NATHAN AUSTIN
RAY DI PALMA
LAURA ELRICK
CARLA HARRYMAN
VINCENT KATZ
MICHAEL MAGEE
PHIL METRES
JASON NELSON
CHRIS STROFFOLINO

JACQUES DEBROT
PATRICK DURGIN
E. TRACY GRINNEL
JEN HOFER
BEN LERNER
JENN McCREEARY
CHRISTOPHER MULROONEY
RONALD PALMER
Special Thanks to...

My wife Susanna for all her help and advice; my daughter Anabella for sleeping enough; to Kristen Gallagher for her suggestions regarding contributors; to Carla Harryman and Jacques Debrot for conversing; 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.
REVIEW: *Shed* by Yedda Morrison
reviewed by Laura Elrick ............... 40

NOTES FROM A PRELAPSIARIAN NEW YORK:
VINCENT KATZ
"How Much Fun You Can Have Thinking":
Reflections on Poetry in the Year 2001 .... 42

CARLA HARRYMAN
Interviewed by Michael Magee & Jacques Debrot ... 44

CARLA HARRYMAN's eleventh book, *Gardener of Stars* is an experimental novel that explores the paradise and wastelands of utopian desire. Other works by Harryman include two volumes of selected writing, *There Never Was a Rose Without a Thorn*, *Animal Instincts*, poetry, prose and plays; a hybrid novel, *The Words after Carl Sandburg's Rantahoga Stories* and *Jean-Paul Sartre*, and a book-length dramatic work, *Memory Play*. Harryman's most recent play, *Objects Stationed on Platform in the Sub(Urban) World* was premiered last year at Oxford Brookes University and will be staged in San Francisco and Detroit in 2002.

VINCENT KATZ has been awarded a Rome Prize Fellowship in Literature for 2001-2002. He is curating an exhibition on Black Mountain College for the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid. His book of poems *Understanding Objects* was published by Hard Press in 2000.

BEN LERNER is originally from Topeka, Kansas. His poems can be found in recent or forthcoming issues of *First Intensity*, *Stale*, *The Belet Poetry Journal*, *The New Orleans Review*, and *Post Road*.

MICHAEL MAGEE's first book of poems, *Morning Constitutional*, was published this year by Handwritten Press. His article "Tribes of New York: Frank O'Hara, Amiri Baraka and the Poetics of the Five Spot" appears in the next issue of *Contemporary Literature*. New poems in *X&Y*, *Open Letter* and *Pavement Saw*. He edits Combo.

JENN McGREARY lives and works in Philadelphia where she co-edits *ixnay* press and *ixnay* magazine. A chapbook, *four o'clock pocket chiming*, was published in 2000 by Beautiful Swimmer Press. Poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Tool A Magazine*, *POM2*, and *So To Speak*.

PHIL METRES is an assistant professor at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. His poems and translations have appeared in numerous journals and two anthologies. His translation of *A Kindred Orphanbook: Selected Poems* by Sergey Gandlevsky is forthcoming (Zephyr, 2002/3). He has difficulty with biographies, since they tend to leave out stuff.


JASON NELSON writes, Aside from these odd words, other sequences of words and letters have seen print in *Verse*, *Big Alka*, *Syllogism*, *Cross-Cultural Poetics*, and other magazines printed with ink. Digital work can be seen www.heliozoa.com.


CHRIS STROFFOLINO had work in COMBO 1. He is the author of several books of poetry as well as *Spin Cycle: Selected Essays and Reviews* (1989-1999) just out from Spuyten Duyvil.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Everything which follows was written and sent to me prior to September 11. Some of it will no doubt seem prophetic or, at least, uncanny. But perhaps it only makes sense: these are poets who have had their ears to the ground for a while.

Of course there is plenty here which bears no relation to “the events.” And yet, the works themselves are events, entering this world, yours, in the act of reading, as they entered another in writing. “The war is the first and only thing in the world today,” Williams wrote in his introduction to The Wedge, 1944. What he went on to say bears close listening: “The arts generally are not, nor is this writing a diversion from that for relief, a turning away. It is the war or part of it, merely a different sector of the field...I don’t hear anyone say that mathematics is likely to be outmoded, to disappear shortly. Then why poetry?”

In claiming to be part of the war, the poem complicates its meaning. Whatever we, as poets, say or, as readers, hear, is potentially joined with “the war” in a newly whorled form. This has nothing in particular to do with “political poetry” in the limited sense, though such poems may certainly have their say and effect. A poem might dive headlong into the improvisational contest over key terms (“collateral damage,” say) or it might in fact posit a world where such terms are not part of the symbolic economy: might show us (to borrow from something Carla Harryman says toward the end of this issue) “the party ‘we’ did not get to.” The poem’s being-in-the-world means that even fantasy is far from escape — this is an opportunity, an opening.

Williams again, famously:

It is difficult

to get the news from poems

yet men die miserably everyday

for lack

of what is found there.

I don’t accept poetry’s marginalization as a given and I insist on its perpetual usefulness. Poetry is like the Blues in that, however grim the subject matter might be, it celebrates the ability to say it differently, to not accept the language that landed us — all of us — in the jam we’re in, and, by changing the language, to gesture toward a time when we will do it differently, with our new words in hand. In our present time when the word “evil” is used, on all sides, to explain (away) our tortuously complex circumstances, we need poetry more than ever.

COMBO 9

BEN LERNER

Two Poems

Old World Birds

I slapped a face card on my forehead and set out with a buffet of burnt offerings to please the information networks of the sycophantic sea in the hopes of salvaging some furniture or forms of judging, of loving from the sheer facticity of waves arranged as audience, as gentry of enzyme and erosion in the moment of ship wreck, when deckhands cling to payrolls, paddling with compass needles as they sink beneath the weight of systems of weights and measures, pockets of buckshot, dreams of pre-linguistic queens who smell of sandalwood, queens without natural predators, who locate milks in hairy fruits and feast on flightless birds. I searched, in other words, for survivors along this beach, a beach the color of absence, amphetamine, but failed to find life or signs of life among the bodies that washed up with the flotsam and the screed of a woman’s cap, a gross technology for which I lacked a hermeneutic, being, as I was, a man without country, culture, possessing only what the tide implied was mine, an utter other even to myself. What to do with this delicate relic of the future which, like a book, suggested structures beyond my comprehension, mothers, for instance, or the world-historical stutter of lovers discovered playing footsy under iron tables? Although the fables of the hippocampus and the hippocrene had been taught to me by dobsonflies and driftwood, I had no arc or archaeology available to reconcile this little length of velvet, its texture in and of itself a text, with my length of little memories, starting at storm-eye, slowly developing into strategic fantasies of sinking, drawing breaths of brine until by eyeing
sweetmeats I could salt them, killing
abalone through the power of persuasion
when I finally washed ashore. Sure, my hunting
had a politics, but it was pure, contrapuntal,
kinetic in hindsight even, like the first evening
I learned that I could pleasure myself without
telling myself in the morning. But the introduction of that shard
of property activated laws of probability
that lead to my island’s discovery and loss, loss
and discovery, by epistemes with anchors that could only
know the ocean floor through rape or poetry.

Critique of The Dopamine Program

Tonight the bureaucrats are representing me again
as a benevolent bearer of outmoded wisdom, and the wind
is distributing its pamphlet of ash
to the workers who stitch
garments of silence
with Afghani bayonets. I was less
foreign before you gave me foreign aid, you must admit,
before your phrase ‘rain delay’ delayed our rain
dances, for instance, and the jungle mist
became a metonym for muddled legislation. That we had no legislation before you landed

with your self-fulfilling seismographs and arrogant cats
is rendered problematic by the fact
that ‘history’ itself was an investigation
launched by your settlers into settlers’ hats
and hat-racks, the latter structure referring
to other structures in their possession, as if a culture
could be defined by what it hung. And before long
there were racks of guns, wine, nice racks on the young
women powdering their noses in nightclub bathrooms
with Peruvian Flake. If I can’t complain

it’s because the very architecture of lament
is considered inauthentic by the vanguard
of mustachioed adolescents stockpiling rifles
and pipes in my garage. I have never seen a single star
or blacksnake, for example, breast or seascape
without the informatics of my gaze

imposing violent unity upon
light, tongue, nipple, wave
and state, so that my desires attract
quotation marks like flies to shit. I have spent

the last two-thousand years preparing this address
for the row of semi-sensate memorials to your right,
my left, with the sole wish
that they compel you to admit you don’t exist,
not in the sense that hawks or salt or poems exist,
that is, naturally, with illogical bodies
equipped with logical cysts
and non-Euclidean zones in which

there is sex without slogan, surgery, or suction,
and where the silent anthem of the human
may play continuously in the minds of children
continuously at play, the same Indian children
now playing Cowboys and Indians, playing auction
among the nation’s capital letters, casting
shadows that roughly translate here to ‘ruptures.’

CHRISTOPHER MULROONEY

Demogorgon

an alteration upon this common sense I dicta:
a happenstance upon this phone
ya bologna

and another case and étui or pincushion
follow the words see scattershot
all around the humdrum hills

practical definitions practically dumbfounded
go for a pitchfork song in the way of things
in the way of things
in the way of

broad is the avenue not so much as
once it was and
brought down to size
all the citizenships were in
hook and bride-ale
that is good ruin

as parsecs to Parsees
hymns to Hindustanis
pheromones to Pharisees
and Mohawks to Maharanis

NATHAN AUSTIN
from glost

ENVEL'OP, n. [Fr. envelopper; It. inviluppare, avviluppare, to wrap; viluppo,
a bundle, intricacy.] A wrapper; an enclosing cover; an integument; as the envelop
of a letter, or of the heart.

2. Couldn't touch his fingers. My tongue to trace letters, a love-lock from an in­
close. breath drawn in-wardly; cherished—thus wordless.

Insteps, like angels. A sigh: absent are hands, entwined around a bottle, a womb,
or the other surface of interiors. Beautiful sky—a list on folded slip of paper. (iris)

Under the rose, in secret; a manner that forbids disclosure. As, to disclose the
secret thoughts of the heart, a blush may open a secret passion or catch in the
breast. To invade, to blossom; to stain with a rose color, nearly the same.

Any folding of the hands into which words are clasped close. Found in this fash­
ion may be thread, several pins, visible indentations like teeth in the flesh, or a
fragmentary sheet, small enough to be fit into a purse. The lips—as drawing strings.

And a single roses, wondrous sweet with many other things which I brought
away with me. a pocket could as easily be filled with hair, loose fingertips.

E. TRACY GRINNEL
from music or forgetting

open-ended refrain (38)
this hoary/am i not, or am i not/fielded
season
[colon] retrospectively
viscous geographics/cataract

at cities
await
in all truthdom there is a wilderness
a cavalcade
an interruption

visible or articulate. makeshift:
a crane happens

the bird to the grain (43)
inviolate
properties of stray:
refracted kingfisher, actual light
in/striate
a breast to the where, quite quite

held was or visage (hold down), may
in violet
as in triolet
and properties thereof

adrift/33 [colon] point/pre-
hull sounds re-
verb to by ex( )ume
dry winter
dry winter
glass is once
something else
and this vertical or
vertebrae melod-
hulls reverb to by
sancti-
(tomb is eyeless)

35/afligh(or fall to the stray
or sea when the land's

sheer water and lichen

fight (fl—)

fullair

to stand or facing

there isn't a gull afraid of waiting
/likened itself
and then
even) lines/ stay in the wind so

adrift/39 (thought of a lark
is a caption. Humboldt
swiftly. is a delay/

/is a day over plenty

a haggard mark. beaching/is it rescue
swiftly. thought of a thought. alight
raising belie. running (swiftly) by
habit of parallelograms/to sidle

is an industry. unto
unbridle. caveat emptor/
breach. neighborhoods are for the birds
cavatina. a while
RAY DI PALMA

Two Poems

Measure

In einem Zug. Sweat, the resolve, is dark magic. The cold fire that unnerves any hex. And just so the wind. The only meaning possible of the two primary options afforded. An unexpected remedy for this was the use of only an inch or two of various other sentences. Just to see who’s not there. The staggered distance between birds and moths changes daily. Fireflies, statuary, and narrowing glaciers. The cycle ever slower never stops. Fireflies [patterns of flight] statuary [from hill to hill] and narrowing glaciers [never stops]. The cycle once laid along now runs through. Common ground. Infinite, presumed, achieved, sustained by the fluorescing gyration of the hieroglyph, it offers the measure cut from the caper. Answers aren’t given. Answers are made and taken. A resonance informed only by synaptic trace. Symmetry’s imperceptible mirroring purge. Dividing absence into calm and uninhabited repetition. Weight affords the discarded inference of challenge in any trope convenient to gravity. Prepared to depart when the entry is made. And the weight, only a point of reference. The setup: he turned to, he replied, to which the man answered. Intervals of symbolism provide the illusion of an apparatus of ascent. Isn’t it? = the implication. Concealed, confined, at the disposal of The Behest. The sky’s afternoon offered some unnoticed, unacknowledged purpose. Memory obviates duration. Not just disclosure, but its extent, and the barely perceptible thickness of the tongue. As ductile as a cork thread.

Scope

The distances to combine, passing through what it emits, as arbitrary as just in case, the nurtured cold, the voice that may not return, this brand to the touch bearing its weight. Seeing the matter of its ambling perimeter cut away, interrupting the body with its decimals. The responsible core, deciding not what but the way to choose. What and the way. The former only coined, the latter a declaration of stillness. Notches of suspicions. The price of attention’s stop integral and initial, unmodified. A sentimental barrier lofted in camera, signals clouted by the tongue aside of the door. Only as nominative as dimensional. Not by intention but by anticipation. Anything solved shifts for itself. Taken to the answer, turns up a tangled frame, forced to swallow the portion solving with the mouth open. Argued an ending with the stuttering mechanicals. Full of the plain delights of option and momentum. Accounted then by name, Block, Knock, Organum, Partition, Itch, Scope and Hole. Flung with a bale of demies. Called forth, honed even plainer stalled in their trap or trugging-place, still without response, ruttered aloud in brief summation by Net, Clatter, and Flinch. Scrail’s prod and Cup o’Lack nunquam stoopers rusticated from pedlar’s gate and duomo to puddle, column and arch. No beneship to their watch. Seep’s the dalliance, in good estimation, all and only remnant of circumference. Never to be translated from this place.

PHIL METRES

Three Poems

Election

after Jackson Mac Low’s “The Presidents of the United States of America”

George Bush rode his camel—look!—through the eye of the needle. The head of the camel looked ahead, George looked back, his eye like a hook, hooking onto the house where his father had sat as President. The hook caught in his tooth and he would always speak like that, despite standing on one side of the fence.

PALimpsEST

Greetings. By Now you
Probably Fingered OUT WE
. ABDUCTED YOUR READER
BE AWARE HE’s A PRESENT
SAFE AND SAGE. YOU NEED FEAR
NO FISCAL HARM FOR HIM,
SO LONG AS YOU are
Following our demeands
Only please no: Disobey
—The reader’s history. Get
One rusted zipper tooth, zebra
Stripe. pinch of lust, mint

Zither, repair of lungs, arable
Paper, & then & then,
Wingsinging, Ziploc of loss.
Everything will be lissome,
Ancient, ugly as cigars.
Have it with yourself at noon,
At midnight. Sit alone. We’ll
Phone. Let it wring & listen
Careful: the message

BURN ALL FIRST DRAFTS. NEVER USE MONOGRAMMED PAPER.
NEVER FOLD—A CRUCIAL WORD CAN BE
LOST FOREVER IN THE CREASE. TRY EATON’S CORRASABLE TYPEWRITER PAPER—
HARD TO TRACE. EASY TO ERASE.
SHOULD YOU DECIDE TO RAISE THE RANSOM PRICE. DO NOT KEEP CARBONS. FOLLOW EXACTLY THE PALMER METHOD. MISSPELL AT LEAST ONE WORD—ALWAYS LOOKS
THREATENING. RESIST THE URGE TO DOT YOUR “T”S WITH TRIANGLES, DOUBLECROSS YOUR “T”S.
DECORATE YOUR BORDER WITH GRAFFITI. ALWAYS WRITE “DEATH” IN RED. THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ONES USE CRAYOLA. TAKE YOUR TIME YOU’LL NEED A GOOD PAIR OF SCISSORS, A GIANT-SIZED JAR OF
We will leaf, will give
The place & time to meet.
This is just a commercial
Preposition. Be Bewear:
We are prepared to executive
Our thread. Refuse to speak with
any agency. No police. This is
between you and us.
Yours,

PASTE, TWEEZER TO HOLD
ALL CUTOUTS. USE A WIDELY READ
MAGAZINE LIKE TV GUIDE OR
PEOPLE. AVOID ESOTERICA. BE LIKE
WESTERN UNION. BE AWARE OF
LINT, EYELASHES, CIGAR ASH, CAT
FUR. DOORS WERE MADE TO INSINUATE
THINGS UNDER. SIGN WITH A BLOODY
FINGERPRINT—MAKE IT YOUR VICTIM’S,
NOT YOURS

Enemigos

When I was coming up it was
a dangerous world and we knew exactly
who they were. It was us

versus them and it was clear
who them was. Today we’re not so sure
who they were, but we know they’re there.

There is a world that is much more
uncertain than the past. In the past
we were certain, we were certain

it was us versus the Russians
in the past. We were certain, and
therefore we had huge nuclear

arsenals aimed at each other
to keep the peace. That’s what we
were certain of. You see, even though

it’s an uncertain world, we’re certain
of some things. We’re certain that
even though the evil empire may

have passed, evil still remains. We’re
certain there are people that can’t stand
what America stands for. We’re
certain there are madmen in this
world, and there’s terror, and missiles.
We’re not so sure who they are,
but we know they’re there.

MICHAEL MAGEE

Hats Noodle

for Anabella b. 11/8/00

knot your father’s pathogenesis stranded on an Orkney

or a Faeroe while Phaoah’s sideman mines a reedless conch for sound

ebbing memory / peach preserves
the daughter who’s father demands Dana Farber, the top notch, is not

you but your mother’s patient, her Job (the O

Boston’s O, a vow-
el in the moment of trans

supercilium
grown cilia & cilia

(also lymphing to finish vanishing when-
ever in New English pack Bonnie’s cat in Ovid’s yacht

wanna make songing of it?

Bracken lack a jug
Wheeled lock a club

Taken like a buss
Take care t’avoid the forehead

•

and the ford as all roams lead to road e.g. she
greyhounded from San Antonio after three days she
in Providence she dropped she out she this is not she one
of the she things she that she “just happens” vaya con Viacom, amiga

Buena suerte, hermana

•

combo

combo
letters sent

where the dark Housatonic winds

between Hoosac & Taghkanic to the

sea

and as Misty as broken karaoke
as Irish out as mitochondrial bisque
All souls α(ε)ρ(ε) to lead her dad on arrival
Da Boyzon her arm
Working Reconstruction over here

in the burnt out tap & dye shitticker softshoe
across weighstations & antique snowjobs
I’d like to show you a raced history ala Fred Douglass’ caulking
struck down

in a space wielding marks
and covered by yards of snow angel pockets

* can we speak of hockey & mad booty?

Done.

Minstrelsy.
the earth is wound
look: red in the face, bloodshot blue

y’a know mom? Oh, yo no se

these are the turns, the verses in soil, the
terse voila a bald bird gathers no mas open soars faster
do we the feats “true man” defeat?
imminently, imminently history is the bad painting in your
good combine

(conversely, seen from space on living room TV
the earth is painless but the TV is not)

a crow in the snow is worth

Ductus Venosus was believed to have lived around a previous epoch in prelapsarian splendour, shunting victuals from Placenta to Vena Cava, as they were then called, all the while circumventing the immature — some would say uncouth — Liver. These graceful beginnings masked a less than gratifying future as, having taken the name Ligamentum Venosum, she withered and, as the narrative goes

Where’s the joke

* all in the unction say ah fit to be tied by our own sandals

and fired by a hire cause on purpose a junked a popped cork adrift among junkets, —

combo
THE JUNIOR EXECS

and sand dollar bikinis

we meanwhile rub our eyes like a genie's lamp
our limps congenital, baby, like a con's genitals
the more congenial

maybe depending on what s/he's in for

"there is always an element of crime
which is why "crimes against humanity" are usually perfectly lawful misnomers, incongruous
PARADOX: incongruity is not healed by order but by another incongruity fire

w/ fire

save yourself w/ a made of cow T-cells by the sea, sure but we should bury our last vestiges of self pity in light of Joe Oliver's letters to his sister

* your head smells Beautiful, your butt reeks, model of Platonism

low rank, a Fundamental into that chasm Christianity settled down at the same time reinterpreting the lower as the created and the higher as The Creator

This is Why people Stink to High Heaven

(but not why we hit you with the chrism all that for was the crazy black bottom Irish and the gap btw ten sons' "Yule is He" and Joy's "you listen" plus Armstrong's faux island red leg ancestry, true whenever the Pope crams well, shits in the woods or licks his cat who creeps to the Baptist in us for his golden drowning

someone is always putting the kiss back in Kissinger bleary about this

wintry mix out punned panes rocking asleep you

the melting flake is not a tear or a flake like me, — anymore than the frost is Frost H2O, crystal

let Coolidge 5 min. "stir 'em up"

little darling... little darling Kissinger kills babies sing : singe fly to the web and see:

* protection w/ out protectorate can we? postpone my self, hell, the whole world anything and everything anything : everything ::

if it's true that then. the Pater of defest dipped in defined whine trains substantial nation

we ride one to purportors to supporters to porters, pull-a fast one, man a body gets around in the poplars, the pines, see cedars historical seceders, oaks in Okla's Nature Theater

do you read me?

I love you, over loud & clear, over untranslatable babytalk, over your code name
is Senator Dale Bumpers, over silence, over
and out and out
•
"we’re a winner" or were a winter?
Aunt Tiffany calling
The kith in from the Blvd to the kitchen We’re cooking, and booking
call us trans for our rants examine entranced entrances or
sleep the sleep of the dead in a deep deep sled of the
hieroglyph
its all rapid this glissade this skillless glissando
fit & lash flutter, something written on the body
in the literal path of its co-
mmitment and dada
and dada
in the mobile

Texture and Color Affect Silhouette and Size

She stands as an outline, minimizing irregularities.
angular women shiny-surfaced
surface compelling attention
for slenderness
She attempts to possess the actual contours.
translucent reveals a loose construction
proportioned with slips slipping to counteract
their becoming tendencies
Her uneven figure thrown
into relief against the light
thin dimensions command
massive contrasts and appear spreading
etirely by geometry
She meets conspicuous colors with her apparent fabric.
Dressmaking

textile:

a strand prepares the continuous
for fibre spindles
drawing and twisting in the subsequent
and parallel
held sewn in cotton quickness
or the consequent necessity

pattern:

change rounding measures
in proportion readied by pieces
and ended
stretch the gathered curve along
bottom with a slight inward line
length shaped before
center's wide remainder

embroidery:

fastening for a seldom transparent
fold bound into water
stitching bonds lapped and pinned flat
the hem eases cloth
from cloth's material
threading in slight or slight circles

great bearing surfaces

A pin fixed.

Two horizontal stays between frames,
Tilting bias, links, bolster
and longer links. Self evident
when on the straight, novel arrangement

of great bearing surfaces:
eccentric straps properly warmed up.

A slack corner is warm and wears faster.
pull-rod brake-block flue

Disregarding the ferrules

The weights of the engine and the tender pin.

Patrick F. Durgin & Jen Hofer

from Routine Knew

Omissions make it swing: Be anywhere now: Do just to it:
Rescind the following ("Desultory premise" "Stitched in space" "Horny toad")
Hello homogenous kid, a theogony of antagonoid kid gloves
Do just us to wit: How we are moved to fond transports — far and away
"by increasing the curvature of the lens" ("Lends"
"If style marks the artist's most characteristic trait, manner registers
an inverse process of expropriation and exclusion."

(Look & See)?

Presents presence, presents. Hip to hip they gather
in a semi-circle to receive, retrieve. Curious curious
Two makes virtuous virtual plural calling was curious
Dismal, catholic hours buffer zone file along chanting
Scraping loafers and fishes after the dim skimmer slides
(Sides) the stint for a bigger better bang for your bible

"To attenuate" "Make thin" "Extenuate" "Serve"
As an excuse or crime, as a sad slim covering on the skin
The ghostly appliances ("Crawling around") gestalt clicking
Teeth, tongs, probes ("Semblance proves nothing in the collective
godeification of obligatory tripped responsiveness")
(Why Not)? (Why Now)?

To all the realism in London (No receipt) ("Ladies first") (The Underground) Sent away for a time, holologocentrically go-go gone toward The two-toned politician's dream or senator's couch'd kindred Stationed sidewise to the gimp captain's cottage industry

Webcast "en direct" per console mighty dispassionate but entirely "there" Touching, per se, and so & fed back voice-over effect / affect re: FRAct all Portable spawn makes it O.K. to suspect "postwar" rhetorics of "the race"

Gloss remnants such as soundboard patter transposed You make those loops when you sleep or do they sweep to and fro The face the mask the same regime the key, key, key food

"Dank" "Thorny" "Bank"

We walked the red beaches of the iron range to vote asked in service to our ("Country" "Landscape" "We" "Escape") doting doe-eyed landed gentrified uncle's best chomp at the bit (Idealism, she wept, or practice makes perfect). Fractured cervical consolation minced into simpering flattery gets you there ("Whatever it takes "Bargain basement "World premiere today) a reputation for being obnoxious or the being of being obnoxious

"Free lunch" "Free look" "Pay per minute"

Reputable intransigence strolling across the ballot Onanism of describing an unintentional convergence (or flight) Cash monies the tripe or drossing (close the door I'm drooping ("Clues" "Numerous" "Paystub")

(Clop (Criminal (Contestant)))

Sorts my primordial broth and splices the project into predestinatutorial trepidation "says Girl Friday to her" (Wracking in the free world jockey-tropiccanatic)

bless "White Christmas" skinheads ("man") fucking skinheads Fuck 'em ("And" "Their" "Sensate Things")

Intervals, of course, the rough the course becomes (parsing) sharing ("options") (Opinionated nor less nor more than such tits 'n ass will allow ("So" "Little" "Time")

As a spacious commodity, the seats at the movie theater fielded sparse enough to accommodate the jerking jerks

"At ease" "Collapse" "Quiver" (Considerations consequence or lack run rampant Tardiness via cultural methodology unconvinced Severed limbs askew in the shop window harmonious Anatomically correct bustling nickel-and-dime outfit One-trick ponies hiring the indigenous lot of 'em)

Or consider following:

It's a chitty-chitty-bang-bang from the manner to the man But a bebop-a-lula to the baby carriage Sordid runts with ill-begotten designs on civic prod Tumble over the inimitable covertness of said critical masculinity

("That's a grammar, Sherlock!")

Fortuitous as two half-assed pragmatists Dissolving in civic resolve (I suspect those conniving figure eights of "All America City" "Millersport" "The Race Café"
Subterfuge: Huddle and ambush (with) in that order, that's the debate

Sedate it: Mingle, why don't'ya, in the animommapita (too white)... so, predate it?

Nicely said the Docent Nicely, as ease makes easier or doctored
Or don'cha flounder louder for anonymity's sake, wowee!
God's baby broken at the midriff by a slimy Spaniard
("La La Leche" "Sparkplug Hug" "Press Pass")

Not Bad Or Else Through The Grate Elderly
The horns rose, then the vocabulary testier still
Grindingly Unsounded Big Big Government Free Goods
(None such theatricality ((Makes the carbon smoother than glass

Predatory mechanized insertions limb a faster state, pegged so it's unquestionable?

Or merely implausible Lower the mote Scratch & Sniff
Lake cities and their incontestable masculinity Mower the float Chaffed & Stiff
The new folklorique cum algorithmic synehdochic katydid martyr murmur
And that cocksure enchantment

("Their nasturtiums are ballistic" (Rivulets / Currency Exchange))
That was Niagara Falls ("Those" "Were" "The South Towns"
Scrutinize the doctrine to consider the following
Topography, genealogy, &tc. (sense cannot stall again and our billions worn thin

The last to hate ubiquity eventually tell the mischief
Don't just decentralize but plug in a mood ring
You'll know us by our shoes (Eventuality's centrifugal force or carnivals in every plaza (perma-nomadic downtown)
For an incidental audition motor won't hone a void
Purled applause askance yet ocean is always in place
Of a perpetually disgruntled topos

Imagine local adamance, an infinite slogan

JENN McCREARY

from a doctrine of signatures

4.

he said, you write like I cook—or try
to cook. I promise you a poem of domesticated
purslane, of lettuces & lemons. I promise you
a poem as perfect as a potato
is perfect, that tastes like valium
feels & turns the sky
to honey and lavender.

5.

we've important work to do: cataloguing, giving
things names, putting to order
an unruly home—a kitchen in the choirloft,
a bedroom in the belfry—a grotto in the most proper
sense of the word, juniper berries crushed
underfoot & all that moss spread out, creeping
velvet lichen.

we like to be compelled by things & the things
compelling us here are true:

the first was hung
by her hair;
the second had her hair set afire
& asphyxiated on the smoke and flames. that's two
deaths by hair this week—which means
something, but we know not what.
6.
a goldfinch makes a nest of thorns & survives
on the nearby thistles. such behavior was once considered
Christ-like & the birds were appropriately
painted. da Vinci believed a goldfinch
could prophesize the recovery of an ill patient— placed
on the sickbed, if the bird gazed at the invalid, recovery
was imminent; if it looked away, the outlook was bleak.

a goldfinch kept in the home, in a gilt cage or
tethered to its perch with a fine thread, will serve
as a charm to ward off the plague & other
maladies. perhaps we should procure
such a bird. perhaps we should dine tonight
on sorrowful thistles— artichokes,
asparagus, etcetera.

CHRIS STROFFOLINO

Behind The Hymn

The crime, a simple one, common as Caedmon's:
against community. Venerable Bede
paints his story against a prelapsarian harmony,
a backdrop of high human community.
No one making fun of another's voice.
No mere tolerance either: "Everybody plays the fool sometimes
so rise and fall my friend
and sing to spite the voice you'd have if you wouldn't sing.
No need to wait, no need to stack the deck."
The pre-fall world not simply a man and a woman built from him,
but the gentle perspective edited out of Beowulf,
an alternative community of visionary tenderness
we find in the story behind the hymn.

But Caedmon couldn't take it, out of bashfulness
according to the officials, but there's reason to be skeptical.
He doesn't appear to me as he appeared in Levertov's painting
as the poor misfit cowherd not let in the exclusive club,
not so much the little drummer boy as the stone
that rejects but has to pretend it is rejected
to be the cornerstone. Unlike Rudolph,
he was already invited to play in their reindeer games.
Thus he is harder to pity as he hides in his barn
disguised as the isle of misfit toys.

His is the first British rehearsal room.
One could see him plotting revenge, seeking fame.
Sure, his preference for "simple beasts"
over Beowulf-like epic poetry scene preening
is to be admired and even praised,
especially if the songs most of them spoke
were monster stories in which Grendel
always bore an uncanny resemblance to clumsy
illiterate anti-social cowherds (mama's boys to boot).
But there is no evidence in Bede to suggest
that the community from which Caedmon ran
was anywhere near as brutally macho as Hrothgar’s meadhall,
and that bit about finding in the barn
the monotheistic god
so supported by those colonizing continentals,
sneaky, absolutely sneaky!

And not even for a reason as noble
as the Africans in the American south
taking on the religion of their oppressors
or even Caliban learning to curse in the highest
state of the art Elizabethan English Prospero made available to him.

No, Caedmon answered imagined coldness with coldness,
had to see heaven ("Heofron") as a roof ("hrofe")
and not accept the sky, the open air.
Caedmon just needed his space, which I can respect,
but he couldn't even see the tame beasts for the angels
who battered his heart into song.
Heofron was no hrofe but that which protected Caedmon
from his own tendency to abstract angels from beasts.
In his creation song, the earth comes last.
I don’t doubt his good measure as much as I doubt his honesty.
No “sudden angel” scared him back into the circle
as but one of a democratic community.
Instead, he went straight over their heads
and used St. Hilda and the good folks at Whitby Abbess
to club the prole art circle, like the Clash
siding with CBS against their mates who used to get in for free
(the nerve of Dylan going electric!),
But more profoundly, since Caedmon set the tone,
broke the ring, changed history, or was bent on it,
and history (as in tribute) now uses him to justify its existence.
The ring was never the same, is now “prehistoric.”
Cry, citizens, cry!
For Caedmon was the first Madonna;
God his marketing device.
The first lipsyncher (poor Milli Vanilli).
He ate the apple and the apple was God
and eventually the circle of reindeer faces—
who only laughed and called him names in his own head—
got their revenge on him by making him a star.
They gladly robbed from themselves to do so.
Either there’s a sucker born every minute
or he sang so well it didn’t matter
that his words were not even as good as “Eleanor Rigby”
(which used to be anthologized as poetry
but which seems to lack the staying power of his hymn).
The music is best lost to us
practically forcing us to make our own,
and buy fourtracks and managers,
and leave the circle behind
even if we don’t go so far as to go solo.
And Caedmon sang his songs everywhere—
As he was consistently voted
best singer of 672 AD, 673 AD,
some began to resist. They too were “bashful”
or sick of the goody-goody Pete Seegers
and their whitebread songs of solidarity,
and found barns of their own, laboratories in dreams
in which to conjure God and appeal to a creation
that could only happen once, and in the past.
A whole new race had begun, their (secret) motto:

“I’m better than Caedmon because I’m just like him.
Sure, he might have been the first singer
to call heaven a roof, god as the barn in drag,
but it was the fruit that caused the fall. Cry, citizens, cry!
Even then, Christianity was capitalism in disguise,
at least from the scant records we have.
Sad world of bare outlines,
of not enough distance between people
at least by contemporary standards.”

Caedmon brought distance, found God in solitude
and brought it back to those who never needed it,
who already had it within, or made it like love
without having to masturbate.
But that time is gone now.
“What’s he doing in that barn?”
were the last words that community ever uttered in unison.

I’ll tell you what he’s doing.
No, he’s not wishing he were in Scotland fishing tonight.
No, he’s out to prove you’re wrong, out to see evil in your peace.
Out to become everyman, get you down in the hole
that he was only in until he got you there.
This is the only democracy he feels he knows.
He’ll even act as if he’s giving you shelter
against harshness in see-through song.
But the song remains a thing too,
and as such another harshness.
Uncomfortable in a circle unless it’s the only center.
He’s solo-ing it in the barn when the caterpillar
becomes a butterfly even though it’s been a moth, a leaf, all along.

“Get down on your knees and listen”
is one of those revenge fantasies.
I, too, got brass in pocket
for the desire to want to check
the fame game acceleration nozzle
is, in today’s society, a denial of life and joy.
The only true murderer’s a killjoy
and I wouldn’t say Caedmon murdered
anything worthwhile by doing tricks for you,
if I felt his hymn brought me joy
as it presumably does to the medievalist
the academy makes more room for than for the lyricist.
And I would be more forgiving of him
if his songs were available on LP and Cassette
as I would probably be a bigger fan of Duncan's
had I gotten to partake in one of his intense conversations
now lost, when only the writing remains.

I'd be more forgiving, too, if Bede could be proved wrong,
if the high human community he painted
was really more like that to be found
in the roughly contemporaneous Beowulf (658-680 AD)
that certainly would ostracize a mere lyricist
as a mama's boy, lacking epic ambitions
and there is nothing to disprove this in Bede's account.

So hail Caedmon, and the necessary barn.
Hail the angel or beast that tells us
that competition is not necessarily capitalism,
there's no expression but artistic expression.
Hail the middlemen brought in to keep us from getting too close.
They don't have to be used as psychologists
you go to to complain about the stress of the job
you have to take to be able to afford them,
nor marriage counselors
that prevent some from making love
ever since Caedmon could not prove a lover
and was determined to play professional
or at least use heaven as a middleman to get to earth.

RONALD PALMER

Verb Confusion: (No Suggestions)

When the penitentiary is appealing: I got your stitches: growling like a tiger in rain:

He was pre-greased for the imaginary deal: I follow him on the snow path from the
parking lot to the edge of the woods: scoring the penis as prize: we enter among
the trees: we hide among the trees: Personality forfeited the jury: several lines
later: I gag on this promise: for the propagation of fury. Only to raid another
century's luxurious landscape of language: for the sedimentary O: mission: re-
 mains blurry. Jean Michel Basquiat drooling into the history of geni: us: I forgot
the line I was thinking on the highway. What will end up mattering: remains the
question: searching the mind's electric pulse. 7:04 PM A night in January-NYC:

homing to feel alive at the Nigerian Poetry Café: The median of survive is trouble.
Anxious in my zip-lock: my thinking protruding with my self in it: Effortless you
vomit what passes for C.A.P. Tit for Tat: pitter pat: turn off your tap: Reverse the
previous lines to line up with your thinking.

I allow you another brother. You pause for me another brother. Most lenient
Kantian Liberalist: Oxy: moronic yes: because your version of GOOD is
blameless and therefore more ethical: I you and we allow ourselves another
starving brother to enter our imaginary bed: I am the bridge that has forgotten its
reason. I am the bridge that has forgotten why we needed bridges: in the first
place: Yes O: Yes: I craved my lack between the two of you: not jealousy but I
wanted the two of you to function as one: I wanted the two of you to function as
my lacking: is there thinking inside it? Is there thinking inside my lack? Drop
me through the critical filter. Lock me in a room full of Richter's photorealism
but blurry period: Ghosty in their eloquence: with Miles pumped in squealing
Bitches Brew.

Don't get hysteric: al: beit ese I will not stop saying it. I will not.

Winner takes nothing: Winner Takes All: Winner Takes Call: Winner Bakes All:
Winner Takes Call: Winner Breaks Fall: Winner Takes All: Winner Breaks Fall:
Winter Takes All: Winter Takes Call: Winter Cakes All: Winner Takes Fall.

Make poem reflect all styles past present future: Homo sex is trapped in text: So
does anybody ask any questions at work? I thought the siren from the street was
part of the music: I thought the music in my head was part of the siren.

Invisible ink appears like humans born: Invisible power cord attached to each
human: we walk with cords around the earth: Maybe the alien is a star: Bananas
and Champagne: shall we reenact Krapp's last date? Possession deflates passion: Trust: a must: the invisible hand in my lap clutches the secret. One
mouth was rounder: more guarded. The other: tongue tight then tongue wild:
swallowing my mouth: exploration tainted with the mythic fear: innovation
translated as resentment: non-tenured as contentment: I cannot die: my own
mind will not die in my own mind: I myself am unbearable. Even the echo of my
temper was an embarrassment. A boy hiding among trees: A man among trees
exploring the pre-greased tunnel: for that unbearable boy was me: he wears his
class on his ass: And then the ice drips down the urban canyon like frozen glue:
I'll kiss Miss Hopkins in 100 years.

Feed the social body with my fears. Empty all my synonyms by switching gears
of piss course. Loving every tea room boy: Rot out the life span for the anti
social body. The simultaneous television calms and feeds the social body: rot out
the life span.
Car as office: I am suspicious of the east coast—under the thumbnail moon glowing next to venomous Venus: Glowing fang. The unreal constellations taunting belief. Acknowledging a history of the sky. The argumentative stars are belligerent with the need to expose the self’s packaging. Belief begins when the self spells saviour: or savior: however knowledge spells god.

My favorite part is the not-touching. Not the tongues where they want to go. But before the bodies allow themselves to mix: before the fingers become aggressive with performance. Before the ecstatic brown snifters are passed across the sheets. Before. Before. The imagining of the act is the erotic. The yearning of the act is the erotic. The translation of the act is the erotic. The fear of not being wanted is the erotic. The assumption of being erotic is the unwanted.

Nothingness centers a quadraphonic equation: floating eye of death’s solar storm: intersecting calm hinges everything farther: (read: father) operatic note pauses planets: death doesn’t terrify: verify a boundary-less floating—fs all death does: among the original sun: (read: son).

Granite ’s antithesis is bliss. A density infects the thing: ness: Becomes a hymn: ness that harnesses the urban fioness. Mouthwilling gives this boxing match legit:ness:

Blindness’s insurrection:

**LAURA ELRICK**

**Serial Errant**

1.

When she was arrested she was arrested without sanitary pads no place to put her children but under established law immediately after giving birth. This still bleeding after the dry cleaner this paperless producer that damn-lucky-job-her-kids-up-front-in-a-playpin let go. Arelis said to her when she was fired she said you should thank God for this baby God gave to you when it comes

[at Rikers]
[at Crane]
[at Sing-Sing]

Without consent without established knowledge seeking prenatal though inadequate before this had her urine searched her discharge summary was a copy was a copy given to the police. One example one woman special needs in a nightgown “pleading her belly” shackled to a bed was prepared for arrest. (Steely instrument flogging the scalding cunt) with a uniform’s claim to neutral

at Lompoc
at Soledad
at Summit

The targeted group is expected to generate though each personal history of insufficient prenatal (and this importantly) now seeking it no place to put her children is targeted for testing. So tested disregard to ensure public safety from crimes against person…) property against…) unhealthy birth an aberration threatens the orderly transmission. On gave the head its birth floor the she

at Wallkill
at Big Spring
at Fort Dix

From childbirth immediate the context of employment the unfit mother the diagram the discharge summary. Promiscuous / Stockpiles to force shortage. If unable to deliver antibiotic borders. On board in a great storm in holding cells chained to corpses packed spoon fashion human cargo. What the Boardroom shoves through the portholes to sea

at Bare Hill
at Hale Creek
at Terminal Isle

2.

Is she excited?—It means—(tilt)—Worked hard for—

He asked you to—It’s best to—Is she excited?—“Wide-eyes”—

Keep it—It’s OK—Up to you—It’s—Is she exciting?—
Add it to—PICS—*(cart)—Please?

Tell me—When we arrive at—Exaggerated body language—

*(Single mother)*—What’s written here—Can you READ?

3.

Towns used to sue to keep prisons out

*(This won’t hurt a bit now, just a little...)*

Inoculation:

“We need

*J-O-B-S* jobs...

and a CURE (citizens united for the rehabilitation of errants)

to keep our uh...heh heh...

hotels full.”

*Crack/Down but*

market’s a gangsta

Ritalin-ed locales

desperation gettin up / in / yr / face,

employs,

and implements a
two-faced embrace

and diligent’s not a pretty thing

Tour guide In a crisp white shirt:

“They’re delightful to work with—no cars to break down, no family emergencies, no calling in sick.”

Prison blues—

*(jeans)*

convict-made

*for ya*

out on Industrial Boulevard, the road rolled out and on past

cookie factory

machine shop

minimum adjacent female intensive confinement center

“It’s just like a small community out here.”

*Make use*

*the dregs*

*if they cain’t*


circuit board

gamuts

combo
under work lamps peering
through microscopes

subsidized compass to
pig farm's (profit) bred
magnetism

clerky peap chicklet sales
fr strike-time, if barred
telemarketers, if cup gloves if

sitting in the touch-up line at

"Can I
help you?"

Regionally dependent
entrapments
to neutralize
dangerous persons by bettering

"rights"

The smoldering decades
soldered

Cointelpro to

Little 'plants'
in the ballot
box of
drugged soldiers

"Some of our work went to China, the rest to San Quentin."

4.

Just a clutch of lesser powder white jail times in a capsule called poetically don't
talk to me in that tone of voice. Can't/quick/pitchit/cuffed/nightfeet/grow fainter.
who's there?

An ideal match plus (martini while)
Identity liberates colour from relation.
and their reply was silence. Naturally,
sharing its luckier talents. This is called artful abdication, rich "sobriety," or

I had thought you genuinely qualified
speared flesh of gin-soaked export crop.

scouring the ground for tiny rocks dropped in a hasty hand-off, surveillance coverage near total near to from lofty light (renovated) heights. Can you imagine?

Grievance remanded to green room to navigate gallery-speak

"deal?"

A true story, if you wish.
The sexuality of poverty (and the poverty of sexuality) as lived by the commodified producer of life and life-source is a grounding concern of Yedda Morrison’s latest work. Reminiscent of the early Martha Rosler—but in words, and with a productivist bent amidst the now-dominant consumptive paradigms of corporate globalism—*Shed* is poetry that is self-reflexive (refusing to naturalize its own structures and processes) and yet resists the by-now-familiar temptation to aesthetically resolve those contradictions that are, at this point, socially irreconcilable.

At a time when two-thirds of all labor in the world (seventy percent in the “Free Production Zones”) is done by women—when the same women, super-exploited at the point of production, are then summoned by (suggestively donning/sexually wielding) the products they have made but can never afford—when many do not have access to even the most basic of necessities for themselves and their children, not the least of which includes reproductive control, such work registers an important correction to feminisms which have abandoned the relationship between labor exploitation and gender, sexuality, desire, subjectivity.

Indeed, who is picked to pick? and “Can we eat this ‘ruined season’ apple?”

Morrison lays bare the logic of capitalist (re)production that is manifest in the labors of industrial agricultural workers who “pick” and “ship,” and who are then (and have been historically) “picked” and “shipped” for their sexual (shall we say) capacity.

The book, with startling mechanically-intimate cover art by Leona Christie, is divided into three sections. Though these sections are formally and lexically distinct, they are linked in their twirling development of problematic “themes” that originate in the relationship between image and language, including: body functions and the functioned body, productive process and the procession of products, moment of (photographic) capture and the captive historical moment.

The relationship, the manufactured obliteration of an historical imagination, is the discursive surround-sound which “Politicizes need after a ruined civic season / If in turn you are a public, afloat in dead arms picking.”

It begins with “A line or cordon of people serving as pickets.” The first page:

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The Crop and 3 in front
wrapped in cotton—
born (here) in plastic pumps i’ve
wrapped dogged
our dirty nails
soil what’s wrapped
in cotton
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This highly condensed seven-line stanza begins presumably as a verbal reproduction of a photograph: a cotton crop that the three laborers standing before it are wrapping into bales. The perspective spins in line three to that of one of the laborers (a generic voice) who nonetheless performs her industrial task in plastic pumps—a kind of permanent residue of an earlier middle class century of European womanhood. The voice is at once that of a tired, dirty worker “dogged” by a never-ending task, and that of a producer necessarily turned consumer who is “dogged” by the *mark* of her labor. Her dirty hands can’t touch that unknown delicate which at the end of the “line” is wrapped in the cotton she produced.

What follows is a tumbling, sparsely punctuated half-page “sentence”—interesting when viewed as a gushing refusal to be silenced by the tightly controlled (would-be negating) contradictions evident in the visual/empathetic page one. It is here that the contradictions are split. open at the historical—linguistic axes. In other words, that looking and uttering are historically specific activities in themselves is integral to Morrison’s critique of them. In what begins as an etymological play on the word Cerasus (both an ancient city and the Latin word for cherry, which is also a symbol of virgin fertility) she imagines the city (body-politic?) as...“my own black topsoil rich in humus and lime,” which “she’s not writing someone else’s from outside” of.

Enter patriarchal division of labor, twisted backdrop to the capitalist’s “elevator tower or crane boom mounted on truck platform from which pickers or launchers raise power lines to service the bastard simultaneously.” Amid all the furious activity each wears “a picture hat that is rapidly firing (or i do)” which speaks—in sure, framed, purchasable moments—as the subjective.

These concerns continue throughout the rest of the book, particularly how the subjective experience “fits” into the “organization” of productive forces (including child-bearing and rearing) under capitalism. In Stella Mari, the second
section, the language of hunger/food/consumption/bodily function is wedded to
a kind of nursery-rhyme-like violence where woman not only produces food for
others, but is herself snatched to be eaten. And in Aerial Motive, the last section
of the book, we trail what I can only describe as the sexualized and silenced
daughter/bride through the violence of the history of industrialization.

Teeming with the contradictory configurations of life "feminized" under
capitalism, Morrison's Shed will refocus your critical poetic lens, as the produc-
tive crucible beckons a new generation of feminist writers.

—LAURA ELRICK

NOTES FROM A PRELAPSLARYAN NEW YORK

"How Much Fun You Can Have Thinking":
Reflections on Poetry in the Year 2001
by Vincent Katz

I'm an impatient reader of poetry. If I can't get all the way through a poem, I consider
the poem uninteresting. All of a sudden, there are a lot of poets whose poems I can read
all the way through. Some I've been following for a few years; others were unfamiliar to
me. I had not been aware of the extent of this shift until a recent reading by John
Godfrey at the Poetry Project in New York. Before the reading, Martha Diamond had
expressed impatience at a statement of John's a few days earlier. When she asked what
he was planning to read, he replied, "Poems for people between the ages of 18 and 25." She
took his remark as an insult, but I felt sure there was something behind it, though I
didn't know exactly what I did know Godfrey was too street-smart to let a comment like
that go unguarded.

John's reading featured recent poems—chiseled to a bare-bones sparseness, lean,
mean, and imposing. The other reader was Ange Mlinko, whose first issue as editor of
the Poetry Project Newsletter had just come out. I sensed a certain relation between the
two readings. Neither was autobiographical in the literal sense, and neither was overtly
political. Mlinko's work, like that of certain other younger poets, sometimes resembles
prose, both on the page and when read aloud. Its musicality sets it on the side of poetry.
Playing with the line between poetry and prose doesn't seem so interesting an enterprise.
That's not exactly what Mlinko was doing, though. She was mixing diverse areas of
thought—science and gossip being two of the most prominent.

As I walked home, and the next day, and the next, I thought about the differences
between the poetry I thought I preferred and the poetry I thought I liked less, meanwhile
re-reading the Newsletter. What I thought I liked was poetry that reacts directly, though
not literally, to the outside world—whether that be a song heard, a painting seen, sex,
being in a landscape in a certain light and climate—it's as though the intellect has been
set free, allowing itself to be attracted randomly where it will. The Black Mountain poets
can be seen, in their differing ways, to be exerting influence: Duncan through a willful
mellifluousness, Olson through a charged view of history, Creeley through a colloquial
musicality.

As I re-read the Newsletter, I realized that most of the poetry being discussed was of
a high caliber. I also realized that much of it is being published by fugitive journals and
presses. Taking references from the Newsletter, as well as scraps from my own memory,
I began surfing the web. What I had suspected proved true. There is indeed a movement
foot, which I will attempt to adumbrate.

Distinct from poetry of the 1970s—defined by Ashberian abstraction on one side
and Ginsbergian barrier-smashing on the other—distinct also from poetry of the 1980s
and much of the 1990s—which was dominated by the personal-as-political reduced to
TV-talkshow-style therapy sessions or stand-up comedy—the new poetry, written
mainly by poets under 30, is intellectual, cool, involved with wordplay and games, has a
scientific edge, and is a powerful collective of disparate voices. It is different from
Language Poetry's theory-driven texts, as well as from neo-Beat posturing. Godfrey, of
course, was hip to it. You could tell by the way he was dressed—his own style, but
flashy.

2000 was the year of New York School Ascendant, but not in the mode of the John
Ashbery of The Tennis Court Oath, which has exerted much influence over the past three
decades and is arguably one of the core texts of the Language School. The new poets
seem to adore Frank O'Hara, judging by the many references to him and his poetry in
their work, as well as the supra-referential O'Haranianism of some of the writing. In
particular, it is the O'Hara of Lunch Poems and "Bionter" that provides a useful tone—
abstract but personal. O'Hara seems to have been taken up as the symbol of an uncon-
ventional literariness. Poets like Anselm Berrigan, Edmund Berrigan, Katherine Lederer,
Hoa Nguyen and others are working in a vital area, defined largely by the freedom of the
personality to make its inconsistencies known. What makes them different from O'Hara,
Schuyler, Berkson, Corbett and others they admire is partially that they are,
observing and responding to different worlds, and partially they avail themselves of un-O'Haran
approaches. The Berrigans and Nguyen rely on that voice in the head that edits and
reforms what it has seen and heard in the last five minutes, twenty minutes, twelve hours.
Lederer and Mlinko are more willing to let literary models guide their writing.

These poets read a lot of textbooks on a variety of topics, which makes them
not unlike a group of young visual artists. Matthew Ritchie is one of the better of these,
in that his literary references don't intrude on his artworks' charm. When he speaks,
however, his sources are quickly revealed. His paintings based on physics and molecular
biology look a little like scientific diagrams, but they have a robust physicality that takes
them beyond those conceptual beginnings. It is possible to enjoy Ritchie's work without
knowing anything of the thought underpinning them—for his graphic technique and the
striking forms he composes. Discussing his work in The New York Times, 10/15/00,
Ritchie explained, "Basically, I wanted to say, 'Here's a map, now let's go on a journey.'
It was meant to be a generative structure, designed to produce adventures inside itself,
adventures in information."

Ritchie's themes would not be out of place in the work of a writer like Mlinko: the
Watchers—fallen angels from the book of Enoch—used to describe the beginnings of
human consciousness; the Big Bang as seven quantum mechanical forces brought together in a Holiday Inn outside Boston, etc. Describing his early development, Ritchie outlined his independent research into such topics as “the history of color...competing religious systems in the West and their relationship to philosophical and political structures, how those in turn were related to the evolution of early scientific practices and how that evolved into contemporary scientific practice... I’m trying to create a landscape where different kinds of information can coexist... I dreamed the whole thing up as a way to express just how much fun you can have thinking...”

This last thought seems to me the crux of the issue. Whereas some poetry in the 1990s, along with much visual art, seemed mired in theory, this new poetry and art uses theory and other types of literature as a jumping-off point for a joy-ride through creation, which is why the influence of O’Hara has loosened so large these days. With the passing months of 2001, “O’Hara” has rigidified into a sign for many; his influence will fade, and we will again be faced with the cold wind of what to do next.

What’s good about the new poetry is that it’s involved mainly with itself. If it finds something in the past that smiles to it, it accepts it (it has decided glibness, once again, is a virtue), but it feels no necessity to be tied to an existing school of thought. It places a premium on practice, the act of putting words together on a frequent basis, so that how well something is said is equally important to what. As Kenneth Koch once remarked about a poet then in his twenties who recently turned forty, after an initial stupification, you feel great, because it’s always great to have more good art in the world, because it makes you want to write more poetry.

10/16/00 — 12/17/00 — 12/25/00 — 7/3/01

AN INTERVIEW WITH CARLA HARRYMAN
Michael Magee, Jacques Debrot / 2001

MM: There’s a line of yours from “In the Mode of” that has always stuck with me — “This is not logic but a language of logic used to other ends. Just as ‘I’ might be used, as well, to other ends.” I’m wondering if you can elaborate on that, perhaps in relation to your idea that “narrative might be thought to be a character” or the notion that one might choose to “distribute narrative” rather than disrupt it at the level of the sentence.

CH: Don’t know if I can fit all of this into one package, but let’s see where it goes.

Well, if I use the language of logic,—such as if then propositions— to “other ends” i.e. not necessarily logical ends, then is the comparison made with the narrator’s use of “I” a legitimate comparison? The narrator of “In the Mode of” is not me, Carla the author. It is a fabrication that refers to itself as “I.” This work is what? What’s the genre? Not autobiography? Is it an essay—well if it is then “I” mean something by what I say. And of course “I” do. But this work is neither exactly essay nor fiction. “I” follows certain trails of thoughts (forged by whom?) which become events, narrated by “I”. These are the things that happen to “I” or that “I” thinks. Not me (even if I am finding out what “I” thinks and writing that down). I follow “I,” who, among other things, refuses to divulge her/its or his gender. “I” can range freely around in the not-yet-constructed event until “I” gets there. “I” is free of certain attributes that would decide the conditions of her interactions. But because she is free of these conditions, oops! I said she! she is still in a relative relationship to that which she is free of—freedom is a relative thing...it is contingent on limits.

There is an underlying dynamic related to power. The narrator is trying to find a way around questions of power, not via polemics, but via a game related to narrative. Is this narrative about me? Is it about something else? Whether or not its sources are autobiographical, all made up, or public and political, (its about me only insofar as it is what I can think) how might one navigate through all of this without giving into or relinquishing desires to dominate or be dominated. Dominating and domination are related to certain narrative drives. These almost become objects of sexual teasing in this work. These drives, in this work, are also connected with opportunism and the art market, cultural cynicism, and erotic fascination with art. What is the relationship between the erotic fascination and the art market? The autoerotic sexuality of the fascination betrays the money fetish of the art work. If some art is “about” the relinquishing of the boundary between fascination of fixed idealizations and psycho-somatic (with the emphasis on somatic) desires then what happens to “elevated” art narratives? Narratives that are part of a system of exchange? “I” is resistant, as is narrative in my work, to certain systems of subordination. And that’s how the language of logic gets used to other ends. And when one doesn’t go along with rules of subordination, narrative and non-narrative might collide. So the distribution of narrative might be due to a collision.

Gulp.

JD: Well yes, the “I” in your work isn’t “Carla the author.” But it’s not just a “fabrication” either, I don’t think. I mean, what I find really interesting is how — with all of your canny skepticism about the expressive fallacy — you still find a way to be psychologically present in your writing — even if that presence is in some fundamental sense theatrical. And this might tie in too with your own preference for “partiality” — as distinct, say, from the way that the New Criticism, as well as some versions of the Language school (to make a comparison without implying an equation), sanction impersonality in order to situate the reader in the most comprehensive cultural vantage point available. In other words, why shouldn’t I understand your writing as being about — to quote Morton Feldman in another context — “a total commitment to your own uniqueness?”
Acker however is often regressive. I might speculate that the autobiographical facets of her work, of which there are many, are all related to regression. If the “I” is expressive, in this case, it is through regression, I might speculate. But the expressivity of the subject is entirely mediated by other contexts. The expression does not reach its object the object abuts it: juxtaposition annuls the self-expression and absorbs it into the constructed space of text.

As in the case of Acker, my writing includes regressive impulses. Masturbating in front of an art dealer’s painting signifies regression linked to power and authority. But this sounds too serious; in the writing, it’s funny.

But the I in “in the Mode of” is a vehicle: it works like a marble in a pinball machine except the game is invented during the course of the marble’s excursion. Perhaps the expressiveness you are identifying is related to the pleasure I was feeling in writing the piece/making the game as I follow the marble.

One can locate a similar kind of pleasure, I think, in Lynne Tillman’s Madame Realism criticisms. Madame Realism is and isn’t Lynne Tillman the art critic. Madame Realism allows Tillman to focus on art issues that journalism rarely likes to entertain through the vehicle of a third person personae, who speaks also sometimes in the first person.

Perhaps the “I” in “In the Mode of” is behaving like a third person.

Just because something might appear to be comprehensive in respect to agreed-upon norms, it doesn’t mean it is. So what you say about partiality makes sense to me. But my uniqueness, whatever that is, is not in competition with comprehensive positions. Uniqueness, in so far as I can even talk about it, has to do with a confluence of events, situations, contexts. The unique circumstance of Shklovsky’s exile to Berlin was also a shared exile—not unique. “Uniqueness” always has a relationship to a conceptual scheme: it can be considered dialectically or dualistically or serially. Unique or not, I have no interest in thinking about my uniqueness per se; but I am interested in Shklovsky, Acker, Tillman and the use of “I” in their respective writings and the relationship of such uses of “I” to my use of the pronoun in “In the Mode of” or in a work such as “Typical Domains,” in which, “I enjoy being slavish for in this way I conceal my deep suspicions. I enjoy all the roles I play.”

The fact is, I’d like to solve this problem of expressivity—haven’t gotten there yet, have I?

MM: I agree that “uniqueness has to do with a confluence of events, situations, contexts”— quite distinct from the notion of uniqueness associated with, say, Romantic genius—and I don’t want to belabor a topic in which you don’t have much, if any, interest. BUT: there is one aspect of uniqueness which seems
valuable to me and I'm curious to hear your opinion ("Uniqueness," anyway, is the wrong word perhaps: ec-centricity, being out of the center, would I guess be my word of choice.) Nate Mackey talks about this: "the role of eccentric individuals whose contributions come to be identified with the very culture that may have initially rejected them" and goes on to explain this phenomenon by noting that "in matters of artistic othering individual expression both reflects and redefines the collective, realigns, refracts it."

So, the individual is always mediated by but is also always mediating the collective. My question would be whether you see your writing in anything similar to these terms — considering how it acts within, in the simplest example, a small community of writers; or more generally, do you think of your writing (either in the act or afterward) as having a public address? Lastly, can writing "realign" or "refract" or "redefine" (small or large) collectives?

CH: First off, I don't think that one can talk about community — small or large — in a general sense. Communities serve so many functions.

I agree with/like Mackey's description of mediation between the individual and the collective. His consideration is close to that of Raymond Williams in his essay "Form" in Marxism and Literature. My recollection is that in the context of Russian Formalism, Williams discusses the relationship of traditional usage of form to innovations in form. One of his claims may seem obvious, that in an unstable culture, nation, society innovations occur (but, I think one would qualify this by considering the nature of the instability: sometimes perhaps destruction occurs — I am thinking about the recent destruction of the Buddhas in Afghanistan). In stable cultures or cultures in a period of stability, aesthetic traditions are upheld according to Williams. American culture has been unstable forever, and innovations variously occur all the time. Yet American culture is also ideologically glued together through doctrines of stability — "we haven't had a war here since..." (a phrase that candy coats a lot of American reality). So national narratives play a complicated role in this country relative to questions of stability, instability, tradition and innovation when it comes to the arts. Art that upholds the traditions of the stable democratic narrative, progress, uplift, rags to riches, immigrant assimilation to the middle class etc., tend toward traditional form (what individuals invent within regulated structures) is what maintains, to some degree, the viability of traditional forms. I like William's perspective and Mackey's.

Now for what baffles me: you are asking can individuals in small communities of writers mediate and also can writing itself redefine or realign small or large collectives? Writing has and does sometimes change people's (individuals and collectives) lives. But I don't think that's what you're asking about. Perhaps what confuses me is the idea of the community in this context. I think that community in the context of American culture is fairly unstable. So if an individual is trying to redefine or realign the direction of an art community in this American context, there would, perhaps, have to be a sense of its stability. The sense of the stability, may be related to the way the individual understands his/her community or "that community over there" to be working. If the person then has a critique of such a community(ies), she might attempt to intervene or
make a new community or a new connection between communities. In any case, the intellectual stabilizing (which would involve naming, identifying qualities of the community—and this activity might seem painful or violent to people within it) of the notion of the community, would be, potentially the first step toward a critique. I would assume that the critique would be related to values that might exceed the specific activity of a community. How does the community represent, act within, or serve as an example of larger social or cultural values?

Sometimes, I think that the debates around the politics of poetry and community are obsessed with power and reception in the most trivial senses. The question of who has power and what can one/we do about it, derailed thought from its more significant objects. What I mean by more significant objects is pretty complicated but exists presently in the tensions between aesthetic practice and political knowledge in a social context that is on the one hand very unstable and on the other increasingly hegemonic and conservative.

I am now in Detroit. That means I am part of multiple communities: the university community, the poetry and art community, the body politic, my son’s school community, etc. My activities within these communities have had small effects on them. The reason I am here is economic. I exercise a certain degree of freedom, that which I can “afford,” and the returns, on the personal level, are pretty interesting. To what degree can one create change if change is desirable? There is a gentleman in Detroit that ran the Detroit Opera Theater as a nomadic organization: the opera moved from theater to theater for many years. Then he finally prevailed on “the powers that be” to renovate the “opera house”, which was originally a vaudeville theater. It is quite an amazing cotton candy Italian palace of a performance space. He really made something happen, but his art form is traditional. The city “mothers and fathers” e.g. the big three can get behind something like that.

I have a friend, a black poet and playwright in Detroit. One of his jobs is teaching poetry workshops in drug treatment centers. He teaches economic and commodity critique in the treatment centers as a major feature of his curriculum. His theory is that you can’t survive the treatment and you can’t be a poet if you’re not awake. Can he change the Detroit community? He can make a difference in certain individual’s lives. But as long as the big three and the complementary real estate interests and neo-fordism and deracinated uplift narratives control the city, that is all he can do in that context. Of course he does other things too. He starts things up in what Acker calls the “interstices.” Like him, I am drawn to doing more than one thing at one time, of not being pinned down to a single identity, or mark of community and to working the “interstices.”

MM: Well, I think you’ve answered my questions even if they weren’t all that clear. In my reference to “large communities” I guess I meant something like this: can the language generated by a poet, or poets, or simply the speakers and symbol-makers in a sub-community, alter the broad, relatively stable system of belief (say, the “the stable democratic narrative” you mention above) by/through which a large community maintains its social structure? What role would “innovation” or “non-conformity” play in such a process? As far as small communities go, I was thinking of many of the kinds you mention above. And, again, it seems to me you addressed both pretty thoroughly.

JD: Something that interests me a great deal is the difficulty of evaluating the specifically literary quality of experimental texts. How would you begin to assess the value of the kind of writing to which you are committed with literariness as the final arbiter?

CH: I think I would have to know more about your own vocabulary, disciplinary thinking, etc. to answer questions of assessment. Tonight I was sitting at the café at the local gym eating a salad and reading Michael McClure’s The Beard. I think it’s a great work. That’s my assessment. Why? Because it’s a brilliant juggling act. Billy the Kid keeps saying “it doesn’t matter.” And that really pushes Harlow’s buttons, but then they keep trading lines. All of the lines resonate in a swirl of perfect suspicion. Sex and not sex, death and not death, language that is only words, and language that is caught, thrown, that penetrates, is penetrated, and empties through repetition: STAR STAR STAR STAR. One of the most marvelous things about this play is its generous recognition of narcissism. Narcissism is a possession of anyone. It’s okay to have it. The play plays with empty and giant themes without guilt. It touches step by step the expansiveness and limits of language.

A mini self-portrait:

An improviser found herself one day necking with the Comte de Lautreamont and Simone de Beauvoir as if the first books she had ever read were Northanger Abbey and The Tennis Court Oath. The dates of these encounters were all mixed up in her mind.

Everything that follows is footnotes:

Month of May: an emotional footnote

I am in love with the literary and am entirely a literary being— with torn edges, tatters, which mark breaks of literary tempo—as a way to honor and redefine the literary in respect to the contemporary. Right now there is a terrible closing off of the possibility of the literary in respect to certain mainstream and even not so mainstream discourses. Yesterday in my advanced writing seminar, we were reading Hak Kyung Cha’s Dictee in tandem with essays from Baldwin’s Notes for a Native Son. Topics discussed included language and dislocation, historical
imagination, and the physicality of language, and writers' appropriation of non-literary language. We also discussed Baldwin's essays as virtual templates for literary works. At some point, one of my students asked me why most short fiction "these days" seems to have to do with small discrete, bland, events that are meant to reproduce some kind of epiphanic experience. What's literary? Baldwin's essays or some truncated excuse of a short story?

Well, I think you and I know the answer to both questions: there is a terribly conservative drive toward a contraction of the meaning and value of the aesthetic. If I say this contraction involves political ideology and investment capital, someone might say I'm not being literary. Identifying the causes of the over-cheapening commodification of literature is not literary. The language is crass. This language is crass. And this has everything to do with actual existence and the on-going media drive to de-politicize/de-intellectualize actual existence. My anguish, and it is nearly that, in teaching, is that I want my students to try to rise to the level of Baldwin or Cha and not settle for bland epiphanies that anaesthetize (as opposed to aestheticize) the senses. But am I betraying my students by not allowing the meager and paltry, that which is easily achievable, into the discourse of the classroom? I find myself as a teacher constantly trapped in paradoxes. I am not prejudiced against sub-genres, like some teachers of my generation are. I love certain works in detective, thriller, sci-fi genres—but I always exclude the conservative, the small spirited—the stuff that seems endlessly and easily achievable.

Peter Nicholls in his work *Modernisms* talks about Breton in respect to a "transposition of aesthetic categories into actual existence." As much as it can be, my art practice is my life. It was literature that gave me coherence and a life. Had I not fallen in love with the literary as a child—with *Moby Dick* and *Les Misérables*, Langston Hughes, and Jean Genet, Beckett, and Ashbery and Shklovsky, I can't imagine what would have become of me. I betrayed the students by not allowing the meager and paltry, that which is easily achievable, into the discourse of the classroom? I find myself as a teacher constantly trapped in paradoxes. I am not prejudiced against sub-genres, like some teachers of my generation are. I love certain works in detective, thriller, sci-fi genres—but I always exclude the conservative, the small spirited—the stuff that seems endlessly and easily achievable.

Next note:

The writing wants to circumvent on either side of the subject object binary the installation of exhausted reading practices through a certain trope of authority. Ron Silliman wrote an essay called The New Sentence. He used my poem "For She" as an example of the "new sentence," and to which "For She" is used as an example, are:

1) The paragraph organizes the sentences;
2) The paragraph is a unit of quantity, not logic or argument
3) Sentence structure is altered for torque, or increased polysemy/ambiguity
4) Syllogistic movement is (a) limited (b) controlled
5) Primary syllogistic movement is between the preceding and following...
sentences;
6) Secondary syllogistic movement is toward the paragraph as a whole, or the total work.
7) The limiting of syllogistic movement keeps the reader’s attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below.

Stillman has also stated previously that the sentence in poetry is related to the meter of verse. I think this may be an obvious point, but it is also essential to remember this. The sentence is heard differently when thought of in light of meter than when it is not thought of in respect to meter. This is important when considering how to read my work.

Here is the poem:

The back of the head resting on the pillow was not wasted. We couldn’t hear each other speak. The puddle in the bathroom, the sassy one. There were many years between us. I stared the stranger into facing up to Maxine, who had come out of the forest bad from wet nights. I came from an odd bed, a vermillion riot attracted to loud dogs. Nonetheless I could pay my rent and provide for him. On this occasion she apologized. An arrangement that did not provoke inspection. Outside on the stagnant water was a motto. He was more than I perhaps though young. I sweat at amphibians, managed to get home. The sunlight from the window played up his golden curls and a fist screwed over one eye. Right to left and left to right until the sides of her body were circuits. While dazed and hidden in the room, he sang to himself, severe songs, from a history he knew nothing of. Or should I say malicious? Some rustic gravure, soppy but delicate at pause. I wavered, held back of the head resting on the pillow was not wasted. We couldn’t hear each other speak. The puddle in the bathroom, the sassy one. There were many years between us. I stared the stranger into facing up to Maxine, who had come out of the forest bad from wet nights. I came from an odd bed, a vermillion riot attracted to loud dogs. Nonetheless I could pay my rent and provide for him. On this occasion she apologized. An arrangement that did not provoke inspection. Outside on the stagnant water was a motto. He was more than I perhaps though young. I sweat at amphibians, managed to get home. The sunlight from the window played up his golden curls and a fist screwed over one eye. Right to left and left to right until the sides of her body were circuits. While dazed and hidden in the room, he sang to himself, severe songs, from a history he knew nothing of. Or should I say malicious? Some rustic gravure, soppy but delicate at pause. I wavered, held back. I tremble, jack him up. Mattred wallows. I couldn’t organize the memory. Where does he find his friends? Maxine said to me “but it was just you again.” In spite of the cars and the smoke and the many languages, the radio and the appliances, the flat broad buzz of the tracks, the anxiety with which the eyes move to meet the phone and all the arbitrary colors, I am just the same. Unplug the glass, face the docks. I might have been in a more simple schoolyard.

I am only concerned here with the first two properties:

In this work, the “paragraph organizes the sentences.” But might it not also be the case that the sentences organize the paragraph? That like the forward and backward (Stein) movement of the sentences, the poem is produced by the

feeling for the paragraph as constituted by sentences and by sentences as constituted by the paragraph. If one looks at later works of mine, I think one can find this modernist impulse quite easily. Ron’s “new sentence” suggests a progressivism I don’t purely buy into.

A few days later...

The work Chairs of Words, commissioned by the Cranbrook Museum, is a good example of what I mean by modernism in respect to my ouvre. Chairs of Words draws from the famous (Eames and Saarinen mostly) chairs, designed when their creators were members of the Cranbrook Community. My work reproduces the shadows of the chairs as words on the wall. From a distance the visual poems look like forms standing in for chairs, and when one “reads” the chairs, one can not experience the totality of the chair image shadow at the same time. Also the more the shadow words are organized as prose, the more the words disappear into the form. There is a complex relationship of part to whole. Think, for instance, of the relationship of the aerial view to local specificity in Williams, linear and circular time in Woolf’s The Waves... There is a co-presence of past and present in respect to the development of and potential values for literary device—in this particular work, but also in my use of the paragraph.

So to return to Stillman. “The paragraph is a unit of quantity, not logic or argument.” In my work, the paragraph is never only a unit of quantity, even when, as in “For She” it foregrounds the quantitative quality of paragraphing. But all of my paragraphs when I write with paragraphs have a feeling for shape, which is constructed through an attention variously to the potential elasticity and self-reflexivity of language, of argumentation, narrative, play, mimesis, discourses, and story telling. This is certainly the case in “For She.” I think an obvious reading of the poem starts with the last line: The schoolyard is not simple: I make decision about the feeling or sound of argument in a prose poem. I attend to the desire for argument, for narrative, for playfulness and listen for what the desire and the poem suggests. There is then a conversation happening, and a forward and backward looking. This is literary.

MM: I have a question which relates perhaps to what you say toward the end here — “There is a co-presence of past and present in respect to the development of and potential values for literary device” — as well as to your “mini self-portrait” (the mixed-up dates) and the general issue of literariness. It has to do with your use of anthropomorphism in Memory Play and elsewhere in relation to Blake’s use of same (and perhaps then to your interest in Blake). Here’s what I’m thinking: in your work and in Blake’s work there is a relationship between anthropomorphism and the idea of timelessness. For Blake this is Christian and visionary. His problem is he has two geneses: 1) the Adamic, prelapsarian one (the second creation myth in Genesis where God forms Adam as well as all the
other animals from the dust on the ground and doesn’t specifically give him
dominion over them, doesn’t create an evolutionary hierarchy to the degree that
the first creation myth does, etc) where anthropomorphism is real (Adam/dust or
as Blake has it, clay); and 2) the one from the Gospel of John: “In the beginning
was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in
the beginning with God.” This latter genesis, say, foregrounds the issue of
signification: the distance between “was” and “was with” becomes a problem.
So, take this passage from Blake’s “The Book of Thel”:

Then Thel astonish’d view’d the worm upon its dewy bed.

“Art thou a Worm? Image of weakness, art thou but a Worm?
I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lily’s leaf;
Ah, weep not, little voice, thou can’t not speak, but thou can’t weep.
Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless & naked, weeping,
And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mother’s smiles.”

The Clod of Clay heard the Worm’s voice, & rais’d her pitying head
Those questions and, again, the distance between them: “Art thou a Worm?” vs.
“Is this a Worm?” Blake may want the prelapsarian transcendental signifier but
he gets “Worm,” the word.

I’m wondering to what degree, if not this poem, then the issues it raises
inform Memory Play, specifically those sections (Fish’s incredible speech on pp.
17-19 and Reptile’s on p. 62 which raises the issue of Utopia) where you echo
the first verse of John’s Gospel? Two things which jump out at me: you intro-
duce the issue of economics (eg. the value of diamonds); and of gender (I don’t
mention Eve above but here she is). And of course I haven’t even mentioned
“Child” and “Songs of Innocence.” And just to pile the plate a bit higher (!)
what role does the utopian play, if any, in Memory Play or in your writing
generally?

CH: Time, Animals, Pleasure, and Utopia

Time:

A conventional literary notion is that memory is related to time passing within
the narrative of a person’s life. It is often deployed in respect to a notion of
personal loss, and seems to serve as a counterpoint to historical narrative, the
narrative of the many—that which subordinates the value and particularity of
the personal memory. Time passing marks loss of innocence within the conven-
tions of realism and the “lesson” to be learned from the predigested novels and films
of mass culture is that the loss is either not recoverable, or it is: depending on
how sappy the narrative dares to be.

The cultural desire in respect to such narratives is for the personal

transcendence of history. The economic exploitation of this desire is culturally
ubiquitous and has been dealt with variously (and to somewhat different ends)
by “postmodern artists” as divergent as Richard Prince and Steve McCaffery.

In 1982, I gave a talk at New Langton Arts in San Francisco titled “The
Middle.” This was an exceedingly non-linear essay, composed of appropriated
texts, my own discourses and storytelling. The storytelling was for the most part
presented as autobiography but there was not one, as far as I can remember,
“true” autobiographical event narrated in any of the story snippets.

There was an overt argument to “The Middle,” which was contingently
related to its formal hybridity. The argument concerned the notion of tragedy
and the use of the psychoanalytic appropriation of mythic narrative as interde-
pendent upon each other. My argument at the time was against tragedy and the
psychoanalytic appropriation of mythic narrative from a perspective of gender
critique. As Lyn Hejinian has noted, “The Middle” was a rejection of closure.
The “middle” was not intended as some kind of Confucian or American liberal
middle road, but as a challenge to the concept of fate as glopped onto by

The Clod of Clay heard the Worm’s voice, & rais’d her pitying head
cultural narratives. Storytelling need not be driven by anticipated outcome; its
purpose might be more immediate or conversational or communal. In Memory
Play, the death of Willie Loman is mocked for its pathetic inevitability. [If
anyone could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his
eternal lot—“There Is No Natural Religion,” Blake, 76]. It is probably evident
by now that the formulation there is no turning back is a problem for me: there
is turning back sometimes and sometimes there is something else and other
things rather than only choices between blindly moving forward or turning back/
refusing development.

Blake’s “Book of Thel” seems to me to be about mourning and mortal-
ity in an incomplete sense. The child is terrified of loss and mourning and
coming to terms with and escaping her death. I find it to be a heart-breaking
poem. Given this probably not fully informed reading of the poem, I see the shift
from “thou” to “this” as a kind of adolescent projection. The worm is “this”
when Thel perceives it as uncared for. She then does not care for the worm in
the way that she would want a parent perhaps to care for her, or in the way that
the Clod of clay cares for the worm and is blessed by understanding the nurtur-
ing inherent to a more exemplary (and mature) understanding of what the Clod
might call the meaning of life: the recognition of interdependency as the purpose
to care for that which is outside one’s self. Thel’s escape from the grave and
return to the vale at the end of the poem is strange: but time here is not satisfied
and her life/end or death incomplete. It seems then that if the prelapsarian time
is associated with her flight from the grave back to the vale, we are talking about
something insufficient and immature in respect to knowledge. Thel is not
identical to but will always be within this insufficiency. However, experience,
for this reader of the poem, registers as an adult experience: the adult is mourning
the child and the child’s death will recreate in the adult the system of
insufficiency. And to take this into a slightly more semiotic register, the word
“worm” is not but affixes to an “image of weakness,” because Thel can not care
for or animate the “word” sufficiently in respect to knowledge—this is a knowledge Blake associated with god.

A writer might feel some canonical writings to be liberating and others oppressive. I use the word feel(ing) on purpose. My mother used to recite Songs of Innocence and Experience to me when I was a very young child or I read and recited them to myself as well and re-experienced my early reading as my mother’s voice, and so for me the words of Blake’s songs mediate that space of recognition, which Thel can not locate. What I owe to Blake or to my mother or to the situation of innocence as moved by a “phantom limb” (Mackey) of knowledge is the love of language. Or, in the same vein, Blake’s poetry becomes the site of mourning for the mother as described by Kristeva in her essay “Life and Death of Speech” (Black Sun). Blake’s writing can be so pleasurable to me that I can hardly read it interpretively at all. This pleasure might be related to knowledge in a constellational sense: the knowledge is archaic as it involves language in respect to a primary relationship, it is connected to the pleasure of recognition: that of the mother’s for the child, but also that of the child’s for the words as the words communicate something both graspable and somewhat outside the child’s cognitive capacities. Learning in the visceral manner that a child learns exactly involves the sense of an object and the sense of an object having more to reveal than what one can fully understand at the moment. One thing that makes Thel so sad from the adult point of view is she will not live to know this— as in a circuit with reciprocity between object and subject.

In reading Memory Play, one can easily imagine that Milton is an oppressor and Blake a liberator, because Milton is the object of parody. However, in Memory Play, the Miltonic figure is not directly related to Milton but rather the kinds of cultural humiliations that might be associated with institutional relationships to Milton or the literary canon. Well, and more to the point, The Miltonic Humiliator is an absurdist doll: the name suits the device. My relationship to Blake is much stronger than to Milton, but the response to Blake is also primitive or primary. The use of Blake’s song in Memory Play is meant to be regressive. There are many considerations of the prospects of memory in the play and at this moment the play enacts regressive memory. In other words it performs the thing rather than speaks of or about the thing and what I am rejecting is really the substitution of the narrative about memory (as connected to what’s been lost only) for memory’s multiplicity of capacities.

Fish’s long speech is a meditation that deploys regression: in the beginning is where her litany begins. The symbolic and the semiotic registers of language are both engaged. One might think of the beginning as before birth or before conception. Perhaps Fish is producing a Buddhist exercise within a Judeo-Christian rhetoric. The first problem is not what happens when I die, but what if I/anything had never been born. What if anything that is isn’t? The poem/speech’s game of subtraction moves to this brink.

I am not certain that for Fish prelapsarian time is a problem. Sentient being is a problem. Pelican, Fish’s predator, later tells Fish that non-existence isn’t so bad. He’s trying to get her to jump off the pier in his movie. The value of her own life might seem to Fish to be continuously relative: she might see herself as both subject and object. This is what makes her fishy (as in suspect). It may even have something to do with why Pelican can imagine doing away with her. How could a sentient being think this way? But then she isn’t fully conscious; neither is anybody else. The knowledge of good and evil in the world of Memory Play is complicated; it is not possible to be fully conscious. People are animals. This is neither good nor bad in itself. Pelican might not be able to help himself being a mercenary sexist pig predator (and a rather enjoyable character in a play), but then again fish can stare him down: she can rewrite his nervous system by surprising him into some kind of adaptation, maybe.

Reptile, on the other hand, is fairly evidently thinking of paradise. He or she is an ancient land animal. Reptile goes way back: perhaps s/he imagines that reptilian memory predates that of Pelican’s. S/he is in paradise before the pelicans arrive. Reptile has a feeling for duration that exceeds most feelings for duration. If there was a time in which diamonds had no value, then it is possible for diamonds to have no value now; except that this is all the product of an imagined future that has never come to pass. So for Reptile a lot of time has passed but without the imagined future having come to pass—at the moment in the play in which s/he considers this question. For Reptile is attracted to what passes before attention: the mind flickers, lights on a present event. The present event arouses a kind of memory, which is sometimes erotic.

Utopia

I describe on its back cover Gardener of Stars “an experimental novel that explores the paradise and wastelands of utopian desire.” Utopian desire has two and perhaps three sources: desire in respect to discourse vis a vis feminism and the erotic connection that Ernst Bloch makes to with the feeling of hope.

The dedication of the book is as follows:

In memory Warren Sonbert
Every party we did not get to leaves space for us to picture wishful images

— Ernst Bloch

In Gardener of Stars, the “wishful images” are related to what one might call female ferocity. One of the only good examples of female ferocity I can conjure (get ready for a long digression) is Monique Wittig’s Les Guerillères — I say this because Wittig pays attention to language. I am not in love with the trope of the Amazonian romance/utopia, although perhaps I have tried to be, but Wittig’s work is not to be reduced to that mode, in spite of its presence. Her work is witty, politically complex, draws from surrealism in an extraordinarily sophisticated manner. Here is a book I have come to admire through a complex of responses: first as mentioned through its linguistic and intellectual sophistication (something that is usually under-recognized in respect to this work, I think) and secondly through its audacious invitation to disidentification: how one
situates oneself in relationship to the text (is this "just" an Amazon Utopia, is it a revolutionary work, is it a literary experiment? Is it only for women? For Lesbians? Is the reader reductive or not in her responses?) reproduces the conditions, via its imagined readership, of inspiration for the work. The book recreates through reader’s identification with and against it, the antagonistic world of gender that she reverses, deterriorializes, and inscribes. This is very different from a utopia (Moore, Bellamy) that tries to, through fantasy, persuade its readers of its reasonableness and efficacy, or through irony demonstrate its lack of reasonableness.

In Wittig’s terms, the party “we” did not get to is that in which the word “woman” doesn’t exist and the wishful images are the world in which “woman” does not exist. Although, there are always ways in which “wishful images” also stand for something/people in the world; for instance, those who have left the social contract of gender, or imagine doing so.

The minor (I borrow this from Deleuze) presences and practices and forms of knowing and consciousness is what makes up the world, more or less, in Gardener of Stars—it begins with a “wishful”/fantasy representation of women who have left the world of men behind—and they have done this by taking advantage of social cataclysm related to the AIDS plague. In other words, (this is the subtext speaking now) they have abandoned patriarchal civilization rather than attempting to rebuild or replicate it—but as an experiment, a kind of wish fulfillment: they have elected out of the social contract. But with an insurmountable caveat: they do not believe in the binary and they are irreverent toward boundaries: their walls are two feet high. They do not live their lives to protect themselves from “men.” The wish in the novel is impossible; although this does not suggest that the only answer is the return of patriarchal civilization. The impossible wish in the novel creates a fantasy opening. Franco Borsi, in Architecture and Utopia writes:

Utopia is infeasible: a utopian project is an infeasible project. It may be so by default or by choice (when no attempt is made to concretize a project, “choosing” infeasibility as its basis), or by a failure to evaluate certain aspects or structural risks (employing “structural” here in the broadest sense), or by ignoring economic considerations (when means do not match ends, when a plan’s concrete context does not match its cost, etc.). . . . The terms “fanciful,” “fantastic,” and “imaginary” thereby become positive synonyms . . .

And the fantasy opening creates a relationship between the novel and the reader, the novel and a micro or macro culture, which may or may not replicate the gender binary, and cultural assumptions that go along with it.

So time is multi directional and we already know that I think. In literature and in music time is various from piece to piece and best yet and still within the same piece. Time can be an activity or a semantic sore or hot spot.
NATHAN AUSTIN
RAY DI PALMA
LAURA ELRICK
CARLA HARRYMAN
VINCENT KATZ
MICHAEL MAGEE
PHIL METRES
JASON NELSON
CHRIS STROFFOLINO

JACQUES DEBROT
PATRICK DURGIN
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