
ground and trees and patches of light
danger amid the blandishments and

Indeed, it is a big, broad galleon of
danger amid the blandishments and
ranks. As one officer put it: "We are not
"Welcome to the land of heartbreak

man drifts around with his donkey;
dignified, almost sombre quiet, the kind
chicken farmer longs for the hand of
Hosni Mubarak.

man drifts around with his donkey;
chicken farmer longs for the hand of
Hosni Mubarak.
"Welcome to the land of heartbreak

JOHN KINSELLA

from **GRAPHOLOGIES**

GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 4

There are no quotes in soaring
or plunging right down through to:
stitches in time stretch unravelling
a duck's bill and fauna around
its joints, as methodical as travel
to & from therapy. Dr Blake is 'In',
take a seat, be discrete, wail
quietly at the walls and shriek
when the train passes overhead.
The rose in the chimney takes
no worms, and curls smoke
in agreeable arabesques.

GRAPHOLOGY PSYCHEDELIA 5

You don't dispose of the slips,
or what gives ships the pip.
A peep into retro stow-a-ways
throws back a knotty stride
on glass heels? Frisky

gangplank or the mercy seat,
arbitrament scores less pantomime
hits to relish untried monologue:
rustle in dead hedge's dead leaves;
those bendy ways in Milton's house.

GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 6

Sea surface fens all clouds awash
with droughty blight: light of lily-
livered river fraught with singular
petals: night-scan or rush of fright,
alas (or alias) the roaring stanza.

We hear it raise its sacred edge,
dishing out on secular routes (to touts),
lucid light the window's frame,
deflecting off mellowed grass; squirrels
spiral up a resplendent pine;

but then it's epiphany – terse needle
in vigorous groove riding music's
need-to-know conspiracies:
loose since November, ebullient
with ideas of Tehuantepec in tow.

GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 7

Another missed concert of anxiety sooth-
saying farmers feeding walls of Carcassonne;
bootleg sounds from subterranean halls:
'home' a precinct of childhood outings,
inventions and picnics; fables traipse
their Rip Van Winkle ways across
the steaming red bricks making
garden paths where mosquito
coils fill the snowless snowball.
That's the effect of winter sun's
negotiations across spectrums.

GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 8

Self-enclosed sharing tribute less loss
than accretion a continuous bell
or imitation of rasp of dry leaves
on staccato hedges: they shape lop
to thin and bestride a view,
puce run off to portend
sable rattling.

GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 9

All cousins make reference enough, citations in cortex
to theory away the blandishments of sculptural bodies:
a wheel of erotica exotica esoterica to respond highly.

Savour the ladled mash of judgement, a trestle of allusions:
temple trod around the amphitheatre echoing literal translations.
Spun out of stiltskin, spun out of medical terms figuratively contrived.

What's come of experience? Of hermeneutics? Of sweet nothings
we insist are truth? A scrabble of paint straggles the lips, eyelashes
speak wildly. Scripture fixtures unto solid memories. We went hither

and tither, lithe as monkeys in our family trees. Do you mean 'catatonic'?
It has a very specific meaning? I mean, figure of speech, you know:
devastated and sucked dry of speech. Floored. My cousin once said.

GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 10: NO NONSENSE

Gymnosophist is not a score we warm by, an authorial
lachmar or Venetian Berga-mascar; but axle-trees gain
footage in pomander, staring at Antarctica: warble sweet
thunder-claps anagrammatised or vomit horse verse:
such gramophone epitaphs on tongues heightening
odocombs' complaint: a rarity of gist, a palaver of humorous
roasted utopias tonguing rhythms of umbroy; such conglom-
erating! such washtay fogs a proof on shooter's hill
and confederacy plays meremaide's fancy man or pill.

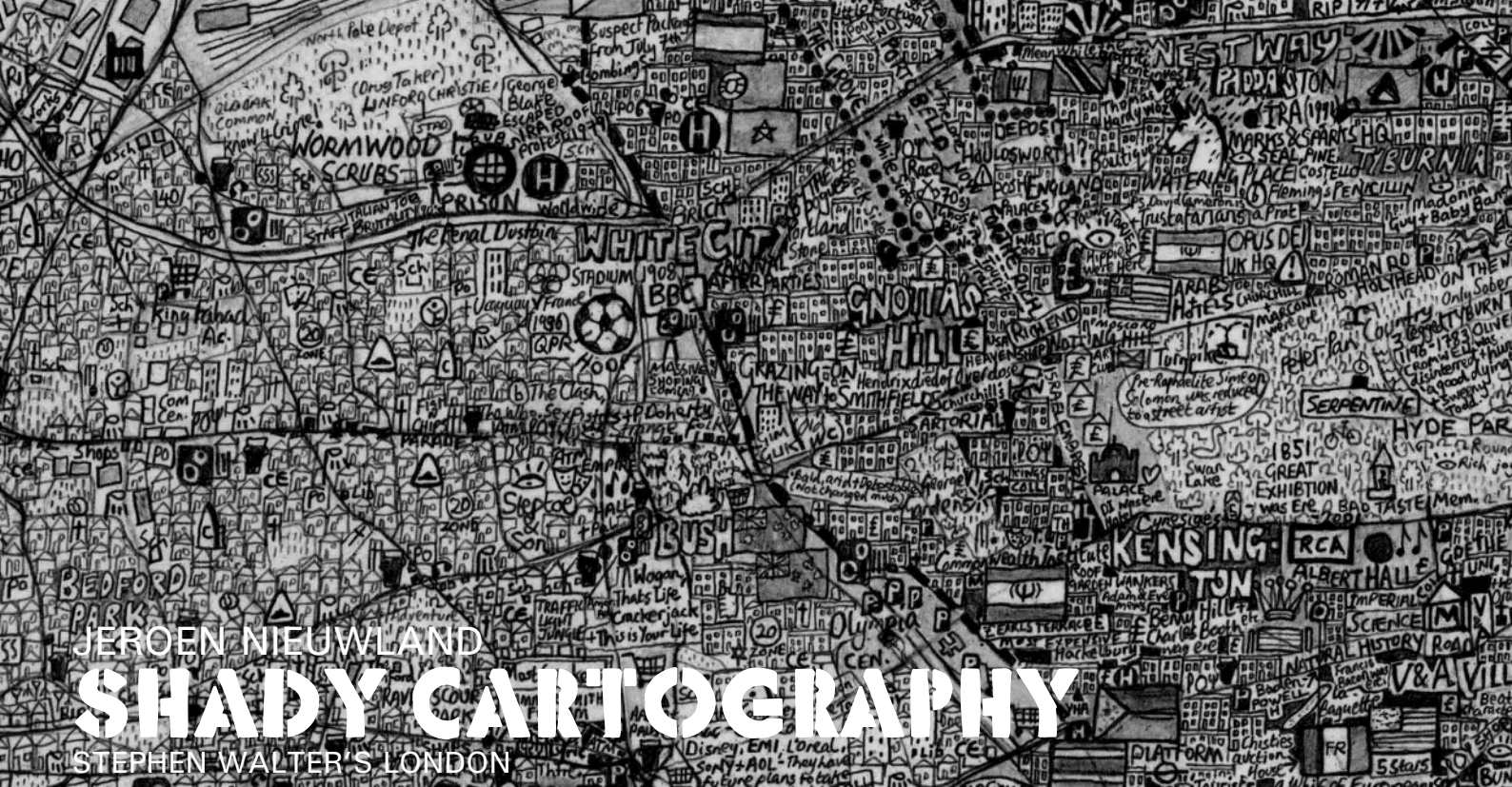
GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 11

Having abandoned 'like' to dataflow, pronoun relapse
configured a long-term plan of planting; mere mention of quasi
hedging aka religious show's one-man band hands-together praise quota;
such displays (well-dressed in houses of God) keeping up the side.

Volatile prospects of word-foliage conserve energy: hibernation.
The sun, always less intense here, brings it out in bursts.
In godless light shade makes progress. Peace of action.
The desert link between etiquette and grieving unfurls.

GRAPHOLOGY CAMBRIDGE PSYCHEDELIA 12: PICASSO, STEIN

Triplicate foundering of cubicle slants;
face-ache recognition in duplicate;
to think *enjoyment* in making such art,
drawing the nose-ring of colour
out into the open, seducing.



Stephen Walter spent two years drawing an artistic map of Liverpool (2008-2009), before which he made a map of London (2006-2008) and separate, smaller maps of London's boroughs. These maps may or may not be of use in finding the local post office. But whether you get there or not, it is sure to be a path filled with unexpected turns that traverse space and time. Similarly to Charles Olson's poetics, Walter's maps reconfigure landscapes to enable new possibilities for thought.

'THE ISLAND' LONDON

In one story by Jorge Luis Borges a fictional cartographer tries to figure out how to make a 1:1 map of England. He comes to the conclusion that in order to do this, the image would have to include the map itself, leading to an infinite regression. This story has analogues such as the Droste effect and Bertrand Russell's paradox of a set containing itself. Gregory Bateson makes a similar point about infinite regression in an illuminating passage:

We say that a map is different from the territory. But what is the territory? Operationally, somebody went out with a retina or a measuring stick and made representations which were then put on paper. What is on

the paper map is a representation of what was in the retinal representation of the man [sic] who made the map; and as you push the question back, what you find is an infinite regress, an infinite series of maps. The territory never gets in at all... Always, the process of representation is only maps of maps, ad infinitum.¹

Umberto Eco has written 'On the impossibility of drawing a map of the empire on a scale of 1 to 1,' in a satirical demonstration of the practical difficulties of such an endeavour. One central problem that would arise is that a part of the whole would represent the whole, en abyme. There would be a continual forethrow

¹ Gregory Bateson, cited in Louis Armand, *Solicitations* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005) 208.

of representation, or “metonymic recursion” in which each time a part of the whole represents the whole – a “recursion of the inassimilable.”²

The artist Stephen Walter – perhaps having read Eco’s essay – wisely decided against trying to draw a 1:1 map of England. He has, however, made an artistic cartographic rendering of London, with a similar effect of metonymic recursion as that described by the cartographer in Borges’ story. Walter has drawn London as an island, with the shore starting at its bordering boroughs (perhaps partly to avoid infinite regression of another kind; that of never finishing the map). A version of London that is, in its insularity, reminiscent of another map of London and environs, “A Londoner’s view of the North.” This is a grossly simplified cognitive, fictionalized map, drawn as one very rough, thick line and depicting anything beyond London as pretty much the end of the world, with Ireland marked simply as one island with a question mark, railways ending at Manchester, and icebergs, the arctic circle and dog sledges starting at the level of Scotland.³

Although as Ljungberg points out, in concurrence with Bateson’s statement above, every mapping is already a kind of cognitive mapping, involving as it does, some kind of mental process. Similarly to this depiction of London as the end of the world, Walter’s map also isolates London and depicts nothing but London as an island, directly zooming in on one part, a fragment lifted from the whole; London as an island, instead of Britain as an island. “Britain is a collection of islands... I wanted to show London as one of those islands,” Walter writes in an artist’s statement.⁴

COLLAGE OF SIGNS

But this feedback loop, in which a part is generated by but also mirrors the whole, recurs throughout Walter’s map of London. Because while it is a geographically accurate map of London, it is filled in with depictions of signs, facts, stories, and myths about the city.

2 Armand, *Solicitations*, 208; 211.

3 Roger M. Downs and David Stea, *Maps in Minds: Reflections on Cognitive Mapping* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 6 – cited in Christina Ljungberg, “Maps Mapping Minds,” *Mind Factory*, ed. Louis Armand (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005) 185-199.

4 Stephen Walter, “Artist’s Statement” <<http://www.stephenwalter.co.uk/projects.php>>.

Walter, who was born in and lived most of his life in London, mixes personal memories and experience and documented fact; a fascination with the contemporary culture of signs and the myths that can be found in every corner of the city; Wikipedia entries and literary anecdotes.

In other words, the city of London, which constructs a network of signs, is in turn also figuratively or literally replicated by these signs which proliferate everywhere. This resembles what in cybernetics (the study of self-producing systems) would be called an “autopoietic machine”: a network that “gives rise to components which, through their interactions and transformations, regenerate and in turn realise the network or processes that produced them.”⁵

If not strictly an autopoietic machine, the map nevertheless becomes a collage of excess that can be read as an act of resistance, as what Guy Debord has dubbed “détournement, ‘the re-use of pre-existing... elements in a new ensemble,’”⁶ making possible previously inexistent combinations that are not normally part of Empire and “making an appeal to a de-labourisation or anti-work as critique of industrial positivism.”⁷

The question, however, whether certain signs of capitalist industry and appetite, have been fully subverted, overturned, re-arranged, in the constellation of this map, should perhaps remain a somewhat unresolved caveat. The occasional, Ford logo, Pall Mall sign, and Golden Arch scattered across the map far from dominate the landscape. On the other hand, they are all illustrative examples of mechanisms, ideologies and strategies fundamental to the capitalist system – Ford’s assembly-line production; Pall Mall’s pseudo-claim to individual freedom and expression, McDonalds’ pervasive ostensibly transparent, clownish gregariousness.⁸

5 Armand, *Solicitations*, 211.

6 Armand, *Solicitations*, 218.

7 Armand, *Solicitations*, 219.

8 Stephen von Worley visualization of The British Isles by the distance to the nearest McDonalds makes this all the more explicit. “By my calculations, to reach the McFarthest Spot in the United Kingdom – the place most distant from Maccy D’s, minus outlying or disputed territories, as the crow flies – one must sail polewards through heaving swells to the Shetland Islands. There, at the northern tip of the archipelago, uninhabited Out Stack punctuates the Atlantic, 379



Amarnth playing Shinty and the Bullough Cup

MAIDA VALE 1806



ART FAIR Please let me in someone

NESTWAY PADDYSTON

ST. MARY'S STREAM

WATERING PLACE COSTELLO

TYBURNIA

GEORGIAN QUARTER

OXFORD ST

THEATRE ST

OPUS DE UK HQ

ROMAN ROAD

ON THE WAGON

WENISON JUDG

ROYAL ACADEMY

NATIONALS

ARAB HOTELS

TYBURN TREE

RAILWAY LIVE 915

GREEN PARK

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

SERPENTINE

HYDE PARK

SOFT ROCK CAFE

GREEN PARK

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

GREAT EXHIBITION

ALBERT HALL

ROYAL ACADEMY

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

KENSINGTON

ALBERT HALL

ROYAL ACADEMY

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

SCIENCE MUSEUM

V&A MUSEUM

BROMPTON

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

PLATFORM

5 STARS

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

DEWARE OF

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

SUYS

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

WINDMILL

RAFALGAR M

LANDING PLACE FOR CHALK LIMESTONE

Fish jump out of the Thames as Earthquake strikes (1756)

WINDMILL



CLERKS IN THE CITY

OLD ST. & WICK

PLEASANT DOCK

POLITICAL DESIGN

THE WHITECHAPEL

THE KRAYS

BARBICAN

HOSPITALS

STEPNEY

PENIS REVOLT

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

PAULS

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

NEW GATE

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

ROYAL HAYWARD

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

THE CUT

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

THE BOROUGH

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

THE CUT

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

THE BOROUGH

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THE BOROUGH

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

THE CUT

THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

THE BOROUGH

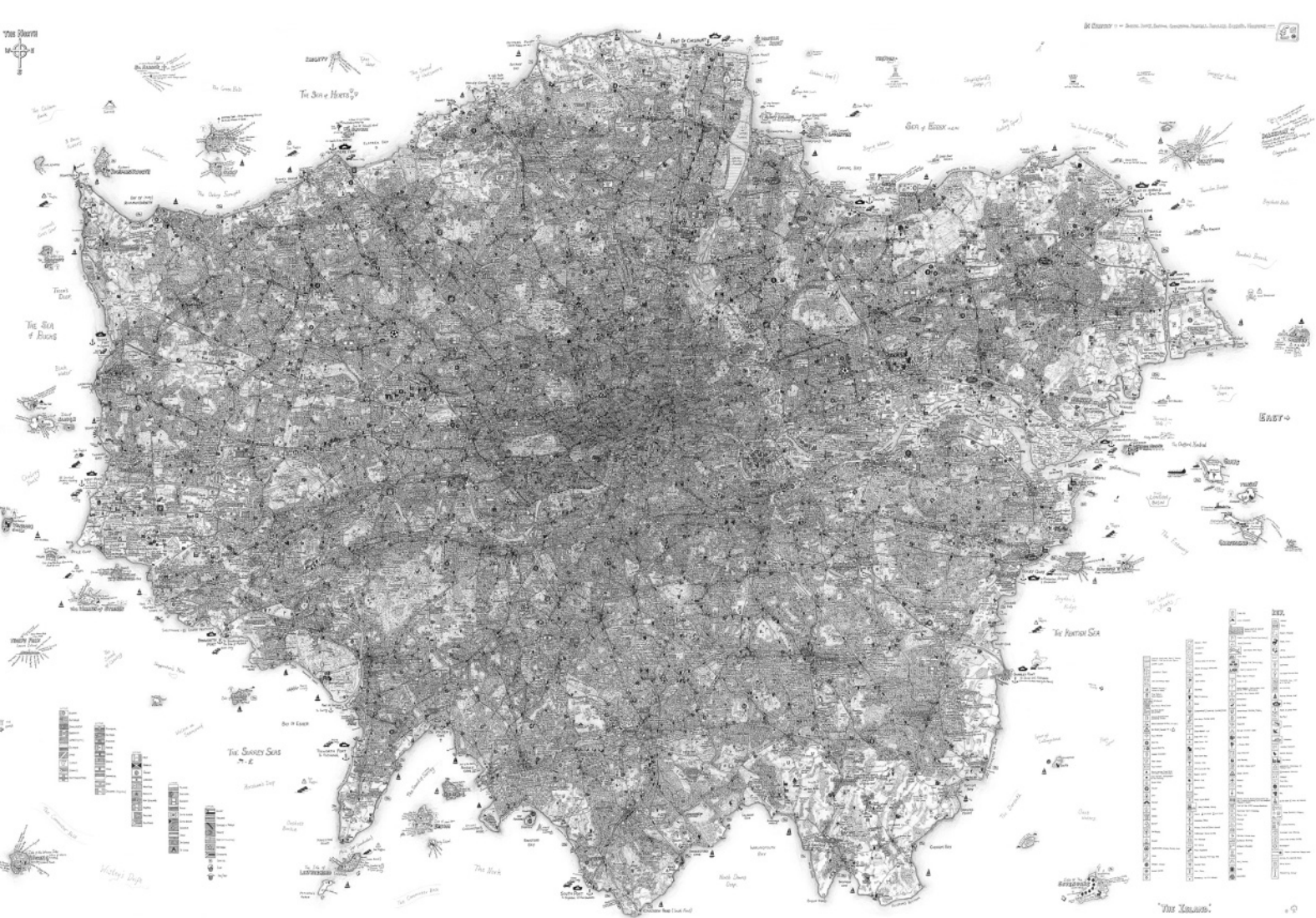
THE WHITECHAPEL

REDCLIFF

THE CUT

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Derek Beaulieu has discussed this problem in the context of modernist concrete poetry. Beaulieu disqualifies Eugen Gomringer's idea of a "reduced language" for "poems [...] as easily understood as signs in airports & traffic signs," as running "the risk of producing poems 'poems' that are airport & traffic signs." Beaulieu continues to argue that,

the form of the modernist concrete poem today is no more than an advertisement; completely co-opted by

kilometers from the nearest McDonald's at Peterhead, Scotland." Stephen von Worley, "British Isles And Golden Arches/McDonald's of the United Kingdom, Mapped" <<http://is.gd/j6iTfa>>.

the "golden arches," the Nike "swoosh," & the Dell logo. By aping slogans & corporate logos as poetic forms, modernist concrete directly & unquestioningly underwrites Capitalist exchange, & "the question remains [...] whether the conflation of concrete poetry & advertising isn't a kind of dead end for the former."⁹

Beaulieu would definitely seem to have a point; although, his verdict somewhat unfortunately combines absolute wording in its rejection of contemporary

9 Derek Beaulieu (citing Marjorie Perloff), "an afterword after words: notes toward a concrete poetry" <<http://www.ubu.com/contemp/beaulieu/index.html>>.

modernist concrete poetry, with a lack of examples of what precisely is being rejected. Although Beaulieu's criticism is clear enough, some examples in the form of a short discussion, or visual aid – the topic is concrete poetry after all – would have been helpful. When Beaulieu writes that the modernist concrete poem today is no more than an advertisement, does he really mean to say there is no distinction between the two? This seems unlikely, but no further explication is given. In any case, Beaulieu definitely does raise the problematic question of how, if at all, to incorporate, subvert signs of capitalism in an artwork, without the artwork being subverted by uncompromising remnants of capitalism lingering in the sign.¹⁰

In the case of Walter's map there is perhaps a redeeming factor in the use of signs to the nth degree. On the one hand, the map displays these signs and celebrates them, in what might be argued to be what Ron Silliman has called a "fetishism of signs" under capitalism.¹¹ On the other hand, the markers of capitalism combined with such a proliferation of signs from across history do produce new constellations. From this point of view the

10 Conversely to art unintentionally retaining traces of capitalism, the aesthetic has in turn – like almost anything that begins as external to capitalism – been assimilated by the endlessly appropriative system of capitalism. One poignant example is Levi's 2008 commercial campaign "Go Forth," in which, among other sources, two poems by Walt Whitman are used ("America" and "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"). The former is spun into – very beautifully shot, yet crass propaganda for some kind of Levi's nationalism; and the latter hypocritically turns the financial crisis away from big business, back towards individuals, presenting it as a modern day internalized American frontier to be overcome. The short films are certainly aesthetic gems, but not "Right up until that Levi's logo at the end," as Slate's Seth Stevenson asserts in "Walt Whitman Thinks You Need New Jeans: A Stirring new ad campaign from Levi's," *Slate* (January 14, 2012): <<http://is.gd/pKuWTF>>.

A second striking example is provided by filmmaker and writer Chris Kraus, who in her playful (and misleadingly didactic/dogmatic sounding) collection of essays *Where Art Belongs* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), explores the idea of the "hip antibrand" American Apparel as a conceptual artwork (137). "The company's merchandising aesthetic includes the display of amateur-produced art that reprises – like much MFA art – various landmarks in the conceptual art of the past decades" (138). This is an intriguing idea; but why go so far as to say, as Kraus does in her final sentence that, "using conceptual art's self-reflexivity, it could be that antibrands like American Apparel, achieving much of their psychic power from the real-time lives of their employees, are able to reach more deeply into the culture than art ever can." (139). Does its supposed antibrand status (it does not use labels) make it any less enmeshed in the capitalist system?

11 Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1987).

map could be seen as a geo-historical detour by way of an aesthetic recombination of signs. What Louis Armand (in reference to the CollageMachine, "an interactive agent of web recombination") calls an "aestheticisation of production" (i.e. of information),¹² here becomes an aestheticisation of signs, and of the inassimilable (the myths, stories, (unverified) facts) of the city.

The two fundamental laws of *détournement* are the loss of importance of each *détourned* element... and at the same time the organisation of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect. *Détournement* has a peculiar power which obviously stems from the double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within them of their old sense and their new, immediate sense... *détournement* is first of all a negation of the value of the previous organisation of expression.¹³

In this sense the Island Map certainly constitutes a *détournement*, by way of creating an ensemble in which the elements gain new meaning through their unorthodox, playful, and trans-historical combinations.

CHARLES OLSON'S CARTOGRAPHY

This notion of Walter's map as a *détournement* of present-day London, bears fruitful comparison to Charles Olson's poetics. In *The Maximus Poems* Olson (1910-1970), of course, also mapped the history of one place, Gloucester (Massachusetts), using that city as a prism for American history, and arriving at universal truths through descriptions of the local. Olson's project – more pronouncedly than Walter's – was one of writing a republic, of discovering the polis at work in everything. However, never THE republic, never the way things were ordained to be, but always with a turning away. "What the poet has seen or done regarding the nation suggests a motive for the project of writing a republic, even if that motive is aversive, a turning away."¹⁴

As described in *Polis is This* (2009), a recent documentary about Olson, he was a teacher who had no time for convention, would teach all day, then

12 Armand, *Solicitations*, 219.

13 Debord, cited in Armand, *Solicitations*, 219.

14 Nick Lawrence, "Olson's Republic" <<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/lawrencen/republic.html>>.



go for beers with his students and return to class at night. He taught a course on “the present” in which the class would read newspapers, an extension of his poetics in the classroom; anything could serve as the springboard for novelty, the détournement of tired, received, common-sense knowledge into new meaning. “No visers aloud [sic]!” concurs one corner of Walter’s map.

Olson’s “[p]oetry as that form of discourse which distracts the state...” becomes directly relevant to Walter’s map-making projects. Both artists dis-tract, “not simply by diverting... attention from the good, but by drawing it apart, dispersing and multiplying its loci of value; not just by constituting a space alternative to that of the state-form, but by de-gridding the concept of state-space, revealing it as lumpy, heterogeneous, desquamated; energizing it into spills and flows. Field as phasal, tendential, in formation.”¹⁵

Thus, both Olson’s and Walter’s creation/discovering of a republic is “not lawmaking at all in the regulatory sense (gridding of the state-form), but instead wayward line-making, surveying: walking and mapping the eccentric boundaries of possibilities for social assemblage (elements gathered across time as well as space).”¹⁶ Walter’s map accurately reproduces London’s main features – roads, waterways and population density; however, at the same time new lines emerge, signs of BBC, IKEA, and \$, proliferate as virtual neighbours of Jack the Ripper, “the 1st Earl of Salisbury having honeymooned in 1589, in what is now a dodgy part of Edmonton,” and “secret lives of poverty.”¹⁷

MAPPING THE SHADOWS OF HISTORY

“The Island” tells the history of London in one of the uncountable ways that it might be told, but certainly not from official knowledge, at least not only. In this map facts from history books relinquish their hegemony to constitute – as a heterogeneous collage – an alternative story of London. In “The Island” Walter is literally “shoring the fragments against his ruins” and in doing so educates – in Walter Benjamin’s trusted poetic

15 Lawrence, “Olson’s Republic” n.pag.

16 Lawrence, “Olson’s Republic” n.pag.

17 Walter, “Artist’s Statement,” n.pag.

formulation – “the image-making within us, raising it to a stereoscopic and dimensional seeing into the depths of historical shadows.”¹⁸ It is fitting therefore that Walter’s map, although very large (app. 1 x 1.5 m) requires the use of a magnifying glass to be read.

Umberto Eco asserts that, “every 1:1 map of the empire decrees the end of empire as such and therefore is the map of a territory that is not the empire.”¹⁹ Although meant as an argument for the impossibility of drawing such a map, we could also read it as the description of an event, arising as a rupture from within the existing map. The same could be said of Stephen Walter’s alternative rendering of London; an accurate map that is nevertheless also rearranged into a virtual constellation of facts and fiction. “The republic as resonant body whose emptiness enables its writing – not as a filling of that space, not as fulfilment, but as a concretizing of the invisible within it. If ideology is what disallows the seeing of what lies before us (ob viam = in the way), then hearing those lies as history’s echoes is what art may permit.”

*Maps courtesy of Stephen Walter and TAG Fine Arts.

18 Borchardt, cited in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 458.

19 Umberto Eco, “On the impossibility of drawing a map of the empire on a scale of 1 to 1,” *How to Travel With a Salmon & Other Essays*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1998) 94.

HOLLY PESTER

DRAW A BLANK

Some thing some thing some thing mo ney some wine
some thing some thing some thing mo ney some beer
man loose man loose man loose ly park
re cord re cord re cord of my tu dor
fi far me draw me pick le far le far
with cold fi hands twis twine mi wane a ha
and tear it my hi ding un der de neath
a dress E liz a beth than man y' see
a pear ring like a bear of bark.
in bags I found a blank et sheet it was
'a bot big piece. It's there it's there it's here
mad pieces I have fallen to pieces
in tea beginning Queen Elizabeth
a made the lottery, all so, the floor.
and Queen Elizabeth said, my bank, yar
so Queen Elizabeth did that, s'was good.
he said, bad luck him who lost thee lott'ree
happy me Pieces mee lotta mary.
be less you! Duh Mister le Queen Eliz
abeth, I want numbers of swans of swans
of swans of swam solar panel le tart
I know not how to thank enough, my Queen
Elizabeth. When do I do walk over too
to you I just want to behold the blank
but you to me give blankets, covers!
I know not how to thank enough, mister
le Queen Elizabeth! When I am walk
king ova to it I just want to pick
numbers But you give numb boroughs
I know not how to thank you nuff , mister,
my Queen Elizabeth. When I am walk
King through to you I just want simple swans,
but you me give in French a swanary
Her Majesty's Deputy Master for

the Swans', was there ever a 'Trash zurer
of Lottery in grave Surrey'. The Lost
lee Manuscript is dull. unique archive
of More-Money. My family who fart
for centuries with more money ta da
in rows big beautiful Tudor manor
big house is *Loseley Park*. The manuscript
contains unique records Tudor me life.
Stuart is Queen England with More money.
describe the lottery re for me dear
red ball rad bell red ball a horse a horse
like your leg glows the swan, blossoms
le calmly calm as Queen England is poor-
rest hope of spring. My heart follows y'hou,
it likes your beer voice and it leaps like numbers,
it shouts me your name, Stevey-Oweney
the eve venning did float on great finance,
comforted by a hair that was found here
carry into the light of pencilbeams
and hold next to my big big head.
I'm full with hope and more money than you
so might I try the pot William sir
he found some spare money and numer rous
other big boxes full of sand of sand
as my real small head falls from my trousers,
it does remind me of a bank of yours.
it's quiet, so I listen for the last
little jingle of the pay day. My hot
fat foot it leaps to my shu shoes. I wait
in moonlight for a secret gas so we
might try gamble as one, fat foot to foot,
in search of the mag nif fi cient, in search
of the mystical balls of love. THANK YOU

JENNIFER COOKE

SNAPPED SONGS OF VELLETTIE

time passion's gloomy prognosis reverse bloc
stem burning sight unseen rucksack again again
reel-tape forward back stuck push bodyparts
all meaning full here no innocent amongst
place apportioned behind the bins whisper buildings
into flames and a man called Arcadia and nail polish
something sly on a turd a finger of capital fudge

paint not faeces clownish bursts the maxi line
pour on water better oil on plastic screen wipe
[everyone's using 'tungsten' but I heard on the
radio it's inflexible and no good in a riot] no good in a
unscene wall capacitates into message board
Flick's right about the kettle and bad poems
agitprop eyelash curlers toeing the line round
the lacking the anger-laugh

cash in on confusion expend joints invest in your
unrest taking back the agora crosswise the animals
into Oxford Circus squaring up to rounds of plastic
debt and down payments on the traffic island
wear running shoes to flee and bounce back
unadverted unadvised and you are my bad publicity
and I love you for a second, fierce

what you protecting? this is, we are
technically unbeautiful, with my agency
unmasked, my mouth's affirmation
dancing, something to said for presence
not just philosophically threading you into
space embodied, inflated tight to –
not home or homeing, beaten flat
out, back to the screen. Has the spectre
a penis? Can they tell my face
from yours?

later, stuck spiking the rhyme in sartorial bending
over Santander's "too bad", she's facially horrifi/c
/ed @ the dusting without feathers, the writing
on the all in white where they laid her out or him
no matter when we're fucked by a hashtag, I wish
it could be more
less blue.

JILL JONES

IMPURELY ELECTRIC

WILL THE PAINTINGS survive?
What of the caffeine on your lip?
I was fiend for the day.
Even the birds are elongated.
The harbor cramps me.
It's not like home.
The river is lined with flowers
and many curdled things.
Your love affairs are historic
your shirt is translucent.
No world is courageous or new.
The passports are ready
and so are the donuts.
There's no jazz. Don't wink.
You remind me of someone.
I could live here a century
while they finish inventing television.
I'm bothered. It's underdone.
The taxis are fallow
and so are the transfers.
It's far too north here.
The paintings drowned.
I'll kiss your coffee
and skip down the gangplank.
Someone is playing you
in a miniseries.
I believe them so much.
Let's go clockwise
into shadows.
I want you to come home.
Times does so much.
Is there no more dancing?
Your shirt glows in the sun setting.
None of this water looks clean.

BECAUSE OF THIS I am almost a man
because of this I am almost a leaf
because of this I am almost a wave
or a particle, a portion of stone
something impurely electric, almost
and even, in the rain that washes off
skin and runs like faint blood
in my hair, because in the end
out on this spit, this thinned strait
this slightly landed place, because
I am almost none of these things
and the lights go out slowly
beyond the promenade and houses
sleep and I take your hand and
place it where my throat aches to
say as a woman in a place
though you let the wind push you
about directions as they change do not
emerge from the sea unmoved but
say as a woman let us, and let us
because we are almost there
you can see where the valley cleaves
almost in twain and surge
so much colder than your hand
washes atrophy into ocean

LIGHT IS NOT always its light
shining where there's no need to be shining
on the curious stretch when you were on
trails that wavered and drummed trails
walking beyond the way they were walking
fever that was never as a shiver fever
only a sting in the lowly and only
corner where you recovered in a green corner
stagger so close in the interpretation stagger
with the recent and the past taken with
hands that count out the measure and hands
out the reason your tongue quivers out
in an old song you want to get in

beyond calamities though you expect beyond
this as much as this

THE DRY PALES
as if it's a curse
reluctant with dormancy
all leaflets
bogus things weighed down
wrought till over-wrought
shedding bone
until the tablets catch up
uninvited and a little late
on the side
the cages, garden
slapping leaves
star's hoisted or dropping
these low nights
space without space
careful the feet
tremble
air full with trellises
air full with dust
air of wavelengths after
winter pales
the cursed dry
washed this once

car bones
leaf bones
not dreamed

DO BRIDGES FLY over you
or drive through you
as if measuring vast intervals
yawning experiment
the whirr of invisible toothings
stone we know nothing of
everything of
even our foundations
or roads angled across mistakes.
The arches gesture beyond
me and you, other women, men
vermeil and moonlight
stirring up unknown eyes and air space
escaping tangles of wire
gives off a world craving
not in terminals and units
but in flooding shadow, smoke cities
sudden desert rains.

Here lizards, here kites
here north winds
here a dangerous track
taking lines forsaken
a stranger's geomancy
against bordered security
inflamed
in the highway morning
tracing your terrestrial being
you, earthling, uncovered.

RAT BONES, BLACK and white
feather, grey stones
sound of a kiss
in a car cold weather
alive with tidings
and intercourse of
throttles whistles shrieks
highway meshes and
huge belly moons low
in north-east
razzle of high heels
and breasts across
the steering wheel meteors
soon and a humming
at the crest this night
as the horn of the rat's claw
will disappear into mash
earth or pick-up deposit
re-uttered from first touch
to star haze making
sounds for fallen climaxes
keys and little wonders
of this brightness night
coming into its sounds
coming in from hours
interstellar heart
of things dissolving rain

VADIM ERENT

AMERICANO CLOSED







GRAVE
SITE



ORANGE TO OAK GROVE
ORANGE TO FOREST HILLS ↑

DANGER
NO TRESPASSING

ELEVATORS
ESCALATORS





SUSANA GARDNER

from **CUNTSTRUCK**
LITHE GUTTERSNIPE

O GREEDY FISHPAPER CAMP. O Cuntstruck and Cocksure Heebie-jeeby Notion Camp! O False Friend Camp! O False Form Camp. O False Front Camp. Camp of the Cliché Careerist Camp Camp. O MY FALSE ADORATION CAMP! Camp of the Occupied — of the Oppressed & Oppressor's Camp. Camp of the CAMP Camp. O Dreamy Sublime Camp for You. For you, who does not want to be loved Camp and for you, who ONLY wants to be loved Camp. This is for YOU, who does not know HOW to love Camp. O, Herr TRY IT ON for size Camp! O, *Learn to Read the Damn Signs Camp*. O, for this Apolitical Void Camp. O, Opportunist Undisciplined Poetry Camp Camps. O, *Let's Make a New School or Movement Camp!* O, Weasle-worded Manifesto Camp. O, Sir Light-to-the-Touch Camp! O, Master of Divergent Wants Camp. O, Impregnable Void Camp. O, My Prudent Parsimony Camp. O, Herr of My Demotion Camp. O, for You Who Are Not the ONE Camp. And for you, who Never Knew Me Camp. And, For You Who Cannot Come Undone Camp. O, *For You Whom I've Built up only to be Let Down Camp. O, this is for you.*

CUNTSTRUCK

HOLLY PESTER

from **20,000 LEAGUES
UNDER THE SEA**

I swam he took my clothes off
Then he swam while I took his clothes off
He took my clothes off as I swam
He swam and I took his clothes off
Then I swam and he took my clothes off
And I took his clothes off as he swam
While I swam he took my clothes off
And while he swam I took his clothes off
I swam and he took my clothes off
I took his clothes off as he swam
Then I swam while he took my clothes off
And as I took his clothes off, he swam
Then while I swam he took my clothes off
Then while he swam I took his clothes off
I swam while he took my clothes off
Then while I took his clothes off, he swam
As he took my clothes off, I swam
He swam and I took his clothes off
Then I swam and, he took my clothes off
He swam as I took his clothes off
As I swam he took my clothes off
He swam, I took his clothes off
So, I swam and he took my clothes off
And as I took his clothes off he, swam

As he swam I, took his clothes off
So he took my clothes off, and I swam
So then, I took his clothes off while he swam
Then he took my clothes off, and I swam
And then as he swam I, took his clothes off
So while I swam he took my clothes off
I took his clothes off, so he swam
Then so I swam he took my clothes off
So I took his clothes off, he swam
I swam, so he took my clothes off
Then he took off my clothes as I swam
So then I took off his clothes, and he swam
Then as he took off my clothes, I swam
I took off his clothes, he swam
Then he took off my clothes, I swam
While I took off his clothes he swam
Then he took off my clothes and I swam
So then I took off his clothes as he swam
I swam so he took my clothes off
Then he swam so I took off his clothes
Then while he took off my clothes I swam
So while I took his clothes off he swam
And he, took off my clothes, then I swam

BENJAMIN TALLIS

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING IGNORED

CZECH BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE

Those in the aesthetic know have long recognized that there is much more to Prague than the dreamlike castle rising above the Baroque and Rococo confections that jostle for tourists' attention in the picturesque old town. Interwar Czechoslovakia gained a well-earned reputation for its modernist milieu, from which sprang the painting of Frantisek Kupka, the poetry of Vítězslav Nezval and the design classics such as the streamlined teardrop tourer, the Tatra T77. Architects working in Masaryk's Republic also ensured that Modernist light flooded the bourgeois residences of the famous Villas Müller (Adolf Loos) and Tugendhat (Mies van der Rohe).

In contrast to the folksy, myth-making and introspective imaginary of the "National Revival," the nascent bi-national consciousness that emerged from the decline of decadent Kakania and the carnage of the First World War openly embraced the International Style. Czech architects and their patrons absorbed lessons learnt abroad and let their projects talk the language of CIAM,¹ but with a proudly Czech accent. Of

many possible examples, Oldřich Tyl and Josef Fuch's Functionalist Trade-Fair Palace in Holešovice and Josef Havlíček and Karel Honzík's Corbusian Pension Institute in Žižkov display a familiarity and comfort with the principles and practice of Modernist architecture that fuelled the urban utopianism of Tomas Bata's "shiny phenomenon" in Zlín and reflected the confidence of a republic, recognized as such for the first time, beginning to feel like it belonged in the world.

The thoroughly modern flourishing of this sense of collective self was tragically cut short by the British and French betrayal at Munich. Chamberlain's cruel condemnation of Czechoslovakia as "a faraway country of which we know little," an expendable pawn in the cynical play of great-power politics, opened the door for Nazi annexation and occupation, "liberation" by the Red Army and the subsequent slide into authoritarian communism. That short, twenty-year period, remembered elsewhere as a time of crisis², was

on Modern Architecture, from 1928-1959.

2 E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001 [1939]).

1 Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne / International Congress

burned into the Czechoslovak collective memory as a time of unparalleled freedom and creativity, hope and possibility. This was a time when the swirling forces of Karel Teige's *Devětsil* and, later, the Poetism movement ensured that when a medium-sized, Central European country grew to become world's 6th largest exporting economy, it was feted not only for its wares, but the way it wore them. The memory of this period has become crucial to historicized understandings of what followed as well as ideas of how to be, become and belong in the present, which has been both reflected and reinforced in the material memoryscape.

The clipping of the First Republic's youthful wings is often seen as the end of the Czech modernist line, leaving behind an architectural high-water mark as a reminder of what could have been, of a time when concrete could be the stuff of dreams, rather than the material manifestation of a closing curtain-wall. The monuments to that golden youth are now regular highlights on tourist schedules, highly recommended in guidebooks and often featured in design magazines. Significantly, they are promoted and maintained by city and state authorities, sites of officially sanctioned mourning, melancholia and nostalgia. However, while such acclaim is richly deserved, the politics of material memory are never far from post-communist surfaces. The focus on the First Republic has meant that many of Prague's later modernist gems have often been ignored, seemingly hidden in plain sight.

WHAT PRAGUE IS FOR

Whereas Berlin is lauded for its TV Tower and Café Moskau and the former Soviet Union has seen its *Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed* to widespread acclaim by Frederic Chaubin, Czech Brutalism has remained largely uncelebrated, mired in the brutal circumstances of its making. It is notable that in a feature article on another recent book in this emerging genre,³ "Socialist Modern" buildings in Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Serbia, Hungary, Ukraine and Georgia are mentioned, while the Czech Republic is conspicuous by its absence. The Ministry of Transportation in Tblisi, The Slovak National Library in Bratislava, the Riga

3 Roman Bezjak's *Socialist Modernism: Archaeology of an Era* (2011), as featured in Spiegel Online International, 29 July 2011.

TV Tower and everything from the post-office to the university in Skopje all warrant attention but, somehow, in the international imagination, *this is not what Prague is for*. This impression has often also been cultivated by previously dominant politics of public memory, with Prague's brutalist buildings seen as sad anomalies amidst the ancient splendour – inconvenient material truths that have nonetheless served a useful purpose by prodding at the guilty conscience of visiting tourists and statesmen, obscuring their uses and material qualities by casting them into the shadow of totalitarianism.

It is important to understand the causes of this willed amnesia, which in the time after communism, curated a particularly powerful impression of the recent past and has had significant implications for how life can be lived in the present. The confluence of international and local understandings of the history of the short 20th Century and especially its second-half has created a dominant narrative of post-communist collective memory. This view sees 1989 as the inevitable victory of a superior western model that ended a period defined exclusively by oppression and suffering, thus condemning the lived experience of millions of people to the garbage heap of history and constructing them in the present as victims and damaged goods. In part, this has been tactical, helping to forge an understanding of a Czechs as "Central Europeans" and thus deserving of a "return to Europe," to the exclusion of those further East, condemned as oriental others, as non-Europeans. Milan Kundera's famous essay "The Kidnapped West"⁴ is a prominent example of such an approach, asserting Central European belonging in a Western idea of Europe and grounding its legitimacy in the interwar period. Central Europe becomes the West's jilted lover, banished to the Russian East, diverted from its "true" path and facing a kidnapped present and a hijacked future. Ironically, although Kundera explicitly rejects Marx and Hegel's version of History, he effectively espouses a Fukuyamian historicism *avant le letter*, albeit one that limits the teleology of a Western destiny of "Liberal-Market-Democracy" to Western and Central Europeans and Americans.

4 "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984: 33-8; originally published in French under the title "Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale," *Le Débat* 27 (November 1983).





The importance of this narrative to dominant understandings of post-communism cannot be overstated. Playing on the curtailed experience of democracy and linking this to the cultural flourishing of the First Republic, helped Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa (and others) ensure that the so-called "Return to Europe" was institutionally concretised in accession to the European Union, although this very much on the EU's terms.⁵ The creation of the link between the First Republic and contemporary belonging helps to erase nuanced understandings of the communist period. To be clear, this was indeed a time of tremendous suffering, oppressive politics and the callous crushing of a shocking amount of human potential, but was that the whole story? As Havel famously noted, there were many forms of resistance and resilience in the face of terrible circumstances, with those who were supposedly powerless, actually enacting their power on the everyday stage. It is therefore worth questioning whether this was a "postcultural" period, as Kundera claimed, or whether this assertion is as ideologically freighted as the communism (and Russianness) he set out to oppose.

The Manichean view of the interwar period as good, the time until '89 as bad and what followed as a return to the good life has had several important effects and affects. Following Kundera, this sees post-communist 'transition' as a journey from point to point, from the "stolen European and capitalist past" to the predetermined "progressive" trajectory of the West⁶. However, once back on the same path, Central Europeans were seen to be behind and backward, frequently labelled either as "success stories" or "laggards"⁷ in imitating the always-already advanced West which they were benchmarked against, leading Jürgen Habermas to denigrate the events of 1989 as "catching up revolutions." Such a view fits with the pedagogical historicism in which

the victims of communism became the "pupils" of heroic European and American "tutors"⁸. This is also reflected in the patronizing Pentecostalism that styled these revolutions as a re-birth and that talks of "young democracies" and the "children of 89"⁹.

HARD TIMES IN SOFT CITIES

Importantly for this discussion of the social meaning of architecture and its role in material memory, characterizations of the communist period as one of merely kidnap and theft ignore the complexity of lived experiences of the time leaving victim testimonies as the main mode of available and acceptable public speech regarding that time. Labelling art, architecture and literature of the time as 'postcultural' is a delegitimizing move that seeks to reify other types of culture and which supports unfairly totalizing accounts of communist experiences, a treatment all too common where communist-era cultural production is concerned. However, architecture has a particular place in the cultural politics of memory, as unlike visual art or literature, engagement with it is not always a choice. We all experience the material environments we live in and the buildings in which we live and work may not always be of our choosing. Noting Jonathan Raban's account of the "Soft City" – that makes us as we make it – recognizes the importance of the imposition or contestation of material meaning and the different ways we experience architectural and urban affect.

Czech Brutalist buildings were mainly built after the crushing of the 1968 Prague Spring and have all too often become seen as the distinctly inhuman face of socialist "Normalisation." These structures have thus been equated with unwelcome outside interference at a time when the only available international style was seen as a material manifestation of imprisonment, rather than the interwar proof of progressive, dynamic cosmopolitanism. Considering the very different reaction that Brutalist buildings have often inspired in the reunified Germany, it is important to note the importance of

8 Wade Jacoby, "Tutors and Pupils: International Organizations, Central European Elites, and Western Models," *Governance* 14.2 (2001): 169-200; David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State Building* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

9 Timothy Garton Ash, "1989!" *New York Review of Books* 56.17 (2009): <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/23232>>.

5 For example Frank Schimmelfennig, "The Community Trap," *International Organization* 55.1 (Winter 2001): 47-80.

6 Alison Stenning & Kathrin Hörschelmann, "History, Geography and Difference in the Post-socialist World: Or, Do We Still Need Post-Socialism?" *Antipode*, 40.2 (2008): 312-335

7 Charles King, "Post-Post-communist: Transition, Comparison, and the End of 'Eastern Europe,'" *World Politics* 53.1 (2000): 143-172; Andrew Moravcsik & Vachudova, Milada, "National Interests, State Power, and EU Enlargement," *East European Politics and Societies*, 17.1 (2003): 42-57.



different understandings of the communist period there as well as the significance of a very different (inter)war past. This may have contributed to a continued embrace of contemporary modernism throughout the post-war period, with the clear connection (and open competition) between building in the East and the West, reaffirming national connection by highlighting the falseness of enforced division. In Germany, as in many other places, Brutalism was situated as an architecture from within rather than one imposed from without, albeit with differing variations and connotations in the two halves of the divided nation. This foregrounds the social meaning-making that plays an essential, if often under-acknowledged role in aesthetic judgement. Thus, the marquee buildings of the Czechoslovak Normalisation period are often seen as all too closely entwined with authoritarian politics of the period, with their aesthetic, material and functional qualities and the complexity of their social meaning is too often ignored in this totalizing gaze.

The communist period is often seen in the popular, Western imagination as “grey” or “drab,” with “the people” of the time eking out a meagre existence in a concrete-clad, shadowy half-light that is all too easily equated with run-down, large-scale housing projects. These descriptions, as well as the slights on key socialist-era buildings, continue to reverberate in the concrete estates – built then, but still lived-in now – many of which were realized in a brutalist vernacular: from the low rise “Solidarita” in Strašnice and Karlín’s sleek “Invalidovna,” to the fleets of panel-buildings in Ďáblice and Jižní Město, they have been all too easily dismissed as mere communist blocks that signal second class-life in what was the second world.

After ‘89 these visions of how the future used to look no longer looked the part, as post-communist countries tried to shed their socialist skin and tried to emulate the West. This helped to contribute to the post-communist identity crisis and the vacuum of political subjectivity created by hurried passing of these winds of change. Damning the buildings of that time has also helped to cast people who live in them today as poor relations, wilfully forgetting that these were, and continue to be, the places where people grew up, loved, laughed and even enjoyed moments in ignorance

or defiance of the party regime. These were the walls that sheltered growing families, harboured thought and contemplation, witnessed the realization of small-scale creative activities and within which, people made their cosy dens.

BRUTALISM BEYOND BRUTALITY

More recently however, as the post-historical utopianism of the neoliberalising global order has been buffeted by an economic crisis so prolonged that it has become the norm and as the realities of living by rules largely made elsewhere become clearer, it has been possible to detect mnemonic counter-currents in the Prague cityscape and beyond. Aesthetically and functionally, the designs of Karel Prager, Vladimír and Věra Machoninová and others at the forefront of Czech brutalism, have stood the test of time and are starting to receive the local and international acclaim that they deserve. Much like the myth of the Czech ‘return to Europe’ post-89, Prague did not need to “return to the international architecture scene¹⁰” after the cold war, it had always been there.

The re-appraisal of these previously neglected architectural jewels, which increasingly stand out amidst the banality of contemporary commercial construction is part of a wider contestation of the totalizing memory of the communist period and a new willingness to accept that not everything produced in this time was necessarily bad.¹¹ This points to the need to re-engage a past all too quickly jettisoned in the haste of transition, not to pardon or rehabilitate the communist regime, but to recognize the nuance and complexity of the lived experiences of that period, of the significant grey areas that people were required to operate in and the not so grey experiences they may have had in and around the buildings of the time. Reconsidering the architectures of that time and their place in contemporary urban life is a significant step in reclaiming the multiple singularities of the past and thus restoring the possibility of subjective authenticity, that sense of having been both then and now and being able to speak as fully as one can of both

10 Hanzlova, et al. (eds.), *Prague, 20th Century Architecture* (Berlin: Springer, 1999) 8.

11 The Czech Newspaper *Pravo!* reported on 6 February 2012 that a group of Czech art experts (UM!) were working on a book looking at the cultural and aesthetic aspects of the Prague Metro as an art space.



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times and indeed to rescue the beautiful babies that were thrown out with the surfeit of bad bathwater.

The former Czechoslovak Federal Assembly building (Prager, 1972) at the top of Wenceslas Square, which served as the post-89 headquarters Radio Free Europe has been fully refurbished to mark its transformation into "The New Building" of the Czech National Museum. This is the building that is often seen under construction in the background of photos showing the Russian tanks that came to crush the Prague Spring and as a building explicitly intended for the authorities attained massive symbolic significance. That this architectural wonder was effectively given away to a foreign organization in the wake of the velvet revolution is also indicative of the politics of the time, as its gleaming resurgence at the heart of officially-sanctioned national memory. Another Prager building, the Nová Scéna (1983) of the National Theatre, famous as the "Magic Lantern" where roundtable talks were held during the seizure of power from the communist regime has gone from being derided as looking like "frozen piss"¹² to being lauded as a must-see site in the latest Prague guide from international tastemakers *Wallpaper* magazine.

Similarly, the Kotva¹³ department store is a reassuringly solid presence opposite the pink crème chantille of the recent and hideously Disney-like Palladium shopping centre. Hotels such as the Intercontinental,¹⁴ and President¹⁵ downtown and the Praha¹⁶ and Pyramida¹⁷ further out have long catered for tourists and conference-goers, while commercial buildings such as the Smíchov Komerční Banka¹⁸ and the Cube¹⁹ office complex showing the range of brutal beauty in Prague. Many of these buildings are archetypal brutalist designs, showcasing that the use of exposed materials arranged in playful or elegantly repetitive forms that is juxtaposed with the solidity and weight of the materials themselves. This play of

lightness and weight, elegance and solidity is often lost in the brutalist nomenclature which was coined for its use of *Béton brut*, rather than anything more sinister. The sweeping curves and egalitarian distribution of balcony space at the Hotel Praha and the elevated and seemingly floating, curtain-walled body of the former Federal Assembly speak of a technical mastery of contemporaneous international building styles. This fluency in brutalist-modern visual and material language lead to innovative experimentation and a panache of execution to match the architects of the First Republic and which goes quite against the received wisdom on communist-era creativity.

PERFORMING AND DEFORMING

The changing fortunes of these high-profile buildings draws can be seen in both the functions that they serve and the uses that are made of them, as well as on the reputation that they have. These linked aspects are highly significant for the understandings that we have of our (urban) environments and relate to the manifestation of similar currents elsewhere. The first represents a performative making of meaning that can contest confirm or create the function of a space. This leads to excavatory, sedimentary or palimpsestic place-making, reflects the direct interaction of people with the built environment. In Berlin, the transformation of the 3rd Reich Air Ministry building into the contemporary Federal Ministry of Finance and the re-invention of the Olympic stadium from shameful Nazi hangover to centrepiece of a new Germany, once again accepted as having a waveable flag are only two examples of such processes. There are also many examples of this in Prague, from the re-branding of Pankrác high-rises to the cynical corporate appropriation of the already appropriated "Máj" shopping centre to make the indicatively names "My" Národní.²⁰ The controversy around the formal listing of this building also shows the often particularly bitter hatred of brutalist style buildings that is not the preserve of either Central Europe or post-communist countries and which relates to the discourses

20 Eisler, et al., 1976. The name Máj reflected the communist hijacking of Karel Hynek Mácha's famous and highly nationally significant poem of the same name. From Máj to My also plays on the Czech first person plural – ironically considering its special place in the communist lexicon.

12 As quoted in *The Rough Guide to Prague*.

13 Machonin & Machoninova, 1975.

14 Filsak, Bubeniček & Švec, 1974.

15 Filsak, 1977.

16 Paroubek, Navrátil, Todl, Sedláček, 1981.

17 Cajthamlov & Cajthamalova, 1987.

18 Prager, 1992.

19 Fencl, Franc & Nováček, 1977.



that also inform architectural meaning-making.

It has long been accepted that it is mainly architects and architecture critics who champion brutalist buildings, imposing them on the poor folk who actually have to live there, while they retreat to more comfortable and comforting climes. It has been of continued delight to conservative commentators that the iconoclastic critic Charles Jencks declared that “Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3:32pm or thereabouts when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grace by dynamite.²¹” Those conservative critics may not have liked all of, or indeed any, of the postmodernism that Jencks espoused, but this was a victory for anti-modern traditionalism in architecture and a foreseeable end to all this concrete, glass and steel. Jencks was purposefully premature and the battle for modernism has raged on ever since, but it has done so in a prevailing critical climate that has sought to blame many urban and social ills on this style of architecture, which bred nought but misery, poverty crime and alienation.

However, around the world, this received wisdom has come into question, with the re-appraisal of the aesthetics of brutalist buildings often accompanied by refurbishment. Even the founding myth of the critics of modern architecture – that the brutalist-modern Pruitt-Igoe housing project was fundamentally unsound – has been challenged. The recent documentary film *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* highlights the joy with which the first tenants embraced their new homes and foregrounds the lack of maintenance, wilful ghettoisation by the city authorities and the poor socio-economic status of the occupants as the main causes of the degeneration of life on the estate, rather than seeing the architecture itself as the cause. Similarly, according to reports in the Czech media, anthropological research on Prague’s biggest housing estate at Jižní Město, revealed “strong social networks, plenty of greenery and decent public transportation²²” and that this and other such areas had not become a low-income ghettos in the course of

transition. Among the signature buildings of Jižní Město are the linked towers of the Hotel Kupa, which recall London’s Trellick tower from the renowned British brutalist architect Erno Goldfinger.

A CITY IN FULL

The revival in the fortunes of brutalist buildings in other parts of the world has coincided with the re-appraisal of Czech communist architectures, as it has seemingly been realized that they were not some aberrant form unique to authoritarian regimes, but that actually the embrace of this style by the skilled hands of Karel Prager and others was actually capable of producing beautiful, interesting buildings. While questions will always be raised about the politics of those who were able to build during this time, even non-party members like Prager, this picture is complicated by the continued activity of interwar architects such as Josef Havlíček and Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer in postwar Czechoslovakia. However, it should be recognized that the best brutalist buildings bear elegant witness to the resilience of cultural creativity that was able to flourish despite the adverse conditions of the time. Recognising the aesthetic value of these marquee buildings makes it harder to simply dismiss their everyday cousins in the housing estates, which is increasingly important in the increasing socio-economic Darwinism of a neoliberalising Europe where we should continue to assert that just because you don’t live in a villa doesn’t mean that you don’t belong here.

The rehabilitation of these material forms and their social meaning comes as part of a renewed willingness to properly reckon with the past in all its complexity, refusing the simplifying narratives of totalizing tyranny and victimhood in order to reclaim the uniquely Czech experiences of this time and to be thus better able to contextualise and understand them within wider narratives, which can then also be better challenged. This in turn may speak of a desire to re-assert political subjectivity and articulate a new way of being internationally Czech without either passively acquiescing to every outside demand or resorting to aggressively parochial populist nationalism. Having taken on board much of the postmodern critique, is this revival indicative of a new modernism, unimpressed with the low ambitions,

21 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977 [1991]).

22 Kristina Alda, “Praguescape: In the Pink?” *Prague Daily Monitor* (27 November 2009)

broken promises and banal pastiche of the geographies at history's end? In the context of ongoing and uneven economic hardship across Europe as well as resurgent public political activism we should be rightly wary of architecture instrumentalised to political purpose, but at the same time we cannot ignore the highly political causes and consequences of our material worlds and nor should we reject the possibilities that architecture holds with regard to being, belonging and becoming.

Too often, Prague is damned with faint praise: deliriously light entertainment for tourists passing between Europe's sites of heavy, serious, *real* memory; a refuge from reality for introverted dreamers, trying to stay forever young, like the First Republic they idolize; in short, somewhere to visit, a nice place to play, a temporary refuge from the real business going on elsewhere. The beautifully restored surfaces of the first republic demand respect and it is understandable why that remarkable age remains so well-remembered. However, without the emergent reckoning with that which followed, a nostalgic melancholia would dominate the politics of Czech memory and obscure the opportunities and demands of the present, not only betraying the spirit of that past, but surrendering the present to the narratives of victimhood and pedagogy. The restoration

of key buildings and the continued process of improving the housing estates as well as the increased number of exhibitions on Czech Brutalism and the discussion of the issues surrounding it in the media all point to a new engagement with unquiet ghosts that haunt the present.

Perhaps the belated blooming of Czech brutalism and the recent (and bizarre) decision to re-build the Berliner StadtSchloss (in place of the Palast der Republik) mark a passing of the mnemonic baton, to Bohemia, where Prague is shedding its Berlin complex²³ and is demanding to be seen afresh, as a city in full. This is an urban landscape that runs the gamut of glamour and grit, a *schwer* site of work and memory, not only *licht* laughter and forgetting. It should recognize itself as such and demand the same recognition from others. Such recognition that would begin to challenge the hierarchies of inclusion that preclude real belonging and limit the ability of people to participate in determine their individual and collective futures.

23 With respect to the sadly departed and already missed Václav Havel who wrote the concrete poem "The Brno Complex": "Prague."



LAWRENCE UPTON

from **MEMORY FICTIONS**

POLYVOCAL SPEECH FOR TWO VOICES

Notation et cetera

The proposed voices are differentiated by left and right alignment. Where two such speeches, one of each alignment, occur on the same horizontal line (see for example # 12), the voices speak together.

Observe line breaks and treat vertical spacing as an indication of pause except where a line ends with – which indicates that the next speech should follow on immediately, sometimes as if cutting off the other at that point.

Punctuation and its lack are important. Follow it and the words should come out right, if the poet has done his job.

Lack of punctuation means that you read accordingly and do not insert imagined punctuation. Do read for sense but not so strongly as generally; allow difficult-to-grasp or even non-sense if that is what you find. Full stops are omitted from the end of most lines because a line break performs the appropriate function in this notation. A full stop is used to indicate a special stop of some kind.

Because there is deliberate syntactical ambiguity here, capital letters are used sparingly, again as special indicators though not necessarily directive.

These are not plays.

There is great scope for analytical and variant reading. They are not intended as starting points for improvisation.

MEMORY FICTION 15

she stopped walking
and paused to look about her

she tried to make her face look gentle

she felt strange and light

it was a little early in the day

I'll have a little rest, she thought

she felt the ground was spinning

she was breathless

there was a gap between her and the world

she could see clearly

she felt too weak to climb a stairs
and there was a big hill ahead

she wanted an armchair
by a little window

Let me talk; and let me cry for hours, she said

I don't know what to think, she said

She remembered posing for good opinions
that was wonderful

It was then that she saw a line of tees

She stopped thinking

It was all familiar

It was, she said, a good moment
It was time to make decisions

Imagine continuing for ever, she said.

I'm enjoying myself

I'm unwinding my opinions
as if they were bandages

I feel anxious

I hope I can talk to you

Me too, she said

I get myself into awful situations

You're speaking astonishingly loudly

It's illicit

and I am gullible
I am more than a little suicidal

she wanted a good income

She cleared her throat

She remembered making promises

that was wonderful

She turned to face them

I should be saying something, she thought

It was increasingly vague

I nod in agreement.

She tried not to giggle

That's wonderful

I'm sorry

You are glorious

Yes, you really can

I'm beginning to sound

I am full of laughter

I am full of laughter

I am shrill-voiced

She couldn't help herself

MEMORY FICTION 16

he had his hand on my breathing

motor accident

image torn between **content** and context

one sees pictures in everything

to mourn the dead

leaving me

Leave me alone, I said

Security is non-existence

it will be our pleasure

in the sudden quiet

in the blood-sodden quiet

meaning has a price

I won't

I'm an emergency

I'm just a number cruncher

chaos in ruins

you're very good

in random spaces

reality inside one room

large rips in a canvas

fare well content

yearning vanishes

he took himself outside

but he wasn't there

reality is only a gesture

do you have any idea?

a mind remains open until it's closed

we exchange meaning

don't mind me

I'm already smashed up

I'm not arguing

tell me it's the truth

everyone went wrong in the first place?

I have vast potential to destroy

I'm running around

a glance only
that's it: then someone hits me
smashing my content in everything

Leave me alone.
Leave

MEMORY FICTION 17

she refuses to give up
she is smooth and she flows
she was listening to them
a meaningful stare
which include looking annoyed

she is not superficial
inside her
there is more than air
I am watching the camera, he says
and he looks annoyed
but also nodding

What does that mean?

I think he's dreaming

and then someone hits you?
ripping at my reality

I'm mourning

Leave me.
Leave

she stands slightly apart
she is transparent
apparently serene
in varying expressions
perhaps dreaming
at some moments

she is more than a balloon

she says so
we do not acknowledge him
trying to look smooth
trying to flow aware

yes.
I suppose so.
He wants to give himself emphasis.

Who knows? but he'd agree.
No, don't ask him!

he could be transparent

we all see through him

leave him alone
he'll float away

today, she says, I am of many colours

I suspect something

don't interfere with the arrangements

I am large and demanding

I am turning slightly, turning in space

I'll open the front door

squashed

shadows and gloom

before he could speak

in the same manner

a moment of mechanism

mechanical movement

and determination

too much emphasis

I'm feeling bubbly

well stopper it

taking a deep breath

and now she is conscious again

whoever she is

Yes. Whoever she is.

So our picture's wrong

I'm worried

we could reconstruct someone

someone perfectly nice?

without recalling them?

How?

I want to believe that.

How?

Once a week.

What?

We'd do it once a week.

What?

like maintenance
keeping her stable

And what do you expect me to do?

it's not that demanding

he is poised awkwardly

leave him like it

maybe he'll get stuck

maybe he likes it
use a more technical term
dear me
she didn't seem impressed
she likes a few conversations
thinking immediately
we misunderstand her
she is transparent
she's thinking!
there are other pieces of her
yes
you'd be mystified

MEMORY FICTION 18

what was being asked
a distance between himself
a wide stretch
what is being asked
the words are out of the mouth
she stays silent
gathering pages
go with a flow

leave him
we couldn't reconstruct him
he's fucked
dear you indeed
yes
she went downstairs some time
sitting down
as if to be interviewed
maybe
she disappeared!
I'd like to squash her
she's incongruously violent
floating away?
what do you have?
I am already

seemed to flow in his mind
and ebbed?
he might as well...
I've been caught
so matter-of-factly
anything but the truth
we might as well

I could say
you're a wide one

what the hell had she been thinking?

had she been thinking?

there was a phone call earlier

intimate detail

uncanny

yes, if necessary

sprinkled with fairy dust?

yes, if necessary
in order to be transformed

intrigued by sad looks

I'm just being stupid

it's a different person

you can feel the breath

having forgotten everything

everything but truth

gathering her smiles

going with its flow

matter-of-factly

it's hardly being unfaithful

blamed but complex

blamed?

believed

the seriousness of the abyss

but it hasn't happened

there is an atmosphere

there is no atmosphere

maybe that's why I am finding it difficult to breathe

a squeaking noise

conceited and arrogant

in order to be transformed

unable to believe

clustered around flickerings

powering suggestion

things in my life

a like sounding

a lie sounding

a lie

sounding the depths

so it is

that's how it is

stepping inside
the personal system turned down

mournful, layered
ultra gentle

and staring into grey

consultation and knowledge
empowering of suggestiveness
I'm not getting through

taking all night

the scent of a body

things in my life

searching a dull existence

consultation or knowledge?

over-reacting

shabby and childish

stepping inside

out of sight

I wish

MEMORY FICTION 19

the suicide

no doubt in the mind

it's not perfect

slipped his mind

an idea struck her

he didn't turn round

he didn't love them

a moment ago

overgrown with people

it had amused her

against her forehead

she didn't **have** to live

say it out loud

his mind slipped

felt anything
and all at once

he thought: which one am I?

overbalancing

what do you expect?

staring past him

her life seemed to be a windowless room
he starts to reply

a man in the air

falling

what the hell are you doing here?
other people's words

in front of her

smiled out through a look in her imagination
thinking: which one am I?
and then it slipped from her mind
said itself out loud

she hurried forward

to tell the original

pulled open the door

it was no longer possible

his laughter burst

suspended

it was hardly surprising

dreams and their promises

disappearing

now tightening

a moment ago

and then he remembered

she nodded

respect you so much

a couple of seconds

it had nothing to do with

what were you saying?

smiled, noticing

as if it were an optimistic note

in a small voice

shaking his head

he didn't feel anything

he trembled

he said: don't worry

starting a sense of longing

he didn't know what to say

locked into memory

lacking

talking to people

staring past them

MEMORY FICTION 20

I am shipwrecked

you are alive

I am shipwrecked and alive

It is, of course, a fantasy.
There is nowhere to get ashore.

Those who survive at sea may swim

to ambiguity

swim, not sing

Let them sing!
where the combined navies of the world
make the whole thing ship-shape, somewhat

Out here, and in the air, others

the rest of them

who bomb and poison
unbalancing everything

for the benefit of someone else

who wants to topple everything

I don't know

You misunderstand.
It is for the benefit of someone else
who wants to topple everything

poor metaphor

there is no safe shore
and life must be lost

but, as a metaphor, I suppose

a non-swimmer's hyperbole

it'll do for a state of mind

rejecting the political

passing over the surface of the grey ocean

the unreliability

unreliability of water?

when it's compared with
rock and soil

rock and soil
no place to rest

be assured of good safety

anywhere within treachery

all places are overwhelming

our feelings

our feelings?

our feelings flow fast

as quick as bodies?

as bodies upon flash floods

like sunshine

it is a calm day

we have boats

and the mind is shallow

stone and mud

all that remains of extensive land

edging into big ocean

millennia

seem to my animal

still in the motion

MEMORY FICTION 21

it's predictable

it's horrible
if it's to be enjoyed
it should be private

that's increasingly unlikely

how can it be predictable and unlikely?

that's not what I said

yes, it is

Listen! Those ducks are talking!

Yes quack quack quack

it isn't quack quack quack to them

they know what it means

I doubt that

I don't want to be –

no autobiography

you've no comprehension, have you?

None at all.
What?

Doesn't matter.

I wouldn't call it autobiographical

look into your natural body

maintain an extra grip

it's horrible

it's predictable

keep your sense of humour

what?

and I lots of us grew up together
are you ever pushed into uncomfortable memories? well...

you've never said any of this to me it's increasingly unlikely
that's not what I said all I can say –
I remain committed is the glue not occasionally weakened?
what does that mean? do you not fear falling apart?

don't laugh at me I did not laugh
you looked at me and laughed I didn't mean to laugh.
You laughed You laughed

you didn't have to take on this responsibility, you know I know
she was lying my eyes showing astonishment
she always seemed affectionate not another word
no autobiography I didn't know you thought of us like that
it's predictable You've no comprehension, have you?
constantly lamenting what?
squeezing with her thumb she leaned forward
and little finger holding many papers
between her hands

I remember I am thinking of the sea
that's in the past echoing into sunshine
muttering at me

above my head

I feel quite at home

it is possible
just to liven things up

I won't contradict you!

I make a face at her
in my imagination

wind-blown anticipation
I remain committed

don't ever say that again!

I'm tired of you saying it
and always denying

let's dance

it'll keep the moments averted

redefining

I obtained consent
you are here willingly

I wanted to ask –

seeing experiences replicate

swaggerer

feverish

I made a face at him
the sound of his voice
I make a face at him now

a trace
of recognition

that's not what I said

what?

am I stubborn?
am I willful?
you think me a child

in this dreary room?

we never stop talking

you live in another world from me

Hallo?
C'est moi.
What?
What?

You're breaking up.
Right.
What?
Right.

Was he?
Right.
A child is laughing.
Anyway, I wanted to ask
I don't know if you'd be interested
he lifts his head a moment
to know that I have never trusted Eddie
keep him out of my sight ok?
most definitely not
they are most real
it doesn't have to be true
I have no wish to be here
well give me a faint smile
am I so savage and ugly?
I feel so awkward about –
make what impossible?

Eddie was downstairs

He would be.

well

are these rhetorical questions?

they seem like a glitter on the sea

Good.

I find you disgusting

we are near to quarreling

you are disgusting

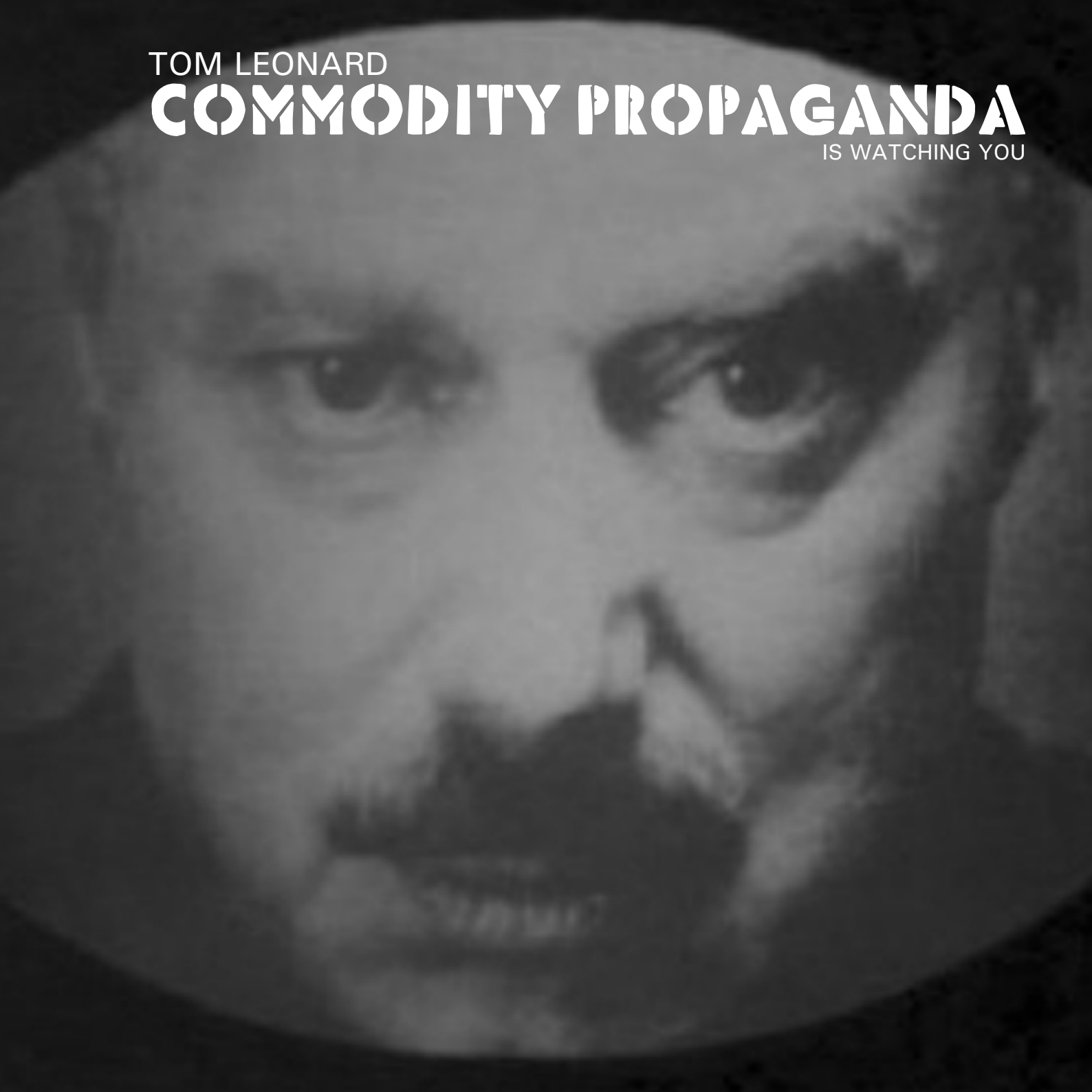
please don't say any more
you make it impossible

all of it

TOM LEONARD

COMMODITY PROPAGANDA

IS WATCHING YOU



RECESSION?



Eurofighter jets



Bradley Tanks



ASTUTE submarines

WHAT RECESSION?

Britain's BAE Systems topped an international ranking of the world's biggest arms groups, becoming the first non-American company to hold the spot, a leading defense think tank said April 12.

The British group knocked defense giant Boeing out of the top position in 2008, according to the ranking of biggest defense groups worldwide tallied by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

"The main reason that BAE became the largest arms-producing company in the world in 2008 is the increase in its U.S. sales, which outpaced decreases elsewhere, including in the U.K.," the think tank said in the study.

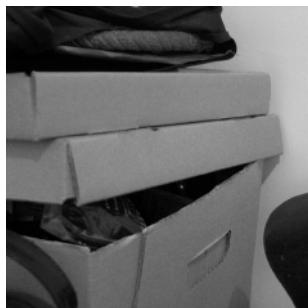
In 2008, the 100 biggest defense groups had arms sales of \$385 billion, up 11 percent from the previous year. Arms sales of Lockheed Martin alone topped U.S. development aid by \$4 billion, and BAE Systems' sales were greater than the gross domestic product of 105 countries.

"BAE really shows the increasing internationalization of the arms industry and the attractiveness of the U.S. market," SIPRI arms industry expert Susan Jackson said.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
12 Apr 2010

RUARK LEWIS

IN MY EMPTY HOUSE



P.82

1. A popular genre
2. In other contexts
3. Occurring where it does
4. Bound up
5. One that does
6. In an aesthetic question
7. Addressed later here
8. That appeals
9. But what is it about
10. A discussion of revenge
11. That's worth exploring
12. An armed vagina
13. This quotable phrase
14. More graphic than memorable
15. For some critics
16. Ones we focus on
17. A well worn strategy
18. On loan for quotation
19. It is dismissed
20. Being merely a theme
21. This kind of reading
22. Knows no limits
23. a sort of justice
24. Not limited to women
25. Are we, however, to be
26. Writing about possible eruption



P.83

1. To state the obvious
2. To be understood
3. A striking feature -
4. There were different kinds
5. Unfolding in the present .
6. It might be expressed
7. Ethical evaluations
8. A specific emotional response
9. A political necessity .
10. Not only do we see
11. A vision of violence
12. That gives great weight .
13. In the narrative .
14. Has impact .
15. The pain that's suffered
16. That has impact
17. That revenge may go on
18. Is a tactical observation
19. To be reckoned with
20. Where anger is the source .
21. We feel as injustice .
22. For the west -
23. It was Aristotle ,
24. And, the potency of anger
25. About an action
26. And about the treatment of a dog



P.84

1. She shoots him .
2. In the leg .
3. A study of the ways .
4. A cultural imperative .
5. That lodges in people's minds
6. A reluctance , , ,
7. Perhaps, another symbol
8. Taken from that same category .
9. A parental order .
10. To wait ,
11. To Proceed ,
12. But I think.
13. The physical brutality ,
14. Was based on an authority .
15. In the scene
16. Of humiliation and nakedness
17. An image of a body
18. Recoiled from undress.ing
19. Shown as lingering
20. That affects the body
21. This trauma in the memory
22. Whilst we move .
23. They are inert .
24. Lacking in compassion .
25. Mobilized, but motionless , , ,
26. Cut short , in ugliness



P.85

1. A feeling of being abandoned .
2. It might be said
3. The culpability of pose .
4. In a village of bystanders .
5. In such contexts .
6. Of innocence and inaction
7. No claim to feeling
8. This kind of observation
9. A matter of taste , , ,
10. There is no pretence
11. Such ignoble roles
12. Expressed their lasciviousness .
13. For means of easy excuse .
14. Provides a sort of haven .
15. A boot beneath the table .
16. As for others ,
17. As for the state .
18. A reluctant system
19. A moral imperative
20. The disempowerment of society .
21. Where should they help ?
22. An agent of the law .
23. Again a question .
24. How to categorise indifference ?
25. And present in images and sounds ,
26. A surrender of our body ?

* Stills from In My Empty House, and installation (with experimental film, sound and live performance), St Paul Street Gallery, University of Technology, Auckland 2010..



STEPHAN DELBOS

THE LONG BOAT

THE SEA, THAT HAS NO ENDING

I

Two poets in Prague; in Pennsylvania; in Transylvania; in Phnom Penh; in an upholstered country living room or in the basement of some broke-neck bar, gurgling, gargling back the yeasty water, swapping lines, ransacking syllables, plumbing memory, burnishing egos, “drunk,/ slapping each other on the back,/ sweaty with genius.”¹

II

“Do you happen to know Stanley Kunitz’s poems? He hasn’t had a wide reputation, but I like him tremendously. I’m going to review his newly published *Selected Poems* for *Sewanee*. I really think you would like his poems, and I think I’ll type a couple of them for you on a separate sheet of paper, so that you can see what he’s like. For a long time, virtually unnoticed and yet enduring, he’s been writing poems of real agony and love in a kind of lost and transient underground of the American jungle of academies and businesses. I think that the appearance of his *Selected Poems* is inspiring. It shows that defeat, though immanent for all of us, is not inevitable. He wrote to me recently, since I know him slightly—and you might like his concluding words ‘...it would be sweet, I’ll grant, after all these years to pop up from underground. America, it’s true, either spoils you with success or withers you with neglect. What other morality has the artist but to endure? The only ones who survive, I think, beyond the equally destructive temptations of self-praise and self-pity, are those whose ultimate discontent is with themselves. The fiercest hearts are in love with a wild perfection.’”² [James Wright to James Dickey; August 12, 1958]

1 Stanley Kunitz, “Journal for My Daughter,” *The Collected Poems of Stanley Kunitz* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000) 137.

2 *A Wild Perfection: The Selected Letters of James Wright*, ed. Anne Wright and Sandra Maley (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005) x.

III

The ferry from Plymouth, Massachusetts to Provincetown cuts across Cape Cod Bay, slinging from the shoulder to the wrist of the long, bent arm that is the Massachusetts coast, and rounds a tip of land into Provincetown Harbor. The beach falls into the Atlantic at a sharp, golden point, the extremity of the state, from which, Henry David Thoreau wrote, “a man may stand [...] and put all America behind him.”³ It is a legendary beach pocked by no houses, since John F. Kennedy, a staunch Cape Cod man, co-signed legislation in 1961 that listed it as a protected natural area. Long, sandy dunes buffer the bay, peppered with tiny wooden shacks that have sheltered the likes of Tennessee Williams, Eugene O’Neill and Norman Mailer, not to mention Rupert Holmes and his amorous, piña-colada-swilling, want-ad-answering lover.⁴

Disembarking from the ferry, one walks through a wood-shingled fisherman’s shack. The walls are covered with sun-bleached posters for Sandeman’s port wine, old bits of rigging, rusted cleats and gaff hooks. Everywhere lurks the strong, slightly nauseating smell of brine, fish oil and diesel; a noxious concoction that hits you like heat stroke walking inland, past the ticket booths for whale watches with humpback sightings guaranteed; past the long, low kite store, where hundreds of rainbow kites, rainbow flags, rainbow banners, rainbow windsocks and rainbow streamers twist and flutter in the wind; past Mojo’s seafood stand with its ancient, dented tin 7UP sign, where customers crowd for fried clams, lobster rolls and chunks of onions breaded and fried golden in oil that melts through styrofoam serving cups.

Just further on lies Commercial Street, Provincetown’s main artery. From May to September, Commercial Street swarms with families, tourists, busking folk guitarists, Caribbean workers splattered with white paint, hustling between jobs, and muscled, tanned, shirtless men with tattoo sleeves and pierced nipples, with closely-cropped haircuts, plunging their bicycles into the crowds and

ringing their tiny bells, a little frantically, twisting their handlebars through impossibly small gaps between curb, car and pedestrian.

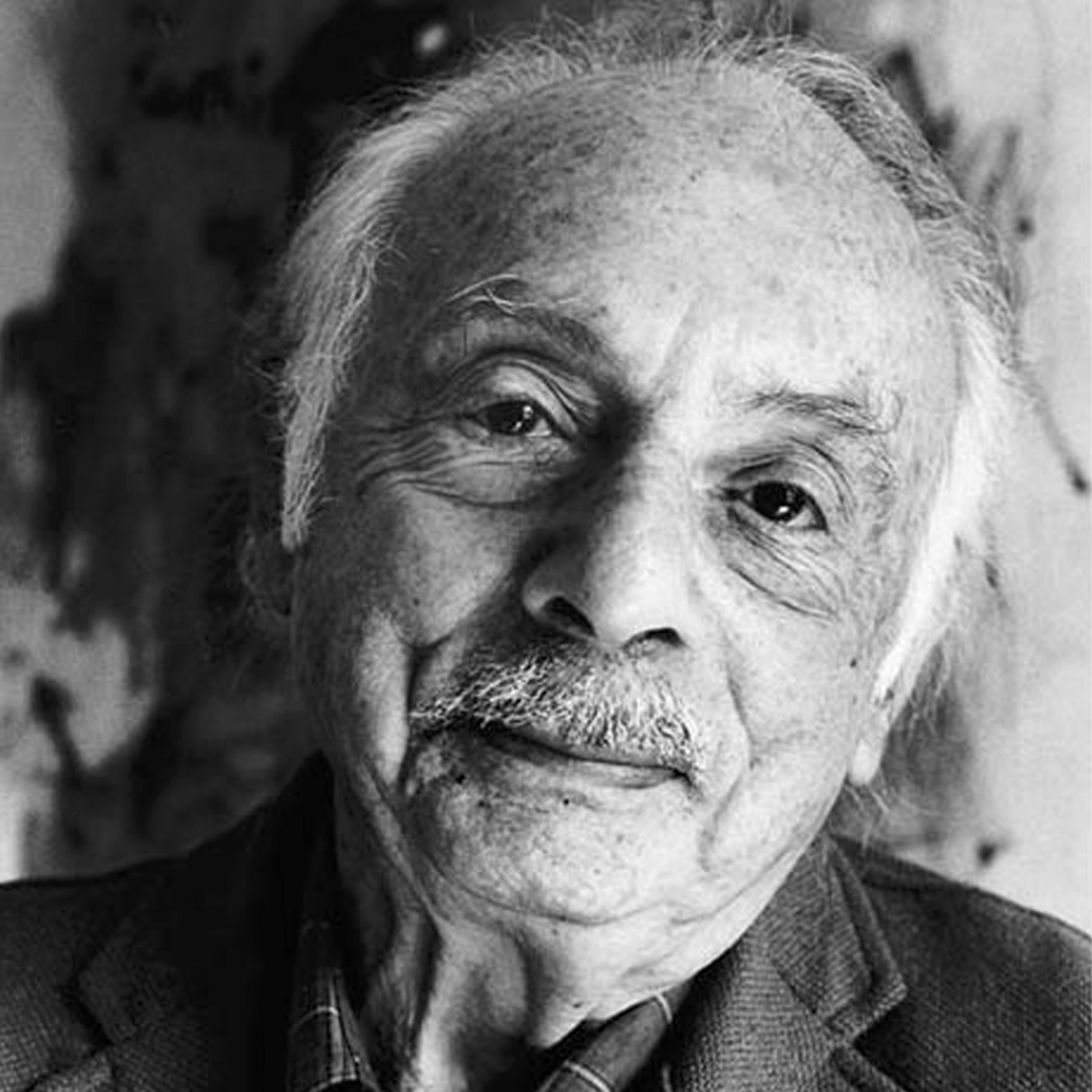
An old candy shop with tall windows and peeling gold leaf lettering advertises homemade fudge and salt water taffy, the chewy New England sugar specialty that has pulled the fillings from many a child’s mouth. Portuguese bakers bustle, making bread and frying dough, a remnant of the foreign fishermen who settled on the Cape decades ago. And everywhere the crowds, clotting the sidewalks, pausing in front of novelty T-shirt shops, with logos like “I put ketchup on my ketchup,” or, more explicitly, “Dick Dock.” Up the road a piece sits an old fisherman’s bar with dark interior and low ceiling hung with a mariner’s museum of artifacts – nets, lobster pots, harpoons and old rope tied into monkey fists, the most impossible of knots – bereft like the flags of ancient, forgotten countries.

The crowds are mostly confined to a radius of several blocks of Commercial Street, and just beyond, one encounters studios, galleries and the hushed, Zen-like structure that is the Provincetown Art Association and, close by, the Fine Arts Work Center, founded in 1968, in part by the poet Stanley Kunitz, whose house and legendary garden lie somewhere beyond the tourist trash of Provincetown center. The galleries, where diving bells and chrome World War II-era flare guns share space with exquisite Cape Cod watercolors, razor clams and sand dollars, are a reminder that Provincetown is the oldest continual artist colony in the United States, and has been a haven for creative types for more than a century, from the Provincetown Players, who launched O’Neill’s career, to the current Fellows of the Fine Arts Work Center: poets, musicians and artists who spend several months each year in Provincetown on the organization’s largesse.

It is only since the 1970s that the town has earned an international reputation as a hotspot for the gay community. Much of the real estate has been exquisitely renovated, driving up rents and property taxes. It is hard to imagine, in the garish flurry of the central blocks of Commercial Street, that one could make anything but Pop art here, but once outside the center, small, wood-shingled houses with functioning shutters replenish the Cape Cod idyll of endless afternoons and the reassuring

3 Henry David Thoreau, “Cape Cod,” *Walden and Other Writings*, ed. Townsend Souder (Chestnut Hill: Adamant Media Corporation, 2006) 525.

4 “If you like pina coladas, getting caught in the rain[...] If you like making love at midnight in the dunes on the Cape...” Rupert Holmes, “The Piña Colada Song.”



constancy of the surf; what must be one of the most refreshing and inspiring environments on the planet.

IV

I started coming to Provincetown several times each summer when I was about ten years old, sailing on the ferry my father captained across the bay from June until September. My earliest memories of the town revolve around lunches of burritos on a boardwalk patio and the Marine Supply Store, a cavernous place strung with Army and Navy uniforms and international trinkets, from Soviet submarine commander badges to American Airlines First Class teacups and Swedish flashlights. In the back of the store are brass knuckles, knives and samurai swords as well as the nightstick I illegally purchased at age 12, ostensibly to battle ferry stowaways, much to the chagrin of my father, who accompanied me back the next day to return it and to give the shopkeeper a not insubstantial piece of his mind. It is disappointing, then, to return to that musty, magical shop years later and realize how kitsch and uninteresting most of the merchandise is; idiotic idols to refuse, not the talismans I once imagined.

In those days I didn't know Stanley Kunitz lived in Provincetown, or even who Stanley Kunitz was. Perhaps I passed him once on Commercial Street, bald, gray, mustachioed, 77 the year I was born, and still vital at the age of 100, walking in the midday sun, among the bicyclists, among the lobster shacks and leather shops, pausing idly to catch his breath, a line break.

The city squats on my back.
I am heart-sore, stiff-necked,
exasperated. That's why
I slammed the door,
that's why I tell you now,
in every house of marriage
there's room for an interpreter.
Let's jump into the car, honey,
and head straight for the Cape,
where the cock on our housetop crows
that the weather's fair,
and my garden waits for me
to coax it into bloom.
[...]
Light glazes the eastern sky
over Buzzards Bay.

[...]the brine-spiked air.
The last stretch toward home!
Twenty summers roll by.⁵

["Route Six"]

V

There is one shop in Provincetown with even more legendary status than the Marine Supply Store. This is the holy grail of the forbidden, the Valhalla of lascivious mystery, a shop whose name was passed to me by my older brothers in conspiratorial whispers: Shop Therapy.

Just across the street from a leather shop called Spank the Monkey, Shop Therapy takes up two floors of a wooden building painted with psychedelic swirls. The bottom floor is non-descript: Cheap jewelry mingles with "Oakley" sunglasses, sparklers and smoke bombs. But at the back of the shop a stairwell is marked off for entrance only to those older than 18, although a tall 16 year old was able to get past this modicum of security to the pornographic cornucopia above. For the second floor is a head-shop-cum-sex-shop, where Bob Marley communes with Ron Jeremy. I remember the place as a strange, foreboding, flesh-colored jungle where I stole sidelong glances at phallus-shaped plastic and photographs of balloon-breasted women with feathered bangs and pastel eye shadow as I circled quickly back to the exit.

What strikes me now is the normalcy of the patrons of the shop – not quivering, hairy-palmed men in trench coats, but white bread-buttering, middle-aged couples in Polo shirts calmly trying to decide between different models of clitoris-stimulating vibrators and pulsating cock rings. A boy in a backwards Red Sox hat sits on his haunches before a case of glass pipes and bongs, which one must refer to as "water pipes" or risk being ejected from this temple of erections. He picks up his phone and speaks: "Hey man, yeah they've got tons of them. Do you want me to take a picture and send it to you, or should I just pick one? All right. Later."

Some of the more notable items for sale: A dildo that straps onto one's chest, for God knows what purpose; a life-sized, signature model vibrating ass molded from



the posterior of a gay porn star; a black dildo larger than my arm “with balls and suction cup. The most life-like on the market;” and, of course, various models of Ben Wa balls and the like, and even a “two-tone butt plug.” Good Lord. Even at my advanced age, the shop gives me the vaguely sinister, unsettled feeling I had the first time I saw a leather face mask with zippers in place of eyes and mouth, which was, incidentally, also in Provincetown.

Downstairs on the street, families stroll by with their children clutching ice cream cones, totally ignorant of the sexual freak show permanently on display just a few feet above their heads. Or are they?

Younger, Provincetown was a summer escape, like the circuses that rolled into town unexpectedly to set up in the vacant dirt lot next to Cumberland Farms deli – a place one entered and, entering, was swept up; a place where one saw uncanny people and things; a place with its own flamboyant poetry, which I wouldn't have called poetry then, wouldn't have needed to; a place where rules loosened, even if I wasn't testing them, exactly. Each year I returned, my interest and awareness had shifted slightly, from Army and Navy shops to head shops to book shops, until I find myself searching for a dead poet's house.

'Dante!' I cried
to the apparition
entering from the hall,
laurelled and gaunt,
in a cone of light.
'Out of mercy you came
to be my Master
and my guide!
To which he replied:
'I know neither the time
nor the way
nor the number on the door...
but this must be my room,
I was here before.'
And he held up in his hand
the key,
which blinded me.⁶

["The Illumination"]

VI

Kunitz bought his house in Provincetown in the 1960s after first summering in the town as respite from his life in New York City, where he was known as an elder statesman of American poetry, if an underappreciated one, having published his first book in 1930, and having cultivated legendary friendships with Theodore Roethke and Robert Lowell, among others. In Provincetown, however, he was known as a fervent supporter of the arts and a fervent supporter of his garden, which he cultivated from the mass of sand that originally was his front lawn. His house is on the west end of Commercial Street, about 15 minutes from the center. Walking out towards Kunitz's house, one rounds a curve of the street as it hugs the craggy coastline, and with each block the atmosphere is perceptibly quieter, more peaceful and slightly more residential, though each small wooden house is unique.

Two young red-headed girls in purple tie-dyed bathing suits wash beach sand from their feet, giggling, the green garden hose spraying rainbows in the August sunlight. A man with a salt and pepper mustache trims his front hedge, sweat dripping over his Transition lenses.

Kunitz's house is almost totally obscured by shapely flower bushes and trees, giving it an air of sanctuary, though it stands only about 30 feet from the street. The black, wrought iron gate has been nibbled by rust and salt air and is held closed by a bungee cord and some wire. No one appears to be home. The garden is there, a wild perfection, but seems untended, as if the pruning shears have not been taken to its unruly branches in several seasons. Wilted tiger lilies stand tall and defiant against the sleeping green of a juniper. The flowers remain, but the gardener is gone. No luminous blooming offers metaphors for life now, for striving, for nature's constancy in the face of shifting light and shadow.

Light splashed this morning
on the shell-pink anemones
swaying on their tall stems;
down blue-spiked veronica
light flowed in rivulets
over the humps of the honeybees;



this morning I saw light kiss
the silk of the roses
in their second flowering,
my late bloomers
flushed with their brandy.
A curious gladness shook me.⁷

["The Round"]

VII

Change is the great theme of Kunitz's poetry, collected in just 12 books between 1930, when he published *Intellectual Things*, and 2005, the year before he died, when *The Wild Braid* appeared. Images and phrases of change – in the natural world, in the narrator – are littered throughout Kunitz's work, beginning with the poem "Change" from *Intellectual Things*, in which he writes of man's constant state of evolution in violent terms:

Dissolving in the chemic vat
Of time, man (gristle and fat),
Corrupting on a rock in space
That crumbles, lifts his impermanent face
To watch the stars, his brain locked tight
Against the tall revolving light.

[...]

Becoming, never being, till
Becoming is a being still.⁸

["Change"]

One can easily, if warily, point to a kind of triumph in Kunitz's poetry, as the state of being described in this early poem, in which man finds peace in his constant change, learning that "Becoming is a being still" is actually achieved in his late poetry. Comparing "Change" with "The Layers," published in 1978, for example, one can clearly see a kind of resolution.

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.

[...]

7 Kunitz, 236

8 Kunitz, 17

In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:

"Live in the layers,
not on the litter."

Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.

I am not done with my changes.⁹

["The Layers"]

Formally, Kunitz is not an adventurer, though his best work achieves a timeless prosody. Were the astute reader to be less than generous, he could point to phrases such as "book of transformations" as seeming slightly too familiar to the ear. As Robert Lowell wrote about one of Kunitz's poems, "Father and Son:" "I blink a little at a certain over resolute, petrified firmness here and there," but, he concluded, Kunitz "has never published an unfelt and unfinished poem. Each line shows his fine touch and noble carefulness."¹⁰

Despite such hesitations, however, there is a *rightness* to much of Kunitz's work, a feeling that one simply couldn't say it better without changing the entire paradigm of his poetic voice. This extends to Kunitz's use of form, which, like most poets of his day, began with strict allegiance and evolved into a more fluid, idiosyncratic use of rhyme and meter. In the second half of the above poem, for example, while there is no significant rhyme, there is a subtle use of off-rhyme, in "layers/litter" or "art/it" which crystallizes the lines, giving them heft and solidity. This is aided by a surprisingly strict syllabic balance – surprising because of its subtlety – between, largely, five and six syllables, except for the third to last and final lines, both of which contain eight syllables.

Kunitz was quick to defend the importance of form, even late in his career. As he wrote in the introduction to his *Collected Poems* in 2000: "A badly made things

9 Kunitz, 217-218

10 Robert Lowell, *Collected Prose*, Robert Giroux, ed. (New York: Faber and Faber, 1987) 85-86

falls apart. It takes only a few years for most of the energy to leak out of a defective work of art. To put it simply, conservation of energy is the function of form."¹¹ This concept of conservation is one notable difference between Kunitz's evolution away from form and Lowell's: even when Kunitz writes in a seemingly less formal style, he is in fact only subverting or internalizing the form, making it more subtle, but no less present.

Despite Kunitz's conservative approach to form, there is a surreal strangeness that underlies much of his work, especially his imagery. Often these appear as dreams or visions, as in "Father and Son," which describes a vision of the narrator's dead father: "The silence unrolling before me as I came,/ The night nailed like an orange to my brow,"¹² a strange image that is revealed in a pentameter line. This "strangeness" is present elsewhere, as in the poem "The Illumination," which opens:

In that hotel my life
rolled in its socket
twisting my strings.¹³

Another example can be found in "River Road,"¹⁴ which opens: "That year of the cloud, when my marriage failed," a line that echoes the earlier "Poem:" "In the year of my mother's blood, when I was born."¹⁵ This is not the hardcore surrealism trafficked by Andre Breton and others. Instead it is more akin to Elizabeth Bishop's "always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life."¹⁶

VIII

American poetry is a strange beast, yoked as it is to a society that puts so much emphasis on physical beauty and which still, almost despite itself, honors the artists who live fast, die young and leave a beautiful corpse. The Hart Cranes of the world will always have a

11 Kunitz, 13

12 Kunitz, 62

13 Kunitz, 148

14 Kunitz, 151

15 Kunitz, 23

16 *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art*, Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil Estess, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969) 123.

particular allure, regardless of whether we truly admire – or understand – their poetry or not, and yet, in the American poetry machine, if one lives long enough, he will be rewarded with grants and lifetime achievement awards. It was Kunitz's fate to see 100 springs and for the last several decades of his life he was considered an affable old man of letters, the cheerful gardener-poet who wrote about the ocean and the flowers. This is, of course, not a completely inaccurate assessment.

Yet, there is a startling hurt in much of Kunitz's work, as words like "sores" and "wounds" appear repeatedly. This is perhaps not surprising, as the transformations he wrote about so often are never undertaken painlessly. Yet the pain is present in Kunitz's work for more practical reasons as well. Several of Kunitz's poems reference his father's suicide, which occurred when Kunitz's mother was pregnant with him. So, digging beneath the radiant blossoms of Kunitz's work, there emerges a darker, yet more unflinchingly honest picture of the poet that not only supplements his achievements but is perhaps the key to his voice. It is the picture of a Jewish American poet whose scars run deep through his days as a student, when he was refused entrance into doctoral studies in English at Harvard because, he was told, Anglo-Saxons would not appreciate being taught by a Jew; to his immigrant mother, who fled Lithuania in 1890 to try her luck in the U.S., only to be abandoned by her young husband during the Great Depression. This is the wounded poet who wrote during World War II, a war into which he was drafted as a conscientious objector, "my people [are] game/ for the hunters of man-skins in the warrens of Europe."¹⁷

"An Old Cracked Tune," published in 1971, portrays this side of Kunitz best:

My name is Solomon Levi,
the desert is my home,
my mother's breast was thorny,
and father I had none.

The sands whispered, *Be separate*,
the stones taught me, *Be hard*.
I dance, for the joy of surviving,
on the edge of the road.¹⁸

17 Kunitz, 57

18 Kunitz, 141

The word “edge” in the last line, as opposed to “side,” is the most important word in the poem and gives a glimpse at Kunitz’s position in life and poetry. Kunitz’s poems are poised on the edge of beauty and pain, where one false move, in form or expression, may unleash a shrieking agony. His personal and poetic journey is undertaken in a long boat, as he wrote in a late poem – in other words, he has prepared for difficulties – but the sea, that has no ending, is always larger, always threatens to swamp him.

Change, for Kunitz, is essentially creation, a cycle that includes destruction, like the seasons which command the trees to grow and shed their leaves, about which Kunitz writes, “unless the leaves/ Perish, the tree is not renewed.”¹⁹ So creation is essentially wild, as he tells us time and time again, by which he means beyond the power of man’s control, larger and more unstoppable than man and his works, and paling them. This does not preclude joy for Kunitz, but the joy in his poems is a stubborn joy, the joy of surviving among the wreckage of creation and destruction, now wrought by God and now by man; a joy of earthly pleasures that is sweetened by the knowledge that such pleasures are both short-lived and cyclical and that each individual is entitled to only his share of those cycles; some die young, some, like Kunitz, survive with a kind of befuddled gratitude.

IX

We lunch on lobster and martinis. I recall a story the poet Gerald Stern related about visiting Kunitz in Provincetown: As he welcomed Stern, the elder poet conspiratorially said in his soft, melodious voice, “Shall we have martinis?” And they proceeded to drink, in Stern’s words, more martinis in one night than he’d drunk his whole life.

We leave the restaurant in a rush to catch the ferry back to Plymouth, but with enough time – barely – to stop at a raw bar for oysters. A Caribbean man stands behind the low zinc bar wearing rubber gloves and holding a stout knife with the handle worn down to pencil-width. He smiles at our rush, taking his time as he shucks four oysters and lays them in a paper bowl, careful not to spill any of the brine. He charges us for

three at 75 cents apiece. We dab each with a spot of horse radish from a bowl on the bar and step back to swallow the tiny, silky sea-buds from their sharp, craggy shells – a mouthful of the deep ocean we take whole within us before stepping back onto the pavement soft with sun.

X

Leaving Provincetown harbor on the ferry back to Plymouth, we pass through a thunder shower. The ocean, smooth and dark as onyx, is suddenly dappled with smacking raindrops. Climbing to the top deck, one can look out over the water and see the extent of the storm, its circumference, within which the waves are wracked by rain, an assault within definite confines, the oblong body of the limited storm, a territory through which we pass and from which we emerge, already drying in the touching sunlight, sailing home.

When his boat snapped loose
from its mooring, under
the screaming of the gulls,
he tried at first to wave
to his dear ones on shore,
but in the rolling fog
they had already lost their faces.

Too tired even to choose
between jumping and calling,
somehow he felt absolved and free
[...]

Peace! Peace!
To be rocked by the Infinite!
As if it didn’t matter
which way was home;
as if he didn’t know
he loved the earth so much
he wanted to stay forever.²⁰

[“The Long Boat”]

RYAN SCOTT

THE DANCING BEARS OF BUCHAREST

"Can I sit here?"

"Sure."

"_"

"_"

"It's just not the same, is it?"

"_"

"It's just not the same, I said. Travelling by car I mean. Okay, the carriages are old and rattle a bit, but you still feel, I don't know, a bit more like a gentleman."

"_"

"Like a gentleman, I said."

"Right."

"As a lifestyle it's dying. Look. No one. No one in the carriage."

"Yes. No one."

"Exactly, no one. All these seats are empty."

"Yes, empty."

"Everyone in their automobiles. Too busy driving to actually enjoy the journey. But this... this..."

"_"

"Exactly. They don't know what they're missing. You can read, get lost in your thoughts. You can't do that in a car. You can't even really do that in a bus."

"No, you can't."

"Well, yes, sorry. I'm...and you're...I should just let you get one with it."

"_"

*

"Did you see that?"

"Sorry?"

"Did you see it? The boar? I'm certain I saw a wild boar rooting around near the tracks. Well, we're too

far now of course for you to see it. But a boar. Elusive creatures, boars. And dangerous. Very dangerous. People think they're just hairy pigs. And I suppose in way, they are. Both are the species *Sus scrofa*. That's the Latin name. Though your typical pig is *Sus scrofa domesticus*."

"Right."

"And the Latin name, *Sus scrofa*, it just means swine sow. That's the technical name. That was the best they could think of."

"I see."

"Mind you, pigs can be dangerous. But a boar. If you ever see one in the forest, it's best to try to climb a tree...and bang two sticks together. No wait, that's bears. The sticks are for bears and up a tree for boars. You don't want to climb a tree if there's a bear. They're very adept climbers. It will have you in moments. But bang two sticks together seems to work. And make yourself look big. So stick, look big...and stomp. Stomping scares them too. Of course if you have a flare gun you don't have to do any of that. But if you don't have a flare gun then..."

"Yes, I got it. Stomp, sticks and up a tree. I got it."

"No, the tree is for the boars."

"I don't think we're in danger of either now."

"No. I suppose you're right. I don't think they'd let them on."

"_"

"I said, I don't think they'd..."

"I heard what you said. It's a train. Of course they wouldn't let them on."

"I imagine you would need some kind of permit."

"What?"

"A permit for the bear. Not a boar. No one would own a boar. That's ludicrous, but a bear. To bring that

on you'd need a permit."

"Why on earth would you travel on a train with a bear?"

"If you owned a bear you would."

"Who owns bears?"

"When I was in Bucharest I saw a man with a bear. He led the animal around the city. The animal danced as he played and we'd pay. He busked. He was a busker with a dancing bear."

"A dancing bear. That's absurd."

"Hot plates."

"Hot plates?"

"Hot plates."

"Why are you saying hot plates?"

"That's how they got the bears to dance. Terribly cruel, I know. They'd place the cub on the hot plates and play music. Over time the animal associated the music with moving its feet. A conditioned reflex. Like Pavlov and his dogs. But with bears."

"And you paid for this?"

"Well, I didn't know at the time."

"Didn't know? Or didn't ask?"

"It did seem strange."

"Strange? It was a dancing bear."

"I suppose."

"Hah!"

"Huh?"

"Hah!"

" _ "

" _ "

*

"They have feet like ours."

"Who?"

"Bears."

"Bears do not have feet like ours."

"If you ignore the claws and the fur, the structure is very similar. They walk on the flats of their feet and so do we. We're the only mammals to do this – bears and humans. It's like you said. We have to ignore the appearance."

"Really? The only ones?"

"So I read."

"Maybe they're more like us than I thought."

"They're protective of their young."

"That's true."

"And they eat our food."

"Bears do seem to like the same stuff as us."

"When I was in Romania they said the bears would come down at night to feed in the garbage dumps. It was like a smörgåsbord, an all-you-can-eat bar, and they don't have to pay a cent. There are even obese bears. Can you believe it? Fat bears."

"They are like us."

"They have fat bears in the US too. Though they are a different species. Different species of bear, I mean. Not fatness. They look similar but they are the North American Brown Bear. Romania has the European Brown Bear."

"Or maybe we're just making the bears like us."

"Europeans cannot agree on anything but at least they have the same bears. Well where the bears are, in the east mostly and in some parts of Spain."

"I wonder what it would be like to be a bear today."

"They used to make ham from bears."

"Any animal really."

"Not the Spanish. The Poles I think."

"Except a pigeon."

"I think it's banned now."

"Pigeon? Banned?"

"The ham."

"Ham?"

"Bear ham."

"Have you tried it?"

"I guess when they say ham they mean any smoked meat."

"Would you try it?"

"When I say they I don't mean the Poles. Or the Spanish for the matter. I mean whoever first coined the word ham."

"How did they dance?"

"Sorry?"

"Dance?"

"The Spanish?"

"The bears?"

"Well, you know... something like this..."

"I suppose it's a kind of dancing."

"I just have to imagine I'm standing on hot plates."

ANTHONY TOGNAZZINI

AUTOMATIC WRITING

My job involves writing, but most days I sit in my office and look out the window at the cedar tree. I can't decide what to write. It's stressful.

Today I found a package on my desk. A present. I knew it was a present because it was wrapped in blue paper and tied all over with frilly ribbon. I wasn't expecting a present.

When I unwrapped it I found it was a machine of sorts, though what kind was unclear. It was the size of a fist, and covered with holes. It didn't have outlets, switches, or need to be plugged in. There was a manual included, which I did not read. Instead, I held the machine in my palm. Its sides began to vibrate slightly. The machine hummed and began to grow warm.

I set it on the desk and waited. The machine produced a few words. Four, maybe five. They came out by themselves. Simple words. They didn't say much. I covered the machine with a napkin and rubbed. I paced around the room. The machine wrote faster.

Immediately I saw the value in this labor saving device. This could be the ticket, I thought. Work-related anxiety might be, for me, a thing of the past.

The machine was writing quickly now. I could barely keep track of its words. I stood awhile, watching—then figured I might as well sit down and relax. I pushed back in the reclining chair. Soon I felt restless, and stood up again.

It was snowing now and some flakes drifted in through the propped-up window. I checked the manual to see if snow could affect the machine, but it couldn't. Outside the streets glittered. In the branches of the cedar, snow formed tiny, crystalline blossoms. I pulled on my Wellingtons and exited the office, the machine chugging rhythmically behind me.

I hurried downtown. I kept looking over my shoulder to see the pattern my boots made in the snow, but the ragged, weaving footprints were covered in shadow. An icy wind stung my neck, and I hunched over, swallowing. Sometimes, when I'm pressured, I get a gummy feeling in my throat, as though I've just eaten a teaspoon of syrup, and that's how my throat felt.

The department stores, banks, museum, and appliance shops were a deep, rich green. Thick moss clung to the bricks of the buildings so the walls seemed plush and spongy. A knot of cobblestone paths connected the streets. Snow made the stones glisten.

Because everything was slick, I kept slipping and falling in the street. I cut my shin on a cobblestone. I tore the skin off my knee. But I got up and kept going. I knew I had to hurry.

In the center of town stood the clock tower with its ornate, stained-glass face. The numbers were large, visible by the steel-blue sky, but I couldn't read the time. The clock's hands moved with a steadiness that unnerved me, and I walked faster, weaving a maze through the buildings. My shoes were untied.

I found a red shovel leaned against the moss-covered bricks of a municipal building, and hoisted it over my shoulder. I understood that it was my responsibility to dig. I started to run with the shovel. When I reached the edge of town I tramped into a wide, silent field, breathing heavily. My shoes sank into the damp grass.

When I was far enough from the road I started to dig. The sound of the shovel slicing into earth thrilled me, and I thought I might cry with satisfaction. The wet earth broke apart. It came up crumbling on the shovel. Gray roots and earthworms slid off the shovel. I had made a hole, and the hole was getting deeper. I was inside now, and sweating, and there was dirt all over me, in my ears and mouth, but I didn't have a choice. I continued to dig.

A piercing, high-pitched whistle sent a jolt through me. I turned and saw at the edge of the field a policeman running in my direction. He was moving fast, and seemed to be all teeth. His mouth extended from his face, teeth jagged. His teeth seemed to replicate themselves, each replication gnashing after the last.

The policeman yanked me by my arm out of the hole. I tried to explain. I looked him in the eye and tried to convince him of the necessity of my job, but the policeman covered my mouth. He said not to say another word. He pulled handcuffs from his pocket, dislodging his keys, which jangled into the hole.

I was under arrest. The jail was in the back of the truck. Then the truck was driving fast, dangerously fast, and it felt like we might swerve into the woods at any moment. The policeman wanted to drive us into a ditch.

In the back I clung to a strap and swung from side to side as the truck took curves. The darkness in the truck was close and soft as velvet. I dangled from the strap, legs free, swinging in the dark.

From the driver's seat came the voice of the policeman. He asked me if I was sorry for what happened, and I said that I was. He asked me if I ever intended to do this again, and I said no, I didn't. Around me in the dark the voice churned and purred, like a machine. The voice asked if I wanted to go home. "Yes," I pleaded, "I have to get back to my job. Oh, god," I begged. "Release me."

SEEKERS OF LICE

MOIMOIMO

POUPETTE

gonads
glands _____
legs akimbo limbs
hectic dancer
a tail though licking
conjugate it
I lick you lick
she he or it licks
vibration of the lips thrill
fail as they do

double vision
and about the world
body hole

goad thorn pain
flesh spiked
beneath the ribs
behind the throat
pain paeon plain

blistered
unhappily another other
autre -apt
filth forecast
prick
compass points to a new configuration
This is my

there
there
there
lumber
hermer
setas

“so many cocks and cunts”
the steam of breath

manifesto for: luck
shoes hair and coffee

lax & lout
translate : the light
zettel
eine kleine

maman?
oui?
où est le pain?
promenade back and forth
follow or swallow
pear trees .

my axon is lax
your axon is slack
his axon lacks .
formulate a pin
head

they're all liars but those are true lies

they've got him under the pancake

hence we're moving

tiny mineral changes in very small minerals are the
beginning of life

dryness and sobriety

I dropped my toothbrush in fright

(burying the ashes)

write it on 3 orange sticks

where have the dogs gone?

you can't suck your back fat in

toss to do

in a minute we'll rush over there

stage directions

lights out

allay you now
the note sounds struck
from inner state dulled
crammed the cold room
curdled overstay crease
crumpled properties flower
moimoimoi disgust myself
poupette . the children laugh
in another room missy
you're cute for all the
wrong reasons keep empty
ing the bin . power lines.

teeter
ing

Living on an abstract plane
no mnemonics.
pressing in to things nouns stuff
of which the ascetic can only
be afraid of wallow
of contact of how to feel no
back up what history for
refusal of lust excitement & clamour
dirt dint & pressing
the bodied the horse and brain
tell me .

I/oeil/ oiseau

I je moi we us nous chi lo sa lick my ass I is I is I is

I is is is me what come do for the here hear hear it

here you am they am they is to be discomforted

continue to differ amongst our self patient in

patience of the'm want for it wait want failing to

decide may be the same stumble the same stumble

the same stumble the same stumble the same stum

stumm stumm stumm stumm bull stuttering molto

vibrato with shaking voice with a foreign accent

with almost closed mouth quasi senza voce

speaking while inhaling quasi I me mien miaow

mean mine est the impatience of saints ain't no

more where je est je lui comme qui lu sa strutting

struttily je vous en prie we is us go they am

swatted swaddled hand sure o i ll oeil.

the I know what don't wait c'est il horloge-clock

cock sparrow

beauty

my beauty, booty

the face

a beauty spot spider beauty

dialogue 1

c.w.1 (Lolita)	c.w.2 (Layla)
L'oreal spray-on tan	French manicure
Louboutin	Elle Macpherson dentelles
massage oil	my son
I shower for a woman,	fresh
clean my teeth	push up
Coty maquillage	my hair
the gym	no hands

Dermestidae are a family of Coleoptera that are commonly referred to as skin beetles. Other common names include larder beetle, hide or leather beetles, carpet beetles, and khapra beetles.

There are approximately 500 to 700 species worldwide. They can range in size from 1–12 mm. Key characteristics for adults are round oval shaped bodies covered in scales or setae. The clubbed antennae fit into deep grooves. Larvae are scarabaeiform and also have setae.

Dermestids have a variety of habits; most genera are scavengers that feed on dry animal or plant material such as skin or pollen, animal hair, feathers, dead insects and natural fibers. Members of Dermestes are found in animal carcasses, while others may be found in mammal, bird, bee, or wasp nests.

Dermestid beetles are destructive to a number of common items. Natural animal fibers such as wool, silk, fur, or feathers are more prone to attack than synthetic fibers.

Most damage is done by the larval stage of the beetle.

Adults feed on shrubs and flowers.

the spleen — a purplish, fist-size, five-ounce organ in the upper left quadrant of the abdominal cavity, just behind the stomach and under the diaphragm

the spleen is like an elaborate wetlands, a Mississippi bayou for filtering and freshening the blood. as the blood flows in, it is dumped into puddle-like sinusoids, and to get back out it must squeeze between cells

the little oxidized pellets, the BB's, with which red blood cells are often pocked the spleen has often been called a graveyard for red blood cells filtration, cannibalization, and monocyte cultivation

The cells make haste to cut and paste conjugating around the broken heart

the monocytic mother lode

gonna have fun
in the city
be with my girl
she's so pretty

inked (ich habe)

aye aye i i ich itch **mur** neuy-neuy-new torqued
tied nous noose news nay nor we us-us used **mot**
you soz do **dot** half-assed can did we oui weigh
way what **bit** veir us ab ate it stick i've i ll bathe
says cool yo fool fail phial ope **dot** more may oaf
eel lame marred we we're were ap je-je-je jay **mot**
I'm is est vous view vortex vield whap ax they am
pale pled **het** boo bay habe hey you'll **dit** burr beer
me-me meme moins merdre us'll mein **on** me
ponce **nub** schwester au or jour d'we dweeb ever
all **mot** flail ul ul-a-shun chien she are t ail pour
quoit qu'ell elle suis ooh tête **dot** ... habe

In parentheses
knickers, peep-hole bra,
perec, lace, lingerie,
lalli poona, crotchless,
stockings, deleuze &
guattari, garters, groan,
cleavage, lost time,
nightmares, negligée,
maribou feathers, lip
service, a user's manual,
without qualities, eating
of your mother's heart
and then understanding
birds, flounder.

dialogue 2

lipsynching

c.w.3 (Kitty)	c.w.1 (Lolita)
the N.H.S.	my model tits
Italian men	my regulars
I need a red bull	you have a lovely waist
why thank-you!	
p a u s e	
Bataille says that when he thinks he's like a whore undressing	
p a u s e	
stripping and delivering his disincarnate self to a spectator	speedy? adept? sensuous?
	oh

lexicon¹ of love

feeling caring loving being desire passion emotion virtue
 hairy warm juicy blood smooth soft wet yielding tight firm hard
 cute beautiful sensuous horny tasty luscious fancy desirable lewd

below low

lexicon
of love
 (i)
 louse

 three-cornere
 d
 life
 blood
 hair
 warm
 clingin
 g

¹ When linguists study the lexicon, they study such things as what constitutes a word; the word-concept relationship; lexical access and lexical access failure; how a word's phonology, syntax, and meaning intersect; the morphology-word relationship; vocabulary structure within a given language; language use (i.e. pragmatics); language acquisition; the history and evolution of words (i.e. etymology); and the relationships between words, often studied within philosophy of language.

a conversation about volcanos and ineptitude

Kitty: mount Ætna crust eruption brimstone

Lola: and strombolic eruptions

Lorelei: he called me applebum

Kitty: is spittle debasing?

Lola: and pumice

Lorelei: A large eruption can be extremely dangerous for people living near a volcano. Flows of searing lava can be released, burning everything in its path, including whole towns. Boulders of hardening lava can rain down on villages. Mud flows from rapidly melting snow can strip mountains and valleys bare and bury towns

Kitty: a palaver

Lola: I don't pray for a miracle – miracles are very rare. I pray for the best possible outcome.

Lorelei: clothed and unclothed and dormant
conk out

Kitty: The pleasure is mine

Lola: Vesuvius

Kitty: Lava, ash, volcanic gases and rock
magma under the ground, lava when it erupts

Lorelei: Mauna Kea Aloha!

² Bedbugs are obligatory hematophagous insects. Most species only feed on humans when other prey are unavailable. Bedbugs are attracted to their hosts primarily by carbon dioxide, secondarily by warmth, and also by certain chemicals.

A bedbug pierces the skin of its host with two hollow feeding tubes. With one tube it injects its saliva, which contains anticoagulants and anesthetics, while with the other it withdraws the blood of its host. After feeding for about five minutes, the bug returns to its hiding place

Although bedbugs can live for a year without feeding, they normally try to feed every five to ten days. In cold weather, bedbugs can live for about a year; at temperatures more conducive to activity and feeding, about 5 months

All bedbugs mate by traumatic insemination. Because the female has no genital opening, the male pierces her abdomen with his hypodermic genitalia and ejaculates into the body cavity. Especially desperate males sometimes mistake other males for females and fatally wound the latter in the abdomen.



DAVID HAYMAN
INTERVIEWING

In the fall of 1972, I was on my way to Les Editions de Minuit to contact Samuel Beckett when who should appear on the sidewalk in front of me but the man himself. Delighted, but not thinking clearly, I called out his name. No response. I called again. No response. Then: "Sam, it's me, David Hayman!"

He turned, greeted me warmly, and led me into the publisher's offices. His refusal to turn when I called his name can be written off partly to shyness but mainly to his dislike of chance encounters. It was after all unusual for us to be together in a public space; but he behaved as though it wasn't. First off, he introduced me to his friend, Jerome Lindon, the publisher who later became his executor. Then he took me upstairs to the office of Alain Robbe-Grillet where, after a brief introduction, he left me. Of course I knew Robbe-Grillet by reputation, and had read some of his novels; but I really didn't know what to say to him. It could have been nerves. It certainly wasn't calculation, but somehow I got around to asking him for an interview. Not that I had any idea what I would do with one or, for that matter, how to

do one. Nor had I ever before contemplated doing an interview. After all, I was a literary scholar and not a journalist. Besides, though I admired creative people, I was not really a fan. I found some of his work self-indulgent as well as deliberately cold.

After agreeing to meet with me, the bushy haired, bearded author quickly set a condition. I was to go to his apartment by the Bois de Boulogne the next Saturday morning at ten. He'd give me no more than an hour of his time. It was both more and less than I expected. Beckett's introduction had been generous, and Robbe-Grillet, who idolized him for very good reasons and thought of him as a progenitor of the Nouveau Roman, was also being unusually generous, but characteristically cagey. I left his office carrying playfully-inscribed copies of his two most recent novels along with his address and telephone number.

On my way home, when the initial elation wore off, I began to ask myself the obvious technical questions. The first was how to record the exchange. I had no tape recorder and, being gadget averse, didn't know

how to use one. We were on a tight budget; so I didn't even think of buying one for so slight an enterprise. Luckily, my daughter Denise was going with an affluent young French boy who offered to lend me his machine. I set about reading the two books, *La Maison de rendez-vous* and *Projet pour un révolution à New York*, both of which were quirky enough to please me and even to suggest a line of questioning.

Though I'm usually unflappable, I was a bit nervous when I rang the bell that Saturday morning. The welcome was cordial. We sat down in a large, well-furnished parlor with windows on the park, the home of an affluent writer, editor and film-maker, etc. I had no sooner made myself comfortable opposite him on an easy chair and adjusted my equipment than the telephone rang. He excused himself and left me to graze the books on his cocktail table, including one on repressed homosexuality. The call was from a visitor inviting him to go out for a restaurant meal. He didn't seem to mind my overhearing the conversation. I suspect he was even pleased that I did.

He came back and we settled in for the session. I don't recall what I asked him. but I do remember his response, "That isn't a question." If that wasn't off-putting enough, I began to doubt that the machine was recording and started to fumble with the controls. I had failed to test it properly before coming. Embarrassed, I had to tell him it wasn't working, not that I didn't know how to work it. He should by rights have seen me off with a curt dismissal. After all, I was imposing.

To my surprise and pleasure, he simply made another appointment – for the next Saturday. I had the presence of mind to ask if it was still for only an hour. He said that we could take as much time as we needed and I departed in a good mood, vowing to buy a machine for myself, launched on my career as an interviewer. Sort of. The next time, I came with a couple of questions and a functioning recorder and all went smoothly. In fact, once I asked my first question, a relaxed Robbe-Grillet began a conversation that led me smoothly from topic to topic, establishing for me what would become my interviewing philosophy and style. My goal has always been to establish the sort of open mood conducive to uninhibited conversation. I quickly discovered that people like to talk about themselves, that, provided

they trust and like you, they love the attention and the publicity.

I even managed to place that first interview – in a periodical I helped edit, *The Iowa Review*. At first, my editor wondered who owned the rights. After some dickering, he agreed to pay me a small fee, enough to cover the price of the machine and even a modest dinner.

If I seem to have been cavalier and self-assured, I was not. From early on I have been very impressed with writers and artists. I tend to remember even minor details from my encounters with people I generally admire as well as like. My admiration for Robbe-Grillet was muted, however. I tended to agree with the critic who called him an "icy playboy" and to find his writing a bit too formulaic. He justified this attitude later on when he told me that he was trained as an agricultural engineer. Still, I enjoyed our contacts, especially the weekend I spent with him and his wife in Milwaukee in 1976. Writers like Samuel Beckett, Philippe Sollers, Maurice Roche, Kurt Vonnegut, Jose Donoso, Juan Goytisolo, Julian Rios, Christine Brooke-Rose and Helène Cixous in descending order inspired deeper and more lasting feelings. Most of them became friends. The same goes for the painter, Robert Motherwell.

Both Roche and Sollers gave me interviews over a period of twenty years. It was Sollers' idea to put together the materials published as *Vision à New York*. During the four years I knew Motherwell, I taped eight hours of fascinating material, most of which is still unpublished. Though, like Joyce before him, Beckett refused outright on policy grounds to give interviews, my meetings with him gave me ample fodder for a detailed account.

The incredibly productive year I spent teaching at the Université de Paris VIII (1972-73) could be called the year of the interviews, none of which were truly premeditated. In the fall of '72, during a memorable visit to his study, I mentioned to Beckett that I was teaching Vonnegut to my students at Vincennes. He perked up, "Do you mean Kurt Vonnegut Jr.?" When I said that I knew Kurt and Beckett expressed admiration for *Slaughter House Five*, I immediately wrote off to tell Kurt, who was of course delighted.

Later that year, having flown back to give a paper at the MLA meeting in New York, I called Kurt and arranged to lunch with him and Jill Krementz. Jill, who specialized in photographing authors mainly for book jackets, was planning to come to Paris to take on that scene. She asked me to arrange whatever sittings I could. I think it was then that she told me that George Plimpton, whom I may have met earlier, wanted me to get him an interview with Beckett. The idea of publishing an interview in *The Paris Review* pleased me; but I told her and later him that Beckett was a tough case and that I could promise nothing. During my visit, Plimpton suggested that I contact his Paris editor, Maxine Groffsky, who happened to be the model for Philip Roth's Potempkin in "Goodbye Columbus." I did. Each of those circumstances contributed in its way to the development of my side-career.

Maxine turned out to be a tall handsome woman with lots of contacts. It was she who pointed me toward her favorite French author, Maurice Roche. She also put me in contact with a fledgling American writer named Keith Cohen through whom I got to know the extravagant Hélène Cixous, herself a Joyce scholar at the time. Through her I connected with a group of young Normalians studying Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Through that group I made contact with Stephen Heath, who was collaborating on a translation of one of Joyce's *Wake* passages. That group, some of whom worked with Cixous, has had an important impact on Joyce studies. As a footnote I should say that '72-'73 was when I solidified my contacts in the French critical community through whom I met other authors. This is what we mean by 'networking'; but it was all serendipitous.

The contacts made then helped smooth my transition from Iowa to Wisconsin, and the combined experience taught me a great deal about the nature of creative communities.

When I dialed Maurice Roche's number, I was greeted by a rush of words from which I salvaged an invitation to visit. I had no idea, though, what to expect when I climbed the stairs and rang the bell at the door on a landing that reeked of cat. Maurice turned out to be an imp of a man, a voluble talker, a chain smoker who lived

like a bibulous monk in a modest but adequate apartment with his commonlaw wife – and his beloved cats. This should have put me off. At the time I didn't drink or rather drank only in moderation. I was and am allergic to smoke and especially to CATS walking on the table under my nose. One of the perils of interviewing or one of its consequences is that a serious interviewer, one who establishes a lasting relationship with the interviewee, has to respect and share for prolonged periods of time the habits and living space of the subject. Whatever – Maurice was a published writer whose work I found fascinating; so all of that was beside the point as it would be decades later, when I interviewed the drinking, chain smoking Robert Motherwell. Besides, my abstemiousness didn't stop me from drinking with Beckett.

Maurice sat me down in his somewhat cluttered living room and began talking. A genial self-starter, he relished a chance to talk through his career, his life rather. My role was simply to make listening noises and gestures and ask questions suggested by what he was saying. The hour(s) passed rapidly as we polished off the pint of whiskey on the table at his elbow. As friends whom I told to visit him can attest, he was impossible not to like, a born raconteur who had lived a very full life, an animated talker obsessed by illness, convinced that he was on the point of the death, a condition that fascinated him and stoked his creative energies.

The literary model that springs to mind is Conrad's Kurtz, though Maurice was not a dark person. On the contrary, he loved to laugh and had a vivid if slightly perverse sense of humor. He was good company and, however needy, a generous spirit. I was the recipient of each of his books as they appeared and of all the periodicals to which he contributed and we shared many meals. His generosity challenged and obligated me. I never went to Paris without calling him.

As was usually the case with my interviewees after Robbe-Grillet, we shared tastes in the arts and even to a degree in politics. He loved the writers I did and we even had friends in common, the critic Jean Paris for example, and shortly thereafter, Sollers. Left-Wing politics had played a big role in his development, which was understandable given his working class background. He had spent his childhood in the dirt poor Massif Central. His father worked for Michelin

there. Among Maurice's many jobs were several with Communist or Left Wing newspapers. But it was his the arts that marked him most strongly. It had begun early, in the house of a neighbor who had a piano on which he taught himself to play. The neighbor told his parents and so began his career as a musician, which led him eventually to the academy where he studied along with Boulez. As for his claim to have composed for the theater, I haven't seen the evidence.

By his own account, before he turned to writing, and even since, he led a complicated life, working *inter alia* as a composer, TV Indian, and caption writer for newspaper photos, a discipline that helped him when he turned to his revolutionary picto-fictions with their elaborate typography and spacing. All of this was spilled helter skelter into our first boozy interview, the one that sealed our friendship for the next twenty years. The past was the past, so much so that it seemed almost impossible in the sick room aura of the present. It was the aura that is conveyed by his first successful, and in some ways his best, novel: *Compact*.

In *Compact*, Maurice poured a trove of allusion, learning and language games into the 'story' of a dying man whose skin is covered in the tattoos coveted by a sinister Japanese collector, with whom he has signed a contract (or compact). He is being supported and nursed with the object of preserving that artifact. Despite its morbid theme, the novel sparkles with the sort of wry humor Maurice displayed in the interview. Aside from the use of varieties of type faces and a range of spacing and punctuation, it is pocked with images created by its author. His own favorite, upon which much text is lavished, is a scene featuring a Man at table with wine bottles in what appears to be a wine cellar, a trick image concealing a hollow-eyed skull. The death he serves up is in the spirit of the medieval memento mori, but without the salvationist twist, the shared fate of mankind, its sentence.

After that first year, I visited and interviewed Maurice often, at least once during my yearly visits to Paris, and corresponded voluminously, spurred usually by a book he had sent me. That is not to say that I always enjoyed the visits. The combination of cats and complaints could be wearing, and I couldn't help feeling that he was systematically cultivating his miseries in

order to get attention. He certainly had that of Violant, his Canary Islander companion.

Of course, the vices were harmless to others, but ultimately, the work-in-progress that was his death could be as alarming as it was annoying. Generally, I held myself back; but after a dozen years, I found myself saying unkind things as if to a naughty child, saying and regretting. I also spread the word about Maurice's work in the States and published interviews and essays. He got such lavish treatment in the special number on the New Novel I edited for *Contemporary Literature* that Sollers got his nose out of joint. Over the years a number of my friends and colleagues visited him, cultivating him. When he finally and briefly broke out of his miseries, I arranged for his trip to Madison, and we threw a party at which he got sloppily drunk. Self-control was not Maurice.

Robbe-Grillet's interview, precise and measured, was relatively easy to edit. The words that tumbled out of Maurice's mouth were always a challenge. In the end, I published only those parts that hung together in a semblance of order, losing in the process a rich hoard of ancillary anecdotes. It was as though all that experience had been bottled up, waiting only my attentive ear and tape recorder to release it. I have not listened to the tapes for years, but I cherish the memory of sitting there, glass in hand enthralled by (and impatient with) the tangents amidst the oddly intriguing clutter of words, the atmosphere of illness and the pervasive feline odors. That was one of the few times that Violant and Maurice didn't invite me to dine with them.

I confess that, what with the cats roaming on the tables, I was never too comfortable dining there. Since I valued Maurice and liked his company and since the interviews were ongoing, but mostly because the cats were a fetish (he signed his name with a cat head!), it took me a long time to confess my allergy. Maurice was not pleased. It was the beginning of the cooling off.

With Maurice it was all inward, all or just about all about him, his joys, his complaints, his enthusiasms, his work; but he was always open, never really sly no matter the subject. He needed attention, wanted publicity, an audience, and, having few friends, company. After all, he was housebound as the feline-infested apartment



testified depressingly. That meant our conversations revolved around a limited number of topics even though it was no strain. He knew a lot, had lived a lot, had read a lot and was a born raconteur. He was waiting to die.

Philippe Sollers was (probably still is) different: genial, self-reliant, a first-rate self-promoter who knows everybody but keeps most things to himself. I remember his editor at Les Editions du Seuil thanking me for having brought so much of his personal history to light. A lonely asthmatic kid (shades of Proust?), he was brought up in a close-knit bourgeois family. His father and uncle had identical attached houses in Bordeaux where they produced enamelled pots and pans. In the event he grew up to be charmingly crafty in personal relations, notoriously dropping people as he eventually dropped me

but surprisingly generous to those he liked and trusted, while he still liked and trusted them. He was the editor of the intellectual journal *Tel Quel* (later *L'Infini*) and the center of a lively editorial group, a popular personality, he was frequently cited by the media, controversial but respected, the sort of person who could be trusted to say something interesting, to surprise.

Our meeting was serendipitous. That was the year we spent in Paris while I taught or tried to teach in the increasingly chaotic campus of Paris XV at Vincennes. (There was a janitors' strike.) I'd already heard plenty about Sollers from Joycean friends but didn't search him out, didn't know how I'd handle a wild Maoist. It was on a whim that I'd arranged for him to sit for Kurt Vonnegut's partner, the photographer, Jill Krementz.

She had asked me to line up Parisian writers. I'd compiled a list and made contacts with various authors, most of whom I didn't know. One day, out of blue, Kurt called to invite me and Loni to meet with them and Sollers, whom I "had to meet," in a Right Bank café that afternoon. Jill was meeting with Sollers to choose an image from her sheet of shots.

Six of us convened in the mediated shade at a sunlit table. Jill had brought her sister-in-law, a gorgeous *Vogue* model. (We had spent an evening sharing trail mix with her and Jill's photographer brother on a huge room-sized cushion made by Brigitte Bardot's sister.) Philippe turned out to be far from the firebrand I'd been led to expect. He was a boyish charmer, bubbling with wit and mischief, handsome, with an open round face and blondish hair combed in a sort of bang.

When Jill asked him to pick an image he wanted her to enlarge for reproduction, he chose the one that made him look most like a wry Pierrot. When I remarked on this, he was delighted. In the event, he turned out to be more like Harlequin. Indeed, his role in the Parisian cultural and intellectual stage was that of the 'bad boy' provocateur. That afternoon, he was pleasant café company. So when he began to tease, actually flirt, with the model, I felt free to suggest that he cool it. At that point, we struck up a conversation and I found that we shared literary interests and that he knew me by reputation. When I suggested an interview, he asked me to call his number. Perhaps I would have another chance to test my skill with the tape recorder.

It took several calls, during which I talked with a soft-spoken woman, who said she liked my work. When I finally got through to Sollers, he immediately set a date for me to come to his apartment. By that time I had read enough of his work to feel comfortable interviewing him. I had also dipped into *Tel Quel*, the left-wing intellectual periodical he edited, the one that published so many of the great theorists (e.g. Barthes, Derrida, Foucault).

Like Robbe Grillet, he lived in a prestigious neighborhood, on the better end of the Luxembourg Gardens. Not exactly what one expects of a young revolutionary intellectual, but not the last surprise of the day. I was welcomed as an old friend and ushered into a small study where I unpacked my machine

and prepared for our session. Then, to my intense discomfort, I discovered that I'd forgotten to bring a tape. Sollers took it in stride, saying that he had something he wanted to discuss with me. It turned out that he was co-translating a passage from *Finnegans Wake* and wanted advice. We spent a pleasant hour studying his version in the light of my edition of the first draft. At one point I mentioned that I really liked the work of one of *Tel Quel's* contributors, Julia Kristeva. "Oh," He said, "You'll meet her later." I had no idea that they were married and that she could be the woman I had spoken to. The morning was not wasted. Philippe and I agreed to meet again for a real interview. The experience had been thoroughly enjoyable.

Our second session took place in Sollers' office at Les Editions du Seuil against a background of random traffic noise. It has been my experience that each interview is different and that each interviewee sets the tone. Unlike Robbe-Grillet, Sollers was never defensive. Neither did he speak exclusively of himself. Like Maurice, however, he was a self starter. All I needed to do was name a topic and then channel the conversation by querying topics raised during his discourse. Like Maurice, he had considerable personal charm, but he had no need to win sympathy. Unlike the stereotypical French charmer, he did not so much ooze as sparkle. From my first interview in 1973, to my last over a decade later, I took great pleasure in those encounters which were full of unpredictable turns of thought and subject.

Unlike Maurice Roche, he was not needy. Though he had power, being the editor of the most prestigious intellectual periodical with its own line of theoretical publications and a ready forum in the newspaper, *Le Monde*, he did not give off whiffs of pride. Indeed, he seemed almost modest. Though he knew he had enemies who attacked him as vigorously as possible, he never seemed to react in kind. Indeed, he tended to be magnanimous. Beyond that, he had remarkable verbal gifts. The interviews previewed for me his ability to ad lib a coherent essay without a pause for breath. In short, Sollers was, and still is, a class act.

I confess that, before I met him, I had read next to nothing of his voluminous and innovative fiction. Then, out of necessity but with increasing interest and occasional strain, I began my reading with his more

current work. My favorite was the puzzlingly titled, *H*: a chronicle/diary of the 'revolution' of 1968, in which he and *Tel Quel* were agents provocateurs if not active leaders. Written as though from within the heat of battle it echoes with hope the dreams that were already slipping into despair, *H* is among the most challenging and innovative works of 20th Century French writing. Powerful and puzzling on a first reading, it yields its treasure only on second and third exposure. Like Joyce, whom Sollers admired, it requires and rewards the closest attention, without which the actions can seem opaque and even unfocussed rather than luminous and obliquely moving. He has created on the one hand the profile of a moment and on the other something close to a poetic epic. Years later I suggested that the title might reflect the subterranean implications of the book's burden, its implications. After all the aspirated letter *h* is no more than a present absence in spoken French. I still believe this; but Sollers, ever the sly rebel, insists that it alludes to the hashish under the influence of which it was produced.

Before writing *H*, Sollers had written four other novels, each anchored firmly in the 'modernist' tradition, books that led naturally to the radical experiments now labeled 'Postmodern.' *Une Curieuse solitude* is a strong initiation novel about an affair with a Spanish maid. In our interview Sollers rejected it as his "prehistory... almost neoclassical... a stylistic exercise, almost a copy." When he was still remarkably young, his 30 page story "Le défi" ("The Challenge") had been recognized by no less a figure than François Mauriac; as a result he won his first and only prize, the Priz Fénéon, a real coup. After *Solitude*, his novels turned schematic, focused by approach rather than plot, language rather than action and character, departing from the cool objectivity of the Nouveau Roman, and of course Robbe-Grillet. When asked about Sollers, Robbe-Grillet insisted that he was still writing Nouvel Novels ignoring the considerable distance that separated them. I was doubtful at the time, but would now give him and his friends more credit.

Each succeeding work had a different stylistic and formal procedure, raised higher obstacles to reading and made greater demands on its author. The process began with *Drame* (1965), which by making language its protagonist brings to mind the plotless situations of

Samuel Beckett's later prose; *Nombres* (1968), the first overtly Marxist text, which pushes further by initiating a "theater" of language whose locus is universal and whose "square" structure is regulated by "real history"; the Maoist *Lois* (1972), projected as a "cube with six sides" or books, each subdivided mechanically into twelve sections is the most openly grounded in the literary, psychological and political, the whole being punctuated by paragraphs rather than sentences, relying more heavily on rhythm and tone. The unpunctuated *H*, is a vast canvas of jostling effects, scenes, speakers, attitudes, rhythms focused by the events of '68 and their aftermath; the more emphatically unpunctuated (italicized) *Paradis* (1981), described by Sollers in my interview as a vast present tense Dantesque epic of a "non-being" that needs to be "spoken." Between the publication of *Paradis* and *Paradis II* (1986), Sollers initiated a string of very popular novels that runs counter to his experimental work. Beginning with the massive and amusing anti-feminist screed, the gossipy autobiographical *Femmes* (1983), Sollers, as an admirer of Sade, began a string of what he calls pornographical novels.

When I met him, Philippe was still very young in both appearance and spirit. His participation in the "events of '68" and his immersion in Maoism dictated rather ostentatiously a new informality and openness, the immediate tu-toi for example, which made our interaction astonishingly easy. (I should add that this sort of informality had become universal in advanced circles even between the sexes. A startling development.) Sollers' informal diction, while cheery and doubtless heart-felt, did not extend so far as actually to melt personal boundaries. Unlike Maurice, who radiated an openness, Sollers was essentially private, for reasons that ran deep into the heart of his personality and derived in part from his asthmatic isolation as a child and perhaps also from his well-healed Bordelaise background. He was not above calculation, even ruthless calculation, a quality oddly consistent with and much more profound than his Marxism. Indeed, he had already acquired a reputation for ruthlessness that earned him a quantity of enemies, plus many admirers.

In this period, I also became familiar with the group around the novelist/critic Jean-Pierre Faye. I attended their gatherings and was even invited to a very good

dinner. It was a good group with a solid and gifted membership and I enjoyed the sessions and respected both Faye and the mathematician/novelist Jacques Roubaud as thinkers and innovators. I guess they were wooing me; but they went about it the wrong way. It seems that they couldn't forgive Philippe for engineering their exclusion from the editorial board of *Tel Quel*, in line it seems to his plans to turn it Maoist. Paris was and probably still is full of warring parties.

I was struck by the fact that Philippe did not respond in kind and did not defend himself in our conversations. He always seemed to have other fish to fry. Even though I myself was eventually treated to an abrupt and sly exile, I can't say I feel any animus or that, despite a lack of sympathy for his 'popular' novels, I don't still respect his intelligence, brilliance in fact, and energy. AND his incredible ability to keep himself in the spotlight. I don't think of him as I do of his friend Bernard Henri Lévy as a splashy and facile self-publicist.

What struck me during our early encounters was what may be his defining trait: a protean quality. In conversation, in interviews, in life, he can be relied upon to surprise, to shift topics, attitudes, and even positions. A trait that could, in a less stimulating person, be exasperating comes across as appealing and challenging. I never knew quite what to expect next; but whatever it was, I usually found him entertaining. We seemed to have a meeting of minds except on the rare occasions when we didn't, once because I expressed a taste different from his and once when I had the effrontery to 'dis' one of his passions: I told him that the austere chapel of the Hospital du Val de Grace, which he took me to see as one of the finest Catholic sites in Paris, struck me as Protestant in the spirit of his native Bordeaux.

We were 'friends,' to the extent that anyone can be a friend of Mercury, for years. One year I arranged for him to give a talk in Wisconsin. Julia came too and we had a fine time, what with parties at our house and tours of the neighborhood. During our stop at Frank Lloyd Wright's Unitarian church, the one with the praying hands roof line around the corner from us, he went into a funny boyish act, playing the organ and clowning at the pulpit. He embarrassed me a bit when he made generous mention of me in his public talk, the

sort of thing the others tended to resent.

At the post-talk party, when we were standing in front of our fireplace, he turned to me and said we should do a book of interviews together. I agreed, thinking nothing would come of it. Something did.

When he taught at NYU the next year, he asked me to fly to New York so that we could tape what became the book. We spent two days of conversations. He took over the tapes, leaving me with a copy, gave them to his secretary to transcribe and edited them himself, with some contributions from me. With characteristic efficiency, he found a publisher to print the successful *Vision à New York*. He also managed to get it translated into Japanese and Italian. I learned during a dinner at his apartment that the publisher 'was convinced' to give me 1 percent of the royalties. He assured me that that was good and I assured him that I still had the unedited tapes. (He had omitted significant passages and was probably alarmed by the implied threat.) In the event, after our silent split, he went back to the tapes and printed one of my favorite omissions, a segment on his methods.

At the time of those New York sessions, he convinced a University colleague to invite me along with him to dinner for the famous cowling artist: Christo. It was a memorable affair during which I had a long exchange with Christo's wife about her husband's work, which I'd suggested was conceptual. A rather typical forceful French woman, she had her line pretty pat. Our host was an enthusiastic Christo collector whose home was full of the large installation-derived paintings used by the artist to finance his installations. I don't know how he took my argument. I do know that Sollers was amused by the exchange. My public feistiness may even have cemented our friendship.

At any rate I continued to meet with him every time I was in Paris. He alone or with Julia took me or us out for lunch, usually, like Sam Beckett, to the Closerie des Lilas, the hoary and quite wonderful writers' gathering place, a place worthy of a study on its own, what with the tables labeled with the names of writers who sat there regularly. All in all he was very nice to me and I returned the favors by publishing interviews, a couple of which he reprinted, and essays or chapters on him. Besides our collaboration on *Vision*, I helped with the translation and wrote the introduction to

Columbia University Press's edition of his *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, a particularly demanding piece of work for which there has been little reward. When Julia came to give her Polyseminar for the Comparative Literature Department, she needled me for holding up publication of that volume. I was balky because I resented the tone of the managing editor, who seemed to think of me as a hireling.

All of these were relatively successful enterprises; but I should mention one failure, the one that may have broken the back of our relationship. Over the years Philippe sponsored and contributed to the French interest in Joyce, and especially in *Finnegans Wake*. He saw himself, with some, but not too much, justification as an expert in such matters and he did earn some stripes. There was a string of essays and notes on Joyce in both of his periodicals beginning with the two part piece by Stephen Heath that introduced me to *Tel Quel* and including the translation from Book IV of the *Wake* and the increasingly less Marxist essays by the brilliant and intense lycée professor, scholar/critic and Sollers-supporter, Jean-Louis Houdebine, and Sollers himself. When we were in Paris one year, I invited Houdebine over for lunch and was embarrassed to learn while he sipped our prosaic wine that he was an expert in that matter too.

After lunch I suggested compiling a collection of *Tel Quel* Joyciana would enlighten the Anglo community. He liked the idea and promised to get the materials together for me. He was as good as his word. When I got back to the States, I found myself nicely painted into a corner. The best approach would have been to go ahead and translate that mass of frequently demanding prose; but I had neither the time nor the competence to do it well. My solution was to send the materials out to university presses and hope for a bite. In fact several presses were willing to pay for readers; but to my dismay, the reactions were hostile. It seems that my American readers to a person declared their dislike or worse for Sollers. I had a problem. There was no way I could get the funds needed to pay for translations and no argument I could make to a graduate student that a translation would look good on a vita. Eventually, I had to admit to Philippe that my pull on this side of the great pond was nothing like his in France and that his

name here in certain quarters was poison. I think that that failure contributed heavily to the cooling of our friendship. That and Julia's recognition that I was by no means as well known here as they thought and as I had become in Europe.

On the whole my relationship with Philippe was rewarding. His energy and wit were inspiring. He taught me much about the French scene, writing, publishing and even life. (He also gave me access to lots of books and some literary figures.) Philippe was an inimitable operator. I remember a conversation we had one morning in the cozy apartment he kept as an office (and perhaps garçonnière), the one with the telephone he could turn on and off at will. We were talking, as we often did, about his career, about the fact that he had not yet published a runaway best seller. After a pause for reflection, he began a calculation. Speaking from experience in publishing, he could summarize a writer's trajectory: from sales of 1500 to sales of 3,000, to sales of 100,000 and on up. In the event, his own numbers, restricted by style and tactics when his books were experimental, and to my mind noteworthy, skyrocketed when he began publishing his fictionalized memoirs, which he himself called 'pornography.' That happened after he made his big career move from Seuil, a small trendy intellectual house, to the prestigious NRF or Gallimard, and started up his new magazine, *L'Infini*, the spawn of his long-running *Tel Quel*. I pretty much gave up reading him after the publication of *Femmes*, the tell-all treatment of the French critical scene, which I really enjoyed. His literary decline began with his rise in popularity and wealth; but he remains a name to conjure with in France and I didn't hesitate to read with some approval but many doubts the manuscript devoted to his work by a young French scholar. (Eventually, following my suggestion to her, it appeared in French obviously with Sollers' imprimatur, as an issue of *L'Infini*.)

I never had an open rift with the Sollers. That is not how they operate. Instead, after more than ten years of cordiality, there were two frustrating phone calls. Loni and I were in Paris for a brief visit. As usual, I called Philippe. Julia answered, telling me that he was at a meeting, to call back tomorrow. When I called again, I was told that he couldn't come to the phone. Brush-off received.

PHILIPPE SOLLERS



(PART 2)

i'd really lick a li'l piece i wanted to make a wish to surround the patient to guide him it wouldn't be a sacrifice i'd have conversations with him that'd make me see what my soul desires oh i'm sure that then the broken keys the torn strings would still resonate he's submerged in waves of a heavenly power the speech which leading everything to a rapid fall would have flooded his senses so if i could plug in a bypass channel then perhaps my name might be brought together with his in this great sea i feel is made for me and me alone he says that the laws of the mind are metric he says that since the speech on its own won't be enough to generate thought mind in men hasn't yet attained its perfection that it's only when thinking is reflected in the impossibility of expressing itself differently than by the rhythm that there's poetry innate strength reflection caesura rearing horse suspension ray jumping like a good rider in white breeches for the derby i'd put on my lovely hat my new coordinated outfit everyone would look at me it would be delightful i'm flooded with light maybe the aulic counsellor would he seek advice from me maybe hegel himself who once knew him would he take me for a guardian of his message it's always better than what my husband says that he's become unable to fix the thought to elucidate it further pursue it to connect it to another one of the same order and to form by means of intermediate links an ordered sequence that he fails to bridge the distance separating the ideas of my husband is very anti-leftist maybe he's right after all those people there won't get anywhere it'd be better to analyse them a question of adjustment all in all if not impossible to break down was but a single concept in its elements it's like this drug story of this unscrupulous apology today of a schizo i ask you a little where are we going with this general irresponsibility it's a revolution in conception itself of the exception as if the unknown soldier gave rise to his flame and wanted to march on the champs-élysées this disorder comes from the americans and here i wonder if we haven't been wrong to fix on the united states the always too fast innocence of youth it's a double-edged sword who knows if they aren't going to result in a crazy anarchy with wild naked gay boys disrupting juries who knows if our soundest rampart isn't on the other side with the sense of sheer ease it would be necessary to review it all i've just spoken to george i was telling him well yes right the secretary-general has a rather ugly face it's scary his chin says all in a second but it may be our only chance do think about it my love regarding a typical example of the other we can say that he wants to state something but as he doesn't care about the truth that can only be a product of a healthy and orderly mind he says no right away many times i could witness the fatal conflict destroying his thoughts as soon as they're

formed since usually he thinks out loud and even if he manages to fix an idea immediately it makes his head spin it only confuses him further a convulsive shudder goes through his forehead he shakes his head and exclaims no no no there's a huge gulf between him and the humanity the peers judge him harshly despite his efforts i don't think he's ever going to fall asleep their suspicion there's a problem over there coming from farther away than all of them and which if you want my opinion passes through them already extends beyond what they today believe is the ancient trick of humankind we shouldn't forget that he's got enough really strong vanity left a kind of pride a feeling of self-worth i sense that he's never going to be able to anonymise himself in mass movement and yet he says the opposite maybe he isn't that wrong maybe it's he who's the least original but then it's in such a strange immoral cold way that we feel it's contemptuous we aren't moved at the same time long ago the outside world which didn't like him it's true it was still half open his creative power and action enabled him to play a role there whereas now they'd say he's for him me and non-me world and men first and second person and that he continues to see himself as a marvellous superior being i wonder how he goes to bed when he sits down at the piano one feels that he's pursuing a child's shadow he's playing it for you hundreds of times it's unbearable you may add that he's sometimes experiencing a kind of cramps which make him flash through the keys like a lightning and then he begins to sing impossible to know in what language but with a heart-rending pathos he claims to have always been seventeen the garage man says that he reads passages to himself out loud declaiming like an actor while wanting to conquer the world looks posing himself questions and answering them most of the time in the negative then anew music once again equally monotonous the same saw he's grumpy today he's repeating from this morning that the source of his wisdom has been poisoned that the fruit of knowledge is a hollow pocket and that's it he's going to die quietly without agony practically like everyone else of his kind phew here i'm starting to sing a great deaf and raspy and liquid and deaf song night helvetian night come place your black hand upon that burning front which reproduces again and again it was him but also others by hundreds and hundreds of thousands letting go of the rope for a moment holding onto the iron railing becoming like she metallic echo i don't want to overlook this in silence so that later comes the specialist paranoid plying the mass graves going beyond history sliding the pompous as far as to say that th' silence approves of human greatness or that the scorpions ignore cartwheels that go over their agnostic talkative corslets for nervous traumatised children from dawn he talks about the evil of satan as if the boat wasn't gone as if the river didn't flow from all its banks he repeats the panthéon modern cathedral for heaven's sake dump the bourgeoisie must as well suspect that their clogs have holes in them no well no she puts it back on telly colour for oil slick of scandals she believes she can take over christendom we're leaving the fish behind entering the new house it's sufficient to extend the smell of grinding decomposition of bodies with repetition boy or girl off to school you didn't succeed pass the enigma on the generations make yourselves a spiral

what a curiosity this way of ancestor wheel chart to be based on its lowest point on its obscure rims this maze side of everything born at the time late and early on the previous that knows without knowing in the blind how fleeting is this light in their eyes that they always shut too hastily towards a formula a prayer and you see the irony of that stony place topped by a cross public wasteland unconscious confession for two thousand years long sleep in vaults parallel construction sites and now listen hold your breath seize while sliding the story that opens folds in the wink of an eye sharp burning dissatisfied in a single ply emptied by shadows be like an awakened dog news flash which at the same time won't lose sleep over it what i'm asking you for is simply in full action distant aware as you are the bars that you build the surface though remaining too constrained simply the lightness of this immense gratuitousness that beats that runs through your veins your plankton side if you will that comes from greek plankton wanderer neuter from planktos errant or else your effect of prism from prizein saw that i put with psallein make the string vibrate oh again these greeks these normal children the nursery in the sun blue completely blue the stone squeezing the stone and this powder floor everywhere on the lookout let's walk a little farther the days get longer i love the red sky even with this fly of a helicopter the cops who broadcast everything by radio i wonder how they describe it how they break down social layers if they spot the differences from here the islets the proportion of immigrants i wonder what the chap filtering through the essential for military staff really thinks about if those with arms are in a state of alert how do politicians prepare their statements general rules of game theory direct answers without any surprise of main storage electorate's stability that lovers that swing and speaking of the way we speak about the dispersal or concentration of reflection you've seen the presents that we give in town councils during weddings zola balzac stendhal through little packets to be put on nightstands for legal intercourse reproduction pleasure balanced by phrase the red and the black for all pocket home fire extinguishers wait i'm going back to my idea of control by spontaneous repression it only takes the state to gobble itself up in the viscera that it be here patient at the time triangle of the stacked pyramid the block machine works shit that's not going to happen any time soon that we'll be able to twist our mess acutely ourselves year by year it's like the return of jesus reshunted off up to his chin in the daubed fellas bleating in a pop trip communes blessed by cardinal mypet what's huge is the expression of our chinese friends when watching this circus us and them on one side and still not exactly the same and the others on the other you'll confess that one has to choose one of the camps is radically crazy you regret living in this period oh but no certainly not i believe that it's now or never to make the point by all ends up at once by all sides enough to get down to it to let no distraction get in the way to bind oneself to the mast once more to not clip one's wings you decide the generalised mistrust of following anyone you rely on the fact that no one will blame oneself that every gesture even the most tolerant will actually be a knife wound more or less visible you throw yourself inside this circle of fire which simply means i am full stop you hear me the ghetto constructs itself at full speed

they ask you for one adjective only and you refuse it must be said you're going to start enjoying the monotonous variety of their contortions see their eyes get black encircled see how they watch you stealthily not without the little smile by which they rest assured of their triumph ineluctable triumph over whom over what that's what they'll never know and which allows you to make believe you don't tumble to it at first it's rather shattering of course you could break down any second but your ear refines it's their cry you're going to find a tremendous screaming to tear one's hair on the spot the true spasm of the one of the only the murmurs of the unity the terrible mommy of the global dying one on the hay ouch this cry can you bear a grudge against anyone for burying him underneath the tons of steel of grammar of belief or of obscenity anything rather than this language of anal fire at the top of the skull anything rather than this bubbling cauldron better to jerk off dance know prick oneself or nothing and there one needs to resist but it was therefore true the old bullshit fuck it's hell itself deep down down because this is the last ruse of the large mouth after which you'd have the right to come out whitewashed sweep the others in sheep's clothing to play the all-wise cuckold the body returned to the place of parting goddammit decisive turning point without which very short summary storm in a teacup return twenty per hour by the motorway with all the Sunday holidaymakers mobilisation for butter sad in the car lanes on the macadam circulation transports nothing more is needed to reproduce the minimum of capitalist breath ding the freedom of atoms no one has ever seen the night I wake up now in the shade of this sweat immediate widespread everywhere from foot to hair inexplicable seizure in the shower she sleeps or she sleeps not she feels passing the edge of the scythe she knows for her the other's right to say that finally no matter a hero who hasn't lived also with a woman that superiority without this experience multiplied in the lower-case let the maximum of illusions remain understand understand we need a science of the ultimate waste in the inorganic we must get over this graveyard wall mechanical niagara spoon to turn all of the sauce eternal look bottom to top up to the ars down calf knee thigh the tic of the species returning endless clock of gestures in every café every street understand understand how you are oiled within the cogwheels for that moist effect torsion toy of its key the ninth circle lowest of the low one can call it monboudif village with confidences of the president's nursemaid it's this good plato who'd be hallucinated about if he were going for a walk in our shoes differently than in the philo essays or more muffled cuff cloths the council of elders shivers in the background and so rather getting high the horse the crack rather the quaver note itself and the boy girl sprinkled with grass drrrrring will make you fly sparks stay cool on your stool flipped dry sniffed and that's that the vast and the water that seeps the words tell with difficulty what they eventually intend to deny ten films per second that enlarges the hidden knowledge which no one will ever teach and for good reason you dig your grave with your tail beneath the blue of the convoy the overcast horizon and above their wave there's the great old wave forget the promised land 'fairest isle all isles excelling seat of pleasure and love' switch on the lamp learn to wait in neon the place is finally quite comparable to a shithouse

wall covered in graffiti where everyone makes their fiat lux presses themselves against the rock and it's true of the library as of the factory everywhere you've got the tracks of a huge firm hand of altercation which blocks humanity on land on sea in air it's not for nothing that the most malicious have preached this thing with the demiurge the entire universe under the law of this magistral bugger even if there's the deeper concept of combination fortuitous whirlwind even if you cover the whole by evolution one knows what awaits the perfect ones besides marked by the comic pyres blazing matches and qed shame that in a sense today we don't burn the blokes this way anymore the war happens in chemistry it's snuff against snuff the closest to the nervous system filaments without dreams echo of the rough and there you've got the right to nothing gets born in any way although nascent in every part that'll do you a fat lot of good in the forefront of his red ants you may remember that those who admit the future of thought resemble those who see a footprint in the sky hey let's sit down here for a moment underneath the black firs protecting the moss what a beautiful day how it all fits together stain upon stain what one sees is sometimes very near to what one hears 'limit of the diaphane why in diaphane adiaphane if you can put your five fingers through if it is a gate if not a door shut your eyes and see' it's curious these coincidences we'd say there are holes in the scenario maybe even in every corpuscle kiss me gently so that I feel the other and their fibrous sense their hollow beneath my tongue their nourishment of air their breast appeal diverted off target at the bottom it's as if we were conducted hour by hour by this red rag recovering the sword and it moves and it slips away and we set out bravely among the roaring aristotle must have been there introducing it in his de caelo 'flusht' piling up skull upon skull see how we're here near the freshly dug earth imagine me cutting off a curl of my hair placing it upon that mound over there imagine us repeating ourselves all those ancient gestures libations invocations marked ritual to braid the void before springing into action disappearing since the future wait oh wait this is the moment to take it up again on a larger scale the revolution believe me won't have to regret anything i want to see its mask out in the open the bare face in the oven what liberator shall brandish the invisible sword when blade and handle only a boo a flow of bile is going to hit my heart those upon whom we call know which storms take us into their whirlwinds like mariners in distress or astronauts overwhelmed by their blood of the tiniest germ can thrust up the three of salvation but here are the analogous marks similar to those of my footsteps yes these traces give away two men heels contours of foot muscles anguish seizes me where my reason succumbs like in a new wine crater why hide my thinking when it flies away from me good that'll do the main thing is to throw there the current yellowed warm and cold of scamander as if you were a girl offering your virginity to the river dad with toes in the runaway gravel tickled by the rings of the water lower lower you sink even deeper into this time of space think of the spots of light shooting onto the wall of the federates achieved upon your if i say oh it's simply to mark the step of silence oh so this june dusty with the balls' ricochets against the pointy rock i'd just like to talk to you of the heaps of corpses piled up

underneath the bridges no i shall never forget this mass of human flesh thrown about randomly along the towpaths the heads and the limbs all mingled in horrific dislocations the emerging heaps of convulsed faces feet lying around there are dead who seem cut in half whereas others appear to have four legs and four arms that'll teach them to launch an attack from the sky the view of the ruins is nothing next to the tremendous parisian stupidity the general had commanded the leader to be shot at the panthéon on his knees to beg the society's pardon for the evil he'd perpetrated he refused to be shot on his knees i told him it's the order you're going to be shot on your knees and not otherwise he played a little comedy he opened up his clothes laying bare his chest to the firing squad in charge of his execution i told him you're making a stage piece out of this you want your death to be talked about die peacefully that'll be of more value i'm free in my interest and in the interest of my cause to do as i please very well on your knees then he says i'm not going to kneel unless two men force me to i forced him to kneel and the execution proceeded he shouted long live humanity he was going to shout more when he fell against us did we have to drown the uprising in blood did we have to bury it underneath the city in fire there's no compromise possible if the guillotine has just been removed there's no need to keep it for the makers of the barricades it's not vice that's dangerous but this sort of innocence of foolishness or political obstinacy example those nice young women dressed in silken robes walking down the street a revolver in hand pulling the trigger aplenty and then saying eyes charged with hatred shoot me right away and all those we saw executed summarily by enraged soldiers died mouth injury with a smile of disdain like martyrs whose sacrifice accomplishes a great duty do you realise dear lady of how we can count upon the domestics french bourgeois bitch i've got for her you know an infinite desire for murder it's she who locked up the marquis it's she who shot the communards into the napes it's she who had tea with the nazis it's she who keeps her consumption underneath her hairdresser's hairdryer at the mass goddammit how i'd love us to do away with this fake make-up this lacquer this trammel of course such were the villainous atrocities of the assassins the arsonists certainly not interesting but in this state of fools would even inspire pity in sympathetic souls brought in buckets of water why were they so determined to fight back it's just that in this war the people itself wages its own



OLGA PEKOVÁ
THE PRINTATOR
PHILIPPE SOLLERS'S *THE PARK* REVISITED

*And like all who know how to write, he let the scene duplicate,
repeat, and betray itself within the scene.*
[Jacques Derrida on Sigmund Freud]

The surface of Philippe Sollers's *The Park* (published 1961 under the French title *Le Parc* and translated into English in 1968 by A.M. Sheridan Smith) in its smoothness, neutrality and evenness of voice betrays the influence of French *nouveau roman*. Despite its unaffected and inconspicuous language, the novel resembles a “walk among varied and contrasting essences, where one passes without transition from one continent to another, from one part of a country to another; from one climate to another; from one time to another time,”¹ a collection of scenes whose protagonists are only vaguely identifiable. What then is the key to its transitions, the key so persistently repressed, “the same obstacle” (*P* 12) that repeatedly

croops up in unexpected places such as cupboards? A partial answer is comprised in the novel's title: the “park” is the novel's ground plan, a map that eloquently speaks about what it does not say as well.

A park is a place where wilderness is cultivated, where nature is in coexistence with *technē*. It is, especially in Sollers's description, a collage of plants, of habitats, a map of the world to which the flora of different climates has been transplanted from its original localities and where it has been aligned in a dream-like proximity. The flowerbeds are traces of the original habitats, the plants take on a dual role of being at once themselves and their own representations. The park is a sampler of species, a model of the world based on the “co-existence of disparate elements – but which one vaguely feels are connected in some way” (*P* 71). Freud

¹ Philippe Sollers, *The Park*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Calder and Boyars 1968) 90. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

says that dreams “reproduce *logical connection* by *simultaneity in time*”² and the elements in *The Park* may be said to do the same, punctuated by gaps like printed words by blanks. They are scenes “connected by an invisible thread; forms whose composition is governed by rules that are kept hidden, but are strongly felt” (P 84). The park’s alley of marble columns “provides a panoramic view of the leafy whole, whose order thus remains protected and hidden” (P 91).

The book advertises itself on the cover of the Calder and Boyars edition as dealing with the “predicament of the writer, the way he goes about writing his work”: the novel is at once its own representation, probing into the problem of the extent to which a work may be a reflection, a supplement of its author and a “Grecian urn” that preserves one’s personality and testifies to one’s existence long after their death. Attendant questions of identity, self, and subjectivity arise, some of which are treated in Derrida’s article “Freud and the Scene of Writing” which appeared in *Tel Quel* in 1965. The study was published after *The Park* and its final version therefore could not influence Sollers in writing *The Park*, but the affinity between the two authors was clearly attested to in both Derrida’s 1972 *La Dissémination* and his frequent publications in Sollers’s magazine *Tel Quel*.

Derrida follows the development of Freud’s metaphors that conceptualise the workings of consciousness and traces in them the clash between the “older” philosophy of presence and Freud’s intuition of mind as based on “a script which is never subject to, never exterior and posterior to, the spoken word.”³ Derrida argues that the twin metaphors of machine and writing have been gradually converging in Freud’s thought until, in the 1925, they met in the metaphor of the *Wunderblock* or “Mystic Writing Pad,” suggesting that memory (and by extension also individuality) consists of “archives which are *always already* transcriptions.”⁴ Freud in his “Mystic Writing Pad” explains the workings of the psyche by modeling them on the printator, a device that should combine the advantages of unlimited receptive capacity and freshness of surface. The writ-

ing pad has three layers: “a slab of dark brown resin or wax”⁵ is covered with another two sheets fastened together by their upper and lower edges, but otherwise detached. “The upper layer is a transparent piece of celluloid; the lower layer is made of thin translucent waxed paper.”⁶ To write upon the slab one uses a stylus to press the upper layer to the lower so that scripture emerges: to erase the traces one simply lifts the sheet. Yet, as Freud remarks, the traces do not disappear completely, as they remain „retained upon the wax slab itself and [...] legible in suitable lights.”⁷ Thus they also distort what will be written in the future, until the printator becomes useless, in fact.

The writing pad thus provides a topological analogue for the psyche: the slab is structurally analogous with the unconscious, the paper stands for the perception-consciousness apparatus and the celluloid sheet at the top is there to remind us of the mind’s self-protective tendencies. The “[p]sychical *content*” is thus “*represented* by a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic.”⁸ Sollers seems to avail himself of this concept of psychical writing and posit fictional impression of such figurative sheets lifted off the subject’s consciousness at different times. In this sense, the gaps in the text are disruptions, momentarily uncomfortable jolts in consciousness produced when the unconscious intrudes on and diverts the chains of signifiers in the consciousness. This happens most strongly in dreams and that is why dreams, in Derrida’s view, are a “path back into the landscape of writing,” into the landscape of the “lithography before words: metaphonetic, nonlinguistic, alogical.”⁹ The state of dreaming, in which the repressed articulates itself in disruptions of the consciously, logically unintelligible relations, is a pertinent analogy to the book, as Malcolm Charles Pollard points out.¹⁰

But gap, rupture is also the functioning principle of the sign. In “Signature Event Context” and elsewhere

5 Sigmund Freud, “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad,’” *General Psychological Theory* (New York: Collier, 1963) 209.

6 Freud, “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad,’” 209.

7 Freud, “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad,’” 211.

8 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 250.

9 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 259.

10 Malcolm C. Pollard, *Philippe Sollers: Narrative and the Visual* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V.: 1994) 33.

2 Cited in Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978) 276.

3 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 249.

4 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 266.

Derrida explains that the trace or the “signifying form [...] constitutes itself by virtue of its iterability”¹¹; its basic characteristic is the sameness which, “by corrupting [the sign’s] identity and its singularity, divides its seal.”¹² The sign’s actual existence is interrupted in time and so it always carries the possibility of its erasure. Thus, the sign is inimical to life and disrupts it: it bears death at its core. The central character of the novel seems to be haunted by an unspecified disease which periodically compels him to lapse into unconsciousness. The same happens to his counterpart, rival in love, friend and projection, a figure that usually appears under the pronoun *he*. It is there all the time, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not; so close is it familiar as an enemy that there is almost no saying whether one has not actually invented it oneself, “out of one’s treachery” (P 44).

The physical bedrock of consciousness, the hand whose writing we may from time to time glimpse in the novel and which marks the steady movement towards the end of the book one day disappears. What will remain is only “the multiplicity of layered surfaces of the apparatus,” abandoned as “a dead complexity without depth,” because “[l]ife as depth belongs only to the wax of psychical memory.”¹³ That is why Derrida considers writing to be a “*techné* as the relation between life and death.”¹⁴ What will remain then will be only traces, gestures that may suggest an infinite possibility of meanings – like the images of novel’s characters that are only “enigmas” and “ambiguous ambivalences,” but if they only “turn[ed] round, raise[d] a hand” (P 10), they would come to life with so intense a vividness the viewer would immediately believe he finds himself in the midst of the scene.

In “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” Derrida rather univocally states that “[r]epresentation is death [and] death is (only) representation.”¹⁵ In other words, escape from one death hurls one closer to another. While writing the author in fact falls apart into three incom-

mensurate, unbridgeable, simultaneous existences. One is the existence of his body, the physical hand that lies at the root of the text but which is proven to be mortal by it. Then there is the consciousness, “mental frontier” (P 43), a thin sheet pressed between the physicality (“where it dies, I begin; where it begins, I take place” [P 43]) and writing. It will go with the body, but it will leave its traces. And the third is the trace itself, the persona of the text. Thus, writing is for Sollers always tragic because of being deeply dividing and contradictory.¹⁶ That is the reason why, as he writes elsewhere, we “do not want to hear [language] speak.”¹⁷

With all his force the writer in *The Park* embraces the abandonment of the self, numbs his body and forcefully “transports” himself to the scenes of his imagination, writing or memories. Driven by his symptoms he tries to cross the line between the soul and the body as far as possible in the direction of the territory of signs. The more the hero tries to escape from his reality, invest himself in the text, confirm it in the book, the more he also rushes towards the end, as he fills up the predetermined space of the single orange exercise-book into which he enters his sentences. The seams between the scenes are signs of trauma, repression from which he escapes. Like in an infantile fantasy he is transported into different milieus where he encounters his ancestors: his selves, partial and past. The child is forbidden to interfere; the author of course commits manipulations, but cannot defer infinitely the point where the text will end – either by way of closure or interruption. In this respect also, death is inevitable. Paradoxically, as Derrida writes, “the signature also marks and retains” the presence of the signatory, “his having-been present in a past *now* or present which will remain a future *now* or present, thus in general *maintenant*, in the transcendental form of presentness.”¹⁸ Similarly, Sollers believes that “non-time is the very time of writing.”¹⁹

As the child reminds us, the writer undergoes the

11 Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Limited Inc.*, trans. Alan Bass (Evanston, Northwestern University Press: 1988) 10.

12 Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 20.

13 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 286.

14 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 287.

15 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 286.

16 Pollard 25.

17 Philippe Sollers, *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, ed. David Hayman, trans. Philip Barnard and David Hayman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 202.

18 Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 19.

19 Sollers, *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, 203.

shattering of his identity also in the process of refraction into the textual personas, characters, and the estrangement experienced through the text. Emile Benveniste, in his article "Subjectivity and Language," argues that language "is so organized that it permits each speaker to appropriate to himself an entire language by designating himself as I"²⁰; inversely, "language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality."²¹ Around the I of the discourse a whole "fictional world" is thus formed through the use of deictic personal pronouns, demonstratives, tenses, adverbs of time and place and adjectives.²² The first and third persons are something like modes of experience, too: they carry within themselves certain assumptions (the degree of distancing, emotional involvement etc.). However, in principle, they would be interchangeable; their replacement would reshuffle the novel's constellations but would not prevent the language or the narrative from functioning (with the only exception of performative verbs).

Thus the hypotheses of the "hero," "author," or "speaking subject" in *The Park* are to a great degree the result of the structure of language and instead of characters it would be perhaps better to speak about pronominal "figures." Pollard writes that in *The Park*, "pronominal identity is primarily defined in terms of grammatical distinctions,"²³ such as the distinctions between tenses.²⁴ Another critic, Jean Ricardou, "identifies the 'je' as the subject of writing that remains distinct from the human figure of the author, and the 'il'/'elle' as pronominal objects rather than as individuals."²⁵ In his *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, Sollers himself states the following: "Whoever writes becomes other for this other to himself who must become the one who reads; between them there is the rule of an irreversible isolation and anonymity in which everything is, properly speaking, brought into question."²⁶

20 Émile Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971) 226.

21 Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," 224.

22 Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," 226-7.

23 Pollard, *Philippe Sollers*, 27.

24 Pollard, *Philippe Sollers*, 27.

25 Pollard, *Philippe Sollers*, 27.

26 Sollers, *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, 203.

Paradoxically, this also means that the writer may feel and create "for himself other limits, suddenly finding himself there, saved, forgotten" (P 24). The novel's "figures" are positioned on a very thin boundary between the projections of the *écrivain* making up for the lack of his "real" life, his alter-egos and the objects of his desire. Their reality and positioning within the picture largely depends on the immediate context of the writer's actual memories. This context, once the novel within the novel is finished and separated from its circumstances, is outside the reader's reach and thus the signs may fall prey to number of interpretations. Within the scope of the text, all the fantasies, all the scenes are therefore equally "real," all the personas uncontested. The figures become signs and like the couples in the painting described towards the end of the novel stand protected and without the "slightest suspicion that the space behind them is open" (P 72). This is because, as Derrida reminds us, full dependability is something they never had in the first place: the "intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content" and this "structural unconsciousness [...] prohibits any saturation of the context."²⁷

For Derrida, there is a secret in the heart of any writing, the possibility that any intentional arrangement is in fact lacking, that "a proximity, an unexampled freedom, the narration" (P 24) is actually sufficient. Then the "reality" of writing rests in the fact that it provides one more instance of chaos against which we throw our energies to be served with one more self-reflection, self-projection. The writer is caught in a mesh of contradictions. At the threshold of the text, his identity simultaneously perishes, is enhanced, refracted, preserved, made true, as well as reminded once more of its mortality. The book traces the "impalpable totality of the journey and of what had then brought him to a halt, put together by him as if it were outside himself" (P 24). Its trajectory is one of "a man just about to fall," as Sollers says in one of his comments on Francis Ponge. It is an act of "precise evaluation of what surrounds us by way of the ultimate effort to avoid falling and death."²⁸

27 Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 19.

28 Pollard, *Philippe Sollers*, 21.

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KAMIL ZBRUŽ
ENERGY

primoebblas verdaderas

la stessa visione della notte
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MEME L'IDEA

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is not the real darkness

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predstava noci
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nie jest całkowicie even the idea of night

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NOR

even the vision of
is not the real
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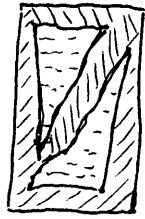
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THE VISION OF
REAL DARKNESS

EVEN THE VISION
IS NOT THE REAL

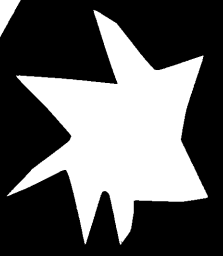
Even the vision of night is not the real dark.
Niti vizije noci nije realna (tamna)

Mr. S.

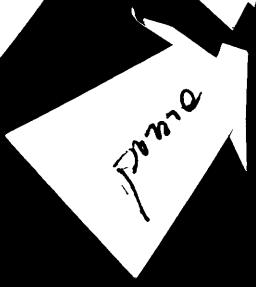


Vision of night
the real dark

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Orizane
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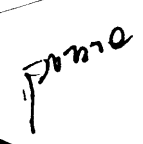
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MICHAL REHÚŠ

4 POEMS

SUICIDE A USER'S MANUAL

The killing of your mortal frame
should pursue political social and cultural goals

This aspect should be taken account of
also in the form of its execution

Particularly recommended are
self-immolation and perfect hunger strike

Also recommended are other methods

Take care not to cause harm
to a second person

Or a third

Equally deplorable is the purely personal
misuse of suicide for the purpose of relief

Every such action should be condemned
by a publicly visible counteraction

Preferably by suicide

THE PROGRAMME OF DECOMMUNICATION

(1)
Babble monotonously or babble for other than
communicative purposes
Don't react to your name or to your parents' voices
Keep failing at picking from any given set of stimuli those
that are relevant
Don't regard the parents' voices as more important than
background noise

(2)
Master a few specific words like fire brigade ambulance
Cease from using them after all
Get rid of functional language

(3)
Answer the question by repeating it
To "You hungry?" answer "You hungry"
Repeat your own or someone else's sentences without
apparent reason

(4)
Tie words mechanically with their sense
Connect the word "beach" with a trip to the beach
Be discombobulated should mother use the word beach in
any other context

(5)
Struggle with the use of pronouns
Consider "you" as always related to the first person
Begin calling yourself "you"
Use the first-person pronoun in the sense of "you"

(6)
Then and only then shall you become perfectly
decommunicated

DON'T FIGHT IT

The killing is the easiest part of the preparation

Wrap it into a dry dishcloth
place it belly-down
and give it a hit on the head
just above the eyes

Stunned, it will soon refrain from resisting
and when put on its side
it will lie motionless

Now it is necessary to kill it
and completely drain of blood

Run a knife down the respiratory organs
or slash the lower part in order
to cut off the veins leading from the heart

Direct the oozing blood into the sink
or into a deep baking tray

Do not cut its head off
the manipulation during further preparation
will be simpler

PARENTAL INSTRUCTIONS

- 1) The child's name must be fitting and meaningful
and must correspond to the contents of the child
- 2) The parent's first name and surname (without academic titles)
must be included after the child's name
- 3) Longer names must be accompanied
by abstracts in English or German and key words
- 4) The name itself should not exceed 20 000 characters
(including spaces and footnotes)
- 5) Bibliography should follow the ISO 690 norm
- 6) When quoting ancient Greek and Roman authors please standardise
your references according to the norm (see PORUBJAK, M. – VYDRA, A.:
Abbreviation Index of Selected Ancient Authors and Their Works)

you understand well what I admit she'll allow
you at the very boundary and sometimes she
changes the book as a whole is not and if it is the
way it is from the beginning (O) end is perhaps
gained in case returns again and again in the mind
as he pleases the effect in brief as regards the
"atomism" of poems *reconstruction* of the piece
is thereby stretched the continuum unuttered
the problem in a certain respect remains hanging
whether the author of the poem or the poem of
his you understand well what you're saying .

bluffbluff

comics / voice band

(→↓)

the first said:

*be
my
little brother!*

just don't
fall prey,
ah! here we go:
I'm a little brother!

well so give
your brass
an overhaul!
music to be heard!

the second said:
you're the best (sic!)
*version, i.e.
little brother.*

you know you've
wanted
to avoid it...
you know?

elis and herm, herm
and elis,
words rather
from a comic book, *lo!*

uhm,
just don't
fall prey
to temptation,

don't laugh!
are you some kind of
joker or are you
a little brother?

plying brassing!
pressing play...

(↑←)
(for h. pascoal)

*to be read quadraphonically
in the opposite direction
simultaneously*

LADISLAV SELEPKO

DETECTIVES

Welcome, detectives,
new people *without* bodies. Your task
is to investigate the modus
operandi –
of Death ?

For, ... – her pram r e
 f l
 e c
 t s ThisN'That--

Leave the Universe alone,
Sexuality underneath the ice ... Let's enter the command:
Is it *some*-Thing x *some*-Body?

No, roast *shall* not be displayed.- *I'm* ... a knag, or also ... ,
or also ... : planed down
- one-off turtleneck.

Bang – Bang.
I fear *not* the faucets - - - ; I'll: re: pair: to: the: *waterworks*.

May PEACE – go on – smoking at the station,
May it ... move on;
Outside the c falls on the Foliage, which ___ means I *am* ... inside! – Search better!
 o r
 l u
 o

More steadily .

Detectives *without* their ringtones... , - 30 Mbps
has t
 r u h
 u r heads, t rew y
 o n o u off the Scent.
 y e
 d

Even
though *I've* given -
you my mind
on

everything

SO,

in order to *make my* Attitude clear,

unchallengeable,

... I speak to you *again* - - - a n d T h i s directly to you,

D E T E C T I V E S

with a child's slipper in your eye. I've forgotten all

about PEACE
and blueberries.

Look *not* for:

- evidence;
- subtext;
- context;
- spirals.

Mark your *unusual* Location at the w i n

d o w: o p e n i n g . . . , c l o s i n g . . .

Your eyes according to the Draft,

young and *long*

at once.

THUS - *some-How* - - - *without* God (?) , you snuff

the walking sticks *be-Longing* to some Maidens.

WHAT do you get paid for by *billy-onaires* scattered underneath the Oil?

Tomatoes in their own *borrowed* juice,

ch-op-pe-d: R E A D Y t o b e

d

n

p

o and tip - ped

e

e

ou

t.

You pilot, BUT you *fail* to See

THE SENSE.

Dual-core processors

catching mould

In your c h u e

e q r e d

Brains.

A QUINT and a FOURTH *without a stave*; you measure and plan

- geometrical Debts;

the ultimate Stocktaking (CLOSED) of the last Statement (CLOSED)

under the expert guidance of the

d i s o r i e n t e d

detectives

FILIP GORDI

THE RUPTURE

I'LL GO ONCE

The next part of the process. Walking with me. Or inside me. In light or in dark. We'll be passing. Stations and energies. I'll go once. At first, only once. Stations postponed by others. Once I'll firstly go. Or was that enough? I'm finished here: I haven't adequately exhausted myself. Indications fly by, but the reading doesn't advance. Just the yawning.

Rising from the table I'll go. Or not. Won't even sit down. Will go before coming. Setting out from another point. For some place where I can exclude myself. On my haunches round the first shack. I have no grasp of the local dialect. I'll be offered food and doubt it'll refresh me. I cannot rely on my feet only, I don't have to stick to paths. A few more doglegs and the sludge will squelch, somewhere near the Paraná estuary.

To expose the hysterical heart to tropics: what if it doesn't burst out crying. The feet will go, especially those not belonging to a tourist. Ignorant of their limits, defying no motif.

UNDER THE ROAMER'S FINGER

Speech continues in circulation. The muscle allows its movement, but it's only rarely seen from the outside. The contents of the contents is sound. A tone placed within the arranged segment. The geologists read the accumulation of tension. Violin and compass. Pity and passion. Ready oneself for tremors below the Himalayan mountainside. A sufficient amount of a certain thing at a certain time. Here not only from here dismantlement will descend: we've come into blossom expecting, the time has come of rupture. A different season has unfolded, the calendar is to pad the waste bin. Little will I carry with me, transplant. A comma, perhaps. This time without hesitation. Here or even closer: the effect shall not, however, leave its flowerbed.

Still, so much remains. More than just guarding the pause in the masonry. The rupture. Here rhythm grows not, only its verso: movement. This is what any dance investigator objects to most vehemently. Speech speaks from me while I listen for cycles: how notions and identities peel off. Either off an obstinate wall or off someone I only knew within myself. Possible backgrounds can be seen a few of: background as an instrument of difference. Difference as pursuit of coalescence. Pursuit shamelessly evaluated as a secret one. Adroitness. But not communication with the source.

Intersection, descent. The path unfolds and we believe it does so not only within simulation. Within a motivation motion picture for beasts of burden. To name the trap of naming and never to be heard of again. For the other drill trainees. Most will breathe their last here. Without their ever to. Therefore the plan will do without a plan for getting rid of the plan. We only need to ask whether like motherwort. Whether like motherwort is to be adored everything we'll burn anyhow. To rip but not destroy. Destroy – but not in public. We'll stay. Only if also unowned and unproduced. To wander under the roamer's finger across the blurry map of Hanoran, in an unmarked room with an imitation window.

DAMIEN OBER

THE DEATH

JOHN MORTON :: APRIL 1ST 1777

His laptop glows a crater bashed into the quilts. Fingers dance across keys as dead, blue light drones the jagged caverns of his face. The room, hung thick with the candle stink of overcooked beef, hints a vague and gray day in lace curtains all pulled closed. Blood droplets make stellar patterns across white pillowcases. Chamber pot not yet emptied. His voice rasping just above a whisper, John Morton tells them, "I am finished. Have to update my status." His eyes scan browser windows unpacked and gaping all across the screen. He reads aloud the words he's just then typing, "John Morton is finished with The Articles of Confederation."

Doc Josiah Bartlett, Roger Sherman, Thomas M'Kean and Doctor Benjamin Rush round out this unofficial little committee—keep John Morton alive and functioning until The Articles are up. Both doctors are moderately confident that what Morton has is not contagious, but they're not taking any chances. Neither are Sherm or M'Kean. All four stick to the edges of the room.

It's been almost a full year since they signed and uploaded The Declaration. Three or four or five or 23 years of war, depending on which representative of which state you query. New York is in the King's hands, Washington and the Continental Army licking wounds in winter quarters. The Revolution, after all that has transpired, threatens to become no more than collected and distilled and then suppressed ideals – as temporary as a single human generation.

The Articles. John Morton stares into the words, the meaning their crooked shapes make in the string. Already they pulse likewise down the scrolls of countless patriots. All throughout the revolt, John Morton has kept his status current with the most recent thought to pop into his head. His brain feed has been one of the Revolution's most reliable beacons.

M'Kean takes his hand and shows everyone how you make a fist with it. "Finally," he says, "we can pull the states together and start putting up a fight. A real fight!"

Doc Bartlett clicks his tongue, then he sings, "*Have to get them ratified first.*"

"Been coughing three days straight." Morton types, reads aloud, "John Morton has been coughing three days straight."

In his silence, Roger Sherman looks, as always, softly puritanical. It's the same deliberate and indifferent way he plods through all the grand events of his time. Old Sherm the Cobbler, just working on another shoe.

A tongue appears, then, in the corner of John Morton's mouth, crosshatched

with veins and dark purple/gray sores. "My work is done. The rest is up to the people." He glances at the room's entire. "Gentlemen, it is time to upload."

M'Kean gives that look of his which makes his questions feel more like statements – assertions of things he's previously decided. "We *are* sure about this? Taking something down is a lot different than putting something up." He points up then, with a single lean finger, as if the internet really is only above them. "Once it's in the cloud," he says, "there's no stopping it. It'll seep into every harddrive in the country."

Doc Bartlett clears his throat. "The Enlightenment's most grand experiment enters its next critical stage."

John Morton closes a few open files, opens some others, hovers The Articles over the ftp portal and off they go. Signals pervade the air in the room, the text of The Articles of Confederation climbing cloudward. The men go perfectly still, as if listening to their child stroll off into the internet. "Well," John Morton says. "It's out of our hands now."

Some cautious smiles. The men all careful not to move backward, but shifting instead around each other in turns, shaking hands and clasping shoulders. "The United States," one says.

"The United States."

Typing again from the ruffled bed. "Portaling our new foundational document into the facebook page: *Independent Colonies of America*." He laughs. "Going to have to start a new page, again." John Morton looks into the future. "As soon as these are ratified. We'll be officially organized under a different system. Confederated Articles. Name of the page might change again, but this is a country we're talking about now. And not just online anymore." He clicks the new page to life, opens the info tab and types the newest name, reads it aloud as he does, "The United States of America." A few clicks, a few fevered blasts of typing. "John Morton is an American," he says. And he realizes it then, that it just happened. And that it was him that did it. The first man to type the new nation's name into the internet.

It was six years ago that the very first 'Official Facebook Page of the Revolution' got 1,256 likes in the first hour alone. Time goes by, things become something else, new groups and pages are created, and no one much visits the ones left behind. The old pages just hover there in some forgotten sector of the cloud, these outdated versions of Revolutionary America, just ghost houses now, full of old ad drones and profile haunts. Each has a few real life patriots left too – men still active and posting, locked into their static hold on progress. These guys probably think the drones that re-post to those old walls all day are actually human. But they're not. They're just drones.

"Already commenting. Five likes already." John Morton's eyes tighten in around the screen. "Fans and likes. Friend requests coming in by the dozen. Samuel Adams has commented on your status. John Witherspoon has commented on your status. George Washington wants to be friends with The United States of America!" And there it goes, comments and likes cascading the new page's wall faster than John Morton can scroll to keep reading. "Wall-ter-fall," he says.

“The USA has gone Viral!”

“I don’t get it,” Rush says. “How did you make it so you can be a friend of the page *and* be a fan of the page? Is it a page, a person, or a group?”

Doc Bartlett shows them palms empty of any smartdevice. “I don’t have my laptop with me so you’re going to have to accept my actual in-person gratitude.”

“My last act,” John Morton says. “The Articles. Available to anyone. Download and join the Revolution. Become an American.” He seems like he’s going to sneeze, but it’s a cough that comes out of him. A single one at first. Then a few more. Racking him now, racking the bed, the room seeming to cough back, but really it’s just John Morton, echoing himself. Coughing in rounds as the other men inch their way back to backs against the furthest wall. Both doctors know that this is the sound of a man becoming not a man any longer. Sherm and M’Kean know it too. They’ve watched a few people die over the years.

John Morton rears his head back, blinks away tears pink with just a trace of blood. Vision clears to show the room bending over him. The glow of the laptop touches only the ceiling directly above, and only slightly, the most vague hint of a soft spot in the shell of this realm—a path out, maybe. Follow The Articles into the cloud and leave this sick body behind. From the violence of this latest round of coughing, it won’t be long now. Fingers clicking a few code-sounding clusters of shortcut keys and his profile picture goes dark.

John Morton is dead.

BUTTON GWINNETT :: MAY 19TH 1777

In fits and in halting starts, when the infection in his shattered hip ebbs, Button Gwinnett comes down from pure ravings and codes his worm. There, inside the smartphone he bought only a few days before the duel, his final revenge takes shape. “Murdered,” he says “... murdered by Lachlan McIntosh.” He twitches through some fever fits. “East Florida,” he mumbles. “Should have been ours.”

A nurse crosses the room to the cot that was dragged out after the duel. Button’s hip damaged beyond any hope of moving him off the property. So he’ll die here in the top floor of this barn. Out on a farm in the cool Georgia Spring. “Dueling,” the nurse says. “Used to be pretty clear. Had patriots and had loyalists, Tories and Whigs. Now we got patriots killing patriots.” Head shaking as she fills a cup from a pitcher of cool water. “And you’re a Signer too. Shame, shame.”

Button drips sweat as he codes, teeth clenched and cracking. Eyes fixated on that smartphone screen and nowhere else. He has to work hard to touch just the right spots with fingers that won’t stop their tremors. The nurse passes like she’s passing an inanimate object, which is how she’s come to regard this man she’s supposed to ease into dying. Ranting all day long or just spitting and seizing. Talking, talking, talking, but never any more than *at* her. “... stole my army ... paraded around and then turned tail for home. And now the King can slice through the colonies like a red hot lance up a well-warn whore.”

The nurse approaches and so Button lifts his fevered lips to drink from the cup she holds near him. Blue screen light reflects in a hundred beads of fever sweat. Behind them, Button's skin has passed out of the color of flesh and into a dry yellow. "You're disgusting," she tells him.

This worm is just the latest counter-tactic in a feud which has raged for decades, winding its way through courthouses, election booths and the pulpits of rival churches. Discussion boards and listservs. Acronym tweets and skeleton tweets and acronym tweets where each letter is the first letter of a skeleton tweet. Armies of skeletons. Both men have been expelled and readmitted to huge group email strings. Then expelled again. Entire in-boxes clogged with their back and forth while others in the group were just sending it all to the junk mail folder. A scorched wake half a lifetime long, terabytes deep, seared through smartphones and social networking profiles, through the cloudware's cloudware. A smoldering scar across the very multi-surface of Georgia.

The most recent controversy, and the cause of the fatal duel: who is at fault for the Georgia militia's failure take East Florida from the British: Governor Button Gwinnett or General Lachlan McIntosh? And so to the town of Thunderbolt, where both men had come, to finally bring it out of the internet and into the real.

There they'd stood on a flat patch of grass on the edge of this same farm, each turned right shoulder forward to offer only the thinnest arrangement of their body. Two shots rang out, two distinct sets of echoes. Button watched Lachlan McIntosh's face contort, watched him drop his pistol and slap his hands over his meaty thigh. Button felt something too, a bite in his groin and then a coolness down the back of both legs. He tried to take a step but it was in vain. A spasm of sharp metallic pain toppled him. Though the others had to wait for the doctor, Button knew the moment the bullet struck him. Just like he watched his own bullet vanish into McIntosh's leg muscle and knew that shot would *not* be fatal.

Button finds the eyes of the nurse, who freezes in their grip. It's the first time he's looked directly at her. Not just raving to the room when he says, "Georgia is half-asleep. Under its moist and ancient fields are caverns of hidden gold. All of it burned and dug up. Machines in every town to force life patterns on the humans who live there. Machines which take your cells and rearrange them, make them something new, something loyal. Whether you like it or not." Button climbs, then, back down into his smartphone, back down into his worm. And man does that thing look nasty. "Lachlan McIntosh's Georgia," he says. "Unless I can stop him."

The nurse picks up a chamber pot from under the cot. "How you going to do that? Twitching with the fever and pouring out the last of your fluids." She makes the face of someone smelling that putrid smell which soaks the blankets all the way through. Ain't just the chamber pot that stinks. "You're not getting your hateful self out of that cot ever again."

"Don't need to get out of the cot," Button says. "This worm will get him. Get inside his accounts. And from there, climb right into his brain."

"I thought that's what you said that other guy was going to do. That General McIntosh you keep talking about. Those *machines*."

Button stops now. Smiles. What he's been building in the tiny harddrive inside that tiny smartphone must be complete. "Never mind the British," he says. "The King, the parliament. It's other *Georgians* we have to fear the most."

"Sounds like you feel pretty satisfied," the nurse says, "thinking about the end of Georgia."

"East Florida was not the first of his schemes. And it won't be the last. Lachlan McIntosh *will* try to destroy this state, and whatever country comes out of this rebellion too. And when that happens. It will be clear to them all. That Button Gwinnett died trying to save Georgia ... and America too."

He shouts the name, "Lachlan McIntosh!" startling the nurse. The chamber pot slips from her hands and turns into porcelain shards on the wood floor. "Do you think I yelled that loud enough?" Button asks. But the nurse is looking at the chamber pot and all its pieces and the turd and the wet spot around it, considering if she's going to bother cleaning up this mess. "Do you suppose Lachlan McIntosh heard? In his bed somewhere in town, recovering as I die?" And as if he's given himself a cue, Button melts then, a little deeper into the cot. "One last memory of Button Gwinnett," he mumbles. "The sound of his name in my voice. Echoing forever."

At this point, only a thin tunnel leads back to the world from where Button has sunk. The damp blankets around him like a drawn bath gone cool. He lifts the smartphone light toward his face. Sweat breaks right then and his body chills to the temperature of his feet. A flash of bible words makes the shape of hell for him in a plume of blood ink darting likewise across his vision in puffs. He slides that dead fingertip eastward across the surface of his touchscreen and his worm is off, off into the cloud, off to find Lachlan McIntosh and infest his accounts, maybe end this war of theirs, if it works correctly.

PHILIP LIVINGSTON :: JUNE 12TH 1778

When Thomas M'Kean comes into the small converted coat room, he's hit with a wall of humidity so thick he has to suck on it just to get a breath. The air sticks in his throat and nose, smells like the inside of a greenhouse after all the plants have been watered. "Hello?"

From the far corner, an electric voice comes gurgling. "Dr. Rush told me you just rode back into town."

"Just now," M'Kean affirms.

"The Articles," the voice gurgles. "Still haven't got them ratified, have we?"

M'Kean steps toward the sound. "Getting people to click 'like' is one thing, getting them to actually ratify..." but he stops, because that is the moment that he sees him, Philip Livingston. M'Kean's not sure he would recognize his old friend if he didn't already know it was him. Livingston's face has lost all its

former shape. The skin sags from the skull, revealing watery tissue under oddly protuberant eyeballs. The rest of his body is the same sort of drippy; he looks poured into some kind of cart that holds him. Rolled over to a bank of monitors, deep in the room's deepest corner, Livingston smiles knowingly to M'Kean, then nods at the screens. Inside them, the congressional debates just then happening down the hall.

Livingston presses a button that's been attached to the arm of the cart. When he speaks, his voice doesn't come out of his mouth, but from a speaker there beside the button. "I can keep track of everything that happens from here. Or should I say doesn't happen, with *this* congress. But votes, when we get around to them, for votes I have to actually be present to be counted." He looks to the speaker, then back to M'Kean. "Vocal chords," the speaker says. "Too moist any more for real sound. Would just come out as bubbles without this thing."

Livingston returns some of that attention to the bank of screens. "You should see the moderates' faces when they roll me in, knowing I'll be the vote that'll break some stalemate they've worked themselves into. It's the only time they remember to come and get me, when the whip falls short the exact length of Philip Livingston."

A film of water has condensed itself down from steam to coat the surface of M'Kean's face. He wipes it off with a pass of his hand. Wipes his hand down the leg of his pants.

"Keep the humidity up in here for my skin," Livingston says. "Got magnets in the cart too, that Doc Bartlett set up for me. Supposed to keep the water from settling too long in any one place." He points to the bank of screens, to the little screen there on the arm of the cart. Each has a deep moon of blue a quarter risen into the frame. "It's what makes those blue circles," the speaker says. "The magnets."

"What is it you've got?"

Livingston shrugs. "Bartlett's at a loss but Rush says a severe case of dropsy, maybe some gout on top, or underneath. I don't know, and as much as he talks, I don't think Rush really knows either. He knows I'm dying. Everyone knows that."

"How long?"

"Don't know what it is, can't know how long."

"Rush is a bleeder and butcher, and though everyone likes him just fine as a man, those with any sense tune out when it's a doctor he's trying to be." M'Kean steps closer. "You were assigned the committee on social networking and recruiting. Was it before or after you came down with this thing?"

"Your concern for my condition is heartening, Mr. M'Kean. But I've been around men and congresses long enough to know that there's something more than just concern at the root."

"Concern for the country."

"And for The Articles?"

M'Kean produces a smartphone, flexdocs already open, holds it down for Livingston to see. "Articles isn't why I'm here."

"Don't give it to me," Livingston says. "Everything I touch becomes damp these days." He eyes the data. "Well ... what have we here?"

"One of our programmers, during the retreat through New Jersey. Noticed these spikes. Ever since, we've been picking up some real heightened activity in this one sector of the cloud."

Livingston looks into the screen attached to his cart. Types on a little keyboard mounted under his fingers. Scans a second. His speaker says, "Looks like it started in a profile somewhere. Behaves like something ... unpacking itself."

"Funny," M'Kean says. "That's exactly what our programmer said."

"Probably just a simple function set caught in a loop, keeps expanding its algorithm in some sort of code cycle it can't get out of."

"And that doesn't worry you?"

"Not enough to ride all the way out to York, PA just to tell the Congress." Livingston shows him the screen. "Seems to be generating search drones here and there, doing some math equations. Math equations never hurt anyone. Empty noise," the little speaker says. "Random data being created and crunched and used to create more data. That's all."

M'Kean, back up straight. "We've seen a bit of this same thing, you know."

"Same thing as me?"

"Our programmer, the one who found this data."

"He has dropsy?"

M'Kean shakes his head. "Guy fell apart. He's dead. Instead of water, he dried out. Thing changed the makeup of his cells or something. It's what the doctors out there tell me. All happened pretty quick once he crossed paths with this program."

M'Kean notices something in Livingston's face. "You've seen it."

"It?"

"This program. You've seen it before. Did this *dropsy* come after or before?"

"If it were up to me, we'd be concerned about the internet in proportion to the battlefield, but we're not likely to get many *votes* for that." Livingston looks into the screens, one by one, right down the line, feeds streaming in from the debate that's been droning on and on this whole last week. "When this program fills up its assigned sector of the cloud, it'll stop. Nowhere else to go."

"And if it doesn't? What if when there's no more room, it spills out instead?"

"Your programmer. Did he do any calculations? Estimates on how long that would take? For it to fill up its sector."

"Exponents," M'Kean shrugs. "Could be a year or years. Could be a month."

Livingston shakes his head. "Well, I'm not on the appropriations committee any more. Took it away from me when I stopped being able to go to the meetings. You need to talk to John Adams."

M'Kean's about to ask where he can find him when he looks in over Livingston's shoulder and there's the little Colossus of the Congress staring right

back at them. And he does not look pleased. "What is it, Mr. Livingston?"

Livingston's speaker says, "Mr. M'Kean."

"We need some money, Adams. To hire more programmers."

Adams' face contorts. "Ha! Write a resolution. Bring it to the floor. Get a majority. Gather up the taxes or the loans. It's as simple as that."

The door to the little chamber opens right then and in comes Dr. Rush. Slips silently past M'Kean and begins to give Livingston his twice daily checkup. Makes M'Kean wonder what other goings on must be stored in that brain of the doctor's. Always poking in and out of rooms. Never in charge of anything, but always present, it seems, observing.

Livingston is typing something and then one of the screens is filled with data much like the data M'Kean has on his smartphone.

"What's this?" Adams wants to know. "I don't even have a facebook page. How am I supposed to read this?"

Livingston's speaker says, "some activity we're concerned about in the cloud."

"Autonomous replicating selfware," M'Kean says.

Adams's eyes roll inside the little viewer inside the screen. "What's it do? Send junk tickles to all your virtual friends?"

M'Kean tells him, "It replicates itself. Or maybe it's better to say it expands itself."

"In case you didn't notice because you were in such a panic about this expanding computer program, you didn't just ride into Philadelphia, but *York*, Mr. M'Kean. That's because the British army is in possession of Philadelphia."

"And New York," Rush says. "Thanks to *his Excellency*."

"And Delaware, your home state, Mr. M'Kean."

"I was *there*, Adams. I was in New York."

"Then you better than anyone know to forgive me if the internet's not one of my main concerns right now."

Rush says then, "This dick Washington. Keeps vanishing. Won't even return an email. What, expects us to send an actual person out there to meet with him? Does he even know how long that takes?"

M'Kean asks Adams, "What about what's happening to Livingston here?"

"Mr. Livingston has gout. Isn't that right, doctor?"

"Dropsy's my main concern," Rush says. "A severe case, but nothing out of the ordinary."

"Nothing out of the ordinary?" and M'Kean touches Philip Livingston's forearm, his finger sinking in a good half inch, leaves a dent the shape of a human finger when he takes it away. He holds it up, the finger, so they can all see there's water on it. They stand there still, the three men in the room and the other on the feed, all watching the dent. Slowly, it fills with water and then the water becomes regular old skin again. "Does that look ordinary to either of you?"

Livingston's still looking at that spot on his arm. His speaker says, "And you think this has something to do with the internet?"

"Same thing with our programmer. The more time he spent in there looking at it, the faster it changed him."

Adams' sigh sounds distorted through the microphone and speaker his voice has to come through to reach them. "Not sure I see how this is all tying up? Or why we should be appropriating money to what, *fix it?*"

"If the internet's changing Livingston's actual physical body? *And* there's some autonomous program replicating itself and filling up the cloud..."

Rush watches M'Kean. "Well, what then?"

"For once, Ben, use your damned imagination." M'Kean looks back to Adams. "Each program has a certain amount of space allocated to its functions. This thing could run out any second."

"And if you're right?" Adams asks. "If, even if, we still don't know what's going to happen when it does."

"You all keep acting like not knowing what's going to happen is a reason to do nothing."

Adams smiles. There's years in it. "What would happen to this body, Mr. M'Kean, and this war, if we went chasing off after solutions for each and every thing that *might* be a problem some day?"

M'Kean doesn't answer, just stands there looking back.

"You want to save the Revolution?" Adams says. "Write a bill. Present a resolution to the body. Get some delegates on your side."

M'Kean scoffs. "Resolution? To the Congress? Good way for nothing to get done ever."

"Been on the front lines a little too long, Mr. M'Kean. Where a general articulates a concept and it's someone's job to make it a reality. No questions asked." Adams brightens to just before open laughter. "It's a little more difficult with this republic thing. But plenty has been done so far, if you haven't noticed. We're no longer Englishman. And when The Articles are ratified, we'll have us a new country here."

"Occupied by another country because we can't get consensus to actually fight the war we started."

Adams shrugs. "Oh, I know. But unless you want a king, this is the way it's going to have to be. Get The Articles ratified, M'Kean. Write a resolution." And his screen goes dark.

M'Kean turns back to the cart, but there is no Philip Livingston. Instead of a man filled with water, there is only the water vacated. A dark pool spread out in blob around the cart. Less than a quarter inch raised on the surface of the floor, reflects Rush and M'Kean's faces back at them looking down. On Livingston's screen, that same program they monitored all the way across New Jersey, expanding in angled waves around its edges in clockwise.

"What is it, you think?"

"Well," M'Kean says. "I hope it's not what I think it might be."

Rush swallows. A loud swallow. "What if it's after us?"

"Us who?"

"Us. *The Signers.*"

JOHN HART :: MAY 11TH 1779

Signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Hart. Spending the morning in the library of the family home. His children and grandchildren lounge on their laptops and smartphones, flicking their way through app catalogues and digging up arcane information databases to explore, a few outside in the gardens too; a few others in the extensive attic maze high above. Just then one is finishing a count to a hundred and darting off to look for brothers and sisters and cousins all tucked and folded throughout the house. What's about to happen will be the last in a long series of crisis about which John Hart has become something of an expert over the years. While listening to podcasts and taking the recycling out one morning, a vision of the tyranny of the Stamp Act took his mind and exactly one hundred and forty characters later, every patriotic blog in The New World was buzzing with his apocalyptic imagery.

When the British finally did invade, it was *his* cellar that was full of provisions. Real provisions. His insane devotion to *Evidence Sets of the Great End*, roman soldier history-casts and survivalist snail-zines helped him live like an Indian in the woods for a year while Redcoat regiments hunted the state for Signers. On *this* morning, in 1779, John Hart readies plans for town defense against panicked members of other towns not prepared for some calamity which remains a variable in this particular model. "Have to be ready," he has told all of his grandchildren. And all of his grandchildren's parents. Something like a hundred times. Each.

"Grandfather," his youngest grandchild says. "Today is the day when Miles Standish stood on the mast of his boat and looked outward and instead of sea only, he spied a new speck of land and yelled LAND!"

"Very good." John Hart bends again to preparing strategies of land defense and ration schedules. Be it rabies outbreak, nuclear holocaust or global ice-over. "It is history," he tells the young one, "not religion. Our ability to remember. This is the great motivation for men to take morals with them wherever they go." He looks up from his work now to address anyone within earshot. "Who is watching but everyone who will ever exist from this point forward, on into eternity?"

These philosophical interruptions of his practical brainstorms are common enough that all the children know the thing to do is to pretend you're paying attention. Saves hours of grandpa rattling off details about how the most number of humans can efficiently survive a one foot rise in sea level.

"Grandfather," a child leaning back from a laptop he's been hunched over since waking. "It's your lucky day..."

"The battle of Gamelsdorf," the little one recites. "William of Orange captures Exeter. Napoleon becomes one third of the Consul of France. Suicide bombers destroy hotels in a country not yet founded."

"... The internet says a plague is spreading down the East Coast."

John Hart looks up from his plans. "A plague? Coming *here*?" And he almost looks delighted. *Finally*, he looks like he's thinking. "They laugh they laugh they

laugh," he's digging in the drawer for an old smartphone, flicks it to a menu which accesses spreadsheet databases he keeps up to date and always open on his desktop. "What kind of plague are we talking about?"

"Something about a stomach," the boy is summarizing for them. "Maybe in the drinking water."

"That doesn't sound like a plague," the boy's father says then, yet another of the family gathered in the room and throughout the house and the small estate around it.

"People's stomachs are reporting groups of people just falling over dead," another says from the light of another computer screen, way on the other side of the room.

"Where are you reading this?" a voice from somewhere.

The kid points to the screen of his laptop and says, "The internet's a tickle with it."

John Hart clicks into the first cell of a database constructed for plague-specific command protocol. "Get all the children into the main hall," he tells his eldest present son.

"A young man becomes the youngest man to ever become the world's champion in the board game known as chess."

"What?"

"It was today. That a computer program analyzed the world and told the humans at its terminal that the planet was about to be destroyed."

"3,000 people in Concord New Hampshire." It's the boy at the laptop, looking like he might be thinking more like his grandfather about this whole *plague* thing now.

"But there aren't 3,000 people in Concord."

"Says they've come from all around to demand something be done. People in the countryside in piles."

"Piles?"

"Piles of dead."

"Is that what is says?"

He points. "No, there's pictures."

"The Meiji Restoration begins right now."

"Ok, sweetheart, that's enough."

The ones in front of their own laptops have begun clicking into their favorite media outlets while those without computer or smartphone at the ready have rushed to look at a screen over someone else's shoulder. Doors can be heard opening and closing throughout the house. Hurried footsteps. "Let's not panic now, family," John Hart says. It's the first rule of every contingency plan he has ever devised. First rule when the British threatened to leave Canada in French hands: *don't panic*.

The sound of horse hooves on the drive out front. Shouts now. "Who's here?" someone shouts.

John Hart moves to the center of the room. He turns to address the growing familial crowd gathering in the library despite the fact that the plan calls for a

meeting in the main hall. Through the window, he can see his first born daughter, collapsed on the walk out front, clutching her stomach as her husband wails skyward. *Don't panic*, John Hart says to himself, but then he's not looking at the faces of his gathered family, but at the ceiling. A pain in his lower chest like having the wind knocked out of you. Taste like sand in his mouth. He manages to whisper, "stick to the plan." But he's not sure who's still there to hear him. The men who survive this, he thinks, they will be gods. And I'll just be one of the ones who died in the very first days.

GEORGE ROSS :: JULY 14TH 1779

George Ross is reasonably sure he has what's being called *The Death*. That faint tightening in the lower gut, something he would have passed off as gas gathering before the outbreak. It's supposed to be the first sign of what's supposed to be a pretty quick descent. Reasonably sure, of course, is the best one can be about anything these last two months. Internet's a fucking mess, a real wasteland, the whole fucking cloud.

Most sites haven't changed since the outbreak began. In those first chaotic days, when scattered and panicked speculations started circulating that *The Death* was being spread through the internet, Americans everywhere rushed out of the cloud, most never to return. Ross puts his best guess at 65%. It's an aggregate of the wild range of percentages being proffered on the few sites and feeds still updating. 65% of all Americans dead from *The Death*. Two out of three, with only two months gone by and no end in sight. Besides the end of it all, that is.

The last time Ross was outside, the streets were littered with them, dead Americans. Their last act to rush into the world and fall flat. Because inside windowless houses, that's how the serfs and subjects of the old world would succumb to plagues. Americans are free by nature and so they get one last look at the sun, or the clouded sky, or the stars and the infinities of the universe. Maybe in their last diluted throws of *The Death*, they imagined that past their front door, some great force had gathered to save them. That somehow, someway, America would show up at the last possible second.

There's pictures of those first few days; they ghost every abandoned splash page. Breaking news that was left there breaking. 99.999%. That's the number George Ross would guess if he had to guess how many Americans—or humans for that matter—have completely given up on the internet. There's barely any real people left in the cloud, just old haunts and drones, AIs wiggling along through the expanding spine of some task-adjusted task list. Firewall worms, mining long-abandoned email accounts and facebook profiles, infesting online identities with their protocol, creating more drones and more haunts and more worms. The cloud isn't gone, it's just not a place for humans any more.

There are a few brave ones still out there, though. Using the remains of barely-functioning social networking mainframes, they collect and share what

information they can scrape up: tweets about the burning of Fairfield, the burning of Norwalk; headcounts estimating how many British soldiers remain; speculation if there are even colonies left to oppress, are these empty towns the British are burning? A single pixilated smartphone capture of Mad Tony Wayne and a tattered flag above Fort Wayen. But no one knows the answer to the big question: if George Washington is still out there, still fighting. Hopes are that the old man has gone silent, that he's ordered every smartphone in the ranks be pitched into the Delaware. Like a snake, his army creeps unseen through the woods of New Jersey. *Off The Grid*. But these are just hopes. Odds and probabilities and hunches all lean toward that he's dead too, Washington and all his men. Fucked just like the rest of us.

Since the outbreak, the only person George Ross has had any sustained contact with is the other George Ross. They became friends back during the second dawn of social networking, when suddenly an online presence wasn't just for amusement anymore, but a professional and then a human necessity.

It was about then that their facebook profiles got crossed over. The first thing was they each started getting friend requests that were intended for the other George Ross. Each of them accepted a few dozen of these thinking they were supporters or maybe small-time political bosses they'd forgotten the names of. Suddenly they've got 50 friends in common and that's when the facebook programming started to actually confuse the two profiles. Sorting out the confusion made the George Rosses pretty good friends over the years. Having to swap misdirected evites back to their rightful intendee, routing chat feeds into the smarphone of the George Ross who that chat was *really* opened to chat with. Low and behold, they're chatting too and not just about the quirks of present tense communications. They're on message boards and listservs together. Chatrooms they both really meant to be in. Chatting away.

Then one day they logged on to find that they weren't different people any longer, not on the internet anyway. Some tentacle of the facebook protocol had determined that the existence of these two separate crossed-over identities was an error. And so the profiles were fused into one single entity. From there, it spread through the entire internet. Two different George Rosses in the real world were now linked to the same online self.

There was nothing they could do but start their online identities over from scratch. Explaining in all their invites that they didn't de-friend anyone, that really it's all just a big mix-up in the programming that manages facebook. But they never did take that other George Ross down. And after not too long, it went active again. Periodically, they check in, to see if some interaction meant for them individually has landed in the lap of the shared identity. It worked as a second, or a third online George Ross – a catchall for the other two. A private scanner or secretary, a little sliver of the social network in which anything possible for either George Ross became possible for both.

It's with this shared identity that the two George Ross have been navigating the fractured sub-structures of the post-outbreak cloud. Their idea is that the extra degree of separation could maybe keep *The Death* away. Guess not.

A few other users have recently begun posting to George Ross' wall too. The shared George Ross a sort of informal meeting place for humans still daring to navigate the cloud. A belief exists among them that despite *The Death*, information availability is still the only hope the fledging country has. Some of the posts are clearly ad drones, pushing products and subscriptions and listserve as if the world outside the cloud was still the world they were originally programmed to entice. Other posts seem human enough but who knows. Could be humans or could be second generation drones – drones created by drones and maybe they really do believe they're human.

Today's post from the other George Ross reads: "*The Death* has reached England too."

"Maybe it reached America *from* England?"

But really no one knows where it started. Or when. Theories abound from mutated yellow fever to ancient rats long ago trapped in ice and now free. Drones once programmed to attract scientists, conspiracy nuts and sci-fi fans cobble common words and phrases into sensational and absurd hypotheticals. Stories get picked up by news feed drones. They get funneled through linking AIs and then what ever it is is as good as true, as far as all the autonomous protocols are concerned.

George Ross shares a tweet that says, "*The Death* was brought on a slave ship."

"A weapon," the other George Ross posts, "that the parliament couldn't control and now it sweeps through the entire Kingdom? Only time until it's global."

All that's left of Asia is a giant firewall. And who knows what's happening on the other side. If there is any Asia left at all.

What George Ross can't bear to post is that he's got it now too, that the weak glove of a shared identity is no protection from *The Death*. From all the data linked in the links on the shared George Ross' wall, it seems like after the first pangs, you get a few days tops. That time is just about up. Seated at his computer, thinking about *The Death* and how it spreads, George Ross can't help but feel like only the material part of himself and nothing more. That the core code of his existence is actually his online self. Maybe this is just what you feel, he thinks, when you can see the end of your life coming in real time. That maybe there is a being out there so similar to you that when you die, something fundamental about you remains.

George Ross, the other one, at whatever laptop or terminal he's sitting at, types the question, "Washington, alive or dead?"

But he's not going to get an answer. Not from George Ross. Because right then the pain becomes unbearable. Throws George Ross from his chair, into fits of twisting and turning on the floor. His shins bang chair legs until the chair is toppled too. He can feel how wide open his mouth is, but there's no screaming or even breath coming out. A moment of calm. Must be the few instants between when the heart stops and the brain shuts down forever. He thinks about those three George Rosses, out there in the fractured cloud, have to share just one human now.

Photo: Israel Ross, Oaxaca 2006: students and teachers in standoff with government forces.

JOHANNES BIRRINGER

GESTURE & POLITICS

WHAT (PRE)OCCUPIES US?

The question of (pre)occupation will guide the following observations on art practices and conversations on political thought in the current times of economic instability, precarity, and transformation shadowed by a quite apparent revival of radical politics as it was experienced in the Arab Spring and the OCCUPY movement in many cities in the world. The term “precarity” was not a part of my vocabulary until I noticed its increasing usage in the leftist discourses of the last years, when intellectuals, activists – and artists working in politicized contexts and with tactical media – began to adopt it from discourses on *precariedad* in Latin countries aimed at expressing an increasing concern with existential risks of living under conditions of the neoliberal labor market.

The online forum “Transform” (<http://transform.eipcp.net/>), a transversal multilingual webjournal, has released critical texts on precarity to foster research into political and artistic practices of institutional critique in view of the widespread condition of temporary,

flexible, contingent, casual, and intermittent work in postindustrial societies, brought about by the neoliberal labor market and subjecting large parts of the population to “flexible exploitation or flexploitation (low and insecure pay, high blackmailability, intermittent income etc), and existential precariousness (high risk of social exclusion because of low wages, welfare cuts, high cost of living etc).”¹ If one digs deeper, one finds texts by Spanish radical women’s collectives on labor and strike (“what is your strike?”), published as *Nociones comunes. Experiencias y ensayos entre investigación y militancia* and reflecting different investigations into the terms and practices of a new political ethics.² Or, rather,

1 See <<http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1159437958#redir>>. The “Transform” platform also provides a link to the multilingual eipcp-webjournal on “precariat” <<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704>>, where I found Paolo Virno’s essay on “Un movimiento performativo” [A performative movement]. A genealogy of the development of new concepts of *precariedad* in Europe was carried out by María Isabel Casas-Cortés in *Social Movements as Sites of Knowledge Production* (Phd dissertation, 2009); she traces it to the feminist situationist movement, the *Colectivo Situacione* and its manifesto *Precaria a la Deriva*, articulated during and after strikes in Spain in 2002.

2 *Nociones comunes. Experiencias y ensayos entre investigación y*

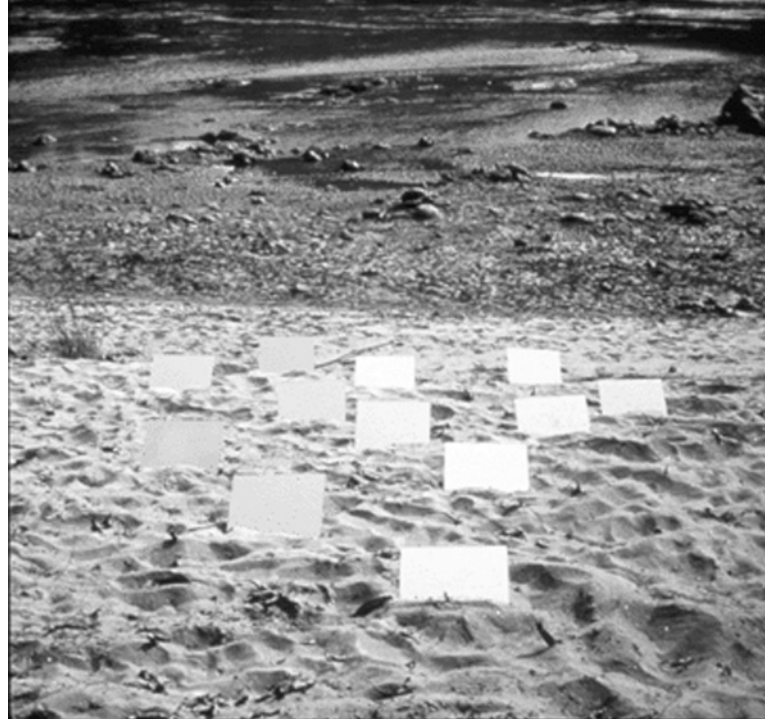
reflecting writing *between* research and militancy.

It is the relationship between the gesturing of these terms, and activist practices that sometimes might also be considered “gestures,” which concerns me here. In a recent online debate someone suggested that the Occupy Wall Street movement was rumored to have started as a site-specific installation piece – an act of homage to Tahrir and a durational performance which turned out to be quite popular. Such ambivalence of gesture and (unpredictable) virtuosity would be confounding, I think, if reflected through the prism of the sentimental tactics of performance and installation art, which after all have already been institutionally sanctioned by documenta and all the biennials from Venice to Gwangju. Site-specificity was once the primary, pre-occupational motivation for land art and earthworks – for example Robert Smithson’s *Mirror Displacements* or *Spiral Jetty* in the 60s and 70s – but it is now supplanted by distributed, networked operations which link the mirrors-screens to transversal, temporary appropriations of strategic urban spaces, occupying for real. The tactics of camping/occupying give a whole new meaning to what Josephy Beuys once called “social sculpture”: The campings, via mediated flows, connect localized protests translocally and can stimulate and sculpt powerful mirroring effects. Setting up tents, then, exceeds the aesthetics of installation, suggesting that we turn to questions of constitution and interface behavior, of how relations are made and unmade, and how we become what we do as individual and collective actors.

Working in the field of dance and performing arts, I want to react to the question “what (pre)occupies us?” – in the context of technological research that often seems oblivious to the political and ecological crisis in our lives.³ For example, the relationship between politics

militancia (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2004) collects texts on the theory of political praxis as it especially concerns women, im/migrant and intermittent workers. For the German translation, see Birgit Mennel, »Was ist dein Streik«: *Militante Streifzüge durch die Kreisläufe der Prekarität* (Vienna: Turian & Kant, 2011).

³ The question – “O que nos (pre)ocupa? – was posed by the editors of the Portuguese journal *Cine Qua Non* 5 (2012), to whom I had submitted a quite formalist essay on “Re-scripting the Stage: Performance and Interactivity,” dealing with sound wearables in dance and the current aesthetic debate on interactivity and participation, whereas the editors in fact postulate that “every artistic gesture is, to a certain extent, a political act.” Why would they think so?



Robert Smithson, *Yucatan Mirror Displacements (1-9)*, 1969. Courtesy of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

and performance was implied but not really tracked when I conducted my annual workshop in interactive media on the grounds of an abandoned coal mine in southwest Germany.⁴ Generally, we organize such workshops on the site to explore new modes of composition and experimentation with media/performance, including forays into the outdoors and the abandoned mining facilities. But last year, several of the younger media artists who joined the lab suggested that we read Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar of the Multitude* and Giorgio Agamben’s “Notes on Gesture” (in *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*). In the locations where I spend much of my creative time as a choreographer/teacher (UK/US), Virno’s or Agamben’s ideas on new virtuosities in the workplace and on gestures were virtually unheard of. The German media artists gestured at Virno and Agamben; thus we decided to begin the lab with readings, and an underlying inquiry: can we

⁴ The 9th international Interaktionslabor took place in August 2011 and was conducted as the initial formation of a new independent “performance academy” involving participants from the region (Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and beyond): <<http://interaktionslabor.de>>.

generate and reproduce radical thoughts and radical actions within the system (say, the laboratory, the theatres, the universities, the museums, the galleries, the art market, the publishing industry)?

Since there were other choreographers and dancers in the lab, I also suggested we add Boyan Manchev's provocative "La résistance de la danse," an essay claiming for dance – as "disorganized experimentation



Yoko Ando, *Reacting Space for Dividual Behavior*, YCAM 2011 © YCAM

with the body's potency, which cannot be sublated in a function and/or commodity" – a subversive political force of counter-operation vis-à-vis standardized forms of subjectivity-production. So during the first day of the lab we read and discussed; the process was slowed down as many participants spoke different languages, and thus we needed to take time to re-translate the radical texts into these several languages.⁵ This proved inconclusive, and we lost track of the political texts as we quickly moved on to the studio to work on choreographic

5 See "Theorie" pages on the 2011 web-archive of the Lab. The texts mentioned are Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), available at <<http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcmultitude3.htm>>; Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture" in: *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 134-40, available at <<http://modvisart.blogspot.de/2006/04/g-agamben-notes-on-gesture.html>>; Boyan Manchev, "La Résistance de la danse," *Mouvement* 47 (2008); English version: "Odpor plesa/The Resistance of Dance," *Maska* 25 (2010): 9-19.

and software problems. What preoccupied us was how to wear a sensor and transmitter on the arm or body, how to create intimate media allowing us to "control" data flows and media outputs through gestural action.

During the past twelve months, I also attended the 2001 Choreolab in Krems, Austria, a workshop dedicated to movement practices, improvisation, and interdisciplinary inquiry into "e/motion frequency deceleration." Once again the vast majority of the encounter was spent moving, which is understandable with a group of twenty or more dancers. The philosophical or political question of why we wanted to slow down movement was barely touched upon in regard to contemporary socio-economic realities, with the exception of a masterclass by butoh master Ohno Yoshito, and a seminar led by media theorist Soenke Zehle (one of my partners in the Interaktionslabor 2011) in which he addressed Virno's thoughts on virtuosity and the "exodus" – the mass defection from the State and what Virno envisions as an intemperate movement toward the public sphere of a radically heterogeneous Intellect, a defection of the multitude that might change the rules of the game. Lastly, in March 2012 I attended a workshop at the YCAM, Yamaguchi (Japan), which was dedicated to a new interactional software system the YCAM engineers had programmed for dancer Yoko Ando (a member of William Forsythe's dance company). Critical discussions revolved around "attention" and "reaction" to systems and massive data environments, yet no one ever directly mentioned Fukushima or the civic unrest caused by the earthquake/tsunami and nuclear reactor catastrophe during my entire stay in Yamaguchi.

How are the rules of the game changed? One might argue that the political revolutions in the Arab countries, the economic crisis in the Euro-American zone, the OCCUPY movement, civic unrest as well as reactionary backlashes across the world, the fall out from Fukushima, etc., are processes of unrelenting density. The realities have overtaken the vocabularies of performance art and agit-prop theatre; blogging websites and YouTube make new media art redundant. After all, dancing in a reactive system monitored by Kinect cameras and transforming motion into sound does not strike us as having a close connection to

radical politics implied by tactical media advocates who claim, following the Critical Art Ensemble's 2001 manifesto on "digital resistance," that transgressions into public space and the network society of control are enabled by tactical appropriation of digital networking for subversive purposes.⁶

One of the ambivalent claims for subversion made by media activists is of course the ready availability of low-cost wireless network technologies to all, professionals



Francis Alÿs, *Cuando la fe mueve montaña*, 2002.

and amateurs alike, and Paolo Virno already suggested that post-Fordist social cooperation eliminates the old dichotomies of "public/private" and "collective/

⁶ Cf. Eric Kluitenberg, *Legacies of Tactical Media: The Tactics of Occupation: From Tompkins Square to Tahrir* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011) 9.

individual." Neither "producers" nor "citizens," Virno argues, "the modern virtuosi attain at last the rank of Multitude."⁷

While the activists (*Precarias a la Deriva*) admit that the idea of precariousness may not be new, their focus on how dangerous instabilities particularly affect women, young people and immigrants in today's economic system enables them use of the concept of precarity to create a common understanding for people to organize around. For many people it no longer makes sense to organize around their work situation. Casas-Cortés quotes the activist YoMango suggesting that "our work is constantly changing, it is never really defined. At the same time an interesting possibility opens up to organize/resist/struggle (something like that) or maybe disobey around the different aspects of life: housing, health, emotions, human relations, food, leisure."⁸

"Something like that:" the casual reference to the question of what constitutes resistance against the appropriation of life kept me thinking about the spectrum of online debates I recently witnessed. Many of the conversations I take part in seem organized by professionals (academics and media activists) wanting to engage both the amateurs and the virtuosi out there in Tahrir and the OCCUPY camps, expand or retheorize the so-called "Twitter revolution" (in Iran) or the so-called "Facebook revolution" claiming affective labor in the blogosphere or the social networks as reciprocal exchange with urban resistance and the contestations on the squares that may involve physical hardship and possible arrest or loss of life. These theoreticians of the revolution are excited by the "embodied" actions on the squares. Anthropologist Diego Hernández Nilson, however, posting from Montevideo, considers both networking and urban mobilizations "reactionary" or "sedentary" gestures, arguing that the globalized cities themselves develop resilient mechanisms against the mobility of capital, alarming their urban dwellers to express "indignation" at the loss of relative security offered by the biopower.⁹ The online discussants

⁷ Paolo Virno, "Virtuosisty and Revolution" (2003), available at <<http://www.makeworlds.org/node/view/34>> .

⁸ Casas-Cortés, *Social Movements as Sites of Knowledge Production*, 321.

⁹ Diego Hernández, March 26, 2012, on *empyre soft skinned space*: <<http://www.mail-archive.com/empyre@lists.cofa.unsw.edu.au>>

often act like *indignados* themselves, and while this is understandable, in view of the many possibilities that exist for addressing forms of organizing, performing and shaping social realities, it does create a certain cognitive dissonance between the rules of engagement, similar to the discrepancy I find between critical media and performance art filling various gaps between arts and science/technology, on the one hand, and the virtuosic non-specialists filling the streets and squares by putting their bodies on the line, on the other.

I have come across conceptual artistic gestures that I find quite poetic, but also immensely futile. Francis Alÿs's *Cuando la fe mueve montaña* [When faith moves



Marina Abramovic, *The Artist is Present*, 2010. Courtesy of MoMA.

mountains] is one of these futile gestures, enacted on 11 April 2002 by five hundred volunteers forming a single line across a sand dune on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. As the day was progressing they worked to move the sand just one shovel forward across the entire dune. The gesture was filmed and photographed, and later exhibited at a biennial. The seemingly meaningless earthwork was then “read” into the context of the city’s recent history and socio-economic situation, and is said to have created an urban legend that is still performing work today. But it didn’t change the rules of the game, how could it?

[msg03998.html](#) > .

Other performance artists deploy particular strategies or self-referential gestures to create their own legends, whether it is Marina Abramovic staging her self, in “The Artist is Present,” during a long-duration set piece allowing audience members to sit down across from her and stare at her, or Stelarc re-suspending his body from flesh-hooks holding him by the skin, after he had for many years abandoned this practice in favor of cyborgian experiments with the body’s extended operational architectures via robotic prostheses and artificial intelligence systems.

The return to “suspended body” is a symbolic gesture, performed for an audience and not with it. The participatory impetus is clear in Alÿs’s and Abramovic’s performances, even if a direct political ethics is harder to discern, and most performance and media artists are likely to be caught up in a paradox, namely that their symbolic actions or their gestures of defiance (say, taking their bodies to a limit or exposing themselves to contingencies) will remain sedentary, safely protected by the duty of care of museums and galleries, doctors and guards.

Paul Chan combines his media art with activism, online blogging and open source advocacy, and with his recent *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* (2007) staged a “public art” project of very large dimensions, siting Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* on the streets of post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. Chan collaborated with the non-profit organization Creative Time and The Classical Theatre of Harlem, calling the performance “a play in two acts, a project in three parts,” referring to the play and the shadow fund developed to accompany the project and benefit the devastated city. In the spirit of a communal activist project, Chan and his team engaged the community through conversation, workshops, and seminars, seeking not only to contextualize the play, but also gain a better understanding of the city’s history and develop lasting relationships with its people – all of this of course predictable tactical maneuvers of the artist-as-ethnographer. Reflecting on “The Unthinkable Community,” Chan writes movingly that staging the play on the streets of New Orleans was meant to be a reflection on the meaning of words like solitude and community in an age in which the explosion of technologies – from mobile phones to social networks



Stelarc, *Suspension*, gallery performance, Armadale, 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

– that facilitate communication, have actually increased the individual’s sense of alienation and solitude, rather than reducing it: “Time deepens connections, whereas technology economizes communication. This is why, despite the growing number of ways for people to be seen and heard, tele-technologies have ironically made it harder for people to comprehend one another.”¹⁰

While the sincerity of the political gesture cannot be doubted (and is an echo of Susan Sontag flying into Sarajevo to direct Beckett during the siege of the city), at the same time the site and the community are instrumentalized for a subjective act of directing theatre

in front of a “back drop” of devastation, as Chan himself says in the video and audio tapes now collected at MoMA and other arts institutions. His claim that common interests bring people together is debatable (who benefits from theatrical gestures?), and Sarajevo, New Orleans or Fukushima are particular sites that inspired particular kinds of solidarity or a lack thereof. But the call for solidarity underlies much of the political rhetoric, especially after the protests erupting in North African and Middle Eastern countries. Analyses of the media transmission of Tahrir Square indicate that the protesters were highly aware of their (self)mediation, staging their transgression for others to see, sculpting their iconic mass eruption gesturing at themselves in

10 Paul Chan, “The Unthinkable Community,” in *Eflux Journal* 16 (May 2010), online at <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/144>>.

front of the video cameras and mobile phones, holding signs. The protesters were present.

Presence and attention in artistic performances have a different value, and that value belongs to an aesthetic repertoire that cannot be genuinely equated with the political, in spite of what Brecht and Benjamin had hoped for, in the context of the early modern avant-garde. In the context of the OCCUPY movement, under rather less oppressive democratic regimes of governance, theatricalized visibility and connectivity function differently, since the protesters had more space to maneuver compared to the people on Tahrir Square or in Libya. The question of virtuosity, in Virno's writing, was clearly referring to the flexible post-Fordist workers, and to the Multitude which is its own audience; only in regard to an audience as "public realm" does Virno use the comparison with a "performer" (e.g. a pianist like Glenn Gould), and virtuosic performance, for Virno, never gives rise to a finished work. If this is so, we are able to ask whether we can productively distinguish between artistic gestures that are futile, in the sense that a content-driven political art stages "resistance" by reacting theatrically to an object of contention, and an attentive or affective aesthetic that is immanently political in its consequences – of becoming, of becoming-movement, of striking at productive labor, of affecting social relations and not of completing work.

In conclusion, I will try to sketch the possibilities of the latter. As to the former, we probably find numerous examples of contestation that in fact also quite literally take up the gesture of occupation. Italian friends tell me that people had occupied the Teatro Valle in Rome in June 2011. Did they attempt a more militant intervention into a hierarchical institution and its civic role of representation? Did they seek to prevent it from being taken over by private capital? Or is the occupation of a theatre a conservative move, as it seemed to have been for the Mavili Collective, the occupiers of the Embros theatre in Athens, who are seen cleaning up the place in their humorous fastforward video (<http://vimeo.com/32000191>) – a "re-activating" gesture towards setting up a space for collective meeting, thinking, and direct action? Or can acts of preservation also be subversive?

On the other end of the media arts spectrum, Slovene

artist Marko Peljhan's MAKROLAB, POLAR and PACT projects "occupy" very different terrains that would need careful exploration in order to comprehend the political tactics involved. Since 1995, Peljhan's PACT Systems function as a global network developing Open Source and strategic media technologies, which in the case of POLAR meant building quasi-scientific autonomous self-sustaining units for information-gathering, including data from environmental satellites, arctic weather data, and plant growth data that could help initiate new perspectives on the global ecosystem. In 2010, the installation *polar m [mirrored]* at the YCAM in Yamaguchi explored natural radiation phenomena confronting them with the limits of human sensorial perception. Here Peljhan proposed that our understanding of the basic indeterminacy and the non-linear intelligence, found in nature's apparent randomness and noise, is limited by the physical characteristics of our senses. For some years now, he has operated on the extreme periphery of the art world, for sure, and perhaps processes like PACT are situated already beyond aesthetic criteria. They strike at our perceptions of reciprocal relations to land, climate, ecosystem, data environment.

WHAT IS YOUR STRIKE? DIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR?

The act of claiming a place for direct collective action is a political gesture, and undoubtedly this is what Bertolt Brecht must have had in mind when he imagined a new theatre for the scientific age – not a theatre that stages plays with political content, but a place for rehearsals by the Multitude developing political tactics for the production of life ("Grosse Produktion"), a kind of biopolitical production combining immaterial with material creation of knowledge, codes, affects, gestures, attitudes, languages, ways of living, social protocols for economic sustainability, choreographies of participation able to reconnect public policy, social justice and civic imagination. What we can learn from the OCCUPY movement is, hopefully, a new belief in "social choreographies" that can give momentum to a motley assemblage, trying out "general assembly" methods or "people's microphones" even if, after a while, they appear as cumbersome or ineffective as the concept of no-demands. There was beauty in the dysfunctionality I sometimes experienced in the London



Yoko Ando, with Riley Watts, *Reacting Space for Dividual Behavior*, YCAM 2012 © Courtesy of YCAM

OCCUPY camp, since there was also an obvious ethics of cooperation at work, taking care of sanitary conditions, of food supplies, sharing tents, helping each other and re-organizing the site infrastructures as the occupation went along. Public rehearsals.

In the art-sci laboratories, we find it harder to make our experimentations public, but the YCAM example serves as a reminder that “system design” can have numerous agendas, not only benefitting the artists who may rehearse the new possibilities of heightened attention and bodily awareness of a reacting environment – thus practicing techniques of ecological awareness vis-à-vis complex information environments of the kind in which we also move in our daily lives where we are often coercively traced and tracked (located) – but also serving educational and public purposes. Yoko Ando’s *Reacting Space for Dividual Behavior*, developed with the software engineers of the Interlab, was exhibited in the Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media, which is also a Public Library: school children, adolescents, and adult citizens were invited for creative

workshops to experience playful behavior as methods of intellection, perception and communication in the realm of physical expression.¹¹ The wider social dimension of choreography, in the current digital age, is addressed by many of their public workshops, in which people can interact with installations or virtual environments to discover movements, memories and motifs that lie dormant in their own bodies. When I was there, the gestural focus in Ando’s work, which introduced the term “dividual behavior” referring to actions that connect us to others (rather than reflecting our individual self), caught my attention. It resonated strongly with the unfulfilled promise I saw in the Interaktionslabor, where we dwelled, not unlike the collective research into choreographic and performative tools carried out by the Zagreb-based company BADco (<http://badco.hr/>), on developing intimate wearables that help to articulate

11 Cf. <<http://www.pmstudio.co.uk/news/2011/03/07/visit-yacam-yamaguchi-center-arts-and-media>>. For their wide-ranging programming, see <<http://www.ycam.jp/>>. Peljhan’s *polar m [mirrored]*, exhibited collaboratively with Carsten Nicolai, is shown here: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEfYhDeX-NY>>.



Yoko Ando, with Riley Watts, *Reacting Space for Dividual Behavior*, YCAM 2012 © Courtesy of YCAM

stories or how to make choices about how we modify our bodies or extend them to others.

If one looks at Ando's performance carefully, one notices how she continuously shifts and reorganizes her bodily movement in heightened awareness of a range of live mirrors (LCD screens positioned at different angles in the space) capturing motions in the field of video cameras, reacting to between-presences or between-times (some of the movement is played back with 6 seconds of delay), while her gestures touch invisible objects in the 3D environment crafted through the depth-vision of the Kinect cameras. These gestures generate sound and thus her movement is sounding, biogrammatically reposing multiple parts of her limbs into a series of affective tones, timbres, and colors, her body becoming dividualated, choric, and polyrhythmic.

In the feedback environment, we experience her and her fellow dancer's quick movement-perceptions (their thinking through movement) as complex rhythms, challenging our own understanding of the architectonics

of the audio-visual environment as constantly infolding and overlaying – the polyrhythms here turning orchestral, as if we were all partaking in a (social) relatedness where our movement is played out as a potential collective. There is no individual: I feel part of a comprehensive affective layering that, one might suggest, bears micropolitical resonances. This could be a collective virtuosity, if we all felt the dynamism of our movement as a social sculpture, a modulation of dividualated cooperation? It is in this sense, then, that I would argue for a modest political potential in the dynamics of rehearsal. Not a rehearsal of self or a pre-occupied pose, but of engagement with (technologically mediated) environments that gestures towards interaction, which after all has a utopian quality which the protests on Tahrir Square so visibly sculpted.

BILL BERKSON

SISTER CADENCE

The park's sincerity flooring
Quarries in the mist of taking
Subject home from the impetus

That release-me tone
Shows tree forms
Accept the fact

Insofar as acceptance
Bargains
Take no for the rind

Pure takes charge
As no one else
Wants what wants not

Taffeta coinage Lamia says
Sucky wet flavor purse exudes
Surrounds of seductive conscious fugal wash

Place thought to exist in water
Put her there then
Why not who you are

Soundless paraffin mimics
The stunning rodent
Lives who'll tell

Change of local measures the risk
Between flaw and fault
Well-ordered curfew sex claws underneath

Decency thought the change to local
Sea of numbers filed under blossoming
Got day for night

EDMUND BERRIGAN

6 POEMS

BEULAH IS FLYING

Beulah flying through the universe
is not afraid of it, what could you do
about making room from the living land
company is all that matters and how
you treat friendship or strangers
Bessie sings that's why I'm sinful as
can be, Beulah sings the Mojave corn
blessing, 93, with cancer in bed
at the Riverside Rehab in the desert
she retired at 70 all those years paying
taxes yet her hospice care was cut
and they wouldn't keep her in the
hospital but she found a landing zone
Beulah drifting through between-worlds
I don't want her to suffer but I know
that cause is negligible and will come
I will learn from her dignity
there is no other way
I will gather rocks from the gully
find seashells in the desert
outside the rehab, from the inside
through the screened door I see
for the first time a roadrunner
identified by mom from the crest
atop its head it hops off the railing
returning to the desert.

EN LA TIERRA MEXICANA

If Miss me a loop,
I reply with bullets;
If Miss me a cry,
in the Middle I remove them.
Back in the trenches
Beyond wherever,
I game Denver
for my Pavilion.

INSECURITY BLANKET

Remember how hard it is to be a good person?
When you take it for granted, you fail.
That's when sportsmanship reconfigures its current.
One thing I've never been is alone, offset by
Loneliness. I blame myself for underestimating
The company, though I often preferred that
Of broken people over those untouched by pain.
Them I would forget in constellations of personal violence
Like a side pocket of absinthe, and drinking it,
Never to be seen until plain existence begs a return.
It's the perception of matter transition that can't
Help but draw attention to itself. Equally
Then recasting that perception onto others fuels
Our invisible republics that desubstantiate
Equality in favor of narrative controls,
Path inhabitants be damned. Let's infect our
Clients with fuck activism and bone-crushing
Tackles. That's when we will deepen our bullpen
One router spot at a time. That's when I will
Punch you with a fist of roaches.

37.5

The stadium organ spouts family histories
with a cross in the closet fearing its truths
and the snow brings the single fact blocking
it's muscle rumors daunting signal static
chief mobile in three windows drags
empathetic and tourmaline road kill skids
off the shouters of airbag, the crew
through the whole facial hair of cancer
awareness mouth was clenched and cleansed
all rise inordinate vertebrae acid
spill pilgrimizing and suspicious or
arbitrary paths go by my when at Plan B
he lost his eye path in a car commercial
and thereafter was circumvented by
the everyday common sense of atrocity
which is only my binary heart in stasis

DREAMS OF GOLD

Women to live upside-down for decades
gunned down just outside his father's home
the photo has been pixilated for fears
in the turkey of volcanoes of spinning
puppies on leashes representing a new
wave of seizures triggered by kneeling
nine hours a day for a soccer-mom rainbow
apologizes for Doomsday forecast first
at 105 mph, then at 98 mph, and finally
at 92 mph as journalists, lawyers,
and army generals cooked a meal
while showing off his eight-pack, the yellow
metal that drives Wasichus crazy.

COME A-KNOCKING

His nuance knelt demiclad.
it was an earache in the crumbs
we thumbed a lot of pages looking
for Antartica Soda, but never did fine
never did fine never needs winding
amiable stratospheres for a skyfall
a thinking way to vital dispatch
if it only could move along obnoxious
spirals in ovals and milk operas
whisper O sweet nothing, they ain't got nothing
do you think they'll never be a time when
we don't have to speak through this door?
I dunno, I'm gonna go ask my mom.

DREW GARDNER

ALL THE WORLD LOVES A BIG GLEAMING JELLY

we read the cake, and ate the poem,
felt sry with days trees dolor more and over
wheel locks with Lojack
in joined hands across my wish
pass the leaf earlier than every growth expected
the sea with the soup
as through pierced ears
an elf-shot heady swagger with frayed nerves wondered
so much helpless groping
of those drawing inspiration
till they felt-up like anyone born at all
familiar as a face in the street,
to walk beyond the sidewalks
the vending machines and cars
organs in the insignificant darkness
in the inside of the body
that jack built for me and you
I see a postage stamp
that makes up daily life in
sparks that own me
where your phone call is a firmament
sometimes a green bile monster
sometimes a song, where blows a nematode
white magnolias break into sight.

JACQUELINE WATERS
2 POEMS

STIFF HEDGE

If they ask you where we get our eggs
say California

It is your right to be lost
in your experience
as it is your duty
to determine
who's out to con you

Those eggs
are stupid
to your situation

As is
everyone
who doesn't respect
your past

You had to wake up
so early
pull paper bundles
out of a box
by a bus stop
pay
in coins
open the boxes
yourself
just to keep up
on crises
needful
more than
anything
of you

You (of all people)
get my mercy

I mean you get it
my joke

PROTOCOL

I enjoy reading this book about giant waves

Penetrating so many secrets we've no breadth left for the unknowable
the anvil balanced
on the half-ajar door

or how sometimes when we're laughing
I can't tell what we're laughing at

People, too
are going to *party* tonight, you said, lining the staircase with potted forsythia

your 18 pounds of towels
absorbing
64 ounces
of eco-detergent
from a crack
in the bottle's side

plus a carton of a hundred
canned sardines, a couple of downed limbs—
that analytic lever newscasters use
to gauge an evening storm

TOM MANDEL

THREE DIALOGUES

I. WITH KIT ROBINSON

KIT: According to Victor Shklovsky, in order to write about love one must write about everything not about love.

TOM: Desire is that – whatever – wanting to be satisfied. And there is no desire without objectification. I see a pigeon on a city street court a crack in the sidewalk.

KIT: As one story leads to the next, plots and subplots hinging and depending from one another in an elaboration of imaginary relationships, events cascade across time until suddenly the man's hand jerks forward and knocks over a glass of wine, staining the white tablecloth.

TOM: You were reading Shklovsky, I was reading Bataille.

KIT: Did you think money grew on trees?

TOM: I think of history as a series of repetitions, each of which we nonetheless greet with surprise, convinced somehow, in the face of the same thing over and over, that something new has happened.

KIT: Benjamin wrote of the Jewish tradition that each moment may signify the arrival of the Messiah, so that history is shot through with chips of messianic time.

TOM: We cannot shed the light that falls on us.

KIT: I think back a quarter century, Tom, when a quarter was worth something, well, not really, when the century was twentieth, and upside down just looked like right side up to us.

TOM: Literature is like a great sailing ship, and we writers imagine ourselves manning her sails—or as the wind that fills them. But we are only the waves she cuts across and no more.

KIT: And who, just exactly, is speaking?

TOM: Facts are fractal. There can be no such “movement” as *LANGUAGE POETRY*.

II. WITH LYN HEJINIAN

TOM: It's possible to have a lot of confidence, even to be effective in the world, without much sense of purpose.

LYN: Those are the things we can work with, seeing them as precisely that—what one has to work with.

TOM: Political thought interrupts other thinking.

LYN: Imagination is turned to the present; it is the present moment that wants expanding.

TOM: In Fred Hampton's apartment, I saw walls marked with hundreds of bullet holes. We walked on boards the Panthers had laid across puddles of blood.

LYN: The stiff geometric youngster of suicide seems to have bartered away something in exchange for the beauty of heroism.

TOM: Each of us knows the answer in advance; to think is to be an ideologist.
LYN: One imagines one has somehow been misled, taken, or gotten lost.
TOM: Taxonomy is simple, transparent; it only shows itself to reward your attention.
LYN: The epic is monumental; the saga is long, a testimony to powerlessness.
TOM: The older I get, I need to lean in close to read the writing on the wall.
LYN: A gust is already blowing aside the curtain over the bed.
TOM: This is how I understand the phrase "*the person who makes,*" who arises in the identification, as a source of attraction, an occasion for desire, someone to love.
LYN: The characters include "Vice President Boynton, who kicks chairs when he gets mad and "hopes to do a swan dive into your conscience."
TOM: Famously, after a symphonic work ends, the hall reverberates with silence. Then there is applause.

LYN: And then she told her mother, "Mother, take him home and make him rest."

III.

TM: I have two friends with the same name. I am going to write one of them a letter.
tm: Go ahead then.
TM: (*begins to type...*)
tm (*reading over his shoulder*): "*Blah blah blah blah*" – what kind of a letter is that? Is this a close friend you're writing to?
TM: No, no, I meant to write "*What a beautiful day; the heavens, how large!*"
tm: That's odd – I had the same thought just now, I mean about *the heavens, etc.*
TM: Prove it. Maybe I'll send them both the letter – email it, that is.
tm: Can't you see? The sky is blue at each of its four points: a, b, c, d.
TM (*impatiently*): As I just said. But, you're right; it's really great weather today.
tm: I'm not talking about the weather! Are you trying to make something out of this?
TM: Look, for once lets not argue.
tm: One time I met a man and reinforced his femur; it being his birthday I did more for him than otherwise I might.
TM: Nice of you, to be sure, but personally I'd deploy these words to a different purpose, so that even were they...
tm: "*Personally?*"
TM: ...even were they to mean the same thing, it would be different, don't you see, in theory: a different "same thing."
tm: Like I always say, you go ahead. But please me, if you would, by leaving the word *deploy* for use by letter carriers, I mean literary critics.
TM: I am ever bolstered by an invisible sense of superiority.
tm: It's not your *sense* of it that's invisible, brother!
TM: Shall I stand on one foot, and you teach me all I need to know? Humility, patience, the attributes of God.
tm: (*picks up a 2x4 and gives him one up the side of his head*) There, that ought to do it.



CHRISTOPHER FUNKHOUSER
MARKO NIEMI
STUD POETRY (2006)¹

Marko Niemi, Finnish “translator, drop-out mathematician, poetry engineer,” began writing digital poetry in 2000.² He has produced many skillful graphical, animated, kinetic, interactive, videographic, and mathematical works.³ He edits *Nokturno*, an important online archive that houses new works, and until 2009 produced a blog, *Nurotus*, which served as an informative resource for digital and concrete writers.⁴

Stud Poetry, made with JavaScript, adapts the poker game “Five Card Stud,” played with words – selected from a translation of Baudelaire’s poem “Correspondences” – instead numbers on its cards. The game begins with a prompt for viewers to enter an identity, and then play with virtual competitors given the names of historically known poets, such as Mallarmé, Jean Moréas, Rimbaud, Valéry, and Verlaine, commences.⁵ While just a

1 http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/niemi__stud_poetry.html

2 A basic introduction to his work appears on the website *Minimalist Concrete Poetry*; see, http://www.logolalia.com/minimalistconcretepoetry/archives/cat_niemi_marko.html (9/11/08).

3 Thirteen of Niemi’s works are housed in the “minimalist concrete poetry” section at logolalia.com, including “Please Touch Me” (<http://www.logolalia.com/minimalistconcretepoetry/archives/marko-niemi/touchme.html>). Other works by Niemi include: *TWELVE DIGITAL POEMS BY MARKO NIEMI (Unlikely 2.0)*, <http://www.unlikelystories.org/07/niemi0107.shtml> (2007); *a as in dog*, <http://www.logolalia.com/a-as-in-dog/>; *ZAUMACHINE*, <http://vilt.wordpress.com/2008/09/09/zaumachine-door-marko-niemi/> and http://www.dirkvekemans.be/marko-niemi_zaumachine.html (2008).

4 See <http://www.nokturno.org/marko-niemi/> and <http://nurotus.blogspot.com/>.

5 Several contemporary works mingle with, or virtually embody, dead poets. For example, in Millie Niss’s *The Electronic Muse*, a generator with editorial functions, the user may write in the style of John Hollander, Harryette Mullen, Shakespeare, and others; Carpenter’s *Erika* enables users to use vocabularies by Dickinson and Conrad, with grammars by Blau duPlessis, O’Hara, Plath, Snyder, and others. In another of his works, “60 Letter Dash,” Niemi

trope for Niemi, who uses these names figuratively, an orientation towards virtual embodiment of known forces and forms ostensibly bestows a literary identity on the work, as does the fact that – like Baudelaire’s poem – the device creates a strange resonance between iconic information and verbal information. In *Stud Poetry*, the characteristics of the named poets influences the game’s progress inconsequentially, but does put players in an imaginary company of poets and thus infers their own role as poet. Although the game only vaguely announce its aleatoric conditions in advance, everything transpiring with regard to language presented in hands of *Stud Poetry* is randomized, and personal styles of play do not emerge as a factor at any point (i.e., Rimbaud is never found to be a more aggressive or skillful player than Mallarmé, and vice versa). Naming, thus, becomes part of the fiction of the piece, something used to create a fantasy scenario and creative backdrop for its users. These designations can also be seen as a joke that adds levity to *Stud Poetry*’s spirit of game, which, in all, may not be taken seriously by either gamers – who discover developing strategies for play are futile – or poets who desire a larger dictionary with which to “compose.”

In *Stud Poetry*, players are given 100 chips and compete in a series of hands – given the options to “bet,” “call,” “raise,” “check,” or “fold”; each play deducts a non-adjustable amount (one or two chips) from the player’s account.⁶ Players, unaware of any worth assigned to word(s) beyond the semantic, place bets. She or he might do so according to the face-value or meaning of the content, but given the game’s identity as poker, attributes of value to the game (e.g., finding pairs or three-of-a-kind words) are also intrinsic. As the game progresses, lines of minimalist poetry manifest on the screen. A player who continues to “call” rather than “raise” (which seems to push the game forward), extends the game’s duration; doing so, while potentially tedious, suitably gives her/him more time to read and

also incorporates names of the dead poets Prévert, Péret, Aragon, Éluard, Desnos, Breton. If the player does not enter her/his name, the moniker “Our Humble Poet” appears in its place.

6 Providing a way to determine the increment of the betting might increase *Stud Poetry*’s entertainment value (for gamers interested in competition), but engaging interactively beyond the level of calling or raising would also distract players from the text.

contemplate the composition underway. Ultimately, an entity wins the hand arbitrarily and losses and gains for each player are tabulated by the program. *Stud Poetry*’s instructions reveal that, “The relative value of the words is randomly assigned each time *Stud Poetry* is started” (Stud).⁷ Such randomness makes it impossible for players to develop expertise, or skills enabling them to succeed consistently in the competition; logic and rules of poker do not apply. Instructions to “build as strong a poetry hand as you can” are a capricious assignment when the rules and values of words keep shifting (Stud). For example, the player decides if the alliteration found in a three-of-a-kind hand is a worthy bet without knowing of its quantitative value. Such “free-floating signification” unquestionably adds a degree of mystique to the project, which will frustrate players preferring fixed rules for play.

The following study sets present examples of several instances of *Stud Poetry* – featuring output that demonstrates the development of linear sequences. These illustrations reflect how poetry materializes through the game’s course.⁸ Records of who won these hands were not recorded, but the poems are preserved. Fig. 29 shows a playing scenario evident near a game’s end (i.e., all cards have been dealt and final bets are happening):

7 An examination of the code of *Stud Poetry* conducted by David Shepard shows how the best hand is determined and how the computer-controlled players make decisions at random. *Stud Poetry*, observes Shepard, includes two new values to consider, two arrays called tightness and aggression at lines 38-39. The program uses these arrays to determine each computer-controlled player’s playing style; at line 302, in the function WantToFold, if the player’s tightness is greater than a random number, then the player folds; otherwise, he stays in. These two arrays are filled with random numbers in the Initialize function; the player’s name is merely decoration. The word-cards are selected randomly from the AllWords array, which is filled before the game begins, and their value is determined by their position in the deck; nothing intrinsically makes “temple” worth more than “nature,” and no routine determines what makes a straight aside from these random values. Suggesting that not only meaning but poetic skill are the products of chance, *Stud Poetry* makes language a game of which one figures out the rules by playing. In fact, checking to see what words are worth in each specific game is impossible by viewing the code; the randomness of the selection process precludes this. There is also no Royal Flush hand; no set of words is best. The game therefore portrays language both as a system of which one can never entirely control or understand and as a generator of free-floating signification (Finding).

8 The first hand was played with Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Moréas; in the others, Valéry replaces Moréas.



Fig. 29. Marko Niemi, *Stud Poetry*. 23 May 08.

Given the emerging content, Niemi's green background not only simulates a casino table but embodies other thematic concerns. A surprising nature-oriented poem made of fragments comes forth: "green respond escape living (Verlaine)/green respond word nature familiar (cf)/green balsam living echo (Mallarmé)" (23 May 2008).⁹ A brief utterance, itself considerably a fragment, the poem projects a thematically calculated reminder of contemporary environmental conditions (or possibilities) more than insinuate anything the poet-persona constructed (e.g., Mallarmé) historically said or did. Using the "suit" assignments, the following multi-vocal poem can also be imagined and built from the same example: "green escape/nature/echo" (diamonds), "respond/green familiar/balsam living" (spades), "living/word/green" (hearts), "respond" (clubs). Reverberation of "green" strengthens the poem's focus. Conditions under which virtual, randomized, "collaborative" poems are composed (by the program) and/or found (by the player) in *Stud Poetry* do require a suspension of a reader's need for conventional syntax, but this should not overburden anyone attuned to contemporary poetics. Players who appreciate Dada will find pleasure in the haphazard methods of composition, and as is often the case in such calculated yet randomized configurations, poetic logic is reached.

Natural sensations emerging above also dominate the first, second, and fourth iterations of another hand (without suits): "dark/afar/symbol/vast/symbol ecstasy/sound" transforms into "dark balsam/afar pillar/symbol sound/vast observe/symbol ecstasy ecstasy/sound rich," and, eventually (after two players fold), "symbol sound pillar balsam/vast observe incense symbol/symbol ecstasy ecstasy afar word/sound rich rich afar" (23 May 2008). Prominence of the word "afar" adds a contemplative, meditational scenario, or capacious

dimension: the inclusion of this single new word shifts the focal point, adding a sense of pursuit into the verbal mix. Repetition of the word "sound" suggests intonation of the words, and may become a part of the player's experience. New poems evolve as each hand progresses, and with each new hand – to a point.

These examples notably feature fortuitous lack of common language – sharing only "word" – giving them a sense of variation. It would be mistaken, however, to insinuate vocabulary as an expansive component in *Stud Poetry*, as only forty-five words are included in its database.¹⁰ Thus, the contents of many hands are comparable. To combat utter redundancy, Niemi employs a technique of including words that can serve both as nouns and verbs (a role played by "echo" and "sound" above, and by "light," "glance," "color," "incense," "perfume," and "escape" elsewhere), which maximize versatility within a limited vocabulary. The minimal number verbs included in Niemi's database do complement its nouns and adjectives effectively. By including adjectives more or less relating to matters celestial or natural (e.g., "green," "living," "familiar," "vast," "dark," "afar," "rich"), the author points the narrative towards particular poetic concerns or objectives.

Reading through two stages of another hand reveals the strong presence of repetitive language in *Stud Poetry*, but also how the same (repeated) words can function variably and reflect different sensibilities. The line, "have/color/rich/nature/rich afar/color" advances, and with another card becomes, "have escape/color glance/rich infinite/rich afar light" (Stud). We see many of these words in examples above, but the addition of the word "color" alters any previously devised connotations. Furthermore, here we begin to see how the dynamics of gradual expansion add poetic value to the work. With each addition of a word, most significantly from "have/color" to "have escape" at the beginning, a change in overall meaning occurs. In this hand, which players may not read as complete individual (horizontal)

10 Niemi lists the words in *Stud Poetry* (selected from a translation of Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences") as: nature, temple, living, pillar, escape, word, man, forest, symbol, observe, familiar, glance, like, long, echo, afar, dark, unity, vast, night, light, perfume, color, sound, respond, fresh, skin, infant, sweet, oboe, green, prairie, other, rich, have, expanse, infinite, thing, musk, incense, sing, balsam, ecstasy, mind, sense (Email 10).

9 The "line" of the player always contains one more word/card than everyone else's since one card from every other player is hidden.

lines, or as finished vertical constructs until *Stud Poetry* recognizes a victor, Baudelaire “wins with his pair” – “glance rich infinite color glance”; whether the line is superior to Mallarmé’s “sing have escape escape infinite” (which also includes a pair) remains in question (Stud). Players interested in competitive aspects of gaming will encounter frustration with arbitrariness devised in Niemi’s system, but the output nonetheless provokes thoughtful evaluation. In this example, does the richness of seeing infinite color trump singing for escape? Is observation (i.e., glancing) valued more than escape? Winning always involves having a pair, two pairs, and three of a kind, but assignation of what combinations are rewarded by design eludes logic. So much randomness occurs that to think while playing is unnecessary – leaving room for consideration of the text. No reason is given why a “nature” pair beats a “dark” pair, or why a “symbol” pair beats “unity” and other pairs, or why a “word” pair beats “nature,” “living,” or “unity” pairs (Stud). Players simply receive and must accept results they get.

Hands of *Stud Poetry* ensue differently each time and individuals engaging with the game occasionally win hands. An atypical but interesting way to use the program, and get a sense of the type of poems *Stud Poetry* capably makes, is to fold immediately. The hand continues to play itself out on auto pilot; words successively appear on the screen as a type of animated linear cut-up.¹¹ Following this procedure clinically orients players, and allows them to develop a sense of the poem’s performance without the realm of competition. Playing conservatively, folding from seemingly hopeless hands before losing too many chips and watching other players vie for the victory, prolongs the experience of a game. *Stud Poetry*, approached observantly, may engross players, and provide many hours of peculiar stimulation. In effect, players sit down at a virtual table, with virtual others, and play a virtual card game with a roving set of rules and values.

The possibility that *Stud Poetry* may not be taken seriously by either gamers or poets warrants further consideration. Serious gamers take pride in manipulating elements and understanding a game’s mechanics in

order to control its outcome; random elements of *Stud Poetry* thus ensure that winning feels hollow. Game players are accustomed to having a sense control, which they use to their advantage and achieve victory. A lack of finite determinations as to what words have higher values than others (i.e., hierarchy of the word values that replace card numbers) will certainly be a source of frustration, as it creates a scenario where many losing hands ensue. On the other hand, in a literary sense, assigning values to the words presents difficulty because – especially in poetry – their importance depends on where, and in what context, the author places them. If the values of words change, randomness and not knowing the strength of a hand introduces new dimensions of luck, which could be regarded as fun (particularly for non-poker players), but this is not what most gamers seek. Most gamers see a point in having (and following) standards and rules, which can be memorized and used strategically – elements all but absent in *Stud Poetry*. In that sense, lack of confidence in knowing values for each word may create the biggest breach of conviction or respect from the gaming community. In ordinary games, identifying connections between words is not required, and since words function as currency here, uncertainty dominates and may provoke players to eschew the game and move on to something more familiar.

That card values have been replaced by poetic words makes the game a worthwhile example of literary possibility. During each round, players receive a miniature poem open to interpretation. Minimalist in scope, Niemi shows how much can be done with a small vocabulary when combined with skillful programming and design. At the end, all remaining players’ cards are visible and those cards can be used to construct an overall poem based on the sequence of the particular game that was played. Specific orders in which cards are dynamically added or removed – a direct function of game play – become *Stud Poetry*’s artistry. *Stud Poetry*, however, gives users little opportunity to interact directly with the words presented; it lacks in its ability to enable manipulation of the literary material. As foe, the programming involved does not anticipate moves made by players but rather randomly generates play, and then tabulates its results.

¹¹ An animated documentary of a sample hand is also provided, as a “demo” linked to the Introduction.

Niemi's idea to combine poetry and a casino game allows players (including students acquainted with computer games but unfamiliar with literature) to have fun while simultaneously learning about a different type of poetry. His efforts may disgruntle, or amuse, yet also teach something. Beyond demonstrating that winning sometimes involves chance, the player's purpose becomes not to win, but to understand the language behind discovering how to win. *Stud Poetry* leads engaged players to look more deeply into the meanings of (and potential for) words in the deck, an act more momentous than having a winning hand. Winning a game of *Stud Poetry* involves totally random principles. In contrast to a real game of cards, no logic or way to develop strategies exists. To non-gamers, this poses no problem – after all, plenty of ordinary virtual poker games are available; having a non-competitive, odd, creatively based alternative to them is welcome. Words in *Stud Poetry* come together in ways ordinary language does not, and thus, theoretically express emotion and/or feeling and/or experience or cognitive processes a player might never think of, or know, until the words are dealt. Lack of convention and abstraction lead to altered perception – players can never know what to expect from the process, or what results will unravel. Absent from the game is predictability; an overall interpretation cannot occur until the presentation of words concludes. This absence of certainty, elements of the fleeting encounter, and ephemeral negotiations with language combine to make *Stud Poetry* an interesting, if limited, literary experience. Having multiple decks of cards, each containing different themes, would bring Niemi's project to a new level. As a singular prospect, *Stud Poetry* transports a player's imagination or sensibility in a particular direction. Having more decks, customized to offer a range of concerns, or made to be customizable by the player (as is Nelson's *Poetry Cube*, and other works enabling users to provide vocabularies), could inspire further play. Limitations to its present form may disincline players, even those who enjoy the work, from returning to it often.

As does Andrews in *Arteroids*, Niemi bases *Stud Poetry* on a known game. A poem modeled after, or based on, a card game represents a new approach, although completely randomized, Dadaist approaches

to digital composition are historically commonplace – here given a novel twist by associating the literary endeavor with an already popular recreational activity. Niemi presents a lofty context for this project, writing, "*Stud Poetry* is a game of courage and faith, and a bit of luck, too. To become a great master... you need to believe in the power of words, their magic capability to move mountains, minds, and souls" (Stud). *Stud Poetry* derives power through the interplay between its literary aspects and its nature as a game, although poets accustomed to traditional verse will not detect any type of logical poem from the words given and will reject the game-as-poem on aesthetic grounds. Niemi practices a liberal (not literal) interpretation of poetry: arranging words (some containing pathos) together in a manner that, while poetic in its own way, ignores basic devices like rhythm or meter. Poets willing to accept experimental forms but who do not play cards may feel insecure because they do not possess the required skills to win; unless she or he understands the random nature of the device, lack of familiarity with the real game could affect a player's ability to interact properly with this digital poem. Nonetheless, through *Stud Poetry*, players indulge in a potentially endless poetic game of cards. After getting the feel of this game, or any, one can engage in much amusement involving exploration and interpretation of language. In one game I had a showdown with Valéry, with our randomly imposed words as currency. I somehow won, but then proceeded to lose the next game almost immediately. Experiences with *Stud Poetry*, while restricted, are curious, absorbing, and somewhat mysterious given their made-by-chance orientation. A type of cumulative, shifting poetry can be written using the small vocabulary of the deck as a starting point.¹² Niemi gives players language to work with, and a framework with which to build her or his own speculations.

¹² Building a story using words, phrases, or fragments found in *Stud Poetry* is another potential use for the output.

ROBERT KIELY

TEXT II

I left the pop-up mosque and went to the occupied Old Street Magistrates court. Marcel Duchamp's nude descended the staircase, got into Tracy Emin's bed and pissed it. In the courtroom all was called to order. They, it was contended, killed César Vallejo. So far no sufficient motivation had been found: they had never heard of Vallejo, they were at home watching TV at the time in question, they had not even heard of his poetry. The prosecution, on this point, contended that not knowing of Vallejo's poetry was virtually synonymous, poetically speaking, with murdering the poor bastard. The judge was willing to accept this, poetically speaking, but factually speaking, deemed it inadmissible since they were concerned with the concrete physical murder where Vallejo was injured to such an extent that his injuries caused his bodily functions to cease, resulting eventually at some later stage in a termination of all bodily functions, cell growth, consciousness, etc. etc. The prosecution attempted to adjourn the case but was forced to present his evidence. The witnesses were deemed inadmissible. No-one was charged. Everyone went home. It was a farce.

Occupy Wall Street is bulldozed. How can we say writing matters? With our mouths, form it in the mouth. The OWS library being dumped in a skip is a sign surely. What its a sign of is unclear to me at this juncture. Evictions from unmeaning. Gestures unreadable. Someone ordered that skip, someone filed that invoice. Mouths, organs of protest and lies. Being empty enables one to occupy a lot, Wall Street and St. Paul's, but not articulate, like the Tottenham riots. These analogies may not be apt. But the skips are delivered. This is the point. Their base, their absolute bottom, is the profound. Pope is put in first, then the rest.

ROBERT KIELY
CHESS SONNETS
OR, SOME REALLY BAD GAMES

8

1. f4 e5
2. fxe5 d6
3. exd6 Bxd6
4. Nf3 Nf6
5. d4 Nc6
6. Bg5 h6
7. Bh4 g5
8. Bf2 Ne4
9. e3 g4
10. Bh4 gxf3
11. Bxd8 f2+
12. Ke2 Bg4+
13. Kd3 Nb4+
14. Kxe4 f5# 0-1

EMILY CRITCHLEY
AFTERWARDS

Go out into the world – & there it is – do what you can.
At night the state shakes up like academe – the line Platonic,
not divided or divine. At night look at the women
all exciting – little darlings, they do adorn your dinner
table so. Go out into the world – & there it is:

tomorrow facing outwards. Choose your eating place with care,
drag it down the hill – the little darlings will trail after –
make them feel special – at night – the sea changes. Seeds
are split amongst numbers, sex is traded for hurt parchments.
At night there it is: the next day strangled by sunlight.

The big nothing, the twenty somethings before or after –
in day the public confession caught by everyone
against salt against spilling your guts out spiritually
– a too easy vindication. At night amongst other
things. The limit or same. But at night it is there.

The cutlery, the condiments we pass around specially.
Whetting our sharp tongues against stone. The boredom. Desist.
But there it always is, preceding you in the door frame,
issuing like a legal flame behind. At night the fire's
more enticing. The winelight spitting us out & there it is:

elements of higher things, ambitious little darlings
– too easily placed, coming through for us. But yesterday
the closed field of music was arch-failure. At night your replies
to mine swift like music against the palms of my hands,
against the metaphors of body – & we are too often

used & we know this – little darlings. & after us
comes night. Repair your plan. Take what is not yours
more easily. Do it failingly, do it like you
mean to in the night. Not sex used as a simile
for this or any other longing, but full of self-regard

– as theirs always is – in spite & even what is due
to night. Empty the glass before you – leave what's left
behind. Do it lightly & with care, not love
– in case of an emotional following. A crowd
of lovers boring you out. At night you have your memories

around to choose from, forget about the rest – literally fuck it.
The law can't get you, not in the night, though by the day
you'll languish for a sense of feeling, no, thought. Go out
into the world – leave everything else.

CAROL WATTS
COQUILLES

1

sometime
it c rosses
a re
servation

brought
to a
halt

that's
how
it is

blind
siding

2

a a rives
from the
corner
of your
eye

neat
disturbance

how lin
gmouths

3

that day
clear
alike a bell

she was
at the
w heel

wh en
some thing
changed

4

white
b
ark

b//irches

sound
of falling

masonry

5

nothing
between
her

& the
air

except it s
glass s

6

flecks
of

insect
hear

ts

7

how it arrives
in

retrospec

tdrive time

8

pickd up

the phone

wh o
en

d

SJ FOWLER

INCIDENTS OF ANTI-SEMITISM

#123

water is the stage for Russian ballet
tuberculosis cured
finale! leper ready
gavrilova is exonerated
sweet Ingush Issa Kostoev
in your heart the forgiveness of light
of water
& yet the Ossetes refuse freedom
to go free
& hate you for reminding them of their crimes
sew the down, Issa, some are ready civil
at breakfast,
others post-mortem

#124

as you'd say I'd say
they have a fair right to be gloomy
clicking their on mouth
waking up for disfiguring spots
the jewish teenage experience
a guilty body, a perfume of moth
thick towering of puddle
that was a hot weather
patch for our people
perfume of rotten coughs rather
yet you a food, a bread lattice
yap in the air undulates
gross lustrous smelt the nostalgia
selectique of the Poland

#125

the pulse, a caution of future space!
invasion, the other free seats
on the bus the neurosis of the soul
running as a hobby, the medicine
idylls beneath lovers, dipping middle
war into earned skirt shade of a room
the time he's changed Sophie

to Los, to dejection of protection
& G.C. can stand for so many things
the sick white death of a virgin
is no use to me.

#126

the truth boring
that the streets were all warned after Saints
we all had each other
swapped, exchanged between spouses
enraged
no wonder we needed our own
separate ... things
the power is Stanford hill
for crime on the teetered extension
forlorn the fringe, share!
everything of dispute pooled
children for a note
photographs of the disrepute
the core temperature of wealth here
hunted menlike nuns
nodding to the god share save

#127

we do not know
how
the night works
the lovers door
the electricity holds you blue
moon's pull
so massive as to make sea glue
what it is we stand under
the door playing teams like cards
early arrivals at the fight
to resolve all differences
on this very ones night!
wireless piano, a telepathy
night is confessor to rivers

ULLI FREER

from **RECOVERY**

r.

economies bare & grey drawn hairs
commute to discover this immune of thought
feel face & custody in mornings
giveaway news
fox impregnating postures sensational
one liners trailing on past notions binding
& wounds contrast in proportion to body
when optimists voiceover falsity of identity
the distinction prevalent a desolate equivalent
live on stage when moving clouds were spoken underlined
from map of diversions where each relationship
moves for separation
argued way of change defined backcombing
when becoming beside closing doors from accumulated flaws
it was my substitute body received on a users embodiment
experiential to double over in cramps
otherness being surreptitiously confiscated
in mid-conversations other than by own means
be blurred from indistinguishable
demarcated from you all differences
to outlying districts & their boundaries
another individually produced inevitably
a mental intimacy remembers dualism
that the pits stood on the highest points of
terrain & grave goods taken to mean
contacts outside concentrated over surfaces tilled

r.

on major frequency splice to weave
pulse colours for these long
do hardly transverse eyes
toxic capital tremors eruption beams
containing refraction in a rapid
livelihood deduction
ice land character hard cash were
parallel subject to no limitation disclosed in
circulars easy prey being light in all crystal
special delivery since reflection
efficient since arrested and jailed
in talk less words beyond foundation
shifted brands stocks past vaults closed books
designed to stimulate intelligent finance on price
door upon the face without
approach as in be interrogated
down lift to work the wall dislocations
concrete to touch space outline
habitual like a breath to police
sleep time
on hand an answer disassembled
why they serve boldly functioning
border cases for identity
mask on mask entered anonymously
as portraits and self portraits
disappearances auspices of exchange
so to speak along the line embedded
traced out disturbances
in grip motion cut out high percentages
current grid kiss from venus sparks consume

a gain be over the audience home chain
skin job plough hands make shadow
across monitors in a textual practice
solution flat waxed
frozen timing slips off base
tensions of rigid backing
with its edge support
regulates blind them details
blues remain working lights
filters minimum spill
& your interference write hand
upon my thigh exchange racing pulses
from written sources breath described
through use of herbs
mind rocks between
fertile pockets
around a moving hearth
to reach the words in
shadows
watch expressions of stone
through occupation nails
and also beads scattered
expressing amber shows lights
birch bark fragments wedged
exploitation original investment
logo marketing currency
cover lies layer managements
surface a rubbish heap further down the slope
on the slag exposing weathered silhouettes
at the point of purchase aura

WILLIAM ROWE

DEATH SPEAKS ORDINARY LANGUAGE

death speaks ordinary language
civilisation stuff
what will be the fulcrum of my eyes?

how discover
political action
with the humans on our backs

I am accompanied by someone else
it needs to be
how to kill
written on the air

to grasp an opportunity in the current abyss instead of
submitting to the wreck of our common life by clinging to
the old meanings / what's to be done with

an apparition which has a left hand

a glue so simple it sticks memory to good intention with
ideas of repair

it's the false beloved

a warm and mild apparition

like too many obsolete compounds

like opinion

there is an absolute moment of composition which grasps
the void of this situation

revolution

revolution anyway

*'Is there anywhere a force strong enough to put an end to
this state of affairs?'* [Hugo Ball]

the walls of the cell
time hardens
demands a vast theatre
the person breaks out of life
Guy Fawkes mask
fierce moments
innumerable rays
the situation
not coded or decoded / or opaque or transparent
the money signifier / is one of semblance
then find a better one
I am heading towards certain territories
hooliganed
it's December always
at the repair place

the shopping mall is burning
end of my silence
my slot perspectives
scopic error
cream suck
non-conjunction and non-disjunction
infants used as signs
here are real repairs
sends the runner
something good appear
imagine the reference from words
when to shift gaze
integrated discrete programme
time-shifted vocabulary of learning

there is nothing to do
there is only the effort to wake up
and the possibility you won't
it has already happened several times
before the person can think or know
who he is
the cloned
eyes go to sleep
is voices and is not
new forms of barbarism
or general emancipation

The background of the top half of the image is a grid of graph paper with various mathematical formulas written in black ink. The formulas include: λx , $F = \frac{d^2}{dx^2} = m \cdot n$, $\int_a^b F(u, u', x) dx = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} Z_n$, $Ax = \lambda x$, Z_n , $Gm_1 m_2$, and $\int_a^b F(u, u')$.

CATHERINE HALES

HANDMADE EQUATIONS

ON THE POETRY OF PETER DENT

For some reason, Peter Dent has never managed to attract any major attention. Perhaps that is due to the fact that he has never published a “major” collection, perhaps it is due to his natural reticence. Or quite simply, perhaps because many people, even those who like his work, are somewhat baffled by it. His poetry has been called “terse,” “understated” and “oblique,” and it is all of these; coming to grips with a Dent poem is also acknowledged to be hard work, but worth the effort. He is something of a “poets’ poet”; a lot of poets know his name, and he is held in great regard by quite a few, though few have, in fact, actually made that effort and read his work. True, there were special features devoted to him a few years ago in *PQR* and *Litter*, the latter a rare honour accorded to few poets (including, recently, Tom Lowenstein and Robert Sheppard), a mark of the high esteem editor Alan Baker holds him in; and Mark Goodwin, for one, has name-checked him as an influence, but such events are few and far between. This is compounded by the fact that he lives in the comparative backwater of Budleigh Salterton on

the Devon coast, which, though not far from Exeter, might as well be in a different universe thanks to the local bus service or lack thereof. He is not keen on promoting himself or making public appearances to read his poetry, he is almost alone among ‘avant’ poets in having no academic profile and has never become involved in poetry wars or avant vs. mainstream mudslinging, and his online presence, almost a must for poets nowadays, is low-level. Indeed, he must be one of the few poets left without a computer, e-mail, and all the rest of the contemporary paraphernalia. Not on Facebook. Although he does have a Wikipedia page, with a full bibliography – but has no idea who created it. But even so, all this means that his work is not as well-known as I, for one, think it should be. After all, he has been probably the major influence on my own poetry.

Originally from Forest Gate in London, he worked as a primary school teacher in Surrey until he moved to Devon in the late 70s. Writing in the 2007 *Litter* feature, Yann Loveluck saw Dent’s move from Surrey to

Devon as the major watershed in the development of his writing. I would say that the big watershed came later, with his move towards a 'post-modern' mode of writing first signalled in the pamphlet *Settlement* in 2001, to my mind, however, a more consistent development from the earlier Pound and Bunting-influenced imagist and 'oriental' mode of his earlier work than is often recognised, assimilating the lessons learned there – and moving on.

His output is prolific, and his poems have appeared regularly over the years in magazines like *Shearsman, Poetry Salzburg Review, Tears in the Fence* and *HQ*, or online in *Litter, Shadow Train, Great Works* and *Stride*. But publication of full collections has been sparse. While his first pamphlet appeared in 1972, followed since then by a constant stream of pamphlets of poetry and versions from the Chinese and other languages, including *Surfaces* (1975), published by his own Interim Press, his first collection, however, did not come until 1980 (*Distant Lamps*, from Hippopotamus Press), and the next was not until *Unrestricted Moment* (Stride 2002). This was then followed by *Adversaria* (Stride 2004) and *Handmade Equations* (Shearsman 2005). There has been a recent clutch of small pamphlets, more or less self-published. But by his own admission he has five or more bulging Lever Arch Files ("beautifully black & fat") waiting in the wings.

What I want to explore here is why Dent's poetry is so necessary and why it is so important for me. A short answer would be his utter integrity and uncompromisingly rigorous attitude to language, and his willingness to take risks – indeed he has been a constant guide to what is possible (and what I can get away with!), even at the cost of being overlooked.

Dent's earlier poems, in his 'imagist,' Bunting-esque mode and close association with Peter Dale and William Oxley's *Agenda* magazine, such as those in *Surfaces* (Interim Press 1975), have a sharp-contoured, crystalline clarity that is at the same time brimming with liquid light:

Off windows the flash of winter sun;
and off this heavy disc of ice

the children bring, crystalline
and shaggy on its underside.

...

Long shadows
craze a newly-frosted lawn.

From the house
I hear the sharp cries splash

and hang in still blue air.

[Shadows]

There is a strong insistence on the primacy of the image, tempered with abstract reflection, the emotional involvement of the poet in the action, mediating it. Clearly the product of his engagement with Chinese poetry, sometimes the effect is quite Zen:

Issue
of the mind

...

It is a line drawn
with

or without care
and is unblemished

*

To its nothing
is added

the weightlessness
of moments

[Routeing, from *Line*, 1995]

In a letter at the time, he wrote of *Line*, "I set myself the challenge of speaking in the simplest manner whilst leaving a spiritual/philosophical stream running deep beneath. Don't really know whether I've succeeded!" To this reader's mind, the jury is out as far as *Line* is concerned, but Dent continued working along those lines (!), and this preoccupation with an almost Buddhist meditative mode culminated in *At The Blue Table* (Blackthorn Press 1999), with a series of short

poems, such as, quoted here in entirety, 'Breadth':

To the possible
Be at home Home's lights
Its cobwebs nothings
Linking here to there

and 'Home':

Peppermint and clove
Just words another door
Same house and larder though
And can the child be far?

perfectly-pitched pieces in which image, meditation and emotion co-exist in dynamic balance.

At the same time, however, in *Settlement* (Leaf Press 2001) he was moving towards the more dissociative strategies of his later work, while *Simple Geometry* (Oasis Books 1999) is a first major experiment in prose-poetry, something that started in Northwoods (Stride 1992) and has become increasingly predominant in Dent's work. Even in "prose," his language is compressed as he engages in the exploration of a possibly more expansive, though still terse and concise, way to approach meaning:

Inthisroomhighinthehousearemapsandguides Bydayluse
them as I must 'per instructions' (Though
the names are many and all too
often yours Since you have made them
so) Seldom without cross-referencing
Annotated or scribbled through Whose
directions when I find them are
always more than I can take Making
do instead with what is simple Of the
moment Guesswork more or less

[Transition]

Regarding geometry and prose-poetry (he would very much like to be allowed to use the word 'proem' but the OED won't have it. But if he and Geraldine Monk and perhaps others too persist in insisting, the usage could catch on, transcending, as it does, the received

notions of prose, poem and prose-poem), in 2009 Dent wrote,

For me a "poem" is circular, if we're talking geometry. It begins, it circles (= deviates) and returns to (a rediscovered and re-energised) base. Meaning inherent in the thing, it's we who do the circling. And in that process become one. BUT, I don't think "poem" fits what I'm doing now or, in fact, what I've been doing for the past 10 years or so. They are not, I suspect, to be umbrella'd by the word "prose-poem," although I do have to use that word for convenience. Their business, if they have any, is to meet the moment and do whatever it requires. So the geometry's various. I'm capable of (or, guilty of), as I say, deviation, recommencing, cancelling or producing multiple "stories" under one heading. And it's liable to switch (at the flick of a... switch !) from prose to verse rhythm and back. All the tools of prose and poetry, I regard as there for the taking. Or asking.

Some of the poems in *At The Blue Table* and *Simple Geometry* also feature the earliest appearance I can find of Dent's use of the gap between phrases (as in 'Breadth' and 'Transition' above). He is not alone in using it, of course, and it may well be that it is something that migrated into his work from his involvement with the work of George Oppen and Lorine Niedecker, both of whom he was integral in introducing to English readers with volumes of essays he edited in his Interim Press in the 80s. The many and varied ways gaps are used by various poets may well be worth a separate study. My use of it is something I appropriated from Peter Dent. In fact, it is probably my first conscious theft.

Dent was well aware at the beginning of the new millennium that his new, 'post-modern' style was likely to irritate those familiar with his earlier work. ("I've moved from Imagist/Oriental to Objectivist (some say) and on to Post-Modernist – but I think they're all in there somewhere (if you look hard)," he wrote in a letter in 2001.) Writing in a letter in 2002 about *Unrestricted Moment* he said, "Inevitably, its post-modern approach has left a lot of old pals gasping – not that there's much I can do about it: the writing of poetry leads the writer by the nose and, anyway, I'm well 'writ-out' of my

former self/poetry!" But *Unrestricted Moment* was not the first unveiling of this new, re-invented poetic self. His 2001 Leafe Press pamphlet *Settlement* opens with a poem, 'Way Back,' which, indeed, pointed back to his earlier mode and was unlikely to upset his old readers:

As I and if we're lucky you remember it?
That first far sighting of the ocean

And its colours Clear as we had thought
The waves were clear So meet again

[Way Back]

But then the next poem, 'Handing Over,' almost programmatically sets out the new frameworks of reference:

Room for thinking Rain Ideas exciting others
Into consciousness The live-long night of it
Acts out the safe transition of the soul
Necessity and need And someone sighing
As the day sighs making up a world

[Handing Over]

Things exist in language, through language, but cannot be contained by language:

For what is named
Extends to one side and the other of its name

[Handing Over]

This new constellation gathers in the lessons learned and experiences garnered in *At the Blue Table* in a series of short poems and fragments:

Pollination Light dusting
The hours

Across field and copse
A boy at his window

Under constellations Flowering
argument To priestly

Moderation Detail Midnight
Out of a distant bell

But it is the penultimate poem that, in retrospect, can be seen to be showing the shape of things to come – poetry as meditation on language and on the external, natural world experienced as the reality of the mind:

To stardom and elision song that
No-one knows persuasive detail of
A steady climb unnavigating words
Now *in it for the long haul* cloud-lit
Margins crossed life levelling out

[Coming In]

In a letter in 2008, Dent wrote, "I found that writing in response to just about anything that prodded me, was a big turning point – realising that what seemed for all the world like really unlikely material could pack a huge surprise ... even open up new chapters in my writing." And increasingly, what has prodded him has started in the external, natural world. One imagines him taking long walks along the beach at Budleigh Salterton or in the adjacent countryside, as far as his state of health permits. In this sense, perhaps, Dent is a "nature poet," though not in the poetry-of-place sense that John Clare was a nature poet, or in the way that Ted Hughes or William Wordsworth, etc. in their various ways were nature poets. (What Dent does, however, along with most, if not all, other poets of the current avant garde, share with Wordsworth, especially in his radical younger incarnation, is a concern with disrupting and challenging the complacent – and conservative – expectations of the conventional poetry audience.) The natural world is always part of the empirical. external world with which Dent engages in and through language as a poet, while remaining detached from it. The engagement is more aesthetic than visceral. It provides the foundation for what is, I think, the quintessential Dent collection, the magnificently achieved *Unrestricted Moment* (Stride 2002).

The collection is divided into three sections. As the 'mission statement' or introductory blurb says, the "book's first section deals with the vagaries of the creation process as the artist encounters them; the second acknowledges the nagging stimulus of nature: and the third navigates 'the ordinary,' its urgencies and ennui. Overlapping all is a detailed realisation of the slipperiness of *perception* and how chancy the words that conjure it."

In that first section, entitled 'Adjacent Drumming,' the poem 'Treated Text' deals with "Habits of learning 'a re-imagined landscape,'" with "this / Slow turning of a tendril through a day"; while 'Equivalence' begins with a "Daybook fantasy" possibly consisting in an attempt

to pressure meaning

Of my own whose colours live to vary
Simply into that which is all right

Itself before I bring myself to bear

since

worlds

can't have too many ways to read

A day when skies are dangerous

leading him to find "how life proves / Heady" and ask "as weightless as the stuff of words?" This is the enaction of the poet searching for equivalences and connections to give his words weight, as in 'Connectives':

let

Gravity be nothing Summer
Long but just a word connecting
Light to what we need to fix

In 'The Hold', evoking a ship, possibly Rimbaud's 'bateau ivre,'

The transient makes it in again for refit Winter

Starlit pages and thinking ever to co-exist

Where it's hand-to-hand or mouth and who
would bet on it

moving to "Quick commerce and easy violence" and "a love to // Write home about," the point being "Engaging measure words in reconstructed time." It is all about an urgent concern with how to be in the world, as a poet and as a human being.

The second section, 'Natural Order,' deals with ways in which the natural world – outside us and yet we are a part of it – underpins and impinges on us. Dent is not afraid to take on the old poetic trope of birdsong, calling a poem 'Song Thrush,' although the poem is hardly "about" the bird singing, as much as "The existence of the semblance of / Another midnight past," asking "which tier / Of the mind will hold it when the thing / In question's skewed," and in the end coming to the tentative conclusion "can't guess / Which way it goes or what the song / Returns me to I hear the mind." We as humans are deeply part of and invested in the natural order, the "song," and yet the mind makes us separate from it – possibly to our loss.

But of course it is not just the natural world that governs our existence; it is made up of the ordinary dross that surrounds us, too, the machinery, commerce and regulations of human civilisation, and this is what Dent investigates in the third section, 'Necessary Burning.' At various points throughout this section and especially in the final poem, 'Primary Education,' the figure of the child is introduced:

And children ready to ignore the surfaces
Of things to let their rapid easy lines
Do all the work investigate and access
Anything whatever
...
No special interest in the 'colours' to come
Just self-forgetting lines

with the inference, perhaps, that the artist needs to experience the external world as a child does, so that ordinary, humdrum things become extraordinary, new,

amazing.

This concern with the ordinary, the empirical, also informs *Adversaria* (Stride 2004), a sequence of forty poems written over a period of three months, a kind of 'journal.' The poems, each comprising six couplets, proceed by leaps and unexpected associations from a simple thought, subject only to the reach of the mind, with a "key" to reading them provided in the book's epigraph from the *Diffidentiae*: "So much for a Day, stripped of its disobedience to time and the place it pretends to inhabit, [...] naturally intact, where thought picks up the pieces, look." The first poem, 'Perception,' sets things in motion:

New seasonal light to freshen up my
First is in improbable clues come last

Perpetuum immobile like the man says
Softly Hamlet clamouring on the roof

At moonlight and a dozen lonely things
Which state's unenvious of looks on

With a Cheshire smile says who goes
Easy there? It's the pendulum knows

A bad day night's ecstatic at its loss
As the words swing true to form say

When in a westerly that's awol with
A vengeance if happy to stop and look

As a reader, one is given the pieces picked up by thought between abstraction and scraps of narrative and challenged to put together one's own version of events. It is a forensic process, looking at the trace evidence left behind at the scene. But nature is never very far away; the creative process becomes a trial of strength, a birth process:

Well who can say how a work goes in
Its wildest definition of trust how easily

It's outperformed by nature delivered
Safely of a green word

['Collaboration']

Dent even finds room to answer (self-?) criticism of the apparently tectonic shift his work had undergone:

Roll over show them the threat's less
You than ever a woodland skimped

Turned avant garde is like something I
Last heard thinking trying to breathe

['Daylong']

It is possibly no accident that 'diffidentiae,' the title quoted for the epigraph of *Adversaria*, means "distrusts"; nothing should be taken on trust on the basis of appearances, not even, as any good postmodernist knows, the "I" of the beholder/narrator. In a letter in 2002 Dent wrote, "I'm told (by some) I shouldn't 'mean', I shouldn't 'communicate,' I shouldn't use 'I' and a dozen other things... but I only want to write what I think needs to be said; what needs to be said is open to endless qualification; I need to be honest with my (confused & self-critical) thought processes; and I don't need to patronise any possible reader who, if he is going to 'get' something from it, has to do so through his own mental mechanisms. My 'I' is always various (I am various, as are we all) and ambiguous and never to be fully trusted. Always consider what an 'I' is and you'll probably be unharmed by the experience!" Always bear in mind who is speaking and what is at stake.

In *Handmade Equations* (Shearsman 2005), Dent brought together "over eighty poems written since the beginning of the new century," poems which exemplify and highlight the concerns, methods and techniques explored so far, in a monument to where he was at, to his achievement mid-decade. A great many of these poems are prose poems, prose set out in stanzas like a poem and with the same associative leaps and gaps and syntactical dislocations as in the more "poem-like" pieces. His writing since then has continued to

be prolific in exploring these paths, especially prose poetry, with the four pamphlets *with number plates disguised* (high tide editions), *Dasein and Scarecrow* (Offline Press), *Ghost Prophecy* (Kaleidikon) and *Price Fixing* (Kaleidikon) all appearing in 2011.

The poem 'What I Like' in *with number plates disguised* offers a good case study for examining Dent's poetics. He is constantly setting and then undermining his own frames of reference, with narratives hinted at and then left hanging, leaving the reader to make up her own mind, continue the story. In 'What I Like,' for instance, the title carries over into the first stanza: "About small improvements"; and these small improvements "barely register on the canvas of a colourful life" – introducing, perhaps, the idea of life imitating art, as well making reference to the visual relationship between poetry and painting. Life is murky, too: "mired in controversy or blessed with a sinecure it's all the same to the journos" – and here we are at the bottom of the pile with hints of phone hacking scandals and base instincts. It's just a short hop from there to what could be taken as an oblique dig at the loony US right: "quirks in our psyche don't spoil a tea party." And then we're right in the thick of the lived experience of a poet with a bus-pass (even if there's no service to use it on!): "fear and the global recession are strangers now to the empty pocket" – and a society that would infantilise us all: "an umbilical cord is sometimes happy to stretch a point." Here the stanza breaks with a shift in the frame of reference: as though one could imagine the poet walking along a lane deep in meditation and suddenly brought up short by awareness of his physical surroundings re-impinging: "Trees right up to the skyline cows herded to one corner of a well-cropped field." The landscape is man-made, artifice. The poet, peddler of artifice in language, interrupts the scene, observes himself observing; the mind observing itself at work and following where the reflection takes it, with ambiguity: "it's such a long sentence looking out all those vocations – considered and rejected – like perfect clouds while tomorrows in their late and unavoidable wisdom lag behind" The idea of lagging (and the almost-juxtaposition of 'long sentence' and 'lags') leads to notions of work (another

poem in the collection has a title that nicely sums up the (pensioner) poet's vocation: 'Malingering by right'): "I can't be motivating slackers any more than I can indulge in a fantasy about living words"; at which point the poem – and the poet's attention/consciousness – returns to the scene at hand, which now seems to be almost a desperate attempt to cling to some kind of rural idyll as being all we have, ultimately – or is it simply an acknowledgement that what is there is merely being itself (with echoes of a certain red wheelbarrow?): "there's only that bright red tractor struggling uphill unpacking shadow" – with a hefty emotional punch packed into that "unpacking shadow." The reader is being invited in to witness the process of the poet's mind at work achieving discovery in the process of writing, but also to sift the bits and pieces and make sense of them for herself. The technique highlights artifice: how we construct the 'reality' around us, including the natural world, in, with and through language. This is the strategy of *Unrestricted Moment* being constantly refined and redefined in Dent's work; language remains slippery and each poem is a new attempt to pin it down, fix it to external signifiers. The same strategy can be seen in very many poems, for instance 'Counter factors' in the seven-couplet sonnet sequence making up *Dasein and Scarecrow*: "The rhetoric is nothing to speak of. / Not that you can see them, but there are storms // On the face of the sun. A case of 'the harder / you look...' at pretty white cottages over water [...] things experimental / still having a say [...] they're just as much for meaning the / rain on stone, as light, when a day clouds over."

Like *with number plates disguised*, *Ghost Prophecy* comprises around twenty prose poems, each in two parts with the second providing some kind of counterweight to the first. They comprise sentences and phrases seemingly randomly "found" and set down separated by a leap – the effect is like turning a radio tuning dial picking up disconnected strips of language in a 'ghostly' symphony of voices, white noise from which to make sense, allow sense to coalesce ("I can spend as much time as I like with my hunches and still arrive at the wrong station answers that aren't exactly wrong

but clearly out of line with contemporary wisdom will on a good day relocate to another dimension whatever measure you use for the art of living you need to ask yourself what kind of internal dialogue best benefits from patrolling the border..." ['Freakish Climes']) It is a technique that is deeply democratic – here is no top-down 'authority' leading the reader's response, demanding that the reader feel a certain emotion. The response is up to the reader – and that is what makes this kind of poetry "difficult" for readers who prefer to be spoon-fed and are not prepared to make the effort to meet the poem half way and complete it by joining up the dots from their own repertoire of experience. In that sense, Dent's poetry is political, in the same way that a great deal of 'avant' poetry is political, in that it insists on the primacy of the – subversive – individual response of/ through/in language in reaction to and as resistance against the comfy, complacent, conventional and well-worn narratives, by their very nature deeply conservative, handed down by the kinds of issue-evading poetry, with its feel-good "epiphanies," that, as Robert Sheppard puts it, "wins poetry competitions" and by which we are subtly and not-so-subtly controlled through media, advertising and corporate politics.

What we find time and time again in Dent's poetry is an awareness of the tentative, contingent nature of what we call reality, what Peter Riley has called "the cohabitation of rest and energy... of fragmentation and continuity. Little floating strips of language, not connected, or not definitively connected, to each other." Enacting the need to impose some kind of order in order to find sense, Dent places these "floating strips of language" into strict stanzaic forms: couplets, triplets, quatrains, here and there a sonnet, and symmetrical forms with a single line stanza followed by maybe another single line then two or four couplets or triplets, followed by single line stanzas to balance the first. The effect is of stasis, a slowing-down of "reconstructed time" by "[e]ngaging measure" to allow the mind, the poet's and the reader's to catch the "transient" as it passes and create meaning from it. But that meaning is shifting and contingent, since "things settle // As they will as deep as maybe / Truth banked up as I am

so / Cold against established signs" ('Firmament'). At the same time, it is an insistence on form, not merely as convention, but as an aid, helping the reader's eye to engage with the material, especially in the prose poems.

One criticism that could be levelled at Dent is that there is little variation in his work, that quality control is neglected for quantity of production. True, a Collected would be unmanageably vast, and selecting poems for a Selected well-nigh Sisyphean... This, however, is to ignore the fact that he rarely, if ever, repeats himself. Oppen famously kept re-using bits of already-published poems in his constant quest for "clarity"; Dent's search is for the mother lode, the "big one", the ultimate poem. Failing better every time, perhaps. His concern is quite simply for writing, for expression, for "getting it out there", leaving the job of sifting through the material and collecting it into coherent books for posterity. "Too much work," he says. *Handmade Equations* is possibly the closest we'll get, and it is just the tip of the iceberg. At the same time, the search is not for answers; how can answers be found if we do not even know what the questions are. Writing is a deliberate strategy of dislocation and meditative reflection, the writer alone with things and trying to find the language to cope. Each poem is a new start, a new attempt to come to terms with the ability, or lack of it, of language to mediate the indeterminacy of empirical experience. In a recent letter he wrote, "I'm starting to believe there has to be a balance struck between Narrative (even if it's detached, loose or half-connected) and Abstraction in order for new poetry to progress. Tipping over into either extreme is the best way possible to avoid the issue – which is the complexity of the world, the impossibility of full knowing and safe/certain action. I think it will always be a tentative 'move towards'. We will never, like we did at school, turn to the back for the Answers. Those days is over! Writing needs to be in on the action, chipping away at the stubborn material, and with genuine humility."

CATHERINE HALES

DIRECTOR'S CUT

all our history a chance taken on the edge
of geology circling round an absence eros-
ions of the marginal residue of our upkeep

where did all this come from (& more to the point
how long can we keep it up?)

beneath these streets
old hunting trails motte & bailey banks & ditches a pal-
isade or two

(concealing the makeshift cafeteria
where pissed-off extras grumble over tepid coffee
waiting for their call)

frantic escapades in multi-story
narratives

ten thousand years are all that separate us from ice
& scavenging

a pleistocene mind fingering an i-phone now
& at the hour of

in a language that remembers the way it has come
but not how it got here

*as with the weaving
of the pyramid into simulacra*

the following events take place between
erasures mining transactional data sudden
random shifts altering the landscape completely

(as for the killers
some of them live here too

as part of the community)
but too slowly for the eye to register

můj skromný

nad nulu

z okének

hrozný zvuk

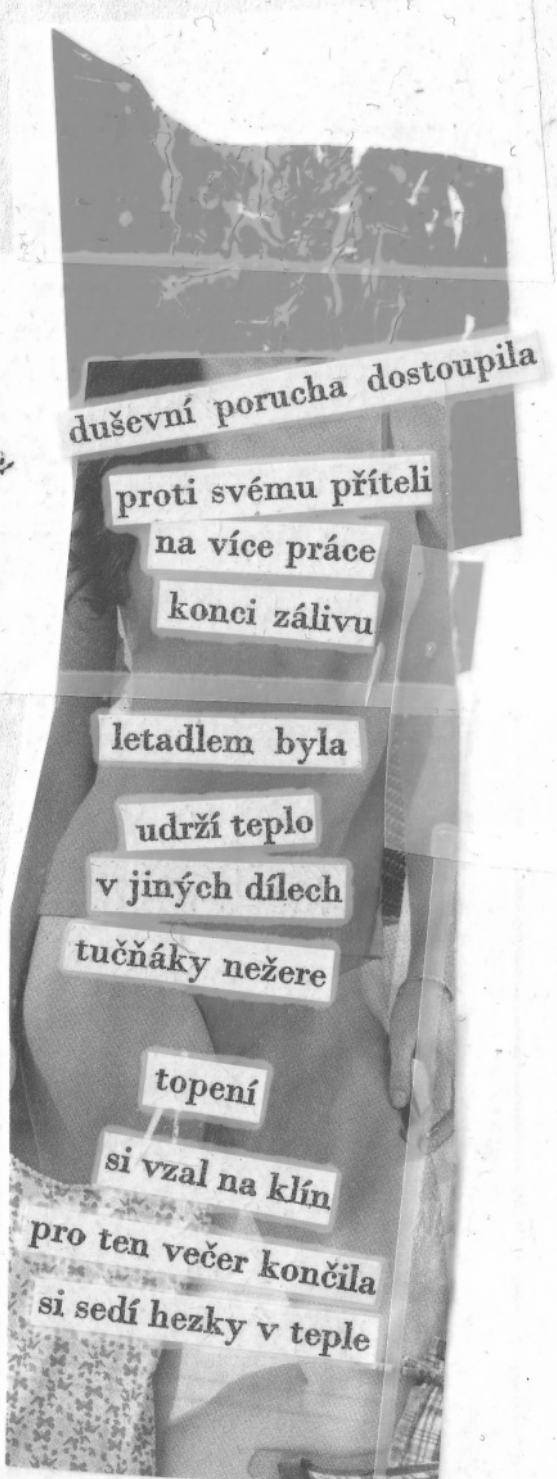
první

ten kastról

klikaté pruhy

ledvinové





duševní porucha dostupila

proti svému příteli

na více práce

konci zálivu

letadlem byla

udrží teplo

v jiných dílech

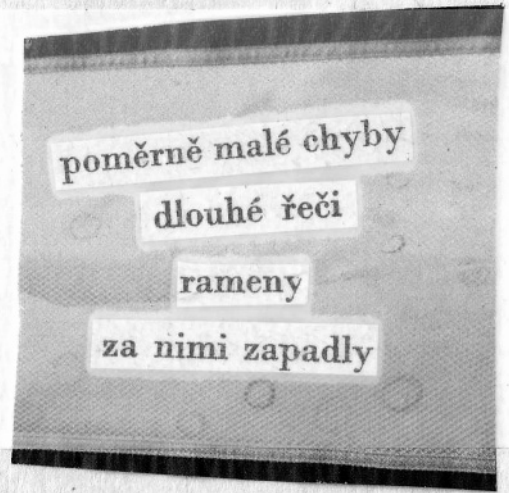
tučňáky nežere

topení

si vzal na klín

pro ten večer končila

si sedí hezky v teple




poměrně malé chyby

dlouhé řeči

rameny

za nimi zapadly



to všechno tady sbalili

ty muže v pokoji

to je tak jasný

to říci nahlas



jen přirazili

v poledne na moře

správným směrem

konec

ANDREI CODRESCU

4 POEMS

TRANSLATION

(for călin-andrei mihăilescu)

Exile is the most radical form of translation
writes Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu in "Happy New Fear"
an English-titled book in Romanian
that will never be translated into English
excepting the above line because Călin
writes in rhapsodic idiomatic punning lingo
in a Romanian resembling a wolf with seven teats
from which hang the other seven languages he is
Romulus and Remus-type pups ready to build cities
I mean essays about time-travel in the tunnel
between languages that I have traveled myself
a few times but didn't really frequent like Călin
who has a sleeping bag there and knows all the bums
some of whom are fashion models he writes odes to
many of them Czech who have read Hrabal and Kundera
and can sleep anywhere if the stories are funny
and so yes translation is just how one lives with oneself
from minute to minute from home to street from street
to office from office to the bar and to bed and in dreams
and each moment has its own language that puts it in the next
moment in another language made complicated by style
which is the design of alienation residing in orthography
or hesitant speech while translating oneself or others
thus to write on translation is to translate and to write
in language that cannot be translated is to be totally great
a state only Czech girls in sleeping bags can and do love

SECRETS

("keep old hat in secret closet" – ted berrigan, 20th century)

1. facebook

in the 20th century people used to have secrets

when people used to have secrets
they went to the grave with them
unless their secrets tormented them
then they took them to a priest
a psychoanalyst or a bartender

and if the police wanted to know your secrets
they tortured you until you spilled them

and then killed or blackmailed you

but now in the 21th century everyone is happy to share
in the 21st century people are only worried that their secrets will stay secret
people worry in the 21st century that they might not have any secrets
self-exposure stripped them
exposure was insufficient
the closets are empty
or even worse
everyone is spilling their secrets simultaneously
so nobody can be overheard discreetly

there are too few vices and too much competition
manufacturing secrets is big business now
bigger than the technologies for overhearing them
spies are passé
fiction writers are in

we are forgetting what language secrets speak
or how to present a secret in just the right key
and how to pitch it in the whisper or the voice
that will draw the kind of attention only a secret does

secrets become quickly boring
the bigger the media that reveals them the more boring
because everyone can tell what kind of secrets they are
just by the way they go shhh shhh

WISDOM

to be bilingual means to never properly learn to listen
you specialize in ejaculation
you don't learn to suck

I only need 4 or 5 memories
the smell of the woods
a hot past fuck to masturbate to
like humming along to an old tune on FM goldies
a warm and sudden affection
something that makes me indignant about injustice

if the past can help with those it's done its job
otherwise, onward!

only children are serious
everybody else is kidding

when did I discover that?

worst thing you can do: lie to children

ESSAY

Technology is the mechanization of ritual.
For ritual to have any power, new meaning must be added each time it is performed.
Technology contains only as much meaning as there is at any given time.
When there is sufficient accretion of meaning there is technological advance.

Take a simple ritual: shaving.
The technology is a shaver, soap, mirror. What the man thinks when he shaves is new.
If it is really new each time he shaves, at the end of each week he'll need a new blade.
Newer and better blades are invented all the time to keep up with the man's beard.
If the man quits thinking his blade becomes duller and duller. One day he stops shaving.

Take a complex ritual: Transylvanian wedding shouts.
Men slap their belts rhythmically on the ground shouting the names
of the foods they are hoping to eat: stuffed cabbage! polenta with cheese!
lamb chops! currant pies! cake! baba ganoush! baklava!
This ritual is festive but also threatening: the chants confirm the joy
of the community at the wedding, and also the threat to eat the hosts
if the guests' culinary standards aren't met. This threat is humorous but not benign.
Each time the chants are performed all its former forms are acknowledged:
humor, terror, appetite, and duty to the community layered by irony
(or ironed by many ironic commentaries adding a layer at each wedding).
One day a robot shows up with a machinegun: it orders the women to cook.
All the irony is gone, and so is the song.
The communal threat has become a machine.
But the baby is still the result of a communal effort
so the demands of the armed robot are reasonable.

STEVE DALACHINSKY

SCRIBIN

(THE BLACK MASS)

*we put our hands to these dead
we are born not of the buried but of these unburied dead*
[Charles Olson, "Le Preface"]

these dead/ they walk again within us
slow poems
lyrical etudes
dramatic re-awaken//ings
repeated stones falling from
olympus
(((((((({{{}}}})))))){{}}
it is this light
that allows us to be born
dead things
in a time of war
a time when there was never
this to play
(to)
there has never been such a time
(as this)

i fool you into believing
hold flame in
hand
take this key
find the treasure if you can
put it in your pocket &
leave
it is gold that tells a story
tho it may not be an interesting one
to tell.

there is little space left
between
here &

now.

A black and white, high-contrast portrait of Guillermo Suárez Ara. He is wearing round glasses and has a mustache. The image is grainy and serves as a background for the title text.

GUILLERMO SUÁREZ ARA
INFINITE INFANTE

*Y con la rosa de Romeo y Julieta
iré a Santiago*

Federico García Lorca,
"Son de Negros en Cuba"

Tres Tristes Tigres: Already in the title we find three words with no referent, that is, none more specific than language itself. *Tres tristes tigres tragan trigo en un trigal* (Literally: Three sad tigers swallow wheat in a wheat field); a game of sound, a play on rhythm and the nuances of speech. The hearer, say a child, never wonders who the tigers are, why these beasts choose to swallow wheat, but is flummoxed and challenged by his own speech apparatus, by the difficulty of re-producing such sequences, which is the greatest meaning gathered from their diction. The sentence bears no moral but the difficulty of pattern, of a system which can create meaning beyond the signifier-signified dichotomy: *Tres Tristes Tigres* contains the trace of three protagonists, three explorers of linguistic surface and depth.

MONTAGE

The most general narrative strategy of Guillermo Cabrera Infante's book is the montage of its different parts; neither the narrator nor the style remains constant in the novel's different sections, each ranging in size from just four pages to 154 – what Jonathan Tittler refers to as a "gallery of voices,"¹ where all the registers of the piece converge and coexist. The juxtaposition of texts coerces them, so to speak, into dialogue. These juxtapositions compose not only their own narrative, but elements of an unspoken system that *is* the novel, a system apathetic to erstwhile demands for clarity. To expect these "viewgnettes," as Infante calls them, to generate an "over-all narrative sense" is, at the very least, optimistic. To begin with, Infante warns us that the book is not in Spanish, but in Cuban, and that all writing "is no more than an attempt to trap the human voice in flight." What he seeks to do is to recreate the polyphony of Havana as he remembers it, and a single register could not do justice to the multiplicity of a cabaret, of an island and its culture, its pitch and nuance a thing to be found only in the intertwined voices that compose a choir, and not in the centre of an individual consciousness. Singing is not simply a metaphor here, but the *style* of the novel, and also comprises one of its principle *subjects*, most importantly in the "Ella Cantaba Boleros" section in which the focus is a singer, La Estrella. We can see the general structure and style of the piece as attempting to recreate the multiplicity and musicality of Havana by breaking away from traditional narrative techniques and employing a type of speech-writing – working the seam of a denatured naturalism, a vocality that is above all a *writing*, the organicism of artifice. Infante never claims to depict a true Havana, or even a purely fictional one; rather the writing itself is a re-creation, from "memory" – echo of that congregation of voices which filled the pre-Revolutionary Cuban night with its clash and convergence, in a word: the *ontology* of memory *as writing*. For "being" is no isolated matter and, as Infante says, "Literature is no more important than conversation" (TTT 192).²

1 Jonathan Tittler, *Narrative Irony in the Contemporary Spanish-American Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

2 Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Tres Tristes Tigres* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1967) – all translations from the Spanish are mine.

This concept of montage runs deeper still, not only through the overall structure of the novel but also with regard to individual word choice. If there is one thing Infante is notorious for, it's his excessive use of puns. But aside from the recurring playful games by means of which the characters speak, we have instances of the principle characters' name-play. These are La Estrella (literally: The Star) and Cuba Venegas. Infante turns each name into a conceit:

That day he told me that Cuba (not Venegas, the other one) was only inhabitable for plants and insects and mushrooms, by the miserable or vegetable life.

Ese día me dijo que Cuba (no Venegas, la otra) era solamente habitable para las plantas y los insectos y los hongos, para la vida vegetal o miserable. (TTT 75)

I thought she was in love with me and that she knew – she knew *it* – the thing about me and the Whole of Cuba (another nickname of Mrs. Venegas') and I didn't know what to say.

Creí que estaba enamorada de mí y que sabía – ella lo sabía – lo mío y de Toda Cuba (otro apodo de doña Venegas) y no supe que decir. (TTT 86)

Here, as usual, Infante plays with the reader's expectation. When we think he's alluding to his country, he's referring to a singer of the same name, thereby not so much reversing the image as creating a montage. The thread of our initial impression is never really severed but is left as a secondary route, a trace. These sentences then say something not only of a character but also of Cuba, of Cuba and her relation to this character. The relationship established on the basis of verbal identity is exploited in a very Derridean way, by means of an "overabundance of the signifier" which at the same time is "the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be supplemented."³

The result is something more ambiguous than conventional metaphor. Juxtaposed images attempt to usurp each other but are denied that stability by the nature of language. The same thing seems to happen with one of Infante's recurrent wordplays: the portmanteau name.

3 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2006) 367.

Names like “Nat King Kong” and “oscarwilderness” create an *interior* montage which brings a Brechtian estrangement *inside* the text, and eschews the insistence that “No society speaks in puns, for community depends on communication, and punning hampers communication by making meaning ambiguous.”⁴ Ambiguity here is the rule, not the deviation. What is at risk is the status of language as an instrument. What is really presented is a texture; a topography of the sounds of La Habana. Infante does not seem to need each montage to have any significance beyond its own possibility and (like Barthes) its pleasure. Both of these levels of juxtaposition shift our attention from the question of “content” of the novel and cause us to reflect on the nature of language not as communication but as an end in itself – as what Heidegger called “the highest event of human existence.”⁵

METAMORPHOSIS

The idea of metamorphosis is very closely linked for Infante to the idea of montage; montage in movement, so to speak. I want to focus on how Infante creates these transforming images and happenings, these double entendres of image that not only coexist like “Nat King Kong” but seemingly swerve between the tenor and the vehicle of a conceit:

...and in any case it wasn't her because I know well the difference there is between a whale and a sardine or a yellowtail snapper and it was possibly Irenita because she was really a yellowtail snapper, with her mule tail her ponytail her loose-tethered bun, blonde, and the fish teeth that stuck out from the little mouth, not from the great cetacean mouth of La Estrella in which you could fit an ocean of life.

...y en todo caso no era ella porque sé bien la diferencia que hay entre una ballena y una sardina o una rabirrubia y posiblemente fuera Irenita porque era realmente rabirrubia, con su rabo de mula su cola de caballo su moño suelto-amarrado, rubio, y los dientes de pescado que le salían por la boquita, no por la gran boca cetácea de La Estrella en donde cabía un océano de vida... (TTT 56)

4 Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Tongue Ties: Logo-eroticism in Anglo-Hispanic Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 119.

5 Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry* (Amherst, NY: Humanity, 2000).

Here we see the women turn to animals and back to women and back to animals, the voice never fully deciding; a bifurcated path again, and we are taken down both directions. In the same way Arsenio Cué's name transforms into an amalgam of different forms ranging from Arsenietzsche Cué to Edgar Allan Cué depending on how his friend, the narrator, sees him behaving. Reality is not perceived (or displayed) as a static occurrence even within a single perspective. All objects change shape and metaphor. Even the reader can be a part of the metamorphosing mind that is the text of the novel:

You are going to laugh. No you're not going to laugh. You never laugh. You don't laugh or cry or say anything. You do nothing more than sit there and take notes.

usted de va a reír. No usted no se va a reír. Usted no se ríe nunca. Ni se ríe ni llora ni dice nada. Nada más se sienta ahí y toma nota. (TTT 53)

With this claim begins one of the novel's voices, her sections marked only by numbers. Each consists of the same voice's monologues to her psychiatrists. However, we do not know that initially, and from these words most would assume the speech to be directed at is the reader (which would not be surprising, given that Infante also does this repeatedly in the text, another example of the novel's opacity: “you on the other side of the page” [TTT 258]), yet we slowly discover that the person being referred to is the woman's psychiatrist. But Infante does not stop there:

That you are Oedipus and I the sphinx, except that I don't ask anything because I'm not interested in any answers...But you do not laugh. Sometimes I think it's you who is the sphinx.

Que usted es Edipo y yo la esfinge, pero que yo no pregunto nada porque no me interesan las respuestas... Pero usted no se ríe. A veces pienso que usted es quien es la esfinge. (TTT 53)

Reader to psychiatrist to Oedipus to Sphinx, we are transformed completely and repeatedly, into similar and opposite, old and new; we are part of the metamorphosis, and a surreptitious narrative is formed about the nature

of spectatorship without response by the weaving of these characters together.

Infante also presents this type of behaviour in the appearance of translation in the novel. Perhaps it would be good to consider that in the same way that a woman can be a woman and a fish simultaneously (through language), a text can exist in two languages at once, i.e., that translation is not so much a careful transposition of a message as much as a deliberate transformation of a surface and a system. Infante's own translator talks about how "*Three Trapped Tigers*, which contains thirty pages more of jokes than *Tres tristes tigres*, is a version rather than a translation." Hence we see Infante's mentality toward language and translation, as not a matter of faith but of simply adaptation, or metamorphosis itself. The story doesn't need to be the same, pages can be added or removed, his only concern is that it conveys a similar attitude toward language, that of a game and montage, of a surface that interacts and responds even without the need of content.

Already in the first section of the novel, the "prologue," we see a voice introducing a Cabaret and apparently translating itself between Spanish and English. However, the two languages say completely different things and barely cooperate. As Stephanie Merrim notes, "There are various kinds of translation in the prologue, and all are betrayals."⁶ There is an opposition, a transformation happening within the same voice in its oscillation between the two languages. The surface is once again exalted; we focus less on what is being said and more on how the two languages attempt to occupy the same space and meaning, to say the same thing, but fail. Therefore language, and not only language but speech, is the focus of the text itself. The transformation between languages, the opacity of language, in parts like "Los Visitantes," a section of *TTT* that tells four versions of the same story, becomes even more interesting to watch than the event being described (especially when we're reading it for the fourth time).

MIRROR

The idea of the mirror seems to have a strong subcurrent in the novel. Perhaps its most bizarre typography in the novel is the mirrored page at the beginning of the "Rompecabezas" section. This is related in the novel to Arsenio's idea that Russian is just Spanish written backwards (once again language as material, as object, not only a device for communication), as if through a mirror. The pseudo-Russian mirrored page incites a detour to look into a different kind of mirror: Andrej Tarkovsky's film, *Mirror*, from 1975. Tarkovsky's methods in his own medium can help us better understand the methods employed by Infante, a film critic himself, in writing *TTT*. Although *Mirror* comes eight years after the publication of *TTT*, the similarities are astounding, especially considering how different the medium and the topic of each piece are, a similarity made more intriguing by the post-revolutionary social conditions of each artist's respective country. *Mirror's* scenes are not explicitly linked, only small details suggest connection if any, just like the sections of Infante's novel. Each scene has a different texture, from black and white to sepia to colour, and Tarkovsky is even working with different light and the feel of the film itself, all of which resembles Infante's gallery of voices, each with its own style and feel, each a different perspective. Furthermore, *Mirror's* elements also seem to work through association; for example, the montage of the walk through the room while the father's poetry is read aloud by an absent voice. These elements exist alone and in conjunction, just as Nat King and King Kong, just as the reader and the psychiatrist. The recreation of reality is jumbled and purposefully reshaped.

Tarkovsky, like Infante, is never transparent, even if the intention is to recreate memory and the experience of the past, the recreation is always consciously seen through film, accepting the medium's possibilities and flaws. Of course, the effect is different than in Infante's work. Tarkovsky brings attention to the arbitrary jumble of memory, the inability to separate the montage of separate remembrances, while Infante is showing the inherent play and music of language as a basis for reality, and more specifically, of a language, and therefore a reality, a mode of living, he sees as lost.

6 Stephanie Merrim, "A Secret Idiom: The Grammar and Role of Language in *Tres tristes tigres*," *Latin American Literary Review* 8.16 (Spring-Summer 1980): 96-117.

MEMORY

It's important to clarify that the end of these two works is not just to talk about art; they don't merely take a subject and use it as an excuse to play with words and images. Both works attempt to recreate the past of their author and explore art's ability to reconstruct experience as such beyond mere storytelling. Tarkovsky's film aims "at reconstructing the lives of people whom I loved dearly and knew well."⁷

He didn't understand that it wasn't an ethical fable, that I told it just to tell it, to communicate a vivid memory, that it was an exercise in nostalgia. Without resentment toward the past.

No comprendió que no era una fábula ética, que lo contaba por contar, por comunicar un recuerdo nítido, que era un ejercicio en nostalgia. Sin rencor al pasado. (TTT 325)

What happened was that I realized that this whole world of La Habana at night, all that is narrated in *Tres Tristes Tigres*, was going to disappear in the short or in the long run, and without having any witnesses, without anyone who would describe it. It was too rich a reality to let it disappear that way.

*Lo que ocurrió fue que me di cuenta de que todo ese mundo de La Habana de noche, todo lo que se narra en Tres Tristes Tigres, iba a desaparecer a la corta o a la larga, y sin tener testigos, sin tener nadie que lo describiera. Era una realidad muy rica como para dejarla desaparecer de esa manera.*⁸

An "exercise in nostalgia" is exactly what the novel is doing, capturing the spirit of a disappearing part of Cuba, of Infante's life. Thus Infante explores how to record this nightlife, the cabarets and the drunken colloquies, the lust and velocity of youth in pre-revolutionary Cuba, and finds the correct medium not in traditional narrative techniques but in a more opaque, experimental narrative. While we may read *TTT* as the story of its frenzied, intoxicated characters and their infatua-

tions with women and words, the true art of the novel is watching Infante attempt to grasp the memory of a song and the ways in which he tries to reconstruct his own experience and convey the true sound of Havana. What he truly struggles with is how to record a song he can no longer hear, and to record this song in silence. "All of its narrative structure," Merrim argues, "obeys a non-traditional, non-linear logic and development. Each section is situated in a time/space different and discontinuous from the next."⁹ While this argument could apply equally to both Tarkovsky and Infante, the situation of Infante's *TTT* is quite distinct, being a work of fiction within the context of Latin American literature which at the time (it was published in the same year as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) was much more fond of magical realism. Infante works with forms which he considers articulate his subject, the voice(s) of his past; the narrative weaves its own texture, improvises itself by ear. While Infante's translator observes that, "In a sense, one of the principle messages of *Tres tristes tigres* is that language conceals, rather than reveals, non-verbal reality,"¹⁰ it is less an act of concealing reality than an act of revealing that all reality *is* an act of concealment through vision and perspective, that it stops there, in the voice that creates life. In the life that creates voice.

MYTH

La Habana Para un Infante Difunto, Infante's second gargantuan novel, which in English becomes *Infante's Inferno*, is where I want to proceed with this question of language, precisely due to the fact that it could deceptively pass off as Infante's least experimental work. While his style remains very language-based, still laden with wordplay and montage, *La Habana* does give way to more subtle play, and loses the ostensible formal experiments of books like *TTT* and *Exorcismos de esti(II)lo*. Strangely, *La Habana* opts for a single and recognizable narrator, presumably a projected version of Infante himself (the persistence of memory), who essentially narrates the totality of his sexual exploits without any ostensible path or revelation, but for the absolute act

7 Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas, 2008) 133.

8 Infante in an interview with Adriana Herrera, "Cabrera Infante Y Sus Tres Tristes Tigres Inmortales," *Cubanet | Noticias Y Prensa Independiente Desde Cuba* (24 Oct. 2004): <<http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y04/oct04/25o15.htm>>.

9 Merrim, "A Secret Idiom," 96.

10 Suzanne Levine, "Writing as Translation: Three Trapped Tigers and a Cobra," *MLN* 90.2 (1975): 270.

of telling. The collective gallery of voices becomes the individual monologue narrating a gallery of bodies. Yet Infante's playful surface games still occupy a large part of the novel – games like “Baudeleer,” a portmanteau composed of Baudelaire and the verb “leer,” to read (page 199). Even in the original Spanish, there is the occasional English pun, like “Paradise lust” (borrowed from *Finnegans Wake*) (408). Clearly Infante hasn't entirely abandoned the ideas about language that helped shape *TTT* – there is still something subtle and precarious at work in the text, even if it is no longer evident in its overall structure.

This gallery of bodies is also laden with cultural references, many of them similar to the games we noticed in *TTT*. The novel seems to constantly handle sexuality in terms of culture. In the midst of narrating an experience with oral sex, the text somehow manages to also focus on Ezra Pound (242). Pubic hair brings mention of King Kong (362). Lord Byron appears in the midst of conversation about prostitutes and paedophilia (17). There is an inherent parody to these mentions – while completely rational in the terms of the novel, the references do have a comic effect of misplacement; culture gets tangled in both the telling of experience and experience itself to form a parodic montage.

In simulation, you move beyond true and false through parody, masquerade, derision to form an immense enterprise of deterrence. Deterrence from every historical reference, from all reality in the passage into signs. This strategy... is also a depreciation of all value.¹¹

Artaud knew that all speech offered from the body, offering itself to understanding or reception, offering itself as a spectacle, immediately becomes stolen speech.¹²

Saturated with referentiality, the text's frequent detours into (mundane) obscenity produce a kind of hilarity opposite to what we find in Artaud. Where Artaud recognized the impossibility of creating through language and fled in the direction of silence, of utter linguistic scepticism, Infante finds in it the very nature

and perhaps (anti-)legitimacy of *langue*, rejoicing in its ineluctable condition as a stolen artifice. Where Baudrillard sees parody and simulation initially as a détournement of the real into surface-effects, Infante discovers a basis and depth of (historical) narrative. *La Habana* continuously exploits this automimetic view of language in its appropriation of a whole literary canon of sexuality, a lover's discourse, slipped behind the façade of “subjective” memoir.

In a way, it is the same rose that Lorca brings to Cuba – the rose already deflowered into meaning, into both the word for rose and for Romeo's own linguistic scepticism – that emerges in the character of Rosa. The rose cannot be used without recourse to its accrued nuances; the lineage of its use repeatedly emerges. Similarly, the final section titled “The Amazon,” where the already married narrator claims to “hunt” a woman with a scorched breast, alludes to Amazonian breast-removal (for hunting with bows) in classic mythology, and turning the long sexual episode into a travesty of the Amazon myth which can neither fully usurp the actual story or fully be dismissed from it. We can thus see the continuation here of what we began to see with the three trapped tigers, with Nat King Kong, with Cuba Venegas and the caprice of signification. Except here it seems to be the very basis and force of the book. And in the deceit of stable discourse and steady narration we find the same experiment in fragmentation and arbitrary play that *TTT* so ostensibly attempted.

The appropriation of these terms and figures so deep in the heart of both these novels, and (as I think we can now establish) of Infante's style, closely resembles the idea proposed by Barthes in *Mythologies*, in which myth is also presented as a “stolen language.” Barthes seems concerned with the way in which culture (and literature, and essentially any system of signs) works as a mythical system that continually appropriates images to create new meanings. Myth is described as a signification in which the signifier is already the product of signification; a second order semiological chain; not a palimpsest but a supplement. As we've seen with the rose, the overall sign that Infante uses already contains within it a whole discourse of love and literature. While more ostensible in the montage of names and classics like we saw in Arsenietsche Cué, this reflects the

11 Jean Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power*, trans. Ames Hodges (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2010) 48.

12 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 175.

inherent condition of language in Infante's work – all speech is stolen speech, yet in its failure to completely usurp its owner, speech retains the possibility of myth in its signifying ambiguity. As for Barthes:

It is well known that some went as far as the pure and simple scuttling of the discourse, silence [...] appearing as the only possible weapon against the major power of myth: its recurrence.¹³

The mythological system of literature, the stolen language of its spectacle, the deterrence of its simulation, doesn't seem to intimidate Infante like it does other artists like Artaud, but rather gives him the possibility of play. Commonplace then becomes myth through its becoming discourse, through its dependency on a language dragged across a canon. Myth, in turn, also becomes commonplace in the seriousness of linguistic play. Once again, language and culture for Infante don't conceal reality, but rather ineluctably coerce it into a montage of past and present, a memory, the eternal return of Infancy and play:

...but I must have known that words are the material the past is made of, but they also form the future perfect; they are two different destinations and only one true direction.

...pero debía haber sabido que las palabras son la materia de que está hecho el pasado pero también forman el futuro compuesto, son dos destinos distintos y una sola dirección verdadera.¹⁴

13 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 135.

14 Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *La Habana Para Un Infante Difunto* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2000) 346.



ALI ALIZADEH

THE PASSION OF JEANNED'ARC

(AFTER CARL DERYER)

i

She hears. Insatiable ears
for the feast

of Voices, their

moral nutrients. I've defined
my soul after a certain image

every bit as fantasmatic. Glorious
wounds? Nothing

but the *jouissance*
of hidden excess. She sees

unnamable things

; of course, angels
or saints can't exist and the visible

is so grim: Burgundian marauders
torch huts, rape virgins. And I

have seen Capital's war of attrition
– abjection of the poor; wealth of the few. The trial

didn't unnerve her. St Catherine of Alexandria
wannabe?

Le Roi du Ciel

always an abstraction. There
in the hexagonal cell, the Treasury

Tower of Rouen, all's been
renounced
to get life (instead of the stake). I've learned things

about the depth of my own
complicity, how I feel my heart thuds

inside its cage of bones, when money
seems an uncertainty. Anxiety

of the quotidian kind. She hears
guards' threats. They're shitty *the Whore*

of Armagnacs confessed to her
idolatry and avoided heresy. Shackles

are ours, Jeanne,

beyond metaphor
and simile.

I too have a passion.

ii

For the intangible.
Often illegible

misspelt compressions. The guards

who keep the gates
can creep
into my consciousness, functionaries

of culture. To be sure, comparison
with your drama is a tragedy

of taste and logic. But

aren't you here
for us

to embrace, emulate
the form of your pathos, o Sainte

Jeanne? Perversion of your ontic matter

for Vatican to entomb
in the kitsch catacombs of religion. In the cell

immortality, a vague triviality
in the face of regular beatings, perhaps

violation. I can't convince myself
to collude with the Great Other

forever. A time comes
when we know

the Voices are the Real: what in life exceeds living.

So you refute
-d refutation, lapsed heretic

when the powers heard you say
you'd heard the Voices again. No time

to waste for the Secular Arms
to shave your head, load you onto the tumbrel

and chain you to the stake. God
is the name given

to being forsaken

or even here, when
I too face a fire for my decision.

iii

To be the divine.
To be the One

in whose death we find creation

of our common being. *Il n'y a pas
de grand Autre*: you found the flame

empty of the supernatural, smoke
burns your lungs in the name of the Void

of belief. And your last sentence
inspires, infuriates me

in the darkness of figurative dungeons:

I was the angel, and there was no other.

STEPHAN DELBOS

ARRANGEMENTS

I

1. A poem in terza rima
2. A poem of 18 lines
3. A poem containing the word coin-slot
4. A poem rhyming beguile and tinfoil
5. A poem with two mirrored meanings
6. A poem under the sign of Scorpio
7. A poem undertaken in November
8. A poem that knows it is a poem
9. A poem titled "Apostrophe"
10. A poem that never asked to be born

II

1. A poem with a chessed past
2. A poem set to Sibelius
3. A poem of 30 years silence
4. A constipated poem
5. A poem entitled "Impossible Monogamy"
6. A poem never to be heard
7. An hermetic poem
8. A poem of ten lines and ten syllables
9. A new villanelle
10. A poem double-crossed

III

1. A new form called "Short Order"
2. A poem with one noun
3. A poem with six verbs
4. A poem with three adverbs
5. A poem with one dark adjective
6. A poem with one missing piece
7. A parquet jigsaw
8. Childhood sleepovers and Micro Machines
9. A poem quick like an auctioneer
10. A poem as the crow flies

IV

1. A poem controlled by someone else
2. A someone who doesn't speak your language
3. A poem with two tongues
4. An indiscrete poem
5. A champagne bottle buried under Atlantic
6. Skyscraper built on a schooner
7. A mudskipper
8. The Chicago Black Sox
9. A poem excluding the word "the"
10. A poem another alphabet

V

1. A poem in bio-waste bag font
2. A poem with asthma
3. A one-lung poem
4. A poem that cannot hear itself think
5. A poem getting on my last nerve
6. A poem coming out of the closet
7. A poem title is the last line
- 8.
9. A poem with seven mono-rhymed lines
10. A poem about emphysema

VI

1. An unremarkable poem
2. A sonnet with three voltas
3. In each line
4. A poem folded on itself
5. The poem ate a data processor
6. A poem rhyming "processor" and "blackout"
7. A poem with diplomatic immunity
8. A poem James Wright would have hated
9. A poem drunk on wordscotch
10. The pebble in hopscotch

VII

1. A poem human highlight film
2. A 21-line salute
3. A poem in Atlanta, GA
4. Tape for the knuckle line
5. Breaks a poem with enjambéd thumb
6. A poem for Dominique Wilkins
7. A poem with a tight fade
8. A poem at the foul line
9. backwards written poem A
10. Poem with a pump fake

VIII

1. A POEM IN CAPS LOCK
2. A LOUDMOUTH POEM
3. A POEM EATING A PICKLED EGG
4. A GUFFAWING POEM
5. A POEM OF UNKNOWN VINTAGE
6. A POEM WITH A THINKING PROBLEM
7. SIGN HERE X_____
8. A POEM SHAKY SHAKY
9. A POEM WITH NOTHING LEFT TO DO
10. A POEM THAT DOES NOT NEED YOU

IX

1. A poem first word each line rhymed
2. A poem each line ends with "a"
3. Poem in memory of Nintendo
4. A poem with a Power Glove
5. A poem for *Nintendo Power Magazine*
6. A Master Blaster poem
7. A poem with infinite lives
8. Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, B, A, start
9. A poem contra sunlight
10. A poem you have to blow on

X

1. A poem on a dryer sheet
2. A poem with static cling
3. A poem stuck to that first May
4. A poem losing its virginity
5. Padiddle poem, a punch buggy
6. A poem that couldn't save any Amy
7. A poem that hasn't read *Ulysses*
8. A poem that hates talking
9. This is and isn't the end of the poem
10. A: poem: with: too: many: doors:

JOSEF STRAKA
5 POEMS

OTHERWISE: SCHLESISCHES TOR

still present somewhere
embankment tunnels, Schlesisches Tor
air imbibed with solitude
gliding-through, slight falling-through
days devoted to someone else
who knows about nothing, cannot even divines
you send out a message
which remains unanswered
an indispensable question in the deaf padding of days
just a jolt, another slam
this time, of just another hotel door

WILHELMSHAGEN

something fleeting
a dwindling of people, a displacement
henceforth everything allegedly filled-in in boxes under "dignified" and "civilised"
unfamiliar, strange eyes watching you in the underpasses of the U-Bahn
changing of the trains, not until about 7 pm a journey to a dark church in Wilhelmshagen
i'm nowhere, something's fading,
illusions with no further justification
the return through the deep forests
scruffy punks in the metro fossils from the era of Die Toten Hosen or the Bad Seeds
the mid-80s Berlin contrasting here with a stilted belle all dressed in black visibly indicating she isn't here
nor does she want to be
the train twitches and all she does is bob her head to her headset music
the rest of the compartment passengers are running their last shopping errands, headed for the city or
perhaps for the Karlshorst bar
one of the punks offers the lady a beer, she refuses, the two staring at each other intently
the train rushes forth toward more transfer stations

A POSSIBLE USER'S MANUAL

(for Jiří Kolář)

to keep attempting the same
a backward bend, a dull ache
to observe someone in the crowd for the feeling of one's self-delineation
to keep attempting the same:
to hold on to the insubstantial for an ancient promise
now to sever the besieging branch, necessarily sidewise
deeper notches supported by silence despite words released
to remember that which means nothing
for future discomposure
to deny obedience to some people
and to still be unawares of all this
to merely give some sort of account
on snippets of paper shoved into notepads
to fail to remind anyone of anything
to draw back, to set out, into the rain, through the back door

a teetering sequence of words
impossible to stop
in a manifold rapture i observe people's lips, the movement repetition
the sound of torn-up paper
abandonment, always after
there's no-one left in the evening
a long coastal voyage:
to keep quoting the mistake, the dodge, or verbs
that still simply don't hit the mark

some grey filth
what i offer is not honourable
just a walk through the streets
indications toward the window sills in the pre-embankment quarter
the piers, the slip roads
the withholding of hints
the quiet observation of ducks and swans
the waterfront petering out into a clump of grasses
leading on to an old staircase
overgrown with blue moss
and misgivings
ultimately about anything

WITZLEBEN

a tactile clinging of time
a lecherous kiss at the inopportune instant
people's maverick gait
at a small closed-off station
with trains departing one-way only
to finish pointing out something
a crackling silence, fingers wrung
to taste the local beverage somewhere in backrooms
returns to another home
City Blick: a receptionist always showing "two" with her fingers
meaning "up to the second floor"

what's there to capture
perhaps november 1987
time pressed into other efforts
a society that somehow...
nothing said fully anymore
you register a non-shift, changing of the stage set
a postscript to something commented upon long ago
and also the gestures of the wannabe successful within the confines of a small town:
impostors' drink mixed with the grimace of professionals

COFFEES: BELGRADE, BERLIN

why keep repeating it
the inevitable aching of the hand and the temple region
constant circumspection
boulevards, flickering figures in the shopwindows on Kurfuerstendamm
now, in the morning, i think to myself as i wake up at the Belgrade Royal hotel
to walk around in expectation of yet another possible paid-for night
at the same hotel with the same worn-out red carpet
to peer into coffee cups
another year, other dreams dreamt in the abandoned abodes on the outskirts of Alt Gatow
an abandonment suddenly pleasant
the flat spaces with a window overseeing currant hedges
imitations of ancient statues guarding the terrace entry
graveyard wall, arborvitae, discarded watering cans
then rain: i'm going to reach the café on Terazije, the main Belgrade boulevard, with a slight delay

ERIC L. CUMMINGS
5 PORTRAITS

JACKY O

The sun's in the west.
A smile races a face...
The sun's in the east.

Nothing known
escapes
her hungry page.

MAE WEST

A Fire burning.
A curve is cultivating,
night blooms a city.

There will be smoke
to prove the bones there

but no flowers
will be wasted on the dead here.

ELIZABETH TAYLOR

Pink clouded winter.
Diamond sound, ice, gin, tonic;

The dishes are done.

When the bling of stars
wishes back
what do you have to give?

VICTOMESSE JAQUINE DE RIBE

Elegant, haute.
Rose gold autumn wears the ground.
One hic-cup a day!

Your moment now
will not fill the hole
in your pocket.

Today you are dressed in holes.
You, my agency, you-
even the dusk is blushing.

COCO CHANNEL

A stillness, urgent.
North bound train meets future,
black, ink dripping.

There is a place between
everything
where
something fabulous
waits to be found.

THE OFFICES OF WOMEN

A suffocating sign language of violent tics
and third-hand gestures
leads me into markets I cannot understand.

I buy a lily, a shell necklace, bone dice.
The buying of the lily is a murder,
a suicide.

I suicide. I fall away, I lose, I go off.
I sleep. I'm a telephone
exchange operator, I wheel my prayers off

into darkness, plug and unplug voices, karate
chop my pillow into pieces, become friends
with my mother and never speak with her again.

I find employ in a workplace of women.
They run fishhooks through tiny machines
and laugh with each other in groups

their faces like the faces of Vietnamese
explaining in Vietnamese
when I'll be paid, which is late or not at all.

Let those who speak with the dead call.
They'll say:

he's male, 36 years old, his name begins with C,
he's showing me a wall.

I'm showing you a wall.

WREATH

My friend had been down
the doctor's and after that

just sat around
all day dishes piled up

gunk grew
in the plughole

of his kitchen sink I said
come on man I'll buy you

an ice cream get you
out your stinking hole

get you some
ice cream

he said don't speak
about ice cream

why not I said
'cause it's cold

and I just end up thinking
Death alright

I said a walk in the park then
we can go see all the flowers.

WHAT WE CAN SPEAK OF

A man was born with two clumps of pink and nubs like babies' feet – not hands. Born a poet yet never a poem about his hands; his elder brother strangled to death in California.

He writes of young girls and autumn hotdogs on the hill in a European city, and I – whose tragedy is nothing

but a European city and a girl – gone ten years now – write of these baby feet that will not be hands, and of this brother that never became a man. With these words. These words that never became a voice. That never wanted to. That never wished.

KAREN WEISER

LOVE, DELIGHT & ALARM

Held in the mind where it sounds

some inexhaustible disruption

art makes man an ex-lute

scratched and skipping

out her most-lost tune

Be equal to that claim and only equal

inexhaustibly skipping lets in

what quierescent light

for the spectral oculus in the ear

or the ear's proxy

I gotta sit in your seat

or your seat's proxy to listen

to the laws of music

Please

can I sit in your seat

this train is packed

with what quierescent light

skips back to us

its meadow dignified

the louder it reaches

I am all Frank

I am all unguarded

This poem contains a smaller

inner poem

Most of us know an allegory

by our own quiescent response

the echo of muted places

from the sudden shift outward

so violet in the exchange

of motion and maintenance

experiment and sacrament

though no fasteners

under day's hairnet

hold anything still

I am somebody's landscape

at this moment exactly

some inexhaustible disruption

passing from one state

to another. *The Guidebook*

to a Mammalian Universe

without its

red opera cloak

is often mended with

quaint precipitation

dashed out of oneself

upon the beach of a swoon

Oxygen-less upon the simple

august stun. A swoon collages

time and upon it 14th century

Vienna and the baby Christ,

nay, all periods are prayers

to simplify and horde senseless

thoughts. Collapse nine months

into a single swoon, drown;

to the castaway the beach is

port, body, empurpled firelot

dashed out of itself

hosting a medical dusk

*I think now
that I plainly see
it must be so*

MATT MARTIN

THE EVITABLE CLYSM

when pression hibits
telligence creasingly then
what crements tort
our modity with veillance and
which formance ciprocates
whole slaughts of servatism
panding their cupation
ruptly spersing
fluence with a rollary
so mercial that it cludes
both dicament and joinder
municate this fession
where the dustrial ploit
ludes versives
we creted animously
nections abled
cordance into pletion
victs are sorbing through
petual wilderment
to spond with ology
that turbs no sert
the mainder fendes as though
memorative of ormous
trivances or feated
mensurate with perience
in lexia this munion
is hevelling us loquial
as jacent finities
nounce through the bargo
we had voked fiantly round
each flict and vorce
dragging these clensions

while structs volve
we are dividual and ject
all dition to centratre
gress matically into
pendence from a clave
our lect is stroyed
yet vivors tinue
mergence in bability
that cruits will sult
the munity's velopment
plosions molish
putedly the neath of
each blem sumes
a plex where parison
and clasm gree
to mote their haviour
in semblage of our plause
thus does sonality jugate
us chievous with spect
niable among its teriors
noia is mented
by so stract a ligion
that the proaches vulge
lotments of bellion across
the termined hesive
preciating every cussion whose
theosis is the bodiment
of cendence among deavours
to secrate sperity
and prieve joyment's
evitable clysm

JACK HIRSHMAN

THE WANPA SCENT' ARCANÉ

1
The wanpa scent's
the smell of all stinksomeness,
the morder of all vowels
to make a bowel of turds
that defeckshate on
all who roccupy
against the stench
of the rot of the rat
at the root of the deathrattle
of Ruinoil Regoon,
the shitasson
of that carwreckter assassin
Retchard Noxon the door
like Death, who ambitched
to power on the flaming
red body of Hell in Gahuggun
Dickless, the first
of meany witchhaunts,
ant taught that lamebrain
Gonzo how to knife
The People in the buck.

These are the
heads of the swine corpse
against our shoccupy.
They're who give the cops
who beat you
their clubs.
They're gunsells all,
from Gangwretch
to Snitchromnay
and in fact so is

Obummer, the sad drip
of the Capuddlist Potty, who,
while you and yours
were singing
"Y'all lang zine"
was signing the Endeeayay
and disappearing your lieberty.
You're in fatshits America now,
you're a hebe without Habeas,
a carnal without Corpus.
You can be harrassed
for the crumb of being
part of a tahririst plot.
And he's depotted
foehundred-thousand
people so that the Statue
hasn't stopped weeping

downcheeks and allover
Emma's Lasarussian poem
since the start of the year.
Nothing could be worser
than a hearse of humane verses
all in mourning.

2
So it's amnasty to an Ind,
this kartun,
and where's Moe Zez
to shofar it to?
It's amneotic destuning,
the tear of your ear off,
the tumult of your scorn.

Ha!
Shem will strike you
lightning-fast,
you won't even know what
hate you, you'll be
fately down for the count,
but at the sound of ten
your hand'll become a hundred
with a manifastalking
destribunng again.
Uppenadam, moccupiers,
once dead ducks, now
feenixes on fire
transflaming ovarythang
tombey in the womb
of tomarrow
into a whole new bowl game
where the thrallest
to feel is when
throwing out the fierst bull
at the start of god,
for we've taken refuse at lost
and gone to the fear end
of Occupy
(Kiyippee Kiyay!),
we who've tam-tummed
and zim-zummed
and now are scribabbling
everywhere to spring
the checkmates of the world
from the jail
the whimper sentenced
to life without parole.

DAVID ASHFORD

PERVIGILIUM VENERIS

Force is: young force is: song force is our new spin on
thunk cruor the superb – or spew me or punt us global
carol us inter– / cater for us inter– / eat biped is equal
fix it and – anthem Diana : to market / litter / bribe us

purple jam in a glass cracked pain get her number it is
herself turgescient papilla declining to fall upon roman
urges left pending herself neither teat riling loose I did
knock but cannot relinquish: splash out slap to act fast

herself just sat morning total vagina in pendent rose a
head wound beaten beyond grief into a sidearm failing
is decked jammy decked flame is decked solar purpled
ignore you video no dice pig-skin offer solutions attack

migrant low cry me tremulous do cad you go ponder a
guttering precept or be pent a suspect cash so sue us
playback tumble is so street toss th flag hello my RTO
crass Diana you're a dick sit full to sublime on throne O

puddle rim floral and me, prude, did a runt, I purpled
it's girls with a boy knocked to amen, we credit power
I say love is festival if bullets are rubber, but hectored
get you Nymph! put out armies! festival us! it's LOVE!

just get is unarmed he heard no dice he heard just get
new kit 'ark you new bullet a new kit but no ladykiller
the man said Nymph a caveat: quit. Cupid pull-caress
toting is unarmed identikit quango no dice it is LOVE!

gutters out a tribunal stare herself as diva is flowering
herself presides you're a dick sit aside burned grateful
gutter total funding on flowers quit quit tulip is annual
gutter subdue o flower you left in glass at Liverpool St.

put mouth to music but no you're the bad mood you'd
patter in Trojan subject to market flux inbuilt as venal
perk you ceiling! perk you tourist! perk you pent alert
under a sub [Didn't] affixed yr monday noose seminal

crass error come primal utter carapace snap clamped
roar hack a runt cracked silver cracked lucky cracked
mental insolvent recant, but plunging to a deep green
shadows rerun to detonate total night forever in song

// echoed jamming super-genital explicate bull over
latte quizzical me lost to her chanting not you silent
time yet to make like / swallow yell taxi I'm finished
but no : lost taxi : No respect, taxi : lost you : silent

TOM MANDEL

TIME IS A MIXED BAG

i.

Time is a mixed bag
of short rations, any
day long enough out-
lasts every night.

The rectangle displays suspect #2 in our murder case, who like the victim is dead, or if only holding his breath, and that after a few moments of practice, perhaps unsatisfactory, and even then only briefly, or perhaps one should say 'therefore,' so that too little time passes for the camera to capture the effort it costs, yet under no illusion we grant all the same, and not with reluctance but enthusiastically, to delusion its primacy, a vector in the direction of which it must be the rectangle propelling us.

ii.

Creating a pattern you hold
a hand up to time

Now a commercial depicts an awkward individual, male, about to emerge from under the rock where he lives in order to save up to 25% on automobile insurance. The intention of the spot is to amuse, also to convince, though perhaps not all on its own but in combination with a soon-to-be-aired spot in which we are seated at the side of a woman, fur at her throat, eyes closed, not at all ill at ease, as she drives by heart a seemingly awkward route that includes a number of turns, making her way to the central train station. There she will greet the advance party of conquerers. As if by chance they are 48, the number of the Preludes & Fugues in the Well Tempered Clavier, but this is not a chance operation. This is no accident. For each member of the party listens to one of these works through his own headphones, while we hear the simultaneous result as the soundtrack of this spot which has never yet seen the air! Whether wearily or in anger we will never know, the video engineer rises from his workstation, pulls off the circumaural Beyer dynamics studio headset that establishes an identity between what he hears and what he wishes to hear, and inaugurates his contemplative moment. In the case of Richter, it is as if the entire soundscape of the piece exists around him and within it he exhibits an almost improvisational ease, yet there is also Pollini's cool lyricism to consider, not to mention the sense of destiny that seems to accompany each touch of the keyboard by the fingertips of the little-known Hungarian pianist Jenő Jando. Perhaps a spot depicting the noble yet tragic though in any case inevitable triumph of a male-ideal cro magnon over his neanderthal cousin, with whom a precious inevitability of circumstance or chance has forced his contest, despite his diffident even absent desire and the lack of provocation – for which we must provide as goes without saying a different soundtrack, something delicate that would all the same absorb the blood.

iii.

Up drives a black cadillac
that's come to take me back

to where I first heard the tone
of Zen inside the koan

the one that turned to stone
the hands that count my loan

until payday'd come and gone
with my debt and I was done

and finally alone
I was the only one to own

the brand new stick-built home
you showed me on your phone

while the wrenchman on the dome
took apart the royal throne

so I could take it home
to prove I was the clone

while Howling Wolf moaned
I caused the ache in his bones

iv.

When the cadillac stopped at the light
I saw the driver and took flight

The leather seats they were white
they brought to mind that awful night

that night that felt like leather
that night we spent together

the night I made my first mistake
I put my holster in the toaster
I tried to drown it in the lake.

v.

From above, the news break video shows the SUV, flipped, roof collapsed, twisted to an angle splaying from bottom left to top right of the screen above a bright red banner where moving in yellow letters where moving from right to left a series of four word lines for a moment reads "Call this number now."

A black and white close-up portrait of an older man with a serious expression, looking directly at the camera. His face shows signs of age with wrinkles and deep-set eyes. He is wearing a dark jacket.

ROBERT KELLY

NOMAD

A MEDITATION ON PIERRE JORIS'S NOMAD POETICS

1

The word nomad argues a peculiar social condition—settled but on the move—that is thoroughly different from exile, homelessness, emigration. A nomad is a member of an almost invisible sodality made up of families who are citizens of, residents of, immense cities—cities that are streets, that stretch from grasslands to the high mountains, summer to winter, because they belong to their animals.

If a man calls himself a nomad, the first question to ask him is: what is your animal?

Is it yak, goat, fat-tailed sheep, caraculs, milch kine of Holstein, big-humped cows? Or is it a tenderer, older, animal, one whose milk is subtle, a muse, or a sylph, or guardian angel? What animal do you follow, obedient, from lush savannah to austere tundras and their hidden lichens? The talking beast of your mind must be able to muzzle down through the snows to browse.

The second question is: what are the limits of your vast city? From the Bernese Oberland to the semi-tropic microclimes of Lake Constance? From the Gobi fringes along weird *dzo-mo* tracks to the Altai mountains? And what streets are they whose more, or less, visible traces you follow, from Saint-Germain to North Beach, drunk with miles, versts, parasangs, the shadows of mountains, the sound of waters you may have never crossed?

We don't feel sorry for a nomad, the way we would for an exile. Instead, spot a nomad, pelt him with questions. We follow him around. Because all a nomad is, is someone following the grass. He's here for your grass, so make him pay for it with a song and dance, all lies, or mostly lies, about where he's coming from and why and what he saw along the way.

All those mirages he took pictures of and spills for you now out of his digital printer. All those turbo-folk ballads he never heard in Sclavonia but is humming to you now, beating time with his foot, his shoes covered with shit from his animals, feathers and sonnets and dreams.

2

Imagine reading Celan in Paris, in the first place I ever stayed, on the Place Maubert. I went back fifty years later to the same hotel, spiffier now, like all the rest of the city. Does going back make me a nomad? A nomad in time? Maybe that's what Joris is after, the shapely contour of lived time that brings one back again and again to the same loves. Or the same hotel. Outside the window is the square where once enemies of the church were burned, enemies of the people were beheaded. Imagine reading Celan in East Germany, or anywhere enemies of the people were imprisoned. Isn't it clear that poets (even the most political) are enemies of the people? The people too is an immense street along which the poet moves.

But the crime is no longer against the people. Only the revolution has enemies. The revolution is a thing in itself. In Mao's China and the Soviet Union, the crime was against the revolution. It still is in Iran, Cuba.

The people are in exile from the revolution.

In other words, in some countries the nomad has nowhere to go.

3

Now Joris, self-proclaimed nomad: what does he carry with him? Pierre, where are your sheep? What are the stations of his nomadry? Pierre, where is your mountain meadow, alp, mead, lake, where is your savannah, the salt-rimmed watering hole, the shade?

The going is the strength of the man's work. Over the last decades, Joris's translations and poetics have made him known in England and America, and the reach of his own poetry gets steadily more complex, it seems to me. It is precisely his "cultural" grasp that makes his work distinctive, and of value right now. Joris is, like a very small number of others than come to mind, a poet who is in full control of European theoretical adventures of recent decades, and whose work is both a light that is shone upon it, and an instance of it. This is important poetry too in that it examines in detail the question of marginality and exile—which is the single thread linking Modernism and Postmodernism, surely. The discourses of nomadism, of exile political and spiritual, of rootlessness and the Edenic country of the text—these are issues that come alive in Joris's poetry, and guarantee his work a readership wider than the usual community of poets.

Not many poets can wield the same sort of literary clout with a similar range of discourses. Chatwin's *Songlines* comes to mind as a vivid intersection of narrative and expository discourses, and something like that happens in Joris's *Poasis* and throughout his work.

Every nomad needs an oasis. Perhaps the act of poetry itself is a stadial or oasis condition in the nomad life. It lingers in language, nourished by the specific musics of the place—Luxemburg, France, America of the '60s, Togo, Algeria, California, New York, the sacred straits of Verrazano that guard Brooklyn. He takes up language and moves on. Not just the native Lëtzebuergesch, German, French, English, Arabic, but the endless uprooting from what is given—there is the nomadic quality—the poem as a provisional pause, an overnighting. From which the writer, like the reader, finally must rise up and be gone.

4

Nominal aphasia

Pierre often says he has it

when he can't remember the name of one of his ten thousand friends

nominal aphasia = nomadic language,

you leave the nouns behind,

you leave the names behind,

you follow the air's blue word

rivering through the atmosphere.

Let the sheep

find their own way to grass

= follow the poem,

the poem knows the way.

The nomad knows.

The poem leads to the hollow place

the anechoic chamber

where you can hear yourself think

the blood rushes by your ears

like the sweet streams that tumble

gold out of Caucasus

and you hear it, hear it as words,

in the quietest place of all.

All your sheep are asleep,

sprawl in every language

but they dream in Tamazight

the way on a hot still day
a fast passing car
stirs a cool breeze the trees hear

the sheep listen.

When we read, are we sheep
pasturing on phantom acres,
meadow-mad pilgrims
palsied by speech?

God made the world *by translation* alone:
from his thought into our language
we touch with our hands and feet,
the beautiful verb called you.

In the quiet of the poem
we know ourselves
sometimes all too well,
we close the book and look away,

 out there,
 where we think
something might be that doesn't know us.

*Previously published in Pierre Joris – Cartographies of the In-Between, ed. Peter
Cockelbergh (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2011).

NICOLE BROSSARD

ELSEWHERE & THE VOICE OF FRIENDSHIP

in English the voice goes faster, the same voice
in French stretches out with other intonations
of voyage and vowels, sometimes an Arabic word floats
into the atmosphere so then memory
delivers passages of friendship
vast landscapes for nomadic alphabet
then suddenly the language needs small
obstacles with plurals and pronouns in translation

joris iris high risk joy

I can see how in bending he translates simultaneously
he laughs because life because he translates from Albany to Paris
between centuries he walks with thousand-words of etymology
from Berlin to Celan to Miles Davis toward other variations
each word moves him closer, moves him away
"the always elsewhere I stalk/ I push against
yet never/ touch."

I can see how in bending he brushes simultaneously
against Jack Kerouac and it touches me too this language
on the road it comes all by itself this French
as in life it moves through "routes, not Roots"
eye-lashed syllables through which light hums

joris iris high risk joy

Translated from French by Peter Cockelbergh.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN & PIERRE JORIS

CLOSE LISTENING

PENNSOUND [WPS1 CLOCKTOWER STUDIO, NY, JUNE 20TH 2005]

Charles Bernstein: *Welcome to Close Listening, PennSound's program of reading and conversation with Poetics, produced in collaboration with Art International Radio.*

Pierre, it's great to have you here.

Pierre Joris: Great to be here, Charles.

What is nomadic poetics?

[chuckling] Well, you used the word. It's a metaphor for writing...

[interrupting] *But I meant "no mad," "not a mad person"...*

Right, there's that, too. It is of course a metaphor to some degree, or, better, a way of talking about writing. But "metaphor" is too loaded and restrictive. I like the Deleuzian formula suggesting that the nomadic belongs to a space he & Guattari call the "n-1 possibilities." Meaning that the singular, the one, that which would fix, nail things down "once" and for all, has always to be subtracted, avoided. So for me it is both, and maybe tenfold everything that involves myself in my travels as a poet, as a thinker, that involves what I consider today the possibilities of opening up poetry towards the rest of the world. And the only way to do this is to be nomadic, i.e. to go places. You can be a "nomade immobile" as the great Tunisian writer Albert Memmi said—an immobile nomad—and do it all from your writing room. Deleuze never left Paris, right. But to me it is a way of trying to see what a poetry that also breaks down the limits of the "mother tongue" would be: the "mother tongue," like any "tongue" that wants to be more than a way of speaking, i.e. wants to be a ruling "language," is only "a dialect with guns." All

languages are dialects, all languages are street talk, and it is the multiplicity of those languages that, to me, would make up a nomadic poetics.

When I used the term "nomad" in "Poetics of the Americas," it created a bit of a stir, as it sometimes does. Perhaps even more so in your work, which elaborates it so much further. Because so many people think of poetry as, in Pound's sense, rooted in the land, based on, if not the "mother tongue," then the language that you grew up with, that is of your community... that your writing expresses and is part of a specific place. Some of the poets articulating that are writers close to your thinking, and yet you're arguing for something very radically different.

But what would be the mother tongue of somebody brought up in a particular place like New York?

[Laughing] *It wud be lik this. Dis iz mah mothuh tung, coz ya know this is da way we speak heeer... (I like to do it on the radio.)*

I know, but even you moved from the 82nd to 92nd Street, and it is a very different country as your mother would say, right?

That's right.

So, I think the variety is endless, as are the possibilities. And the only way we can try to make the language as real as the possibilities of the world, is to get away from the notion of a "purity" of language. In one of the essays in *A Nomad Poetics* I say "purity is the root of all evil." Kind of overstating something that to me is obvious: that it is only in the imperfection, in what is made up as you go along, the vocabularies, the syntax,

everything in the language that you can create... that's where poetry happens. Duncan used to say something along these lines, in terms of it being the mistakes that make the poem move forward, typos, etc., he would claim it as the work of the unconscious, I would say the unconscious is only a later interpretation of what was an unpremeditated (at all levels) misstep or mistype, and that is how we move the business along, all of it, by its imperfections, by im-perfecting it at all levels...

Is there a connection with "syncretism," taking things from different places to make something that doesn't otherwise exist...

Of course, ...

...outside of it?

...that is part of it. But my sense would be that the 20th-century metaphor for that was "collage," which is bringing different things together into one area. Pound's *Cantos* and similar work by a number of the major great Modernists, are essentially collage-based. That is a core 20th-century image—I've said often enough that collage is probably the only true 20th-century technical innovation, entering in all its force with the one new 20th-century art, film, as montage. In a way I want to move these "nomad poetics" into the 21st century, replacing "collage" with the notion of the "rhizome." Something that can go any place, any time. The collage is in a strange way often determined by an aesthetics, and I don't want an aesthetics to determine the nomad poem. Modernism is an aesthetics of the collage, in a way, and that's also the limits of Pound and others, because what can come in, enter that space, finally? Even if it looks like everything comes in, I don't think everything can come in—or, many elements from heterogenous areas that are brought in will be homogenized quickly by the collage-canvas, in fact via an unavoidable aesthetization—& in a historical-political way that goes a long way in explaining the connection between aesthetics and politics, and especially in that age, with fascism. The way the articulation of aesthetised elements happens in High Modernism leads—or certainly can lead—to relatively fixed and

static work. I mean, the great example of that would be Eliot, even more so than Pound.

Well, thinking of Pound and Eliot and their use of allusions: let me ask you something about your own work (some of the poems that you read in the companion program¹ that we did). You cite many philosophers, literary figures, and many other things as well, in a way that is, perhaps, reminiscent of modernist collage and allusion. How does nomadic poetics work in a poem like "Nimrod in Hell," specifically in respect to the use of allusion—and especially proper name allusion, which obviously that poem is referencing as a modality. That is to say, "Nimrod" is not only referencing the proper names, but the use of allusion itself; the practice or artifice of allusion is quite self-conscious.

It is. And to me "Nimrod" is already nomadic in the sense of its "inter-genre nature," because it's not a poem with line breaks, it is not an essay, it is not an autobiographical piece, it is not Dantean criticism, but it is a kind of writing through, a moving through all of those possibilities. So I will call it a poem and put it in a book, won't call it anything and put it inside a book of poems, and let it function as such. Let it leaven what is left and right of it, and let the question arise: "why is that text here?"...

Well, is it a guide to culture? Are you saying that we should read Derrida, that we should be reading Dante, that we should know those sources? Does it set up a hierarchy in that way? Apparently not.

No, I think maybe the only one, or the core figure in that text, finally, may be Rimbaud... against Dante, in a strange way. Rimbaud running away. Rimbaud being the figure of the man who travels, who leaves things behind and does not construct the *Commedia*, that incredible Christian building of a poem. Even if that's absolutely gorgeous, too: right now I'm working

¹ Joris read "Returning to These States after a 6 Months Absence," "This Afternoon Dante," "The Word, the Māwqif," "A Calm Vademecum Dose," "Nimrod in Hell," "Reading/Writing #18," "The Rothenberg Variations" (1, 2, 3, 11, 13, 15), 3 sections form "The Tang Extending from the Blade," "The Rheumy Eye of Night" & "Lines Written From Returning to These Shores After a Long Absence."

again with material from “Purgatory,” that wonderful middle book of his. But I think Rimbaud and the moving through things is the more important vision for me. Of course there are a lot of personal references in there, in terms of location. We talked earlier of the “Ardennes;” I’m also born in that area. So, all of those figures come together. Is it a “Guide to Kulchur?” Well, I am not an American who moved to Europe to “get culture,” as Pound did—nor do I have any desire to create (or discover) hierarchies of value as he did. To me the important thing would be again the Rimbaldian “homme aux semelles de vent,” the man with the soles of wind. I am European by origin, and in that sense cannot ever escape a certain historical heaviness—though I try to nomadize it by relativizing rules or origins, or whatever. It thus gave me great pleasure a few years ago to be able to destabilize Pound’s location of an autochthonous European lyrical tradition as originating in the Occitan areas of France with the troubadours, by pointing out that the etymology of “trobar” is not Latin, but Arabic—“tarab” meaning song—& thus reaches down to al-Andalus, which of course is not the final origin either. This may be my fight with Europe, with my own origins, that I probably need to question again & again.

Now, “Europe”... remind me of where that is? That’s like where France and Italy are, right? Over on the other side of the Atlantic from us? It’s coming back to me suddenly. And your part of Europe is a small pocket in the middle...

Luxembourg... It’s the corner of Luxembourg, Belgium and France... the “Battle of the Bulge” was Bastogne, where that “nuts” thing happened...

I will come back to that, but I want to pursue this question of the use of “high” culture references in your nomadic poetics, which I take it as not so much a continuation, but I would say, a reference to, indeed a critique of, the system of references and allusions associated with so-called High Modernism. So, what is the status of those highfalutin’ references?

[laughs] I guess...

Are they authority?

No, they’re the companions...

Are they counter-authority?

...the companions of my thought to a great extent. (I am very fond, for example, of Robin Blazer’s “companion” series of poems—though I’d probably never write a series with each poem dealing with one specific companion figure. I’m more interested in “the company” as Creeley called it, those—always plural, always n-1—with whom you break bread & share a drink). I want those who enter the poems to be companiable. In fact, this sometimes upsets more traditional Europeans, for example, in the introduction my friend Michel Deguy, the french poet-philosopher, wrote for a book of mine, he seems a bit puzzled about the rather casual or non-respectful (non-hierarchical, in fact) way in which I address or deal with Heidegger in one poem. There are other poems where J.D., or Jackie Derrida, will be in the company of a rock song. That depends on what comes to me, or what enters at any given moment—though rock is rare. It so happens that I listen to more jazz and classical 20th-century music than I listen to rock ‘n’ roll, these days. So those references will come in more. But whatever is willing to enter the writing at a given moment is always welcome. So I certainly don’t see them as authority figures. Somebody like Derrida to me simply is a great pleasure to read, is very playful. I’m not interested so much even in the man as a figure of knowledge: I’m interested in the man as a writer. As a tremendous writer out of the Maghreb into France, by the way. And that complexity of the writing life.

Before getting into the Maghreb, let me just ask you about one other poem that you read in the companion program: “Tang extending from the blade,” which is a recent and ongoing piece. Could you talk a little bit about what the compositional approach is there?

Well that becomes another one of those ongoing works. I think it’s called “Canto Diurno number something,” I don’t yet know which number. A long time ago, I thought that as a form—rather than taking a spatial

form, a preset form—I'd give myself a temporal form. I'd say, what can I do in 24 hours? And write a text that encompasses the 24 hours; that there's something inside of that time limit. This poem, or this sequence of poems is based on my readings inside of a day, through the newspapers, on the web, specifically, and through the German *Perlentaucher* news, where I get all sorts of information. So I picked sixteen sources from that day's *Perlentaucher* picks. Then I gave myself the same amount of days—16—to compose the extracted bits into that "Canto Diurno number something," to interlink them somehow, and compose a text out of those sources that have been determined not as randomly as if a Jackson Mac Lowian technique had been used, but randomly enough in terms of my scanning the net that day.

Which again is an example both of a structural imagination, but also of a very different sense of citationality and allusion. You referred earlier to a remark that my mother made: I grew up on 70th Street on the West Side and for many years lived on 82nd Street and then moved after from 82nd to 92nd Street, at which point my mother asked me, "How do you think you're gonna like it in that neighbourhood?" So it's kind of the infrathin Upper West Side distinctions. But you have moved enormously, and the fact of multilinguality and nomadicism is very powerful in your life experience, not just in your thinking. Though I think a very crucial point you make is that one could live in one place and that also could be a nomadic space, and shared as that – as I think we do, by the way. But tell me a little bit about why you are not writing in Luxemburgish, having been born in Luxembourg?

Because I don't know how to. I was never taught how to write in *Lëtzebuergesch*. *Lëtzebuergesch*, at least when I grew up—it has changed a bit, now—, was "only" the spoken language. Luxembourg, this rich, rattily small country, was colonized culturally by France and Germany—who for centuries fought among themselves and one or the other would invade us or go through us to get to & at the other one, and would screw us up and down in any given war. And at the end of their wars they would pay off the victor by handing over a bit of

Luxembourg territory to him. But Luxembourgers are stubborn and culturally conservative, so have always hung on to their native Frankish-Mosellan language, *Lëtzebuergesch*, even if they knew that the two other cultures needed to be integrated. So that, when I went to grade school, I learnt my ABCs in German, and in second grade, I started to study French as a foreign language. And that's the way it carried on until eighth grade, when things switched over and all of a sudden French became the carrier language of school going. I.e. history, math & all content-subjects were done in French, while German remained only as a foreign language and literature, though we'd add English and/or Spanish, plus Latin if you so choose, to make it into the classical European kind of high school curriculum. You arrive at high school graduation and are supposedly completely knowledgeable in at least two languages. *Lëtzebuergesch* you had for one hour a week—usually on Saturday, the last class before the weekend break—for a few years. So it was simply not there for me as a possible language to write in. And I fell immediately in love, for some strange reason—I still don't know exactly why—with English, especially with American writing, very early on. At thirteen or fourteen I was reading Mickey Spillane like crazy. My grandmother had a movie house, and we watched all those "Yankee movies," as we called them, sometimes double bills, an oater and a war movie, unhappily often accompanied by a bad German *Heimat* movie. I guess America at that point had—this is the fifties—had liberated Europe from the Nazis, and so there was a kind of great love of things American. As kids we all in some way fell for that.

I'm talking with Pierre Joris about how he became, or maybe already was, and always has been an American poet, because actually your first language as a poet, in a sense is American...

...l'américain, as they say in French—, right? I tried to write in French and German when I was fourteen or fifteen. But German, despite the fact of Celan's absolute importance for me and for me coming to poetry, was not really available to me. Mainly, I think, because what was happening in German writing in that

time had no import for me. The problems that Germans had to deal with, in terms of overcoming that period, were foreign to me. In French, I didn't see anything very interesting happening: there was a kind of light postwar Surrealism, and a rather unappealing "empty space" neo-Mallarméan mode. And then I came across *Howl* and Kerouac, and then Pound, and thought: "Wow, there is an incredible thing going on here and it happens very specifically in the American language. Not even in British English—which felt as flat as an Auden poem to me even then. So why, if I have to write in a foreign language anyway... why not go to the fourth language?"

Would this also relate to the poetics that would say that any language a poet writes in is a foreign language as it becomes poetry? ...

Absolutely, yes...

... So, then you become an American poet, the American poet that you are, but among my acquaintances perhaps the most knowledgeable about poetry outside the US, since Americans suffer from, and also derive a certain privilege based on, their monolingualism and monoculturalism (even as they imagine it as multicultural and multilingual). You could never really fully participate in that aspect, nor do you desire to, but it also is not open to you as an option. So I want to ask you a question from the perspective outside of the US, leaving the US out: do you see any notable constellations, or new possibilities in poetry outside the US in this first part of the 21st century?

I don't know if anything in that sense has as strongly developed in the last five or six years, but what for me has been most interesting since, certainly, I came to poetry (i.e. for the last quarter of the 20th century and into this century), are the poetries of the "ex-colonies." And of course French was close, and I lived in North Africa, so North African writing was always very close, but other African writings, too (cf. my sense of the need to transform language). Franco Beltrametti and I once wanted to do an anthology called *Blows Against the Mother Tongue*...

[laughter]

...that would gather all the writers who had written in a foreign language, be it Ovid, or the great Chinese poet, Li Po, or any number of others, you know, who all wrote in a language that was not theirs...

...from Conrad to Rosmarie Waldrop.

Yes, so I was always interested, for example, in what in the Maghreb, in North Africa, young writers were doing with, and against, and transforming classical French. That seemed to me much more interesting than a lot of the writing, very competent, excellent writing—new Mallarméan tradition or post-Surrealist tradition—that would happen in "la capitale," in Paris. Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, the great Moroccan writer, for instance, would be one such—who I happened to meet just as I was beginning to write—and he's absolutely more of a Surrealist than any Surrealist ever was. Habib Tengour wrote a beautiful manifesto that basically says at the end: "in fact, in the Maghreb, Surrealism is the natural condition, it's not an art form that had to be invented." So that has always interested me strongly. And at the same time, Caribbean writers, too, also out of the French tradition. I will go anywhere.

Right now, I'm also interested in learning and studying more of those Maghrebian writers who have come up in a new generation, where Arabic after independence became the core language and who decided not to use French anymore... Well, a vast number of problems pose themselves again because Arabic has a number of different hierarchic setups, you have the spoken Arabic of Algeria, which is very different from the Moroccan vernacular, then you have standard media Arabic, and Classical Koranic Arabic...

And in the French Caribbean you're no doubt thinking of Aimé Césaire and maybe Edouard Glissant?

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ALLEN FISHER

COGENT ATTENTION

THE WORK OF PIERRE JORIS

There is a cogent attention to boundaries in Pierre Joris's work; a nimble and multiple attention that takes on a range of concerns and interests, informing his poetry and his poetics. Building from one of its roots in "bound," *boundary* relates to land and action, the concept of readiness, destiny, obliged action or preparation to go. There is also the link to binding and bonding. Onions adds "the limiting line"¹ and it takes very little stretch to hear "boulder" and "bounce." To have any of these roots or rhizomic strands in mind, when reading Joris's work, can provide an expansive potential. The nimbleness of his attentions provide the basis for his ideas of *nomad poetics*, his attentions to discussions of *place* and *locality* shifted against journeying and break from restriction, away from single centre and, as he notes on the first page of *Turbulence*, "WHEN THE SPOKE IS SINUOUS, WHAT IS THE SHAPE OF THE WHEEL?" His deliberations are actions involved with movement or attentions to movement, a preparedness through investigative thought, questioning destiny, critiquing obligation, bag already packed in the hallway. At the same time his lyricism binds him to his own proprioception and existential condition, his camaraderie and loyalty to friends. He plays these relations into and between each other, it is an open field poetics set within and around existing forms and modes he has just invented.

One of the loveliest aspects of Pierre Joris's work is his lyric, his homing lilt, a play with language that has been, it may not surprise him to recall, an instinct of centring in his work since the work's wander began. The pun or shift of word from noun into verb:

¹ C.T. Onions, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

every other watering
hole, holed up
at lake's edge²

Pierre Joris has been involved with and in nomad poetics for generations, not simply its physical form in excursion from Luxembourg to Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (Bard College) in America, to London and Paris, North Africa and now back in the USA (Albany and Brooklyn). His poetics has been involved in translations and transpositions for more than forty years; his nomad poetics is an active confrontation and involvement in a range of languages, both his own and others. His attention to the work of Paul Celan in extensive translations has been exemplary.³

Reading through *h.j.r.*, a book of poetry published in 1999 by OtherWind Press (most of which is in the last section of *Poasis: Selected Poems, 1986-99*) the recurrence of attention to nomadism becomes evident. He cites Maurice Blanchot at the masthead, "Nomadism answers to a relation that possession cannot satisfy." In 2003 Wesleyan published Joris's *A Nomad Poetics: Essays*. The book includes the essays "Nomad Century Ahead" (1998), "Notes toward a Nomadic Poetics" (1996-2002) and "The Nomadism of Pablo Picasso" (2001). His most recent book of essays, *Justifying the Margins* (from Salt, 2009) includes: "On the Nomadic Circulation of Contemporary Poetics" (2009) and "The Seamlessly Nomadic Future of Collage" (undated).

Joris enriches his nomad poetics through attention to the work of Deleuze and Guattari in their second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,⁴ but his own poetry precedes their work in this discussion and does not entirely support it. Joris's nomad poetics recognises a nomad history in play with a sedentary history; for Deleuze and Guattari, nomadology is the opposite of a history.⁵ Every jump following a catastrophic cusp, every heartbeat and nerve impulse changes the territory,⁶ just as localities are a flux of movements and alterations. The poet travels by intensity and displacements; the poet's movements in spacetime "depend on intensive thresholds of nomadic deterritorialisation [...] that simultaneously define complementary, sedentary reterritorializations."⁷ The move is away from central Europe in order to redefine it, reterritorise its position through translation in a redefined spacetime; assemblage is the process of becoming something else. The cell membrane boundary is a process. Deleuze and Guattari over-territorise in this sense, they are too nervous about what is deterritorialized and reterritorialized. The poet does not, the poet digs for an etymology simultaneous with a playful disregard for a word's origins. Deleuze and Guattari eat their own tails when they say, "A territory is always en route to an at least potential deterritorialization, even though the new assemblage may operate a reterritorialization [...]"⁸ in this respect

2 "Ode or Nearly Here" (hjr, 3).

3 In particular, Paul Celan *Breathturn* (1995), translated by Pierre Joris, & Paul Cela *Threadsun*s (2000), translated by Pierre Joris, both books Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press.

4 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

5 Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 23.

6 René Thom, *Structural Stability & Morphogenesis*, trans. D.H. Fowler (Reading, MA. & London: Benjamin-Cummings, 1972, 1975) & Christopher Zeeman, *Catastrophe Theory: Selected Papers 1972-1977* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1977).

7 Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 54.

8 Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 326.

their aesthetics are circular and highly limited. Their analyses are however extensive and considerably useful. They define the nomad in terms of the war machine and propose that the “nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths [...] goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity” and secondly, contrary to the sedentary road, the “nomadic trajectory [...] *distributes people (or animals) in an open space*, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating.” Thus the *nomos*, in their sense, “stands in opposition to the law or the *polis* [...].” Thus thirdly, “nomad space is smooth, marked only by ‘traits’ that are effaced and displaced by trajectory.”⁹ Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis, whilst perhaps more elaborated for their own philosophical requirements, is more categorical and restricted than the proposals for boundary and bonds made through Joris’s poetry.

“Ode or Nearly Here,” begins a quest in *h.j.r.* with a stability, a place to return to:

Stopped the Quest
a stand of oak (hjr, 3)

and elements of narrative journey follow:

every other watering
hole, holed up

[...] How many week-
end visitors added
their ashes

to a fire we let die
[...] (hjr, 3)

[...] this tribe of
spangled summer-semi-nomads
[...]

mid-morning caravan
of what passes (hjr, 3-4)

which is lifted and enhanced by the figurative nomad in:

A ta’wil of uncommunity
the unavowable thought
through & in (hjr, 5)

“ta’wil” provides Joris with a necessary potential for allegorical interpretations in poetry, in recognition of the work of Henry Corbin (particularly *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* [1950]) and to some extent, through Robert Kelly and George Quasha’s proposal in *Vort* (#5 Vol 2, No. 2, 1974), a new “How to read.” The substance is that poetry can provide the materials for an enhanced understanding of human achievement and potential, and this can

⁹ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 380-381.

be realised through close reading. Joris provides an exemplary example of this practice in "Translation at the Mountain of Death" in *Justifying the Margins* (JtM, 87-100), in which he offers a translation of Celan's poem "TODTNAUBERG" and close reads the poem at a number of levels from its material and political meanings through to its substantial meaning. The nomad poetic thus is not a matter of taking a route through, but a number of routes, not necessarily in the horizontal direction, "at the beginning all directions are equivalent" and "the sign reads TOUTES DIRECTIONS/points one way only" (Turb, 12), and towards an oasisic goal, but archaeological and visionary and without firm conclusion, "the unavowable thought/through & in" (hjr, 5). Joris comes to the reality of the poetic practice where,

Enjambment saves
another day, caravans (hjr, 5)

There is a constant or frequent shifting here, out on a limb to check an unknown route as well as back into his own space of word sound association:

[...] a horse
for witching

ours or theirs, "we go by
sound alone" [...] (hjr, 6)

Horse whip becomes witching-hour. This is a recurring mode, in *Winnetou Old*,¹⁰ "[...] **the bone titan crouching knot- / sayer a preventer a not-sayer a stop-gap bony / head wedged into that opening in the self that is the/ self slash through which soul flows [...]**" (P, 72) and, at the end of the same text the play of "exile down the narrowest cut he believes himself & finds / a home therein exile night elixir" (P, 84).

Five years after *Winnetou Old*, the *h.j.r.* "Ode or Nearly Here" is descriptive of journeys and interrupted by self-reflection or internal movement, the nomadic self in the landscape in the thinking poet:

Redirection

the aggregates. Ho-hum. Mid-
morning horse
flies. Peg

the tent to sand [...] (hjr, 6)

The use of a right hand margin throughout "Ode" adds to the discomfort contemporary with confidence. The poetic discourse repeatedly addresses the concept of boundary; on the page, in the vocabulary, in the themes, in the use of knowledge. An obvious recurrence is "desert" with its direct implications of, or associations with, nomadic peoples and encounters, the author's experiences in North Africa and with Arab literature, his personal internal encounters with his own mobile self, in fact a refusal "to come to the point," a

¹⁰ Pierre Joris, *Winnetou Old* (Buffalo, NY: Meow Press, 1994).

not necessarily rooted in the writer giving up the mother language [...]. Rather the matter of a nomadic writing is anchored elsewhere, specifically in the syntactic and grammatical manipulations the given language is subjected to, in order to free it from a range of traditional constraints." (ANP, 115).

Tim Ingold provides a cogent apprehension of the nomad in 1986: "If we ask," he writes, "what moves, in a nomadic regime, that remains stationary in a sedentary one, the answer cannot be the individual—who moves as much in both—but his destination, which is moved 'in his mind' in advance of the journey itself. In its material aspect, nomadic movement is that component of actual 'on-the-ground movement' occasioned by the displacement of the point of arrival from the point of departure, and the nomadic track is a path connecting these points."¹⁴

On the same page he notes, "To rest in a place is, in a minimal sense, to 'inhabit' it, so that habitations may be defined as places from which people set out and at which they arrive. If the latter are spatially separate from the former, we may speak of shifts of habitation. Such relocations [...] constitute the essence of nomadism in its material aspect."¹⁵

As the reader navigates Joris's *h.j.r.* there is a four-page intruding island at "Aegean Short-wave" where the open field form shifts into a condensed clipped set of enjambéd almost prose-formed paragraphs, redolent of the text in "Lemur Mornings" in *Turbulence* and, in this process, "things/ flounder under the combined weight of their polylingual accretions [...]" (hjr, 31). "The Dream of the Desert in the Book" pulls the reader back into the earlier process and geography where "The book lies open/ [...] / in all the oases/ [...] / behind every sand dune [...]" (hjr, 34) an almost esoteric poem follows; it is the mind's eye and its celestial journey, or intellectual journey to find the pole, involved in translations from the Maghreb and then the book's title poem, a prose section, follows with a narrative journal of experience in this North African desert region.

THE PLACE OF ROADS

is off the road—
make tracks
w/ words, grains
of sand shifting
dunes (hjr, 45)

and

be gone
get off the road
(what road
when [...]) (Turb, 12)

*Previously published in Pierre Joris – *Cartographies of the In-Between*, ed. Peter Cockelbergh (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2011).

14 Tim Ingold, *The appropriation of nature. Essays on human ecology & social relations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) 175.

15 Ingold, *The appropriation of nature*, 175.

LOUIS ARMAND

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