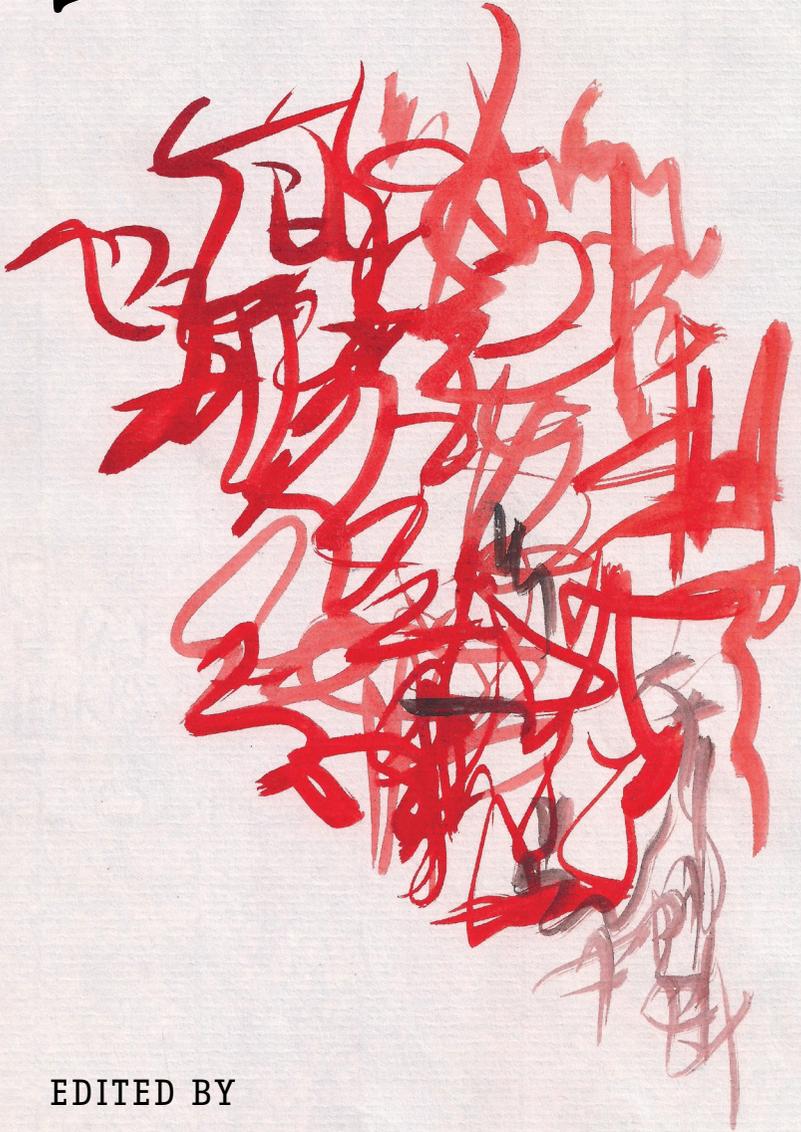


**A
VOICE
FULL
OF
CITIES**

The Collected Essays of
Robert Kelly



EDITED BY

Pierre Joris & Peter Cockelbergh

A VOICE FULL OF CITIES:

THE COLLECTED ESSAYS
OF ROBERT KELLY

Edited by Pierre Joris & Peter Cockelbergh



Contra Mundum Press New York · London · Melbourne

(that's what it is)
experience, telling what happened &
what can happen,
age---
the recounting of what a man
his place (Clio!) & that will never
(as the filiofas...
Homer Hesiod Herodotus
Pindar Pausanias
guides to the stories of the Greek
underground railroad
for any culture those
ad no idea
of what was going on
like crazy to find out,
ct by fact, breath by breath
why in our age magick replaces philo-
sophy (study of order)
again, breath by breath,
& if that is soul
the hands to hold
the head to understand
ent to read the verberations,
alright, soul.
lex grandi lex grandi
or, a name remarked
op verberation
securus indicat orbis
terraram
ingers are our best history of the
Plesitocene.

A VOICE FULL OF CITIES

Collected
Essays
of
**Robert
Kelly**

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1.

A BOOK OF IMAGES: DEEP & OTHER

Robert Kelly

The Poetry of Images: 20 Points

(All lines quoted are from Jerome Rothenberg's 'Invincible Flowers', 'Prober 1' and 'White Sun Black Sun', 1960.)

A. For convenience, a tentative classification of ~~four~~ ^{three} grades of images:

simple, morphemic;
~~simple~~ ^{simple} crying out loud in the sun
(the sudden appearance, carrying full weight)

compound, ~~the modified image:~~
~~Not give me plastic flowers.~~ ^{Not give me plastic flowers. sweat, tired flower}
(attributes of plastic informing attributes of flower; the converse to a lesser extent)

composite, the phrase ~~is~~ image:
flowers pasted on walls in great bunches
(the image, without losing sharpness, is given depth and location; there is a greater tendency towards each element in the composite to work backwards and forwards both)

complex, the ~~verbal unit~~ clause ~~is~~ image:
the sheets are thrown like sand on the floor
(despite the grammatical extension, despite the 9 words, this is a single image, but an image supplied in its fullest state: location and motion, like the film clip as basic element of montage)

B. The points which follow attempt to ~~consider~~ ^{examine} the consequences of two ~~points~~ ^{statements}.

Axiom I. The image, the images, the sequence of images constitute the fundamental rhythm of the poem. ^{Colson's statement}

Axiom II. Poetry, by its simplest definition, is an organization in terms of line.

^{Proposition which follows will seek to explore the} ~~points~~ ^{of these}

C. 1. What is the relation between the image and the Points line? ~~if~~ ^{if} images of the gamma and delta type ~~reasonably~~ ^{reasonably} form lines by themselves? ~~can~~ ^{can} ~~they~~ ^{they} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~classified~~ ^{classified}

Can composite & complex images

NOTES ON THE POETRY OF DEEP IMAGE

... the movement of images is rhythm.

— Nicolas Calas

These notes represent my attempt to understand and use this statement. The climate of the notes is the atmosphere of excitement and confrontation I am aware of in Jerome Rothenberg's workings in what he calls 'deep image.' In the second issue of his *Poems from the Floating World* he writes: 'The deep image rises from the shoreless gulf: here the poet reaches down among the lost branches, till a moment of seeing: the poem.' Working with deep image is the development of a 'basic imagination.' I read FLOATING WORLD as an attempt to plot a series of points, the poems & translations printed, to surround an implicit definition of the powers of the deep image. Rothenberg's first volume, WHITE SUN BLACK SUN (Hawk's Well Press) has just been published. The poems in it are very good, very moving, very much alive: demonstrations of the fruitfulness of the approach to the poem via deep image. And the collection is, beyond the matter of the poems themselves (what shall be said of them?) a happening in itself: the appearance of a demand for a new set of concerns in poetry, the appearance of a cogent movement in a new direction. The notes that follow are offered as pertinent perhaps to the climate I've spoken of.

The present & necessary function of poetry is the transformation of the perceived world. This transformation orders the known world into an effective and coherent universe. The eye, seeing a concrete pavement for the thousandth time but the flakes of mica embedded in it, glowing & fiery, for the first time, sees a transformation and so is illuminated. But poetry cannot stop with that enlightenment. Epiphany is meaningless display outside the context of incarnation. Poetry is concerned with things transforming and transforming things, with the whole picture in mind. We are given: 1 world to transform, 1 language to transform it with.

Transformation is process, involves truth as emergent from process and not distinct from it, involves knowledge which alone redeems us from innocence, the deadly innocence of not knowing where and what things are. Poetry answers the questions what where when.

Nothing can be known unless it is known in situ, in the context of its world. Transformation aims at the continuum of all perceptions. Poetry is this continuum. Poetry establishes the mutual relevance of every percept to every other percept.

Percepts are from dreams or from waking, rise from the unconscious or from the retina of the awakened eye. Poetry, like dream reality, is the juncture of the experienced with the never-experienced. Like waking reality, it is the fulfillment of the imagined and the unimagined. The percepts, in order to be communicated, are fleshed in language. Poetry cannot exhibit naked perception. The clothed percept is the image.

Poetry is not the art of relating word to word, but the ACT of relating word to percept, image to image until the continuum is achieved.

The Line:

If the poem takes its departure from speech, a relationship of some kind must exist between the rhythm supplied by the image and the rhythm of the breath. What is the relationship of image to line?

One easy answer is to say that one image equals one line. This denies the independent existence of line, and is a quasi-solution that produces poetry of blandness, no matter how great the initial force of images: the images are not being articulated, urgency is lost.

Projected verse (for which see Charles Olson, *Projective Verse*) offers a method of resolving breath and line, and my concern with it here seeks to substitute the centrality of image for the centrality of syllable & line as a way of access to the happening of a poem. The line as set down on paper is an indication of the breath period, with visual & rhythmic considerations determining the visual notation.

The projective line ending in open juncture allows tremendous stress on the last verbal unit in the line, a stress exploited not for key words but for key silences, stretching out to vital & peripheral words. 'Systematic derangement' of standard speech rhythms, of the inflexibilities of our analytic grammar, is a sharp exploratory tool, and a means of locking images.

When the image, *prima materia*, is lacking, the verbal gesture is quickly emptied: the poem elapses instead of happening.

The fundamental rhythm of the poem is the rhythm of the images, their textures, their contents, offer supplementary rhythms.

In addition, there is the rhythm of the breath. One line represents one breath period. The line rhythm is a product of internal (stress, morphemic pattern) & external (weight, length) factors, relating one line to another and to all others. Each line is rhythmically related to another line by those same elements that relate lines formally to one another, i.e., formal similarities beget rhythmic relationships.

Thus a poem involves the fundamental rhythm of the images (fundamental because more complexly present), a rhythm which is at once intellectual & sensuous, and also the structural, more directly sensual, rhythm of the breath expressed in line. The counterpointing of these two rhythms is a principal source of fullness and complexity in the poem.

Deep Image:

Plucking things from the street or from the unconscious is comparable to the digging of ore. Images do not necessarily proceed directly from the pitchblende. Verbalization is of prime importance, and on its subtlety the success of the appearance of the image, and of the rhythm of images, depends.

The deep image must be transferred to the paper, BUILT into the poem, in language which gives it its fullest spatial, temporal, sonic & kinetic properties, as conditioned by its presence in a series & in a structure. Supplying the image in its fullest force is thus partially a function of language.

Basically, the fullest force is possible only by means of the successful employment of one image's position in a context of other images, the image, after its first appearance as dark sound, still lingers as a resonance. Thus resonance must be controlled, and the effective means of control are the acoustics of the space intervening between one image & the next. The subsequent image is conditioned, made to work, by the image that precedes it, and conditions, as it is finally conditioned by, the image that follows it: through the whole poem. The first image to appear in an André Breton poem will normally dominate all subsequent images and the poem as a whole, even when the reader seems to have forgotten it.

The whole poem is more than the sum of its parts. Very important for this superequivalence is the ORDER of images within a poem. The final quantum will vary with the rearrangement of the images and of the images' fields of force. Every image has its field of force, it shadow moving darkly through the poem, with which the poet must contend.

The rational progression of images is only trope, whether or not the middle terms are excluded: metaphor with a stale taste of truism. Only the superior rationality of the dream is an effective impetus for the movements of the deep image.

The image is the measure of the line. The line is cut with image in mind.

Language:

The verbalization of the image comes out of the linguistic patterns of the poet's native language.

In the poem built from deep image, the image itself bears an enormous weight, for through it and its connection with the rhythmic sequence of images, the flow of the image-conditioned word & music, the meaning of the poem exists, all communication takes place.

The American language of today provides the only reliable linguistic patterns for the poet of images. Verbal expression of the image demands an urgency and directness that only the spoken language of poet and reader can supply the language of here and now. "The language of the image must come across vividly and urgently, without cuteness of distraction."

Only in the native linguistic PATTERNS can the deep image communicate at full strength.

In the image and in the line, the poet is using a language superficially akin to that of everyday. Atop the familiar linguistic patterns, the images mold their own expressions. The poet charges these expressions using the full arsenal of poetics, so that the image works in all its urgency, at its maximal communicative force. The need for urgency, for tension in the work itself, cannot be exaggerated. The language of deep images restores the poetry of desperation.

October 1960
(*Trobar* #2, 1961)

STATEMENT FOR *NOMAD*

As a start.

It is for the poem to move among facts so that the entirety of the visible IS visible.

That in the rhythm & fullness of time: to gather, sort & build, “stone from under his mountains.” We speak of composition.

“Know what is in thy sight, & what is hidden will be revealed to you.”

The poet cannot stop with the visible, but he must encompass that before his “creating” can begin.

Forever our damned confusion of what a thing is with what it does. Dante on function & being, Hell where the images lose their functions, merely are.

“Mirrors coated on the back with tin, & blind men’s dreams, these catch only the surface of the face, & that dim light cannot steadfastly endure even though it may make fleeting joy seem real.”

In our day we do not find or do not seek God’s grace, that light which Dante did not accommodate but which accommodated him: light proceeding from a more-fully-grasped complex vision of the real.

Our experiences of the Not Me (impersonal, “objective,” not the Id of rejects & displacements) we treat *as if* demonic, as if answering to the Eichmanns who gibber inside each of us. Enough for me to suggest that we have not yet clarified our sight, & see still too much out of memory, & not enough by sunlight.

It is not enough to be nostalgic for the immediate. Build out of the immediate; music.

So facts are not just surfaces.

And here it is necessary to say that deep image is the functional perception of all dimensions beyond the surface.

REVIEW OF STAN BRAKHAGE'S *METAPHORS
ON VISION*

(for his home age at last)

————— that everything enters the WORK

(those pages of Duncan's day book which speak (for the first time in our age of the world) of the Work, & of the worker, maker, that his blysse is, his Bonheur is, when the work is)

(That writing of Brakhage makes to include all the circum-stances of the moment, music & the smell of bay leaves, pen in my hand — not as a function of myself but in response to that evocation whereby he induces phenomena into the dance signification.)

& the Work sustains itself in.the.midst.of.it.all. Yes. & that he sustains the Work is of scant interest to you, bifocal gurus of the western hamerican Young?

but what. you can. maybe. understand. is this.

(since you need not *see*, look, here is a book, the same familiar oblong sarcophagus you long ago learned not to be scared of; Brakhage's book, of words, those instrumentalities you too have often blandly used so ill they wither on the boughs of your discourse & burst into ashes, Sodom apples you gather from the living tree of speech — words you fancy you understand, here is Brakhage's wordbook. Another Chance.

— nor, despite the tone with which I am pleased to approach the issue, is the book Art History for the Blind; this book is marrow)

Brakhage's films (e.g., *Prelude*) attack & agonize the lazy or untrained eye (not ready to run at its own true speed); in like manner, his book, the words flaming and flagrant in it, baffle & weary the ear for which words are dead or dying. A valuable instruction.)

Yes. Just this much. The “eye” is neuromuscular apparatus, & like all such needs to be trained, to “see” — just so, *that in us which perceives the full meanings & relationships of words*, written or spoken, must be trained, & kept in training.

The operative principle: “THE WORDS TELL” (Zukofsky); Brakhage reminds us, minds us, we must be ready for them.

(I myself, mildest of men, have received minatory epistles from those offended by my poem’s assertion that the Sun is a Woman. What will happen when it becomes commonly known that Brakhage says the sky is not blue? Wow!)

Getting to it. Beyond the *metaphors* of vision (by that term Brakhage modestly conceals in Critical Language the nature of his achievements) lies a profound exploration of human vision. Man-sight. Words as metaphors of the act, no further than that. Man-sight. Too often the stress on *sight*, to the neglect of the former construct. I understand Brakhage to be concerned not with the ‘automatic’ reactions of the eye alone, but with what stands at the far end of the perceptual path. Man-sight, where *Man* (each word construct to the other, o blessed American) = that system terminating in eye.

What the butler saw — Why, peering thru that keyhole was it, did tumescence manifest itself in his member *at the sight of &c.* The Grammar of the sense, our confusions about who sees, what part sees. Does tumescence see. Does phallus see. Answer me.

Do you suppose Pavlov answered anything?

Art, western as sublimation of the psychological quest for wholeness, whereby wholeness of the work is allowed as the goal, and, in a mystery, possibly itself the means towards that prior goal it seems to substitute for. Physiological wholeness, of which sexual intercourse is itself a *metaphor*. See Blake’s ‘unreadable’ theoretical reconstitution of Man in *Jerusalem* (about which Northrop Frye would know had he studied physiology as well as theology).

Thus, Brakhage draws on the Sources of his own movement to connect

with the sources of each man's being. Not by writing about them, or turning back to regard them (SOURCE IS NOT SUBJECT), but by letting Source project itself into the substance of the Work: for the eyes.

“the formes from objects” source of what is seen “flow” thru the sources of what is seeing, i.e., a physiological unison,

& from that compound source, in motion, the work appears, in form.

That the cycle be continued.

Reading Brakhage, two areas of interest extend, both of which may be pitfalls for the eager-to-be-diverted reader:

a) technical expertise

b) content, stories,

to call both by wrong names, as they might be so mis-taken.

It is wonderful that D.W. Griffiths thought to take the camera up in a balloon. It is wonderful that Brakhage has trained himself in the handheld camera so that a perfect fluid correspondence (or system of correspondences) exists between subject & object, one we can see. The first villanelle was a gimmick; the first canzone a major discovery of the whole craft. *Tékhné*, in full play & full meaning, furthers itself in the artist.

Brakhage is resolute in abhorring specious modes or instruments of power. That one, simply, already possesses the ‘power’ of blessing & cursing, and that one must forbear displaying these powers or wilfully grasping towards him. Otherwise, stricken in the work, or, as Lawrence has it, wounded in one's sex, by the diversion of source-energy from its proper goal, terminus, form in the Work.

(“The shaman cannot help himself.”)

Poets, like bankers, can stand guilty of fraudulent conversion. Magic, and Brakhage. As the superior man, forewarned by soothsayers of the present omens, does not decline the ominous event, but walks out, himself, into Senate House or Theater or motorcade, because that is where his work leads him at that fated or fateless hour, likewise the artist is at the disposition of his signs.

Interruption the only tragedy, but to evade the signs is to evade the work.

Ballistics.

All for naught if the aim is bad. Tekhne go brag. Remember Pound's the sun's lance striking the precise word — the romanticism of the Dynamic forgets: 'the precise.' Energy must land squarely in phonetic or associative or optic event.

(Nor is Projective Verse playing paper-dolls with line endings, but has to do with: right aim of the energy discharge, i.e., seeing to the bore of the barrel.

"Where will I end the line?" Where does your cock end.³

=

As, via Brakhage, an opening of the words of power (i.e., clear & distinct words); cutting the words; sometimes the pun, as feedback. But: towards locating actually the 'roots and branches' of the neural physiological event. Task.

But: reliance upon your *means*. In Brakhage's films, total reliance on the visual means, the film mediating the play of light upon a surface.⁴ The means incredibly limited, as light or no-light (with perceptible intermediate grades), as limited as stop & continuant.

Now this book is a man discovering his sources & his means: these are essentials. Of the art.

Without due consideration of them, æsthetics is shit.⁵

So that this book, which does not presume to pass judgments or offer theories, is one of the most important works of æsthetics of literary criticism, if that term still delimits anything at all. Ever published. In America.

(*Matter* # 2, 1964)



3. Where does the power end? Where does the Hudson cease to be estuary & start to be river? Where the salt ends. In quo salietur?
4. In *Mothlight*, Brakhage's reliance upon the root means is total. The camera & its retinue dismissed, the film itself mediates light, having, in its own substance, previously mediated natural forms. The means are in our control.
5. Aristotle's *Poetics* is still intelligible after 2000 years. Can the same be said for most lit/crit after 20?

INTENTIONAL LANGUAGE

happens to the reader

lately since (possibility of)

focus on *poem*

language (rightly)

*semed

====

*semed = sign'd or meaning'd of its craft, towards

====

language semed towards

non-object/ive/,

(to borrow of visual art,)

as not of the recognize-object-as-such)

that is,

briefly,

words (*prima materia*)

attended into dance (syntax),

whence (i.e., be slow, from syntax)

a field-of-precept

("experience(d)?"

opens

to the hearer

(Repeat:

from the syntax

the meaning ('meant' or 'unmeant')

gets itself

landed mirrored or distorted)

= fucked into the hearer (or eingefügt)

((i.e., the poet's attentions are to that

scrupulous dance

from which the transfer,

transmission;

On the other hand,

there has been a tradition
(old & little practiced lately)
((is this good or bad?))

of OBJECTIVE language —

(even if coming-on)

— writing.

Writing the key *here*.

i.e., objective-writing

a) plans a destination — control —

for the reader's response.

b) serves as a basis of commentary.

((b) is finally more cogent historically than (a))

Eliade speaks of *intentional language*

In Tantra:

saying one thing & meaning it-~~&~~-another

/ vajra = phallos = diamonds = 'mind' = vajra /

Intentional language is different from code & cipher (for obvious syntactic reasons) & from secret languages (like Shelte or Bog Latin, Pig Latin, Op-Language) because only some words in a given text bear (or suffer) the intentioned re-understanding.

Intentional language has a power of fascination

(wherein its evil)

& the capacity to be endlessly translated,
re-interpreted, commented upon.

(Do you remember the Awful Sinking Feeling when you realize that your childhood enthusiasms Hopkins & Dylan T & Mr. Yeats were writing in Intentional Language much of the time, & that where you had understood a primal penetration of the world, a re/newal of the life of things, only a religious opinion was 'intended'? Which shows how little attention you should pay to their intentions. What do they know?) (tho GMH & DT probably did not know they were writing intentional language at all — so be careful with this word of Eliade's *intentional*. As much the reader's intent as the writer's, Freilich.)

((in a great number of years, their works will go the golden way of Mother Goose, & their intentionality be forgotten as Mrs. G's political pasquinades have mellowed into domestic myth))
((orchids to time, or history, or our beautiful Forgets))

We do certain past poets the honor
(& we have no greater honor to bestow)
of reading them
as if they meant it, absolutely.
meant what they were saying doing
as much as we do,
clearly compelled to create anew
a body of articulate sense.

Metaphor is carrying over charge from text to reader.

We have till lately insisted on the unicity of each poem, *not* wanted the veiled message, have wanted the subject to address the object, have wanted in our euramerican way to *be* the object addressed. Each poem an isolato.

But this is older, intentional form, hermetic, combinative, serving always the beginning of intellecttion, of COMMENTARY-begetting.

Examples of unimpeachably Intentional Writing:

- most alchemic treatises
(wch are thus different from allegories, radically different.)
- tantric texts
- much mystical poetry of Islam
(e.g., Ibn al-Arabi's Tarjuman al-Ashwaq) & of Xty (e.g., John of the Cross's few rich poems, each of wch serves as Initiatory Text for a commentary of his own).

Some distinctions:

Effective ALLEGORY interprets itself.

Any literary work CAN be interpreted in many modes.

Intentional Language MUST be interpreted.

(Allegory is a characteristic & neglected Western form, & is fit instrument for our Faustian greed, since it knows nothing of Ensker/Eller, & knows only BOTH/AND. Good health to it.)

The poet will not be tempted to try Intentional Language writing
 until he knows something important,
 or thinks he does.

Then he's in trouble
 since the whole mechanism (= river-machine)
 of our modern 'non-objective' writing
 (post Rimbaud,
 I'm talking abt,
 the AUTONOMOUS poem)
 is based on
 learned ignorance,
 i.e., not knowing where you (the poem)
 are going till you're there.

So at this moment there is a major cleavage in the possibilities of writing

"non-objective"

"objective"

Intentional language
 autonomous primal words in symbiotic life with commentary
 modern poem

(& these have nothing to do with the dreary sociologies of Letterz in Amurica)

(notice PLEASE that the non-objective is not equivalent to subjective: I continue the metaphor strictly from the visual arts; don't confuse the issue)

Already we can note certain poets or their spectres moving towards the Intentional Language, most notably, right now, say Lamantia

(swayed by Schwaller de Lubicz's researches into the absolutely objective character of Egyptian hieroglyphics as Intentional language?)
 or, less reconditely, Leary's versified Tao Te Ching absolutely clamorous for the Special Understanding of the Chemic Initiation,

& from there, much acid & grass
 writing of our time.

The Faith of our Fathers (I'm talking abt Whitman & Rimbaud & Mallarme & Pound & Joyce &c.) had reference to an absolute puritan covenanter's faith in the power of the word-in-relation,

 syntax as absolute,

 the poem itself

as salvific.

 And that faith, new faith,

 even if it's now our orthodoxy

 (& it is)

still funds the most diverse lines of creative work (Roussel — Ashbery — the escuela de Nueva Yorque) (Pound — Zukofsky — Olson — Duncan — Creeley &c.) two evidently viable schisms in the meeting house, but both clearly on the non-objective side, as far as the work itself goes.

The healing:

both intentional & non-objective writing come to exist in form,

 syntax mediates,

 I mean it is a man's syntax we listen to

 & thus take (his) (our) (the work's) meaning.

Note that the oldest extant English poems are

 riddles & spells.

(7 August 1966)

Pokorny
on
 $\sqrt{pel-}$

flow \longrightarrow

B. *pel*, 'city.' Old Indic *pár*, genitive *puras*, 'fortification, city,' more recent *puri-*, *puri*, with the same meaning; cf. *Singa-pore* (Singapur), 'Lion City.' Greek (Æolic) *πολις*, 'fortification, city, state,' (**peli-s*), Homeric and Cyprian *πολις*, with the same meaning. Lithuanian *pilis*, Lettish *pile*, 'fortification, castle.'

1. *pel-*, *pelə-*, *plē-* ‚gießen, fließen, aufschütten, füllen, einfüllen‘, auch ‚schwimmen, fließen machen, fliegen, flattern‘ und ‚schütteln, schwingen, zittern (machen)‘; nominal: *pel* (Gen. *pel-es*) und *pelis* ‚Burg‘ (‚aufgeschütteter Wall‘); *pl̄-no-*, *plē-no-*, *plē-ro-* ‚voll‘, *pl̄-no-tā* ‚Fülle‘, *pl̄-tó-*, *plē-to-* ‚gefüllt‘, *pl̄-ti-*, *plē-mṅ* ‚das Füllen‘; *pelu* ‚Menge‘, *pelu-* ‚viel‘.

A. Arm. *belum* ‚ich gieße aus‘ (**pel-nu-mi*), *zelum* (**z-belum*) ‚lasse strömen‘, Pass. ‚fließe über‘;

cymr. *llanw* m. ‚Flut‘, Verbalnom. *llanw*, *llenwi* ‚Füllen, Fließen‘, mbret. *lano*, *lanw* ‚Flut‘, corn. *lanwes* ‚Fülle‘ (**plēn-uo-*);

lit. trans. *pilù*, *pilti* ‚gießen, schütten, aufschütten, füllen‘, intrans. ‚fließen‘, lett. *pilēt* ‚tröpfeln‘, *pile* ‚Tropfen‘, *pilt* ‚tröpfeln‘, *pali* ‚Überschwemmung‘, lit. *aĩpalas* (**ant-palas*) ‚Aufwasser auf dem Eise‘; russ. *vodo-polō(je)*, *pol(n)o-vodbje* ‚Hochwasser‘, kslov. *polō* ‚Schöpfgefäß‘.

← polis, city

D. ‚füllen, Fülle‘: Ai. *píparti* : *pípr̥máh*; *pr̥ṇáti* (*pr̥ṇáti*) ‚füllt, sättigt, nährt, spendet reichlich, beschenkt‘, auch *pr̥ṇóti* ds., *púr̥yatē*, *púr̥yatē* ‚füllt sich‘, Aor. *áprāt* (: *πλήτο*), Imp. *pūrdhí*, Perf. *paprāu* (: lat. *plēvi*), Partiz. *prātá-* (= lat. *-plētus*, alb. *plot*; vgl. auch *prāt-* : lat. *com-plēti-ō*), *pūrtá-* ‚voll‘, *prāna-* ‚voll‘ (= lat. *plēnus*, av. *frāna-* ‚Füllung‘, air. *lin-aim* ‚fülle‘), *pūr̥ṇá-* ‚voll‘ (= got. *fulls*, litt. *pilnas*, abg. *plōnō*, air. *lán*; von **pel-* hingegen av. *pərəna-* ‚gefüllt‘); *parīṇah* n. ‚Fülle‘ (: av. *parənah-vant-* ‚reichlich‘), *parī-man-* ‚Fülle, Spende‘ (**pela-*); av. *par-* ‚füllen‘;

arm. *li*, Gen. *liog* ‚voll‘ (aus **plē-jo-s* = gr. *πλέως?* oder aus **plē-to-s* = ai. *prātá-*?), *lnum* ‚fülle‘ (**linum*, Neubildung), Aor. *eli-ç* ‚ich füllte‘; *lir* (*i*-St.) ‚fülle‘; vermutlich *holom*, *holonem* ‚häufe auf, sammle an‘;

gr. *πίμπλημι* ‚fülle‘ (ursprüngl. *πίπλημι*, der Nasal aus *πίμπρημι*), Fut. *πλήσω*, Aor. *πλήτο* ‚füllte sich‘, *πλήθω* ‚bin voll, fülle mich‘, *πλήθοσ* n.,

THE DREAM WORK¹

1

Just now this seems heuristic possibility:
Wednesday's dream is not Tuesday's child & is not Monday's grandson.
That is, dreams are not *linear* in their expanse (extense).

Are we falsely counselled to record each night's dream, lest we forget? The dreams that matter are the dreams remembered of themselves.

To organize experienced dreams in a calendar way, stretching them out as a line in time towards what, is to subdue that which does not take place in time to Time, falsifying both terms.

Chronology is oversimplification.

My premise is that the dreamworld in us is (like our lives, Q.E.D.) a complex solid of such a nature that 'crystalline structure' is a more useful analogy than 'line,' chemistry a better ancilla than history.

I am watching a snow field as I write, the complex foldings & turnings in the snow. Sastrugi, the intricate physics of the snow as snow, settling crystals locking & unlocking with crystals, snow in snow, AND the intricate impetus of the wind, moving in & on & after snow; let the experimenter note schematically & quickly one dream. No part of him will let that one dream stand alone. As he is writing it down, other dreams of various times will come forward, to be noted down (i.e., hooked on) where they connect. That is the beginning of the dream work.

Radiating & rotating, the structure of dreams will begin to take form, towards objectivity.

1. [A practical outcome of this investigation dream as social gesture/communication was the *Annandale Dream Gazette*, which had a brief print run under the editorship of the poet Bruce McClelland, and a still thriving online continuity guided by the poet Lynn Behrendt at the blog *annandaledreamgazette*. — RK, 2014]

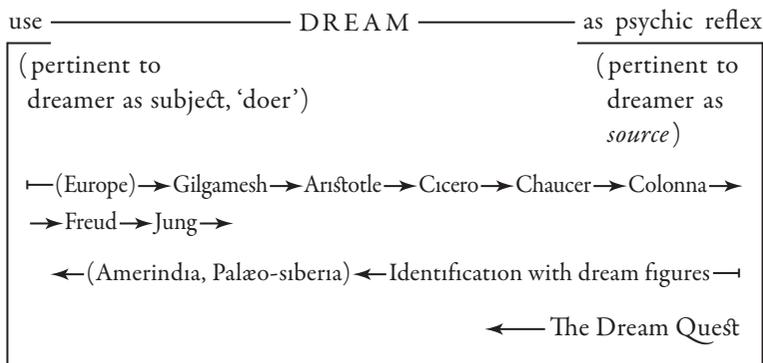
2

All earlier discussions of dream seem to have confined themselves to dream as psychic event in the life of the dreamer.

We must now assert the autonomy of Dream as ARTIFACT, legitimate *product* of psychic event, not record of it.

We must learn to honor the dream as work-of-art, & to devise (towards some eventual perfection of it) a language or method for *presenting* in verbal terms that product (not representing it, or interpreting it et cetera).

The spectrum of hitherto noted applications would be of this order:



Now the *tertium*, dream as autonomous artifact, must be dealt with.

3

Earlier notes call attention (a) to the aperiodic & symmetrical structure of the dream-life — the series of dreams a man has over a long time — & (b) to the autonomous artifactual quality of each individual dream, whereby (its value as psychic reflex of the dreamer forgotten for a moment) it assumes the same sort of value a work of art possesses. Bear in mind there are good & bad works of art.

That processes rightly called 'creative' are going on all the time in every being.

That in most beings creation shapes with any purity only the dream. (Occurrence of familiar (known to the dreamer) faces, figures, & situations in the dream is no more an argument against the artifactual quality of dreams than occurrences of that kind destroy the artifactual quality of novels.)

Prudent social motive of the Dream Work, to constitute by recognition a new art form for the onrushing collective age

thus to insure

possible working conditions for all artists (I am writing as a trade-unionist)

& a mode of conscious creative activity for those our fusty culture denies the role of art-bearers.

(Note that the Colonna spoken of in *Dream Work/2* is that Francesco (b. 1433) who wrote the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (a synopsis of which, with commentary by Linda Fierz-David, exists as *The Love Dream of Poliphilo*, Bollingen Series XXV). The *Hypnerotomachia*, with Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, are the two essential fixes on the literary (i.e., writing it down into the work) possibilities of the Dream Work. Distracted by art history, we reprint only Colonna's elevations of fantastic buildings; distracted by social history, we concentrate on *The Canterbury Tales* to the neglect of the supreme extended lyric in the English tradition.

But let me be clear that my concern is *not* with dream as source of literary works, paintings &c. — that has always taken care of itself, at least for those blessed or cursed with dreams.

No. *For the sake of the dream*, in all its clarity as fully created thing, the Dream Work is concerned with devising a comparably distinct way of transcribing, to make available, to make public. The problem of the Dream Work is not aesthetic, then, but logistic.

Dream is from Old English *drēam*, 'joy, gladness.' By night or day.

So far the Dream Work has been insistent upon the 'impersonal' qualities or behavior of dreams, how they are or can be of meaning not to the dreamer but to his society, at large. And so far this preoccupation has limited itself to general prolegomena towards a theory of transcription.

Now it becomes clear that transcription is only one possibility. The 'dream quest,' typically of the Plains Indians, had as its goal the acquisition of a dream, possession of which would serve as talisman to the dreamer, & serve the structural function of directing the mode of his integration within his society. (See on this subject Olson's phenomenal "The Gate & The Center" — now reprinted in *The Human Universe* — in the first issue of *Origin*, Spring 1951!) Externalization of dream 'instruction' concerns us as another (perhaps more important) way of honoring the autonomy of the dream — taking it indeed as the reckoning whereby perception & relationship can come to be ordered.

So that now:

Two Doors:

WORK YOUR DREAM

ACT YOUR DREAM

4

Each time there is only one utterance [that] will satisfy all the demands of the dreamer. The dream continues till that utterance is clarified & won, or irrevocably lost. Then waking can supervene — The sudden crisis of sensory input serving as a buffer, a distraction, from the overwhelming loss of the dream's loss.

Those who are inconstant dreamers must build a factitious strength in the orders of waking, must make, & seem to themselves strong. Our racial strength in the victories of dream, there are some brave men who defer the therapy of their dream, & insist on opening only to the strengths of 'conscious' origin — these men are traditionally in the minority. But as population *density* increases, fewer & fewer men will be able to dream their own dreams to clear conclusions. One expects then a sustained resurgence, quasi-permanent, of *all* the imaginative arts. One consequence of that will be the pre-eminence of *fable* & the comparative neglect of questions of 'form' & 'structure.'

But *fable* (I use the ancient word) is essentially *event*, some events linked in the telling.

re: Snow Jobs / we have got:

riding out over the whine
of the not-unjustified
universal bitching about
specialization
(in sciences & scholarship, as a bad thing)
is the fact
that there can be (& at historical times
has been, now is)
a scientist of holistic understanding,
a scholar,
a scientist of the whole

the Poet —

be aware that from *inside* comes
the poet, scientist of totality,
specifically,
to whom all data whatsoever are of use,
world-scholar

(from which infer the triviality of current trimmers & rhymesters,
viz. that they are not interested or interesting themselves in anything
everything &c.)

Pound Goethe Coleridge (off the top of my head)
greatness from the breadth
of their *concerns*,
i.e., one (if only one) index is exactly
that breadth,
they do not have hobbies they eat
everything
true index: breadth of radiance *or* splendor
poet as world-scholar,
holist,
(poet here = maker (with words))

(even as from the health of technology comes
information-theory
 & from computer praxis
to unitize
 (as first steps (0=1)
 to unity, création du monde)
poet then not the encyclopædia (à la McLuhan thesis)
 but the DISCOVERER OF RELATION,
redintegrator,
 explorer of ultimate connection
 & connectedness in among & all
(& if we let teleology or divine providence in: that's why
 poets are hounded from place to place & job to job,
 to keep them moving over the whole earth
whole surface of act & process & learning & doing,
 children of Cain the wanderer
 whence music & the fashioning
 of metal
 all
 material
for our use,
 at-one-ing
 the world

Sermo

Those things we *make* on a frozen earth
free us inward.

We are each a field
& also the limits of that field.

Above the
field the sun rises & stays in the sky and falls
to the inward west.

Everything that happens goes
on happening, planted in a thousand
fields, breathed in a thousand winds.

For
love & knowing & notice plant us in the minds
of those who love or know or notice us, those
we love or know or notice.

Those I have
loved *happen* still in my mind, occur there
as principles of order.

We are
haunters & haunted. We talk in our own fields.
What is called Imagination is the harvesting of
the field.

In the folk tradition the harvest festivals
survive to remind us of the everlasting variety of
inner harvest.

Sound is image. Touch is image. All
things 'inward upon.'

Memory closes the door
of the body. Memory closes the gate to the field.
The Muses are not Memory's daughters. They
are the naked presences who walk in the
shade of each man's forest, sing by the rim
of each man's fountain.

Imagination — χρυσοποια
(In this way gold is made.)

Tensors

[jetsam

of it:

we'll keep the prepositions for the sake of a one day classicism
 we'll hold the nouns in good standing but the verbs in escrow
 (Chaucer did without them, all but the simplest, & verbal formulæ
 with *do, be, will* &c.)

(i.e., a *Renaissance* is needed for the proper use
 of verbs — Shakespeare, Webster; Donne already dwindling from it —
 from the 18th century onward — Hopkins & 20th-century apocalypitics
 notwithstanding, Tennyson & the pleonasts notwithstanding — our
 language has been of adjectives & nouns & adverbs.)

What we need are verbal *tensors*, or do we have them already in the
 possibility of clusters of (falsely called) prepositions?

Is there anything more interesting to us than *location* in space-time,
 ego, *relationships* of? Only the prepositions (& some adverbs) offer
 themselves as useful *coordinate — moduli*.

- 1) as against that familiar adage of creative writing teachers to make the
 verb come alive.
- 2) by *Renaissance* I mean too that 'great audience' we've been hoping —
 maybe wrongly — for since Whitman, i.e., ears that are not *embarrassed*
 by richness & accuracy.

So we look for languages of fixes, coordinates, tensors to locate 'reality.'

Things shun their definition, shuck off their own weight. The poetry
 we once were told lived in *things* must reside for us in things, & the
 romance of *locale* in poetry give way to the epic of location. If men
 make computers, computers are humane agencies in all their reaches;
 we need both retrieval, but mostly the *imaginative* (in its toughest
 sense) discovery of new *locations*, new grids, new tensors.

[This to accompany certain experiments in old-fashioned Basic English,
 experiments both in *relational poetry* & 'chrematic depletion.'

Tensor Languages

For the most part, the list of 100 “operations” in the Basic English list, with the omission of a few that beg the issue of a specifically *human* observer (say, see, seem) unless a specific ‘subject’ occupies such words.

2) All the radicals of combination which themselves occur on the list can be used with any other word on the list. I have in mind, e.g.,

with-
there-
-wards
here-

3) All such words will be called, in this system, *radicals*. These radicals may function in any way in which ‘words’ can function in ‘English.’ (Use of quotations here to mark words of a mystical character, not susceptible of easy definition, & not my problem in this context.)

Tur Sinai’s article on the origin of language [in *Language: Its Meaning & Function*, ed. R.N. Anshen] his inferences from the adverbs &c., which postulate very much a tensor language as the earliest linguistic stratum.) So that = *Word* proposes to define the customary *location* of a thing with *relation* to the *space* of the observer.

WHAT

(vs/ mnemosune
 prana]
 pneuma]
 (psycho-) psyche]
 anemos]
 animus]

hoama
 soma
 χορος

[σωματ-]

(Cupid's lady =
 Love's self)

Ψυχη

cell/f

“ m a t t e r ”

Ablative Relations

Cnossos — Mycene

Lesbic Ψ

[what did Simonides
 ‘introduce’ to
 alphabet?]

‘Zoroaster’s’ deity
 [gath/ering to sing=
 worship. Gathas are
 s o n g s]

+ the cross of Matter
 (irreversible)

⊕

⊙ circle of spirit
 (shown with nucleus)

WHO

Instrumental Relations

(K u r)

‘Odysseus’ —x— ‘Sinon’
 ‘Sappho’

— ‘Jehova’ —

Jesus = radix

‘Shakespeare’

‘Boticelli’ ‘Ficino’

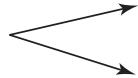
(‘Caravaggio’ a murderer)

‘Fludd’ ‘Dryden’
 (experiment)
 ‘Rochester’

vacuum, air-pump,
 tygers ⚡ 32!/sec/sec

‘Melville’ =

‘Whorf’



(*Prepositional*)

HOW

(Gilgamesh)

Bible — Talmud — Zohar
/gematria

→ Pindar

→ Sappho (Psappho)

Εργα Hesiod,

the Phacacian court

[i.e., Pindar as he left them, *as* we find her work, her WORDS, not the scholars' 'elegant emendations': In evidence : Davenport's versions of the actual extant text, avoiding (re) constructions]

Mohammed

(who will measure

Mohammed's face — *shiur komah?*)

ibn al-Arabi

Avarroes → SIGIER

↙ Dante

(as validation of Dante *qua* poet)

Dante of Florence:

Commedia = Sigier of Paradise

→ Chaucer — the number & kind of his *verbs*, e.g., in the Tales.

Cordoveiro ↔ Luria

Wolfram's dreams → Böhme

(Law's Behmen) → [Thos. Taylor]

But see too The Book of the Duchess.

"For everything that lives is holy"

BLAKE

["Nelson"]

so: 'Pecos Bill'

the brothers Grimm a) *fabulae* — narrative }
b) *λογoi* — dictionary } *das Volk*

'Aaron Burr' or
'Pecos Bill'

the words of the
tribe

G. Stein, 'dailiness' *Narration*

a story = the story

(, of the people)

or Ezra Pound.

sonnets & lacey forms, a nice guy sans cultura) & Schwerner with
the proletcult lycée vienna out of his ears (which when I first over-
heard were attending Mr. Stevens)

learned also

easy upper west, never a prole)
the words of this tribe (uptown tho it was,

to sing

out of his head.

From everywhere

(& what, more important than ourselves, was elapsing on the east side:
the giant forms of the men who'd been some way to Black Mountain,
who seemed mean & hard & over in love with truckdrivers & poolhalls
& war books, who were reading Raymond Chandler while Rothenberg
read Buber, that tough thing that has so come to say, & stay, & mellow,
Oppenheimer & Sorrentino, amis de Creeley, & Blackburn who had
never been anywhere but where he was, all over the world, who was the
bridge, & the authentic Key to the Cidy)

from

everywhere, that was the colloid,
no orthodoxy for us, no doxy,

nobody pays for tail in the City,

no teleology

what is here is everywhere,

what is not here is nowhere),

so that all this is false, being history, & the only thing that would final-
ly be of use would be tapes of certain talks I had with Economou from
57 to 61, certain tabletalk around the Rothenbergs' pork molé 60 & 61,
food is as much history as anything else, who we were or were not sleep-
ing with, what bar on Leroy street shocked Eshleman new from Indiana,
why he & I drank a bottle of El Cerrito in a backyard on 7th St. & still
could not be clear, our, my, one's constitutional incapacities,

& Eshleman's

work, arching over the intervening time, arrests me with his sure
bodily awareness of flow, of the poem *as* flow and hence *as* con-
tinuity, *the* continuity in the mad agonizing space between body

and body, and to talk of anything but his work, our work, wd be
personal histories

and as the sequel shows, what always happens is
personal history

when what was intended was a public gesture

yet in an art where there are no public excellencies, where the
private did *ê* does matter, where the public gesture (*other* than the
work) breeds swift tyranny,

these people were working to come through.

Hasid Rothenberg

saintly man fond of artful silences, whose prolong-
ed trances in foreign tongues hold him where he had been, *ê* where
Quetzalcoatl went to heal his flesh corrupt with false longings, *ê*
where the sun

healed over alchemy *ê* politics,

who didn't trust Kennedy,

who fancied the smell of burnt flesh unseverable
from our consciences,

who tried to go back in time's

womb *ê* be born again,

a savage tending his dong,

song, sang

out loud *ê* wailed rabbinic

ê came to supper with spiny fish in his bleeding hands,

'my ocean, my ocean'

who did not know Greek,

ê la belle Diane,

that same *ê* I made a beeline for, New Years Eve 59 / 60,

sleek lady with complex rhythms *ê* ostensibly

simple desires, who loved the far-out *ê* declared

herself *ê* sought everyone's good fortune before

her own,

(who introduced me to Jackson Mac Low, the man I'd seen

for years, face of the young Pound now his face *ê*

more like himself, all over town,

and Jackson taught time, time in *ê*

of the poem,

whose work goes on & goes
 on in massive neglect of our theories, obedient
 to the processes, no less verbalized, he incessantly
 makes up,

a huge body of work, a man who writes all day
 long, who did the work in a city where — constitutionally —
 work is to be shunned)

& Diane brought us to those
 places, the great loft on Chambers street, biopsy of
 new music, measuring itself ever, & she glad to
 carry the new dances into old places,

she whose own
 work was & is uncontaminated by second
 hand theory, is incorrigibly itself in finding
 out what & why things happen,

who most used the poem
 as a heuristic machine, a sighting glass, a kit
 for feeling the fingerprints of the world,

detective,
 who has never sounded like anyone but herself,
 she,
 from Whittier, further west even than Economou,
 a well-

done man from raw Montana, oro y plata,
 who watched
 the signs & remembered the gangs sloping off gravel
 on the railway, surely not Dorn's CB&Q? golden
 spiked Union Pacific of our no longer primitive
 dreams?

primitive, natives of our own hungers, needs. (& Levertov,
 putting some or all of us down, or was it only me, said This is a poetry of
 desire, not of need. A very subtle thing to say, but the distinction was hers,
 not there in the world, where *hunger* is unquenchable & Eros & Vision, &
need a philanthropist's cold way of seeing the statistics of it. Wd she speak
 ill of Eros? Yet she found something, calling it wrongly, that was wrong
 there, in the air of that time of work, a *voulu* insistence on the distant &

the Strange, often to the loss of kitchen & subway & bed, the works of
dailiness in a city

but they were men in a trap, who mistook the sunlight
itself for their cage, & the ripeness of flesh around them for archontic
evil & (so persuaded) thus needed a magic out of the trap, a language,
an alchemy of the Tour St. Jacques or obsidian self-torture of the Aztec
priest, so they, or we, were not pastoral

detected no order,

made

order when we could,

a syntax of objects, an Ernst, a

Spoerri table

but talked too much. O how we talked too
much, primitive & deep image & duende, blithering
slogans & all the gimcrack foolishness of the articulate
young.

(Sd. Rothenberg to me: we'll be sorry if we
give 'em a slogan! & so we were)

but there *was* a

splendor, light reflected back upon us from those
words we used, tried to stand under & be worthy of,

&

the words were worth, held us to what we'd promised, bound us to our
premises, measured us, indicted us (Rothenberg & me, who'd done
most of the talking, at least what got to print; Economou reluctant and
thoughtful reserved, Rochelle Owens laughing at the clumsy words we'd
prosed around what we & she cd so much better sing, Wakoski slyly at
the sidelines, poking fun, Mac Low scoffing openly, alert.)

& now may be seen those words float back in the casual
dissertations of gents who have not troubled to read further than the
slogans

(Lorca, forgive us your duende. Nightmare of our nights, forgive us
the word we thought to hold you at bay with)

But now we've vanish-
ed into our lives of work, and I see them seldom, perhaps they see
themselves seldom, we all have new friends too & different places &
live elsewhere, & that makes all the difference in personal history, in

no imposed decorum. Music was what happened, or was supposed to happen, when you talked, wasn't a special attention.

Anti-style. Anti-rhetoric. To strip to the least
(that most durable of poetic resolutions)

↳ the least was: image

subverbal, translatable, i.e., (hence in *Floating World* ↳ in Rothenberg's, Antin's, Economou's worlds the importance of translation: Neruda, Breton, Celan, Lorca, the Primitives (seen qua Levy-Bruhl, not Levi-Strauss))

((whereas to be able to translate, say, Zukofsky into German wd be equivalent to remaking that language))

the least
(↳ hence, by that bittersweet wisdom of Athens ↳ Crimea, the most) was image

↳ here these nomadic foragers fringed the territory of the haiku-chippers)

Rothenberg's own *Sightings* are the clearest documentations, as well as the beginning of a push I think sought to discover the image *within* logos/verbal/syntactic

((as Ken Irby observed of Pushkin's *I loved you once*, a poem without *an* image,

or as Spicer's researches nailed up on the door in clear view, the word *is* primal))

in Rothenberg's *Sightings* the poem happens between the lines of static, lines that are of words, lines sloughing off words, the serpent renewed, everything coming out of the sciences, the whirling legs of Magnum Chaos, ↳ the whistling demons surface

to punish us — ↳ so many of the poems of his ↳ them ↳ us ↳ of that time had as their intention (cd that be part of Levertov's meanings? too much intention, too little attention?)

had as their intention the forced encounter of the reader with the abominable, to rub our faces in the rotting flesh that falls before our economy. Horror never far; accurate as that is to our time, it made a bluster in the verse at times,

a pre/occupation

rather than the verbal ground seized ↳ fully occupied.

Now all this was happening from the late '50s onward, & my own part in it maybe from 60 thru 62. It was the city, & it was the fertilities. *Personal* fertilities far more than I knew (I who always too easily believed in theories & public intentions). And now that we've variously entered our several works, & can share only as we share with the world, as it finally must be, what matters is that we did bear our divergencies forward without contamination, offered or suffered the encouragements of a business that is never easy.

Where we were wrong was to speak of deep *image* when the word we wanted was *depth/thing, tehom*. We could have spoken better of the opening door, or the wellhead, or the well to which the hawk swoops to drink, joining air & earth & water with his own fiery nature. The word *image* botched it, when generations of critics have debased that word into an easy theory that denies intellect & denies music. It was the deep thing we meant, that the poem was itself the battle with Kur, or with the dragon of the deep waters who locks up the fertilities of earth.

The poem is that, but the poem is subject to its own laws, its own depths and heights and battlefields. And the battle with the underlords of diminution and cruelty is always personal,

& there are no orthodoxies below the skin.

Our several adventures thereafter would have to do with word, only earth of the poem. From which everything comes, from everywhere. Past the limits of our intentions. The hard work of attention begins. *Trobar* stops meaning to find & begins to mean: make.

Last of the materialists,
the poet salutes the morning alone.

(*Black Sparrow* pamphlet, 1968)

CHARLES OLSON · *PLEISTOCENE MAN* (II)

Now I come back to this again because my first take on it as recorded in an earlier issue hereof was *pre*occupied by a laughingly systematic bellyache on the subtitle of this (not to surprise you, considering the author) amazingly useful work. Now forget the subtitle, except & until, you understand the book('s tendance & direction). Let it pass, for now. I've been learning.

So that Poet whose work has conspicuously summoned us to the realization that the poet in our days is, and is the only, (as I understand it), scientist of the Whole,

now in this month's letters,

October 1965, from the Poet in Gloucester to a Blake-scholar in Buffalo, what is likewise evident is the necessary turn of the, our, attention to the substances & consecutions of the world we inhabit,

“In fact it *is* poetry, Pleistocene, in that simplest *alphabetic* sense, that you can learn the language of being alive” (p. 9),

language

of being alive. Now the eye of this book is on, is concerned to direct (purpose of letters) at a distance a course of study, primaries, and to this end there are exact instructions, bibliographies, *lisez and ne lisez pas*, to conduct “the people” thru (what I'm supposing to be) the maze of æsthetic archeologists, histories & altitudes, towards, towards,

“There is no single text in Pleistocene except *one*: the few, & *separable*, remains. [Not any historical speculation, only speculation by such persons on the basis of those REMAINS ONCE MADE KNOWN TO THEM.”

The tenderness of Olson's concern for the remains, (which I would call data except held back by those interesting things about data Piggott says in the first chapters of *Prehistoric Europe*, it's there but can we see it, understand what it is that we find, plus the extent to which our seeing depends, just that, depends)

& for the making known of what can be made known!
(& here Olson says, page 12, to keep in mind: “you don't have to

teach you have to extricate. Don't do anyone else's work for them: do what they might not be able to *unless* you have given them a superior chance at.")

And he calls Clarke's students (I guess they are, in a school, a university, in America, getting such in/formation/s, hard to believe) "the people." Which is the loveliest address.

(*Caterpillar* # 10, 1970)

SOME PRELIMINARIES

1.

Every great writer gleams in the grace of admirers, the shimmering glamour of detractors. We see a writer scaled by our own perspective, reverence or disdain. Olson got his share too of the excessive reverence that spits itself out as competition, resentment, chopping down father.

I knew the man from 1962 for half a dozen years, and hardly saw him in the last two years before his death in January 1970. He died at fifty-nine. As I write these notes, I have already outlived him by three human years. While he, such is the nature of these things, continues to be older than me. Twenty-five years older — that was the measure. He remembered the end of World War I, I remembered the beginning of World War II. Such definitions as time offers.

The man. Everybody is distracted by the man — there was so much of him. He seemed half a foot taller than I (me at six-three), lean but bulky — the only man I ever found myself literally looking up at. And he would stand close. He was a dancer, Olson was, and moved always forward towards the discourse. A strange thing it felt. A dancer, not a boxer, though always crowding in.

So much of him, yes, but also curiously little in another way. Sometimes he seemed larger than life, sometimes shy in an imponderable way. Watching him chat with a waitress you saw the shyness of the man, his friendliness, his sweetness, his holding back on the huge engine of his body's power.

Don't let them diminish you! he cried out to me one night, and repeated it over and over, gesturing at my big body, my big appetites. The sizes we shared, of shoes, eyes, airs.

2.

Several months ago some young poets came to me and proposed we all talk about Olson and the Black Mountain poets. They occasioned me to look at the strange reluctance I've felt about dealing out loud with him and his work. I began to think it was time to say what I had to say, if anything, about this man, this maker, who to my sense of it renewed poetic discourse — and not just in our language — vastly more than he's given credit for.

What I want to do here and now is offer, just offer, a couple of working notions about the shape of Olson and his work. I think these notions are worth working on by critics, and by biographers who want to deal more deeply, even if speculatively, with Olson's inner life, the growth of his mind, than Tom Clark's pioneering biography had time to do.

On the way to these ideas, let me try to dispel the common, poisonous, cartoon of him as a domineering pompous patriarch ruling by his size and voice and laying down a stone yard full of by now outdated laws and orthodoxies. Let me share instead the sense I had in the 1960s, and that has stayed with me thereafter — ever since one night he said to me, standing in a curiously hieratic, Konarak sort of Indian way, how no one has grasped the feminine in him, no one knew the woman he was. And one night, more shyly still, he began to talk about the feminine in his own work — not just some exalted sense of Sophia as the feminine disposition of Godhead, but rather the particular feel and agenda of a certain sort of writing that he did. Shyly he spoke about it, wouldn't identify the work of his that he so identified, but clearly gestured towards it: the narrative, the continuous, the *récit*, the "visionary recital" — the tale of the soul. Perhaps narrative itself is feminine, and it is no surprise that the most purely narrative of all the Maximus poems, "Maximus, from Dogtown," about Merry and his Bull, demonstrates a coinciding of the end of Story with the end of the poem in the opening up of the female Earth's part to "take him in." Narrative returning to its womb.

3.

Here then are two notions I'd offer for critics to assay: first, that Olson was a man struggling against certainty.

He was struggling against the Aristotelian groundworks of his Good Education, against the innate conservative tendency of his social mind, against the convictions with which he had grown up, the convictions of sexual and political hegemony he had won from Lawrence and Pound.

Just as I would read Melville's work after *Moby Dick* as a flight from his own fluency, I want to read Olson's work after the first flight of Maximus as a flight from the unexamined certainties by which a man might know myself, "my wife, my car." Away from the apodictic evidence of the senses & the usual homages they demand. Out, out of the social —

Out into the garden of the Platonic nuthouse, as he must often have thought of it, towards the illuminate intensities he began to work with from Meier and Corbin and, in general, the "Arabs," work towards what he would wind up calling Angelology in his *Curriculum for the Study of the Soul*.

Angel. Soul.

Funny words, you'd think, for the man who wrote the *Mayan Letters*, the savvy correspondent in that immense *Briefwechsel* with Creeley, to come to.

Moving as he did, he was doing, we have to remember, what his decade was doing too, the drugs and quests of the 1960s of which Olson is the clearest and least self-deluded conquistador, who for the sake of the journey itself, the pure Emersonian outward, moved from certainty to the visionary Abyss.

I remember Olson one night reading, with minatory fervor, the incredible passage in Melville where the greenhorn Platonist is imagined stepping out into lucency off the crow's nest and plunging to his death, or worse, in the endless ocean of speculation.

Where Pip (in his turn, on another Gloucester summer night) had sunk down to the lowest realms of matter, and seen God's foot upon the treadle of the loom.

Thus my second trope is to test a sense of Olson as the man struggling towards the Angel.

My own guess is that Olson was himself that honeyhead, that Platonist with his foot off the crow's nest. I think he tumbled down into the holy mouth of the sea and the sea spewed him forth — Maximus come to the world's end, straggling up on those Mahayana shores that a century before Henry Thoreau (whose name sounds like *thorough* in Massachusetts) had, first of Americans, come upon, translating the *Lotus of the Good Law* from French.

Someone should find out how Olson came upon, as he did come upon, the figure of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi, the meditation deity of accomplishment: *I am the one who accomplishes all my intentions*.

Can you say that? Isn't that what the "young" Maximus is always saying? And here I will insist on the figure of Maximus, who is not an irrelevancy of the text, a glib Persona. He stands as the engine of accomplishment. Being big he is able, able to stand his ground, stand by his word, able to do. So Maximus is no meek Ishmael battered by conscience and tradewinds, Maximus is the deliberate voyager. And what he sails across, measures with the body of his feeling, is not some dinky periplus. Here is a man who can cross the open seas, a mariner, one who can move out of sight of land, and still get there.

So this is the character of availing, non-existentialist but sheerly experiential, who is the place-lord, the day-god, of Olson's great working out — not a canto. The Maximus *poems*, he insists, not cantos, not a song not a single singing, not at all, though (*The Songs of Maximus*) Maximus can sing.

Call it a dream. A dream is the opposite of a song, can I raise my voice and say that, with some conviction? A dream is the opposite of a song.

And this is Maximus's dream, a dream he got falling asleep over Apollonius of Tyana, or reading the sermon of Maximus of Tyre.

Until he thought he was the book he read.

Then he became that book. And a man becoming a book is on his way to the angel, to being "divine" — like St. John the Divine, who saw heaven descending onto Patmos, and who ate a book.

It is by an appeal to the courts of Mind, an entry into those noumenal wildernesses from which both the conceptual & the historical are

banished — not as wrong but as nonproductive, ir/relevant, *Irrlichter* in the gloaming — that Olson’s painfully honest later poems strive. On a journey from identity to being, sensing those — so freshly — as opposites.

Now Olson used to pronounce “literature” like a bad word, and seemed to hate the artifactual sense of a text as a thing, an amenity, a commodity abstracted from its culture and esteemed for its very distance from its conditions of production. Hence the restless horny probing after sources and histories, the “irritable searching after” an authority outside the text, mirrored in the text. Hence all the business in record offices, archaeologies, Yucatan, Dogtown Common, annals, ledgers, diaries — as if the authenticity of the text in feet arose from its having been conditioned by antecedent textual evidents/evidence (“things seen”).

What must it have been like for such a man to encounter the necessity of the Angel? When Stevens, in his late poems, came upon the necessary angel of earth, it seemed like a profound metaphor, but not a Man (remember that the “angel” with whom Jacob wrestles all night until the rising of the Dawn is, in the Hebrew text, *ish*, a man).

Olson’s angel, he found, was all sourcing and tendrils and shakings far off of the web. Olson found hints towards the angelic in, of course, the soul, & I fought him, and we were estranged by my surly *lèse-majesté* about his use of that word, and I’m still not sure if I was right or wrong about his use of it, though God knows I was wrong to give him (or anybody) displeasure by carping about the term, qua term.

Of course the Angel points to the soul. Your soul. What else do you need an angel for? The Soul is what you cannot see. The Soul is what sees. A man can’t see his own face. He needs a mirror. The Soul holds itself up as the mirror — Olson may have sometimes badmouthed literature, but I think he came to understand, better than any of us had, how a book could be a mirror. And how to make such a book.

(*Rain Taxi*, Spring 1998)

COLONEL GENEROSITY —
SAYING THANK YOU TO JONATHAN WILLIAMS

I miss the elegance of the man, the energy of the poet, and above all the generosity that made sure publishing was public-ing, and that brought to the commonwealth (as he might call it), the shivering needy children we are, news that concerned us and made us better — or at least (often) made us laugh.

The first publisher of Buckminster Fuller, Guy Davenport, Charles Olson — yes, of course they had other little books, but Jargon, with the always beautiful big format, lucid printing, visual sense of importance, endurance — Williams put their names and work out where the hungry poets and readers of the late '50s and early '60s could find it, did find it. We were sick to death of the gentrified poesy of that era, and the books Jonathan made us read (made the Eighth Street Bookshop stock, display) cured us, gave us a fresh wave to ride.

I first met him when I was a frantic reader buying on credit (they kept tally for such ravenous ones) and he was working in Ted and Eli Wilentz's stockroom — a tall slender not very articulate young man, much callower (for all the work he'd done, his travels, his Black Mountain days, his publishing) than the upright gent I'd meet a decade later, when he came to read at Bard College. Or maybe he just didn't like me then.

What am I to do with his death? Same month as Robert Owen Callahan, the San Francisco poet whose own publications reminded me a little bit of Jonathan's, & reminds me too that the great publishers are not those who print and distribute great books but those who create a great new zone of intersection of idea, image, music, and history — a new zone in which books can be read, and our minds can be made known, shared and renewed. That's what Jargon did, and Barney Rosset's famous Grove Press, and Dalkey Archive, and McSweeney's, & Black Sparrow, and some few more.

Jonathan knew and revered Mahler and Elgar way back when nobody played them, when academic composers dismissed them as pompous

romantics. Long before the recent fashion of rediscovering tonality, Jonathan was humming Mr. Delius to me on the phone, or reminding me of anecdotes in Bruckner's sad little life around his immense music.

What am I to do with the death of any friend? Any one? I have to understand that the last gift a friend gives is his death. The death is a gift. Not in the narrow, cynical sense of leaving stuff for his heirs, or leaving space for his competitors, crowing room for his rivals. Not at all — those aren't gifts, they're obligations or commitments or curses. No, what is a gift about the friend's death is that he has, now, at last, given himself completely to you, in peace and thoroughness. He is yours now, to hold in mind, to be reminded by, to talk to and, who knows, be answered by. Death takes away the alterity of the friend, and brings him to you, me, in the place of sameness, where we know ourselves. And where our own death is waiting.

The grief I feel for him is for a man who was a friend for forty years, a voice in poetry & public discourse grandly & often dizzyingly different from anyone else in his time. The grief I propose the community of poets should feel, though, is for the loss of one of those rare writers who somehow are able to include within their own work the propagation, care, and feeding of the work of other artists. Names come to mind: Harry Crosby, Robert McAlmon, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, perhaps Cid Corman more than any — they were poets who perceived no gap — much less created one — between their own poetic productions and promoting the work of others. Not just their friends — dozens of the writers Corman brought into the world never met him, never did a thing for him, except let him bring them forward as part of the large, subtle project of his own poetics.

So it was with Jonathan Williams. This is the thing that's so remarkable about him — how he embraced publishing as publicking, and what is writing in the first place but the publicking of speech? What he himself wrote, and what he published in the six decades of Jargon, the press he founded, form a kind of indissoluble figure, an ideograph of the kind Pound made us lust for and try to construct.

I need to state a simple gratefulness to Williams, for all he published of the great ones of the last half century — Zukofsky, Olson, and all the rest — and also, personally, for his own work. It was his *Empire Finals at Verona* that showed me in the late 1950s, for the very first time, that the sparse, ironic, vernacular of what would soon come to be called the New American Poetry was capable of subtle resonance, quiet rehearsals of ancient beauty, shocking clarity. Those poems of his, setting Catullus to new measures at once historically challenging and linguistically (that is, politically) consequential, showed it could be done. There was a freshness, playfulness, & sniggerless sexiness that did speak Catullus. Some years later, his *In England's Green & (A Garland and a Clyster)* allowed the old stuff to show through, the Blake whose own mighty ironies awakened British pastoral into visionary energy and transpersonal love.

This was the same Williams who would, clear-eared and wicked-witted, make lyrical conundrums out of signs along the highway and hasty scrawls in public places — all the while listening to Elgar and Mahler. I once watched him attending to Elgar's *Second* — his whole body moved to the music, stately, arms swaying, as if to some celestial, slow-motion bluegrass. Maybe Williams let the world take him too much as that wry teasing commentator, maybe he was too shy, finally, to assume the vatic role his lyric gift entitled him to swagger about in. Too much a gentleman.

He never failed to recognize and promote those gifts in others. In the dozens of artists he proposed to the commonwealth through Jargon publications, the famous and the obscure are in balance. Charles Olson's *Maximus* in its first outing or Louis Zukofsky's *Some Time* (surely one of the most beautiful books ever printed) share the bookshelf with the unknown poems of Alfred Starr Hamilton, the unlikely epic by Buckminster Fuller, the eerie photos of Lyle Bongé.

Williams reckoned it a privilege to discover and promote the under-attended-to, and he had his own distinct notions of what made a poet or photographer worth his efforts. None of the books made money,

or only a few did, so the whole of what Jargon accomplished was to manifest an early and very handsome instance of what had by the mid-1900s become a new art form: the small press, which has now metamorphosed into the moneyless transactions of blog, zine, Web site, file-sharing, and all the other forms of free love we hasten to embrace. In Taoist measure, being small & being heard. Being small and making a difference.

Above all my heart keeps coming back to the generosity of Williams and how he made promoting the work of others into an ordinary and everyday part of his own work, all toward a sense of enriching the community of poets — a community that artists need as much as the commonwealth needs them: a quiet, desperate hunger often recognized only when it has been filled and those who filled it are taken away.

As they say in the newspapers, Jonathan is survived by the poet Thomas Meyer. They met in my house on that visit to Bard in 1969, fell in love, and lived together ever since, mostly in North Carolina (where Jonathan was born and died, hard by Black Mountain College, of which he was one of the most distinguished alumni) and in Dentdale in Cumbria. Thomas Meyer is, in my opinion, the strongest, strangest, richest poet of his generation, and has contented himself with the quiet, the mysterious domestic peace that nestles inside the wild gay life of London & New York in which they also moved. In that quiet (as Schiller famously remarked), his talent ripened.

Jonathan is survived too by their heart-son, Reuben Cox, the photographer. And that is apt. Williams made thousands of photos, the real things, 2 x 2 glass slides, of poets and poets' graves and gloomy places that make us glad. And into the great zone of meaningfulness that his writing and publishing both declared, he drew also American photographers — Meatyard, and Laughlin, & Lyle Bongé — who were creating a new *vulgaris eloquentia* for us, the images of our condition.

For forty years, Jonathan Williams lived with the poet Thomas Meyer — two poets living together, sharing and abetting each other's work. Considering how viperish poets can be, that ordinary domestic creative

continuity seems itself a marvel and a demonstration of the kind of generosity I'm talking about. Meyer, who entered into that relation when he was fresh out of college, has been quietly creating an astonishing body of poetry and translations; for me, he is one of the preeminent poets of our time. It seems to me that as different as Meyer's work is from the work of his life companion, it reflects, on an intimate but telling level, the generosity of this grand seigneur we have lost.

Williams and Meyer, Meyer and Williams, wise critics in days to come will analyze what I can only intuit, or foreshadow: each enriched the other's freedom to investigate areas of extreme poetics. To study their work — which always abstained from any trace of the collaborative — would be profoundly important for a study of the psychology of the writer. (Their surface image was appealing but misleading: the portly Henry James keeping house with an even more angelic Arthur Rimbaud.)

They supported one another, these two poets, their work radically different, Jonathan moving steadily into the gaffes and grandeurs of American talk, roadside signs and malaprop miracles; his work moved over the years from complex music towards wise, witty, foolish one-liners, if sometimes into Deep Whimsy where I dared not follow.

(*Jacket* #38, 2009)

ON IRBY

[The years I have known him and the love I have for the man and his work curiously do not equip me to speak abroad of his writing, its insidious and pervasive music, its vast range of referentiality — to both of which I turn again and again. There is no body of work remotely like it. In another order of discourse than the celebrations of such a festschrift as this, I would content myself with deictic, that is, I would read into the record page after page of Irby's work, excerpted, repeated, accepted, the work that instructs and nourishes me. Deictic, in my paradise visions, replaces critique.

But they tell me that is evasive, cowardly, and perhaps it is. Certainly I've had trouble bringing myself to the place-of-writing in response to the editor's invitation. So much so that at length I imagined that the best way, only way, to liberate myself into discourse on Irby would be by accepting the spontaneous and unrelenting *disciplina* of discussion with smart people. Some hours of discussion with Charles Stein and George Quasha led to half a hundred pages of transcription from the tape. I was glad to have talked, but could not find that the consequent text had, as such, value to a student of Irby. But I found I had said half a dozen things that had been on my mind to say about Irby, and these alone I wind up offering, to him, to the paideuma he summons.]

*

Catalpa is like *Moby Dick* in that it starts with a raft of curious quotations, extracts from other texts. I think the most wonderful of these gleanings is by Irby's brother, James, introducing a work of Borges: "The *activation* of thought, shared by author and reader, miraculously effected over fatal distance and time by words whose sense alters and yet lives on, is the real secret promise of the infinite dominion of mind, not its images or finalities, which are expendable."

That ending haunts me, as a statement in itself and as a way to reading Ken Irby's late work. Interesting that Irby puts it at the very end of his gentleman usher's anthology of loci about place and shape and ship.

I'm startled by the statement. I am as a reader so often caught up in the particulars of Irby's work, that it be Fort Scott, Kansas and not Coffee,

Kansas — this place and not that place — as he seems himself always caught up in a web of local specifics. Yet here it would appear, at the last, that the dominion of Mind, that *nous* which is our first and last appeal, motivates its images in time, in time to let them fall away. That images be expendable! That finalities, having activated the thought of the writer and the reader, can be expendable, leaving what, what other thing, Other Thing, the mind/ing in energy — this seems a promise Irby makes. I would expect, from it, that his road would cast off images and places, even while being illuminated by them in the first place; an emptying will come of what has made his work so much itself. Kenosis, by accurate pun.

(I remember, it must have been 1963, having a letter from Irby in which he, almost casually, faulted my then imagistic preoccupations, by citing Pushkin's *Ya vas lyubil* — a poem in which “there are no images.”)

*

Careful here not to confuse me with him. I've always been much too willing to jettison the specific place for some lyric observation comes to me out of it. Whereas Irby does not do that; he doesn't drift away from place, I mean from the place. Yet at the same time that which The Place motivates is available. And place is, obviously, the balance point between where we're coming from and where we're going.

*

Place is always referential to a journey.

*

Does it come back to what Ed Dorn had to say about Gloucester so long ago [in *What I See in the Maximus Poems*]? Gloucester is unvisitable, unneedable, irrelevant. To confuse the place with what it motivates is to blur source with 'subject' — in a world from which subject has at last been banished.

*

[We were talking about Olson and place, vs. Irby and place, and Bob Callahan's work had gotten into the conversation too:] I think that Olson's work, like Callahan's in another sense, is *prospective* always.

[Prospective was questioned; I tried to gloss it:] Whitman, Whitman is prospective. And I don't find that prospectus in Irby. That doesn't seem to be the energy I feel working there, an energy *towards*.

*

I think there are only two things you can be. You can be an Exile or a Prophet. And the prophet leads out of literature, and the exile I suppose leads into it. [Literature and other religions, was I think my sense of it.] That is the sharpest line between Olson, say, and Irby. For all the likeness, Olson seems always to appear as a figure, a stern prophetic figure correcting any tendency towards an interiorization of awareness. On the other hand, Irby always realizes his *severance*. I think it is his glory to be so much in exile. He is Ovidian, writing his *Tristia* perennially. His work, so evidently complex with geography and history and personal travels, reveals itself as not prophetic of a departure, but recoiling from one, a *nostos*, a seeking home. In many ways he relates to literature more complexly and obsessively than any writer I know. There is a brusque American habit of dismissing, oh that's just literature — and Olson, no less than I, posed as an enemy of lit — may at times have been so, since literature always canonizes text, and text makes religion, and religion eases us away from that terrene perplex Olson insisted on.

*

Literature. With whom else discuss Mandelstam and Pasternak and Kipling and Rilke with equal fervor, equally without prejudice? Irby is, or seems to be, the custodian of everything he has ever read. This a tribute not [alone] to his memory but to his care, his huge care for the art he speaks always towards.

*

[And then we turned to the dead, to the mediumistic — how the lonely voices of the newly departed are current in Irby's work.] I mean Irby strikes me as like Staudenmaier [author of *Die Magie als experimentelle Naturwissenschaft*, who incarnated within himself, his 'body,' several hundred persons or personalities, & discoursed with them]. In his silence, walking, abed, in the poised vacancy of houses, he apprehends the gestures of Sam Thomas or Max Douglas, lets them speak in and through him. Never does he seem to seek the occasion out as a 'medium'

would, but always as an alert man would, tolerant of the voices that speak in him and how they relate to his present affairs, researches he is never away from. Not just in poetry. I think of that Ellington piece he speaks of so often, played me once: "Reminiscing in Tempo" is the name I recall. In everything he's involved with, Memory is always Tempo, memory is a pacing device of one's own current apprehension of things. It doesn't, in that sense of it, seem *sad* at all. (Though Irby, reading say from his notebooks, generates a mood of Virgilian sadness I hear in no other recent author.) While the first blush of memory, remembering, may be sad, I think the effect is soon changed, to a quickening of immediate perceiving. Memory is the polarizing filter that saturates the colors of the immediate present.

*

It is a both/and sort of business, to have this place, to have been always somewhere else coming here, over rough roads, pausing for wine.

*

Orexia = hunger, a hunger beyond the sad yearning of *pothos*. In a world where there is an actual disease, *anorexia*, hunger for being less, not-hunger, disease of young women, denials. Orexis is not the hunger of Sahel, that mortal *need*. It is desire raised to its highest power, without ever taking leave of its 'power-base,' the body, the flesh.

*

[Was I, am I, now or in that taped discussion, subtly trying to subvert Irby's actual historicism into interiorism?]

*

But that's why I speak of the absence in his work of *prospexis*. I don't think he tends anything further than this present moment distilled from all past time. A past time he has at his finger tips... very often that magisterial, Olson-like purchase he has on his material, that it *is* material, makes us think he is after such goals. But I think the momentum is different:

he wants to make things public [re/public them]
 in order to appropriate them
 anew
 into his own life of passion.

*

Those Danish poems are often very beautiful, very visionary, as if from some inner perspective drugs had authorized. They drive on from a landscape one supposes to be very uniform, a landscape that takes power (and thus communicates it) in the act or fact of being remembered. Or is that true in general: Landscape doesn't count just by being there; it comes into its reality by being remembered.

Or again: Landscape is what-is-to-be-expended.

*

[For all Irby's preoccupation with the newly departed:] I don't think of Irby as at all a medium. The concern of poets with mediumism has often been, most recently been [people as unlikely as Spicer & James Merrill come to mind] with writing as itself an act of mediumship — and that is not Irby's concern. The dead he reckons with are not, in his grasp on them, different from the living. The Olson who comes in death's dream to visit in Kansas, the Michael Brodhead who 'actually' visits Kansas, they are not different in person/hood. They possess the same sort of ontological verity, occupy the same plane of being.

*

So if Irby is a medium, then we are all in summerland, and all Time ectoplasms in his work. Death has nothing to do with it.

*

[What I'm trying to deny is a sense of Irby as a literal voice-hearing medium in his work. To my ear and mind, the syntax of his presentment is more integral and together than the gnomic allophones one hears at the edge of life. Such a denial would not be necessary if the work were not so apparently preoccupied — that much must be granted.]

*

[Extraordinary how much of what I have to say about Irby is apophatic — assertion by negation.]

*

Irby's work continually rejects magic. Even while talking much about the occult tradition, he seems to represent it as something questionable.

I don't think he is merely 'fascinated' by the occult; minimally, the occult represents one more geography of human gesture, rituals and things that have style.

*

Friction is a simpler name for magic.

*

Even so, neither the summoning of memory nor the web of symbols seem to excite in Irby a nostalgic appetitive mood. We know the usual nostalgic poem:

Hearing this
I thought of you
I want you
right now

*

Who of us has not written that poem a hundred times? Irby does not. He challenges us, dragging together the network and the imagery, the hunger and the desire, but then, excellently and rarely, he does not combine them to produce the obvious. He keeps the gap. Conscious of being able to manipulate that distance, he nevertheless accepts it. The risk of seeing. Accepts the exile, in which *alone* all percepts and data have mutual relevance, as being, all of them, descriptive of Home. Exiles are exiled from *everything*.

*

So he does not set a simple *this* against a distant *that*. And because of his abstention from that easy friction, he is deeply (perhaps more deeply than he knows) contemptuous of magic, at the level of efficacy with which it might operate for — or — or anybody who has ever been ceremonially involved.

You can't do magic without having an intention. Ficino's dilemma was not different. Much as I would like to do magic, I don't want, therefore I can't get.

*

Yet reference to the occult, specifically to Freemasonry and the several traditions it inherits and renews, grows more and more frequent in Irby's work. It is my sense of it that these perceptions-and-renewals have to do with the Occult in the broadest sense, and the little occult (of the traditionary sciences in general) is being used as metonymy for that. That is, Irby is concerned with all the clarity that has ever been achieved and then in any sense occulted. Freemasonry speaks of a Lost Word, & there is the key (always in my sense of it) to Irby's concern. He is a Freemason who hopes to sound aloud the lost word, all the lost names of poets and painters and composers and architects whose work has fallen, in its beauty or difficulty, somehow through the grid of the canons, fallen out of the academic hoppers. There the living and the dead stand equivalent, and each voice is cherished for its difference. I am excited by this vast appetite (orexis) in Irby's work, that he wishes to bring to public view (if only, as I guess above, the better to reappropriate what he finds for his own passional ends) all the lost.

They are the true occult. From a recent letter of Irby's fell a xerox of a pindaric ode by Mary Butts hidden fifty years. From Denmark he comes home bringing word of the painter Carl Fredrik Hill. From his phonograph I first heard Szymanowski & Miaskovsky & Lekeu. I've never had more than with Irby the sense that here's a man for whom everything that ever happened on the planet is relevant. Relevant, and worthy of being held in one synchronic plasma: the poem. *That* is paradise, that is the world in which nothing is ever finally lost. He wants to drag everything forward into the light, all the odd romantic composers and colonial English botanists and unusual southeast Asian spices, all the obscure events of personal history, peeing off the porch, eating a duck, all the copious enactments of desire & curiosity & overhearing, all into the light.

*

And makes me think there is no history but personal history.

*

It's very difficult to have a conversation with him in which he doesn't know a little bit more than you do, or has a few more bibliographical

references you hadn't considered. [Here, as in some of the appetite I speak of, he reminds me of two other poets I have been honored to know: Gerrit Lansing, Jonathan Williams.] So the conscious, paradoxically 'public' Occult is metonym and frequent symbol, in his work, for this real Quest to restore all the lost members of the body of mankind. So that the passion of his poems becomes: to be connected with everything that has ever been.

*

There's a poem where he talks about getting poison ivy, Point Reyes is it, just the way and where Drake's soldiers must have gotten it coming up over the same cliff, ivy, sumac? and suddenly there is a community of blistered explorers he, and we, become members of. More important than the pain, the plant becomes a gateway into a *mnemonic experience*, perception pacing history and being paced by it, the intensification.

*

So there is no link but consciousness, no history but notice.

*

[As I suspected, these notes are part of a failure. They are things I think about. That is, things that think their way between me and Irby's texts. As such, they are distractions, more mine than of him, wayside seed on stony ground. A sense I could leave a reader with is the ideal compactness of an Irby book, the strange density of his language; however small the book, even these recent *Études* which is I guess the smallest, there is an achronic complexity of unfolding that translates itself as the feeling of a solid book in hand: a sensation no other poet's volumes hallucinate me with.]

[The taped discussion took place in summer 1978. I've excerpted my remarks, enlarged them a bit, added bracketed notes, now in December 1978. RK]

(*Credences* # 7, 1979)

AFTERWORD TO *A TRANSPARENT TREE*

Fiction is very strange. The soul says I need a change and the body says but it's so interesting right here and the spirit says Pack your bags; fiction has to respond to all three, yes, but mostly it has to respond to the world. The world is the place with no I in it, a bright continuity with no permanence.

It has never struck me that there is an interesting difference-between poetry and fiction. I write poetry (language turned by sound & silence) all the time, or try to, and call myself a poet when I have the nerve. But I've written a lot of prose inventions, lies, fables, fantasies, attacks, apotheoses, revenges too, & call them "fiction" or even "novels." Now, this fiction of my fiction is a double one. I write it with a good deal of care and attention, craft, I suppose, but at the same time with the delight of the amateur or the beginner. It seems to me that this *joie de dire* is chiefly available to me because our culture distinguishes the poet from the novelist, and since I'm clearly the first, I'm free to play, without prejudice, at activities befitting the second. The critic has the ready punishment: the "poet's novel" or "poetic fiction." Such phrases mean usually it isn't very good as stories go, but you'll find it hard to forget (*The Green Child*, "The Connoisseur," *The Dead Seagull*, "CB&Q").

My concern is writing, and for me poetry and fiction and anything else are at times useful but scarcely necessary labels to identify momentary crest-forms in the sea of language writing & language saying. So what I'm noting here is my refusal to apologize either for writing fiction, or for not writing more of it.

In the frozen masterpieces of *Dubliners* I long for the kindness of soul of Chekhov, but when I'm reading him I miss the physical urgency of Paul Bowles that can make a thousand-mile desert a claustrophobia, or the nervous wisdom of a Kipling, the immense bodiless benignity of Chesterton, the haunting purposelessness of Borges' skeptic profundities, the clean truthfulness of Beckett's minutiae, the powerful credulity of Machen and James, the timing of Doyle, the exaltation of Charles Williams, the smutty obsessive-ness of Mann, the vedantic clevernesses of Nabokov. My masters, my noble ratty masters whom I still worship, and at whose ironic feet I lay this assortment of my desperations. I know, or used to know, the canons of the Good Short Story, & have never cared much for those fussy expectations, though God knows I love the stories

(James, Conrad, Joyce) from whom the rules were worried loose by unseen scholiasts.

Story has always seemed to me to be about happenings *vertical* to the common mindstream of the time & the society — whether by virtue of invention (“adventure,” “crime,” “ghost” stories) or by virtue of harmonic intricacy — the sheer heedful detail and episode within the common texture (James, Joyce, Nabokov). About happenings — about the contingent arisings, impermanent things bruising one another into eloquent new patterns. The world hurting us into speech.

So I’m always trying to do everything. The stories in this book are not very like one another, it seems to me, though each is trying to be everything. (The very definition of the Moment of Writing might be: *Now* I can say it all, at last, the whole thing!) People usually tell me I’m a Difficult Poet, but I don’t think these are difficult stories. Certainly they’re not trying to do anything but tell themselves.

The earliest in this volume, *Cities*, was written in 1966 and published as a little novel four or five years later. It had been composed on the surge of energy left over from writing *The Scorpions*, my first published novel. *Cities* was written quickly and with delight, some of which I still feel, though some of it has turned into puzzlement because of a book with a similar title by Italo Calvino, which many of my readers mention to me. Though I’ve read & admired Calvino’s *Italian Folk Tales*, and looked at his *Castle of Crossed Destinies*, I’ve never had the heart to read his book of cities. I gather from descriptions that it’s Marco Polo-ish, and very good. From what I hear, it must have been written just about the same time as my *Cities*, and by its merits and his good karma has won more attention from the public than my little novel has yet. No doubt there are people who think I stole from him, or perhaps a few who even think he stole from me; neither is the case, obviously, and lately my puzzlement has turned to a slow admiration of the means by which the very hidden cities Calvino and I were both presumably in search of have chosen to declare themselves, and force their own secret commonwealth on public awareness.

Besides *Cities*, the reader will find gathered here some of the fictional enterprises of my last fifteen years, but not all. There are stories I dimly remember (“The Bassoon” was one, a Gurdjieffian reconstitution drowned in irony, and “The Prelector of the Sanhedrin” was another, whose feel I remember vividly, though I forget the plot) but have no longer in my

possession; I assume them to be among my papers at the Lockwood Memorial Library in Buffalo, which here takes on a significance similar to Cox's Bank in Charing Cross — though rather easier of access. (Did I consign those stories and others to the estrangement of distance and archive exactly to match Watson's tin dispatch box in my fashion?)

But past such discrete stories momentarily unavailable, the bulk of my work in prose has been aimed at several novels, no one of which is finished. The largest, which I call *Parsifal*, is finished in the sense that the last page has been written. But the book is so large (the typescript is about 1900 pages) that I have not yet finished revising it to my satisfaction. Since I love revision almost as much as I love the act of writing, it is possible that I will, in Johnson's phrase, protract my labors. Another novel (is it called *Carla* or *The Novist Philosophers*?) has two of its three sections finished — it is about America of the soon future, and is not large. There is a sequel to the *The Scorpions* also, which gives my detestable protagonist another chance; the text has no name and not much substance yet. And there is a small novel (almost in the original sense of that name) called *Erin Tantra America* that is scheduled to be published — a finished text amongst all these seedlings.

My daily practice is poetry, and what I measure my life by is the growth and variety of the poems I am given to write. This sustains me. What fiction I write, whether in grand forms or small, always seems free and fabulous and alongside. Parerga. Jeux. But there are eerie moments when I wonder if the tail is not a good deal better than the dog. It doesn't bite, for instance.

In the present collection, apart from *Cities*, all the pieces were composed between 1977 & 1983. "Samuel Naked," which tries to investigate the life & disappearance of my great-grandfather after he was invalided out of the Union Army, was perhaps the earliest started, and the last finished. "A Winter's Tale" (1977) is loosely based on a Long Island murder trial of some notoriety, and was clearly (even I knew it at the time) prompted by my own crumbling marriage. "The Guest" was written in response to what I took as a challenge to write a Gothick story, which my challenger glossed as "scary, with kinkiness." As I wrote it, I tried to imagine what a vampire really was, and if there is such a thing, what the bat in the window and the waggled crucifix might really be symbols of.

The seven smaller pieces are my favorites of the past few years, ways of working on different scales & measures. Most of them exert themselves

to conjecture at the nature & efficacy of silence — people’s silence, the animal that walks beside them, inside them, around them. I suppose that if my fiction has one pervasive theme, it is that people (my feckless heroes and heroines, my me) do not know what is happening to them. In the bewilderment of sensuous focus and inconstant intention they move, heroically enough, waiting for the world to decipher itself, or clue them in. Waiting for word in a strange town.

The stories interest me, things do, for their sizes, too, the scales they negotiate. Size is a matter of how close you stand — a two-page story, held to the eye, bears down with endlessness.

*

I appeal to two conditions of reading: the book we do not finish reading, and the book over which one falls asleep. From the latter text, dream-reason carries on its own narration, and Borges’ garden of paths that endlessly divide, a curious Sunderway, expands all through our sleep. And then when we wake up the book in our lap seems curiously arbitrary, disappointing, unaware of its own ramifications, mute.

In the first sort of reading, the unfinished, what the writer began, or what through the writer was begun, now acquires a dynamic (if that’s not too hot a word for what seems at first a listless condition), a genetics of its own that goes forward. Whether we ever finish “the” book or not, the book is always a-finishing in us. We may be clever, conscious, deliberate, or do it in our sleep. The overdue book you took back to the library in seventh grade continues to write itself, must be writing itself, in you now, its structures and resonances interpenetrating those of your daily life, and of everything else you read.

I appeal to a third condition — the recognition that comes to us from time to time that some book we indeed read to the end didn’t truly end as its author asserts. We find the author’s smug demonstration of the fruits of causality merely specious guesswork, implausible, hasty, jejune — or just wrong. We know better. We have some sense, clear or less clear, of what the text really was aiming at, something the author missed, or muffed, something the conjuncture pressed upon characters and world — something we intuit. I am haunted by such continuities, beyond the neatness of closure.

Dream narration, lifetime continuations, daydreaming a book onward: in such ways the imagination, by an autonomous act of transgression, corrects wayward masterpieces.

And so I think of fiction as a transparent tree, an intricate unimpeded proliferation of branches from a common stem. The stories go on, each visible through all the others, mutually exclusive only by logic (that woodcraft of Time), not in Vision. The shape of a story is the viability of it as seed: how ungovernably it will ramify. Like any writer, I fancy myself a master of control — leading the reader along only that branch of path the writer chooses — but the writer no more controls the ultimate fiction than the gardener controls the pears plucked by bold children at midnight from his artful espalier. The integrity of bark and leaf & fruit & taste — these will triumph, and mind will use what it finds.

Reflections like these no doubt make writers sweat hard on the last pages, to do by rhetoric and magic what the energy of the story itself has no will to permit: an end persuaded of its own finality. Why else the gorgeous perorations and poignant austerities that close books written in a more common language? Savor such flowers, but do not be fooled. A story goes on, and no branch obliterates another, however they may twist & stretch to share the nurturing light of the reader's after-imaginings, their only eternity.

And yet, and yet. The tree grows, our attention wanders, the transparent must be shadowed into compact visibility. Colors, saturate hues to shimmer or lour against (Ungaretti's word) immensity. The infinite transpirings of text do not absolve the writer from the task of finishing his story. Mole-like, maybe, the worker snouts his way through the writing, only his own body (or body of his fate) lending inertial mass to the projected story. The ending he comes to doesn't end the story — it just reveals him, dusty-jowled, triumphant, self-revealed. If you want to find the writer, forget the autobiography & look at the last pages of the books.

If I were a critic, I would write a book about Endings, Endings, and guess how from Merlin's last cry below the stone we could deduce the mortal weakness of the Grail & its company. A book of endings would be about *ta'wil*, that spiritual etymology that leads apparenity back to its original. And what is here is a book of branches, this book of mine, ours, branches made a bit more manifest. Travel freely from one to another, or work back, perhaps tonight in your bed, to the inconceivable refuge of the single trunk.

(1985)

REFLECTION FOR PEN AMERICA — ON TRANSLATION

Translation is of course conspiracy. Whatever else it is or may intend, translation represents a concerted move of the few against the many, the foreign against the domestic, there against here. It is the paradox of the solitary army, taking orders from a distant text, *parlez-vous*'ing these commands into some semblance of the speech heard round about the place where the translating is going on. Translators are much-traveled characters, close kin to spies and pioneers — two other occupations with a range of acceptance from the most honorable to the detestably covert. But all are cunning. So when we hear that a translation has been undertaken or published, *cherchez* the plot.

Now if a trove of unknown Inspector Maigret novels should come to light in the attic of one of Simenon's innumerable mistresses, we might expect the resultant flurry of translations to be cued by no more veiled an agenda than Dives at his gilded door — Get more, get more. Things sell.

When, on the other hand, *PEN America's* editor invites us to reflect on what translations are needed, what is being kept from us, what are they (over there, back then, far away) hiding from us now, there is a gratifying whiff of the conspiracy theory and it seems to me exactly right. We are invited (indicted?) to become co-conspirators in a huge project of subverting the way things are so far.

And what a grand business it would be if from our various cranky or overparticular or generous responses to the question, a permanent forum could be established, under the aegis of PEN, to maintain a continuing archive of titles and authors we need to have translated. A needy and querulous voice (like the voice Socrates assigns to Love itself) that might lift up from time to time and demand Cyprian Norwid or Quirinus Kuhlmann (two poets who happen to be on the top of my oldtimers list of those needing translation).

Such a forum might also remind us that we lose whole bodies of work when translations lose currency, since the language of the translator seldom has the intimate and obsessive presence that the original has in its tongue. Writers whose names we know vanish from our reading tables when their translations age or grow vague. For example, I think we need to hear Quevedo again in our own lingo, and Gautier, and Mörike, and

Lermontov, and Strindberg, and Lautréamont, and Platen, and Tyuchev, and...

It is a fertile and exciting gesture, this *PEN America* idea of opening up the whole issue of what we're missing by being monoglot. Or, most of us, sesquilingual — I mean most of us read Anglo-Indo-Afro-Carib-Australo-American pretty well, even natively, plus a heavy smattering of some other tongue, typically French or Spanish. So we'll call the usual American reader mono-and-a-half-glot. Nevertheless, since that half tongue is seldom up to allowing us to loll in a hammock with Musil's notebooks or Lacan's jokes or Lezama Lima's original paradise, we rightly clamor for the artful interpreter to tell us what those geniuses have been saying.

But in a lifetime of buying original texts and then reading translations (at times performing the religious duties of comparing the texts *en face*), I have come to believe that translation, as an enterprise and a business, is just as much part of the sinister Military-Industrial-Complex (what we now call the Entertainment Industry) as the hexing of the Kyoto Treaty.

So we need to invent a conspiracy, a confederation of spies who bring us the news, from then or there.

What are they keeping from us (whoever they are)? What is out there that we need to hear about, read, come home to? Imagine what our sense of literature would be like if no one had bothered to translate Proust and Dostoevsky and Kafka. When Bellow sneers at some putative Zulu Tolstoy, I fancy I hear the voice that could never have predicted Gilgamesh or Bobrowski or Rushdie or Lessing (Rhodesia, for crissakes!) or Meddeb or Diop or any other of the humane texts and geniuses that had the temerity to arise in regions off the A-list.

But Bellow's prejudice is accurate enough in one sense — there is a worldwide plot against our business as usual, a plot of eternity against the comforts of time. Translation, whether translations of new texts, or new translations of old texts, or deviant translations of traditional texts (like Gavin Douglas's Scots version of the *Aeneid* that thrilled Pound so much, or William Arrowsmith's *Petronius* — that satirized Pound), all translations betoken a conspiracy against the mind-at-present.

We sleep in language, if language does not come to wake us with its strangeness.

So the bringers of the strange are our appeal, the writers we need now. I'm going to offer a brief list of titles, in case some idle dragomans are itching for work.

Ernst Jünger, *Héliopolis*, his big utopian novel. Several decades ago a very small press published a version I've never found — Jünger's most ambitious book needs a good literary translation, one that considers the precise and lapidary nature of Jünger's style, likely the most self-consciously focused of twentieth-century German writers.

Boris Vian, *L'herbe rouge*. A sequel of sorts to his *L'écume des jours*, which was a sensational million-seller in France (and once a Penguin paperback in English). Vian's perennially fresh sensibility makes him such a sweet alarmist.

E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Serapion Brotherhood*. A nineteenth-century translation once was to be found in Bohn's Library, I think. Certainly needs recasting. Hoffmann's neuroses are precise and vivid, and fraternal with our own. He can talk now, if we let him. (Look at the incredible story "The Fermata" if you think he's all goblins.)

Novalis, *The Apprentices of Sais*. A short initiatory novel, a real challenge to a translator's double sense of style (highly formal) and agenda (deeply poetic, æsthetic, almost spiritual).

Beyond such easily named masterworks needing Green Cards, I can't quite stop myself from reeling off some more names. Jean Paulhan, Gertrud Kolmar, René-Guy Cadou, Louis-René des Forêts, scarcely translated at all into English though celebrated in their own terrains and in international criticism. I need to read them now in my own demotic.

It's not just the æsthete and experimentalist readers who need help. Even the bourgeoisie is deprived of its own international comfy classics: what about finally getting Jules Verne and Eugène Sue and C.F. Meyer and Theodor Fontane into English complete at last? And even Balzac is still not fully translated into unbowlerized English versions.

(My original plan of attack in this note was voided by a timely compliance on the part of Penguin, that cunning press, which gave us a translation, I still haven't seen it, of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*, *Tomcat Murr*, we'd say, which long struck me as close to the top of the list of books we need englished, Hoffmann's masterpiece of the talking cat, the stories interwoven, the hangover that lasts a whole life. So perhaps

even as I write or you read, someone is translating Fijman & de Chazal and Suhrawardi or the complete journals of the Goncourt brothers.)

And then there are the poets. Not just the famous ones like the great Max Jacob and Georg Heym of whom we hear much, but so little of whose work has ever been put into circulation in English. There are others, the ones whose very success has obscured them. They are the ones we are taught to think of as Thinkers, but who are really poets, who thought in language and embodied thinking in the grace of words — I mean for instance the superpoets Nietzsche & Marx, who have always been presented for their Ideas, as if their texts existed just to notate conclusions. Strip away their working-in-language (which is the revelatory gesture of poetry, soulmaking, revelation), and all you have left is opinion. Take the poetry away from Dante and you have a quaint *Fodor's Guide to Purgatory*, as we could imagine a humdrum translator taking away the epochal transformative poetry of James Merrill's *Divine Comedies* and leaving us with a scuffed old ouija board.

(*PEN America Journal* # 2, "Home and Away," 2001)

“AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY” [EXCERPTS]

I

I'm not sure that I want to write my life. I'm not sure there is any way to write it except to write every day, as I try to, the poem of that day, one after another. The poem is a day.

I'm not sure I want to write about my life. Do I even want to think about it? For someone as egotistical as I am, I have spent very little time thinking about it, only about what I want, what happened to me. Happens to me. Sometimes I think about what *it* wants of me.

I'm not sure I want, in other words, to write about my life in other words than those that have already (poem after poem, story after story, talk after talk) made their way into the more or less durable world of language.

I will try. Because I am asked to, no better reason. Could there be a better reason? Give what is asked: there is no other answer. Cavalcanti's canzone: *A lady asks me, so I will tell* — ground enough for all exposition.

When I think about my life, I think about how I hated it when I was younger, & love it now. Then it was curse and now it is bless. What I wanted to curse was how cut off I felt from everyone, mostly from those I wanted to be close to, wanted to like me. What I want to bless is everything, everyone.

2

My autobiography is the writing (*graphein*) of my life, my bios. Now Greek knows two words like that, two words the ancients surmised had at first been one: *bios*, “life,” and *bios*, “a bow” to shoot with as the hunter takes the life of things and turns them into his own life, the life of the tribe.

Writing my life is writing my instrument, my strength.

My life is not my past.

3

An autobiography is different from a biography. It tells the truth, not the facts. “Truth is what most contradicts itself in time,” and, like time itself, it is contingent, relative, impermanent as formulated. The most

accurate clock in the world is accurate only one instant at a time. Its record is meaningless. Or the recorded readings of a bad clock are identical to the record of a good one. Truth, like time, does not only exist as experienced; it *is* experience. So biography (the writing of a life, done by a Greek pun with an arrow, scratching in the ground, piercing the heart, wounding the flesh, taking the life — or writing in the gentle dust of people's impressions by means of the arrow tip, scratching the names of our sins in the dirt) is *life writing*. Autobiography is the self writing life.

And the self exists only as an imputation: the noticer of the huge heap of stuff called *now*.

Autobiography is now-writing, then. Now writing then — and it comes to speak the past. Then writes now too, can't flee from speaking in the words chosen by, the rhythmic pression of this breath in, this body now.

All of which you know. But where would writing be, let alone literature, if we didn't write down so learnedly and urgently what is so obvious? Nothing else is worth speaking but the obvious. That's why we can make do with a reasonably tidy stack of a few hundred thousand words in the dictionary, enough to speak justly of the billion billion things.

We are just talking to each other about what we know. Minding & reminding. Touching. Writing is touch.

4

Real autobiography is *the life that writes itself*. That is what writer's works are, in truth. Look no further: self-written, self-begotten, the poems I have spent most of my life writing are my actual autobiography.

What can I add to them? Some dates, some dedications? Some personal confusions to try to drag back by the tails those articulated energies that have, by wholly entering into language, already managed to get away from me and my concerns?

This is the bow I bent when in October of 1958 I vowed to spend the rest of my life writing in service of that Brightness I intuited as like or beyond the intense blue autumn sky, and determined that I would give whatever I had of life to saying. To write every day. For the sake of the world, as I supposed in my innocent arrogance. For the truth that language tells — for while language does not tell all the truth or the whole truth, there is some truth that only language tells.

That October commitment is the story. To write every day was the method. To attend to what it said. To listen. To prepare myself for writing by learning everything I could, by hanging out in languages and enduring overdetermined desires, by tolerating my own inclinations as if they had the physical accuracy of gravity. To listen, and say what I heard.

(Gale Research, *Contemporary Authors*, 1976 & 1993)

A PLUCKED FLUTE

The concern is to generate timbres. Not melodies. Suppose the last melody I heard plucked my heart. Heart strings. Suppose. And I wanted to pluck a flute, so to elicit a sound out of the air, not lute, no tooth. To liberate my heart say.

This is a generation of timbres. The old melodies die back, climax vegetation of the great Eur-American plain, after the ice. Suppose I want to sing to the ice, or sing ice. Suppose the heart has had its hour?

Do we want our presidents honest? Suppose the heart is feedback as it seems. Only one more language.

“They were saying how queer I was a year or two before, and how nurse had called my mother to come and listen to me talking all to myself, and I was saying words that nobody could understand. I was speaking the Xu language, but I only remember a few of its words, as it was about the little white faces that used to look at me when I was lying in my cradle.”
(Arthur Machen, “The White People.”)

But what the president says we are somehow permitted to hear. “I want some of that consommé.” Is this the old melody making a comeback? While there’s soup, song’s safe?

But the “tones given off by the heart” Pound tells us of, are not plucked from an adventitious air or guessed all too easily. The tone must be heard.

If we want our president honest we have to hear him. Even when in the white building we have put him in he speaks in the Xu language, we have to hear.

Now it is my supposition (said Kung) that a coin dropped on the street sounds with the voice of the president. Or that a tree felled in Berkeley’s woods crashed with his voice. Or that a coon treed up the Guski Road yelps (not unlike an owl) from his throat.

But to hear.

This is a generation of timbres. Now if rhythm is feeling & harmony is thought, timbres isolated in time will be thinking and feeling.

Be thinking. Be feeling. Process. Ing. Neither abstract nor concrete, neither a thing nor a thought. Alive.

So we are concerned not with the tones given off by feelings (call it the Xu language), not with the tones given off by objects, concretes, concretions, ideas. But with the sounds of the process naturing, going, being along with itself, saying.

This is the condition or land (hinted at by the Red Mouth on Jupiter) of the Third God, or age of spirit to which Joachim first woke. Ing is its characteristic timbre in English. Our sounds, our devious ways.

Not thought, Not feelings. No felt in this flute. No even lip to mute. I pluck the flute and the tone is irrevocable, bells out, thinking its way through a world not structured for such feeling. But the plucked flute of all our ways, that monster of clear intention, lifts its own note along, structuring, structuring.

Why are poems so difficult? To answer that is to say only, austere,ly, what they are. They are thinking feeling its way along, feeling thinking its way along.

To be with them is to be thinking & feeling. To be with ing. Be ing.

And there is nothing natural in this, in the taste of ordinary. What we take as our nature isolates, enrages us, pits us against our brothers all day long. In that face of "nature" we find nothing to our purpose, only a fanged vacancy.

So gladly we turn to being.

And what are we permitted to hear? If we are being with, there is nothing they can hide. In the clear depths of the president's soup swims no alchemic ichthys to herald his redemption. His ganoid face mirrors back from his soup plate. Yet even he must be transformed.

Pound's bet, he never hedged: listening closely is the start of the way. One night or early morning an equation spoke aloud in my head, like a mantra given:

TO HEAR IS TO HEAL

Now the isolate timbres sing, and we learn to hear them, and in them hear a great deal of what is going on. And the isolate tones build now not towards a melody — which is a shape imposed on times but transportable out of it — but towards a procession of intervals in time, full of truth & separation.

To hear is to heal. Who listens, hears everything. We move towards the head. In an anecdote, Olson was said to have pointed to his head when the instruction was to Point to Yourself, & all the others pointed at breasts or plexus. That is something. I have seen young ones now who would point to a measurable inch about their heads, that lovely old lotus revisited in our days.

But it is neither firmament nor fundament, to use terms Creeley has lately made so clear. Neither Uranus nor anus. Firmament and fundament are only new finials for the self-same sad old Catholic polarity. And I heard you, certainly, I sang with you too — if we must have that polarity, then give me ass every time. Keep the worm on the ground.

But the joy of it is that these polarities are no place, no way. We must not have that polarity. There are no opposites, there are only differences. No categories but man. Which is not a contrast to god, but a calm mysterious synonym.

The young writer turned surprised to me & said: I thought only the enlightened ones could do that. Or think that. And I trembled for the dirty traditions we have mounted in a dream, that told him Some are enlightened but you are not, Grovel at the guru's feet and hope.

We are enlightened, I answer, firmly, my fingers crossed with immense demand on us that I be true. We are the enlightened, the only, and all that is light mirrors in us, if we can know it so.

There seemed to be nothing else honest I could say.

*

So from the computers & synthesizers issue sounds of no natural instrument, mimetic of no natural condition. Helen said: “in a piece by

Charles Dodge, I heard the sound of a plucked flute — and that's what interests me."

That we can think our way along a process, processing, and pluck the flute, and go on to witness the ordering of these sounds by the grace of our thinking & feeling in the behavior of the instrument. A proposal, to all kinds of our minds.

Poems are so difficult, music is so difficult, thinking and feeling go along endlessly defining themselves, and being, and being a process the hearer can find his way (no place) to go along with. But defining nothing else. Going along with.

As I might say, meaning and meaning it, go along with me.

(1974)



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It is no exaggeration to suggest that Robert Kelly may well be America's most prolific poet, & certainly one of the most singular & ceaselessly innovative writers the country produced in the 2nd part of the past century. To date, he has written more than 70 books of poetry and fiction — books that reveal a breathtaking range, from freshly minted *trobar clus* and contemporized sonnet forms, to epic-length narratives and non-narratives — such as *Axon Dendron Tree*, *The Loom*, or the first two installments of a recent trilogy, *Fire Exit & Uncertainties*.

Just as compelling are the volumes of shorter lyric forms, such as *Finding the Measure*, *Songs I-XXX*, *Not this Island Music*, and *Lapis*, or his even more experimental work, such as *Sentence*, *The Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence*, or his writing-through of Shelley's poem, *Mont Blanc*. The deeper unity of the work is unavoidably present in the voice that underlies the multiplicity of forms. As Guy Davenport wrote: "A Kelly poem is a Kelly poem. It dances in his way, sings in his intonations, insisting on its style. No American poet except perhaps Wallace Stevens has his sense of balance in a line. [...] Kelly has nothing to hide: the untillable balance is there to begin with."

Less visible than the poetry, but certainly no less important, incisive, worth preserving & circulating anew, are the trove of essayistic materials disseminated throughout numerous small & not so small magazines of the second half of the 20th C & beyond. The out-of-print 1971 *In Time* was Kelly's sole published book of essays properly speaking, even though he has been writing on his (& others') poetry & poetics since the early '60s.

Long over-due, the present volume, *A Voice Full of Cities*, collects for the first time Kelly's essays, statements, & other writings on poetry & poetics, making available a vast array of difficult to obtain works. The editors' aim was to insure that — in Robert Kelly's own words — "the fifty years of thinking around the fifty years of making won't get lost, & making & thinking will be seen as one thing."

A forthcoming companion volume from Contra Mundum Press, *A City Full of Voices*, will gather critical essays on Robert Kelly's work by a wide range of contributors.

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