New Wilderness Letter

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EDITOR'S NOTES. New Wilderness Letter again explores the wilderness of language & mind, time & space, still physically open to us: an arena in which future & past concerns are intermingled. The theme of the current issue is writing/reading, viewed here (like all primary works of language) as co-existent with human origins. In Henry Munn's two pieces on the Mazatec shamaness & oral poet, María Sabina (the unnamed source of Anne Waldman's celebrated Fast Speaking Woman), the keynote is struck: "In the background as she sings, crickets chirp, near and far, throughout the mountain night. The chirps of crickets, say the neurobiologists, are 'read-outs' of impulse signals coded in the nucleic acid sequences of their genes. María Sabina, surprisingly enough, says that when she began to speak [her poetry], she realized she was reading. One would think that for such an oral [illiterate] poet her inventions were wholly verbal, vocal ones, but for herself she is chanting what is written. She is reading at the same time as speaking as they [the pre-Columbian Mexicans] must have done when they chanted their myths with the codices open before them like musicaloptical scores." It is in this sense that the primacy of writing (the hand, the eye) parallels the primacy of speech (the mouth, the voice) in reclamation of our total psycho-genetic potential.

The rest of the issue is an elaboration, from works at hand, of how primary reading/writing processes are recovered &/or newly invented in the contemporary instance. Nina Yankowitz is a New York-based artist, who defines her work as reading/scanning & who writes in clarification of a statement made previously in these pages: "My paintings, in relation to to this level of concern, have been involved with retinal scanning, or reading. Writing implies the notion of signs, allowing for a one to one correlative symbolification system. This is not my area of concern in that my marks establish a rate of speed of scanning or a "semantic" range that does not give meaning through a symbol, but rather through a syntax of chromatic proximity of paint placements, as well as through slanted or upright placement and additive or subtractive light diffractions. The marks themselves, in a sense, are map-like, diagramatic of a visual pacing or reading." ... Ernst Jandl, from Austria, is probably best known as a major European "sound poet," but his concern with concrete poetry & image-making exemplifies the connection that has always existed.

Passages from a shamanistic session given by María Sabina and her daughter, María Apollonia, in July 1970 in the house of Celerino Cerqueda and his wife Julia of Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca (Mexico). No foreigners were present. The chants were recorded by the host and translated from Mazatec into Spanish by Mrs. Eloïna Estrada de Gonzales in collaboration with the commentator who is responsible for the English version. The shamaness was seventy-six at the time. Both she and her daughter had eaten mushrooms to obtain the oracular powers of language.

María Sabina, thru Henry Munn

"I AM THE WOMAN OF THE PRINCIPAL FOUNTAIN" (Shaman Songs)

1/

I am the woman of the principal fountain
I am the woman of the fountain of the sea
I am a river woman
the woman of the flowing water
a woman who examines and searches
a woman with hands and measure
a woman mistress of measure

2/

I am a saint woman
a spirit woman
I am a woman of clarity
a woman of the day
a clean woman
a ready woman
a woman of clarity
a woman of the day
because I am a woman who lightnings
a woman who thunders
a woman who shouts
a woman who whistles

3/

Morning Star woman
Southern Cross woman
Constellation of the Sandal woman, it says
Hook constellation woman, it says
that is your clock, it says
I am the little woman of the ancient fountain, it says
I am the little woman of the sacred fountain, it says

4/

hummingbird woman, it says
woman who has sprouted wings, it says
thus do I descend primordial
thus do I descend significant
I descend with tenderness
I descend with the dew
your book, my Father, it says
your book, my Father, it says
clown woman beneath the water, it says
because I am the child of Christ
the child of Mary, it says

I am a midwife woman, it says
I am a woman who raises the sick, it says
it is certain and true
I am a woman who looks over the body and examines it
I am a woman of music, it says
I am a drum woman, it says

I am a saint woman, it says
a spirit woman, it says
a woman of good words, of good breath and good saliva,
it says

I am the woman who questions and sees, it says
the tracks of his hands and of his feet, it says
the echo of the path
resonant path
path of the dew
path of freshness
path of clarity
the path of goodness
the path of the day
I am she who examines the tracks of the feet and the hands, it says

I begin in the depths of the water
I begin where the beginning sounds and where sounds the important

woman who goes through the water, it says
woman who travels on the heights
woman who resonates with grandiloquence
woman who resonates with purity
woman of superior reason, it says

I am a woman of letters, it says
I am a book woman, it says
nobody can close my book, it says
nobody can take my book away from me, it says
my book encountered beneath the water, it says
my book of prayers

I am a woman and a mother, it says
a mother woman beneath the water, it says
a woman of good words, it says
a woman of music, it says
a wise diver woman

I am a lagoon woman, it says
I am a ladder woman, it says
I am the Morning Star woman, it says
I am a woman comet, it says
I am the woman who goes through the water, it says
I am the woman who goes through the sea, it says

I am the woman who examines, the woman who sees

I am a woman of music, it says
I am a drum woman, it says
I am a woman violinist

I bring my light, it says
I bring my lightning bolts, it says
I bring my whirlwind of colors
from where the Father came, from where the Mother where the clean book, the good book is
I'm going to show you where the Moon comes out, where the Morning Star comes out, where our Father, God the Sun, comes out

I am a woman wise in words beneath the water, it says
I am a woman wise in words beneath the sea, it says

I am not afraid, it says
I am going to demonstrate my courage, it says
Benito Juarez
Mother Guadalupe, it says
Mother Magdalene
Holy Father
I am a woman general, it says
I am a woman sergeant, it says
I am a woman corporal, it says
I am a woman commander, it says
I am a lawyer woman, it says
I am a woman warden, it says
it all comes from the primordial fountain, it says
from the fountain of significance, it says
I go up to heaven, it says
beneath the gaze of your glory, it says
where is your paper and your book, it says

I am a primordial eagle woman
a celestial eagle woman, it says
I am a fresh flower woman, it says
I am an important flower woman, it says
I stand up my reed, it says
my reed beneath the sea, it says
my hummingbird, it says
there are thirteen of them beneath the water, beneath the sea, it says
I am a fragrant woman, it says

with words we live and grow

I am a mother woman, it says
a saint woman, it says
a doctor woman, it says

I am the Moon woman, it says
I am the Morning Star woman, it says
I am the Southern Cross woman, it says

I am the woman who observes, it says
I am the woman who examines, it says
I am a music woman, it says
a woman violinist, it says
a drum woman, it says
Holy Father, it says
I am the woman of the primordial fountain, it says
I go up to heaven where your ancient herb is, your celestial herb

Commentary

1/ The Mazatec word I have translated here as fountain has the sense of a place where water originates, a wellspring. It is used with the adjectives nai, which means what is elder and therefore worthy of respect, and chicon, which means holy, important, significant to the utmost degree. The couplet, which recurs throughout her chants, can be translated in three ways: the one given here is the most literal: I am the woman of the ancient fountain, I am the woman of the sacred fountain. Since translation is re-creation, putting it in modern terms, I could translate it as: I am the woman of the primordial fountain, I am the woman of the fountain of significance; which I think is what Maria Sabina means by this reference to the fountainhead of meaning from which her words spring. The image of the fountain is widespread in the writings of mystics. For example, Jacob Boehme, The Aurora: "but the holy fountain or wellspring is incomprehensible and unsearchable or unfathomable to outward reason."

2/ The Mazatecs call the mushrooms saints because of their numinous effects. They say they sprang up for the first time from the blood of Christ -- an idea that is a modern variant of the ancient Mexican name for them: the flesh of God. She feels herself to be blessed, to speak in an aura of holiness.

3/ Here we have an association in her mind between the stars, time, and writing. The glyphs on the Mixtec carved bones found in Monte Alban are dates, and calendrical reckonings were, of course, based on astronomical observations. Both clock and book are said in Spanish.

The canonical form of the mushroom chant is to end each statement with tzo, the third person singular, present tense, of the verb to say. The shaman or shamaness is merely the mouthpiece of what speaks through him or her. The says at the end of each utterance is a point of emphasis, an enunciatory mark, a vocal stop that punctuates the flow of the chant. Lacan: "In the unconscious, it speaks." Heidegger: "Language first of all and inherently obeys the essential nature of speaking: it says."

8/ The tracks of the feet and the hands is a figurative expression for where one goes and what one does. The shaman is a hunter on the trail of the extravagated spirit of the sick person, a reader of symptoms, a follower of signs.

13/ It is noteworthy that the machis in Chile, who were women, climbed up a notched post beating on a drum to officiate. Though the Mazatecs no longer use a drum, Maria Sabina often claps in time to the rhythms of her ecstatic existence. Her chants are extremely melodious, the ends of the words drawn out into pure ringing tones like those of plainsong.

17/ The Eskimos called the shaman, "he who descends to the bottom of the sea," where he went to speak with the Mother of the Animals from whom men live. For Maria Sabina, who has probably never seen the ocean in her life, the sea and water in general would seem to be an image for the unconscious from whose depths her words are uttered.

18/ Benito Juarez, the Indian from Oaxaca who became the first president of independent Mexico is the only historical figure mentioned in her chants. She almost always invokes him after the statement that she is going to demonstrate her courage.

The Woman of the Flowing Water is a mythological figure, the Mazatec equivalent of Chalchiutlicue, the ancient Mexican goddess of the flowing water, she with the skirts of jade.
"You my Mother who are in the House of Heaven," sings Maria Sabina in 1956, "You my Father who are in the House of Heaven/ That are on the mountain, that are in the sea/ Are the Principal Ones/ They know me/ There do I go/ Before your gaze/ Before your mouth/ Before your sight/ Before your name/ Before my book/ There do I go/ Before my tongue and my mouth/ There do I go signalling the tracks of the palms of my hands./

The impression of writing, embodied in the book (a word she says in Spanish) to that of vocal speech to that of tracks. The image of footprints recurs throughout the shamanistic chants of the Mazatecs like an insistent reference in the course of the verbal flow of words to graphic marks. Frequently throughout the 1958 session she says: "The path of your hands, the path of your tongue, the path of your feet, the path of your words, those who are to live in the earth/ Afterwards you will destroy eagles and tigers/ only in your book of paintings do we live/ here on the earth."
"The book," says Curtius, "received its supreme consecration from Christianity, religion of the sacred book. Christ is the only god whom antiquity represents with a volume in his hand." María Sabina stands for the convergence of the traditions of Mesoamerica and Christianity. When she sings in 1970, "I bring with me my sacred eagle/ Lord Saint John/ Father scribe in the House of Heaven," she refers to the statue of the patron of Huautla, the author of the Epistle according to Saint John, who stands in the Huautla church with a golden goblet of communion raised in one hand and a quill in the other, a form of an eagle before him with a scroll over its shoulder on which is written in Latin: In the beginning was the Word.

In an interview with reporters from L'Europeo of Milan, she described in somewhat different terms the same capital, inaugural vision she later described to Estrada. She said that an elf appeared before her and asked her what she wanted to become. She replied that she would like to become a saint. "Then the spirit smiled and immediately he had in his hands something that was not there before, a Big Book with many written pages. 'Here,' he said, 'I am giving you this book so that you can work better and help the people who need help and know the secrets of the world everywhere is known.' I thumbed through the pages of the book many and many written pages, and alas I thought I did not know how to read. And suddenly I realized I was reading and understanding all that was written on the Book and it was as though I had become richer, wiser, and in a moment I learned millions of things."6

The pages are covered with written characters. The designs one sees on the psychedelics, which many people have described as the motifs of oriental carpets, at least this once took the form of script in her imagination. She says the pages were covered with letters. One can hardly imagine a more eloquent, poignant description of an oral poet's desire for the knowledge contained in books. She cannot read, but in her transcendental condition she can. The book is thus a perfect image of the divine wisdom which is beyond ordinary understanding but which the mushrooms enable one to comprehend.

One is reminded of the metaphor of the book of nature which occurs frequently in European literature, that "unwritten and public manuscript which lies expanded unto the eyes of all," as Sir Thomas Browne said, adding that its hieroglyphics were more familiar to heathens than to Galen or Paracelsus, "doctor and alchemist, who understood the role of chemistry in medicine"7 stated: "It is from the light of nature that this illumination should come, so that the text of the books of the philosophers ought to be comprehended and without this illumination, there would be no philosopher or naturalist." María Sabina is indeed enlightened with the light of nature and enabled thereby to read the text of nature which was written in a remarkable way the Chinese myth about the origin of writing recounted by Chang Yen-Yuan in the Li Tai Ming Hua Chi: "The K'uei ' star with pointed rays is Lord of Literature on earth and as Tsang Chieh, who had four eyes, looked up (into heaven) he saw images dropping down (from the star) and these he combined with footprints of birds and tortoises.

Notes

1. To R. Gordon Wasson belongs the credit for being the first person to discern the importance of this theme. Referring to the conjurations of the ancient Mexican sorcerers collected by Ruiz de Alarcón in the seventeenth century and recently retranslated and interpreted by López Austin, he writes: 'The Book' is, I am sure, a permanent feature throughout much of Mesoamerican religious practice, and it goes back far into the past ... Ruiz de Alarcón quotes his Nahua informants as speaking of a Book, using the Nahual word, amoxtl. This word meant in pre-Conquest times the pictographic writings of the Nahuas and Mixtecs ... When Ruiz de Alarcón's informants spoke about the amoxtl, what did they mean? They would not have had access to the Codex Mendoza which was closely held by the powerful. Alfredo López Austin thinks this word was used by them metaphorically, by which I take it means precisely what María Sabina means: the 'Book' in the Mesoamerican literature ... A mount of mystical lore and a mass of conjectures about the amoxtl, so for us. María Sabina and her Mazatec Mushroom Velada, New York: Harcourt Brace Janovitch, 1974. This book contains the text of the 1958 session I refer to, the last by linguist George Cowan. The 1956 session, also recorded by Wasson, is on a Folkways Record.)
4. fray bernardino de sahagún, Historia General de Las Cosas de la Nueva España. 
5. Nezahualcoyotl, the king of Texcoco, was a mystic, architect, and poet. See Miguel León-Portilla, Trece Poetas del Mundo Azteca (Mexico D.F.: Universidad Autónoma de Mexico, 1967). 
7. The characterization of Paracelsus is that of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The citation is from Curtius, ibid. 
9. jacques derrida, De la Grammatologie (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967). In connection with the image of the path as it occurs throughout the chants of the Mazatecs it is worth pondering his statement that "it would be necessary to mediate together ... the history of writing and the history of the route." "It is difficult to imagine," he goes on, "that the access to the possibility of trails should not be at the same time access to writing." (P. 158) 
my right hand
my writing hand
my handwriting

the brain

the heart

the
For some time, I have been interested in that moment in the history of oracles before the given pattern (of cards, stalks, coins) acquired its fixed, characteristic narrative meaning. Anyone who has studied the I Ching, for example, knows how difficult, even impossible, it is to recapture the primordial imagery of the hexagrams from the thicket of learned commentary with which millennia of Chinese civilization have surrounded them. Expertise replaced wisdom as the central requirement for using the oracle, as the enigmatic utterances of its first, inspired practitioners were repeated, then written down and codified, and at last made school texts for Confucian gentlemen. By this process was created a book which crowns man’s ethical considerations, a work of moral imagination as unsurpassed as it is profound -- yet vastly different from the initial encounter of archaic consciousness with the simple images, upon which all the glories of the I Ching were subsequently raised.

Wondering how it might be possible to reconstruct a situation similar to that primal encounter, I turned to the most primitive oracle I could find: the ancient germanic rune throw. It was certainly an instrument of great importance to the north-aryan peoples, as Tacitus attests in his Germania*. But no work analogous to the I Ching survives to instruct us in the method of interpreting the patterns made by dropping on the ground the letters of the runic alphabet inscribed upon stones or bits of wood. Indeed, no such book is possible, since the variety of designs created by the random throw is infinite.

So we must turn to the individual runes themselves, and here we are on better ground, since fascinating, if limited, information about their esoteric meanings has survived the ages. One source of special interest to me, given my race and tongue, is the Old-English Rune Poem, a compendium of lore on each letter in the English futhorc, or alphabet, written in the eighth or ninth century, and now accessible in Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie’s Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems (1942). Here are some examples of how it moves, with my translations:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(feoh) by } & \text{ frow fur} & \text{fira gehwylcum} \ \\
\text{Sceal } & \text{geah manna gehwylc} & \text{miclun hyt } \text{dal} \text{lan} \ \\
\text{gif he wilhe for drehine} & \text{domes hlotean} \ \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Health) is a comfort to every one of men. Yet every man must deal it liberally if he will obtain glory before the Lord.

---and so on, until each rune has been identified with some feature in the human or natural worlds. The language is at times difficult and riddling; nevertheless it disclosed to me the essential properties and elements of the oracle, and thus gave me a place to start.

Next, keeping the ancient value of each rune in mind, I considered the juxtapositions of sign and sign, noting each linkage and coherence and qualification as it appeared in the total picture. Some runes seemed charged with peculiar power; others seemed to fade; still others suggested a sub-plot in the greater utterance, but gradually the twenty-four stones began to tell a story of the moment of their casting.

I cannot readily account for the manner of this telling, or the matter of any of the five narratives, the second of which is given here. I started this work without any ideas about what I might write; but as I continued, I found that each of the five configurations touched a different, forgotten source in me, drew long-stored materials from my mind into its particular gestalt. Once, I found the story moved from stone to stone; again, I found it all in a single rune which by its position was made to say unexpected things; and so on, through five instances of encounter.

This work may be considered a preliminary report, for I expect the investigation to go on. Meanwhile, I look forward to hearing from those other artists or makers or writers whose paths have led them into these or similar landscapes of imagination.

*See chapter 10, which begins: ‘Auspicia sortesque ut qui maxime observant ...’ ('They mind auguries and lots beyond all people ...')
I waited all yesterday for the Black Queen's car to call by for me. I sat on the flowered wing-chair in the parlour, dressed to the nines, new spats, a new fedora on my knee, my whiskers singed and combed.

Lunchtime came and went, and I tapped my hat with two fingers, like a drummer. Teatime came, no tea thank you very much, lest, swallowing, I miss the tiny rapping at the door. With evening came the realization of the fact: not today.

Make no mistake, there is no balm can salve the hurt inflicted by the Black Queen's slight. Forget, you say? forget and wait until tomorrow? It is my right to go! Why else continue, doing this and doing that, unless there be at the end of all of it the black-edged invitation, the ride to her estate within the sleek, closed car, and then the masquerade that ends it all. Forget indeed!

Those of us who all our lives await the Black Queen's bidding never involve ourselves in matters far from home, lest we miss the knock. So, blessed by birth with neither wealth nor title, I have ever remained a dabbler, taking in turns first this, then that profession, as the times dictated.

I played the child, quite well. At the beginning of my career, my finest role? Perhaps. In any case, it did not last longer than the time it took for hidden engines to push hair out upon my face and chest and secrets, thus ending the game.

Still not having heard her messenger at the door, I became a lover. In my youth tall and comely, with only a hint of a student's stoop, I was not unattractive to the ladies. They did not exactly line up outside the door, but the winter night was rare that was not warmed by one or more of them.

The end of all that pleasuring came alas! When my chest and stomach melted down into a puddle round my hips, and made of bed a sport I dared pursue with rented partners only. Because I quite misliked dickering on dim street-corners, I became as chaste as Christ, and turned to real estate.

But listen! In the streets below my flat a car has stopped. Words fly between the concierge and a stranger whose voice I do not know. Excuse me now, I pray you, while I disarray these pillows, and clutter the place a bit, lest the tidiness betray how carefully I have waited, and cancel the effect of arch nonchalance with which I have decided to greet the Black Queen's valet, come at last.
Arleen Schloss

CIGARETTE BURN (below)
76 VARIATIONS (on opposite page)
Nina Yankowitz
NOTES FROM THE GROUND

The following are selected passages from my notebooks, 1967-1976. They state some interests, intentions and concerns in my involvement with making paintings.

1967 January 13-1968 September 31
A need to make magic—to use myself as a vehicle, to use myself as a conduit for transmission, to use myself as a strainer and/or filter. A cerebral approach is a necessary precedent for emotional release in my work. I am concerned with extending the boundaries of painting by stretching the perceptual parameters. I am concerned with using the canvas in its natural state, e.g. resilient, pliable, supple, the ability to stretch, cut, tear. Tack canvas at various tension points and allow gravity to shape the surface. Use paint to distance the viewer in order to perceive the work in painterly terms. Color was used to cancel out three-dimensional areas by employing colors that are at the end of the spectrum, therefore forcing the eye to travel along the surface, as opposed to entering the draped areas. To explore the disparity between physical and visual reality. I'm concerned with distancing the viewer from a three-dimensional surface, in order to view the canvas pictorially. Canvas and color shifts back and forward in space; raw canvas outlines of geometric shapes retain the two-dimensional frontal reading.

1969 February 2-1970 January Exhibit Kornblee
Began utilizing pleating and stitching on the surface of my paintings. Attempt at physical horizontal stitching (diamond shaped stitching graduating from reds thru blues to purple): pleating was used to make a strong visual horizontal thrust of reading, and paint was sprayed vertically to take the eye viewing along a complete and total visual range.

1970 March-August Macdowell Colony
Stitch down pleats used to join third dimension to second dimension. Construct images that called upon the notion of memory, e.g. a surface that appeared to have been spread open from an enclosure.
Layered canvases—swatch like paintings, each fragment painted with visual format of varied kinds of materials. When surface bolted together, the viewer experiences pictorial frontality. Still exploring disparity between physical and visual reality. A preoccupation with placing points in space; assigning sections of whole. The assignment of all directionalities that make up painting; multisectioned horizontal, vertical, diagonal planes compressed into one unit that causes many visual diffractions.
December-1971 Exhibit Formblee
Preoccupation with freezing time—my need to hold onto, to not let go, to capture.
Sprayed canvas with paint, dropped it from an eighteen foot ceiling and photographed the fall. The intention of this piece is to capture the instant before the canvas touches the floor. I am interested in freezing that specific moment in time—the moment of ultimate experience and intensity. The entry into completion of action, when the canvas first touches the floor, begins a process of diminution. The photographs capture that moment, which is then recaptured by stapling that instant to the wall. The individual photographs make up a film experience when viewed consecutively, while the painting itself is perceived as a photographic frame. The painting becomes a recording. I am interested in the transference of role identification.

1971-1972 THREAD READINGS
I want to create my own surfaces, to accept nothing as a given framework from which to begin painting. Began making my own surfaces out of the binding of cotton-duck threads. Structured threads in varying grain formations. I want to make a cohesive relationship between the actual surface and the painted surface, therefore using color to outline and define the structural arrangement of the threads. I want the viewer to read along the grains.

Saw "Olympiad" by Leni Piefenstahl. Noticed that my interest was held in some areas of the film. I realized that because I was operating from the common denominator of boredom with sports, my interest must be actually sustained via camera work. I looked at structure of frames in relationship of camera to event. I found that in an event such as the discus throw, the camera edge moved, the internal action dissipated due to the traveling of camera on the event. In an event such as the broad jump, I noticed that the camera was fixed, there was a sharply defined outer edge, and the internal activity of the event was framed and circulating within a sharply defined outer edge. I began utilizing this perceptual attitude in my paintings, therefore creating a sharply defined outer edge, framing a (somewhat) evenly distributed internal action so that the viewer would intensely perceive the whole as one unit, and then break down the internal structural reading, carrying the eye along a primary horizontal and a secondary vertical thrust.

1972
Am feeling that threads are too physical in nature. They are seductive and the viewer seems to be involved with reading intersection points of threads; they begin reading the physical structure. I want the viewer to become involved with the reading of the surface structure of the linen—the reading of the actual to the drawn. I must have linen made with varied grains woven into the surface, so that the material is flat and frontal.

1972-1973 DILATED GRAIN READINGS
Having linen woven with varied grain patterns—tight to loose weave.

USING: Linen with specified woven grain patterns:
Paint to define, accent, and outline structural varied woven patterns of surface.
Paint to define structural surface of linen.
To make a painting by using two main visual energy forces: horizontal and vertical.
To compose horizontals and verticals that are made up of adjacent color connectives, therefore pushing the eye horizontally and vertically due to placement.
To evenly distribute the internal painted action, therefore forcing the eye to perceive the whole, and then break down the internal structural reading, carrying the eye along a primary horizontal and a secondary vertical thrust.
To create a notion of visual pitch, whereby the eye shifts in accordance with color relationship paths. Visual shifts are controlled by color phrasing and a noted tempo.
To expedite time lag from brain to visual recording (reading back and forth from actual grain to outlined or drawn grain).
To use notative color markings as defining surface phrasing, accenting, and groupings; e.g. heavy markings bring eye to left.
To create an hypnotic trance-like state that allows for unconscious memory from one paint placement to the next.
To maintain viewer scanning the surface, e.g. reading the painting as one would a score or text.

My paintings are a model, a paradigm, as Bill Brand would say, "a container of a matrix of interactive events", events within a structural linear syntax. I think of them as a perceptual epistemology, utilizing that perceptual information in order to transcend intrinsic structural laws. This is portrayed in that the transcendence of the physical paint placements takes the viewer to an hypnotic trance-like reading or surface scanning.
1973 April SCANNING PLACEMENTS
A need for mystery, a need to have paint placements discourse the dialectic of life and death. To show their reason to live, to show the struggle for the paint placements to exist separate from the ground on which they are chromatically built, even as they seem at the same time to sink into it. A need to establish patterns of behavior and perform, in their presence and in notation, physical movement and psychological patterns, and therein showing Acts of 'Being; the struggle to survive.

1974-1976 Exhibit Rosa Esman Gallery, January 1976 SUGGESTION SERIES
These paintings are involved with a pictorial performance of modes of behavior. They attempt to explore the nature of perception and the meaning of language—it is in this sense that they have an epistemological reason for being—through the creation of texts which must be read or visually scanned.

Syntactically, I use adjacent color connectives in a range of chroma to create scanning paths. Visual pitch, or visual sound frequencies, are determined by color phrasing and give a notated tempo to the reading. The addition or subtraction of light in the markings and the proximity of paint placements are factors which are considered in attempt to determine the rate of speed at which surface areas are scanned.

On a more emotive level, my paintings are scores that attempt to embrace the movement and spirit of davenning (Jewish tradition of rocking back and forth in prayer). They are rituals of breathing, heartbeats, brainwaves, temperatures, and pulsation.

1976 Summer--Cummington Community for the Arts; Winter--Dayton, Ohio
Began working with notions of peripheral vision. The work seems to be changing in that I find myself focusing on the act of extrapolation as opposed to located content.

In a letter to Vito Acconci—'My concerns seem now to be more involved with a kind of grabbing in by means of peripheral vision instead of scanning within an enclosure. I seem to be playing more with a transference of roles and identification. The paintings are becoming more about recording the actual making of structure—fractions of room, me, surface, caught in eye suction in an attempt to focus on surface (record as memory). This event is then transformed into measurement of mark, therefore determining the rate of speed at which surface areas are scanned. I’m trying to bring this into the scanning so that the paintings become a hybrid, a record even more notative of psychological patterns and acts of behavior. I show more now their reason to live. I suppose I’m trying to rid myself of the notion of territory and boundaries transfixed.

Measurement becomes that which is perceptually manipulated and filtered through psychology. Meaning through metaphor. Measurement becomes a subjective translation due to combination of physical limitations; arbitrary choice, potential of physically constructed vision, and psychological boundaries. Association, historical references—personal or other—are also determinants. Subliminal punctuation or stopping points become a combination of physical limitations and psychological factors, as the guidelines for activation. In this sense, the activity of traveling from one point to another takes on more meaning than the locations designated as punctuation points.'

1976 November
Need more of a mainline to my emotional as well as cerebral living experience.

Retinal scanning in my paintings has brought me to the point that I must explore film. My work needs now to explore my world of resistance and I look now for a form that will keep the viewer in symbiotic relatedness and in perpetual stress—the continual living and dying again living in each moment.
Example of a rare form of alphabetic blanket closely resembling concrete poem works of the 1960s/70s.

Navajo (Anonymous)

EYE-DAZZLER 1890-1900

Readouts & printouts collaged from 16th century post-Conquest sources, principally Sahagun's History of the Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex), along with Duran's Book of the Gods & Rites & Motolinia's History of the Indians of New Spain. Young's originals appear in brown ink ("a comfortable humanist color--cf Rembrandt--, also a body color, also the color of dried blood, also the color of all four directions combined"), & the letter images are a spin-off from basic xerographic processes. The complete work is numerological, cyclical & repeatable in conception: pairs of poems that ultimately circle back on each other--in the spirit of traditional meso-American codices. (To be reprinted, along with other of his Middle American Dialogues, later this year.)

Karl Young

From FIRST BOOK OF OMENS FROM MIDDLE AMERICAN DIALOGUES

skulls on each side in the wind
sounds of music & running water

armies advance with fewer casualties

traders grow rich & the state with them
souls in the white ash glow red
when the wind blows through

the steps of the temple are steep
the heart pumps blood faster
as you ascend them
stars & the night sky creep more & more
towards his mirror in the daylight
hills answer the wails of beasts
like the sounds of shell trumpets

someone in the room with him coughs

there are over a million people in the city
& nearly all of Mexico has been conquered

an enemy wounded in the legs
or missing a foot
can't be used in a sacrifice

smoking mirror over your shoulder
Peacocks (marked) balances serpent
morning star turns to the star of evening

he sees Topiltzin over the cacti of Tula

canavan breezes will travel the roads
like the legions of stars
marching over the faces of night

stamp with your sandals when fighting
so you don't slip on the blood of the field
a butterfly lands on his wife
HOMAGE TO THE NUBA

Ian Tyson

shadows on seeds lies in the wind

clouds of dust, and swirling water
draws through the palace

the gods grow old, and the stone with them

weeds in the white ash-gloss and
tends to the steps of the temple as they

as you ascend them

the beads pump blood faster

shadows are phased on the sand, as

their cheeks stretch & after upon each

with one stroke on the blade
The preceding are Ian Tyson's readings/translations of Nuba body painting derived from Leni Riefenstahl's Die Nuba. "When I was working out some ideas for the images for Jerome Rothenberg's Book Narratives & Realtheater Pieces published by Bread Editions, one of the sources was the body painting of the Nuba... The drawings that emerged seemed to fit the idea of the "Narratives" and gave both punctuation and a continuous formality within the context of the book. They went through several variations with different media in mind before finalising as woodcuts and these are four of the versions which I considered for etchings and I feel are worth preserving." (I.T./1977)

Keith Wilson

From STONE ROSES

Stone Roses

Torok, Ersebet was my name.
My life was but for 37 years.
I was born in 1919, the 3rd of August. My life.

My life with my husband lasted for only 18 years
and it ended with my death.
God tried our family.

We were ill together.
My poor mother took care of us.
In vain were medicine and science.
How could my mother's poor heart
resist being torn in two?
Out of this pain and suffering?
On this day, the 22nd of January
my heart ceased to beat.

My father, he died beside me
in the same bed and now
he sleeps forever, beside me.
My husband is happy he came to me
now that I am no longer with him.
I thank God for my husband.
And for my two brothers whose eyes
filled with tears at my sufferings.

I have to rest in this cemetery.
My family has had double pain.
We died together, in the same time.
We say, "To God and, until later."

In this life I suffered much.
Chains bound my heart. I loved
the Spring, the flowers of summer.
But God has called me in Winter.

--from the Hungarian.
A headstone. Village Vista, Romania.
The Father

Stop, living one.
Look upon this stone.

Here sleep Torok, Istvan,
born 1893, died 1956.
He lived 43 years with his wife.

Then his energy finally broke
and he died, leaving behind all
who loved him, wife, two sons,
two grandsons to bless his memory
across this tomb. Who could hope
for him during his long illness?
His daughter lying dead beside him?

Before all, he hoped in Jesus
to whom he was faithful servant.
Here in this earth lies
your faithful servant, Jesus.

This memorial is to be sure
you will sleep quietly, father.

Vista, Romania.
A headstone. From
the Hungarian.

A Fasioner of Stone Roses

Szallos, Istvan, called "Boka"
rests here in this earth.
Death tore apart the bones of my life
and smothered the love of my heart.

I did everything for my family,
I worked in foreign lands and gained
much money to bring them happiness.
For my generosity they will not forget me.

And if your heart should hurt for me,
I say "goodbye" to Thee, to my wife
and to our two sons. I, who carved
so many stones rest here in this earth.

Vista, Romania.
A headstone. From
the Hungarian.

Her ashes lie here.

Child's Tale

I know a story
he said.
A wolf ate me.

And that
was the end
I asked?

No,
he said,
I became a rock
and the wolf
he died instead.
You can see him
in my eyes, he said.
EDITOR'S NOTE. A major composer in calligraphic mode, Corner wrote me during my compilation of A Big Jewish Book: "It occurred to me that not only Thoreau but the Orient has been important to me . . . and the calligraphy aspect of it (more often used in specifically musical scores) touches the traditional Hebrew concern for the written letters as themselves, and I even remembered that when I'd just returned from Korea there had been a few Hebrew letters among my first writing explorations. They really don't work (do they) like the Chinese forms-- although they're more imagistic than the letters we use. Sort of mid-way between script and picture (which is to say 'use' and 'vision'), stuck in a domain of rationalized abstractions (which is I imagine proper for them) . . . To be called, when developed, fulfilled, worked out: THE SH OF THE SHMAAAH"--i.e. the initial letter of the Hebrew mantric prayer translated as Hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one.

Philip Corner

SKETCH FOR A MUSICAL COMPOSITION BASED ON THE HEBREW LETTER SHIN

Edmond Jabès

From RETURN TO THE BOOK

"I am a word-grain in the hidden field of Adonai."
-Reb Attal

"The soul has the resistance of the calf of a leg. I am down on the ground. You stomp on me. You stomp on my eternity."
-Reb Lehar

I have followed a book in its persistence, a book which is the story of a thousand stories as night and day are the prow of a thousand poems. I have followed it where day succeeds the night and night the day, where the seasons are four times two hundred and fifty seasons.

The world is exiled in the name. Within it there is the book of the world.

Writing means having a passion for origins. It means trying to go down to the roots. The roots are always the beginning. Even in death, no doubt, a host of roots form the deepest root bottom. So writing does not mean stopping at the goal, but always going beyond.

For five summers I have followed a book which advances quietly in the void where the work builds up. Daily enterprise of joining through the feverish page the ascus of the sign.

A book which is the lacing of risk.

I must tell a strange story which obsesses me of a woman in her eighties who, on her deathbed, spoke just before dying in the language of her childhood (which she had long forgotten). This act in the fog of the unconscious struck me - and still strikes me - as an example of the behavior of poets who speak in their works as they never do otherwise.

Every work cancels the dark. Every work is a hymn from the other side of memory to a memory that is spellbound. Beauty is death's gift to vulgar life so that it can live in beauty.

Abandoning one book means waiting impatiently for the next book's wish to come. The least weakness nails us to the spot.

Birds take wing from nests all around the blue sky. Their flight amazes me. The hour stays in our eyes. I wonder what wounds me without thinking of the wound. Seeing my blood I note that I have been bleeding.
I remember one late afternoon alone in the desert when I watched how the dark studded space with stars - with so fine a needle that I naively thought the sky must be full of wailing women who at each stitch gave out a fiery scream. You could not say for sure if it was the scream of a woman in trance or of the pierced universe. I also remember well how I first became aware of the gravity of silence: watching the Nile flow with its cargoes reminded me of an unbroken line of red ants carrying their food. Hope made breath bolder. The world, all brightness, was dead to itself, was revealed to death in the most surprising lesson of life it had ever had. And I thought that a book ought to oscillate between these two silences, just as the tip of the pen should temper and bend it toward the words which people would read after God.

Any expression of knowledge is questioned by unfathomable occult Powers which even a mechanical movement, even the slightest murmur of thoughts or lips calls forth.

In the quest of the absolute which we pursue with our lesser means, questions periodically sacrifice us to their perennial life. We bear witness to their daring as washed-up pebbles to the adventure of the lake.

In this order, little by little, the book of days has opened into the book of infinite years; and I have participated in its slow but sure blossoming. I cannot imagine now that it could be taken from me. My life accompanies my death in the book; and the beings and things I am given to approach and appreciate are chosen, then lost and found again in other beings and new objects.

Proof is a prelude. The impetus toward God is a jump backward.

It is at any rate clear that we can justify a return to the past only in terms of the inescapable future which answers for it. The call of the roots does not reach the thorns or buds, but the rose in full bloom.

Thus every expected day is a day to live against the grain, a day to die. This double thrust of the centuries fulfills itself in the mental and cultural products of the ages for which we are seed and field.

Life and death have the same desire to last. Eternity knots them together.

In the book, the colors of the sea range from the ivory of absence to ink black. The sea bathes the shores I walk. In its shells I have heard the echo of my name moaning.

The Mediterranean has revived eyes before mine. This is why I want the sea to be the moving, millenary bond in the book. It is also why my dreams have the sense of a lifeline in a world torn with departures. Gangway! Down under there is perhaps a life for us.

Salt beds which the waves cannot lick, the Dead Sea is the very type of a ruined sea.

Not the slightest relation to the Mediterranean: morning sea, impulsive, but distracted, imaginative; amorous sea, soft; sea of swims and speed.

A handful of wheat in hunger betokens the union of men. A threatening fist clinches their drawing together. Love is in the gold of our fingers. The earth is the gold of love.

My trees are the flamboyant and the date tree. My flower is jasmine; my river the Blue Nile. My deserts, the sand and flint of Africa.

Do I have the right to consider them mine because they entered my pupils and my heart, and because my mouth trumpets them forth?

I am a man's wanderings, path and road. Had I so totally forgotten it? Calmly, resigned, and with manly consciousness I accepted the condition laid down: to wander through reality and the dream of reality for which every syllable of the book is a reason.

The word of God is not commandment but correspondence.

"What is the relation between reptile and rainbow?" asked Reb Behar one day of his teacher Reb Ephraim Sholem.

"A most subtle one," he answered: "the adumbration of a circle."

Sight often hides from us the deepest yearnings of free movement and innate gesture. For life is beyond, in the life which wakes.

So ever since the book my life has been a wake of writing in the space between limits, under the resplendent sign of the unpronounceable Name. A wake of besieged days and evenings. The world changes without knowing it. This long crossing merges with sleep.
Repetition is man's power to perpetuate himself in God's supreme speculations. To repeat the divine act in its First Cause. Thus man is God's equal in his power to choose an unpredictable Word which he alone can launch. I obey slavishly. I am master of the metamorphoses. Adventure is a property of words.

("God follows God, and Book follows Book."

-Reb Jorna)

Translation from the French by Rosemarie Waldrop.
Reprinted from The Book of Yukel / Return to the Book (Wesleyan University Press, 1977) by permission of the publishers.

Chinese (Anonymous)

EXHORTATION AGAINST KILLING OXEN

"First do not wait for the time that will never come. That time is called regret and it is always too late. It is wrong to kill anything that is alive."

(Partial translation in Pere Francois Sebastian Dore, Recherches sur les Superstitions en Chine, 1911-38)

FOR MICHEL BENAMOU (1929-1978)

les cloches sonnent sans raison
T.Z.

how beautiful
the words seem:
how ridiculous at last
to fly there

In the wind
like ashes
dancing on the waves:
blue middle waters

l'eau te regarde
wrote Tristan Tzara

leaving a dull trace
seeds & mermaids

of the single
illness
we still nurture:
death

Jerome Rothenberg
David Meltzer, Adam's Amulet (1978), for the birth of a son.
The Hebrew words read: 'AD (vapor, mist), 'AD (Adam, earth),
'ADNVT (lordship, rule), 'ADNY (god), 'ADK (devout), 'ADR (cloak,
mantle, glory; the month Adar), 'AHB (love).
David Meltzer, Adam’s Amulet (1978), for the birth of a son.
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