Chain

DOCUMENTARY
Chain / 2

Special Topic: Documentary

Edited by Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr
Editors' Notes

There is no such thing as documentary—whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques. This assertion—as old and as fundamental as the antagonisms between names and reality—needs incessantly to be restated despite the very visible existence of a documentary tradition.

—Trinh T. Minh-ha

This issue of Chain continues an investigation into forms that are traditionally perceived as neutral or “objective.” Our first issue questioned the subjective processes of editing as they are used to create an object seemingly without author. Our second issue, on documentary, begins with a different set of questions: What does it mean to create an objective text, a document that records supposedly without comment? Does documenting/textualizing a subjective experience render it neutral for the reader/viewer? In what ways does the topical world filter through the creative word? How do creative forms actually capture an event, a person, a place? Are some forms more equipped to document than others?

It is our hope that this issue outlines some of the possible relations between the “real” or the “political” and the individual’s creative response. The contents comment on the world in an eclectic array of approaches—some alternative, some traditional. All of this work highlights the way we use language/image to cut up our experiential encounters so as to (re)see them. Ironically, documenting of the “real” seems to rely on defamiliarization, a shift in the angle of perception/reception/expectation. From the work included in this issue emerges a conviction that the alienated word or image is the most effective means for communicating that which is true. The work causes us to question and qualify our agendas as readers and viewers; we must examine the relation between world and response with care and a sharper consciousness.

We asked the contributors to answer the following questions: 1) How do you define the word “documentary”? 2) In what forms can “documentary” exist? 3) What names come to mind when thinking of those who deal in documentary forms (both in the traditional and innovative senses)? 4) If you were to create a documentary, what would be your medium and topic? Answers appear in italic type.
BUFFALO, NY (AP) — This issue of Chain continues to limit pain and suffering damages an investigation into winds of peace—or at least a ripple of truce—between forms that are traditionally deceptive mutual funds sales practices perceived as neutral or "objective." Our 'first issue questioned if the new budget is going to have an adverse impact on the subjective processes of vandalizing houses editing as partly sunny and mostly cold they are used to create an object seemingly protracted dispute with management without author. Our second issue, before paramedics arrived on documentary, begins with impending cuts for the next school year a different set of city court-ordered questions: What does it mean taking hundreds of thousands of dollars from the charity to create an objective text, a document under immunity that records supposedly without fraud, conspiracy comment? Does documenting "that's not my leadership style" or textualizing a subjective experience broad market indexes render it neutral for the reader or viewer? In the biggest one month drop since last May what ways does the topical world filter family and business tax breaks through the creative word? How do creative House Ways and Means forms actually capture an event, to recast the civil legal system a person, estranged from the sport he adopted a place? Are some forms denounced as "gutless" more equipped to document cause of death than others?

It is our hope that this issue outlines boats, boots or booths some of the possible Lake Ontario waters relations between the "real" Niagara Falls or the "political" jig caster and rig troller and the individual's creative prison term response. The contents comment on seven sticks of dynamite, a fake beard and a notebook with the world in an eclectic array of approaches shooting the victim in the head—some alternative, some one winning ticket sold traditional. All party leaders had been debating whether to name a new leader of this work would gut appropriations for youth highlights the way we use language or "What's in the mind of our president?" image to cut up our losing millions experiential encounters . . . We asked the contributors to answer the following questions: 1) money market funds: just how safe are they? 2) why is enough always a companion word to adequate? 3) is there any other information to consider if I want to purchase one of these wonder drugs? 4) whither liberal woman in the '96 campaign? Answers appear in italic type.

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Alicia Askenase

from Known and Suspected Sites

More Sites

In Connecticut I never thought about these things. The "rubber company" had always emptied stuff into the Naugatuck. One of the ten most polluted rivers in the country. The big scandal in Waterbury (formerly Mattatuck) happened downtown. Somebody piled up barrels in an abandoned lot behind a factory. Right in the middle of town. I hear they don’t want to dig there—what they might find. Still I understand it’s nothing compared to what goes on in Naugy.

Clusters

What about these clusters, babies with birth defects. Near toxic waste sites and farming communities. The government cannot confirm this. Our friends’ baby hasn’t smiled yet—she’s eight months old—can’t hold her head up, either. No hard evidence. A neighbor’s baby died at eleven days—his organs were malformed. In her support group several babies were born with spina bifida the year they sprayed for gypsy moths. Or direct links. The question being whether or not to have babies around here.

1. Pertaining to or proof of some “history” or “story”; a creative non-fiction presentation which should, cannot help having a subjective slant for interest, beauty, appeal.


3. The Atomic Café, Rafferty Loader, Roger and Me, Michael Moore, Guernica, Picasso, Swimming to Cambodia, Spalding Gray, photography by Dorothea Lange, Paris is Burning, Jennie Livingston.
4. If I could "do" a documentary I would want to write it. Film would be my first choice because of the infinite possibilities for expression, its grand size, and its accessibility. The documentary would include other art forms—poetry, visual art, music, dance. Thematically I might try exploring the environment, our impact on it and its impact in return, on us—i.e. pesticides and the health of migrant workers and their families. I would also be interested in writing about the untimely loss of a parent or sibling on the surviving members of a family, how it affects them collectively and individually, and their children, the next generation.

"Men at War," 1975
An ensemble of prints made from a single found negative. The date and circumstances of the original image is unknown.
Merle Lyn Bachman

stupni dō

(the music that keeps repeating)

thick encumbrances of silence

of leaves and freshly turned sod, reportage
"one of the worst"

some chickens & sheep picked at bodies that escaped

clustered together (these words) one of them a man
atop a small boy

speed not enough for fear

lay open the wood planking

as they decay a message, transmitted

body just a half-life for words

——

"stench of burning flesh" (headline)

(I threw the newspaper away & bought another, to retrieve
these words)¹

speed was not enough for fear

squashes before the snows began

a trail of
shoes gloves and half-emptied

their fear was not enough to save

to scavenge off words, pick flesh
off literal
(image-transmission-print-reception
these events imprecise in
aura of distance belied by time)²

reportage : one of the worst : some chickens & sheep
picked at bodies that escaped

of leaves and freshly
turned sod

"Stupni Dō" (piece of newsprint left
on bus, I buy again retrieve
the words)

behind sacks and barrels of po-
tatoes, beets and squash, a flash-

velvet / reveal

upright through the opening
three women in their late 30s
their bodies blackening (did not escape)

lay (bodies) clustered to-
gether, one of them a man lying
atop a small boy

possible rapes (sub-head)
croatian denials  (how we organize)

   in sifted thoughts of experience, nothing
   happens without language
   for us.)

been dynamited

a crawl space

lay open the wood planking that

cast aside, with a blanket & a jacket abandoned

(did his work. objective as a camera
observer—witness—on to the next
story having transmitted
electronically the facts without
heavy metals in the water we call
mercury; tears)

"A few paces away in the gar-
den, perhaps pulled from the
crawl space, two sisters, Amela
and Suvada Likic, aged 19 and 22,
appeared to have been assaulted."  

in muddled pile

and what appeared to have been
their clothing

(and what "appears" as visible
relic to recording
eye / ear (to register a lack of threat—
internal
encumbrance of silence

to manufacture image out of plain
boards (byline):

1.-We "believe" in words.
2.-What we "see" dictated to us by these
marks on a page or sound modules conveyed
by flickering pointillist images on screens.
3.—“Inside” and “outside” the mind, recycled endlessly.
4.—After the massacre, words
5.—A task to record, be “objective” put into understandable
regular units of syntax what is understood to have
occurred; veracity measured against “appearance.” Even dead
bodies cannot be trusted not to lie but “appear”
to have been assaulted
—for they no longer exist in language—are inert, material, gross.
Bodies as objects to be described for they cannot speak or otherwise
elucidate their condition.
6.—How the reporter is the survivor of the event although he was
not present when it happened.
—How we who read his account reconstruct it in our minds, become
implicated in language.

This poem is from a book-length manuscript I am finishing called Suspect
Retrievals.

"Stupni Do" is (or was) the name of a Muslim village in Bosnia-
Herzegovina. An article appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle on October 28, 1993, with the headline: “Stench of Burning Flesh at Site Of Massacre by Bosnian Croats.” The dateline was “Stupni Do, Bosnia-Herzegovina.” The article was written by John F. Burns of the New York Times.

The poem comments on its origins—and its strategy:
(I threw the newspaper away & bought another, to retrieve these words)

The poem’s “endnotes,” in a way, present a statement about the poem’s concern which the poem itself forced to the margins.

I find myself uncomfortable with “documenting” any further how this poem was written. I want the poem (the music that keeps repeating) to be its own documentation.

However, the poem did arise from a specific encounter—my encounter with the above-mentioned newspaper article. Some thoughts on newspapers as “documentary”:

Newspapers “document” events that occur. “Reporters” are supposed to report—just the facts, ma’am. (The reporter cannot say, “This is a disgusting war crime.” However, he can quote Brigadier Angus Ramsay of Britain, who said: “This is a disgusting war crime.”)

Newspapers provide information. The reporter is supposed to be “objective,” providing balanced coverage. (“It seems that there was a massacre committed in Stupni Do, but not of the size reported”: the reporter quotes a military spokesman for the Croats.)

The “news” appears to us in paragraphs one or two sentences long, composed of words generally accessible to readers with an elementary reading level; for example,

The only life left in the village after the massacre, a few dogs and some chickens and sheep, picked at bodies that escaped the pyres.

Newspapers are printed on cheap stock, meant to be tossed or recycled. There are always more editions, more newspapers, every day; one replaces the next.

The Eternal Repository

On August 30, 1994, Lyn Hejinian and I talked in my living room, as we drank peppermint tea from Fire King mugs. This conversation is part of a larger project of mine, a study of the correspondence between Hejinian and Susan Howe (mid-70s to mid-80s), which is housed in the Archive for New Poetry at UCSD. This conversation’s very existence raises issues about the documentary value of intellectual exchange, issues familiar to readers of Lyn Hejinian’s poetry. What is the self? How does the “person” function in the larger world? How do women talk to each other? How do history and epistemology affect each other? How do we distinguish the public from the private?

Lyn Hejinian: Probably very few of us realize how intertwined our thinking is with our letter writing, our theorizing with the personal things we say in letters. It is such an intimate medium. Even when you know some third party is going to be reading the letters some day, you still end up speaking intimately.

Dodie Bellamy: It’s just the form that is seductive?

LH: I think so. I love the letter form. I think that’s the one reason I’m glad my letters are in the Archive.

DB: As you know, I’ve spoken with a number of people whose papers are housed at UCSD. You’re the only person who has no regrets.

LH: I love to write letters. I love to receive them. And I still write lots of them. I really do think the letter is a literary enterprise, and I always did even when I wasn’t thinking of being archived. My contemporaries and I have always insisted that our poetry is grounded in the world—and that’s really a place where the grounding can begin, the first workings out in stages of ideas, with the relationship of ideas to other things in life preserved. Maybe I’ll write to Charles Bernstein tonight and tell him about my conversation with Dodie today, and I’ll say more about what I think about letters, and it will be an unfolding.

DB: Michael Davidson said the archives speak back and forth to one another—and after looking at them for a while, they really do. People you think don’t have any connection are suddenly mentioning one another, and it becomes this huge matrix, an organic web.
LH: I like that unfolding; it’s very process-oriented, letter writing, especially when you write a lot of letters over time to the same person.

DB: You seem to be a very private person. On the phone the other day Susan mentioned how careful she felt you were in your letters—and in one of the letters I read you were talking about how you didn’t like to talk about yourself, you didn’t like to reveal personal stuff. How does this feel in terms of having this public record there; is there any conflict?

LH: I think that when I sold those letters I was too cowardly to reread them, so I could delude myself that my archive was just literary. It wasn’t personal.

DB: How were you cowardly?

LH: Because I wouldn’t want to be revealed in all my pathetic singularity [laughs]. There’s some very serious negative aspects to selling one’s letters or to having one’s letters exist in an archive like that, and paramount among them is the question of privacy. Since I was the beneficiary of the money that came in from my letters, it would be slightly disingenuous or two-faced to complain too much about it. I made them public. But some people with whom I was corresponding, whose letters I sold, have felt, for various reasons, unhappy with that decision. Maybe your article will lead to a discussion of what the ethics of living people selling their own papers should be. For me it has been the sole lucrative thing I’ve done as a poet, until recently when I have gotten teaching jobs as an outcome of my poetic enterprises. But I’ve never gotten any money that’s worth speaking of for a poem. Royalties from books? They’re just pathetic; it’s ludicrous to even think about them. So getting twenty, jobs as an outcome of my poetic enterprises. But I’ve never gotten any sealing their papers—to sell them but sealed.

LH: I think that when I sold those letters I was too cowardly to reread them, so I could delude myself that my archive was just literary. It wasn’t personal.

DB: But in the seventies it was.

LH: Because I wouldn’t want to be revealed in all my pathetic singularity [laughs]. There’s some very serious negative aspects to selling one’s letters or to having one’s letters exist in an archive like that, and paramount among them is the question of privacy. Since I was the beneficiary of the money that came in from my letters, it would be slightly disingenuous or two-faced to complain too much about it. I made them public. But some people with whom I was corresponding, whose letters I sold, have felt, for various reasons, unhappy with that decision. Maybe your article will lead to a discussion of what the ethics of living people selling their own papers should be. For me it has been the sole lucrative thing I’ve done as a poet, until recently when I have gotten teaching jobs as an outcome of my poetic enterprises. But I’ve never gotten any money that’s worth speaking of for a poem. Royalties from books? They’re just pathetic; it’s ludicrous to even think about them. So getting twenty, thirty, forty, fifty thousand, whatever different people get for their archives—and mine was on the low end because I didn’t have that much stuff at the time, maybe two, three cartons…but I know other people who’ve had up to twenty-five, thirty, forty cartons, and I’ve heard of people getting as much as $200,000 for their papers. It’s kind of like getting paid for the debris of what you really do. If I sold what’s accumulated since I sold my papers to San Diego in 1984—say if next year I started thinking about selling the next ten years from ’84 to ’94—I think I’m going to send a letter to everybody with whom I’ve corresponded and inform them of this decision, and give them the option of sealing their papers—to sell them but sealed. Or to not sell them at all.

DB: Unlike the letters of many other poets, your letters don’t complain about marginalization. They’re much more about building a community. You didn’t seem to feel you were this isolated being writing.

LH: I never have felt isolated. I yearn for more isolation than I actually have, in the sense of time for writing and contemplative time to think about the sorts of things I write about. As a girl, until the mid-seventies when I moved to the Bay Area, I was very guarded and stayed out of scenes, partly because I had that romantic notion of the lonely poet, and I was attached to that; it made me feel poetical. Also, I think circumstances had kept me excluded or apart from scenes, like going to Harvard, which was this old boys’ club. But I didn’t care—I thought those old boys were farts and stupid and untalented and pompous and boring. It had nothing to do with me. I guess I identified with people who seemed the centers of the universe, like Kerouac say, but thought of themselves as marginal. So if I could be like them how could I be marginal if they were the center of the universe? My career’s ended up so much better than anything I would have dreamed could possibly happen, that I could never complain about being excluded. So much good has happened. I don’t have any justification for being pissed off. As we’re looking at the end of this century and these huge anthologies that are coming out, this correspondence with complaints about being marginalized is going to look pretty ludicrous. The language poets, for example, are being taught all over the place. It’s not maybe the mainstreaming of the work, but it’s not by any stretch marginal.

DB: Actually I read an article on the history of archives in America, in a journal for manuscripts librarians. According to the article, interest in collecting living writers arises out of the academic upheaval in the 60s, an interest in social history and the canon breaking apart.

DB: But I think when you are young you do expect that within six months of picking up a pen you will be invited.

LH: I think it’s interesting that it seems that this is a uniquely American enterprise to harbor the papers of living writers. The English libraries aren’t buying Tom Raworth’s or Jeremy Prynne’s papers, to the best of my knowledge.

DB: But in the seventies it was.

LH: Well yeah, we were young, how could we expect to be invited to the Plaza by…I don’t know who.

DB: But I think when you are young you do expect that within six months of picking up a pen you will be invited.

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DB: Actually I read an article on the history of archives in America, in a journal for manuscripts librarians. According to the article, interest in collecting living writers arises out of the academic upheaval in the 60s, an interest in social history and the canon breaking apart.

LH: Very good reasons.

DB: I don’t really know enough about England, but perhaps they haven’t had the education upheaval there.

LH: The second time I went to Russia, part of the money that I was
spending to get there came from selling my archives. And when I explained that, people were completely baffled. They thought it was quite hilarious that I would sell debris and then have money, whereas as a poet economically there was just nothing.

DB: It does seem American with its constant sense of the “now” and what’s the next “now.”

LH: And also there’s a kind of self-promotion, self-boosterism, the American bragging or “I’ve been here” kind of attitude that informs the archives a bit. The other thing is whether one’s archives present an accurate portrait or an accurate self-portrait. Do you know Manuel Brito—from the Canary Islands? He’s the publisher of Zasterle Press. He was using the archives in San Diego a lot in preparation for—well, I don’t know what—it must have to do with his academic studies in Spain. For his book *A Suite of Poetic Voices*, he interviewed a number of poets, and his questions for me were all based on his readings of my letters in the archives. I had written things he was repeating back to me, saying, for example, “I know that your favorite author of all time is Herman Melville. How did *Moby Dick* influence such and such a poem?” And I looked at this [laughs] . . . I admire Herman Melville, and there must have been a period when I said . . .

DB: In talking to Susan Howe, Melville must have come up.

LH: Or Bernadette Mayer—I certainly have written her a few letters; I don’t know if they’re at UCSD. She was interested in Melville, and I’d be connecting with her. Anyway, if you take this self-portrait it may not be accurate at all, even though it’s intimate and personal—I mean person to person—and you’re not lying. But it’s momentary; that’s the other thing about letters.

DB: It’s person-specific too.

LH: Yes, it’s person-specific and day-specific. Then one changes over time. Yet one’s letter gets into the archive and looks eternal—the library as eternal repository. There’s a contradiction between the aura of the archive and the aura of the letter.

DB: In your correspondence with Susan Howe the issue of feminism comes up over and over—how you’re two intellectual women challenged by and wary of a movement which had, at that time—because feminism has changed since then too—an anti-intellectual bent to it. Intellectuality was assigned to men as opposed to the fluidity of women. For any woman who has felt 70s feminism’s proscriptiveness to be claustrophobic, it’s interesting to read these documents of female intellectual exchange that are based on something else. I’m sure if you wrote to Susan now you wouldn’t discuss feminism. Or else you would in a different way.

LH: Yeah, a very different way. What it meant, what kinds of issues we would think of as being feminist issues would be utterly different now.

DB: And then after all these disclaimers, a lot of the contents of the letters are exactly what feminism at the time was talking about.

LH: [Laughs]

DB: Is it weird to have this played back to you?

LH: No, it’s interesting. I’ve really never talked to anybody about what was in the archives, or what my letters look like. I’ve never gone to look at them. I talked to a man who had been in San Diego, who had gone down on purpose to read through all the letters he’d written to anybody in all the different archives. And he was very full of himself, literally—I don’t mean just proud—but it was like he had met himself, and he couldn’t stop talking about himself. How funny, to come away with this new more complex sense of who one is, reflected in all one’s letters.

DB: I enjoyed reading your letters and Susan’s particularly because I don’t know either of you very personally, so you’re both these very efficient personas in the world for me. You know, where I know myself, and I’m this messy person . . .

LH: Did you discover that we’re messy?

DB: Yes, I did, and it was interesting to see the cracks behind the personas, and the insecurities and the haltings. How does it feel to have this persona that you must have worked very hard to develop to face the world, and then people can go and see all the cracks behind it?

LH: I don’t feel ashamed of the cracks. I’m not sure that you’re right that anyone works hard to have a persona. Professionally, for both of us, there are ways that one is in the world.

DB: Actually that’s something I had to learn because I come from a blue collar background, and, honestly, I was never taught not to be rude to people. It really wasn’t a social value.

LH: [Laughs] That’s funny, Dodie . . . I think of you as a very elegant self-contained person who has very strong opinions, but it’s very hard to
know what they are, socially.

DB: That's interesting. That's not the image that I think I project.

LH: Right. No, you're slightly daunting and you seem very authorita­tive and dignified. I wonder if some of an answer to your question—this is really a risky answer and I might change my mind about it—why it's okay for the letters to be read, why one would go public with one's private articulations, or the private manner of one's articulations, may actually have something to do with one of the reasons one begins to write, before one has anything to write about, as a girl, say. Part of it is actually to be known. And maybe to be forgiven for exactly those faults that you're ashamed to tell anybody about, but you hope maybe in the larger frame of time, people will say, "Well she was kind of hysterical but . . ."

DB: "—she was great."

LH: [Laughs] "But she was great." It's a relief—like when your best friend knows what an asshole you can be, or what an idiot, or that you always cry over AT&T commercials, or whatever embarrassing little foible or big foible it might be—there's a relief when you finally . . . it's like true confession. It's over. And in a letter you don't even have to face the person.

DB: Stephanie Jed, who teaches history of writing in San Diego, has her class work in the archives and look at the page, the importance of the page, and how it's written, and describe the paper and the ink, etc. In My Life you talk about changing typewriters in it, so her students discuss the different fonts of your typewriters. That is an exciting way to expose students to writing, because once a book is published it's this precious little thing that's taken out of the world, and maybe you can research biographies to contextualize it, but you don't see it as the end of this huge long interactive process.

LH: And a person is a long protracted messy process. There's probably some value in people realizing that. Did you ever think of writing a whole book about your library experience?

DB: No! A whole book about archives?

LH: No—"Adventures in the San Diego Archives," I guess a whole book would be a little much. But I would like to see archived materials taken really seriously as a genre. I'd be interested in knowing about the development of your own use of letters, the epistolary genre. I notice I characteristically anchor a letter. I very frequently will begin almost like a New York School poem: it's six thirty, Larry's downstairs soaking saxophone reeds in a teacup, I'm starving, but your letter arrived today. I don't know why, but it seems comfortable. Localized.

DB: I've been working in the letter form for ten years, writing my "novel" The Letters of Mina Harker. I don’t want to write letters my whole life, but I don’t want to lose their complexity. You have so many layers in letters, your relationship to the content of the letter, your relationship to the person who's receiving the letter, its time-specificness, its documentary value, the voyeurism of other readers . . .

LH: And all these layers have truth and honesty and sincerity and accuracy.

DB: Which I then try to contextualize so that it all seems artifice. Truth as a sort of tone.

LH: Yes, which I think it is always anyway.
Wisdom Teeth

Celia Bland

A tooth is a house taken root.

1. The town is tearing down my childhood home for a park. Tarpaper curls like birch bark from the tongue and groove walls.

Shrubberies will root my iron bedstead, my buried box of buttons, and gravel paths will link the floors I mopped with a sloppy head of cotton yarn.

My stepfather packs his car, stuffing its trunk with receipts, broken teeth, and balled up socks.

It is my mother's car; it runs and runs.

He has buried his tipi in a grave deeper than his own foundations, but it floats in my mind, a miracle of rare device.

2. A tipi is a woman's skirt over hoops, anchored to the earth. Move respectfully between her many legs; bank the evening's fire and close her smoke flaps against the dew.

A column is a woman reaching from her toes for a crown of laurel, a pediment porous and cold as her skin.

Touch her naked thigh and the heat of your palm leaves a perfect evaporating print.

I bruise like that, each fingertip a blue tooth erupting through impacted flesh.

"Just lie back," he whispers and I levitate, mouth agape, waiting for the pain.

Wind rushes beneath the foam rubber mattress like fluttering hands.

I am a roof, a tympanum, an arched mouth braced with silver.

I am thirteen, and ten hands high.

Wisdom teeth bud in my gums like magnolias: two buds on the bottom, two buds up top.

"Open up"—a whisper, but is it me begging the column of flesh to loosen her dress, her breasts, her canvas smoke flaps?

Or is he asking to become my guest? My inhabitant.

I have always been fascinated by the way architecture is a kind of stone or buffalo hide or stucco document of humanity's feelings and ideas about power, beauty, and temporality. In my poetry, elements of architecture—caiyatids, tympanums, arches, tipi poles, and flying buttresses—have provided a structure for the memories and feelings I want to document. In "Wisdom Teeth" I am remembering three events that happened during the summer my stepfather erected a tipi in some North Carolina woods. In my mind, as I read the poem, I imagine that I am looking at a filmstrip. Each picture of a building is followed by a picture of woman, and if the film runs fast, the two images are melded into a single image resembling a tooth: white, wise, and archaic.
Le Lit Encyclopédique, Ou la Mémoire Du Monde.

Du lit, je m’extirpe à l’aube avec difficulté, pour une toilette matinale expéditive et concise. Un petit coup de brosse dans la tignasse, une brève inspection des orifices auriculaires, un check-up de la dentition foudroyant de célérité, quelques éclaboussures aquatiques pour me rafraîchir et hop! je suis promptement de retour vers la couche adulée. On n’est jamais aussi bien que chez soi. L’expédition ne dure jamais plus de quelques minutes et cela est néanmoins suffisant pour me faire ressentir avec acuité la douleur de la séparation. C’est l’une des raisons pour lesquelles je prends tous mes repas alîte. J’ai fait installer un système de montage–charge depuis les entrailles de la cuisine, et les repas m’arrivent tout fumant, à intervalles si réguliers que mes journées s’en trouvent rythmées sans que je n’aie à fournir un effort quelconque d’organisation. Toujours dans un souci de simplification, j’ai fait demander aux responsables de mes agapes journalières de préparer des plats qui nécessitent relativement peu de mastication et dont l’ingestion et la digestion sont rapides à souhait, l’important étant que mon esprit ne soit pas trop facilement distrait de ce qui constitue finalement mon centre d’intérêt principal en ce bas-monde.

1. LIT [li] n.m. (lat. lectus; 1050). 1. Meuble sur lequel on se couche pour dormir (mais pas seulement, en ce qui me concerne); ensemble des objets qui le composent (oui). 2. (v. 1100) Tout ce qui, sur le sol, peut être utilisé pour se coucher, ce qui a la mollesse d’un lit (plus facile à trouver en extérieur). 3. (v. 1480) [dans les loc.] Mariage (recommandable seulement dans des circonstances bien précises. N’en faire l’usage qu’avec grande circonspection). 4. (v. 1960) Stat. Unité de base servant à mesurer un lieu de résidence (ou encore toute une vie pour ceux qui, tel votre humble serviteur, ont fait du lit leur lieu de résidence principal).

2. LIT [li] n.m. (de lit. 1; v. 1200). 1. Couche stratifiée de matière ou d’objets quelconques (metaphore possible de l’esprit). 2. Géol. Couche très mince (1 à 20 mm) de roche, de mineral ou de débris fossiles, dans un ensemble stratifié, stratifié, stratifié. Les pierres ont deux lits: celui de dessus qui s’appelle lit tendre, et celui de dessous qui s’appelle lit dur. 3. Constr. Intervalle rempli de liant qui sépare horizontalement les morceaux de deux assises de construction (serait-il donc possible que toute ma demeure reposât sur une série infime de lits?). Termes de maçonnerie: faces par lesquelles les pierres sont superposées, tandis qu’on appelle joints les faces par lesquelles elles sont contiguës latéralement. 4. (1265). Chenê creusé par un cours d’eau et où il (le dit cours d’eau) s’écoule (comme le sang de la vie, l’eau sale du linge éculé, le suc perlé des melons d’automne, ou encore la bave mousseuse qui s’accumule aux commissures de la bouche des vieillards malades). 5. Termes militaire: lit de pont, se dit du plancher ou fascinage sur lequel passent les voitures, les chevaux et les piétons. 6. Termes de vénération: “au lit, au lit, chiens!”, exclamations pour faire quetter les chiens, lorsqu’on veut lancer un lièvre. 7. A plat de lit, gisant dans le lit: locution qui parait être génévoise; du moins Jean-Jacques Rousseau s’en est-il servi. 8. Et puis, pourquoi pas? Il se rencontre dans les onyx diverses couleurs qui sont par lit les unes au-dessus des autres (Rollin).

Périodiquement, je balance mon corps d’un mouvement sec, et me cassant sur l’arête du lit, examine avec circonspection la partie du plancher qui s’étend sous le lit. Ti! tout est en place: l’ombre épaissie et dense que projette le sommier, les amas cotonneux de poussière dans une des rainures du parquet, les livres que j’ai lus et qui depuis s’écorcent d’ennui, une bobine de laine grisâtre qui se trouve à la crasse la plus complète, une petite couche de crasse la plus complète pour faire le ménage. Non que je vive dans la casse la plus complète (je passe après tout un coup de balai hebdomadaire), mais j’aime plus que tout être maître en mon domaine.

[...] Et l’on voudrait y passer à longueur de journée, après s’y être délibérément effondré, affalé, ne plus en sortir, ne plus s’en sortir, y agonir.

I tend to consider the notion of documentary in its adjectival sense, which thus allows me to go beyond the more narrow meaning of the documenting work of film and video. I define the novel from which this excerpt is taken...
at both fiction and documentary. It has as its topic the bed, and this topic at once informs the narrative and is fed by it. The bed is the site of discourse, that is, the site from which discourse arises and the site around which discourse revolves. It is with respect to this latter that documentary comes into play. Indeed, the novel may be read as a documentary about beds. Passages from different encyclopedias and dictionaries are woven into the cloth of the narrative, quotes from poets, novelists and philosophers are disseminated throughout. It stands in some sense as an encyclopedic memory, and even memoir, of beds at large. However, the novel remains a fictional documentary, for these quotes and sources are played upon and responded to by the narrative voice, elaborated upon and sometimes distorted so that the reader may never be sure of the degree of authenticity of the seemingly objective elements of the text. The textual product thus calls into question the objectivity of documentaries through a narrative voice that leaves impressions of its own subjectivity upon the seemingly objective material of the bed.

Sherry Brennan

Sleep

—after Warhol (thanks to Pascale-Anne)

i. a back

still life
with breath
black
avalanche descending
pas de nu
descendant un escaliers
mais une masse solide
falling, gently, implacably

ii. pressing

there is a little space for you
to tuck your head
but you cannot move
(no place to)
they say you are thousands
of feet beneath
solid rock above
all that way
and you breathe
shallowly

iii. le lit

fissure frisson
“délabrement de cette histoire”
"ravaged"
"in the very depths of my flesh"

"Je veille donc à mes fissures"
"there are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone, but it's not true, there was no one"
"or else nothing, or just sleep"

"dark and terrible depths of the flesh" "our little life"

"Je n'ai jamais vraiment songé"
"nothing solid separating us from other people" "like this insubstantial pageant faded"

a little sleep sans rêve "pas de récit, plus jamais"

iv. to pieces

"la nuit les perce"
pressing your head as you, asleep, might turn
I think it (lifting and dying of spoons)
was the movement of what is that line the I was found wandering over and over lifting and methodically . . . without narrative

I think it was the movement of the what is that line lifting and methodically

. . . without narrative yet I had not left my bed as if one, settling in bed (repetitive) as if one, turning in bed composed myself to sleep lifting and dying off

the breathing wall of skin descends

iii. to disaster

decaying disasters the same as if the eye were closed over long periods the same documentary disaster

ii. documentary

as your chest descends infinitesimally

sheer still life a little bit

flowers documentary death

again documentary disaster like you require sleep

i. sleep

"série infime de lits" again and again ceaseless
deferred. as if one delivering flowers, babies bloody with effort

and screaming? parole abimée might mutter (what’s the Eliot line?) restless

for a word (delivered over and over?) delivered over and over

“if the disaster were not that which does not come, that which has put a stop to every arrival”

recollecting

sleep (space?)


Andy Warhol’s Sleep seems the epitome of documentary to me. In a sense it is consummate and yet disastrous documentary, in its filming of 8 hours of sleep. In the way that it carries out the idea of documentary to its end, by simply pointing the camera at something and rolling uncut, it points out the ways in which the documentary depends on fictionalization or narrative, the creation of a subject. Sleep itself, as an action or “experience,” has a sort of critical absence to it. It’s like a space where I’m not myself—I’m not “conscious,” yet one can’t simply say sleeping isn’t experience or that I’m not a person when I’m asleep. So thinking sleep allows me to complicate the idea of experience and the self, especially as they might be supposed to be presented in poetry. And inasmuch as poetry is made up of snippets of description, experience, narrative, etc., it’s a form of documentary and subject to the same disastrous and interminable writing.

Laynie Browne

Behind the opening hill is foreheads’ diameter etched in satin purse. Where winter discerns the rules of winter, where the meaning of the protagonist is a different subject from where the subject arrives.

It was the place where time became the wrist and not anything strung or worn as an armlet. Here was the dream running in snow from something which seemed important.

Both had illusions which later became snow. Hers was that the snow would not be cold. She saw it as powder. He fixed the image of cotton and added another miscalculation, assuming powdered sugar would also be sweet. There was no taste in the image. Only the cold wet was disappointed, as the sharpness of ice.

To awaken from both of these proclivities, time might surround them like a snowstorm. Arriving in the distant hills of a forehead memory.

Is there a dependable urn into which I might deposit the results of all that has been burned?

Could it be that our feet fell at any given time into the same exact patterns in earth so that I was walking within a hologram of your image?

After another story unhinged, her radiance gone out amidst darkness. I saw this across a table calmly stir in tea. Too far from a sourcepoint, like my shadow in trees. The walking, wading, scrying image visits. As all those painted letters flutter to the floor.

(Impressions upon the earth recorded in walking.)
For those fearing gravity where is a place to dwell among harmonic strangers? For those with no trees in their eyes, where to find a mirror of seasons? Where to sleep willingly in the presence of sensationless being?

There seems to be a natural law, that the more one moves with purpose beyond what can be seen or possessed, the more the house steps out supporting. The more less matterful minds are orchestrating a den of heavy consent and concentration, the more wings despite crushing. The more one eye in eye is distant yet clear, the more sensation can be trusted and the safer the body will dwell amidst circumstances subject to the limitations of preoccupation, undulation, foreknowledge.

Knowing in sensation cannot be acquired, but can be concentrated from the tips of fingers, so that what moves out from fingertips which contain seasonless design, is the manifestation of thought. We are mostly made of thought, not water. The watery interplay between resolution, and the float which sustains positive drift.

As the streets expand and contract, pulsations of weather twist the meaning of season.

With reversed perspective in embracing, traveling towards a different future or past.

The diagonal shadow of October light falling across, seems to cross all in this manner. Parts remaining in shadow are the instances where inner vision remains submerged and not brought out with the shards of mirror above ground.

DOCK YOU MEANT AIRY

DOCUMENT: To make an effort, in images or words, to record and preserve events, persons, places, and experience. To actively invent the means to do so. Thus, the following, among others, are all forms of documentary: monuments, manuscripts, books, photographs, film and video, choreography, music, theater, visual art, language, silence, computers, bodies, the mind, memory, speech, song, maps. It may be those creative acts with no intention of objectivity which create a less distorted picture the subject. Jenny Livingston’s Paris is Burning is an example of documentary film which allows the subject to remain in the foreground.

The relationship between documentary and Rebecca Letters, is genealogy and dream transcription. I was attempting to re-see that which was cut up by layers of time, an ancestor who died before we had met. In documenting a series of dreams I came across a memory of a person I did not know existed. As it turned out, through correspondence and questioning, I learned the identity of this woman. She was Rebecca Browne, a musician who studied piano at the London Conservatory of Music, and lived a large part of her life in the Bay Area in California. I was always told of her brother’s existence, Lewis Browne, a theological writer of some success, the only writer to my knowledge in my family. The omission of Rebecca in family history, I interpret as an example of the lack of representation/documentation of women artists. As it turned out, she was an active documenter of her brother’s work, and made sure that his papers were preserved at a University Library. Thus, I decided to use her name, and her real and imagined history, to pursue my current poetic project, a series of letters to an imaginary ancestor. The manuscript is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Eva Leiter, who died during the time I was writing it. In this sense, Rebecca became a vehicle for writing perhaps less directly about ancestors, and the experience of death. Since a confessional mode can be limiting in the sense that it can confine a reader to a particular reading, and can confine the writer within events which are too close to be clearly spoken of, Rebecca became a vehicle for expression of many things during that time period. The personal history and events involved in this work I see as no less important than the present discovery process, my own subjective projections of who Rebecca might have been, and who she continues to be in 1993, in the minds of those who remember, or imagine her. At times, a reconstruction of an imaginary history is all that is available to those in search of history. I have related the events that led me to this project as a way of explaining their relationship to documenting experience, not to impose any particular reading on the manuscript, which exists apart from them, as well as within a personal context. I am also interested in the role of memory and perception in the personal subjective documentaries individuals create within their minds. In this sense, documentary could be equated with history, and eyesight, and all other forms of perception would be included in documenting experience.
"Auto-," 1995
Mixed media collages (acetate with photocopied alterations of physical therapist's illustrations, originally presented as collage with 6/26/94 x-rays of cervical spine).
"I don’t get it," said an audience after viewing Shoot for the Contents, Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s film on Chinese culture and politics. Those of us who didn’t get “it” were left wondering: what is it all about? This question not only voiced a discontent but also expressed a wish to pin down the truth that has been missing, or the “it” that had escaped us.

It may surprise us that the idea the film resists most is to premeditate and to tell a truth. Already anticipating the motive of this resistance, the title Shoot for the Contents suggests an initial foreclosure to the question: “What is it all about?” The double signification of shooting (taking shots)—at the same time shooting a film and shooting for a content—initiates a rupture from the convention of filmmaking in which the film serves only to unfold a pre-written scenario. From the mutual ground of shooting and the negotiation between its literal and figurative status, there is a collapse of the essential processes of form constitution and content formation. Perhaps it is not too extreme to say that Trinh’s is a highly formalized project, the co-substantiation of the form and the content in fact gives privilege to the first term—one can only talk about “the content of the form” but not vice versa—due to the uncertainty of the second term.

“Trinh T. Minh-Ha looks at women in China, revolutionary politics, moviemaking and power . . .” is what one reads on the poster announcing the film. It all seems clear that what the filmmaker deals with is a set of politically charged issues which may well be translated into familiar terms such as gender, national, cultural and power politics. Surprisingly, when approaching these complex and interrelated territories, instead of discursive engagement, she chooses to formalize the politics involved through deliberate aestheticization. Since form is apparently the privileged term of the film, to formalize the politics also means to aestheticize the form. One way of achieving this, as seen in the film, is to make the form perform, to formalize through performance. Though it comes in many different ways, performance in the film is basically associated with the central theme of “translation,” be it the translation between languages, cultures, identities or moments in history.

The first and the foremost challenge Shoot for the Contents faces is that of language. To make a film in English dealing with Chinese issues,
translation becomes the major obsession of the film. Rather than concealing the struggle of translation, especially from Chinese to English, Trinh makes it the central part of the film. It neither presents a perfect mastery of the fluency of language after translation nor a pure and smooth surface of the English language rinsed clean from the traces of correspondence and negotiation with the Chinese language. Translation is itself already part of the performance.

Related to the performance of translation, the film's other preoccupation is the question of gender. Though some complain that the film never engages itself seriously in the issue of women the way it claims, the presence of the feminine voice throughout the film is a powerful way of addressing and re-addressing the issue at different levels. Interlacing voices of the translator and the narrator occupy the center stage of the performance. The translations of the Chinese film director Wu Tien Meng's speech into English neither absorb the role of the translator nor, more importantly, her status as a Chinese and a woman. She remains visible throughout the film, co-occupies the diegetic space with the male speaker, simultaneously interpreting his speech. For the non-Chinese speaking audience, the effect of the superimposition of the male speaker's and the female translator's voices blurs the distinctive status of the subject of speech—especially in certain scenes where the woman's face is seen against the back of the man. Occupying the privileged vantage point where at the same time being the one to whom the man is speaking, and the one who speaks to us face to face, the woman is able to transgress the role of the translator by performing that of the speaker. This circulation of speech overflows the limit of speaking and translating as well as the gender boundary where the woman-translator displaces the man-speaker as the subject of speech.

If displacement is the mode from which female subjectivity emerges in the translation, subversion is probably the corresponding mode in the narration. In some brilliantly executed episodes, the woman narrator recollects Mao's life by reciting the dictum from the Great Man of revolution. It is not a mere mechanistic repetition or an uncharacteristic marking of his thoughts. The grandeur of the revolutionary discourse performed by the feminine voice subtly summons a trial beyond a mere miming of the thoughts of one of the most patriarchal minds. Let us say ventriloquy rather than miming is the name of the performance. Perverse and incompatible as it may seem when hearing the words of the Great Man are spoken through a female body. However, this is not a case where the female body, the bearer of the voice, serves only as a vocal object through which a male subject articulates himself. Though citing from Mao, the woman narrator no longer bears the meaning of his speech, but rather subverts its logic by putting it on trial. As the actions unfold, the woman turns the Great Man into her ventriloquist's dummy through which she is able to speak her own subjectivity.

"Woman is not the moon; she must rely on herself to shine," a line written by the feminist writer Ting Lan, is perhaps the most salient statement about woman in the film. Only by breaking away from the allegory of the cosmological order that has been central to the Chinese cultural tradition, is woman able to make herself a subject. Centuries of exile into the abyss of the nocturnal darkness and yielding silence, woman's obscure face is shown just to reflect the radiance of man's countenance or her equivocal voice is heard only to echo the grandiloquence of his speech. Now we have distinctively heard: woman is not the moon. She is not the repository of male meanings; she speaks her own. Far from giving herself up as an absence in the making of history, woman is not only present but also makes her presence a subject of history. At the end of the film, the question emerges in the conversation between the two actresses: what does it mean to be a Chinese? What the film tries to show us is the polymorphous and unstable nature of subjectivity and identity. There is no single definition of the term "Chineseness," just as there is no one universal adequation to the concept of "woman."

Whether Trinh T. Minh-Ha's film carries a political agenda has been the subject of controversy. Some charge the film for not taking the political issues seriously due to the ambiguity of its genre and presentation. The political elements in the film all seem to be erased by the ways they are presented. It is not incorrect to say that Trinh never attempts to make a political statement in the film. Nevertheless, the initial controversy provoked by the film is something that is never separated from the political question. What this "apolitical" film does then is to set up a stage or to create a space which invites further discursive performance and political engagements. In doing so, the project turns itself into a highly political assignment, although not in a conventional sense.

What is required of the audience in order to respond to the unconventionality of the film is a different viewing routine. Different is not the same as new; this does not require one to learn a new decoding technique. What the audience has to do is rather to "unlearn" the experience of a stable subject who always appropriates the right to interrogate its object. To insist to know the "truth" in the film is in a way to reassure the subject's stability by maintaining a constant position under the collective term "audience." Shoot for the Contents is a film that calls for a new definition of the term audience by un-defining its role and
displacing its position. Perhaps not entirely unlike a shifting of focus in the shooting, a shifting of subject position (be it cultural, national, political, sexual or economic) in the viewing is just as fundamental to the film.

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**Catalina Cariaga**

**His Civil Rights**

five cities

five votes

Unanimous

mother

older brother

taller brother

sister

baby

---

PS. I hope you can read my handwriting—my unwarranted medication.

My love

Dad
"Water, held in, by gravity alone?"...

All along you had good humor, but your
last sentence is the real truth. That
makes an ending or conclusion.

It is about when my short term memory has been cut off / nothing to be ashamed of / the relatives understand, that is / easier to forget details / or should I say, the fine art of writing a letter stimulates so many memories / for instance, what was his name again? / psychiatrists in the hospital would reason the influence of genetics and environment / believe me, I know the difference / in other words, I had to protect myself from being put in a compromising position / when to my way of thinking, they were out to get me / but I was always gainfully employed, not merely surviving / and how my sister and I came to an understanding concerning our lives while my father was talking a mile-a-minute, as we sat at the park; my sister had just started her first menstrual period. The bright red stain.

It is about the stigma that always followed / that I was different / or would be judged differently / you don't understand / in other words, I had to work twice as hard just because my foot wasn't in the door / do you follow me? / there were two standards / when push comes to shove we have what they call 'Presidential pardons' / don't get me wrong, it has nothing to do with race / how he addressed the letter "Ms" with my married name. Two Dorothy Parker postage stamps.

she is driven to choose the best alternative,
freeway
critical

"he's really better this way,"

billboards
home

"he's really not himself,"

radio
father

in Los Angeles, the minutes become miles,
speedometer
orientation

"no one can exactly predict the side effects;"

blood
control

all along the Pacific Coast Highway—
how he took us children grunion hunting under a full moon.
The lines don't necessarily rhyme.

I'm not criticizing you but try my
way and see how you like it.

It is about the ability of a people within a certain segment of our society to empower themselves / the power of the word / Wait a minute, he can't decide for himself / afraid to explain to the judge the kind of stress taking a toll on our entire family / in other words, say what you mean and mean what you say / in a way that's not shrouded with legal double talk / I know how to read the fine print and what the circumstances permit / for example statute 5150 / that are beyond one's power to control / within 72-hours / how we hesitated until the very last moment when it came to deciding about the power of attorney. The required signatures.

EPILOGUE

Or perhaps I was most afraid to adopt one of my father's many moments of pure lunacy—which unannounced and unexpected swelled like a dangerous and reoccurring riptide of manic synapses that could carry me and our family out and into a silent sea of jagged currents, merciless darkness and the uncertainty of electro-shock treatments for catatonic depression. "They say the sea is a woman" my father would tell me. But I was only a little girl. The crest of the seashore beckoned me forward, and my feet in stationary grip sank lower. The ocean floor slid away from under my heels as I watched the water leaving my ankles.

This is a very nice and informative essay but write them into lines beginning with my pencil marks.
At the wedding she refused to be led down the aisle as if she were property (for a dowry) no fuss, no feminist political statement; she just didn't feel it was appropriate to be given away, by a man estranged from her for the many years of her own independence.

But 'traditional' means many things to different people: the Roman Catholic Liturgy, the Book of Ruth, Gregorian chant, trumpets, 1001 tsuru, silver paper folded into tiny cranes symbolizing prosperity.

Her father wore the barong Tagalog; her mother, aunties and ninangs sang Ilocano folk songs. The bride wore a simple but elegant ankle length gown made of cotton damask. Father and daughter danced, as the relatives waited expectantly for the money dance. That night there was a full moon. Fresh leis brought from Hawaii were of white orchid.

The way I have learn punctuation,

commas are almost disame as periods and

semicolon when the next sentence is

closely or immediately related to the next sentence.

It is about having no choice and saying “Yes” / or having a choice and saying “No” / all debatable / I said No and I mean No / as if there is some kind of litmus test about my being dangerous to myself or others or being "normal." / We didn't think in terms of a colonizer and the colonized / but we did know the difference between intimidation and fear / protected by free speech / I clear the dinner table, (as if I haven't heard this story a million times before); nod my head, pretend to listen, smile in acknowledgment, make a game of counting each illogical construct / for example the barong Tagalog is a sheer, long sleeved European shirt, with French cuffs and collar—worn with a T-shirt but untucked and outside of the pants; of course the humidity in the Philippines. But why is it customary? / I pick up a magazine; tear out all of the coupon cards and perfume samples. I pretend not to listen as if that will discourage his verbal flow; I'm not listening to him; but I am listening to him and I can chart the labyrinth of his chaotic reasoning / The barong Tagalog was worn by the Filipinos, or should I say, the indigenous, in other words the natives / by that I mean non-whites; brown / this is of course, during the 17th Century / so what he means is that the Spaniards wore a tie and their shirts tucked inside the pants. It was one way to distinguish between the colonized and the colonizer / in other words, a Filipino could get into a lot of trouble "impersonating" a European or mestizo by tucking in his shirt and wearing a tie / to my way of thinking it developed as an insurrectionist gesture / you see, the barong Tagalog has become the national tuxedo and is worn at formal occasions / like in 1972 when he stayed up for 72 hours on the three consecutive nights of the National Democratic Convention / and how I left the TV on to keep him company / When heads of state (like President Bush) came to visit the Philippines, (to quote him,"keeping the world safe for Democracy") they are given a barong Tagalog to wear / so the Filipinos snicker at a colonialist in the mandatory indigenous costume / imagine the late President Lyndon B. Johnson dancing Tinikling / to the best of my recollection, he was at least six feet tall jumping in and out of the clapping bamboo / So, to my way of thinking we had to be suspicious or at least cynical about any promises an employer made / those were the days when we would speak our minds and then sweat bullets / get everything in writing
to protect your self/ in another words, read the fine print / of course I've read that book Listening to Prozac; but somehow I really think that drug therapy should only be used as the last resort; although there are solitary moments when talk therapy seems to work more against me than for me; so I am not listening to him, but I am listening to him / so to my way of thinking, there were times when even the unions were out to get me / I could tell when they were trying to set me up for failure / Let's put it this way, I never made any irrational financial decisions / 8.9% interest, no annual fee / Stop; that's not exactly how I remember things it's of no use trying to reason with him when his mind is running on like this; my sister would leave mid-sentence, slamming a door in silent pleasure / On the contrary, to my way of thinking, we always had a roof over our heads / at least I could take the whole family to a baseball game / at the Chavez Ravine Los Angeles Dodgers Stadium / of course they were from Brooklyn first / and my brother would bring his baseball mitt in case a foul ball came into the stands / As for Chavez, I remember when JFK, the late President Kennedy said "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" / I believed in that principle / that's why all the Filipinos tip their hats to Cesar Chavez / when he stood up to articulate the rights of the common man / So to my way of thinking it's not like hardship is a new phenomenon / your mother never needed to learn to drive a car until all of you kids were in college / of course in some ways I understand when those women's libbers complain / by that he means he understands but that he doesn't connect the experiences; the sound of his voice becomes a part of me; his voice, mine; mine, his / throughout history immigrants become scapegoats / during the Depression what's the point? / as if an adjustment to the Gross National Product would make a difference/ how my mother's hourly working wage (with overtime) as an electronics assembler in a factory took precedence; I was the May Queen and my mother never arrived for the ceremony. The white sateen dress.

Of course in China people are always busy like ants and the bullet train is originally (mono-rail) in Japan.

1 Thursday: Buy bus pass
2 Friday: Lithium chloride refill
3 Saturday: Pick up photos of grandkids
4 Sunday: Church, Boxing on ESPN
5 Monday: State College registration: tuition waiver
6 Tuesday: Buy books, Letters & correspondence
7 Wednesday: UPS avocados to girls
8 Thursday: First day of class
9 Friday: Stelazine refill, Mah jong game
10 Saturday: Rototil garden; Mom's birthday
11 Sunday: Church, Buy a new rice cooker (4-cup, Panasonic) in Chinatown
12 Monday: Plant geraniums, ESL volunteer hours
13 Tuesday: Plant drought resistant floor-covering
14 Wednesday: Dr. Cohen: Blood test, Flue shot
15 Thursday: History class
16 Friday: Lithium chloride refill, Mah jong game
17 Saturday: Make enlargements of grandkids' photos
18 Sunday: Church, Have Benito fix the telephone answering machine
19 Monday: Return library books, ESL volunteer hours
20 Tuesday: Sort out old magazines and newspaper clippings
21 Wednesday: Regina's birthday, Catalina & Grant's anniversary
22 Thursday: History class
23 Friday: Stelazine refill, Mah jong game
24 Saturday: Give Tina paria and eggplant
25 Sunday: Church: Boxing or Baseball on ESPN
26 Monday: Library, ESL volunteer hours
27 Tuesday: Last day to drop a class, Nixon library tour
28 Wednesday: Dr. Robbie: Blood test, Vitamin B-12 shot
29 Thursday: History class
30 Friday: Lithium chloride refill, Mah jong game
31 Saturday: Danilo and grandkids
It is about Faith / things the nuns don't teach you / you'd think that that young Vice President invented family values / respect for elders / or tolerance / that old burden of knowing filial indebtedness can never be repaid / save your money / of course, that's if I live long enough to see you graduate from college / they call that opportunity, an interval / a window / that preponderance of proof beyond reasonable doubt / from significant / a confiscated evidence / to my way of thinking, Okay, that's it!

Call 911; and this time we're not going to bail him out how the police came to our house just to talk and taught my eldest brother how to make a citizen's arrest; "If he tries to strike your mother, put yourself physically between them; if he gets outta line, lay your hand on his shoulder, like this and say the words . . . this is a citizen's arrest." A black boot.

It is about the almanac and the atlas containing the exact minute of sunrise and sunset / and of course in those days you were gullible so to speak, amazed because it was like magic / I'm afraid high and low tide full moon when we all listened to the baseball game on the radio / waiting for the moon to be directly overhead / as midnight approached / sometimes it's a gamble, like anything else / to use intuition, it takes skill to know the exact spot, wherever and when the fish just run up on the shore of the beach / the white chalk neatly delineating fair and foul the umpire and his irreversible decisions at home plate

Okay, that's it!

Saigon (shall be probably, become a republic when the British relinquish them).
the girls took piano lessons
and learned Ilocano love songs, phonetically

It's about language
and what's lost in
the translation / I
know what I'm
talking about / you
see, what your
cousin told you
about our native
tongue is totally
inaccurate / Ilocano is not
merely a dialect
spoken in the
provinces / or in
the back waters / it's
a language in its
own right / in other
words, periodicals, radio
shows, folk
songs / of course,
Ilocano is not the
National language
like Tagalog / or
how my parents
decided early on
that we would be
better off mastering
Californian English.
The white friends.

"Jeepneys" are only used in Metro Manila
and the near-by cities. They have trucks
to the provinces.

It's about reading between the lines / the fine print / on your own
recognizance / in other words, most of those pinos in Delano were
bachelors / then Chavez and the Mexican families rallied around the
Filipino strikers and the press called us a "Community" because they
couldn't tell us apart / and my mother always made a point telling me that
I loved my father / afterwards, JFK's younger brother Bobby jumped on
the bandwagon too, / you won't find that in the History book / or how
my father taught us to read before we went to school when all the other
children were still looking at pictures. The colorful Atlas of the
World and the unwieldy Dictionary.

without a driver's license

brittle bones

sunny and warm

vital
how a high fever can turn into pneumonia—in an instant

And don't forget to write to your Mother
on her birthday. Send her a poem too
Working Notes to “His Civil Rights”

In the State of California, laws regarding the involuntary commitment of “insane persons” were contained in the Welfare and Institution Code of 1937. It was not until 1964 through Senate investigative hearings headed by distinguished state senator Nicholas Petris, that these laws were examined and assessed. In response to hearing testimony, the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act, as part of the Mental Health Laws and Regulations of 1967, was enacted declaring and establishing that “the care and treatment of mental patients be provided in the local community.” This act includes statutes and provisions which safeguard the Civil Rights and responsibilities of mentally ill individuals while guaranteeing and protecting public safety.

Statute 5150 of the California Mental Health Welfare & Institutions Code includes: “When any person, as a result of mental disorder, is a danger to others, or to himself or herself, or gravely disabled, a peace officer, member of the attending staff, as defined by regulation, of an evaluation facility designated by the county, designated members of a mobile crisis team provided by Section 5651.7, or other professional person designated by the county may, upon probable cause, take or cause to be taken, the person into custody and place him or her in a facility designated by the county and approved by the State Department of Mental Health as a facility for 72-hour treatment and evaluation.”

Passages in italics are taken from two letters of response written by my father in 1993 upon receiving copies of my published poems “No Boat” (Transfer #66) and “Saturn” (ONTHEBUS, Summer 1993). Misspellings and illegible words were partially due to the onset of arthritis in his 87th year.

As a poet and writer I have a certain suspicion of “documents.” Why? Because although “documents” are helpful, they are prone to falling into patterns and structures of institutionalized hegemony. For example, “documents” of history are usually always the written proof of the conqueror—and not the conquered. I’m afraid that “documentary” is never as purely objective as it may seem, purport or profess to be, and as text, should be viewed or read with a keen eye for subtext.

Therefore, in my own work, I have a subversive (I wish there was a less polarized word to use) sense of “documentary” that it should be any vehicle of creative cultural expression which departs from the status quo or accepted modes of “documentation.” I have recently found that texts (documents) from cultural anthropology (which borrow heavily from post modern and post colonial literary theory) are attractive to me—and very much in tune with themes that I am exploring in my own work. And yet my sense of suspicion of “documents” usually results in an influence on my work in a way that I think, subverts the nature of “documentary.” I deal with issues of race and gender. I document a reclaiming, retrieval and remixing of cultural metaphors, symbols, nuance, queues—not merely to freeze them in an anthropological or archival depository of “art”—but to enliven and set them in motion in a world and time that is most intent on forgetting or denying them.

And so in many ways my work is a documentary of what I call my “Filipinicity” as an American poet. It’s a part of me although I’ll never find it. It is a part of American culture (the most recent U. S. Census “documented” that Filipinos are the fastest growing minority group in the U. S.—set against the anti-immigrant mood in California—evidenced by the so called “Save Our State” initiative that was passed in the recent election) and yet it is nothing we as an American culture are prepared to recognize, yet alone deal with. The courts too will have their say on these issues.

I am grappling with new forms; rethinking the concept of “narrative lyric poetry”; juggling disparities; nervous all the time; unable to hide from mass media because I want to know what I’m up against, read junk mail, cruise talk radio, live with the convenience of consumer products, backing off of “the line,” I am still writing. As a beneficiary of all this, most of my work challenges post-colonial assumptions.

I don’t think that documentary is restricted to video and film. I support the idea of documentary in or through literature (although I know when I say that, I contradict my suspicion of documents and text). But I think that text is beginning to enact speaking, readings, customs, experience, physical phenomenon, psychological terrain, visual space, spiritual dimensions, hermeneutic cycles, the trickster that runs through all cultures that is kept in abeyance by mass media and the limitations of institutions.

Norma Cole

Untitled (from Nostalgia)

"I awoke, still chewing something indefinable and sweet"
—Perpetua

I awoke, still chewing that one's refusal to know something indefinable, anything, emotion for instance and sweet

our hearing

what people will (and) imagine for each other

at the end of that word, get ready for it: I turn to a ladder, Ruby my dear, with sharp weapons attached to its sides

the lateral motion inflected difference between riding and driving her imagination of others' lives

"before ... in time" a satin waistband, the image of women with eyes closed, "The only tender" image of when do we eat, and what book was that

Every bead counts. He has a scratch on his right cheek, she an abrasion above the corner of her mouth. She wears Treasure A, a lovely touch. Where does the first person plural begin?

that all experience takes place overboard, what is document? The I'm telling you form

letters from the bridge

telling about overtones

one-for-me, (observe) in the singing

her work or her tree

"the book of intention": We know it as the name of a book, a writing, a position, a philosophical legacy, although it was named after a person, a son, his son killed in battle. Now read it.

1. Record keeping verging on explaining. Or documentary as survey.

2. Any form that can record (keep track).

3. A philosopher makes a documentary of thought, e.g. Jean Luc Nancy. A filmmaker makes a documentary of philosophy, e.g. Jean Luc Godard, Chantal Ackerman.

4. I'd document the idea of the dictionary on film. Or explore the (inevitable) selection (bias system) in one medium investigating another (i.e. written response to a video documentary).
Leslie Davis and Hoa Nguyen

before the gypsy told her

just go. she is afraid to write down her dreams especially the one where
her nipples are engorged, enlarging into woody vines. the vines reach
out green to her mother looking quite astonished. she shuns anything
that might change her vision of herself. the wine turned in the closet
where he had been saving it. she scraped the salt off the cork with a
thumbnail. her jasmine shedding yellow leaves. the dumb black dog
barks his head off down the hall (though he can't help being brain­
damaged—left in the car too long on a too hot day). can she ever infuse
passion, can passion ever not mean a turning over of possessions? she
tries to watch herself walk like a samurai but knows that postures always
change when looked at

read the instructions and write the rest out as you go. seeing herself as
who she wants to be (always appearing prepared) instead of as the per­
sion who is really there. a vision, stark and thunderous. the cold clean
sheets pulled down by the mother in the novel (tedious) reminds her of
herself. the mother also reminds her of a past lover; the lover reminds
her of her mother, and of course, of herself. fluff the pillow and cover
those growing vines. lessons on useful techniques for becoming an
adult—later seen in late-night movies—after her (real) mother passed
out. her own closet stocked with bottles

just go. she packs her clothes into the heavy suitcase. he didn't even
remember to return her phone calls. won't talk to a machine. this suits
her anyway, her gaze steady at the runway and asphalt wants to disappear
in sun waves, into the overhead compartment. it is not enough he said,
his son one day. he told her of a dream he had as a child. her nipples protruding. he, forcing himself to suckle afraid of the
thick stems. walking along the water. a stark and thunderous vision.

A great variety of things, some thriving and others declining, some joyful
and others grievous, are set side by side and move onward together; this is
precisely the way of this world.

—Nijo Yoshimoto

growth. he swims to her under cover(s). bows down, blanketing her soft
spasms. she knows she will have a gypsy one day—this was told to her in
her youth. from the light on the water there is a sharp reflection. she
writes in every tense, shifting person when she gets stuck. she doesn't
recognize him on the street although they talk back and forth and pass a
cigarette. numbered one through 100 she fills in the lines. she needed
his whole body nightly. thinking of her gypsy. let go
i can interject, add the word that changes the meaning before (impregnates)
and thus create again, because we stand side by side i can begin to look,
experience as a matrix, a piling up of things, how our words are fractured,
revealing apparitions. revert the gaze back (in the eye), even the camera
makes me a demon.

Connie Deanovich

from *The Spotted Moon*

suspicion converts to
loyalty after kissing
the iron ring

across the channel
ashes floating against
a beautiful horizon

kinship is measured
here by if
you say so

the long fingernails
signifying the right
not to work

politics in a
city of clay
involve primitive opera

the face mask
lowers or raises
ideas of importance

once bitten by
the adventure bug
restraint was impossible

she left the
explorers to continue
on her own

their last sight
of her was
of her hat
the naked man
is almost never
the beautiful one

ordeal by labyrinth
was outlawed but
was never enforced

ritual gift presentation
is not always
ritual poison presentation

after learning it
was only fresh
corn meal mush

pollen collected then
used as makeup
for girl mutes

plans for next
year monopolized attention
at burials even

rumors just now
arriving of Frydryk
Chopin's impending death

had at once
shared sympathy and
continued practiced indifference

place his coachman
and eagerly lit
the dazzling lamp

the river identified
for her the
immediate northern outlet

a long spell
of soft dinner
to read undisturbed

the lazy drift of
the word *distinction*
across the teenager

bones of snakes
tossed in a
bowl with fire

parting the beginning
of trouble by
calling in rabbinicals

more highly favored
than a trip
across the lips

he invited her
to suspect him
of wrong doing

_The Etudes_ written
on the wall
of her tent

kept a corner
for sentiment one
for unloading salvage

I like the fluidity of the idea of journeys and chose to document an imaginary journey using the 27-day lunar cycle as a framework for _The Spotted Moon_. I wrote it from June through October 1994 outside. Journeys and cycles are excellent ideas to focus on when you're in need of hope, entertainment, and progression. They are also good for documentary because they are serial and can be easily recorded.
Because of a move, I lost the daily stimulus Chicago life provides. When I wrote the moon poem I was in my fourth summer of five or six in DeKalb, Illinois, which is sixty miles into the cornfields away from the city. I felt the need to define just what stimulus I had left. To do this, I needed to focus on a project that eventually became a 69-page moon poem. You don’t just stop being stimulated because you can no longer walk around city streets looking for it. The natural world and the artificial world of the mind continue to stimulate, and that is what I documented using the framework of the lunar cycle. The lunar cycle is a big thing, which is comfort enough. It also reminds you, if you pay attention to it as I did, that things change. Journeys don’t last forever, isolation doesn’t either.

On Documentary
I prefer a creative documentary over a ledger of facts. But I wouldn’t say a box of receipts for coal, for example, is not a kind of documentary. I once found such a box and saved it because it was a part of the history of my house. Fingering through it was a thrill. A good documentary is a thrill.

A fully-realized documentary, as opposed to a box of coal receipts, seems to me to be part historical/part artistic. A documentary tries to capture fluidity and slow it down or speed it up through focus and selection so that its recipients concentrate enough to understand. In this way, a documentary is a controlling device.

I am not done thinking about whether some forms are more equipped to document than others. At this moment, I have my doubts about music, for instance. Does “Auld Lang Syne” act as a documentary that the year is ending? Robert Burns “took it down from an old man’s singing” and sent it to the British Museum. Did it become a documentary then? Also, is Picasso’s Guernica a painting or a pictorial documentary? Can a documentary be singular?

I might make a photo/text documentary of the restoration of a building. But even as I write this, I feel cornered. In The Spotted Moon I got to make things up. I’d try to be more honest in a nonimaginary documentary. To convince the recipients of the restoration project to be interested in it, I’d have to manipulate my materials somehow or it would be a boring record of facts, nothing thrilling, almost like Warhol’s Sleep.

As a documentary maker I’d feel obliged to go beyond my own agendas. That’s the trick. If a documentary is defined as an artistic presentation of facts, then the maker has a lot to worry about: slant, hidden agendas, accuracy. A documentary, then, seems to need image, movement through time (serenity), selection and focus. And the documentary maker also needs a whistle-packing officer of the law on her shoulder who acts as a reminder of the amorphous laws of truthfulness. How do we tell the truth convincingly and package it in such a way that it stays the truth?

If only honesty is used, recipients will not be persuaded. The medium pushes the truth along the path the maker wants it to take.

Dubrovka Djuric

Proposals for Investigating Languages, Meanings, and Contexts of Conscious and Unconscious in Postmodern and Postcommunist Societies

Psychoanalytical Questioning
(for Diane Rothenberg)

Mothers of the nation, mothers of the nation . . .
What does Freud want?
Stranger is the other
The experience of nothing
The other side of nothing
Low of the Father
roses, buds, branches, mystic pleasure
heterosexual
castle of cards
vanishes
beyond the perspective
she was responsible for vanishing
The unconscious means:
woman in the darkness
she walks into the darkness
displacement

Comment:
Consider the responsibility of individual human beings—which is the ethical dimension.
Consider the position of the women in postmodern Western societies and postmodern Eastern European societies.
In the Balkans the women disappear into the blood and ground. Her bounds are buried with the war machine.
Consider the poetry making love with other disciplines.
Who is the Father and Who is the Mother, and whose is this body?
Rumors, rainings, rings, rivers and rivets.
Psychoanalytical Questioning
(for Deborah Thomas)

What does a woman want?
Sooth territory of this body
a rhetorical transition
this erasure
this woman-screen

white, covered, mapped,
this cover—discovered

faced with the openness
transforms itself into the opposite, the gloom

Comment:
Consider what is the opposite of opposite of opposite.
Consider where is the place of displaced
Consider the lost language, the stolen language
That which is already tasted, already used, already recognized.
The language is not mine.
Whose body is this?

Psychoanalytical Questioning
(for Susan Bee)

Power that goes underneath
unstable riddle of sexuality
of femininity
do not apply
do not apply

just push me, just push me
to the perspective of the Madonna
the foreign object
and the smile

Comment:
If the dream has a meaning, what will be the dream of the individual human being?
Does the nation have the dream?
What is the nation-monolite?
Consider the collective neurosis, does it exist within the individual at the same extent and with the same mechanisms and symptoms as within the nation.
Consider the wholeness of the WHOLE which is cleaned.
Am I cleaned from responsibility?
Who am I in this particular case?
Is there any particular case?
Psychoanalytical Questioning  
(for Marjorie Perloff)

difference within the difference is the difference within nothing with zero and nothing and nothing and zero
emotion is not emotion is zero is nothing within the nothing of the musical scale that is inherited by the words that are signs and are opaque and are mediated by the cages of age
theoretical discovery is pregnant
the new object is disillusion
the new word is misleading
the new freedom is the new slavery
no need for new humanism

Comment:
There is no identity, but multiplicity.
Consider the forms of behavior and how they are determined by the social organization of the society and its explicit and implicit value system.
How the behavior is determined by the social status.
How the language can be adopted and what are the consequences of its adoption, and how its meanings are displaced.
Is there always the displacement in question?
How the context transforms meanings? What if the context is not known to the investigator or any other person who tries to give the explanation.
Consider how the explanation gives always a new context or at least changes the context.

Psychoanalytical Questioning  
(considering the work of Cindy Sherman)

Civil war is secret
pigeons and porks
images of narration
Everywoman is screen-woman
with the silver skin
screen-skin
theatrical space of intent
is desire imposed by the invisible Creator of the Spectacle
legs and arms, heads and eyes and ears of clones

Comment:
Consider the future civil wars how are they represented in science fiction movies, and how these images are used for theatrical visual art-works and how they simulate postcommunist wars in some parts of former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.
I could not deal directly with the thematization of the civil war—I am that civil war.
What narration of war has to do with the world of art, with the world of literature.
Consider the value of the war-thematization in art and literature in the market place of economically subtle postcapitalist societies.
What is the meaning—politically, economically, aesthetically, philosophically—of the war in the technodigital societies.
Is the culture mediator for human aggression, does the culture take place of the aggression as well as all the commodities and mass Spectacles?
Sally Doyle

**I'M NOT THAT KIND OF BRIGHTNESS**

I didn't mean to discover the Sahara, but I made a long turn and ended up here. The sand is deep like thick water and every step of the way burns my ankles when I sink in. The muscles in my calves are getting hard and look like rocks are inside them. I pushed a wheelbarrow full of diamonds across the desert once already. Every glance down hurt my eyes because of THAT kind of brightness.

I took the wheelbarrow full of diamonds to Rockefeller's hotel room and he paid me a good price. This is where all the diamonds go and it makes me a little sad that all the brightness ends up in an air conditioned hotel room with a maid scrubbing the toilet and this man who has never taken a bus to get somewhere in his life.

Walking the Sahara I like to think about the feet of prophets—their leather sandals—that they never took a cab, but walked places. And sometimes they stopped for rice dinners, but kept on walking and merged with the desert so people thought they were pieces of sunlight because of THEIR kind of brightness. Those prophets didn't own a pair of nice slacks and when people noticed them, they shouted—LET ME MAKE YOU A NICE SUIT—but the prophets didn't slow down. They just kept on walking, dizzy and weak, only drinking lime juice for their blood sugar level.

The feet of the prophets were very beautiful and sometimes they bathed them in a nearby river. Now the holy river is on film and I can't go there. This is dehydration.  

**WHERE IS GANDHI?**

I need a border to cross that isn't a disturbance. I wish my kidneys would stop bothering me. It is one hundred steps and I have to stop.

**IS THE WORLD A WELCOME SIGHT?**

It is when I wake to mauve, pale yellow and turquoise. Then I can imagine God. Once I saw a water driven prayer wheel. The water was praying and that sound filled my whole body. Scenery like this is not a strain.

Prayer flags put a certain mood in the air that brightens. Many people think the American flag is a prayer flag—but it is something else—more like a hotel flag or a mall flag or a flag that tells children to keep their feet off the seats. The American flag is being hammered into the asphalt. It doesn't float. But I better stop talking about this flag because I'm not political anymore. I used to be. I used to be addicted to the news like it was the TRUTH. You know what I mean. I read the paper and watched TV. There was always another war to put me in a bad mood. This was when I lost my sense of humor and my string of funny stories and it was also at this time my husband decided liquor was a clever idea and began to admire bus routes and take them seriously. He never came back.

My husband's departure woke me up and I gave up on the news and I began to rely on my musical background. I met a smooth boy and we made this background into a fertile place singing opera until I finally became a person who could laugh again.

**CALL BUDDHA**

Now, I'm banished from the real world. People think I'm stupid because I don't know who was shot today. If I don't know who was shot, I don't know who won. They think I lack basic understanding of streets and shops. Don't get me wrong—I'm no hermit or anything. I like people and stairways and jeeps and skirts and beds. I like to talk to handsome men. I have a birth certificate and I owned a car once.

**IS MY SOUL THE SHAPE OF THE UNITED STATES? DOES IT NEED TO BE A WINNER? IF I'M NOT NUMBER ONE THAN WHO AM I?**

Sort yourself out.

**I'M JUST A GAL WHO WANTS A HAPPY RELIGION**

so I asked a handsome monk to take me to dinner and to show me to a cheerful room. But he refused so I fell asleep on the sidewalk, thinking at intervals how badly people treat people in this city.
How many monks does it take to screw in a light bulb?

WHERE IS MOHAMMED?

WHAT IS YOUR MATTRESS?


He said he forgot the film so he cannot go there.

I'm not a free show. I'm not a girl who dances beautifully on the terrace in fire light. I'm not surrounded by temples and domes. I'm not leaning against a carved pillar or a smooth statue. There are bricks and broken glass and I am breathless.

CAN YOU ALLEVIATE SUFFERING WITH A VISION OF A SAILBOAT?

I'm not in that videotape. I don't move around like that.

THE WHOLE CONTINENT IS BEING HAMMERED INTO SOMETHING ELSE I DON'T RECOGNIZE.

I'm in a different field without a capital. I hear my shoes on the cement and think this is the result.

Maggie Dubris

from Willieworld*

IV

The calls fell one against the next. They came without warning. Bolts of lightning as I drank my coffee or dozed in the front seat of the bus. I didn't talk to anyone. I felt so alone in the city that shook in the path of a hot green wind. This will be the year the papers said this will be the year that the tornado takes us all. There's no money any more. People live on every empty corner. "Give me what you've got," the men say as I pass them on my way to work.

People get shot every day. The Mayor goes to all their funerals. He stands at the altar, his gray head trembling tears in his eyes. "God has called him home," he says "God has called his precious child home."

Then God's voice must be everywhere now. In the alleys littered with crack vials the cardboard cities down by the pier. In the yellow kitchens with their overturned chairs the one night hotels and topless bars calling after the sailors laughing on 42nd Street and the girls who stand along Ninth Avenue watching the Jersey cars.

"It's just God, that sound you hear," I want to tell them

* A version of this poem first appeared in Cuz (2) 1988.
"calling sweet and low."
That sound like the rattle of a snake.
It might be God. But it might not be.
It might be the Devil. If you believe in such things.
The Garden of Eden, angels who fall to earth.
I used to believe in a lot of things. But I don’t now.
Now I drive an ambulance
in the holiest city on earth.

New Year’s Eve in Times Square.
We get a job at a homeless hotel on 43rd Street
a jumper down in a courtyard between two buildings.
We have to go through an apartment to get to the body.
In one room sits a woman with two kids.
The baby is lying in a crib with a stuffed kitten
the little boy standing on a box
staring out the window into the rainy night.

Firecrackers are going off.

It’s hard to hear.
"There was a thump," the woman says.
"Like a chair going off the roof."
The television is on, so loud the sound distorts.
Face down in four inches of water, I see a woman
hands bound behind her back.
"Hold the boy. I have to open the window."
The boy begins to wail. I step outside.

The night is cold
rain blows around us.
A fat girl with brown hair
deep slashes on her thighs and buttocks
as if she’s been beaten with a car aerial.
Her hands and feet are bound with extension cords
her white tee shirt bunched in the front
the left side of her face caved in.
"She came from eight floors up," a cop says.
"They heard her screaming in there. See the window?"

"Is that girl dead?"
Three boys stand hatless in the rain. Seventeen. Pupils like black lakes.

"There’s no girl."
"Come on. I’m from a TV station. We heard a whore got killed."
"You’re in the way."
"Some whore. Do the people in the hotel know she’s dead? That’s a bad floor. Who would whip a whore like that?
Maybe a pimp. You should tell the cops her pimp did it."
The other boys are gone. He looks behind him
turns and runs. On the radio the dispatcher says
"There’s a confirmed cop shot at Penn Station, any unit available?
Any unit available in the borough?" We have to go.

The Ink Spot lives in the subways
riding warm trains in summer
cool trains in winter. He carries
a small paper lunch bag
holding it with both hands. His clothes
are so old they have taken on a color
no one manufactures. A cop
knows who he is. “Sing for them,”
he says, and the Ink Spot sings.
Chain Gang, clear high tones
bouncing from concrete walls
to rake across my heart.
At that moment he seems transformed.
A spotlight falls across him.
His swollen foot taps a perfect beat.
One night, I find him sober
still living underground.
"Remember I asked you to pray for me," he says.
He never did. He was so drunk.
I could only understand him when he sang.
"Do you remember?"
"Of course."
"You see. It worked."

The weather gets warm
we drive through Central Park
the windows open
shining floodlights into the new leaves.
Lasker Pool is dry, but I hear the waterfall
across the road, rushing with melted snow.
At first we don't see anything
then lights, police cars down a dirt road
at the end of a diamond fence. An old man
in the bushes. He wears a heavy down coat and his throat
has been slit; blood and feathers covering his chest.
A pair of dirty tan pants, rope for a belt
pockets pulled inside out
crotch ripped open where someone has cut
his balls out of their sacs.
They lie between his legs like two white onions.

Bob Tidy grew up outside Toledo
lost his leg in a truck accident in west Texas.
He sits in front of the bus terminal in a dirty wheelchair
urine dripping from the seat. One good leg
and one plastic one he never stands on. We get calls for him
every night. Most nights he's too drunk to
speak. I hear things about him
rumors and legends. He hoards his pills
in intensive care and takes them all one night
yearning to die. When he's coherent
he promises to buy me things
as soon as he wins the Lotto. One night
a cop at the bus terminal says
"You don't have to worry about Bob tonight.
They've put him on a bus to the camp shelter."
Two hours later we get another call. It's Bob.
"He escaped," the cop says, "him and Roosevelt Bailey."
They told the driver Bob had an apartment and
Roosevelt was going to spend the night.

Out there it's summertime. Milk and honey days.
The radio down low
police screaming about someone on the highway
kids, a pitchfork, murder
on the highway near the pier.
We can't drive there. It's been closed off for years.
We throw our equipment on the stretcher
roll it up the ramp
run three blocks to where cop lights circle.

A small blond boy lies with a pitchfork through his back.
He's half on his side, almost like he's asleep.
His skin looks alive. I know we can save him.
When I turn him over, brains are tangled in his hair.
He has so many holes in him.
He wears black roller skates
the tongues turned down
the wheels spattered with blood.

At the side of the highway
slumped against the guard wall
sits the dead boy's younger brother.
He looks at his brother's body
looks down at his hands
looks back at the body.

Two boys flank him. One is crying and throwing up
the other has an arm around the brother's shoulder.
Cops surround them, but at a distance
as though repelled by a moat.
I walk through the blue circle.
The brother has scrapes on his palms
from where he jumped the guard rail and dropped
to the street below to try and get help.
His hands are childish, still fat beneath the grime and blood.

He points to a wood and tarpaper shack.
"A skel lives there," he says, using the word skel
as though he's a cop, but he's a kid, and I think
he must have picked it up from some uncle.
"We know him. He never bothered us before. He had a pitchfork
and a shovel, digging the road. He put the pitchfork out.
We skated around it. It was like he didn't see us.
We were racing. Carl practiced for hockey.
After a while, we didn't see him any more.
Then I came back and I saw it.
The skel. The pitchfork going.
Up and down.
Into something. Some
thing. I knew it was Carl."
The boy begins to cry.
He hides his face with one hand
I wipe the other with alcohol.
The boys beside him look away.
"Is someone getting your mother?" I say.

Daniel Wilder had been in a fire
his face was horribly scarred. Years ago
a woman in a scarf
would come by and berate him while he sobered up
then he followed her slowly out the door.
I thought she was his wife, but she stopped coming
and he got older and dirtier and more beat up looking.
Unconscious, the scar tissue pulls at his mouth
so he always seems to be smiling.
I pick him up hundreds of times but speak to him only once.
He has come from the detox camp upstate. It's easy
to forget how old he is when he lies silent
his edges smoothed by wine
his body a map of his life.
Stitches appear and dissolve
hair is shaved and grows back
his belly swells from years of drinking.
Awake, he looks old. "Do I know you?" he says
upright on trembling legs I have never seen hold him.
"I'm so afraid of falling. I'm just so afraid."
He has a cane and digs his nails into my arm as we walk to the bus.
"Don't let me fall, please don't."
On the way to the hospital I ask what happened to his wife.
He says he never had one. "Then who was that lady
who used to pick you up when you were drunk?"
"Oh, there've been so many ladies in my life
the girls just go for me."
He waves his arms in a vaguely pleased manner.
Tipped on his head is an old dusty hat
that looks like it belongs in a movie.
The next time I see him the hat and cane are gone
and he is silent as always.

All summer
we park on the pier by the Hudson River
because it's cool.
We have no air conditioning in the front of the bus.
The hood open to let the heat out, we sit
with our feet on the dashboard
both doors loose
letting the wind blow through.
In early evening I hear bagpipes playing
from the Greyhound terminal down the highway.
One of the medics went over last month
and found the person playing them.
He was a friend of three CBS workers who were murdered.
Every night when the weather's nice
he goes to the place they were killed and plays.
Plays to their memory until the killers are caught.

We get a job in the Lyric Theater on 42nd Street.
On the sidewalk out front is a teenager
stabbed in the chest. He rolls around wildly.
His girlfriend screams and flings herself towards him
held back by screaming friends.
Cops surround us. As I start the IV a cop leans over:
"Someone said to tell you there's a party having a seizure in the theater." One of the EMTs goes in to have a look.
A minute later a cop breaks through the crowd:
"He said to tell you the seizure's a cardiac arrest."
We leave the stabbing in the bus with the cops and run in.
Halfway down the aisle
a fat boy lies on his back. A kung fu movie is playing
the volume turned up so loud I can't hear what anyone says.
The EMT shouts into my ear. I wave him away.
Some kids still sit in their seats watching.
Others stand, wave their arms, black shadows against the screen.
The boy must have just died.
Bubbles fall in a chain from the corner of his mouth.
When we roll him over there's a tiny hole in his back
the size of a pencil eraser
black powder burns around it.
At Bellevue they cut open his chest
but he's dead. The bullet has severed his pulmonary artery
lodged itself in the wall of his heart.
As we wipe down the stretcher a detective shows up
cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. He doesn’t bother to take it out when he talks.
“The kid say anything?”
“No. He was dead.” He writes in a wire top notepad. The cigarette flips up and down.
“So why’d you bring him in?”
“There might have been a chance.”
A fly zapper goes off nonstop behind us. The air is heavy with diesel fumes.
“Did you hear the story? Unfucking believable.” I shake my head.
“The kid’s with his sister. People behind him won’t stop yapping. So he says, ‘Shut up man’. They shoot him.
They don’t say shit. They just shoot him.”
We have a photographer riding with us taking pictures for the hospital’s annual report.
“What a stupid reason to die;” he says
“It’s so stupid. To die for nothing.”

But everyone dies for nothing. A hundred dollars in a pocket, a new leather coat. Face down in the snow with a bottle of Night Train and a broken nose. Or some bar six years ago smoke all around you and the jukebox playing too loud. You take him home. Now the sun’s coming up like roses behind white curtains as you close your eyes.

His real name is Mike but when I first ran into him he said, “Call me Ice it’s easier to remember.” He spends days riding the E train his nights in front of Smiler’s Deli on an overturned milk crate watching the whores’ purses for them and collecting money from passersby. He says he’s a singer in a doo–wop band, too proud to sing on the street.
“Come see me next week.” He gives me directions to a club. But when I go the club doesn’t exist.
“You should have written it down;” he says “That’s why God gave you a pencil. I never told you Tuesday I told you Monday. At eleven, not nine. And you got the street wrong too.”

For a week he disappears, returns thin and solemn with new clothes. He has gone to Virginia to visit a grave. “My wife’s.”
The next night he says it was his sister’s. One night I pull up and he’s so quiet, barely lifting his head to talk. “Ice, what’s the matter. You look depressed.” “Huh. You know when you really like a girl, and you want it to all work out like the cab and everything.”

Five in the morning, the first week of school. We drive to a homeless hotel on 42nd Street for a baby not breathing. The mother has run down from the eighth floor to meet us in the lobby. She’s screaming carrying something wrapped in a nubby tan blanket I wrestle the blanket away from her. Inside is a two year old in cardiac arrest. I start CPR. She’s too big to balance on my arm but I do it anyway, and she slides crookedly as I stumble towards the ambulance. The mother pulls at my shirt, screaming about the baby-sitter. The back doors of the bus open and light spills onto the street. A crowd surrounds us. I hand the baby to my partner push the mother in behind them. As I drive to the hospital I see her like a cork on a puddle, bobbing from side to side as I swerve. The baby lies on the backboard, my partner kneeling beside her, his mouth to hers. As we pull her out at the hospital I take over. She vomits into my mouth. I spit it onto the sheet beside her head. The color is dark, as though there’s blood in it. We roll her into the code room. In the bright light I see her more clearly. Stiff braids tied with pink yarn bruises on the tiny chest a split lip. The doctor can’t get an IV. From outside the curtain
I hear curses and thumping. No one looks up.
The vomit tests positive for blood.
I walk out. Two security guards hold back the mother.
Her face twists crooked. She smells of wine.
"You took my baby. Is my baby all right?
I spoil that girl. She's my baby."
A man walks by in a hospital gown.
His head swivels as he passes the mother. He motions to me.
"She's a crackhead," he says. "Did she beat that baby again?"

The old man claims to have been a boxer back in the thirties.
Now he just drinks. We find him in his slippers
on a factory block on the West Side. "Where do you live?"
"That's my affair." He winks and punches me on the shoulder.
He doesn't like to be called the boxer, but won't tell us his name.
The cops call him old man to his face.
"Old man," they say, "you used to box?"
He goes into his stance.
"I could take you all out with one shot right now."
The cops step back and nod.
His friend won't divulge a name either.
Johnny Bumps, the cops call him
and that's what's typed on the plastic
hospital bands that circle his wrists.
He lets the bands build up
different colors for different hospitals.
I cut them off some nights
leaving one or two
for the next ambulance to find.
His face is deformed from hundreds of
drunken falls. Bumps like half an egg
split with scars or black stitches.
In Penn Station one night two boys piss on him
and kick him down the stairs. A witness
tells us the story. Bumps is so drunk
he doesn't remember it.

Ice told me once
in a moment of drunken closeness
that he wanted to fly into the great blue yonder.
He often dreamed he was yonder
We chase him
running between rusty tracks
the grass grown up in rough patches
piles of black garbage bags torn open
jumping over broken railroad ties
the sky lost in a blur of overhanging branches
dark under bridges where junkies lie on mattresses dotted with blood
running and running
and suddenly the sun breaks through and we stop.

All around us are shacks made of tin
and piles of old tires, laundry
hanging from ropes strung between the trees
twenty or thirty dull tin shacks
scattered across a ravine. Each covered
with neat rows of tiny white letters.
“Jesus sucks your Pussy God is salvation Pray The Fire burns I’m
going to kill You soon Jehovah walks the Earth Jehovah the whore.”
Men sit in torn wire chairs drinking pint wine
poke their heads from blanket hung doorways.
In the middle of it all is our patient
who talks to himself in two voices
one high, one low.
“Is raining?”
“Yes is raining.”
“Is raining hard?”
“Yes is raining hard.”

It's a city of crack addicts.
I don't see any women. The air is stale
as though the cliffs hold everything that happens between them.
I smell a sharp mixture of shit, pot and rubber.
Papers burn in circles of charred stones.
Our patient is starting to come down
and lets me bandage his leg. Some men help
and we get him up the cliff
onto a concrete platform at street level.
The sun is going down over the river
as I call for the cops to come with a bolt cutter and get us out.
From the platform

I see the roofs of the tin city spread out beneath me.
But once we get outside the fence
I can't see anything at all.

1. Physics has shown us that any experiment or reaction is affected by the
very presence of an observer. I don't believe there is any such thing as
objective documentary. To me, reality has very little to do with the "facts." I
try to do in my work is evoke the reader the reactions I experi-
ence in a world where I spend much of my time, New York City's 911
System. The calls or images contained in this piece are culled from thou-
sands of calls and memories of calls, transformed to a point where none is
'real' or 'factual' in and of itself. I strive for emotional truth which I feel
comes from an accumulation of images rather than from attempting to
replicate the physical world exactly.

2. Documentary can exist in any form. I believe film and video are the
least accurate.

3. I think of people who are doing oral history, the folklore societies of
various states, museums such as New York's Tenement Museum.

4. I would never do an actual documentary as I am more interested in the
transformation involved in poetry and fiction. If I were to try a traditional
documentary form it would be oral history, perhaps of outsider religious
movements, and I'm sure it would turn into fiction eventually anyway.
“Do You Love the Dyke in Your Life?,” 1993
black and white poster, 11” x 19”

“Straight to Hell: the film,” 1994
four color poster, 19” x 25”
today the peace & war demonstrators
line up across the street
from each other
the peace songs fade out foolish & white
we shall overcome & let my little light shine

teenaged girls briskly functional
responsible for their emotions cannot know
difference between works & faith
cannot know I will die of grief but
your love alone pinpoint of light
in catatonic darkness draws
fills my mind with light & tears
crying as I watch you turn
from a young to an old man
writing a card to a man in a hospital

"Documentary" suggests truthful record to me—I tend to think of court
documents, or of parchment manuscript. I don’t have a way to see very
much film or video, so I think of documentary as including all kinds of
recording—image, word, sound. The documentary that I am most inter­
ested in is the recording of the nexus between “real” & the “shadow”
worlds—documentary of daily happenstance which embodies mythic reality. I think immediately of the great observers & recorders that I happen to
love: Andrew Lang & Clement A. Miles, recorders of folktales & customs; Konrad Lorenz & Donald Griffin, of the animal mind; Pat Parker, Toni
Morrison, Albert Camus, Sylvia Plath, Juan Ramon Jimenez, Juan
Goytisolo, Alice Notley, & James Schuyler, of the human events—as well
as the great Chinese & Japanese poets & diarists. Today I think of experi­
mental American & Japanese writing— certain Japanese, American, &
British graphic novels & animation [Warriors of the Wind/Nausicaa,
Kiki’s Delivery Service, My Neighbor Tortoro—Sandman & Hellblazers]. I can count on confluence in the submissions to my maga­
zine tight [I don’t have to suggest a topic] & so I feel that in compiling the
manuscripts I am documenting some waves of force that are necessary. My
own documentary is the seasons of my experience, in my own town—I use
poetry, prose poems, & some ink drawings & rubbings from the ‘concrete’
world.

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poetry, prose poems, & some ink drawings & rubbings from the ‘concrete’
world.
Already I can no longer.

Force the bulbs from the matrix.
Push me through to the next layer of untarnished loam.
distinction. tress. rustle. lovely words.

we watched her through a sneaky crack in the wall as she was having her lunch poems.

various is as various thinks.
therefore we are. in search. of.

displacement by-product killing trend
primary purpose dimensional weaponry
cleansing medieval abandon combatant
the shrunken terror miscellaneous with force the perpetual franchise
the miscellaneous with malice torture the machination the systematic
arrested development warlord the field he plunders

the state withered away
the state is as the state does proxy warfare pumped in it's academic
indiscriminate carnage speeds the exodus it's endemic
party to the conflict fan the flames mass relief succor
asylum the weakness that never ends

Dear B,

I got a Stones bite on the hold button. Press your pick. The favorite option. The hold button. Press it. Pick your poison. It's endemic. Rise above. The holiness. The favorite option the hold option. The dust on your shelves. Your tiny world. I signed for your papers. I have nothing left. The zen option. The music button. The favorite. The fluxus option. Press your favorite pick. It easy went by your door. The careless. All them seeds. The hold button poison.

It's a certain sort of system I was walking through leaves I was walking through glass in a language of multitudes the colors can't change but they change so I said if we are certain parts of patterns of reductions of shape to sound the expanse of color, the minimality of tone, the conquest of breath over air, we are parts of sentences from the start so why not pick their words

IF A WRITING, A SIGHTING. I would like to suggest that the poetic is precisely the social, and as such, is capable of occupying the position of "documentary" by virtue of its social functioning as aperture, view-finder, documentary form. Perhaps "documentation" through various expressive apparatuses is more "realistic" than documentary in the traditional sense. The more real "real world" because it is what we choose to offer up from a particular vantage point, representing a mode of thought, production, and action established as critique of the inadequacy of already existing representative forms/genres. "Responsibility is to keep/ the ability to re-
spond" (Robert Duncan). The poem is a made place, a utopian project born out of an existing sociopolitical situation; it is commentary, critique, and action. One is reminded of John Wieners' declaration that "pushed on by the incompleteness / of what goes before me / I hesitate before this paper scratching for the right words." The poem as completion project, a space of imagined future, potentiality. Who was it who said something about poets being the unacknowledged legislators of the world? Well, I'm insistently uncomfortable even being in the same room as the word "legislator," but George Oppen's revision of that grandiose statement gets a little closer to my point: "legislators / of the unacknowledged / world." If this is so, and if, as I say, the poem is a place, a structure, and if a place is a form of knowledge, then the poet is capable of enacting an epistemological shift. Perhaps the poem is a door out. Someone better be watching.

Darcy Frey

from The Last Shot: City Streets, Basketball Dreams*

Russell Thomas places the toe of his right sneaker one inch behind the three-point line. Inspecting the basket with a level gaze, he bends twice at the knees, raises the ball to shoot, then suddenly looks around. What is it? Has he spotted me, watching from the opposite end of the playground? No, something else is up. He's lifting his nose to the wind like a spaniel; he appears to be gauging air currents. Russell waits until the wind settles, bits of trash feathering lightly to the ground. Then he sends a twenty-five-foot jump shot arcing through the soft summer twilight. It drops without a sound through the dead center of the bare iron rim. So does the next one. So does the one after that. Alone in the gathering dusk, Russell begins to work the perimeter against imaginary defenders, unspooling jump shots from all points.

It's the summer of 1991, and Russell has just finished his junior year at Abraham Lincoln High School in Coney Island, New York. Eighteen years old, he stands six feet two, weighs a hundred and eighty pounds, and is the proud owner of a newly shaved scalp and a small goatee. When he practices at this court, everything between his shiny bald top and his jutting, bearded chin goes blank, and he moves over the asphalt as if in a trance—silent, monklike, in a galaxy of his own. Most summer evenings I come by this court to watch Russell and his friends play ball, and I have found few sights quite as stirring as that of Russell's jumper, tracing a meteor curve in the still, expectant air. But the shot, I realize tonight, is merely the final gesture, the public flourish of a private regimen that brings Russell to this court day and night. Avoiding pickup games, he gets down to work: an hour of three-point shooting, then wind sprints up the fourteen flights in his project stairwell, then back to this court where, much to his friends' amusement, he shoots one-handers ten feet from the basket while sitting in a chair.

At this hour Russell usually has the court to himself. Lately New York City has been slogging through one of its enervating heat waves, a string of 95-degree days, and most of Coney Island's other players won't come out until after dark, when the thick, humid air begins to stir with night breezes and the court lights come on. But tonight is turning out

to be a fine one—cool and foggy. The low, slanting sun sheds a pink light over the silvery Atlantic just a block away, and milky sheets of fog roll off the ocean and drift in tatters along the project walkways. The air smells of sewage and salt water. At the far end of the court, where someone has torn a hole in the chain-link fence, other players climb in and begin warming up.

"Just do it, right?" I glance to my left, and there is Corey Johnson, smiling mischievously, eyes alight. He nods toward the court—Russell at one end, a group of players stretching out and taking lay-ups at the other—and it does, in fact, resemble a sneaker commercial. "Work hard, play hard, buy yourself a pair of Nikes, young man," Corey intones. Corey, who is known throughout Coney Island for a variety of talents, practices some deft mimicry, and his rendition of a white, stentorian-voiced TV announcer is easily among his best. "They get you where you want to go, which is out of the ghet-to!" He laughs, we shake hands, and he takes up an observation post by my side.

I am always pleased, though somewhat surprised, when Corey comes by this court. Corey is Russell's best friend and one of Lincoln High's other star juniors. But he specializes in ironic detachment and normally shows up courtside, carrying his Walkman, merely to watch for girls with his handsome, hooded eyes. That may be his intention yet. Tonight he is wearing a fresh white T-shirt, expertly ripped along the back and sleeves to reveal glimpses of his sculpted physique, denim shorts that reach to his knees, and a pair of orange sneakers that go splendidly with his lid—a tan baseball cap with orange piping, which he wears with the bill pointing skyward. From his headphones come the sounds of Color Me Badd, and Corey sings along: I-wanna-sex-you-up . . . He loops his fingers around the chain-link fence and says, "I tell you, Coney Island is like a disease—of the mind. It makes you lazy. You relax too much. 'Cause all you ever see is other guys relaxing."

There was a time, of course, when Coney Island inspired among its residents more sanguine remarks—when the neighborhood was home to three world-renowned amusement parks, and its streets were lined with three-story homes, filled to the eaves with Jewish, Irish, and Italian families who proclaimed Coney Island the most welcoming place in America for a newly arrived immigrant—a latter-day Plymouth Rock. Now, however, all but a few scattered rides have been dismantled; most of the cottages and triple-deckers have succumbed to the bulldozers of urban renewal; and in their place the city has erected a vast tract of housing projects, home to Coney Island's newest arrivals—African-Americans—and packed so densely along a twenty-block stretch that a new skyline has risen at land's end by the beach and the boardwalk.

The experiment of public housing, which has worked throughout the country to isolate its impoverished and predominantly black tenants from the hearts of their cities, may have succeeded here with even greater efficiency because of Coney Island's utter remoteness. On this peninsula, at the southern tip of Brooklyn, there are almost no stores, no trees, no police; nothing, in fact, but block after block of gray-cement projects—hulking, prisonlike, and jutting straight into the sea. Most summer nights now, an amorphous unease settles over Coney Island, as apartments become stifling and the streets fall prey to the gangs and drug dealers. Options are limited: to the south is the stiff gray merengue of the Atlantic; to the north, more than ten miles away, one can just make out the Statue of Liberty and the glass-and-steel spires of Manhattan's financial district. Officially, Coney Island is part of the endless phantasmagoria that is New York City. But on a night like this, as the dealers set up their drug marts in the streets and alleyways, and the sounds of sirens and gunfire keep pace with the darkening sky, it feels like the end of the world.

Yet even in Coney Island there is a use to which a young man's talent, ambition, and desire to stay out of harm's way may be put: there is basketball. Hidden behind the projects are dozens of courts, and every night they fill with restless teenagers, who remain there for hours until exhaustion or the hoodlums take over. The high school dropouts and the aging players who never made it to college usually show up for a physical game at a barren strip of courts by the water known as Chop-Chop Land, where bruises and minutes played are accrued at a one-to-one ratio. The younger kids congregate for rowdy games at Run-and-Gun Land. The court there is short and rims are low, so everyone can dunk, and the only pass ever made is the one inbounding the ball. At Run-and-Gun, players stay on the move for another reason: the court sits just below one of the most dreaded projects, where Coney Island's worst hoodlums sometimes pass a summer evening "getting hectic," as they say—shooting at each other or tossing batteries and beer bottles onto the court from apartment windows fifteen stories above.

The neighborhood's best players—Russell, Corey, and their brethren on the Lincoln varsity—practice a disciplined, team-driven style of basketball at the court where I am standing tonight, which has been dubbed the Garden, after the New York Knicks' arena. In a neighborhood ravaged by the commerce of drugs, the Garden offers a cherished sanctuary. A few years ago community activists petitioned the housing authority to install night lights. And the players themselves surfaced
the court and put up regulation-height rims that snap back after a player
dunks. Russell may be the only kid at the Garden who shoots one-
handers from a chair or practices his defensive footwork with a ten-
pound brick in each hand, but no one here treats the game as child's
play. Even the dealers and hoodlums refrain from vandalizing the Gar-
den, because in Coney Island the possibility of transcendence through
basketball—in this case, an athletic scholarship to a four-year Division I
college—is an article of faith.

Although a pickup game has begun at the basket nearest Corey
and me, Russell still commands the other. As the last light drains from
the summer sky, he finishes with three-pointers and moves on to baby
hooks: fifteen with the left hand, fifteen with the right; miss one and
start all over again. It is not too much to say that basketball has saved
Russell. The Thomases—Russell, his mother, and his two younger sis-
ters—live in one of the neighborhood's toughest projects, just a block
from this court; and in earlier days Russell often caused his family con-
siderable grief, sometimes leaving home for long stretches to hang out
on the streets with his friends. Every teenager does this to some extent,
but the custom posed a greater threat in Russell's case since certain of
his friends back then liked to wander over to neighboring Brighton
Beach in order to hold up pensioners at gunpoint. But having watched
so many of his contemporaries fall into gangs or prison or an early
grave, Russell has developed new ambitions for himself. A few months
ago, he led the team at Lincoln High to the New York City public
school championship, which was played at Madison Square Garden and
broadcast citywide on cable TV. For most of his teammates, it was a
moment to savor; Russell hardly broke stride to celebrate. Until he wins
his college scholarship, sometime in the months ahead, all else in his life
seems to dwindle to the vanishing point—everything besides the ball,
this basket, and his conviction that by practicing every day and playing
by all the rules, he has set himself on a path that will change his life.

Stephon has raised a ball with one hand directly over his head and threaded
it through his legs. From back to front. Without interrupting his dribble.
Now he's doing it with two balls!

Soon the orange court lights at the Garden come on, displacing
the encroaching darkness, and two players on either end of the court
climb the fence and sit atop the backboards, hanging nets—a sign that a
serious game is about to begin. A few minutes later, a uniformed referee
actually shows up to officiate. Suddenly a ferocious grinding noise fills
the air. It gets louder and louder, and then a teenage kid riding a Big
Wheel careers onto the court. He darts through the playground crowd,
around the court's edges, he concluded, "Too many low-life, rowdy-ass Brooklyn niggers. I'm heading back to Queens. Now."

Tonight, however, darkness brings only a cool, vaporous sea breeze and nothing to distract the players from their game. Basketball, it is commonly said, is a sport of pure instinct, but the five-on-five contest that begins here is something else. Corey and Stephon are cousins, and Russell is as good as family—the three of them have played together since they were in grade school. They seem to move as if the spontaneous, magical geometry of the game has all been rehearsed in advance. Stephon, the smallest by far, is doing tricks with the ball as though it were dangling from his hand by a string, then gunning it to his older teammates with a series of virtuoso no-look passes. Corey is lulling defenders with his sleepy eyes, then exploding to the basket, where he casually tosses the ball through the hoop. Russell is sinking twenty-footers as if they were six-inch putts.

The game has just begun when a crowd starts to form: sidelined players, three deep, waiting their turn. A prostitute trolling for clients. A drunk yelling maniacally, "I played with Jordan, I played with Jabbar. They ain't shit. And neither are you!" A buffed-out guy in a silk suit and alligator shoes arrives, swigging from a bottle of Courvoisier. An agent? A scout? The crowd gives him elbow room. A couple of teenage mothers with strollers come by. There are many of them in Coney Island; they get significantly less elbow room.

It's past midnight now, and the ambient glow of Manhattan's remote skyscrapers has turned the sky a metallic blue. Standing courtside, we can see only the darkened outlines of the projects, looming in every direction, and the shirtless players streaking back and forth, drenched in orange light. Now and then the ref steps out from the darkness onto center court and his official stripes glow incongruously beneath the court lights as the Doppler wail of police sirens drifts in from the nearby streets. Corey, sprinting down-court, calls out, "Homeboy! Homeboy!" Standing under his own basket, Stephon lets fly with a long, improbable pass that Corey, running full speed, somehow manages to catch and dunk in one balletic leap. The game is called on account of total pandemonium: players and spectators are screaming and staggering around the court—knees buckling, heads held in astonishment. Even Mr. Courvoisier loses his cool. Stephon laughs and points to the rim, still shuddering from its run-in with Corey's fists. "Yo, cuz!" he yells. "Make it bleed!" Then he raises his arms jubilantly and dances a little jig, rendered momentarily insane by the sheer, giddy pleasure of playing this game to perfection.
When night comes I want to keep reading without turning on the light. In the future eyes will have adapted and some will be able to read in the dark. I envy them. I like to sit in the dark with many people I don’t know. I can’t wait till the lights go out. People are sitting in the dark reading together. The tall letters of words that would come up to your knees stop in front of you wavering slightly. Then someone turns the big invisible lever and the letters slowly disappear, line by line, swallowed up by the black mail slot under the screen. Still photos appear and hover for a full three minutes. Sometimes a grid of four photos, then later, a refrain, the same four again rearranged differently on the grid. And the voices too, separate elements falling over into sense, then rearranging themselves into storytelling, someone alone singing, and back again, running water, many feet on asphalt following the contours of how and where. Being sure, as Fallaci shows, that some people are responsible for setting it in motion more than others. Together we imagine it has taken place. More text that looks like an aerial view of heads in a piazza appears. A piazza because there is a fountain in the middle. The fountain of a capital O. And it is footprints in a square left by soldiers learning their marching formations. It is now creases in the sheet when your cheek is pressed against—when you are just waking into the reverse world. Inside of commentary what happened still happens. More. Again. Of what is this a document?—can always be asked but amnesia is the usual resort. Forgetfulness is entertainment. Is there any other way to crawl inside a book? Between document and event, commentary and reaction, put me between pages and close the door. This a lullaby to wake you up.

Of course it’s the sleep of the visible secret that I want to see. The homecoming of the dead from the gulf war to the Dover Airforce Base in Delaware. Who has that footage?

Oriana Fallaci, *Interview With History*, Thucydides, Herodotus, Salgado, Ondaatje, Zora Neale Hurston, Rhodessa Jones, Paul Rabinow, Vincent Crapanzano, Anna Devere Smith, Trinh Minh-Ha, Michael Moore, Dorothy Richardson, Francis Ford Coppola, etc etc
By the way, our real dad was drunk and is when he killed his best girl in a car crash.

My sister, who was only six at the time, refused to drink the wine.

No!

Years later, the first time I had sex, I was with my mother's boyfriend. I was eager to be sophisticated and wanted nothing more than to please.

He guzzled his wine but did not swallow.

I was no angel. I used to beat my sister.

We seen ya stealing lady.

We gonna have fun.

That's all there is there ain't no more.
A cold breeze smelling of seashells and rice
And then of trees arousing me
More than city life as I experience it requires
Is pushing back the curtains by the bed where I'm lying for a little
while longer
To dream
That I'm a prisoner.
But I can't pretend to sleep while writing this.
And if you turn from this to any other didactic poem you will see the
contrast
Between adventure in the meditations of a woman and imagination in
the speculations of a man,
The one depending on accumulation, the other on loss and gain
Which aren't the same for everyone, enclosed in different circles
And in different skulls
And most of them guarded
Although things get in or out sometimes—the smell of blankets
Hanging in the dark, for example,
Or the story of the father who punished his daughter for being lazy
because he didn't understand her kind of work—
But those too are ideas.
Ideas contend with stories
And this is more worthy of consideration than the judgments which
separate them into "good" and "bad"
Angels.
I know the poet is vain who writes of paradise.
Experiences run together through transitions
Which are long and short at once
And so I watch the long leaves at the narrow window of my cell
And blink.
Perhaps what is most amazing is that with crimes on my conscience
I can still kiss the wall.
My containment
Consists of a series of connections
Sustaining my conviction of having done something
And every act expresses a necessity
To improve.
In over half my dreams a moral dilemma figures.
There is a grazing horse charred in a grassy corral
And a bluejay named 'Julie' directing a flotilla of ships through a
canal
Or a convocation of logicians in striped shirts watching a boxing
match
In a rural gymnasium owned by my grandfather who is sad
And the dilemma emphasizes the parallels
Whose shadows shift
Through the rationalizing ambitions of the story.
My guilt is much like Descartes' doubt.
No—those doubts were certainties, though achieved through "pain
And other sensations
Which could not have been foreseen"
And serve as bars
Or gates
Or guards or guides.
Signifier and signified.
They are snapping the distance
In a dream with an outward gaze that's all about a gain
Of metaphor and change of shape
At this "stopping point"
Under the pressure of the senses
Which draw from 'nature' and develop reality.
That's our reason for acting.
Reason is an aid to stories.
It's the ghost out of the cell,
Reciting what it remembers, ruling nothing out,
Like Clio or Narrator or Anonymous.
But if the flesh of the ghost is no longer under pressure
Then, like a ghost, it's gone
From its unusual or even downright alien position,
Us,
Of which it is an imitation,
Not knowing where to go,
An aporia,
Which will allow us to go beyond the limits of any one viewpoint
And remain there,
Though it may not seem to follow.
But I've gained weight, my own weight
Under my own trusted and selfish senses.
My memory is filled with their impressions.
I write when nothing answers
That something appears.
A terrible slaughter occurs.
As Kwame Anthony Appiah says, technology has not yet rendered
slashing and hacking obsolete.
A city is a big city or a beautiful city
Or a crowded city
Or a small progressively-governed university city
And so forth.
Intellectual systems, speech in dreams, things that change like grass
Always end in combat
(Definition: action; motivation: lack)
Resulting in expulsion
(Expulsion here assumes the nature of a certain form of justice)
But a lot of things have changed.
An anecdotal story is often a span
Consisting of separate facts
Each tenuously connected to the next.
What we respond to are the attractiveness of the facts
And the view each one provides.
There are even such things as philosophical anecdotes
Going around,
Beautifully feathered and perfectly circling
So as not to diverge even an inch from the truths
Thrown among things
And lost in the woods.
Then along comes a woodcutter wearing blue boots
And carrying a bird in a sack over his shoulder
To justify his claims
To the accuracy of the metaphors of branching and perching
He uses
To describe both story and storyteller
When asked.
Where else can one find
Justice?
The young soldier knocks on the ground and an onion shakes.
The story is never universal
Though it may repeat
And even symbolize, like rocks for good or parts for wobble
And music.
With what does a story begin?
The marvellous is a cold vehicle for ink and paper.
The power of Rosa Luxemburg could not be imposed.
But here's an ambitious undertaking:
An attempt to account for the Twentieth Century!
Goya's small unfinished sketch of "Time, Truth, and History"
Was painted two centuries ago at a comparable time,
(1797).
It shows Time with its hourglass bringing naked Truth into the light
While History writes.

It seems to me that a sudden surge of interest in narrative (though not in conventional versions of that) is currently taking place—an interest in story (in what Zukofsky called "a story of our time"—"the story that in the dark hours did not let me rest"). Perhaps it is merely that we are coming to the end of a century and millennium, at a point when several generations of writers want to call the past and present to account for its logic and example.

It is relevant that this interest in story is fraught with anxiety and with resistance to the totalizing tendencies of narrative. Indeed, to the extent that the inadequacies—even distortions—of any account, as an account, are always a part of a story, it is the story itself, rather than what it is attempting to account for, that will "not let me rest." But against totalizing narrativity one might posit (to use Lytle Shaw's term) a heuristic model, one resembling that which Carla Harryman has made a consistent, unreserved, unabashed effort to create and elaborate a place for along the genre borders where postmodernism's irreverent, inventive, willful maturity might flourish.

To the extent that it refers to an already existing and self-limiting genre, the term documentary is problematic. But if we can avoid the corny and sentimental previewing, gauzing, and self-promotional historicizing that marks the documentary as a vehicle for publicity, then we might look to it instead for its provisional, anecdotal, and performative character—as a model for some kind of "serial theory" that can exceed its own limits and recognize the suspense (suspension) which seems to characterize the "meanings" of our time, the intermediary span.
"Echo Chamber" operates in the world as a visual document of more than just a process. As film holds the image; the wax freezes a moment in time. As the wax flows around the spools of thread it also gathers the loose thread and the real becomes held in a solid form. The sculpture becomes, in a sense, a single frame edited out of its context of fabrication and stands as a subjective icon to combination of idea and process.
Aku Lezli Hope

Genny

aunt, the favorite one
once taught and me, too,

"won’t you buy my pretty violets
and remember that we met"

never leaving tunes never ending songs
to be the bride and stand on stage
to manage an awkward grace and be strong

the whole Rogers and Hammerstein liturgy,
our shared credo from grandmother’s parlor piano,
reappears for life’s bleakest moments:
I would never walk alone
and whenever I feel afraid,
I hold my head erect
whistling, and swift sharp ire
like hers were the first line of defense

"Dee tem mwa pokwa
la vee ay bella?"

a telephone for the commuting teen
making her way from poverty to something else

"talk keep talking talking . . ."
cars for the poor in-laws
the sweet alien treasures of her wanderings:
abacus, geisha doll, small jewels of observation
postcards, ring watch, diamond, jade

i saved everything:
the broken china bunnies,
that in the '50s
she went to college,
the furor about her first apartment
with other women called girls,
women who managed the sky
pioneering life in the new world.

every plane ride recalls
every precious bauble reminds
of our sharp tongued sophisticate
dance ballerina dance
the woman who transformed plump Jamaican Harlem
into the best cosmopolitan sass
globe striding, deluxe dilettante
world runner: ma Tante

a fashion statement, Genny,
allowed this mispronunciation,
sketched the unassuming into objets d’art

¡ciao bambino au revoir ma tante!

the big sister I never had, with grand schemes
handsome boyfriends, greater dreams,
you were my further assurance
my guide to life’s real glories:
crown yourself with love and skill
master the moment manage the drill
every chic star mimics you
Diahann Carroll, Diana Ross
yours the sharp articulate voice
of brook no trespass, suffer no fools
as corporate racists reassigned your access
you would lash “those stupid idiots
who the hell do they think they are”
who would trespass against you, yours, ours

you insouciant “Hey Babe”
no one will ever say my name as you did
those plosives curved, enunciated
the jazz of your walk, the mesmerizing switch
your impeccable everything.

I love the way you loved your sister
in loving her, loved all of her, us
even when you could not love me,
the new female you helped create
"and you'll never walk alone"
with access to another language
and the ease of not quite being the first,
of having a model and a vision,
of having a guide,
of witnessing your trajectory,
calculating the height,
knowing the distance.

There was a funeral for my aunt. No memorial, no gathering, no ritual of
grief or passage was accorded her death. I felt bereft of the occasion, denied
a way to say good-bye, denied the public cry and the opportunity to see her
old friends and hear/share stories of her. I was at a loss.

So I knew I needed to write, to celebrate what she meant to me, to com-
memorate her singularity and her role in my life. The commemoration is
done by way of documenting, recording images as lived, experienced, heard,
felt, using reality in a fairly direct way. This is the real story of a real
person; this is biography, this is creative non-fiction, this is bearing wit-
tness . . .

A NYT Sunday book review (on a book about Anna Akhmatova) spoke
of "the poet's function of burying the dead and the ethical role of remembering
them." So here, read about my aunt, help me turn poison into medi-
cine, and help me fulfill my honor-bound duty to record, to document, to
remember.

Karen Kelley

Venus Return

MY HEART IS BEATING

as if fragility is ever finished . . . How are you feeling . . .?
the words of objects are an open
doors, that's its a head on
the wall in place of revelation.
there is the tension between
purpose and result.

against forgetting as if privacy equals inconsistency and IRRA-
TIONALITY, I REMEMBER HE SAID said, "let's fuck normally" AND
WE LAUGHED) to start

a series of procedures meant to
"map" the fractures of interest,
enlarging the field of the
grinding and emptying of food
like searching
for a needle in a haystack

Q: We often have the impression
you can talk with enter into
the body you can start
to talk with it

not a full day since on his knees
and really really deep and many
things are revealed to me which I
never heard from the mouth of any
flesh saying this is so good this
is so good I'm proud to wear it on
my hands and my face and my chest

being very close behind me he has tucked up my robe so as not to wet it,
which is as it should be
since there were only two of us here I travelled according to a map which led inevitably to feelings of loss created by the body's chasms. memories flood in to fill the vacuum: a simple wooden chair, the zipper from a man's jeans, A SENSE OF HUMAN PRESENCE LINGERING ONa sense (after we fucked "normally" and "abnormally"
HE DREAMED ABOUT) THE DEVASTATED MOUTH AND THE YEARS THAT FOLLOW

There is a big difference between choosing outside and being forced to it. Humanly-charged space leads to ideas of extreme engagement and autobiography

vagueness, and a desire to begin again

ensue. the kinds of things people say and do leak complexity and therefore an understanding that contains traces of handling and potential handling. it cannot be dry

dthis is the time and this is the record of the barely detectable something going on. this picture will have to do. it refers to hyperexperiential versions of things even when the message has been smeared all over walls and floor. these are fairly loose and collapsed

Insertion of a bolus of cotton wool into the lumen

had to lie with his clothes spread wide

NOT A FULL YEAR SINCE I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THE BEST MOST TACTFUL WAY TO WASH YOU
not a full year since PROBABLY STANDING UP IN THE TUB but you don't seem strong enough saying I'm cold I'm cold and alone in my hands and my face and my chest

and probably would have starved to death had his sister not continually brought him food . . .

the breath, mouth and wish beyond pleasure (drawn on behalf of shy evidence) WHO CAN LAY CLAIM TO SUCH THINGS? the reenactment of opening, exacerbated by response

I never knew how blood worked as a material (IMAGINEimagine blood all over my thighs a kind of INKnow what language does he speak?FROM MY BODYin J’s throat)

another image shows a lovely “window” connected by frayed strands of flesh, which gives it a desolate air. it is his foot, among other things

humiliation matters little when the human is smeared, the very idea of identity

no recourse remains. cut off, will die in this place, he loves sound for no reason, teeth growing bigger
it is about bodies and what crosses between us involving connect and disconnect
a luring into the cavity. lie across the basin waiting to be rolled away
and wake feeling senseless

your half-hold on sleep
duplicates indefinitely

My brother Nick died of AIDS June 13, 1994. I have his death certificate and certification of the dispersal of his ashes, shocking documents in black and white, yet the real documentation occurs, I think, in how he filters through the consciousness of those who love him. Everything I experience since his death provides a record of his life and evidence of his death. "Venus Return" is a medical term for the pumping of blood back to the heart. Venus as desire. Return as longing for = to crave images of. Now that he’s gone, when I am most open (in half-sleep, in sex) to hearing my blood returning to my heart, he’s with me. In dreams, I hear his voice. In bed, he shares the man I sleep with, as if now he’s not physical we share my body.
Basil King

Mirage
Section XII


FIRE, AND AFTERMATH

The woodframed, brownshingled house where Wes and Bea and Joe and Mary (upstairs) lived, burned, and they lost everything. Everything. In the beginning, for it went fast, Joe ran upstairs to try to save what he could—a fine record collection . . . but he fainted on the steps. Basil, who had been in London during the Blitz, ran in and brought him out, saving his life. I hated Basil for that, of course I was proud of him. We all were, dashing forward to help out . . . clever of me to hate him, while despising, loathing myself. Was in a mood. Not myself. Somebody else, far away, as memorable as the fire.

Next morning, Mark discovered among the ashes a copy of Paterson, burnt through to the passage about the fire.

Tommy Jackson’s MG broke down in Virginia not long after that spring vacation, as he drove back to school, and he phoned Joe, said if Joe would come and get him, he’d build him a new turntable and cabinet. True. Joe did. And Tommy did but, as Joe was known to say, it took a while.

Fire, and Aftermath

About jealousy. About our libido. In the fundamental mass of life we tend to develop the animal. We tend to stalk. To make miniatures. To build upon the miniature a place to apply facts. I did not dream. I was at Black Mountain College. And I wet a blanket and put it over myself before I rushed in to get Joe. He was trying to get his paintings. I was four years old during the Blitz.


Tell the truth and make of it a miniature. Being, or represented, on a smaller scale. The color of weather is elemental. When I went to get Joe out of the fire, I was not thinking of you, Fielding. I was thinking how brave Joe was. I was a boy, and I wanted to be like him.

Stephen Crane knew there would be food on the table. His mother would wash his shirts and change the sheets on his bed. He lived in a house where there was a plate on the table for him. When he looked at the clouds, he saw big pillows, big puffy pillows witnessed his fear. He was always afraid that he had not experienced enough, that his life would be cut short, that time is limited to ideas. And actions give the young instant rewards. The dreams he had gave him pause to ache. To run away from the fear of falling from grace was where he accumulated the belief that he would find Halycon.

A car stops and I get in. I try not to smile. I make small talk with a guy who is running from the Georgia State Police for killing his girlfriend. He can’t stop talking. The car goes faster and faster. He is going to kill us but we don’t die, and he’s taken away. I want a place. I want the law to repudiate my shame. I am cast with inopportune people and I read Stephen Crane and want to walk forward. From this incarnate despair I pronounce this road. Maker of miniatures. The maker strides like a short story to the edge/

I’ve cried for my mother’s venue I’ve done too much alone it couldn’t be helped it’s a loss it’s
I was hitchhiking and I saw three large diamonds, three faces were producing a wall that blocked the road. I could not go through or around. I did not want to turn back. I remembered the diamonds were sisters, and later I painted them. I also painted a large egg. The egg contained Dante’s Beatrice. She was fully clothed and full-grown. Her lips were moist; she had already said, “My name is Beatrice and I am loved.” I saw this egg enlarge itself until it dwarfed me. I know it wasn’t there. I know it was. Oh road-maker, my name, my name, my autobiography dogs my view. These obstacles, these highway obstacles, keep me connected. They say STOP – GO – PASS –. They are my guardians. They solicit my questions. I don’t have much feeling for the land, never did. I always felt more comfortable in the city. Store-bought vegetables. Store-bought clothes. But the road is a long line. I went to its air and I strode its floor. Road-maker, my totem is relieved. There is so little color left that we no longer have impressions. Where there is no language, there can be no law.

Peter Voulkos taught me to center pots at the Archie Bray Foundation outside of Helena, Montana. I’d met Pete at the ceramics institute at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1952. That fall I worked at the Archie Bray Brickyard. In the evenings, I went over to the pot shop and worked with Pete. The German woman who was the cook for the brickyard workers gave us pie every night for supper. The men were very formal at meals. “Please pass the spuds.” “Thank you.” “Please pass the meat, the milk.” “Thank you.”

Lunch and a new man at the table. Height about five feet, three inches. Strongly built. Blond. His blue eyes, the color of love, contradicted his back. His lips defined the ritual. One line scrubbed his clothes and his body. He never turned his head. He never made small talk. He was clean. “Potatoes.” “Meat.” “Milk.”

One of the men said, “We say please and we say thank you.”

He had a high voice: “I don’t say please or thank you to fucking Jesus Christ or any man. Fuck you.” And he chewed his food. Through supper the same exchanges were repeated. I didn’t work with Pete that evening. I was on my bunk reading. I heard my name called and came outside. Behind one of the large kilns, the men were hitting and kicking the new man. He didn’t make a sound.

“Come on, kid. Take a piece.”

I shook my head.

When the pummeling stopped someone threw the man’s suitcase at him and told him to hit the road.

The cat bops a plant. It wants food. The phone rings. You answer it and have a long conversation. The conversation is not recorded and you forget what was said. As you are about to get lunch for yourself, you remember to feed the cat. You are eating your lunch, and as you chew you remember what was said on the phone. After lunch, you return the phone call, and are able to finish the conversation. There are no photographs, no films or videos. Nothing is documented. But memory enables us to begin.

Van Gogh’s letters document his paintings. Documented letters of Mozart to his wife and family and their letters to him read like telephone calls: “I miss you.” “Don’t forget to behave yourself.” “I’m coming home with money.” Making a documentary need not be limited to film or video.

If I were to create a documentary, I would use Rembrandt’s self portraits, all 97 of them. I would begin with the drawings he did of himself when he was twenty-one or twenty-two and follow his changes through to his last self portrait at sixty-three—sixty-four. Rembrandt left no journals, no diaries, few letters. His autobiography is in his pose, the clothes he wears, the contemplation of his eyes, and sometimes the position of his hands. His medium was paint. To follow this man would be a privilege. Like a shark, he never stops. And I believe it was his intention to become paint. My media in making this documentary would be mixed—slides and a text written and read by me.
anytime there is a doubt
(earlier version):
syntax if fucked but it’s how
to write how I thought
the singularity shows
pounding of feet and hollaring
through the walls & floor
victory of the Bulls 3-peat!
television rings: No,
overtime with 3.9 seconds?
left to game 6—I’m not sure
People screaming
by 1 point
bend more slender accents
I can make a wild mutation
moving is existing
over the skyline of Chicago
Reports today that three people
were murdered? in rioting
Nothing spared
Wait for what you
are waiting for
and it will take no end
“"The invisibility of the enemy
and the necessity of hiding
in the earth, the layered
intricacy of the defensive system,
the ear-shattering roar
of the barrage, and the fatigue
caused by the day and night shifts,
combined to shatter
those stable structures that
can customarily be used
to sequentialize experience.”
(from Leed, No Man’s Land)
the civilian world & everything in it
an agent of aggression
long-range artillery, machine guns, trenches
a kind of “defensive personality”
become waiting-machines
inactive while being shelled
everything went underground
Because I am everywhere at this hour
there is something personal
about it throughout
and I come to think of this piece
not as a scene, but as a person
that “expression” is “action”
toward change, plagiarism
the skulls that spades disturbed
utilization of culturally
imbued symbols vigorously debated
there is no longer any shape
add to boiling water
cook for 5-7 minutes
the produce of camouflage
it prohibits
It exists in the indifferent
unbinding element of air

1. Here’s a quote from Peter Quartermain’s book Disjunctive Poetics, in which he articulates (following the work of Guy Davenport) his idea of “assemblage”: “The interpolation of non-art material, indeed the exclusive use of such material, provides what art historians have come to call a ‘frame,’ by means of which no attempt is made to represent anything, but the actuality of ‘the world’ is permitted to erupt within the environment of the work, and the boundaries between objects, categories, and activities dissolve.” This is similar to what I think the documentary achieves. I don’t believe, however, it’s so much that boundaries “dissolve,” but that they become visible in a way that renders them, as structures in the representation of thought, much less transparent—in this sense, they re-solve into visibility. Your phrase, “how do we cut up our encounters with things so as to (re)see them,” implies the art of juxtaposition, or recontextualization, as that best suited to the documentary. So: Documentary is an arrange-
Yusejang (CBS News in Seoul)

I ebb I lie in my strait. the jesus trees waving liek fire hydren over the roofs. if it were seoul but it cant be. if it were ’87 summer but then it cant be can it. June. if never sensed time moves forward then it might move back right I durn I strain in my lit the whole world carmine neon jassus trees burning bending stranding To Yoido then we came, burning plazas whirring two million townies won by tins of cooking oil cheering in front of a fusillade of foreign camera pointing like us just the too of us

I had been working for two months in South Korea on an eventually award-winning, PBS-, NHK-, etc. broadcast documentary about “the Pacific Century.” When I got back to L.A., I told my friends that I’d finally learned that the big difference between feature films and documentaries is how much the actors get paid.

Tan Lin

Soft Sector A Hub Section B Topo-Moo

From point A, a noticeable slip of paper flows to point B On the anchor I inhaled deeply and walked sideways into the beach or distant dormer on the next frame leveling or waving sideways to anchor in a distant corner the figure bound forwards inhaling deeply, the bubble leaving the sun out sideways Of that anchor of dust, twelve fingers point to compass or cross, Inconstant or Restive, the five stained envelopes . . . . . . discarded in subsequent editions like flour Loose Knot an elegant garment guarantees the space where the towel retreats no gizmo ordains . . . 7 emotions like flour . . . Hard hat to kursiv space, welted irrigations, flue-stoned inks aphasia placed at intervals or arrange a blank sewn in enthralled axels sequin the quizzes in retrofit mirrored tubing saraband rancid notations allayed with bulldozed warts tape the rift ersatz aubade treadmill tome of talus until leashed briar redeems savored fishing oblong tuxedo polemic I ate the loaf or I leave things out in a line of typing I jam the pencil I spell ‘destitute elevation’ I rhyme with ‘am pickle’ or ‘vary its kite’ I enter the room air and fabric condone, the wound mowed red as a bag of sewing Toodled log. The waitress puts down the glass of water and the elevator opens. Winds northwest. Clouds northease. The arrows bob downwards. A nap becomes a berth: fag muscle: Nip fog: isthmus stare in, velocities abitrate, the needle floats sideways. Gilt-lined Star, Nippered Oar. From belted joint I shine the hag lashes I wing a jag Ding dong. The needle inserted sideways is Thursday bulldozed . . . across the glazed pane on a deep-sea tanker. Japanese Ling-ling. Trance rubble.
Spanish thimble.
Cock. A nurse rules the roost.
An early phase of inflation
Duck-lined Sabbath
The buttons are raft and lopsided, they make a trapeze
so many rules envision the myrtle
One “day” alerts itself and
‘spells into’ mud, water, fire, blood, ankle, nit, volcano
A Hand shuffled on Deck
Seven tea leaves bluff, the cannon paints an ocean on the cardboard
caddy
wicket is wicket
On the back of the ocean on the cannon aimed sideways to the ozone
seven tea leaves from the distant window on the dormer,
valentine crooked X
From point B, the ocean liner travels sideways, framed by the blue
willow
spray is clock or quiz
the left hand resumed to wave at a replica
Now it crosses its shadow like loose change in a batter’s box
Thursday’s squid tote bag
Saturday’s hatter’s box
Welcome mat of pinned triangle
The balls put on cleats and mickey gores forwards
Solar rupture licked pent up fountain
Shelf was ruler, lipstick throttled vagina, lipstick on cock, uniform
bubble
The covering remains irreducible
On my tongue seven vexes inhabit the pond, I figure or equinox
‘This proposition’—the margin is too narrow to contain.
She or he, tad of varnish blunt respiration drag croak face now flutter
my shadow: she plays under its note or it talks under the slip of paper
a flag, a condom, an indoor rotisserie
when rain touches its shadow and the shadow touches a pail of fish
B: the egg is shaped like a grave on the other side of the hand
I walked into the beach, carrying a cup or an egg to the sill
she sings sideways, another box or window frame off to one side
Next to point A a draft emerges deformed, undecided, squareless
Question: dipstick “against non-constant map”
I pick up the pencil and the sound stretches over it

where birdie sings to the willow
it touches the syrinx, it lets the vine stay on the window
is a day of the week
lets out the wind, covers the lines and lilacs I thought of, cradles its
head sideways
appears a rose in a Coke bottle
where I was moving greyness crawl, gum wrapper, smile, pillow to
crinkle
I am a thing like a typewriter key
I’ve a hammer and eye yet to groom, browsing the aluminum shed
as the lines entered a frame nailed sideways, into the wand
Its glue ponders a thumbtack
A hand moving on the left against the crumbling shower curtain
wick the finger shower October wail
I blew myself across the box.
To plot the course of, to fix or trace (out) the bounds, to limit or set a
limit (around) or through
Cat (‘Gryphon’) grazing on an indoor plain or box. The duck makes
its way into the retriever’s mouth. I boil the roast. A woman
enters an island in the middle of the room near the fireplace
painting and says ‘tasty’
ointment of lilacs, upended figures swearing a kiss, computer painting
a curved or cubed fire out of lots
thread dear nose oh window drench lig
From point A, I arrive on the boat bearing parts of the frame part in
debris part of the ocean liner that crosses the beach stained
sideways in bevelled edge
she says:
my hands = the shades I am chopping
The ocean is seventeen lines deep. I inhale deeply.
The room with the barometer is empty except for a small box I left
on the glass table upon which the barometer reflects the case.
It’s getting choppy.
The white or red line is an hour: the lawyer swaggers onto the room
He says: ‘build a prison or room to house larger sentences’
At this point, I realize a pet helps.
I pick an object.
A plant becomes a bell is a trapeze becomes a sun-toked hedonist.
I churn the flame up in the corridor that leads to the Byzantine stable
the gas tank empty till now
I try to imagine uses for it, I try to become whatever it is, a jar a
piece of string on the carpet, a stable of foaming horses.
now on I am the chrysalid boat slides
slides boat chrysalid the
Glass vegetable. Steak ruffle. Poked lozenge.
mowed pimple, dimple hover, w, severely threaded
plum, Ottoman Express or pullman swagger
Whatever appears to steal mist on a compass (holograms, greeting
cards)

Tepid scram, hope under bathwater like the lotus sewn to an an-
emometer
It will pass from a mirror to a Venetian blind with its tributaries open
It will stand up in which positions its number tinged the betting slip
It will knock the cup or trajectory from point A to the line in a novel
that reads:

"The actress zips out of her wetsuit"
I open the novel: All eyes are a glowing racket
Kung Gong. Kung gone.
Gong. The leaves blow Between A and B.
Sideswept gong. A syringe mounts
(Reclining Nude Carbureator Adjusts Irrevocable Enlightenment)
Let me Lie Spendthrift as a Shaft falling through smoke
Contacts all festooned bands directed to re-run above
Bloodied and gum, t-square, blessed circuit board
Whose sign enters the looking glass
Repouses by syllables, fled by skylarks and wetwipes
Such fragrant doorports, tangents
Now the wobbling pond is a dilated Depository,
Now the eyes are Corrosive and Blessing Rest-Stop
How she flays me, How I Held her.
Wreck resplendent, Feckless U-Turn

(PULP) FICTION VS. DOCUMENTARY

"And here, somewhere, we have an eye capable of any imagining. And
then we have the camera eye..."
―Brakhage

1. Not drowned by the heart in which a condition unlike breath was called
snow. An apple tree is chain-sawed in four parts. In one of the parts there
is a kind of whipping motion, in one a toreador's faint, in one a mother
loads a commercial washing machine in the collateral sections. Thus, in the
lower hemisphere of the image the eyelashes of a woman are carefully lit
and numbered in sections, the first resembling a triangle, the second an
oncoming train, the third a mailing label, the fourth a zebra. In between a
flamingo rebounds at cuff. Love Tar a wetsuit. A bathtub swells in a foreign
language. Into the answering machine, the lens continues to natter snow
like pornography.

2. When he thinks she no longer loves him, he cuts out his left eye with a
hand as shapely as the body of a dragonfly. He peels away the cornea,
shapes the eyeball in a half-full mayonnaise jar, and fills the rest of the jar
with the dried bodies of a hundred houseflies. The few tears remaining are
released and make their way into the wings of the houseflies. It is unclear
whether either the hand or eye is alive in summer. The jar is rotated and
snow begins to fall in what is summer. The hands touch the lovers back­
wards. A melody erupts like a lengthening cigarette. Like wind, something
in the ear, a car door, stubbornness, a spoon, a comb will recite the evidence.
Imagine a bar visible. For the hand it was winter and weeps. For you, in
the winter the hand touches its torso in the lens. For the eye, it is summer,
night is a doll in skin tight silk dress. I am kisses you. A century passes,
A melody erupts like a lengthening cigarette. Like wind, something
in the ear, a car door, stubbornness, a spoon, a comb will recite the evidence.
Imagine a bar visible. For the hand it was winter and weeps. For you, in
the winter the hand touches its torso in the lens. For the eye, it is summer,
"Distance is pure exaggeration . . .
— T. Humphreys

Pamela Lu

Departures

Acting on schemes of pleasure and willful disownment, she drove eleven
hours nonstop to witness the taking of coffee in North Beach. We were
always observant and naturally noticed the footprints, exactly Kerouac's
size and depression. In a bookstore, south of Ferlinghetti, we shared
magazines while savoring the warmth of roasted basil that floated in
from the street. The corner was loved and inflated by tourists who had
travelled with many instant cameras and much resolution for the pur­
pose of feeling rootless.

With her sleeves rolled over her shoulders and her belt slung low on her
hips, she looked quite the action figure, a woman ideal
for overnight
deliveries of packages over 50 pounds, or, in this case, for the rails.
Bored with professorships, she shipped out as engineer for the South­
west line and wrote home daily of the smoke and freight, the lusty-eyed
boys and girls, lonely bars dusting the desert with frontier bravado, and
the toil of crates hoisted high above the open cars, turning and gleam­
ing in the sunset and, once again, the sunset.

But the one I remember was only a passenger and far younger. En­
trusted with the responsibility of seeing her brother and herself arrive
safely at her Aunt's without undue hardship or unpleasant molestation,
she followed a regime of watchfulness and terror. Clutching the shiny
overnight bag, she averted her eyes and counted the miles to Tulare.

After the invasion, my ancestors evacuated Xian and fled south, carry­
ing bundles of personal journals, legal ledgers, and other parchments of
literary interest. Some lingered in Canton as permanent guests and learned
the local dialects. Others wandered incessantly and habitually outward
to Hong Kong, Vietnam, and finally, by some miscalculation or poetic
license, to Burbank California.

One hundred short for a plane ticket to Beijing, he contented himself
with halfway there, or seventy percent, quite the bargain, considering

As new immigrants to California from the Midwest, they combed the
weather for hints of season change, a stormpile, or some evidence that
the country was breathing, keeping pace with its residents. The green
buzz of leaves by a hillside stood for summer; a wet taste of eucalyptus in
the morning became autumn. They had to adjust their emotions to fit
the space of this climate—huge with sunlight, but restricted in the sense
of its gestures, the quick slighness of its tragedy.

I never expected to find you, standing here in the highway of my
thoughts, lodged among the road signs, pine-slat fences, and the grasp­
ing oak trees testing the strengths of their imaginations against a
mountainside. Sometimes I enjoyed the sense of motion so much I
cruised down without thinking at all, letting the country slip past me in
a blur, a swift and steady hallucination. I was roaming for the sake of
roaming and then all of a sudden you were there, and I had to stop, right
there in the middle of the road, to see you better.

After his girlfriend moved back to Seattle he was constantly misplacing
himself, getting stranded with loss. Missing a person was like missing a
train, as if he had woken up one morning just in time to see the last car
pull away from the depot with no promise to take him where it was
going. Some nights he tried to jump the freight and some nights he
only slept by the beautiful tracks, praying for his arms to grow longer, to
catch up.

In this age of need and quantum theory, light is hardly immaterial. You
can see it settling on the treetops, crouching close in corners, still twin­
kling on journey from some planet or supernova. One light-year con­
sists of kilometers of loneliness, coursing blazers through dark space in a
desire to be seen. Like the pulsation of photons or the probability of
rushing light, everything, especially laughter and distance, takes form
from nature.
When cornered, she called herself mixed, or Flip Chinese, a memory of rain spanning three shoreline horizons and five market dialects. The butcher with his pork-steam haggle, and umbrellas—imagine, umbrellas in the summertime. Later, the exotic became her plate of variables, from which she could hurl tomatoes. Not the butterfly fan but an amnesia of indignation, sharp as the odor of dried noodles turned import from export, shipped always the wrong side up, from open-mouthed ports and crowded harbors, wherever the weather could pull loose, and go begging for a place to release its water.

A continent of speech moved nightly in her sleep, another range of syllables smoothed down by the tide, an erosion of wakeless steps that took care of history. In the belly, a sound gave birth to midnight notion: she took it as her national song, then took it to bed. First it was the pirate dictionary, then a register of musical notes, forming clear stones her dreaming could step on. Sometimes a kelp of small swimmings, varicolored and enchanting; other times only the tip of the continent would be visible, undone by its water. But sometimes, very rarely, her foot touched land, proof that distance was a deception to the rule, especially between one island and the mainland.

The call I've been waiting for finally arrives, but this time, it's my turn to be away. When I saw her last, she was in San Francisco, waiting for her ride to Hollywood. Now she calls me from a public booth in Santa Barbara, apparently working her way back up the coast. On the machine she sounds grateful, like a woman suddenly reminded that she is not at home and, at the same time, not homeless.

To hear her talk, life was habitually hard. Oatmeal in the dark, a quick splash at eight, and monthly wages, for opening the proper door properly. But the children surprised her, often survived her—she could rummage through the shelves to find a picture book she might use as a pillow, pressed under her head like palm leaves or the lupine blossoms they used to collect. Then it was not nostalgia, she wrote to a friend, but baseline recovery, not romantic with a capital R but still a kind of life support, however small. They thought to make gifts of wrinkled construction paper, scrawled over with crayon. The shapes that emerged had human faces, and she recorded this also. As if she had nothing better to do than send letters across the miles, to seal her thoughts, and feel them flown.
When the bully stuffed leaves down your (burial) tempted god (throat) I tried to (not swallow) such helplessness and because your name is on the grave I feel I've (open arms) killed you.

Weaker species often (die of fright) internalize fear and immediately a word called out (called down) like a butterfly.

The meticulous (disgrace) of harbored guilt barely paralyzes a functioning almost rhapsodic movement.

Without the wilderness (praise god) confessionals the timed enemy exotic drunken uncle returns from (foreign country) alive.

In a parasitic (swayed immoral) relationship because you are (never loved) look for solace with a gone-wrong body disturbed counter-attack on fiction.

Because your name is insecure blackmail (no longer paradise) to swollen eyes I feel I've streamlined (auto row) your demise.
Like a bat
caved-in
acquired immune
(mercenary) plunge
while in Korea
the battle
for democracy (life)
begins.

Blood which
like sugar (his only
apartment) has to be
evil landlady when
forcing children to
(clean up after)
a mess of
can never re-produce.

We feed on
(news coverage)
embellishes the
unseen party
boy travelling alone.

When I first read the word DOCUMENTARY, I immediately assumed
that my work didn't apply; it didn't literally "report facts." However,
thinking more on the idea of how we "cut up our encounters to (re)see
them," I felt that ALL of my work did that, and that much writing does.
"Shady Lane" attempts to blur/narrate a childhood incident (bully) through
connecting other disjointed incidents of the same emotional value, thereby
creating a semblance of an investigation.

When I think of DOCUMENTARY, I think of a chronicle of times or
events, of exposing, often underinvestigated matters; I think of political
events and non-profit organizations. I think of uncovering, if iN FACT's
film "Deadly Deception" which exposed G.E.'s horrifying practices. I think
of biographies and histories. I think of the unavoidable subjectivity of the
documentor.

Kimberly Lyons

Female Circumcision

in your mouth current pulsations
how the knowledge is derived

margining a strip
a small bud, revolving cluster

presiding auctioneer
from an ancestor

gender, slang, policeman
sit together, locate

reproductive body that becomes detached
for the maintenance of public order

cut and polished
mechanism
subjugated

stuffed with a mixture of the fish flesh
change into a jelly

look narrowly, trinket
I shall see
the distance between the rails
a puckering
in some dimension
suppurative swelling

the one against which
it closes.
In a way, documentation could be a registration of information. But then the registry turns in on itself. There was a flutter of discussion on NPR around the legality of clitorectomies in Europe. Later this poem was written by dousing through a dictionary: Text is chosen quickly by a pursuit of a kind of music. The registry was talking back even though I had put away what I heard on the radio and was not "thinking" about it. Hence the poem was titled after the fact.

Kevin Magee

Three Poems

Author

There is no answer
for a liberty regarded as right and property
or a language that would deliver its objects
as concepts

Experienced prisoners
have explained to me a way to fight the camera

There is a five minute interval between the house
and train

Directive

Rights, carrots.
Misty-eyed missionaries,
hard water mineral stains.
Mellifluous lawyer's hand,

the ganglion. Rita Lewis,
Local 50, Recording Secretary
(Swift Plant in Marshalltown):
"We are our nation's conscience"

Curious as to the logistics of this
talked with Lynn last night after
the Rochester meeting, pitch
about the importance of books

entailed a film projector and someone
who knows how to run one. Transition
or confluence, in the prison of proletarian
appellation, next to no health care
and no education, plenary proposals
what caucuses are for, international
 collaboration to commemorate
‘Days of Decision’ flood the plains

Stampede Effect
for Charles Olson

Work on a share basis
You learn to live with a lot less
We have a common interest
If you don’t love the sea . . . I don’t know
If there ain’t a fucking fish
Ten years won’t be enough
Now we know what a fisherman is
Reading must have been hard work for him
as he muttered quite loud as he read

It is a fight to win what can be won
49 words and when and where
Youth who have organized and marched
around the hearings, the death of the sailors on the USS Stark
The pitch to join
a less than adequate instrument, during those years
I learned to study with an almost
Talmudic care, utilizing each escalation
The product of a conscious effort

RECENT EVENTS IS A DOCUMENTARY WORK

My first job when I went to study poetry at the University of Iowa in 1981 was organizing the papers of Paul Engle, the so-called father and certainly the founder of the Writers Workshop. Having no training as an archivist, I wound up doing more reading than collating and found, buried among letters from Robert Lowell demanding more money and Allen Tate attaching a page of interminable, tight-fisted stanzas along with other

business matters, some two hundred pages of letters written over three months from Mary Engle to her daughter Mary who was finishing’ at Spence in Brooklyn before going on to Radcliffe. The letters begin in the middle of the last big snow in the first week of March, 1959, and end in the tumult surrounding her daughter’s graduation, an event which against the daughter’s wishes mushroomed into a society affair hosted by Adelaide Marquand, the widow of J.P. Marquand whose estate was allied financially with the Averill Harriman and Rockefeller fortunes. This may or may not be true (I heard it from the Head Librarian of the Rare Book Room), but it is more than likely that the influence of Adelaide led to the daughter’s being offered that summer a childcare job with the David Rockefeller family, “the gayer side,” according to Paul, in one of the several letters which close the family drama of March to May, 1959.

Adelaide and Paul were lovers. I have this gossip from the professor who hired me. As a poet, my relation to Paul Engle is not unambiguous. He was also the founder of the International Writing Program, also at Iowa City, and one (if not the first) book I bought after moving there, at the University Bookstore, the same month that I found Mary Engle’s letters, was a small volume of poems by the Hungarian poet Attila Jozsef, translated by John Bakst and printed by Paul Engle’s program. These were the only poems that spoke to me, and there is a line in one of the poems (called Mama) that I have decided to carry on: “Listen to this, proletarians.” May 31, 1959, Father to Daughter: “We will just have to keep our fingers crossed about mother. She has been avenging a bottle of gin a day. She may pull herself together for the week and be quite decent; and of course when she does that, she is very amusing company.”

The brutality with which this information is delivered struck me as hard then as it does now; arriving at the end of a continuum that is all Mary’s rollicking good will and genuine solicitation for the welfare of others. She is often up before dawn, like a farmer, and writing while listening to what all working farmers listen to: the Farm Hour.

As a poet, I write the last name
I learned to study with an almost
Talmudic care, utilizing each escalation
The product of a conscious effort

It began to contemplate coming out with the secret of the company I keep with this companion when, writing in the vicinity of the beating of Rodney King, for me a jolting repetition of the police beating and frame-up of a young communist I knew in Iowa, the public details of which appear in a
bulletin reproduced in the final issue of ACTS magazine, the private details of which include the fact that I and my wife, Myung Kim, were to stay with Mark and his wife, Kate Kaku, a Japanese-American whose family had been dispossessed and incarcerated during the last world war—and like Mark a communist—the same evening (March 4, 1988) twenty-nine years and one day after Mary Engle begins her domestic chronicle, as we were in Des Moines to attend the annual Rural Women’s Conference sponsored by Prairie Fire, a grass-roots group philosophically associated with the electoral hopes of the Rainbow Coalition, and I had been invited to speak at a panel for the Militant Labor Forum, an arm of the Socialist Workers Party (whose program clearly states the need for a Workers and Farmers government) about a recent trip I had made to Nicaragua to help with the coffee harvest and express solidarity with the Sandinistas’ revolution, and carrying this knowledge into the writing reacting against foreboding manifestations of methodical State violence, in the work of the writing, there were a few crucial words that were there for me when I needed them. Tedium Drum, part four, “It was a saying of ours, a saying of ours for years, we may be goats, but we have our rights.” Mary Engle. Months later, writing an imaginary, terrorizing nightsong to my only child, a nursery rhyme for the new monster, Riot, it was again a phrase of Mary’s that came to my aid and closed the song. Market Tender Family, “Kinderhyme”: “Am sure that my copy of Little Fur Child is lost.” There are hundreds of others words of hers and parts of her thoughts littered in the lines and figuration of the work I have been writing in the last year.

These are my fragments of a liquidation, which, after the making of my first book, Tedium Drum (lyric & press/SF/1994), accompany me to that bend in the road where a poet may greet her mentors in a free and easy way, when, to quote Zadkisky, use hardly enters into their exchanges, though Marx would add that Freedom is the appropriation of Necessity, and it is out of deep need that I bend my ear to the furious Latin, years cold as Lollards, in homage to Anonymity and the sheer force and will to live. On the page in one of my notebooks dated 9/26/81, facing the phone number and the hour of appointment with the Professor—himself a disappointed, dissipated novelist—written with excruciating, frightened care is the following line from Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound: “Most vain all hope but love and thou art for.”
"Flashcards," 1990
detail: photostat, flashcards

"Not High Enough," 1992
photostat, glass, steel, transparency, basketball
On April 10, 1990, Phillip Pannell, a 15 year old black youth, was chased through a school yard and into the backyard of a nearby home by a white Teaneck, New Jersey police officer. According to police reports the officer fired one shot that missed Pannell while the youth was attempting to climb over a fence, then Pannell turned and ran toward the officer. One grand jury absolved the officer of any criminal wrongdoing, but a second grand jury indicted him when it was discovered after lining up the bullet hole in the youth's jacket with the entry wound from the second shot fired—that Phillip Pannell was shot in the back and killed while his arms were raised. According to witnesses, Pannell never got a chance to turn and face the officer, but was shot while attempting to surrender. At the officer's trial, an all-white jury deliberated for a little over eight hours before returning a verdict of not-guilty.

Political ideologies are master narratives whose realization depends on social actors who are willing to give up the right to tell other stories, or who have had this right taken away. I decided to defy the terms of these master narratives, to give in to irrationality, contradiction, and ambiguity, to tell some little stories about little bits of information, about little bits of cruelty. By using the particular and the personal story—its terms, issues, and stakes—my work is a kind of personal transgression.

I have a cool and analytic strategy, which is displayed by relating sensational stories in a sardonic manner. The juxtaposition of the highly emotional content to the clinical, commercial, hands-off look of the imagery is, I hope, disconcerting and destabilizing for the viewer. By creating ambiguity, I want to undermine the authority given to concepts like finality, rationality, and unity. I want to play around, because a little agitation is a good thing.
Then that is what makes us reach still more and I the chocked obscure, wrestling to bring finally a wound as the sentence the silence falls upon watch it gather in the deep pillows, the dreams of a tongue that extend to roof like a hand birds prefer to fly from—what light! announces syllables that circulate the secret babble carried inside someone else’s sin you’ve stolen from.
Harryette Mullen

from Muse & Drudge

when memory is unforgiving
mute eloquence
of taciturn ghosts
wreaks havoc on the living

intimidates intimates
polishing naked cactus
down below a bitter buffer
inferno never froze over

to deaden the shock
of enthusiastic knowledge
a soft body when struck
pale light or moderate

smooth as if by rubbing
thick downward curving
bare skin imitative
military coat made of this

---

tabloid depravity
dirty snowball
held together
with weak gravity

"fool weed, tumble your
head off—that dern wind
can move you, but
it can’t budge me"

he couldn’t help himself
he couldn’t help it
he couldn’t stop himself
nobody stopped him

---
blessed are stunned cattle
spavined horses bent under their saddles
blessed is the goat as its throat is cut
and the trout when it’s gutted

---
bring money bring love
lucky floorwash seven
powers of africa la mano
poderosa ayudame numeros sueños

restore lost nature
with hoodoo paraphernalia
get cured in cuban by a charming
shaman in an urban turban

forgotten formula cures
endemic mnemonic plague
statisticians were sure
the figures were vague

sister mystery listens
helps souls in misery
get to the square root
of evil and render it moot

---

spaginzy spagades
spabiby spabibs
choice voice noise
gets dress and breath

slave-made artifact
your salt-glazed poetry
mammy manufacture
jig-rig topsy-turvy
fast dance synched up so
corl burning tongues
united surviving ruin
last chance apocalypso

broke body, stammering spirit
been worked so hard
if I heard a dream
I couldn't tell it

Hypnagogic Notes

1. Definition from memory:
Documentaries are scratchy, black, white and gray. Film stock doesn’t match.
Lighting is bad or it was shot in natural light. Gaps and discontinuities in
the images. Abrupt cuts from one scene to another accounted for by authori-
tative (male) voice-over narration. The people in it are far away in time or
place or position on the socioeconomic ladder. They are interesting, exotic,
or have problems that need attention. Usually there’s no music on the
soundtrack, except maybe at the beginning as the title rolls, unless the film
is about people who sing and dance: simple Irish peasants, or primitive
Africans in skimpy ouifits. Sometimes there’s intense music like
in psycho-
logical dramas purporting to be serious. The scariest documentaries: Nazis
and atomic bomb blasts. Those hatch nightmares.

3. What names come to mind?
Maya Deren, Zapruder’s film of JFK assassination (most expensive 5
minutes of film ever shot?), “Nanook of the North,” Dziga Vertov’s “I
Am a Camera,” Trinh T. Minh-ha, Henry Hampton and Meredith
Woods for “Eyes on the Prize” and “Malcolm X: Make It Plain.” In
very different ways, Leslie Scalapino, Ron Silliman, Lyn Hejinian, and
Erica Hunt seem engaged in poetic documentation of everyday life, through
extraordinary lenses of critical consciousness and acute awareness of how
language aids and hinders perception.

Muse & Drudge is as close as I’ve come to pure documentation of re-
sponses to the aural/visual/print/electronic media in which I’m immersed.
Ostensibly this work is about folk vs. popular culture and mass media
representations of black women. Therefore, the verses comment on everyone
from Tawana Brawley and Anita Hill to Flo-Jo, Salt N Pepa, Whoopi,
and astronaut Mae Jemison (who appeared in a non-speaking cameo on
Star Trek: The Next Generation), blues singers, civil rights marchers,
jazz divas, lesbians, artists, models, girl gangs, homeless women, welfare
mohs, as well as drag queens and male-to-female transsexuals. There’s also
a diary-like aspect, using the on-goingness of the work in progress to record
whatever seems to be happening in my own so-called life. I can put myself
in this poem, because its topic is black women, and I am one.

you put a documentary inside a dramatic feature film, the documentary
will look more “like film,” but also more ‘real.’

4. Precursors to documentary:
Daguerreotypes, Matthew Brady and the Civil War. Battlefields strewn
with corpses. Also stereo-opticons (or whatever they’re called). These old-
fashioned gizmos still existed in the public library of my childhood. Two
images printed on each card. They merged to form a single “stereoscopic”
image through weird binoculars. Ancestor of the View-Master, allowing any
child a voyeuristic tour of the third world and all the wonders of the world.
Documentaries seem wedded to print media. Newspapers, magazines, then
newsreels, film shorts, and later full-length films and videos, television
news, CNN and the heavily censored Gulf War. Who decides which wars,
police actions, retaliations are to be represented with a proliferation of visual
images? Which bloody battlefields we never see? Pictures are dependent on
accompanying context, yet they overwhelm it with their visceral impact.
The impulse of documentary is the assembling of images, as in poetry. If
from Margaret Maher, Emily Dickinson, and Kitchen Table Poetics

crumbling wall / youre letter

brush your teeth
now
Don't forget to pee
Did you Where
is your tooth brush
Okay
Just a minute What
will we read Grimms
The Gold Mountain

potatoes and the dhal
we'll eat
what about
chicken
See the dining room
floor swept every
thing put away
candles and copper
soup
bread

letters for his
promotion
third file drawer
APM 220 the criteria
not in that
order
go to the meeting
Visible

Crack winter skin typing
the dream-like sequence
of looking for her
trace
tracking stand of
trees one brick five
roof slates, water
can grown between two
saplings. Write this

coat the screens
emulsion bites
burn my words
at blind light

women inked
to ironing
angled on paper
pull inks
hard over silk a solid
image

poet wrote
the back of her maid's
letter
Remnants missing
Not possible
to say
pages and pages.
Nearer

gas of pickels
Writing you
a few loins I was
dreaming of george

youre letter this wet
evening a grate trate I watched for
my troat soar it kept so
Put a lot of Pork to it
keep it on to days one night
It did not trouble me sence

Sew the fascicles
prickly arts
domicile verse
alive?

Sunday all have gone wagons
done passing out in the new
grass listen to anthems
Hens have followed We sit
You remember the crumbling wall
that divides

Margaret Maher, the hands that wash

Past the Homestead, Main Street slopes east. It levels out where
a pair of tracks cross: the Amherst-Belchertown line. Behind the Main
Street buildings the train depot stands at a curve of track that disap­
ppears south. A stand of young trees where the ground is broken: one
brick, five roof slates, a galvanized water can stuck between two
saplings that have grown around it. This doesn't even look like a trace.
Up the slope are houses that front on Dickinson Street, once border
to the Dickinson meadows. Mounds of hay for horses in the barn.
Dennis fed them. Tom Kelley was working nearby when he fell. Once
a path from a house with porch run the length of its face. The path
wound the meadow to the Homestead kitchen stretched the back of
the brick house. That kitchen, that house with the porch no longer.

How to find a trace. Where she worked and where she lived,
where her family put down at night are disappeared.

That one knows to even look. She churned butter and scrubbed
pots for the most prominent family in Amherst, Massachusetts. Letters
were saved, recollections made because servants in 19th-century
America were woven intimately to an employer's family life. Later this
family's daughter would become the most elusive and famous Ameri­
can woman poet. Her servants' names were published in books.

If not, the hands that wash stairs, when the plates are cleared,
sweep the dining room, are erased like the house from a stand of trees.
Like her words.
1. definition: contrary definitions:
   notation of
   reveal whole
   text—context
   harness / slow down in order to glimpse
   filter

   Who is the filter? There is an intermingling of documentor and subject of
documentary: the documentor creating narrative as she/he sees it unfolded.
In my work I try to create jagged edges, different places and ways to enter
the material, the documents. As if, like an archeologist, one were finding
the door lintels, the fragmented writing, the urns of the Etruscan: each
person makes it their story with the subject.

2. form:
   CD-ROM, graffiti, artifacts, mixed media, poetry, fiction, film, video, or
   combinations of all of these.

3. names:
   Susan Howe, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Kathleen Fraser, Dale Going,
   Toni Morrison (writing, often with visual). Wonderful film documentary
   was (is?) being done in Cuba (some years ago I saw a great example on
   the life and work of Harry Belafonte). Also, Peter Farquhar of TOMB
   Productions in San Francisco (CD-ROM), and Florentine Films (film and
   video).

4. medium and topic:
   I am creating documentary about the servants of poet Emily Dickinson,
especially maid-of-all-work, Margaret Maher. Titled Margaret Maher,
Emily Dickinson and Kitchen Table Poetics, I use poetry, creative
non-fiction, fiction, scholarly essay, mixed media, silkscreen, xerox art,
collage with domestic artifacts.

Susan Smith Nash

Térmica: Documentation and Erosions of Patriarchy

After years of acid rain, the patriarch's beard fell hundreds of feet
to the pavement below. What had once been the star of the "Welcome to
Spain El Greco Cathedral Tour" was now in hideous disrepair.

Julia Kristeva's mother had attended that tour once, and had fled in
horror. Julia saw her mother's photographs of the place and was inspired
to explore the connections between the ongoing subjectivization of
truth and the authority of namegivers.

Antonin Artaud referred to the cathedral once between grunts,
groans, shouts, moans, and gurgling screams during a performance of
"The Theater and the Plague." Fully intact, this structure epitomized
the experience of the plague.

The gargoyles remained intact, largely because of their position in
the wall, and because they had no graven tablets to hold out like ugly,
blood-stained mallets over the heads of their communities.

So, the patriarch's beard fell. It happened at night. No one was
killed, so no one cared.

The first person to notice was a young girl who fed stale empanadillas
to the pigeons. She picked up a piece of the shattered beard. In her
hand, it split like subatomic particles in an accelerator at Fermilab. Her
friends, the pigeons, sat at a safe distance, clucking, cooing, and making
comfortable glu-glubbing noises.

With torn bits of empanadilla, she formed sentences on the side-
walk in front of the cathedral. She thought she did it for her audience,
the gentle pigeons:

Proposition 19: Commandments are a documentary form
that simply function to attenuate the natural amplitude of
the earth's heat waves.

After she finished, the pigeons flocked around her feet and devoured the
still-sweet bits of empanadilla. They were enthusiastic, but orderly.

Except for one pigeon she had nicknamed Moses, who began
trying to gouge the tongue from a small, pink-breasted hen.
Sianne Ngai

chrono/paradise

I

instead of sinking one has been led to expect
remembers it has been called flowery to plagiarize by anticipation
a superfluity of thorns

what is frivolous if unpaid for
hand-held surfaces a reminder of invitation
on behalf of
a priori Appearance
favors knowledge humiliated by weaker muscles

if experience per-
safety in frame per-
while softly in the garden
protests somebody is almost occasion


to recognize metonymy's intimate fences
induces most rotation pander to slow hills
suddenly outcast like sestina to bed
every now ring in the distance if it were cumulative to the river and the river a nebulous line which is that of cold is not succession

is not co-existence unseparable within which something happens emptied cathedrals approaching as cathedrals in daylight's suture

so bright consummate flowers as infinitive will carry not yet into Substance turned a hand moves struck to inhabit its occasion as memory

if sublime declared vapors, absolute shall the I the clocks together shall all restore inked in tooth or palate "meanwhile at table Eve / ministered naked"

an Epigram delays its form of destination does not inhale to outlast the direction of the spine allows need once a space is denied

if mannerisms take Illumination, embed response as true or false rapid News rifling unheard on twenty-four hour roadside hotlines: am I am my am no may none my I

so the Book begins with problems rhymes month as lost information its revolving lights to inhabit is the Tree

hung on a nail to confess one had not watched failed as Discovery shrinks the throat in expression remained
to (k)now

the suture of half-light cautiously
approaching its own situation
exchange between vision and News
my geisha Satellite

chrono/paradise as Documentary

when the category of difference was invented in a garden

"the disturbance of an intersubjective equilibrium" "generates a subject-object relationship" to which we can trace "the absolutizing elevation of something conditioned to the status of the unconditional" (Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity p.33)

so God invents himself in that same garden

& a text begins an epoch begs in in

an edenic vision haunts our real and its representation through vision

don't step on the grass.

its fissure in the coast of
timed Reputation

a secret I receiving in continua

was measured with Talking Animals

Lick and lick for extra milk
leaving the face aside
memory is to intention, acts

edenic & less hair on the Body of

turns fig-leaf aside
known to exclude its perimeter
of dissolution waters were issued
in the meridian hour
as Author & Disposer
the part is obscured

is Physical
intent on not allowing
a question goes so that it describes the Female
where the grammar exists
"touch being /
what is Experienced"
“Evidence” photographs
Erin O'Brien's Evidence
by Susan Schuppli

Evidence, the title of a series of new works by Erin O'Brien at the Forum Gallery, seems an explicit testimonial to the enduring metaphor that has linked the body to the landscape. The exhibition pairs a series of blue-printed photographic images of a semi-rural landscape with close-up shots of an aged and wrinkled body. Running parallel to these blue-prints, which are hung a few inches above the floor, is a compelling handwritten text that speaks about personal memory as anchored in a geographic memory of place. An information plaque tells us these are images of her parent's hands and eyes and aerial views of their family property in Surrey, British Columbia.

On the far wall of the gallery, a bold generic text advertises "an outstanding property development opportunity." It is clearly to be read as a caption to the final pair of blue-prints in the series, one of a proposed suburban development and the other an image on an eye. The furrows around the dark cavity of this eye are magnified to such a degree that the flesh of the face becomes an actual topographic landscape of crevices, craters, and contour lines. By contrast, any sense of a differentiated geography has already been erased in the technical drawing of the re-development site. It is the artist's own rural family property that is the intended subject of these plans. In this final pairing, the land has been reduced to an abstract concept—a series of spatial divisions on paper—while the photographic representation of the body appears to retain its material and volumetric presence. The photographs become the embodiment of a geographic history in which the lived experience of a place (time) is brought back to the level of flesh (space).

Jena Osman

from Authorities
(A Lecture)

praise lacks gold
never lacked frail deed
gives me hills of seas

In an essay on Othello, Kenneth Burke describes Iago as Katharma. Katharmata:

It was the custom at Athens, lexicographers inform us, to reserve certain worthless persons, who in case of plague, famine, or other visitations from heaven, were thrown into the sea . . . in the belief that they would cleanse away or wipe off the guilt of the nation. (Perspectives on Incongruity, 153)

Someone tells me that according to a poetics of difference, there is a need to leave the experimental behind: writers not privileged by the dominant discourse "cannot leave judgment to 'chance'." But what if the nature of judgment itself is a matter of chance? In winter, 1993, Chief Justice William Rehnquist announced the Supreme Court decision that "innocence is not a constitutional claim." A man on death row, decided guilty in a fair jury trial IS guilty, even when (as happened in the case that brought forth the opinion), the REAL guilty party is exposed later on.

attendants duck increased comforts
citadel violence first lov'd
courtesy too loud
In other words, Harrison Ford would still have had to die for the killing of his wife at the end of *The Fugitive* if his time to prove himself innocent had run out. And as far as I can tell, it ran out. "Judgment"—"justice" is a matter of system. Experimental forms are not relinquishing judgment, so much as they are questioning the system that produces such forms of justice, throwing it into new light.

The presence of Iago questions the flawed system. He goes beyond the stance of a necessary evil, a tool for ultimately attaining (through his discard) a cathartic utopian state for the spectator. He is, in fact, a part of that "utopian" state. He can never be totally purged; he is the scene which allows for Othello (and our understanding of Othello/ourselves) to exist at all. We are meant to empathize with (see ourselves as) Othello. But Othello and Iago are "two parts of one fascination" (says Burke). The system of Aristotelian tragedy does not account for the continued presence of Iago in ourselves. An awareness of Iago's systematic/systemic presence necessitates a redefinition of a "utopia" if the utopic result is contingent on Iago's supposed discard.

"I have voiced disappointment over this Court's obvious eagerness to do away with any restriction on the States' power to execute whomever and however they please. . . . I have also expressed doubts about whether in the absence of such restrictions, capital punishment remains constitutional at all. . . . Of one thing, however, I am certain. Just as an execution without adequate safeguards is unacceptable, so too is an execution when the condemned prisoner can prove that he is innocent. The execution of a person who can show that he is innocent comes perilously close to simple murder."

Supreme Court Justice Blackmun

*Herrera vs. Texas*, 1993

This city was chosen for its prominent doctors. Maple. Around the windows and doors. Tell me an anecdote, preferably in regards to ghosts. Who still inhabits this place? "I hope no one is afraid of dead pigeons" he said in the tower that was six stories high. Six stories of nothing. With a thin ladder reaching high out of sight. A square of height reveals another square like a mirror game. He doesn't touch on the psychology behind the architecture for the insane. Although it's clear that something has profoundly altered. In the hallway, each step crackles with paint that has fallen. There is a wheel chair. Symmetrical doors reveal similar rooms. Does the paint protect the wood? Or is there a fear of it? Is this fear related to the twin towers and the logic behind their construction? Riddled with bullets. You build a place that people fear to go. In approaching the building, there is no option but to picture yourself being forced into its corners, against the walls of a darkened shack.

The presence of Iago is the experimental. It is the contained within a container that cannot make room for its presence. The character of Iago has always caused me great discomfort. In Orson Welles' film *Othello*, one of the first images is of Iago being forced into a square cage which is then foisted up over the city. He's left to dangle there. There is no moment when "justice has been done," of "finality" (to use Justice Rehnquist's term). When Othello finally asks for a reason behind Iago's perfidy, Iago responds

*Demand me nothing, what you know, you know, From this time forth I never will speak word.*
He refuses to become intelligible. And yet it is his unintelligibility that I believe prevents him from finally being discarded. The presence of Iago actually prevents the cathartic response for which the play is so often used as an exemplum. He cannot be “thrown into the sea”; he is a corpsed genre (substantial) that shifts the focus, moves the angle, turns monologue into dialogue. Judgment and purgation are no longer applicable in his discussion.

Rain smashes through the paragraph. The weather lifts from one end of the spectrum to the other, all in the course of a day. Why do I write in sentences? I gave the wrong answer. Geometry will help. Guns change architecture, in that the space used to be open and now there is a confusing series of doors. Also, Frederick Law Olmsted envisioned a city connected by green areas. This has to do with the sentence. To see “I” and “you” as cardboard figures waiting to entertain, to draw in a crowd. The paint crackled with each step and somebody had scrawled up on the wall: “gas, food, lodging.” Arrows pointed in various directions. Red and yellow. Lodge in the similar rooms and then you will be similar. However, if the “I” is attached to myself waiting to speak, this might be mistaken as a language of statement. I’m not saying this.

chrysolitic sense

of why he needs our audience

“Alix Pearlstein

“Bat-Bat,” 1994 photographs
M. Nourbese Philip

Ignoring Poetry
(a work in progress)

Most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people.
—Adrian Mitchell

How does one write poetry from the twin realities of being Black and female in the last quarter of the twentieth century? How does one write poetry from a place such as Canada, whose reality for poets such as myself is, more often than not, structured by its absence? How does one write from the perspective of one who has 'mastered' a foreign language, yet has never had a mother tongue; one whose father tongue is an English fashioned to exclude, deride and deny the essence of one's being? How does the poet confront and resolve the profound loss and absence of language—a language which can truly be the house of one's being? How does the poet work a language engorged on her many silences? How does she break that silence that is one yet many? Should she? Can she fashion a language that uses silence as a first principle?

This was the first paragraph of a letter covering my manuscripts She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks and Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence sent to publishers in 1987. Some seven years, 25 rejections and eventual publication later, the questions answer themselves.

i.

how does one write poetry
how does one—
poetry from the twin realities
Black and female

One doesn’t. The realities aren’t twin. Or even same.
an absence of language
resolve
She doesn't. She listens to the silence—the interstices of time; she listens again.

v.
how does the poet work
engorged on her many silences
how does the poet work
her many silences
how does the poet work
a language
engorged
on her many
many silences
Carefully

vi.
How does she
how does she
how does she
break
that silence
that silence
is one
is many
how does she break
one into many
Loving
ly

vii.
should she
should she what
could she
could she what
should she
could she

Possibly

viii.
can she fashion a language
(what presumption!)
can she fashion
a language
using silence
can she fashion a language
using silence
as a first principle
can she
she must

1. A work that documents or attempts to record ‘facts’ or the ‘truth’ both of which are can be problematic.

2. Documentaries can exist in any form although I suppose a documentary novel could be seen to be a contradiction, but certainly letters and poetry.

3. Audre Lorde, Eduardo Galeano

4. Poetry as medium. Topic: Memory
Stephen Ratcliffe

from *Sculpture*

19.

Waking up being able not to remember the direction one is walking, the bridge that may be said to sag
not as a metaphor (m) but fact having nothing to do with its substance, as one of several rings
whose stone (green) may be taken off the finger, placed on the table when talk continues
to be performed. How in the mental physics by which one person becomes another the situation has changed, no longer the park across the street
or slant of cottage roof against the sky (opaque) or tangle of pink roses growing by the steps,
motion of birds coming into the garden. Instead of such a person one propped up (shoulder) between the sign “a” and its replaceable image, as if the thought of the bridge sinking in the middle could enter the film as its soundtrack, each moment recorded on a tape (evidence) meant to be played in slow motion.

20.

Again driving to the garden (roses) in a car one thinks to park for hours, walking in concentric circles identical to “go,” “stop,” “mistake,” “stumble” or the feeling of being unable to turn back whatever has happened in a logical scheme analogous to that. Lines apparently in a formal garden an extension of the vertical as a tangent in relation to sky (whole) whose blue clouds intersect moving in the distance called subject, the name in isolation with itself as a person may be said to wake up in a different place, this sound pronounced “gesture.” How in the final stages of the play the characters will become interchangeable, the one who calls the one who listens not to take back (accident) the knowledge of how lines are drawn but something elsewhere, the figure who walks back into the garden to listen, bend.

21.

How in the volume enclosed in that place the dream unfolds to include an upstairs window covered with ivy, the garden from which it is viewed, the bird whose call sounds like the other half of a dialogue between the dreamer and himself. Light as evidence bleeding stops because of the pressure that is applied (gauze) to the wound or the scab that forms over it, an expansion of the structure of the argument according to which the table and chair are moved from one location to the next. How the curator of a museum will be able to walk in silence from room to room, that view of himself as closeness or distance measured by how it appears in another location perhaps on the same street, possibly across a body of water.

Sculpture is about form and space and the relation between the two. Modern sculpture has been a lot about opening the space in the center, and about texture or surface—the combination of a surface and an opening. In a certain sense it’s assumed, as soon as you say “sculpture,” you’re talking about space.

—Richard Tuttle

In fact, I was afraid of following the picture to where it reaches right out into reality, laid against it like a ruler.

—Rosmarie Waldrop
Susan Rosenberg and Jacob Wisse

Dialogue: The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl

The following dialogue concerns the documentary film The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl produced in Germany under the direction of Ray Mueller. The release of Mueller's film in the United States coincided with St. Martin's Press' publication of Leni Riefenstahl's autobiography in 1994.

The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl begins with Riefenstahl's early career as a dancer and actress in a popular German genre of "mountain films" of the pre-World War I period. Its account then follows her association with the Nazi regime and her most famous work during that period: a film of the 1933 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, Triumph of the Will—a documentary of the Nazi Party's 1934 Nuremberg congress; and Olympia, a documentary of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Almost half of Mueller's documentary is devoted to Riefenstahl's life and work after World War II: documentary film and photography shot in Kenya and the Sudan in the early 1970s, and under-water scuba-photography which Riefenstahl, now over 90, is pursuing.

This dialogue took place several months after viewing The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl. Half-way through the dialogue both discussants viewed Triumph of the Will for the first time.

• When we first saw The Wonderful Horrible Life... I think we disagreed somewhat on how the film dealt with the unavoidable issue of Leni Riefenstahl's politics and association with Nazism. We had different perceptions of how the film saw itself as addressing the question of L.R. as Nazi propagandist/apologist vs. personality and figure in "film history." The issue of L.R.'s politics was raised most pointedly by the director himself in the few times when he appeared on screen interviewing L.R., persistently questioning her about her political affiliations in the 1930s, presenting her with documents linking her to the Nazi regime, and then allowing her to slip and slide and dodge his questions. Even though his questions were doomed from the start I felt that by bringing up fascism and in the voice of the narrator/director, not historically "documented" in his documentary, he both let her have an "out," let her avoid being accountable (and the audience too); but also, in his persistence he revealed to the audience the mechanisms of her own denial. He chose not to make fascism or L.R.'s position in the fascist regime his subject; rather he made a documentary in which the subject "speaks" for herself and a film about her "personality." This is a prime convention of documentary film: to pretend that there is no authorial voice, but just the "truth" speaking.

• You made me think back not only to the L.R. documentary but to other documentaries that have stuck with me—both fondly and cringly. And they tend to fall into one or the other category. Despite its apparent fact-revealing, truth-telling neutrality, documentary seems to me anything but a neutral medium. What it says about how it judges its subject comes through in any number of ways. In the simplest and least engaging way through a blabbering omnipresent narrator voice that won't get out of your face and let you enjoy the movie or let you make up your own mind (Roger and Me). In a more subtly manipulative, more demanding and interesting way through a mixture of documentary and dramatic convention with no authorial voice per se but with a clear god-like agenda (Thin Blue Line). And perhaps the most neutral of all—this is where I would put the Wonderful Horrible Life—through simple, question and answer format and an unintrusive film-maker who seems to have only as much of an agenda as the camera itself. This last kind can be I think both the most powerful and the most dangerous. For in spite of its unobtrusiveness and the direct access we are allowed, it sends the strongest message. It has the loudest voice of all. In the case of the L.R. documentary the message seemed to be: what Leni thinks matters. In other words, there is no pure standard of aesthetic accountability. Since historians and film students have no common ground for appreciation, and their worlds being separated by too great a gulf, Let's Ask Leni. And it wasn't just Leni the personality (older and removed) that he brought into view, but—as you say—Leni the film-maker herself, there in front of her editing board once again as if we were seeing the real thing. By suggesting that she has direct access to her films, in other words, we're also meant to believe that she has direct access to history.

• Mueller is charting traditional documentary territory and harnessing all of the "artifices of neutrality" to that end. But given your objections and what I take to be your conception of the limited terms of Mueller's project, I wonder how you envision he might have bridged this gulf between the contradictions of Leni the filmmaker and Leni the historical figure? In a sense she is allowed direct access to history, but I also thought the film was suggesting that history is not something that can
be “sealed off” at a certain point, like 1945. Mueller got this idea across when he arranged for a reunion of L.R. and some of the cameramen who shot *Olympia* and managed to capture them on film together at the modern fascist ruin at the Olympic stadium—revived here as a contemporary theatrical set. This was also the only time he captured L.R. off camera discussing “the good old days” with her former collaborators. By using the cinematic convention of “off camera” vs. “on camera” shots he showed the “artifice” of his own film. I also think this “direct access to history” via film is interesting because the content of L.R.’s films raise just this question. The fact that Mueller treated her films in a “material” way—i.e. demonstrating how she constructed/shot/edited them—permitted the viewer some “access” to the strategies of her films’ mystifications. In this way one could argue the viewer is being given tools for resisting the films’ “pull.”

- What I think Mueller did was to make a movie that has very little to do with L.R.’s films and very much to do with L.R. This is especially clear during the early part of the documentary when Mueller recounts in thumb-nail fashion the post-war fate that befell Leni both in her homeland and abroad. That made me immediately uneasy because it said that the project was—at least in part—going to be about the fall of Leni and that by the end of the documentary one was going to be forced to take sides, to decide whether that fall was fair or unfair, understandable but far too harsh, understandable and not harsh enough, or flatly misguided. It seems odd, misguided, even grotesque that this should be an issue at all. On top of it all is the title phrase *Wonderful Horrible Life,* which is ambiguous; it may suggest what wonderful horrible things so and so has done or what wonderful horrible things have been done to so and so. What makes me uncomfortable is the suggestion of the latter. This documentary is as much if not more about L.R.’s struggle with infamy than it is about the infamous things that she and others did.

- Do you feel the film’s agenda, either explicit or implicit, is the “redemption” or rehabilitation of L.R.? At the end of Mueller’s movie he shows previously unscreened films and photos shot by L.R. in Africa in the 1950s and it is as if we are meant to counterpose this love of black-African bodies to the Leni-as-Nazi propagandist of *Triumph of the Will.* He uses her underwater photography similarly: to highlight the continuity of her “artistic vision.” I suppose one way Mueller could have studied the “aesthetic triumph” of L.R.’s films and their political implications would have been to emphasize the importance of public spec-

tacle in Nazi propaganda and to show how her films not only capture this but produce and participate in it; that is they are not, as she wants us to believe, aesthetic orchestrations. Mueller takes her too much at her word—he wants to see her films as aesthetic triumphs and orchestrations apart from a larger context. He is erring too far on the side of ambiguity; but maybe there is a non-ambiguous but still non-propagandistic position he could have achieved, something more than leaving it up to L.R. to dodge his questions and something which still did take into account complexities of her “personality.”

BREAK AS BOTH DISCUSSANTS VIEW *TRIUMPH OF THE WILL*

- Having seen the infamous film, I now see why L.R. was condemned in the first place but do not understand why there should be any ambiguity about that condemnation, why she should be lionized so unfailingly for her supposedly artistic interests and why there should be any movement or attempt in the present to rehabilitate her. The more I think about Mueller’s documentary the more I think it blatantly a project of rehabilitation. That’s apparent from the way Mueller presents L.R.’s films in the most decontextualized and aesthetically pleasing little snippets, as if to suggest exactly the opposite of what the viewer would absorb by actually seeing her 1930s films in the flesh. One appreciates how successful Mueller’s documentary was in this regard by just how shocked one is by seeing L.R.’s film. You’d never guess what major portions of *Triumph* show: the chilling monotony that results from parade after parade of stern-faced shouting goose-stepping Nazis. Mueller paid particular attention to the manner in which L.R. recognized and overcame the potential dullness of Nazi propaganda films. Well, she may have made things more interesting than they could have been, say, if Hitler himself had made the film, but it’s a matter of degrees. I’m not sure degrees matter much when it comes to propaganda, especially of the Nazi kind. It’s like distinguishing between a cyanide casserole baked by a first time cook and a professional chef. They’ll both kill you, no matter how much prettier and tastier one of them might be. Whether L.R.’s artistic talents, hard work and supposedly good intentions were enough to change the message, to make it any less hateful and relentlessly propagandist, that resounds with a very big no for me. Mueller also sought to highlight the artistry of her 1930s films by showing significant portions of her post-war work, suggesting not merely that she went on to disavow her early Nazi allegiances but something far more dishonest—that she probably never had those allegiances in the first
place, as if this post-war work were all part of the same aesthetically uncompromising Leni-vision that existed all along, i.e. okay, she got saddled with Hitler but she did the best she could.

• I guess we come to being very much in accord. As I looked back over early ideas about Mueller's film, I am embarrassed by my naiveté and my reluctance to fully take on this film’s agenda. Having seen Triumph of the Will, I now see Mueller’s much more clearly as the total aestheticization of L.R.’s films. No matter how “revolutionary” L.R.’s use of cinema and technology, it is ridiculous to do as Mueller did: to pull from the intolerable propagandistic onslaught the most “beautiful” cinematic moments. I think the best testimony to the power of Mueller’s film is that I was prepared to approach L.R.’s movie as something I could consume from some disinterested aesthetic/historical position. Impossible. I suppose if he was interested in appropriating her work aesthetically, in writing her into film history there would have been ways to do this more honestly. He could have placed her work in the larger context of the history of propaganda and its techniques, for one. Instead, he bracketed out the politics and made her into an heroic figure—someone who achieved no small degree of artistic innovation in the midst of oppression. In the scheme of a 3-1/2 hour movie all those little moments where Mueller seems to question L.R., to present her as hanging herself with her own obfuscations, just don’t add up to all that much. The film is just too damned interested in her.

Leslie Scalapino

from The Front Matter, Dead Souls

Now

Walking on the sailing quiet pillars with the red ball in the stream, I went on the floating deserted road toward the dissolving frames around me everywhere crumbling afire in the black air.

I'm a scout on the quiet road into it.

That’s hanging on the world driving on the cliff in evening, so the entire ocean is in it, the outside eye that looks at it from elsewhere, not from oneself, isn’t connected to it.

And it is not mine. The deserted road on the rose rim can be brought to separate.

Street people still begging as the rose rim separates are on the street.

This gets to where the eye isn’t mine. While seeing, it’s elsewhere gazing quietly.

The guest workers executed for sympathizing with the foreign invaders occurs now under the jurisdiction of Bechtel. It quells them to have order.

There isn’t existence except ahead of them. Bechtel now works them where there can be no unions.

In the comparison itself is a range. Real time and fiction actually conflate on the rose rim.

They are the same.

To bring writing to a point where vision occurs, to actually see there physically, it is not from one.

For example, a man seeing isn’t the blue eye floating in existence.

This is to where seeing comes from or in the events produced. The outside eye floating on its own sees the man gently put his stem in her.

One is a blindspot which begins at the mouth. As in Lori Lubeski’s corpses aroused, intrepid, moving alone, no world is from her strong boyhood dream.

Lubeski’s “The bloodhound eyes / inset a criminal mind forever the capillary”: dream causes space for the mind criminal to be amused. It is the Persian Gulf, our country.

It gets to where nature is being seen as originless. It is by itself. Aaron Shurin’s “Human Immune” hallucinates nature. As if it were
blind.

Our being opposed to analysis is the means of seeing from in the
dim blue boil.

One isn't being it when the fin amidst the people.
So the image is in nature, and we're not, we're a habit. The image
is its own outer realm.

Others are the image 'only', as if it were just being induced.
Shurin induces it. It's a double erasure.

If he induces nature or the image, where they're not separated,
there's the man amidst the people being a fin—in order—is seeing it as
originless.

That erasure 'culturally', which is everyone’s, and as literally death
of 'others' from AIDS is the act of realistic hallucination in his "Human
Immune." Being in that space of 'everyone’s' is akin to enmeshing of
Robert Grenier's 'poem' which he drew in handwriting 'I am a beast /
my heart is beating,' the two lines inextricably superimposed on each
other visually. It can be only what we see, not translated as type. Nature
is writing as drawing (or type).

Whereas in some of my writing I would take a series in time of
real events as 'their' 'ostensibly' constellated interiorly, and at the same
time as it being that see the events being constructed by the social order
(which is then seen and changed interiorly, in the writing); in this, the
narrative is only.

The narrative is frontal, solely.

My interiorly is the same as or superimposed in the social con-
struction in it. In the 'narrative' it doesn't exist.

The 'narrative' is divided but isn't within one.
Formerly, one had to be interiorly at odds in both of two cultures
and so be a child to mirror that.

The 'narrative' is where nature is almost not occurring in people
being pressed to, compared to, while being in dusk.

Where the foreign workers are now to work for Bechtel in Ku-
wait is a poem, which is real time itself. Per se.
Real time is produced by events. Only.
If the image is not dreamed but is on the edge of its occurrence it's
not dilated.

Apprehension is so close it produces and can't see. That's the eye

hanging. It's mine.

In a play, the characters will say the passage of themselves through
the landscape because the eye is not in them—by nature being halluci-
nated by one who is watching.

A man seeing Jean Cocteau's Orphée, saying it frightened me ten-
tatively yet inured says I'd never paid attention to content before. He
sees behavior as convention everywhere except the physical wilderness.

Why isn't this some humans' seeing?
There are no people: but that condition has to arise here not from
people. Only, or has no people.

Robert Grenier's drawn superimpositions of a drawn phrase in
one color on another phrase in some other color (so it's only its visual
being) are the actual horizon line on the edge/meaning of the written
poetic-line. Which may not 'exist' itself in the writing (line breaks of
poems not existing, where there's only the physical line of drawing).

Nature has no line either.

She can't wait while she's bruised. In the bruised Defoe walking
on the street expands the blue sky.
Defoe's kneeling on the blue blood sack, which is her own chest
as if a bird.

Beaten by the man in the silk suit who was begging, one floats up
and is on the crust. By one. A culture can shimmer.

The silk suits are floating up in front as out on the street one
slumps bruised blue surrounded by them who're coming up.
Concealing being bruised a sack sees, them, who're not existing
there nor does one then. One doesn't move on the street in it.

The tips of the grass are purple waving in a sheet where I looked
up and saw the moon hanging in the bright blue.
Further on the sheet the tips of the grass are black. Black waves
blew toward me.

A woman with empty retinas comes up with her mouth flecked.
One isn't reflected. She's saying one not being like them is ridiculed in
this arising from one's self-confidence. One isn't reflected anyway. How
does she see them?
So one'd have to have no confidence to see her. One has none.

A cord red crusting it a bulb on the end is an outside's beat. That
grew strewn in the outside unattached, a camel's inner cord.

Sealed in the blue bruise grapefruit-of-one's-flesh is a blood sack outside of one's eye.

If they live it they can say it. It's still, not moving in the dim blue of a day, existing there. The silk suits aggressively bawling at the empty retinas are in this narrow blue boil outside where she's bruised in the black night.

The jet of the black ink ejaculated from the floating man curled, he speeds forward with no effort in him through the dim night.

He is without her. As if we're attached like sacks that stop breathing. They don't see one at the moment. She pumps on her back in the night, in order to walk.

That's when what's here no longer reflects. It's neither in the present or memory.

No rebellion affects it. There is no suffering in not being like them but rather in being so. The ridicule forces the crowd into a bright herd. One, who're all, is forced back into quietness. Ridicule can't affect one. It's a quiet bubble of calm in them in which they reflect as rigid and brutal to themselves.

They're wearing yellow ribbons sobbing to themselves still.

The man jets on his own sack on the black ink cloud from it where there's no horizon or night.

Akira who is him clings to the worm in the air. Saying pear-eyed to her he'd been rowing with a friend seeing fins, he says to him they're sharks but the friend comes very close to immense sea lions. They're basking on the water. Turning as one to the boat they fart to the men.

So Akira leaning drinking a whiskey over the walk g-strings going by on the sand in the day, later when he's lying in his own gel says that to her meaning not to go to the Getty.

The fins were incandescently tranquil before from the herd then turning as one to fart suffocating the men.

As Dead Souls is speaking to the men who're there to buy, inside the office, inside her sockets her steely gaze sees Defoe outside far off on the street.

An osprey flies under the crescent moon flake in the bright blue right now.

Here they float in front diving. Whang one drops on the thin surf rim where the air's dim with blue.

The entire range of events, of others and one, is occurring on conscious apprehension not dreamed. That is their only existence though we're not in them. To be just there in their rim is not being asleep.

The neons and the ads everywhere mechanically make the image, the same as this. The dusk is not subjected to the ads.

One isn't qualified by the dusk or on it.

The dusk is turning a dark blue as one is bruised in it. Whatever the men begging think they're illumined. They can't not. Is that the same as the dusk? It can't not.

As the dusk rises and a deep velvet pool of dark settles, the silk suits are on a boulevard. In that relation is my existence.

Crowds who are lying down on the sidewalk to sleep, don't look at her. The space has no pressure.

That's morning at the dark pool of night, where they're together—they don't have anyone in them. A dog is the rose dawn later. Moving by her.

O Blind World: that's day itself. Brown velvet cattle float quivering to one. Singing had to be invented by humans rather than simply being as it is in birds.

Maybe we began with it.

There we expressed tenderness for the animals.

The fury is only in her. Rose dog that has it in it doesn't produce it. One was gutted inside lying unable to sleep, fury when a man's died, as poured in the dog which doesn't feel that or derived it itself, there.

The latter is sitting in her office smoking bowing waiting on some men. She never takes drugs.

They are brutal buying are in a helpless relation to nature too, which is the dawn or light even. That's not the dawn on dusk pressed independently.

We have to perceive that there.

What's the difference? The people on whom she's waiting are minor so she has to oil them, a tyranny of servitude arising from wanting to stay alive.

They're taking cans of peas.

The wrestling ring ahead in the pearl night is produced by it. One's bruises are blue in the night. One doesn't reproduce violence in
such an event.

In Charles Bernstein's poem "Circumstraint" a terrain is flattened to be simply reading, as of Dick and Jane in first grade, so that by neutralizing as if numbing that landscape a 'gaze' (rather than a consciousness, which is more—or less?—programmed) is really everywhere in it, not from one's self—the dropping (at the same time) of its own double negative space of "Nowhere seen / Nowhere withheld."

Dick runs, run, running out back clear past (the range.
A plan for complacent relegation,
denuded of song or story. — Only what unleavens dwells at adjacency,
the blind behind the melt.

That's not song or story, it's a blind eye as real time, by its having no disruption or revelation as modulation of feeling. It's because it's blind in back, but doesn't have song or story as it either. It's the 'neutral' place. The gaze isn't seen anywhere. The text is then as such this/our real time.

The neutral nuance registering a reverberation there (yet dependent in its articulation), they're impermanent.
A moth the dust smudging from the wings yet in a very violent hot blue air.

That he would accept weeping When one's in the blue blister in the night—sitting—and he comes flapping.

and he's completely unknown to one base the night (there) on that—and war.

While there is no neutral range (maybe there is?) in reality, this 'neutral place' which is observation of reality is only in the writing. The ranges are without 'our' credibility?
Custom isn't a norm (in nature), objective. It is.

We try to find the swans in the day that has no weight. That's the day.

Flashbacks so that everywhere people seemed to be seen. They were bleeding through at this time in the street.

Holding to his warm chest flapping in the oily dark, it wasn't touched actually or there.

The space now is such that a horned roiled (figure) has no origin, is entirely the foreground, floating on flesh-hued cloud.

That background is here, the horned roil does not arise from it.
The demon floating has no origin, spatially. Spatially is emotionally here. I want to subject emotion to space; and also to subject observation to it.

Wanting him as real as can be only in this and with no death, Defoe has become Orphée.
Orphée was originally Defoe.

Mist didn't fall on that desert. The figure withering aging could not be.
Yet showers from the plates of cloud fall on the desert. The utter happiness of love for Akira on the illuminated blue field is, yet one has not existed.

A child is sticking its arm down the throat of a calf, several calves lined in the street. The child sticking an arm down its throat, feeding the calves, there is no middle ground here. They're silhouetted.
The calves don't utter. There's no silence in that. They don't, in it.
There's no sky. The faceless worm is the same as the child and calf attached at the child's arm. Feeding the calves is in this.
The approach to find another civilization is not seeking historical knowledge. One has not existed.

A man sitting on the sidewalk in the crowd has running bloody sores on his bared legs, holds a cup. A sign beside him says he has AIDS. They're in the sunlight.
It's the same as their impermanence. He speaks in a humble way. Actual living can't occur being articulated in any tradition. There can't be 'tradition of one's faculties' even.

That action is all that's happening. Tapping, the greyhound was by him in the blue air. Dead Souls who goes off up on the stadium to the blasted sky the clouds float over. The officer is paying for the hot dogs holding them, comes into the garden at the Getty. The officer, who is
in the air ahead of her, glinted teeth at her. She's firing at the faceless worm a ratlike puckered figure on the dead man. They're out in the blue air only. The same blue air of the stadium. The officer was angry with the woman.

Yet he knows the deaf and blind child in the limousine is hers.

The neutrality as if words are stilled there to be 'their' medium is objective as if in no terrain and as if one's opal companion.

Akira sitting out drinking whiskey looks at a black butterfly by him in the blue air. How can he see it?
It's in the air so can't be seen then.

1. I define the word "documentary" as (medium which is) examination of anything 'real,' where interpretation (which is that medium, its form) moves that thing or event and is therefore itself an aspect of real phenomena. So "documentary" is itself defining that which is 'real' which is in movement.

2. "Documentary" can exist in any form; in The Front Matter, Dead Souls. I wanted the form to have 'documentary in it' (as if it is a shape or object) and documentary to be 'in' the writing's form—so there is an unexpected imposition of shapes which never 'congrue.'

3. Werner Herzog in Aguirre: The Wrath of God; Rod Smith's In Memory of My Theories, Harryette Mullen's new poem; Fiona Templeton's You The City ....

4. In creating a documentary, inseparable from a poem or 'novel,' my medium is words and the 'subject' (rather than "topic") is any occurrence.

"The Decision," 1994 etching, 22 1/2" x 18"
from “A” “History”

for Polly Klaas

one

J church burning holes in my palms, time to begin. leathered skin with stitches filled. the red mark—mercuriochrome. (likes to be in uniform). chemical burn and stench (rise, rise up). a plastic bag about the face. not a pillow. pillows leave marks.

two

swarms

A pebble left inside her mouth to stand for a pregnancy; it's her small & dead behind the rose bush, a necklace of blood on her lip. No one saw him leave, eating like a pig, he was nervous about the car. He was sweating. No one put two & two together, his Valiant rutted in the ditch, her with the dead leaves in her hair, wet. Her head against the wet between the trees. Between her knees, some gravel. Late fall. No one saw him do it, no one put two & two—something with a wire, a burn maybe. Her skin, the in-side of an oyster, open. That smooth. Moist. Her skin: rich. Her skin: de-breads & purples. Landscape to defuse itself—Night moves within the tunnels of the heart. The beam breaks. It shifts.
three

Said, till her ears bled. time to begin. fed the chickens hog entrails, smashed the garden tomatoes with a willow tree stick. (traces filthy words in the dirt with his toe). oh happy happy happy dog.

Shut out all words from the song. skull be the screen.
You can't accuse him of being the same all these years.

four

from the small of the back, from the bowel, the thigh, from the upper edge of the inner lip, from the vault in the belly, an arc for a finger to trace a place for a mouth to rest

I am the dream of her body

five

Consider cyanide in the bloodstream, fed through an intravenous sytem. consider a syrum, a liquid. consider a gunshot much too loud. I was looking for something. I went to buy the machinery, the powder, the tape, the saw, the cotton, the gun. consider yourself in a park with a stranger. consider the uncle who stuffed bottles up . . . consider yourself in a car with a stranger, your uncle's face, consider this.

six

And her teeth which I will no longer see in her mouth. The thin chip chip by the river under her. And her bones full of air. And her bones with pockets of birds. And her thirst-bones, her bones which take longer to heal.
Six fragments on Document

I.
I tend to shy away from "topics." I am usually on the outside of these situations & can only (satisfyingly) write from the inside. It is easy to take a stance (strike a pose) on the subjects of the day—& harder to treat them as a way to expose possibility. Topics (generally) lie for me in the realm of positions & my poems do not want to be opinions but inquiries. I wait for an opening so that I may enter the seams—where there is contradiction & ambiguity (fear).

II.

Coroners' reports, marriage licenses, autobiographies, poems—to record particulars in the world or the world of the mind/psyche. Document, in its original, refers to the inscribed word. My primary medium is always this word.

What drives us here (to write)? Rage for order (or dis-)? Rage for language? Poem as Truth? Meaning witness? The information within or the documentary truth of the existence of the producer?

—Tim Atkins

Sappho documented Eros, Niedecker the geese & grasses. Oppen, visible (daily) life & the life of the Eye via the Mind. Dickinson, Sexton, interior documents. Howe, documenting the palimpsests of history (in her particular vision), etc.

III.
"Documentary" seems to want to appoint a value system, an importance to particular kinds of events: wars, earthquakes, populations at risk. But love, too is at risk ("qu'il a lu quelque part un panégyrique du sel, mais rien sur éros; et c'est parce que éros est censuré comme sujet").

IV.
I have a continuous struggle: to let the world slip in with the word. Lately, I try to see all writing gestures as a form of the world (a document), no matter its "content" or "topic."

Seeing "as the intensity of seeing increases" for example is another endangered act.

V.
"For the sake of an instant in the eyes"—Anyone with eyes to see or ears to hear has the world inside and out and all its parts to document.

—Tim Atkins

"There can be a brick
In a brick wall
The eye picks
to document.

VI.
The little hole in the eye
Williams called it, the little hole
Has exposed us naked
To the world
And will not close.

1 ("that he read somewhere a panegyric to salt, but nothing on Eros"), Barthes, Fragments d'un discours amoureux

2 Quotes in V and VI are from Oppen
Rod Smith

Your Group Insurance Benefits

my o my my my.

ENDORSEMENT CONVERSION PRIVILEGE

... a lock,

vericose polis

halflife visors aka
in the flush of blood diskette

Its use of I
as a tentative, fluid collection of

trembling amounts—

Only the elements tremble

Only the false

But there is no false...

... as fascination brokerage

Extended Care Facility Elimination Period—

"yes, we hate them" "profile of a sheep"

No analysand can indent this largesse. Code of mute broth.

Some imminently desirable ice-clock. T-shaped rubber uppers.

The anguished apperception of values as sustained in being by

my freedom is a secondary and mediated phenomenon.

Juiced space

this dust to protect this wax

The rubric

"yes, we hate" "the new realm of the marvelous"

beneath all fates

futile, yet monstrous

suck up to Mallarmé.

Certain sets of concepts can become so vehement through isolation

that they draw into themselves the strength of other drives.

The knowledge drive is an example of this.

No payment will be made for any loss caused or contributed to by:

1 Disease, bodily or mental infirmity, or their treatment or diagnosis.
2 Ptoamine or bacterial infection. (Except only septic infection of

and through a visible wound sustained solely through accidental

means.
3 Hernia.
4 War, any act of war or insurrection.
5 Intentional self-destruction or intentionally self inflicted injury,

while sane.

The advance asterick of the innate fade

Recapitualtes dietic

democratic

Leviathan.

the loan loose

It's astral notice of.
documented

MAZE

30' X 25' spiral: grass turf, wood chips, sunflowers 1994

Meredith Stricker

document: anything serving as evidence or proof as a material substance bearing a revealing symbol or mark
documentary: presenting "facts" objectively without editorializing or inserting "fictional" material

DOGMA

from the Latin decere:
to be fitting,
["to be acceptable"]
docere: to teach,
["to cause to accept or to be acceptable"]

DOXOLOGY

DOCILE DOCTOR (DOCTRINE)

ORTHODOX

& from the Greek dokein:
to appear, seem, think
["to cause to accept or to be accepted"]

PARADOX

* all definitions in this series have been adapted from The American Heritage Dictionary
The periodicity of his own revolutions unknown to him, what
governed that, set down in some past of which he had no record cer-
tainly, though who knew there might be some record somewhere, kept
by someone, or if not, it might be the case that there was no beginning
and no end. But for this time of which he was master, maybe, knowing
that the world has a will far greater than his own, recognizing that, on
this journey down from the north after years of shattering his own
being into pieces against the wall, trying to shape his own journey and
finding that, whatever the case in any given situation, something always
ended up by eluding him, something ultimately ungovernable: it would
bounce back from the wall, as in some lethal game, and hit him where
he was least expecting it, in the foot, scything the grass from underfoot,
or in the stomach, setting the plexus fluttering like a mad banner, or in
the heart, everything stopping then, the calm of disaster descending on
him, when everything becomes very still and the whole being knows
that there is an end to will.

But knowing for this time, this short stretch of which he seemed
to be, appeared to be, the master, this opening of the path and its clo­
sure behind him, what shall we say: thirty years perhaps, taking up the
burden, putting it down again, leaving the earth behind; knowing for
this time that the mind had to travel, had to enter again into its illum­
inations, that the eyes had to function again and bring in their messages,
those automated eyes of the Record; for this time, he would slowly
walk around the appointed place, the place of the people.

Eyes lowered to hide their inquisitive brightness, the frightened
heart, the fear of not being recognized, not as master of eyes, and being
shunted aside into some dark street that his own light would never be
able to reach—eyes lowered, if only, also, to keep from stumbling on
the volcanic lava, outcrops of the vast terrace the village was built on,
largest available flat space among the crests and ridges coming down
from the immense mother and father towering over the village: Pral-
Toliman and the other, the namesake volcano that was called merely, in
its all revealing tautology, Volkan, that is Atitlan, Abundance of Waters
made height, first mother of all things known and unknown, greater
than San Pedro, a "small hill," bearing as its child, at its foot, the baby of
the volcano, Chutinamit, abode of kings and princes who governed
the House of Birds, Tz'kinjay. Before Don Pedro came and drove them
all into the Lake, swimming for their lives, thrashing about, water smother-
ing eyes, mouths, noses, where the glory departed.

Eyes gradually lifting, as time smoothed out to a flow, the daily
flow of place—not the spasm of excitement in the vacant towns where
everyone came only for the great fiestas or where the headmen slept
alone all year in that one rush of service to town and gods—but, no, the
all-day, all-week, all-year, sempiternal daily, smooth, quiet, uneventful
flow of time passing by so that: aqui estamos, here we are, pasando,
spending time, going about our business, without problems, without
hurry, without conflict, above all—even though the village seethes with
one quarrel after another, one dissatisfaction after another all the year
round, yet with the appearance of peace, like that of any people who
have lived close together for ages, which breeds tolerance, and apparent
quiet—like the Japanese, for example, who are masters of the world in
a time of exploding population, because they are not daunted by mobs
and masses.

His eyes drill into one corner after another, lift, descend, swivel
from side to side, in their own quiet rhythm, flashing on one event after
another, one object after another, one person or group of persons, hail-
ing and being hailed, gradually remembering, re-occurring in this world,
as his feet bear him forward, about his own business, the people smooth
out towards the edges of the street, letting him pass; the children cease
their chatter, because he is recognizably about that own business, who
has had dreams, who has made at least this dream come true: that his
path should be directed over this place again, contact re-established
with the scenario of this place, its memories, its collective fate.

There, right there: the dialogue of past and present: never forget-
ting a possible future: "Who knows what will happen tomorrow, per-
haps I live, if God helps, perhaps I die: there we are, that is why I love
pictures, photographs: they are recuerdos, remembrances—and if I die,
good, here is my picture, left behind for my children to look at and
know their father, and, if I live, nevertheless I must die some day, and
there my picture will be. We come into this world, perform our ser-
vices, die and leave the earth behind."

Understand, the earth is forever: put that in your pipe, anthro-
pologist, writer, painter, whoever you are, going about wrapped in
your outlandish tallness, put that in your pipe and smoke it: the earth,
whatever happens, is left behind, that is its fate and also our own. How
he came in, bloated with fear those thirty years ago, walked about the
streets as a daily discipline, saying buenos dias to all he passed by, fifteen
days of fear and patience, with silence from all those he crossed, until, little by little, one or two greetings crept like mice out of their mouths, those others, this people: how, gradually, more and more came out, changed into birds, and flowers, scrolls of speech; how, soon, there was a chorus of voices wherever he went, people recognizing and hailing him beyond the names he could record and remember, many more people than he could possibly write down in his book, or in the tablets, if such there were, of any memory.

And it is the same now, as they look at him sideways, most of them saying nothing (perhaps he does not know us, probably not, strange heads those gringos), and a few of them, yes, greeting, is that not Don Miguel, or Hey Miguel, or Hey Miguel Sol, you flashing by in your seeming great impatience, do you not see us, recognize us, take us back into your heart, memory, remembrance, we that are people, living here, of which you were once a part, must have been born here, taken away very early, a child, into the cold so that you can no longer wear our pants, the knee-high pants aloud with flowers and fruits and birds in their purple-striped cages, but grew tall, on strange food and drink, grew gringo and became something else, something that will always return to us, but will forever, in some small aspect, be apart from us, watching with motionless eyes, even when smiling which we know you are not used to, even when talking to us, which we know you are not used to, being affable, familiar, behaving as one of ourselves, with that mind up there, that works like we work with our hands, and knees and backs, in our poverty.

A girl steps up the hill like a mountain cat, her feet searching out the path among the lava outcrop; a boy, two boys follow her, one boy falls back, the other boy—they have been waiting in the shadows—disappears into the foliage, following her: perhaps there will be that sudden flare, violent altercation, he mumbling, declaring himself, she shouting her virtue to the tree tops, that unexplainable violence of the mating approaches. Walks on. Flash. In a doorway, a young man stands stretching beyond the town, out into the limits of the known world, the assassinations, the disappearances? How to keep the murderers at bay?

Flash, and pass for this day. On the corner of the street, embedded in the wall, he sees a huge stone, must have been a colonial-time stone, almost like a Roman sarcophagus buried into that wall: part of the Convent, destroyed all these years—the church 1541 according to Vasquez—part of some ancient, small chapel, processional perhaps, back of that, part of the four-cross system, the inner one corresponding to the crosses at the edges of town, circle after circle of outlying crosses, stretching beyond the town, out into the limits of the known world, into the mists of the mountains, over which the coast begins, the tropics, the heat? Flash, and pass. And thus, through the village, hailing, being hailed, a word here, a smile there, that proximity: what privacy (I saw you yesterday, didn't want to bother you, would know that back of yours even after thirty years, a lifetime, the back of Don Miguel, Miguelito, Sol, el caminante)?

To the entrance of Primer Mayor's compound, his son, his younger brother, but that was now elder to him, had emerged in front of him, married to the place, learning and acting as he had acted so many years
before—but better, with more wisdom, a world-change, some things having bettered in the interval. The wife, Spanish-speaking, a child still, but, through his position, addressed as mother now, as grandmother, but still a child under the dignity, joking with her brothers and sisters in the compound. No, he is still in the city, she says, took my father there, old man who has never been in the city, has to be guided, that’s why he’s late I guess. I am sad

Uust

gotten over a fever, baby still scaly with allergy, all over face and body: the hawk has gone, the hawk went in the night. My God! story of the hawk, bought for 5 quetzales as an infant, lovingly nurtured, would eat out of Primer Mayor’s hand wrapped in a cloth, disappeared once and Primer Mayor didn’t eat for days until he came back, now gone for good? I am in love with birds, have loved the birds all my life, Sol says, how I wish I could have seen him! Mourning for the birds, names in lengua of the passing birds: big ones, little ones, children scanning the horizon for the hawk, soft whistles: that is how the hawk’s cry was, when he was here ...

Eyes lifted, eyes downcast, the hawk’s sadness, or else his pleasure floating free in the skies, now, so beautiful, she says, the hawk’s legs, puro naranja, pure orange, and the body? the body all black she says—ah how I would like to have seen it!

Flash. Enough for the day. Who knows where the hawk is, loss in the sky, flying higher than the Cessna coming in to land at the strip over beyond the bay, at the far end of the Lake, beyond the village? Hawks’ eyes, seeing everything below, must go to the aerial photography place in the city, get this geography straight, that have always been so troubled by the exact place of each thing on any map, the locus of anything imaginable in the totality of the schemes. Will think of the hawk, will think of nothing else all evening. The hawk’s master, coming back to his manifold duties this afternoon, assaulted by visit after visit, people wanting instruction, prayers, orders from his status as Primer Mayor, he of the fruit of Holy Week, painter of things, singer, guitarist, young man in the prime of life, good memory, strong heart, powerful humors, day overcast by the loss of his bird, floating there somewhere, unnamed and unrecordable, in the sky, invisible to those who loved him.

Atitlan 03.08.79 17.24 hrs.
Ombligo de Tesuque 10.24.89. 10.00 hrs./ 10.30.94. 11.09 hrs.

Over the last several years, I have been interested in the issue of documentation in cultural anthropology. Since the anthropological record is almost entirely documentary (i.e. cleaving maximally to the “scientifically objective” description of the where, when and how of sociological events), the process here probably moves in a direction opposite to that of most “creative” writers approaching documentary. The issue is: how far can one move from the jargon and cliché-ridden textual procedures of most anthropological literature in the direction of texts which would preserve their allegiance to scientific exactness without abdicating literary potential. This would include moving away from the belles-lettres styles in which 99.9% of “literary” anthropology ends up by being written. In practice, this is a very difficult exercise in that you would be challenging a market and feeding the challenging product back to that market—which would then scan it and fail to recognize.

Among the many different kinds of text I have tried to generate, some, like the present one, move far away from orthodox practice and even approach the novel form with the use of fictional characters both among those who study (the “anthropologist”) and those who are studied (the “informants”). This kind of text also exhibits lyrical and symbolic properties which are not normally found in anthropological discourse. The question remains as to whether this is anthropology at all or has ended up by moving elsewhere.
H. T.

from *The Milk Icon*

In an emptiness
filled with signs
each object
shedding its skin
hunts the body
left behind

The surface mined
for its evolving
novelty
linen, honey, alabaster
virgin with three hands

And “now . . . this”
performing
child plays memory
the silver piano
imprints her face

Into a handkerchief
attached to the logic
of markets & visions
a life more “natural”
all faces seen
not heard
Morning's votive
authentic copies
after fearing
the look
disappointing
though given by vow

Fails to know
a wild opening
into the devouring
ground, a design
sketched by red chalk
or incision

Notes on Documentary & The Milk Icon

It's easy for me to think about writing poetry as a form of documentary because I was a reporter for many years. When documenting events, ritual conflicts, ceremonies, social injustice and other people's lives, I was trained in the use of certain ways to approach and read these experiences. When writing my stories, I practiced certain conventions and used language in ways designed to construct the objectivity of my report, to give readers certain markers.

I first began to write poems while working in a newsroom. The "assignments" were different, but the assignments were similar, whether it was the inverted pyramid of news or the womb/pear of the poem. What felt different was the space. The writing space of poetry was boundless, at once light and dark, level and round, unrestricted compared to the chafing formulaic space of news writing. But what I was doing came from the same desire to report and document, to seek and produce evidence, testimony, artifact. And then, as Gertrude Stein remarked in pointing out the difference between a reporter and a thinker, to "enter right into things," to transform consciousness.

We live in a landscape laden with exterior commercial and pop cultural signs; from these we derive our "icons." Their faces adorn our altar of commerce; the idol always ends up doing product endorsements. Russian iconography, however, remains (now but perhaps not for long) an interior realm. Icons are sacred. The word "icon" comes from the Greek "eikon," meaning "image, likeness"; the earliest icons, probably originating in the Eastern Roman Empire, were portraits of Christ, the Virgin, saints and martyrs. Today in Russia the term still refers largely to the religious imagery which covers every inch of wall space inside Russia's Orthodox Christian churches.

I began "The Milk Icon" after visiting a Russian monastery and seeing a particularly precious and unusual icon called "The Milk-Feeder Icon." In this icon, the Virgin's breast drips milk while she holds the Holy Child in her arms. I saw many icons by Andrey Rublyov, the greatest of Russia's medieval iconographers, who is mentioned in the poem and is revered by Russians as almost a holy man himself. I found a striking contrast between Russian reverence for images and the processes of image production, on the one hand, and America's anxiety and desensitization toward images. Here, mass production and consumption create and destroy images in a way that dismembers history.

When I returned to the U.S. and saw icons, once again, in terms of media and consumer culture, I wanted to write a poem which would document my experience of icons in both cultures. I was reminded of one of my favorite books, Consuming Images, by Stuart Ewen. It also seemed necessary to focus on the "front" or "skin" of female imagery in a historical way relative to my own life. Thus, I decided to add the visual component of antique photographs of women from my family.
Prologue to a City Poem

Myrtles. Propaganda. How sidewalks arrived, stare. Harking as if from a. It's you. Just that way, speak. Steel cranes, in the distance, 30 piers. How far—go It was only. It is many. Unlearn? would find Who's been named, hushed. Theater of brisk planning—ask? Reality, what claims for whom, Utility Owned. And who's re-intrigued to claim, We're Living Here. Laurels. To give anchor. Like them. So stood, replies City, retrace, spot. Call him the lark, in winter. Austerity? As many scripts as there are shards— Reflecting what? Submits, speaks: Promise, Sexpression Alumni of State Force Elementary—feel? Who's been hailed, resists. Went out of doors like mad, “it” Not being a subject for old newspapers of self. Integrity / keep ticket stubs for discount dreams. A once-clean marshland. Reeds look at me and I can't And so forth: Variations on theme of Promise How much percent of yank lyrik, as NASSCO churns Readies the always ready state, “folks,” fleet, subsist? Drafters, welders, electronicans, when barely Seasonal, while elsewhere, restraint's perennial. This is a broken record, played for the same dance. It is only. And it's been many. Alludes to If it flinches, who'll risk what? Hence highlights more things That aren't as themselves. X, who's not tried to perceive “Newly” (frankly) as that's a broken record too. The Pacific stretches far and wide, a shoe box. Continue. No. Continue. Got it? So, that night Went out of doors, but doors themselves also walked off Are stopped, named, bundled and (sexpressively) resold. Yet for now, true comrades should agree to some plot— Could become that beleaguered standard that—“survives.” And yellow turns red, turns green: part-time device, means Led, fed—by—up. Only space take-overs count now Only lanes obstructed, signs bent, Language of Risk. X looks and desires. not to. want. and does. not. what?

Who'll reconstruct the sins that never were, but you Alumni. Pathologies, report from old posts Churn films, novels, poems. Or reporting from new posts Afforded by what? Has justly been called Power— Begins to become “city,” a whole lot of me Yet, has never appeared, if, visits brusquely, signs.
cultural and institutional clauses in the grammatical sentence of power, I’m documenting the places at which they translate one another. A new kind of report perhaps (or weird newspaper even) for those who read the various cultural-political indices from which we come to know a period. Not a pipe dream of artistic perfection, but on-going calibration of and struggle with our old friend the dialectic between social being and consciousness. Yet both the prologue and these comments on it might themselves be indicative of a moment (or moments) in Canadian-U.S.-Mexican history in which the material basis for social existence is becoming increasingly transparent, along with its signifying operations—go a-collapsing, structuring—poetry?

Nicola Tyson

“Diary Drawing,” 1994
Pencil on paper, 5 1/4” x 8”
Cecilia Vicuña

Purmamarca
La tierra
tiene su rojo
en Purmamarca

Lunar romboidal

Ella rojeando
y yo temblando

La pierna muslar

Ella tumbando
y yo ascendiendo

Su marca inicial.

An impossible attempt at translating Purmamarca:

The soilearth has its red in Purmamarca

Geometric mole

She reddening
and I trembling

The thigh becoming leg

She, tomb throwing
and I ascending

into her mark.

no capital
soil & earth:
the same word.

where are the
geometric words?

borrowing from
Latin or Greek
only signals
a lack.

tumbar: to
throw down
and entomb
at once.
A sexual under
tone.
"Lima es la boca de la tierra
Cusco el ombligo y el lago Titicaca el vientre”

dice

el mito

Purmamarca podría ser el muslo.

Ascendi la montaña
Inscribí en la tierra un rombo de tierra
Hice un pequeño objeto: dos muslos de greda

Años después descubrí en mi muslo izquierdo
un lunar romboidal.

¿Quién inscribe a quién?
¿Nosotros a ella o ella a nos?

Lima o Pachaqamaq, el sitio del antiguo oráculo
que ya no es.

El poema quizás no está en el habla ni en la tierra ni el papel, sino en el cruce y la unión de los tres
en un lugar
que no es.

Pachaqamaq es “la animación de la tierra por el hablar.”
La tierra y el poema hablándose.

“Lima is the mouth of the Earth
Cusco is the navel and lake Titicaca the womb”
says

the myth.

Purmamarca could be the thigh.

I climbed the mountain
I inscribed a rhombus on the earth
I made a small object: two thighs of clay

Years later I discovered a rhombus, a geometric mole
on my thigh.

Who writes on who?
She on us or us in her?

Lima or Pachaqamaq, the site of the ancient oracle
that is no more
the meeting point, the crossroad.

The poem perhaps is not in speech, nor in the earth, nor on paper, but in the crossing and union of the three
in a place
that is not.

Pachaqamaq is “the animation of the Earth by speech”

The earth and the poem in dialogue.
Anne Waldman

Do Comment

Friend Joe Brainard was dying & there was urgency to document his passing which was during an eclipse.

There was a time an eclipse
I hear voices
A veritable cough in the morn
Cough in the moon
A march of his voice in the afternoon
Then night was smaller, he spoke
—what did he say?—
He said “rueful” he said “ruthless”

It goes on, including the dream of having to cook him an egg so he may absorb the energy of the sun. It was tracking loss of breath, his and mine. During the eclipse I could hardly move, body leaden, needing the energy of sun. The next day the news of his death came. Later I asked Steven Taylor to accompany a reading of it with violin. Now we are scoring text and music. There is one point on one note I am chanting “he sees he sees he sees” over and over which sounds like “seizes seizes seizes.” This documents the moment of his death in my own breath, and he enters my body. You know how friends do that when they die? Enter? Documenting his death—as personal ritual—with poetry & music.

Music works in time as writing does. We performed it into space. Now it exists as score.

Documentary is a rite, a proof, a psychological tendency to hold, to capture, to validate. It is the evidence. Never clearly “objective.” What happened, what happens, filtered through these sense perceptions. I taped the wind one night raging down from the mountains. 110 miles per hour. It is the sound of a beast in the Bardo. I needed to do this to finally sleep. Documentary as efficacy. Who pushes the button to capture what sound? Discriminating awareness will record the increments of phenomena & time passing. O holy recording angels.

“I know how to work the machines!”

Some trackings come to mind:
Merce Cunningham dance videos (filmed by Charlie Atlas), documents of particular pieces but designed for video.
Declaration of Inter-Dependency and other credos, manifestos from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Topics: ecology, Rocky Flats updates, Amendment 2 histories.
FBI case files on Allen Ginsberg & Amiri Baraka.
Bernadette Mayer’s installation of “Memory” with photographs & tape of her voice reading the piece.
Various Jackson Mac Low installations.

Currently working on a personal archive & archive of poetics school (Naropa): Manuscripts, correspondence, memorabilia, ephemera...

Currently working on translation/versions with Andrew Schelling of the Therigatha & Therigathī, songs of the Buddhist monks & nuns, Pali Canon 80 B.C., dating back orally to time of the Buddha... Un-earth these ancient voices!

Also acting as advisor to a new film documentary on the Beats out of the Beat Conference at NYU, & Beats & Other Rebel Angels conference at Naropa. I helped scout local Colorado sites, such as Rocky Flats plutonium ex-plant, now in clean-up phase.

Hannah Weiner

UBLIMINAL

get omit name on phone and see sometime sometime written after why not sacrifice comment comment comment skip details skip details skip paragraph skip paragraph ask grandson who heal celestial invitation hard dont drink switch whodunit meet please did you ever have instructions to put on your continue education complete sir office on phone banana peel introduction over every separate see complete paragraph entirely submit agriculture department where felt submit slightly hostile agronomist say you hear the phone speak after you hang up who where master identifies anybody voice silent queer listen answer propriety who listens to whom sacrifice enough now we speak without phone comfort we track each other write walker heard written follow subject in woods tree incline go west daughter countryside join your forgive space written in silence silence oh dont give away secret who anyway signal distress lie interject prevent illness heard across wilderness subliminal other another silent friend walks me away from the trees find path intercultural institution communist born always speak silent to me sister oh underline safe ask hell it that cant come late tend grads almost intrigue get me silent sister tell whats wrong call again did once agree collect conversation still we call over name over the fence restrict signs we call many very selfish woman cannot contact sir ubliminal celestial territory second page very cruel according to tradition we are teachers obey instructure listen care we secure introduce grandson silent understanding sir similar education next in line healer continue line education complete subject interjubi we liberate gathering forefather we anarchists subject please answer me mail secret silence ok ok finally dead 90 please substructure four wild horses racing across the western sister golden aura complete write across the wild plains listen some obedience principle the other child children younger sit still spelling correct hide put me leader up sit still sir confident sir confident among teachers themselves we are adverse who picture ill subtitle we tear page in half hunt bear across the almost abroad abroad absolute integrity absolute integrity hear me speak abroad in my silence my politics scream my politics scream write at last scream holler upstream illustrations in slowly my mind cross street warn against substream put your pencil beware light who style cant prevent street accidents courage inclined

repeat crossover obey obedience obey instinctive listen carefully crossrail scratchable sir central education department subliminal circle with committee subject alteriative her wisdom teachers unlimited number page sequence forbid oh unequal page circular division second page circular column left quick with reference radio who speak and see what is said in silence stay still walk see to hear astral solace black leader hello finder celestial garden fruit fruit obligated to write obligated to write be friend oh kind dont frighten illegal invite owe 20¢ oh ubliminal scramble leadership secret division of silence division curtail steal hide terrestrial secret arguable division original opposition offer yourself to sir secretary agriculture prevent tenement destruction leadership initials secretary historical sir terrestrial education aim leadership under control with it perfect perfection unlease one line silence arguable division of laughable sir correct identity sir territory inclined sir territory inclined sir speaker silent

hello central education society immediate delivery oh boy solid square sensible bob dylan speaking allout courage speak neil sensible sublime director indifference we blue people power with it column left advan oh mother oh sublime understanding regular entropy department oh hint bequit literal figure it out second choice leadership second choice leadership special contentment ultra subliminal sound complete education get grandmother teach me mindubliminal education division ohboy seldom seldom all black prefer hug hero heroic we are teachers together what are we to do century save ourselves teaching required put healer in old hippies revolution get communist worker have you ever thought action completion old songs twentieth century communist century we wilder wild oh present present practical perfect who controls concentration unlimal practice walk ecstasy mountain believe prison term stronger century be brave score century complete grandson grandson has to be repeated subculture oh repeated silent

book 8 7 4 silent teacher clairvoyantly written

Karen Yasinsky

Why, he can't talk to you? Messy headed neat-nick thing. Why you do get A's. Still can't talk to people. Goody pie pig's snout totin' eye, now promise me.

dert Why you Go get ter!
1. Re-creation of an event, person, object requires making choices which eliminate other potential representations. We constantly redefine our encounters to create something pertinent to ourselves. I think of a documentary as having a subject which exists or did at one time. A documentary chooses a strategy to reveal that subject to an audience. I like to think of documentary makers as intelligent as to trust that they are giving their audience a full field with substantial semipermeable boundaries that can expand, contact and regroup with exciting results and enough fact involved to differentiate their story from fiction.

2. The potential for documentary forms is limited only by the boundaries of communication. I don't think it is restricted to film and video. Time in conjunction with images allows for a certain largeness of story. Time is a familiar device to express a documentary's subject since it is most familiar to our experiences in aging. We have time to go through an experience and time afterwards to create a memory and time after that for dialogue and input to put towards further revision. But, a whole lot can go on through forms outside of film and video. I am interested in creating images which in terms of documenting, question any certainty through which the referents shooting out from the image can be defined. I like to suggest nostalgia which photographs offer, but have an image wise enough to not believe in it.

3. Michael Roemer as a documentary film maker because he does a wonderful job of letting the subject seem to reveal itself and not appear manipulated for his choice of representation. Ross McElwee, also a film maker, impresses me in his use of dry humor to reveal his subject as a complex world in itself which cannot separate out the pain and absurdity. Hannah Wilke's photographs of herself through illness are very powerful in that they use the gallery setting to show how much bigger and more important the actual subject is than a picture in a gallery.

4. Now I am interested in collage and old family photographs, mostly images of myself and my mother. In using these photos in my drawings, I can react many times to them in different ways to reveal a relationship. I would like to do some work with video or film exploring my family. The subject I would care to reveal to a potential audience would not be a "portrait of MY family" but the largeness and strangeness of familial relationships.

Susan Wheeler

The Blanching Heart

From thy Bright Eyes he took his fire,  
Which round about, in sport he hurl'd;  
But 'twas from mine he took desire . . .  
—Aphra Behn, "Song. Love Arm'd," 1864

The hero, such as he was, in the classroom,  
in the evening, found the crosstalk taxing.  
He'd come, driving, from fields lit like rivers,  
glittering under autumnal sun.  
The machete mobile clanged;  
the instructor tipped (ho, bland) his spectacles.  

I had not wanted  
to stray  
in discernment.  

Can we see the air? Below, the spotted heads  
in their isles of café au lait and cake—  
the drifted currents, the dust electric,  
sifting down, divisible:  
all of them gathering at the water's edge,  
crying, Sitemups! Sitemups! I'm irie!  

Each sound bite  
exerted  
its siphalonic call.  

The boar sounder swarming the Yugo,  
the hero turned back to the smell that was he:  
a nursed tin in frost on the window sash,  
desire in the eraser of gone.  
Just the swizzlestick had changed the terrain of the ant farm. Oh nearer my god to thee.
The bird had filched
the seed
from the blue-stippled hedge.

Will we not rather, when our freedom's won
stripe the Impala with a fiery lick
and sit out nights in the firmament
beyond the Winkie's Watches sign?
The hero taps the wheel with a pack of Kools.
Half-smashed. The lot of 'em.

He had the figure
to wear
grace.

Now he bats back and f---- the tetherball,
on the tar in front of the old split ranch.
Children's calls rise up from the woods below,
a caterpillar wends toward the hose; a
hoodlum—no, kid, yanking his baggies,
crests the top of the hill.

1. I would ascribe to a dictionary definition—isn't that the point of the
collective assent in dictionaries? I understand it then as the representa-
tion through documents, or representation based on fact.

2. Documentary, therefore, can exist in any form that lends itself to
these modes—in fact, I can't offhand think of a form in which it can't
exist.

3. Maysles Brothers, George Stoney, John Cage, Richard Ognit, Sherrie
Levine, rap samplers and techno DJs such as Moby, Duchamp, E.Wiseman,
Susan Howe, Jackson MacLow, Bill Viola, Bernd and Hilda Becher

4. If film, the topic would be industrial of some sort; if language,
business.

“Grandpa Nada”
"The Mere Sense of Living": Documenting What Is Not Said

I Paint Shame

I make paintings about the difficult and emotionally-charged moments and issues of my life. I have tried to directly confront what I am most ashamed of and render it in a straightforward and particular manner. The explicitness with which I detail painful events disturbs many viewers.

My Soul Is No Zen Garden

Before I began making paintings about my life and concerns I was a devout Modernist. But no amount of zealous loyalty could obscure how bored I was with Abstract Formalist painting. I realized that the intellectual aspirations of Cezanne and Mondrian could never be my own. I suspected that all art was irrational and essentially emotional and that all aesthetic ideals were essentially arbitrary.

The Diatribe

No matter how much history seeks to portray art as a series of stylistic developments and transitions, I believe that the power of art rests solely in the act of the individual, confronting and giving expression to an emotional matrix of human expression. I believe that to be more than a glorified toymaker or slick button-pusher I have to examine the personal motivations that lie behind my creativity and allow them to openly be a part of the work. It is in this spirit that I have set out to portray my emotional, domestic, and imaginative life. Rooted in the later works of Breughel, Titian, Rembrandt and van Gogh, my painting looks forward towards a new incarnation of painting as an actively inclusive and aggressively human form of expression.

The Pudding

"Grandpa Nada" is one of three paintings I have made about my grandfather's suicide. It is to me the most disturbing of the three. The work is not a documentary in the sense of portraying the actual scene or circumstances of my grandfather's death. Instead, it focuses on documenting the silence that surrounded his suicide, and the effect that death/silence has had on my family.

At the top of the picture are the words: "At the heart of the preppie/my world there is a void with a view." At the center of the painting is my grandfather with a still-smoking shotgun in his mouth. He is surrounded by my family with my mother on the left, sitting on the railing of the porch; my father on the right, sitting in a chair; and my brothers, sisters and myself sitting on the floor at their feet.

The words at the top of the painting speak of my upbringing in upper-class WASP society. They touch on the material benefits of that life and also the spiritual emptiness that accompanies it. This void specifically relates to my paternal grandfather's suicide. My father never spoke of it, my mother only mentioned it; the facts are, to this day, obscure. As my father dealt with his father's death, so he dealt with the emotional situa-
Janet Zweig

*Her Recursive Apology, 1993*

paper, 4,386,375 apologies, 2" x 9" x 9"

To make *Her Recursive Apology*, I rented four computers and four dot-matrix printers. I programmed the computers to randomly generate apologies in the smallest possible type on continuous paper. The printers apologized for two weeks, day and night. Whenever a box of paper ran out, the computer displayed the number of times it had apologized. When I ran out of paper completely, the total was 4,386,375 apologies. Because the apologies were randomly chosen by the computer, no two sheets of paper are alike. I arranged the pages in a recursive spiral structure, each stack one sheet larger than the next. As I was carrying the boxes of paper into the gallery where I was going to show the piece, another person was coming out of the door. Brushing past, I found myself saying, “Oops, sorry.”

at left, a detail of one of the pages, actual size
CALL FOR WORK

Special Topic: Hybrid Genres/Mixed Media

In its continued investigation of so-called objective/pure/neutral forms, issue number 3 of Chain will focus on writing and art that does not sit comfortably within traditional genre categories. This issue will attempt to answer the following questions: what is genre? what determines the boundaries of genre? what causes a work to be considered without/ outside of genre? what happens in terms of reader/viewer reception when multiple genres are apparent within one work?

Writing and visual work in black and white will be considered. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want your work returned.

Deadline: December 1, 1995.

Send submissions to:
Chain
c/o Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr
107 14th Street
Buffalo, NY 14213