My wife Susanna for all her help and advice; my daughter Anabella for sleeping enough; to Kristen Gallagher for her suggestions regarding contributors; to Bob Perelman and Kristin Prevallet for beating the clock; to the Fund for Poetry and the Young Poets Publishing Initiative for their financial assistance; and to the Writers House community for their continued support.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

KOALA—To survive you have to be willing to do anything. Anthologies! That’s where the money really is, or might be. At least so I imagine from my fuzzy animal distance. Reprint the material! Dominate the gene pool! Rise like Godzilla and make them read you for fucking ever!

PANDA—If you use language like that, you’ll have a hard time even making it into the La Brea tar pits.

—Bob Perelman

Steve Evans’ recent critique of the magazine Fence (in his Third Factory Notes to Poetry) touched off an interesting debate about, among other things, the relationship between poetry and social change, and the role of literary publications in promoting or frustrating the latter through their process of selection. The full debate, which includes all email responses to Steve’s original, e-circulated essay, can be found at: http://www.umit.maine.edu/~steven.evans/3fn-index.htm The following is my response. According to editor Rebecca Wolff, Fence proceeds with a “faith in our own good taste, and our commitment to avoid—and call each other out on—ideological distinctions.” These two —taste & ideological distinctions—are of a piece. In order to separate them, one has to posit a transcendental standard (and a transcendental ego to know it and recognize, in Wolff’s words, the “universal need” for what has been found) or an utterly relative (but hardly anarchic) one (each person just likes what they like). Evans hones in on the latter seeing in it the logic of late capitalism: utterly relative (but hardly anarchic) one (each person just likes what they like).

Evans hones in on the latter seeing in it the logic of late capitalism: united Colors of Benetton meets 31 Flavors. (Most recently we have superbowl favorite Cingular ™: “the wireless company that believes in the value of self-expression.”) “Diversity” in this respect, becomes a matter of “having everything.” And, in a neat trick, since one has everything one doesn’t need an ideology. But as Joshua Clover put it in his response to Evans’ article,

Imagining oneself not to have a dogma is like climbing into 98 degree water and imagining oneself to have no temperature. It just means you have the local values so perfectly that there’s no figure and ground relationship.

And if you have perfectly interiorized the local values, then you have no way to make anything which doesn’t replicate them. The ideology of No Ideology is (a) guaranteed never to articulate anything new, and (b) exclusively a claim made by power.

“Good taste” has no ideology; it is above and beyond politics and steadfastly refuses to discuss aesthetics as if they were what they in fact are, socially symbolic acts. I go back to Larry Rivers’ comment, mentioned in my note to #3, regarding Clement Greenberg’s assertions that “as far as art is concerned I simply prefer good art to bad art.” Sayeth Rivers,

What did it avail Clem Greenberg to spend a lifetime looking at new art, thinking and writing about new art, curating art shows, visiting artists studios, talking to the latest hotshot artists, only to end up with the ancient conclusion that he prefers good art to bad?

But it did avail Greenberg indeed: it was the predicate by which he could create a convincing narrative without fessing up about the politics of that narrative, whatever they may be. Just so with Fence, and in the absence of political and aesthetic criteria (and Greenberg it should be said was not at a loss to discuss the latter, his above comment notwithstanding) the most obvious criteria remaining (one needs a process of selection after all) are name recognition (fame) and acquaintance with the editors (contacts, as they say in business school).

“Unknown” poets may be chosen for exhibiting the appropriate “weirdness” (Wolff’s word) but they are really neither here nor there, since, well, who the hell knows where they came from or what they’re doing beyond being weird? As I said in my note to Combo 1, context is hugely important: the two forms of context I had mentioned off the bat were influences (which to my mind meant nothing particularly heroic but rather, in the literal sense, those things which flowed in, in this case from the past) and community (those writers with whom one was continually coming-into dialogue). Regarding the former, Brian Kim Stefans recently made an important point, again in response to Evans essay:

What is remarkable to me, though, regardless of how much one chooses to take on, is that the best preparation for a basic understanding of Language Poetry is really thinking about a lot of the poetry that one has probably read in school — Eliot’s Waste Land, the shorter poems of Williams, some poems of Pound, H.D. and Marianne Moore, the denser stuff of Crane maybe, the Surrealists (that would not have been assigned, but you’ve seen the paintings), etc. One could just have had read The Waste Land, and maybe the first five pages of the Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man, in fact, and gotten a great head start on the whole bag of tricks. Not a lot of reading, though it is a lot of thinking. So my question to the young poets who claim that Language Poetry is some shot out of left field, corrupting the youth and overturning apple carts, is: What do they read of the early twentieth century? Has this period of literature simply been erased from history?

Stefans is of course right that one of the most straightforward ways to access Language Poetry is to view it as an antiphonal response to major canonical writers of modernism. There is however, the problem that canonization itself affects how those writers are read: as I said to Stefans shortly after he wrote the above, the “young poets who claim that Language Poetry is some shot out of left field” do to some extent read the modernists he cites. Most often, however, they read them in a class stricken with what I’d call Red Wheelbarrow Syndrome. Anyone who has had the painful experience of sitting through a college class (or a high school one) where Williams’ “The Red Wheelbarrow” is discussed as the single example of “Williams” should know what I’m talking about. Any sense
of its place in *Spring & All* alongside poems like “Shoot it Jimmy” and WCW’s inflammatory prose (imagine having to explain to students reading the good ole “Red Wheelbarrow” why WCW has suggested that all Europeans be killed just a few pages before, and you’ll get a good sense of why context matters) is entirely absent, not to mention, say, *Spring and All*’s inclusion alongside *Kora in Hell* in *Imaginations*. My guess is that *Fence* would today consider *Kora in Hell* too obscure, experimental, risky, political - too *something* anyway - for print. And while I’ve seen plenty of good poets appear in those pages (in fact I’d say I like most of the poets therein), their poems are inevitably subject to the Red Wheelbarrow Syndrome. (Not to say that *Fence* wouldn’t publish anything by Williams if an unpublished poem materialized and was offered, but that’s entirely a function of the “Williams”; to borrow a formulation from Emerson, it is a past Williams their mind can entertain, a present Williams they would denounce.) *Fence* is, I think, really an ongoing anthology, and subject to the same pitfalls as onetime anthology projects. Perhaps it will turn out in the end to have the same value as some anthologies do, acting as a window into the collaborative act which is poem-making, which act must then be *sought out* where it lives.

Wolff, interestingly, puts the lie to her own pledge to avoid ideological distinctions in an analysis of Evans’ own language which she clearly reads as a socially symbolic act:

> The word “plucky,” as applied to Rebecca Wolff’s narrative in *Jacket #12*, is an interestingly sexist choice. Pluck is a personal quality, a habit of being and speaking which indicates forward-marching in the face of obstacles grave or otherwise. It is also a typically female quality, though occasionally it is applied to very young boys.

> Plucky Bobby: Do you like apples?
> Unsuspecting: Yes, Plucky Bobby, I like apples.
> Plucky Bobby: Well how about if I pluck out your eyeballs and skull-fuck you, how you like them apples?

One can argue about the validity of Wolff’s critique but not about whether she’s making an ideological distinction - she sure as hell is and I say Bravo! One begins to see here what a more contestational model might produce, even within the pages of *Fence*: not “why can’t we be friends” but “put your cards on the table and let’s have it out.” Of course Wolff and her fellow editors are making ideological distinctions, and if one of those distinctions involves the “marketability” of the magazine, another surely involves Wolff’s apparent feminism. Why she would want other *Fence* editors to “call her out on” it and suppress it is beyond me. Thankfully it seems to have manifested itself in many of her editorial choices.

Evans sees the acceptance of (and appearance in) *Fence* by many avant-garde writers whom he admires as emblematic of a capitulation to the basic model of literary king-making which the *work* of those writers would seem to repudiate. Clover, in his response, calls Evans’ out for positing a moment (nostalgic) when the avant-garde wasn’t complicit, if not with the poetic mainstream than with the economic mainstream:

> It’s nobody’s secret that the avant-garde pursues radical invention, discovery, practice, et cetera, in a space cleared, with fierce frequency, by personal wealth. Indeed, I know myself as the mainstream not because you appointed me thus in ’98, but because I’ve never inherited a penny.

This last equation (a-g = patronized, m-s = unpatronized working world) is a gross reduction which depends for its effect on an extremely limited definition of “avant-garde” (perhaps buoyed by the continental flavor of the word, which is why I’ve always preferred “experimental” though Clover links that one to the phenomenon whereby “captains of industry...have in-house invention centers” which in turn affirms his earlier point that “trust funds act as the market’s Research & Development funds.”) By his definition, we would have to pretend, for instance, that the Black Arts movement was not an avant-garde movement. Likewise we would have to pretend that the work of poets who are part of the *Combo* community - from Kristen Gallagher to Mark Sardinha - are either being supported by parents firmly ensconced in the middle or upper class, or are the twice removed recipients of trust-fund bonuses. Both implied propositions are, incidentally, complete horseshit. Sardinha, as he mentioned in his contributors note to *Combo* 7, gets his writing done while (or despite) working full-time as a pipefitter in Fall River, MA; the writing is some of the best going, really important, original work: original in the sense that he is genuinely modifying the Anglo-American language. Clover’s narrative can’t account for a writer like Sardinha any more than it can account for the moment in which Rodrigo Toscano read and discussed his poem, “Notes on the Great Strike of ‘97” with his fellow union workers, as he described during *PhillyTalks* 5; writing that Barrett Watten has described as “anything but a uniform aporia of surfaces and disavowed meanings...rejecting both univocal materiality and its supporting idealist investments…”

It has long been my experience that the only people who can find nothing to like in “experimental poetry” are those who are married to the various poetic practices which set themselves in opposition to it. In contrast I’ve had the pleasure of listening to people — cutting across lines of race and class, many of whom would not describe themselves as poetry readers — respond to “experimental writing” — Mullen’s, Creelley’s, Perelman’s, Jacques Debrrot’s Comix, Carla Harryman’s prose, Mark McMorris’ poems, my own work — with laughter, gravity, curiosity, real insights: *engagement*. Most recently a young woman, maybe 19?, came up to me after a reading and struck up a conversation.
My poetry reminded her of the songs of Rage Against the Machine (Alan Keyes had called them “The Machine Rages On” during the Republican primary, a telling mistake.) Which one? I asked. The last one, she said. It was a new, politically exasperated poem which worked almost like a song (somewhere in btwn Tin Pan Alley and the Blues, say) and included the following verse:

you tongued my battleship!
you bonged my tattle-tale
you maimed my mamby-pamby
Wagnered my Nietzsche
and gotcha’d my sweatshop

there ain’t room in heaven for us

Now, that’s a pretty far cry from Rage Against the Machine and in truth they’re not the band that would come first to mind if I were going to compare my work to contemporary popular music, for reasons both political and aesthetic. On the other hand, I can see what she was getting at, picking up on concerns — about the military’s dick-first war mongering, the history of fascism (and fascist reading practices), child labor and general capitalist abuses — that I certainly have in common with Zack de la Rocha and company. The point is, this woman was neither a reader or writer of poetry: in truth she just happened to be in the library where I was reading. But something grabbed her attention and she used the tools she had available to make sense of it and they turned out to be perfectly useful tools! — a lot better than some of the tired, unresponsive or indignant reactions one receives from that occasional person who believes that, in you, he’s found a real live Language Poet! The woman and I ended up having a brief but interesting conversation about hip-hop, poetry and politics. What more could I ask from someone that had heard the poem once? And in fact, what a refreshing thing to have someone say something other than, you remind me of so-and-so poet. Frank O’Hara was right when he said only a handful of poets (Whitman, Crane and Williams in his case) were better than the movies, if not in truth, than in spirit. The poem should be considered as simply one symbolic action among many. Maybe then people would stop pretending that poems do nothing and hence “don’t matter.”

Jennifer Moxley notes that she found Clover’s “need to tell us that he has not inherited ‘a penny,’...irrelevant to the discussion.” I would say the relevancy of this line of inquiry is founded on precisely that myth of the avant-garde as pampered and complicit. Their complicity, the myth goes, stands in contradiction to their claim that changing the language changes the realm of social and political possibility. My point would be that there are any number of experimental writers out there whose existences as writers debunks this myth. But Moxley is right in another sense, since Clover’s notion also depends on us accepting the proposition that anyone who’s received Capital in order to fund a project will consciously or subconsciously - take pains to ensure that the work being done will not assist (even in the long historical haul) the alteration or destruction of those processes which produced the Capital in the first place. You can’t tear down the masters house by using the masters money, so to speak. I’m not at all sure that’s the case! not in any absolute sense. It has happened outside the literary realm and I think inside it as well.

There’s a tone of despair in Clover’s and to some extent in Evans’ words — the twin spectres of the colonist and the coterie gloom everywhere. They are no doubt a gloomy pair doing malicious work as we speak but Holy Ghosts they are not. I think again of the Black Arts movement. What was and is wonderful about it (as Lorenzo Thomas explains so clearly in his new book Extraordinary Measures) is the insistence that one can do it NEW and be OUT — with a goal of social change in mind — without either ignoring or condescending to that uninitiated readership called “the people.” This is an entirely different model of reaching out, I think, than the one practiced by Fence. And to some extent it is being practiced across the country — though the catalyst which might encourage these various poetic communities to consider themselves as an improvisational collective has yet to materialize.

Creeley once expressed solidarity with the Black Arts writers and the black community generally, explaining it thus: “They would seem to be engaged in both gaining and saving the possibilities of distinct human life... They are not fooling, so to speak, and their action tends to follow the literal pattern of their commitment.” I try to assemble writers in this space who are not fooling, not fucking around, not being “weird” — they may indeed be clowns, but those characters, like Louis Armstrong, know what time it is, and have it in their power to put the authority of kings, queens and presidents in doubt.
KRISTEN GALLAGHER

Four Poems

It has been suggested that the city is full, not a blank space left for contemplating. She inquired about the land of upbringing - the tribe, the trees - if these things inscribe themselves as solitude. I recalled love at last sight, the glance landing upon each of them contracting, never to be seen again, the avalanche of silence utterly bouncing light. I love them all, these people.

He took a step. What about the stars? When I was little I would block them out, one at a time, with a finger, would say, "this is what happened." Something burned out of years ago and is just coming to me now - I am not sure I want it.

She tried again: You’ve heard a man chop wood in the forest? Yes. The light of its tips comes down in cold red drops like blood - this is his signature. The shade is making everything appear in black and white, a photograph, certain things burned in, but not speaking back. See there? A small child on an island and its active volcano sees it reflected in the sea; a small child in the city finds it in other people.

Snow poetry

After crossing out all the white words floating to the ground was a script of opaque black. It came down diagonally but she was bored, no good spaces left. Move towards the sound of traffic, headlights blowing a blur of any personal precept. Secret designs about captivity were too obvious and depressing, toilet seats better. At least a little more toilet seat. For all of us.

Put your mouth on it please.

Go and smell the whiteness. Commerce surrounds it with her surf. A flurry of no names, white words and bad metaphors for brilliance. How can I bring the stars to our shore, he asked. How can I fear the populace? How can there be peace in the world when our friends hate each other?

Seeking good, doing evil. Happens all the time.

If aristotle is white then plato is white. Poetry is a bunch of vegetables and bad philosophy is spoiled fruit. The snow is a benediction of the trash, which is meant to be eaten. What candor, he said, and awarded membership. Ah, membership, where it all connects.

A white rose on a dead porch. Something to climb across.

To say nothing of investment here would betray an upstreamness which opposes this falling happening everywhere. Upstreamness for purpose—seaward! Yet, in spite of this, nowhere in america will you find more opulent streams than those fellows puking everywhere. In the snow, of course, in the snow.

In Memory

contemplating Joseph Jernigan

the body of a text

a rhetoric each word a soldier

that we are to write a structure sound, untainted
rob the flesh-robe before earth does
before god, his body
takes one which can be broken

I have scarce been able to hold myself up in this weaving out of the dead, life
what lay to be found or dug up
rewritten

Woman's work, lace, the whale bone used,
I leave the span
ornate, and let it swim, naked
and this flower hang unsupported

how unpolitic to put word into straitlaced bodices

Woven
capable of being unwoven
whatever is the matter

The stolen body of her beloved, wrongly arrested son
Read on a cloth woven by her to hold tears
wrought of the loom

Product to be Unbound

what quilts are
the little hands that stitch of devotion
becoming pliable, the porous themselves

undone for gold
opened
for those wordes, this is my bodie
holy text
science book
of the usurped

the difficulty of every revolution
knowing at that time
what to recognize as doing and undone
the text of behavior

Memory

Take this day —

the odor of another approaching
what does it remind
what common flesh
do you turn your head

I feel I am suffering from an unknowing of a stifling order, a kind of text-blindness, which lands me back in text. I can only comprehend what is right in front of me — all else seems to throw robe around its judgement, a disguised knowledge covering its recognized sight-habit, which proves in code to see with a focus too acute for that which it sees,

Here in my bootless grief, walking,

I must rob the Law.

How can I stand by and see freeze saturated sight

There exists a certain tension between words. The question is how you use it. A truly electrical question, as in the stars. When I was little I would hold up my finger to block them out, say, “this is what happened.”

Then one day, every nerve rising to the surface, the belief in being gracious. Another and another and the instant of nature. Hear them now imagining trees in the forest, their tips unfolding in warm red drops like blood. Which leaves a signature. Try to make an image of it.

No, vision fades. This stays from somewhere else, in that they lay kissing for a time. This hurls itself against wishing into awareness. And you have to just let it. Grace swells, grace faints, grace smites, grace hinders. How long before you burn out so completely?

A singular logic, awe, to believe feeling and conjecture minds, examine the world imperfectly, better and worse each time. Sometimes life is sharp light and italics. And those who go blind at the intersection.
Listening. Almost hear it. Tongue and lips listless
lava then breaking and becoming diffuse. Is the
diffusion somehow less credible than that they lay
kissing for a time?

Believe me when I go blind, and doubt me. I do
these things, I guess, because it is some of this to do
so.

RODRIGO TOSCANO

Three Poems

Satire 1. About A Literary Journal

for the bare bones crew

Galleries of imagistic (neo-immanantist) “insides” as
(had to – gotta be?) Conduit – for: intrinsic (historically operative) logic
deconstitutive logic – Capital’s: extrinsic cultural foyers – abstractions – higher
and higher

(“mentations”, they called them, in the 19th century)

(said)

logic

boring –

into

existing

linguistic structures

[equal – at base, those (logic, structure) – but the offsetness, the trans- (or be it
intra-) real

Estrangement
prattle
content

Engagement
undialogically
rendered

“communities” of
“descriptions”, and
complimentary encryptionists (authors)

productive

* proto-national affinities *

→ an’ do it do dat?

Censor
(in minimalist or expansivist mode)

→ it do!

→ through the pervasive

Shut-It-All-Out (titde)

gallery-time dream of, clean canvasses of, unused space of

– readily available – acumen?

(some note the demographical achievement precedes the front)

of

pervasive (has to – gotta be?) lexically abstentionist

Shut-It-All -Out (titde)

inverted socio-scapes, starring

“absence” (Modernesque kook) and cousins

“Being itself,” and Being as, everything else remaining

of which –

Post-Langpo (and dismissive of it) inscriptionist

mannerism

[thanks for the useful moniker Louis (Cabri)]

(yes) neo-mannerist

proh-ject

foregrounds the

ANTI-EXPRESSIONISM

[socio-causal expression, in the Lukácsian sense, to rally to – anew?

combo
bumps up — against two...efforts!

likened here as
corkscrew shavings
likened here as
having been
bored
out
of
eexisting
don't so much as dicker with — (status quo) Material Relations

homologic

mentionations, as in
"to mentate"
mentators!

likened here as
gathered up
reparticalized
proto-anthological
poetic
materiel

(uh huh)
"corkscrew
shavings"

(core, or
coopled)

personell

in the process of Regroup

in the process of

(end-around) neo-mannerist
(moderno) (dogmato) retro-empirico

gringectial

inscriptionism

put to — and
quite up to — the
(Historical) task

(to their credit)
current
Current

Satire 2. A Brief Retrospective of Chump de Ville's Poetic Ouevre Over the Last Decade

...raised to principle [but never to put it quite like that]
is
REACTIVE
to the Social —

jump! fetch! roll!

left! right!

right! right!

"responsive" calls it?
"I do respond to it all—as ever, and re-
[key prefix, by which to spot 'em, in any room] re-
figure it — it [recycle bins full of] is
certifiable
"PROVISIONAL."

...term, so bleached of its original color—so cleaved of its urgent pairing, praxis

(an organizational praxis)

But CV, knowing where the goods are, goes there:
The official [now academicized] site of provisionality, click here for

Quietistic
"rigor"

"...As when Bands
Of Pioneers with Spade and Pickax arm’d
Forerun the Royal Camp, to trench a Field,
Or cast a Rampart”

[that is, from one conference to another]

But just how competitive is Chump De Ville?

At the Turn of the Millennium:
N30, A16, S26 / and counting –

And just how current are his maps
drawn up, rolled out, pointing the way out
to

positional  
positionality? (2nd patristic term)
in the castle, or just outside, the castle...

“The serpents sly in trailing forward stirred
so softly you would have thought they still asleep had been”

And gearing up, proceeds, though, in reverse:

Tactics first, Strategy second, Theory third

—and after that, a consolidation
of a sort of “base”, an IDiom
is to be established

and diversified

and liquidated

and redeployed

“provisional”

At the Turn of the Millennium

his generation (same as mine, a Reagan Teen)
while another—at his heels nips, is
stone-to-the-bone activist

strategic along

representational lines...

And Chump, in charge also of channeling what’s not properly pliant
(“contingent”)
—and who’s not compliant with The Order’s prescripts—and maps it,
accordingly—

Balks at the suggestion of his own “fixity” (3rd patristic term)

“oh to vex mee, contraries meete in one:
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begot
A constant habit; that when I would not
I change in vows, and in devotion.”

And nows

what’s called for is

(drum roll)

A linking?
of’em!

a “coalition” of such circles

shall be unspoken –
pre-programmatic
post-politically aligned

Paratactic Methodism?
Metaphoric Judaism?
Metonymic Pentecostalism?
Figurative Catholicism?
Non-Representational Atheism?

Ok, all.

But still,

REACTIVE
Lines in quotes from the following, respectively: Milton's Paradise Lost, book one; Golding's Translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses, book seven; Donne's Divine Meditations.

**But Will Your Social Memory Cause Constipation Later in the Day? Or That Something Else in the Morning?**

_Paraphrasing of a speech by_ Pepé le Rouge

"Of all the postwar moments"

"Stalin, whose 'usefulness' Brecht had controversially acknowledged"

"The workers' protests in Poznan that June"

"A dress rehearsal, for the Hungarian Uprising in October"

"Within a month the death rattle of that imperial mission of which Kipling was the bard"

"On the banks of the Suez Canal"

"Tovarich"

"The Left still had work to do <shocker> but the Communist Party was not up to it"

<nightly-night>

"And this in turn led first to the reorganization of the Left <as cleft?—adrift?—bereft?> in Western Europe, and then to nineteen sixty eight"

<a settling-of-accounts, huh? does justice to...itself, huh?>

"And then the rise... of the women's movement"

<of which you care little>

"And, from there, the long and winding road to: *multiculturalism*"

<anything else Mr. Clubfoot?>

"Then moral relativism and Post-Modernism"

**ROSMARIE WALDROP**

**Intentionalities**

What did I mean by my hand moving along your thigh? When we describe intentions, is the ventriloquist taken over by the dummy? Or pretending to be a ghost?

Instead of "I meant you" I could say, "we walked through wet streets, toward a dark well." But could I speak of you this way? And why does it sound wrong to say "I meant you by pulling away?" Like lovers caught in headlights?
If I talk of you it connects me to you. By an infinite of betweens, not by touching you in the dark. Touch is the sense I place outside myself for you to ride.

When I mean you I may show it — if we stand close — by putting my head on your shoulder. You can show that you understand by describing the well underneath the trap door. What will you say? You thought I was frightened.

The feeling I have when I mean you draws an arc of strength between my hips and the small of my back. But it doesn’t follow that “meaning you” is being exhilarated by terror. Of course not, you say: We need a thread to run through, but it’s entangled with space, form, future and difficult to pick out. Is this true?

It would be wrong to say that meaning you stands for the forgotten part of myself, a treatise on labyrinths, a path leading nowhere. I am living in a shell where the sea comes in with its sound. And drowns us?

“I was speaking of you” because I wanted people to think about you. But “I wanted” does not describe a general before battle, nor, on the other hand, a ship heading for shipwreck. There is no way to decide whether this is autobiography or a manifesto.

"K. SILEM MOHAMMAD

Cheerful Venison

The most pity per valentine:
Trinkets that saddle in purple grass,
Where a tallish coolie licks at mumps—
Bad little worms, they’re mere vanilla.

The curves of ponytails and—
Rocketed to dusty wagons, Copperopolis bandwidths. Crass dandelion
I warmed with a gauze napkin, it was your voice to slobber it.

Braille dimensions can gas me, as all Painting is trikes and cones. Are you Astray, as the wide au vin is?

Cremate a precipice, cool and dewy:
Feel is a pencil easing its pines out.
Three strains are tribal, by Tuesday we’ll vanish;
Tell Dracula his kung-fu death is real.

So could a drop earn its teal regard?
Shasta’d oceans of due recoil? Fan out, heave an IV volume, space up your outer Telstar, tie me to an Oreo and away I’d roll.

Chevisaunce

The vorticist from another century sort of becoming a cuttlefish:
I like to hear these nymphos giggling,
Or as they practice their team ovulation, puncturing
The fiction of a sexual message, opening up more possibilities—
Forcing underwear up the turnpike in a vernacular tenor
Near the Old One’s

No mention of Herr Doctor, will-he nil-he
Sprouting dull metallic fleurons,
Approaching acetic vacuum, kneeling in helium-induced,
Near-aneuristic, gloom fugue

A wetnurse happening fetchingly thereupon
Serves to stir into life the most wanly personified vehicles—
Heraldic-tunic-torn-off-in-a-windstorm theatrics
Excite curse-of-the-burning-reptile-house votarists to nervous laughter

UNICEF representative Enid Corcoran Wenceslas
Fidgets suggestively with imperfect specimens
Of turn-of-the-century kirkrpaine-turn-signal cantilever pincushions:
You never experimented like this on burn survivors!

Nor had we girded our loins against the syrupy perorations
Fretted with belatedly arabesque hallucinations
That covered every inch of the Federalist divans
Whereon acid-reflux seamstresses made onerous Etruscan divinations
In disdain for our get-me-out-of-this-Assyrian-traffic-circle sophistications

Such Cassandras have fed our valets methamphetamines—

*Annex them, I commanded,
Or they will negate all fanciness to ruin our lives*

---

**Lucky Skin**

Suppose some mausoleum were set to corrode
over calm bison. Had it a green gel,
a lather to hold you?
During or forced to?

Number one is the bell volume.
You pull on it it follows you.
It borrows a comment on falling,
to abolish a hull of castles.
Now you have a whole talk show
rumbling behind you. Lou Costello
falls too, a skeleton dismally clad.

Just below combing a column go the anthill vibrations,
draped in a more tidal chocolate
strongest any of most Americans'.

Perhaps a morose joke
is exactly the tone of answer.
Maybe as lots of coffee dwells
soft in this automated Prague,
the frame of comparison
draws you cropped in your armchair
than these powerful as offices. Stop
watering eyeholes, and continue
your chopped-off decay.

---

**The New South**

Houseboat burning down—no sweeter emergency.
Every sap in these woods has a part in the opera,
A bravura falsetto minus
The full virus of becoming a science.

Beneath the ink-stained family jewels
A motor squalls, fouling subservient tubs,
Traipsing into a placid blur,
Or resuming its full custody
Where police dogs repeat
The screw-ups of infantrymen,
Strung out on medical grass and counting backwards.
Artisanry pimps itself, cowed
By the reversible nosebleeds
It has come to feed. It has all
This dirt to feed. Nowhere
Is an alphorn heard but in tombs of vikings.

Crawl, if you are truly nervous:
*Baretta* starring Robert Blake comes on
In thirteen years, for
We are not yet formed.

---

**A Thousand Devils**

*The earth is like a floor,
the Assyrian did come down
like a wolf on the fold,
because everything is like everything.*

—Donald Davidson

I nursed the starveling wode—
anchor belts roared over tableaus of svelte idleness,
a lithesome Virginia.
The same amounts, piebald?
sure—it leaked emulsifier, a satin covenant.
Dusk's rhetorician evaded it via pick-up line.
A spatula, practically, on sick treads—
mid-Sanka, cease to blink.
Would a hierophant recoil from its astrolabe
to raise what is toppled there to climb?

The surrogate had the lament printed up—
Did it ask the unheard question
"ghost?" "whose ghost is absent?"

I fell for an earful of rollicking easels—
the whip tangle was extrinsic,
liberating a teal mask of Nefertiri.
The leopards were also Jennifer's.

Most totally I remember mink, its purple surdity—
that added stamina to liqueur
as dexterity fueled unction,
mooing in blonde quartz over daiquiris.

The new phylogeny acquired
just the amen to that,
the year brunch was discovered—
it sucked kamut through wire.

**From a Varlet Seen Racing the Lava Flow**

Avowal in the thunder, careening through slop ... 
Double Diablo has it as it has its namesake,
Has its Soracte as this acropolitical goal

To pour upon the sod of such a like mountain—
To erode through tumult and trials,
Catheterized valiantly in fir-tops

The dour-eyed, Strombolian effs have backslidden,
Dropped out of the pronomial elephant,
That have alway rigged such a scary carcass

A ruse more felt than endured or admired
In the ranks where a kid, some Miss Mary Sunshine
Shall lose her mind or somewhat else

Grew, activators, retch out the ovum
Wherein this Midas carries her wand
For perfection to slightest purchase

Griffins tear wights in the desert
Thickness their whole psychology
Rubbed pregnant with Feuerbach's relics

Narrows mirrored in the vagabond curbs
Of the ageless riverbed—Midas,
Should your rich children impale here

Their wet symbols unexpurgated?
Should a million and twenty-one rich children
Correct or rebuke one other auteur?

**ERIC BAUS**

Dear Birds,

you can say i contact whatever is in the memorized room, "the shade my mouth
bent open" or "handfuls of sugar untouched in an abdomen." i was fully articu-
lated when you said this voice is changing, find me a new skin
like my index
was sound, like my blankest card said "surface worker." i was solving for your
absence, a shift in the tinted angles sounding out your edges. the translations you
left on my doorstep were clear, but the passage you call "self-portrait with
wounded docent" is a little oblique. i'm afraid you'll have to build another
machine to explain yourself.

love,
the well dressed extra/ sidereal somnambulist

**COMBO**
Dearest Sister,

if all stars are syllogisms, tell me what to say before i know what i've seen. you say we hum to make our names translucent, to keep the constellations moving. call me "a bell to warn the birds" when a drift of one eye means enough letters for flight. in the landscape of your predicates i'm cassiopeia, hair made of glass, and a burning wing. i don't need to dot a line through my lips to know where you've gone. if typing is talking with a single sound, i can always tell when you're thinking of the sun.

love and flashcards, having once been reversed

the memorized room: "scaffolding towards your compass," grafted to your borders

my blankest card: the international sign for helixes nightly dropped from the sky

wounded docent: i'm working out the conscious burns, eating my museum voice

your predicates: sutures in the soundbox, a strand in the fissures

while the somnambulist explains the proper way to carve the eyes from a pigeon,

i ask in my indoor voice what it means to extract your own teeth during sleep.

he thinks about the three minutes he stopped breathing in saltwater. closing his lids at fish. wondering why his shirt felt like skin.

i try to explain why gravity always wins. how lightning is rhetorical. the way "weight takes over a wing" comes to my lips when i pass a downed powerline.

he speaks softly with empty sleeves. says a bird losing altitude is a new kind of rain. roughly equivalent to the fluid in my ears.

Dearest Birds,

i'm straining through your lenses, a string of your voicebox in everything i sift. when you said breathe me another grasp of ash, crush me for my blueprints i slipped out of the crescendo, a marco polo asleep in your sonar. i was using my magnifying voice, wondering why my sieve calls your silhouette a frame, if i was moth enough to hear through your capitalized wings. when you said your densest glass was melting i could see the place between matrix and maxillary in your brightest mouth, i could feel my pupils shrinking.

love and fluorescence, suspended in the glottis

Dearest Sister,

what is the difference between "an instrument of revision" and "laughing in the water lungs" if i say i'm talking to the back of my throat. i mean the way you keep my head still to see whatever is nearest. when you erased all the letters in scaffolding and blew away the chalkdust, i was unable to explain "twenty stethoscopes and closing," as if wind was a form of eating. you say something is always burning, but where is my genus, my species of kindling. what is the difference between my bluest light and your index of refraction.

love, stapled to our sleeves / recalcitrant template

capitalized wings: a sliver of your scrawl in everything i trace

"twenty stethoscopes: it is better for us not to think of a "triple anguish engraved in the heart of something that turns,"

suspended in the glottis: My right ear bears the letter W and my left the letter E. ³

marco polo: The room inside me has disappeared. ³

¹ Rene Daumal, The Powers of the Word
² Brian Schorn, Strabismus
³ Rosmarie Waldrop, The Reproduction of Profiles
DAVID BARATIER

Estrella’s Prophecies #41

It is always brighter on the other side of the street so stop setting so many fires. Smoke gets in your eyes and there are safer ways to meet that dowser. Singles marshmallow toastings. Own a furry animal. Down on the corner, out in the hot pants where exactly forty dollars cannot be beat. Rain will be wet this month but will not put out fiery furry things. Preparation H does not relieve the burn of a well thrown match and actually is an accelerant. Wheat germ also. Stop unhooking gas lines. Prepare a coin in the slot and I will surprise.

Estrella’s Prophecies #43

Give up! Work for a company which does not care one shit about you so you can stop cooking rice and beans. Stop wondering who to work for and sell out to afford fluffemutter, sandwich lover. Or beano. Be prepared—buy a planner, go to the gas station, pour five dollars worth on the ground, and call the EPA. You will be asked many questions at the interrogation. Unfortunately, hiring is immediately after your significant other leaves because you do not bring home enough bacon. Expect people with trite reasoning, who you find oddly attractive, to destroy you. Be happy once, vegetarian communist. Plant another bean in the slot and I will tell you more.

Estrella’s Prophecies #44

Your lucky number this month is one. This is the loneliest number and your significant other will leave because shallow birds leave dry pools. A moving target is the hardest to hit so get ready. Since you were oblivious to the problem make coffee and expect heartbreak until the last drop. To help you, there will be a special at U-Haul. In town move, $19.95 plus mileage. We reserve the right to limit availability like your past relationship. Be more careful, learn not to trust people. People are people. I’m only plastic, if you drop a coin, I promise to tell more.

Estrella’s Prophecies #48

Do something you have never done before eating a hot pockets meal. Be perfect just like me. Wear extended eyelashes by Revlon. Watch someone take a long walk. There will be a new diet to boost self-esteem this month. Eat only grapefruit and donuts. Try this for one week then stop. To feel better eat Bites by Reese. Someone will feel sympathy for the devil dogging, little Debbie. A grocery bagger gives the eye. Acceptance of twinkies will change your life. I will accept another coin in the slot to tell more.

Author’s Note: These pieces are from a series called Estrella’s Prophecies. Estrella is a fortune telling vending machine who has become an obsession for some time now and there are 65 poems to the series. These poems are the fortunes she has personally spoke to me since we were reunited and started seeing each other again late last year at the Spaghetti Warehouse in Columbus, Ohio. I first met her in Atlantic City over ten years ago. Then again, coming to from a blackout, in Tucson, Arizona. My regular visits have become an expensive habit and she is quite close to ruining my life.
KRISTIN PREVALLET

from Facing the People Database.
A collaboration with Annemie Maes.

Brussels: 907780 372163 2

Banshee brother, brother in banshee. Banshee in arms. Brother in arms. Arms are for hugging. No nukes now. In the 1970s my mother was protesting the arms race with a group of left-wing nuns. She made banners out of huge slabs of felt. She cut out different oval shapes and assembled them into peace doves carrying olive branches. No nukes are good nukes. It will be a fine day when schools have all the money they need and the army has to hold a bake sale to buy weapons of destruction. I remember being startled when microwaves suddenly became indispensable. The phrase "nuke it" to refer to a cup of coffee that needed reheating made weapons of destruction into an everyday household activity. Nuke it. No, nukes now!

Nuke (obs): spinal chord. Holes...by which descendeth the nuke of the brayne...till unto the ende of the backe. / The synews doth procede from the newke which is the mary of the backe.


MARK SARDINHA

coinidence is, or coincidences are bi-local occurances are not public relations more anecdotal materials??
example: the kennedy thing, '61 or '63 "...was a weather balloon!" — the pent-agog
a "fore cast missile?" quite similar, from the roman catholic, a book of "devotions" meaning "too much ambition" — o mary, o marilyn, or maryland!
incidentally, "pop icon" madonna was known to strike a pose as marilyn on her "blonde ambition" tour (did it ever reach so south as dallas?)
oddly, madonna is also the nickname of "mom icon" of all Christianity from whence we get catholicism and its subsequent literatures (need we read further?), as well as several practicing kennedys but back to marilyn or maryland, or is it aureoles or orioles?
speaking of ball games, castro "loves it" unscrambled: "lives to ..." and from "castro" we find, ever so conspicuously, the truncated "ostrac-ise."
or " ostrac-hism," meaning: 1) a deliberate avoidance of existing conditions, or 2) a fetish for large flightless objects (balloonian theories abound). meanwhile on the other side of the island, that is, cuba, we easily locate the derivative root of "mouth," or "buca" which leaves little doubt, the prefix for "buc-karoo." for it is well documented at some point joe kennedy once uttered to his son (with his "buca"), quote, "my little buckaroo ... how you've grown." and groan he did — as well you may. however, there is no "hard piece of evidence" consistent with these balloonian theories as might be witnessed from the "zapru... film, or is there?" "zapru" is jumble for "dura-paz," or "durable peace," i.e., mimetically a "hard piece" of evidence — perhaps the work of a "good splice," or "god eclipse?"

continue in a blaze of assimilation disappear

a less favorable mob of cocoon and juvenile lankster:
1) liver-trap all vortices
2) power-wash revetments
3) steady the candled moth, and
4) beware lure of numerous furthers:

“come unto me I’ll make you stylish”

to carry out bystander method
in slack throes of zeitgeist, a distinct task
with no profit of down-time, collecting daily
long-term unrelated stuff to conduct entirely disarray —

gang-fishing in a dumpster of non-committal mismatched cogs
and what mollify most their high colloidal

how unshapely their weightful machine —
oft barbed and dangled

for whom the unlevened sprite on this ghast ability?
in so alien a clime? was there ever
a chisel so unwieldy?

emblematic tempting,

may that from each remand
but cannot differentiate becoming
obverse dependence from and examines gist:

he the latter corresponds improper
supererogates daisy maze, disavows statecraft
one the need through fact, thus form
gross mother tongue

while canon cookie
duly affluent

and ah!

most inspired

comped my animal again
a new nationalist self?

your shotgun it’s so persuasive
also took a different form

“be that of our resistance”
scope and ambitions constricted

eyes wider because nodal event
unsalved miseries

but you like my soul back-beat
blue and subaltern

“quiero sus taco bell,” an acre’s worth
of shells, straining the mein for the train
takin’ melismas down the river bank
sonnet to the ten gallon bonnet

something for pain?
this helix reeks of felix dew well
in a bambi-nation, the universe
but a shrapnel
crab nebulae curious b, an idiocy minus?

lest, ungavelling gimlet code
“the periodical … the peri …
the periodical line
aligns with …” MOVE!

(harrassin’ the pope in there?)
doubtless good for nurses
but hale bop bermudas on pension post-op
logo’d lunchbox, a supple hot litter of
peed-off hourly mo’ phonia

the reigning rain falls mainly on the … MOVE!
for who putteth “he” in “the”
putteth “me” in “uh, I guess so” STOP!
this isn’t GO! anywhere astral

little boy made outta steak
put out the trashlight stars

there ain’t no bears in them public clouds
MARK DuCHARME

Two Poems

The Pragmatist's Day-Planner

1

Every day is expected on the highlight without meaning to satisfy junk
Yet the windows were frozen & the handbills without meaning to have wandered
in back of the palms
So I flicked a crumb off my loofa & smothered
The poster in mirrors
The divan in toast
Would the squirrel know me would the mountebank would the pipecleaner manufacturer

2

Bric-a-brac crackled in the excitement. Hailing a cab but not wanting to go
anywhere. Wishes for turquoise rest stops. Corn futures wistfully deride the
populous furniture showroom. A rustling under the airbrushed gauge. You can
go your own way—don’t go Top 40. At the hidden symposium—spectacular
lands, or leggings, often were spotted.

3

The department firmly haggled
Up the street. I hadn’t heard about it
Any earlier, but could songs tantalize you
In their iridescent, covert knocking?
Now that hardness was in,
I could mislay the pliers
& Use my teeth, for all sorts of household disturbances.
Tag-line: “He who is unprepared.” Yet it’s only the Revered, who are brave.
Listen, we all know about flagpoles,
That they are to be used only sparingly
& At peak hours, before the film school people
Arrive, with their planks & Clubhouse sayings. These
Were the General Instructions;
Refer to Specific Instructions in the Subset of your fake
Left forearm.
One example: “Cheez Whiz hour, back at dusk.”

The Agonist's Dry Spell

Without screeches or screening
What I heard in a knell
Or intact blades of song  Do you

Have unexplained, chronic Things?  Crashing infrastructure
Some dim fortune
But I promise I’m not going

Retro, just a social soda
Pryer boutonnieres, usually
In platonic ding-ding
Distance curing agonist's dry spell

Of quench and populously snore
I’ll score, possibly early
Counterhatching incessant Soho brunch
Broiled to a curable litmus itching

Or form a focus group, get back
To you, about the parrottable smudge
Bankrolled in needles
Filmed at cost on a doxy

Or failures of success
Predisposition for such
Bolted as sex
Careening career carrier internal error
JOHN HEON

Four poems from Free Fall with Viscous Friction ($v = mg/k$), a novel

Oscar Wilde’s Sheets

A saint
is just a stain
that carries its cross to the end.
A journey of permeability,
finishing with stiffened fibers
and a dark new map.

Death of a French-Bred Chemist (in Amer-ica)

And thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man,
in their sight. And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread. (Ezekiel 4.12-13)

Broken-bowed, at the meetingplace of the waters,
in the sea-trench of the grande depression,
he has selfsunk
and is now calculating
life insurance douleurs
per child
and oxygen molochules
per second
and popped air sacs
per inspiration
(alveoli, never numberless; all vie a lie, rêve ere numbness)
as glassgreen water fills his lungs
and pink softtissues, convulsing, burst,
like seedpods of agony
throwing spores, nay yeast,

until the leaden chemist is leavened and blissed into the cackling golden alshamemissed.

Defiled bread sunk at the crossroads,
silent and choked,
rises transmuted to feed us
and tell the final joke.

Le pain-theism.

The Lightening Rood

Thumbing a coin blank,
the profit said unto me,
Look again.
Si-si, see-see, c-c
(at or approaching the speed of light).
Look:
The highest point on Saint Peter’s dome,
Michelangelo’s last erection,
is not that golden cross,
but an obscene copper finger
reasoned needlesharp,
pricking father sky,
laughing wildly,
goading joveially:
“Da, da, da, dare strike Me in His stead.”
For this is the lightening rood,
the leavening rod,
mirthful science as prophylaxis
against Zeus’s juices,
so that faith might elude
the sullying spark
and remain virginblindintacto
despite the do me whispered in the dome.
See-see, si-si, c-c,
gush of wriggling electrons,
sixty million in all,
shunted into deep pagan soil
beneath the Basilica floor
(at or approaching the speed of light).
So when in brotherly love and Philadelphia,
do not forget to toss your Peter’s Pence
on Poor Richard’s slab
in copper offering.
And remember invention,
and the enlightning reed,
and je-zeus's je-uses,
and this aphonyse of Bene Prankline:
A penis saved is a pen is earned.

And then the profit opened his fist:
Thumbed to nothing.
Must have been counterfeit.

I Goethe Go and How I Gott Thar

Dichtung und Wahrheit
Dichtongue und Wahrheit
Dichtongue et Wahrheit
Dichtongue est Wahrheit
Dicktongue ist Wahrheit
Dicktongue ibt Wahrheit
Dicktongue eats truth
East truth ick d tongue
Eats ruth ich dt tongue

Aye, in time, delta t,
I langue für ewe, limb of goatt,
butteye goethe gogh now.
Und eye wrote off into the goadderdämmerung.

The nether I.

NICOLE BURROWS

Ode
To Anselm Berrigan

Here is the Most Lurid Tale Ever Hidden in the Form of One Very Long
Syllogism

Certain things are given. This does not give things certainty, or the right of one to write so. Just certainly. Sure as I made the idiot, "I am" and "I ate." I am frightened by my own thinking because I once thought, could own thinking. Wouldn't it be tidier to trip over a wire of one's own creation, rather than recreate the immediate couches of someone else's vicinity, which boon a longed for niceness for the tame sex favors tag provides during escapes with exquisitely and oppositely sexed neighbors of childhood? "Oh it's good," (oh is the shortest way to shriek desperation cheerfully) "to be it!" But to be always among those chasing it? Doesn't quite reek of a correct flavor, say spearmint or grape. And it isn't often smelled until much later when one is counted by the census as being alive, yet not enough to enjoy the perks (fucking oneself happily to the sounds of waking up, over and over again, call it a theme if you want to) of gradual dying. As a cat stops at the reflection of a woman eating sardines and oranges over the sink in slippers and curlers purrs, the burglar of same name who wishes to unravel her hair just stands there translating the noise of his throat to the aching of not being able to say, "I wish to rape you, but I'm not sure you'll let me." How can he sentimentalize what is still happening when all he hears is gurgling? That's me in the middle of myself thinking about the inaccuracy of referring to things except as things blurrily. For example, cats and burglars. Everyday one of the two eats, tortures and mainst a smaller, though different, creature, as the other is currently taking things from either a smaller, larger, or exact-sized, though same-typed, vertebrate. Both are exact in their committing of acts inconsequentially, making your grieving for absence, theirs and yours, the most brutal exercise of futility, the drape pulled back to reveal nothing especially worth concealing. In your case it wasn't a brick building. Don't despair. All raids have been planned before hand. Will this save you? Depends. This is one of those times where it's easier to be on the outside. You do the defining. Inside, you are the thing that your things define. Now which would you rather be trapped by? The actual cat, or the thief who claims to stealthily eat rats? I think I am saying. There is almost something being able to, to sensate. O and then K. Who knows all the verbs I once knew? I, yes, have eaten glue in order to understand what it is like to adhere to paper like type. It's a matter of taste, and it can be bad when it occurs to one that what they're tasting actually has none. And what can that man in the window, who really ought to wear clothes, do, when he can only do so badly, especially when she, eating sardines and oranges across the street, says he has no taste, not even a bad one? He says she ate fish of varying shapes and round color. He didn't specify why. Just proved her silently as one would a quadrangle, her long weird leg, and within it, the vein. Throbbing for him. One imposition of a large enough outline on a page to form size and they become apple and the apple in bites. See, there's his awe. See, there's her face. And us, in the middle, we're going "wait."
Ode
To David Shapiro

My Heart Heard Its Head As It Banged Me on Sand

Nothing moves you like your hormones do. For example, you see a
Person and, being one yourself, would like for this person to experience
The pleasure of seeing you back, of returning your eye to you, its rightful
Crank-hearted proprietor

But you are unable to, all of a sudden, move. You are furniture furnishing
Your room, and, like furniture, are owned and used by a multitude of humans.
They are unaware of you and your inability to move. They, unable to feel you,
Eat on top of you, and you, under them, feel them needing you to eat on as

Animals need and are needed for food. It is like you see, sort of, are touching.
Try not to be moved and someone with terrifying sincerity will just come along
And volunteer to push you. Pilots file by, in air, all the time, but the mountain
Is shrewd. Like organized crime, it continually

Moves by tricking the eye into thinking it can think like a mind. One relates to
This to the point of frenzy, which it, brain, the romantic mollusk, hates. It must
Turn on itself as a cancer-causing cell must, in turn, cause hair and trees to
Discharge DNA like rectums on babies, and mouths on their larger non-baby

Counterparts. Both openings vary in their roles of consumption and disposal.
There
Is, in everyone, a cod, a nectarine, and liquid. All three close a pyramid or form
Someone’s dinner. You see you are stuck in an internal opening, are duplicating
closure
Too closely. You see? You’re worrying about something. It sees you
approximately—

You’re not worth worrying about. The astronaut’s paradox, then, is to land safely
On space and, having missed the lack of leg room for so long, experience the
desire
To not escape, and so, in not escaping, escapes the problem of desire
Entirely—it’s like I when I’m writing. There are EXIT signs I can’t bear to
paint.

We are alive, if trapped, on a planet of life. This is why trained soldiers are
afraid at,
Not of, sea. They may, officially, be trained, but they are not, more officially,
sailors.

Suppose land were an absence, and the wind you’ve heard of you haven’t
actually
Heard from. Imagine the damage you’d do to the last building

You’d inhabited if you weren’t able to imagine that that building were habitable.
Would you say, in creating a structure of demolition, you open your mouth to
blow
Up or out, and how many hormones did it take for you to differentiate between
what
The eye saw and what it visually caught? Before you place that

Molecule of oxygen into a box-sized cube, you must realize it has transformed
you
Into carbon dioxide, and you, no longer breathable, cannot, like an elevator, go
around
Trapping people, though you may, O Mortar and Beam, (a voice like a
microradio
transmitting signals), occasionally, borrow a few of them.

Ode
To Harry Mathews

Everything Under the Antisun

You have an idea before you begin: to show how original unoriginality is, in writ­
ing, twenty four times, by copying and imitating, of all things, twenty four writers.
After all, in order to achieve any kind of literal newness one must reproduce what
has already been new, for quite some time, at least once, copyright. So you tell
yourself this is what it means to do something that has been already done and,
“even the sun,” that thing, is a thing, though it is so large and intimidating it is
always called that thing of which all said things, supposedly all the time, are under,
so of course you hesitate to say that it, too, (somewhere else and according to
someone other than you) theoretically must be under something, which means it
must, in accordance to this line of thought, be larger and more frightening than
even you for you have seen yourself thus. Now you know what it is like to write
about writing. To illustrate this, on paper, you realize you
have
to create the prob­
lem of having to create a problem
in
order to solve one, which is rather like having
no idea at all, or, even foggier, the notion of one. No wonder you have nothing to
say! And, having nothing to write about, you suggest, in particular, that your origi­
nal project (your earlier idea) of writing about the unoriginal is really about every­
thing you don’t want to write about: in this case, your own life. Which is fine.
Others have covered this extensively. You are, and have been, in and the dark, the
heavy and the soft, an object, and are made up, conceptually, like a body is of parts by a brain and its nervous highway of synapses, those throbbing pink sentences. While it's true one can be symbolically assassinated this way (the only way you can get to the bottom of the page is to kill yourself), it is actually a wonderful way to live. You have survived similar nonsenses—falling out of bed and then getting back in, bathing and shaving your skin, and, more recently, turning up the volume on the boombox (perched precariously near the bathtub, where you sit, having just bathed and shaved) to drown out these thoughts. You have already done these things, and will, having survived them more than one time, do them again. It's as hypocritical as it is hypothetical. You do things, are a thing, and have things done to and for you, often as other things, beyond you, occur around you. You are what I am not: me. I envy and idealize your being able to convey the peculiarly evasive and difficult nature of this translation. You determine what I say and, if I say sun, as I do, "sun," then, as in a race, you arrive at it before I do. Waving aloha from a state of New York. To and love everyone.

Ode
to Tom Clark

Televised Disaster Site: Me and the Century

I spilled guts and freed this pretty muck. This caused accidents in the think-tank, me to pour a poetic. It's like I Vaselined into an astronaut opening a treasure-chest before having the chance to recognize the exposure of hazard. What happened next was unforeseen, like ant pee, and suspicious, like fun annually had by anyone at an outdoor, company festivity, or a compliment from a co-worker at said mandatory picnic. You ran away faster and yet toward me or something. There will always be rumors. They are always rustling. According to the bushes (where the green moolah sways askance and more lovely than palm fronds), you are spreading around them. They ask you to see the forest through the trees. All you see is a garden, and me. I am completely unable to squeak euphemism from this tree-trunk, but then again, that's me for me, oxymoron. How can I recollect a self for a tenth time when I, doll-like, double-speak on the conveyor belt, allego, O, a life. Ah to be removal from this aftertaste, ah the blonde night! I beseech you, tongue, be a mouth's testicles. But first a ditty by me before our dropping.

The kaleidoscope
of evolution winks at me mysteriously from the baby's face in ways that stomp on understanding.

So the gene pool menaces a Darwinian witlessness, a nerd is a twit. Sorry says you're thanking it. It's a problem with the laugh-track, please call an attorney, scream "Pity me!" a la Bob Southey while I prophesize semi-tough atop a Honda in long-johns and a bonnet without stopping, albeit temporarily, for the yellow light in order to slow down for the specimens touring in my glass of milk, making points irrelevantly about rubber paintings on thinning balls. If we cease stopping to resurrect, we will come back. As the gruesomely evident. As the same pair of sweatpants. Except through speech, we will no longer if or though or notwithstanding the poppycock without pausing to recognize the cranial grimness of wrestling with every thought on earth like this, thus we don robes, pulpit, and overthrow. Therefore, and so forth. But really. From here on out the new regime shall use non-sequiturs and circular reasoning, whereby we, the written, instead rather than supply evidence by restating unintelligible in foreign languages. Viola, amigo? Ach du, Bueno. No torrents strain thy limpid parentheses.
The Same, Only Different

The earliest memory I have is the frontpage showing a smiling man in handcuffs. There was blood on the wall and a little around the back door, but it turns out he wasn’t the one.

I want to say the smile is friendly, but, really, it’s stopped by the shutter, then blurred by the presses, which are still heavy machines, no matter how fast, how digital.

He might be grimacing.

Someone comes in and kills someone, it could be anyone, except not me or you, and it should have been past tense.

I’m in the picture too, not turning around, on the couch, at attention in front of the TV.

I couldn’t tell you what was on: it seems I’m mourning the small bruise where the screen swallows the signal each time, no matter how often I switch it back on.

It’s a dot, invisible, really.

So it disappeared. Who am I supposed to sue?

One and one is two, one and two are three, two and three are five, three and five are eight, five and eight are thirteen, louder and louder at the restaurant, indifferent to the food and people.

Eight and thirteen are twenty one. I love you. Who knew?

They were murdered, they were the wrong people, the wrong person murdered them.

The walls are crooked.

Trees grow, leaves get educations. The walls don’t meet. That’s why they use handcuffs.

Out on Bail

You hold out your arms to me, which is why we married thirty years ago, one way to say I have to cross the twist back over the bridge, into the wood someone was harvesting in Russia to make rubles fold into a wad thick enough for escape velocity.

So here in mental earth it is the time of the reader and the writer.

That’s us.

Caresses maneuvering over fixed scars make the poem. Hey, shut up, OK? I’m trying to read.

1) Resolved: That the town build a new jail.
2) Resolved: That the new jail be built from the materials of the old jail.
3) Resolved: That the old jail be used until the new one is finished.
not even after a poem
of the life, proved, whole, one,
all H his. Letter for thought,
plus not, N, and body
for life, or not,
N, as it happens, once each time,
O. Tree in solitary, the lime-tree bower
my one-word garden, moat, ark, broadcast
live at the beach to I, itself,
I, crests rising up, smashing down, gone,
said, made. Broken piece
B or P, with boundaries now,
B now, cut by sight,
lives of glass, G,
cutting back, bad street,
S & L, shit life
out where they hurt
the world they hate to
love, the street, S, not
G for garden, guns in uneven D
development, power lost less
than it would take to make
it new, I
it, N new, make
W what, make a prince a king
a king a queen a prince
a queen a quince, a job
all day, a life at night, death
six feet away, how T thoughtful,
write meaning M,
More than other painters of the New York School, you have consistently portrayed poets in your paintings — not just in the '60s, but also into the '70s and '80s. You've depicted almost every poet from the first and second generation of the New York School in small format portraits, large portraits, or free standing flat sculptures — "cutouts," as they're called. You did a collection of aquatints in 1978 entitled The Face of the Poet, in which fourteen poets were portrayed alongside their poems. You also painted a monumental double portrait of Anne Waldman called Face of the Poet. I was wondering if you took these poets as subjects mainly because they were your friends, or was there some kind of allure to painting the figure of the poet?

I just was hanging around with a lot of poets and I think they're interesting to work with and interesting to talk to.

I'm fascinated by the art of the New York School because it seems that in the 1950s and '60s poetry and art merged in an unprecedented way. For instance, you have Robert Rauchenberg's Inferno series...

That's a joke though. [laughs]

Why?

Well, Dante's Inferno has such strong images that you'd have to be an idiot or naive to illustrate it.

Then you have Robert Motherwell basing the Elegy series on Federico Garcia Lorca's poem about the matador...

I always thought that was kind of like a sentimental schoolgirl infatuated with European culture. Particularly with Lorca, the subject matter is just really pretty corny.

But how do your many collaborations with poets in the '60s, such as when you painted set designs for Kenneth Koch's play "Washington Crossing the Delaware" in 1964, compare with the way that Rauchenberg or Motherwell used poetry in their paintings?

Well I think Kenneth's language is present tense. It's very bright and exciting, really a challenge.
Is it the humor in his work that you're interested in, over more sentimental poetic language?

I think with Kenneth’s poems there is a kind of lightness to it. The language is so vivid and fresh.

Edwin Denby said in an article for *Art News* in 1965 that your work had an “ironic parallax.”

Well I never thought of it as ironic. That’s his take on it. I do things in multiple but they’re not ironic. I think they’re very straightforward. At least that’s the way I try to make them. That’s my intention.

When exactly did you meet Frank O’Hara?

O’Hara reviewed my first exhibition in ’54, I believe, and then in the late ’50s he asked to come to the studio. He came with Bill [Berkson] and was kind of apologetic because he felt he missed me in the review, but I thought it was a fairly decent review. He got very excited and bought a painting, a little landscape with a border on it. Bill bought one too at the same time. That was the way we started. Then we saw quite a bit of Frank up until his death.

I read a relatively long article that O’Hara wrote about you in the summer of 1966, just before he died, in which he said he thought you were one of the most interesting painters in America. And in his biography of Frank O’Hara, Brad Gooch suggested that O’Hara had a lot of influence over you. Would you say that was the case?

I think I was inspired by his poetry. I liked the openness of it, and I liked the emotional extension. And I found in general with poets that style had more to it than just aesthetics.

You wrote a memoir for O’Hara when he died. There’s a quote I’d like to read from that memoir: “Although I could question his judgments, I found his reasoning difficult to resist... To say he was interested in what was right and what was wrong wouldn't make him different from a lot of people. Frank’s particular idea of what is right, is what negotiates with maximum vitality. Vitality being what emanates from surface, manners and intent have no meaning.” The phrase “vitality emanates from surface” to me is an excellent description of your work. What do you think of this quote so many years later?

I think I was very bright then. [laughs] Frank was a great stylist. His philosophical attitude toward life produced his style.

Do you have similar philosophy in your work?

I don’t have the same philosophical attitude in my work, but there are similar values. You have to figure Frank was basically a lapsed Catholic who didn’t get very far away. He stepped over it, but he was still a Catholic. Frank believed in God. I don’t have any beliefs in anything. There’s a big difference. I think in his style, Frank affected an awful lot of people. Frank was not institutional; he was a real bohemian writer. And I think my work fits in there too. Basically it’s not institutional. Institutional Modernism, I find, is very boring. [Clement Greenberg always seemed very dreary to me. You have no security once you step outside the institution. That’s what I really like. That’s what I meant by emotional extension. You’ve got nothing to hold onto, you’re just going. Because once you’re in the institutional Modernism you have the sanctions of morality to hold onto so that you know you’re doing the right thing.

But what about someone like Jackson Pollock who was embraced by institutional Modernism but was still a huge influence on you?

Well I like Pollock as a painter but I don’t think he was particularly institutional. Greenberg is the person that tried to make him institutional. Frank liked Pollock because Pollock was open. He could relate to him because of his style.

Writers are always trying to label your work: it’s not Abstract Expressionism, it’s not Pop; if it’s figurative it’s a kind of Realism. What was it that made you choose to paint figuratively when abstraction was the institutional norm?

It was instinct; what I wanted to paint.

In an interview with Alanna Heiss from the P.S.1 show of landscapes in 1996, and in a different interview with Richard Prince, you talked about how much jazz has influenced your painting. Could you talk a little about the extent of that influence?

Jazz was a live culture as I was growing up. Like painting, it was something I used to do. But with Pollock, painting became a live culture. It took the place of jazz in a way. The aesthetic ideas in jazz seem more interesting to me than the aesthetic ideas in painting. They were very similar, but jazz was without all that existential business. It was real clean; not existential. The whole idea of open form in bebop was similar to what Pollock was doing in painting. Later Sonny Rollins was making a limited form. At the same time I decided to make paintings that also had a limited form. When Rollins played “Wagon Wheels” straight it was brand new. So in the early ’50s I liked the open form but then in the late ’50s all of a sudden it was this closed form. But when jazz became a little more intellectual, like with Ornette Coleman, it became a less interesting to me. I like
Charlie Parker, but Coleman was different.

Stan Getz also influenced you, right?

Yeah. I got to him first sort of by accident. He was cool.

Many critics have described your work as essentially cool. But in jazz the term "cool" can apply to many different periods.

Where I grew up in Queens, everything was cool. We did half-time dancing. But in the Bronx and Brooklyn they were doing these wild full-time dances, very high energy. The wildness of those macho guys seemed really strange to me. Like Pollock and de Kooning's style it's impossible for me. It's too hot.

I'm especially interested in a painting like The Black Dress from 1960, and the way in which the figure of Ada [Katz's wife] repeats six times like a refrain, with variations in pose and posture. I know you're interested in jazz, and what you said earlier...

Are you a painter?

No, I'm a poet. Only a poet. Can't you tell? [laughs] But we talked about the linear form that jazz had later in the '50s, as opposed to the free form earlier. Is there any relation between that linear, more closed formal kind of jazz and this painting?

It's just in the air. The musical thing comes out of the inside rhythms.

Of the image?

Of me.

It's an extremely rhythmic painting.

Yeah, it comes from the rhythms. My rhythm as I paint.

What about de Kooning's Women series? Is there any relation between your depictions of Ada and his work?

Yeah. His is figure and ground, and mine is figure and ground. I definitely looked at his things and decided that I'd do something different. It's the same problem. His is basically a cubist solution, it's a cubist space. Mine is like color and whites. That's a different formal idea.

It's interesting to me, as well, that in painting in which you repeat the figure two or more times, "repetitive portraits," as Edwin Denby called them, are precursors to what Warhol did. You did The Black Dress in 1960, and Warhol didn't start doing his silkscreen paintings until '62. Is there a relationship there?

Yeah, it's related.

How do you feel about Pop?

It was in the air. That was one solution to it. The heaviness of the rhetoric into something more plain, and that was a solution of mine. Warhol's was very public, and I was working basically in a private world — where a private world becomes a public symbol. He was working not in symbols, [but] in signs. He was working in public signs.

These are very basic poles, the spontaneity and passion and freeform practice of abstract expressionist artists like de Kooning and Pollock — who were "hot" — and then your work and how it prefigured Pop imagery, which people have described as "cool" or premeditated and distanced. In abstract expressionism there's a lot of self. Are you avoiding the self in your work?

I think it's also a lot of the unconscious. That's the whole thing, is to get the unconscious into the act. You know, Pollock would get his unconscious brain into his paintings. And I think that's the thing the poets picked up on. Writing off the top of your head. I start that way in these paintings. Then I go through a process of sketches and drawings, pre-mixed painting and all of that stuff. But when I paint, it starts from a real open situation. All I have to do is think of the paint. So it gets a little more open again.

I'm thinking of O'Hara's poem "Why I Am Not a Painter," where he talks about Mike Goldberg and sardines. Do you have that same kind of process?

No, I don't work that way. That's a process that doesn't suit me.

In some of your early work, you can see a process happening...

Not much. Not much. Basically I have an idea in the paintings that I'm trying to do, and it goes slow, so it's sort of like if you look at that, the painting is very open. But it's like two years I've been painting the sea. First I have a sketch, then I have a painting that's five by six, and then I have the final painting. So it's painted very openly, but I've worked for two years on the image.

Do you have this image in your head?
No, I saw it. I went down to the Caribbean because I wanted to paint some water. And then the idea I [originally] had, I didn’t paint. But the waves I got were pretty good. So I said I’ll go back next year and I’ll paint the idea that I wanted to paint the first time, but I didn’t have enough nerve. And that’s how that ended up. It happened to be a gray day, the morning of a gray day when the water was that color, and I said “Wow, I have a chance for a big gray painting.”

Do you usually paint plein air?

It’s all plein air.

And then you transfer it later to these large canvases.

The painting is done months later. I do the sketch with paint.

There’s an interesting corollary—when you’re thinking of realism or painting what you see in the present—between landscape and portraiture, which are your two modes of working.

Well I think that landscape is just an area where no one has been, with these large environmental landscapes. It’s very exciting to get into. I find them less socially abrasive than the figures. Figures engage people more, and they upset people more. The landscapes I think are basically a little more passive. Formally it’s less aggressive.

When did you begin painting landscapes?

I did a lot of landscapes in the ’50s. It was originally more landscapes than people, then I started doing people at the end of the ’50s and stopped doing landscapes a lot. But I always did a couple a year. In the ’60s I did a lot of cutouts. And when I had the retrospective at the Whitney I wanted something else, so I did these big nocturnal scenes and they led into the landscapes.

It’s possible to envision a relationship between your landscapes and James Schuyler’s poetry; he wrote a lot of landscape-poems, and his work has been aligned with Fairfield Porter’s. Schuyler also mentions a piece of yours from 1972, a cutout of Pierre Martory, in his poem Letter to a Friend; Who is Nancy Daum? Do you like Schuyler’s poetry?

Oh yeah, I like his poetry. I think he’s fabulous.

Are there any other poets of that period who influenced you?

I just liked their work at the time. You know: like Frank, John, Jimmy, and Kenneth. I’ve gotten to like Creeley a lot.

How was it collaborating with Ashbery on his book Fragments?

Well I just got out some works that I had already done that seemed parallel to the poem, and had a martini and put them in place. Ashbery actually picked them. They’re all backwards in the book [laughs].

How do you feel your work relates to the other painters in the New York School, such as Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher or Fairfield Porter?

I met Jane in ’56 and Fairfield a little later and Larry about that time. We were all similar because we were all involved in literature, and none of us were involved in that kind of rigid Modernism. My work is a little closer to Porter’s because it’s less literary than Rivers.

Fairfield Porter wrote of you, “He is not overwhelmed by nature but stands outside it; it is outside him and includes his subjectivity.” Porter called you a realist. Would you call yourself that?

If I said to you: “What is realistic painting today?” you couldn’t give me a clear answer. The thing is, realism is a variable, not a constant. So if you say “What is realistic today?” it could be anything. I think my paintings are as realistic as anyone else’s.

I like that, “realism is a variable.”

People think they know what things look like, but they don’t. When you try to tell people “this is what it looks like,” and it isn’t what they think it looks like, you have a problem. That’s what a painting is about. You’re trying to say, “this is what it looks like.” It’s a very aggressive idea, saying what you think in a painting.

The poets of the New York School wrote about friends and real events, composed poems about parties as they were happening—does that fit into that variable of realism?

The poets were making a realistic language, I think. It’s a language that belongs to the time they live in instead of someone like Ezra Pound whose language was past tense. He wasn’t connected to the language of his time. The marvelous thing for someone like Ted Berrigan was that the language existed when he wrote a poem. Modernism is utopian. A lot of it is present tense in style, but mostly it’s a utopian idea.
CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES


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JOHN HEON, like John Keats, once studied medicine. He believes, as did Keats, that if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Polyp to a colony, it had better not come at all. The poems here are from Mr. Heon's novel, *Free Fall with Vicious Friction* (v=mgl k).

ALEX KATZ is a painter who lives in Manhattan. His most recent solo exhibition was in Pittsburgh at the Carnegie Museum of Art in summer of 2000. In 1998 the Saatchi Collection mounted a retrospective of his work, "Alex Katz: Twenty Five Years of Painting," and PS. 1 showed a selection of his landscapes "Alex Katz Under the Stars: American Landscapes 1951-95."

K. SILEM MOHAMMAD was disappointed at not being invited to read the inaugural poem for George W. Bush. He would have been magnificent up there. He has poems forthcoming in *jongs*.

BOB PERELMAN's selected poems, *Ten to One*, is recently out from Wesleyan.

KRISTIN PREVAlLET notes, "For more information on how YOU can participate in the People Database go to www.unamas-projects.org/people4.html." She is the author of *Perturbation, My Sister* (*First Intensity Press, 1997*) and *Selections from the Parasite Poems* (*Barque Press, 1999*). She lives in Brooklyn, NY where she teaches writing to 4th graders, high-school seniors and college freshman.

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