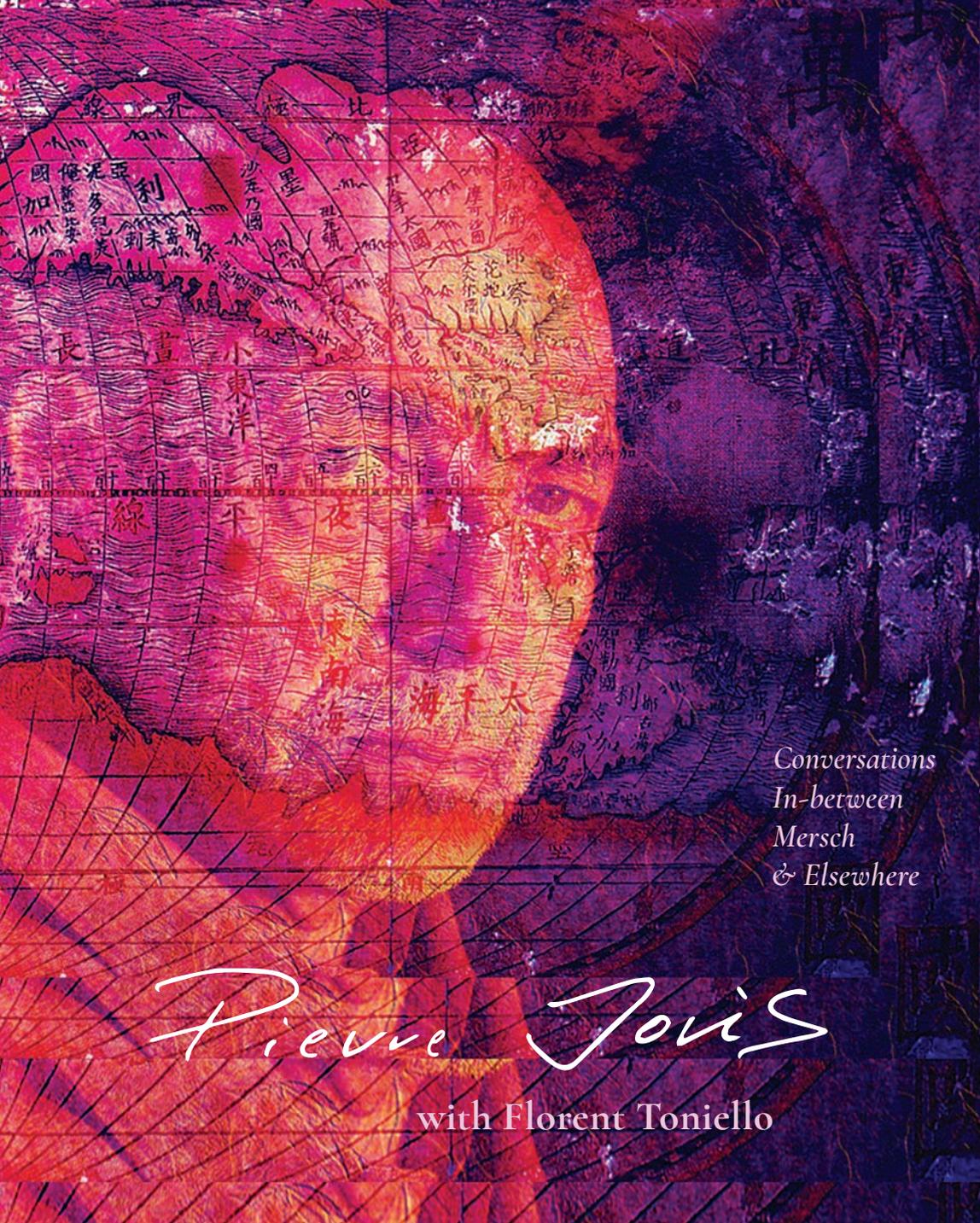


ALWAYS THE MANY, NEVER THE ONE



*Conversations
In-between
Mersch
& Elsewhere*

Pierre Jouis

with Florent Toniello

With a starting point on July 14, 2021, when the Centre national de littérature hosted Pierre Joris' 75th birthday celebration, *Always the Many, Never the One* builds upon the initial interview by Florent Toniello that took place that day to go deeper into a major Luxembourg-American poet's reflections on literature, philosophy, and life. Throughout this book Joris develops a core concept of his thinking and writing, "in-betweenness," using both literary examples & life anecdotes, some never shared in Joris's vast bibliography so far.

The form is representative of the "in-between" concept: while it comprises the initial oral interview at the CNL plus seven subsequent interviews conducted virtually, the whole text was reworked in order to complete the thoughts and add necessary or relevant references, thus transforming it also into a literary essay; but the interview-tone remains, making for lively & stimulating reading. Beyond discussing the "in-betweenness" concept, Joris shares his views on a range of subjects related to poetry, translation, music and the arts while linking his work to the theoretical thinking and craft of leading past and present philosophers and writers/poets, in a dazzling literary world tour-de-force.

To complement this first (and major) part of the book, two "bonuses" follow: a reprint of the interview Joris gave for a recent book by Florent Toniello, *Mélusine au gasoil* (in line with Contra Mundum's multilingual ethos, this is provided in the original French version), and the speech Joris gave at the award ceremony for the Batty Weber prize, to also make this talk-essay available to a wider audience.

PRAISE FOR *ALWAYS THE MANY, NEVER THE ONE*

Pierre Joris is phenomenal, a rare (unprecedented?) combination of serendipity and gumption. He's a hydra-headed omnivore, eyeing the delightful & the grim with equal savvy. These conversations are at once a deft feather touch to the heart & a blistering grimace in the face of the constant darkening of our time. Listen in — and as the saying goes, *stay tuned*. — JED RASULA

This generous and engaging book is an album of conversations, including Pierre Joris's speech in his first country, Luxembourg ("a portable small country"), upon winning its major literary prize. Joris (with Florent Toniello) assembles witty, ranging, informed, and passionate insights on the vectors of contemporary poetics. From translation to nomadism, from "the between" to the scintillation of borders, from his critique of toxic gender/race myths to lively riffs on genre (particularly epic & long poem), Joris's convictions are telling, & his aphorisms are generative. *Always the Many, Never the One* is a defining overview of a distinctive poetic career. — RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

The duet, lush with resonance and reference, has become a beautiful habit for Pierre Joris. His interviews let you see so far outside that coming around again, but off, is easy. The resulting spiral is a new curriculum & in this "riot of air" it's almost like we know all that he knows. — FRED MOTEN

A fascinating collection of conversations that run the gamut from poetry to film, music, philosophy, critical theory, and more. With an encyclopedic knowledge, profound understanding, and sparkling wit, Joris illuminates and elucidates upon Olson, Duncan, Brakhage, Schneeman, Enheduanna, Boulez, Cage, Coltrane, Kurosawa, Godard, Karl May, Ed Dorn, Rothenberg, Ibn Tarafa, Rimbaud, Assia Djebar, Edouard Glissant, Zukofsky, Giordano Bruno, and the art of translating Burroughs, Kerouac, Celan and more. Freewheeling & spontaneous, these are immensely invigorating exchanges between two kindred spirits. — JOHN ZORN

The conversations gathered here, like Joris's poems & writings over-all, bring a whole world into view, many worlds in fact, in the best tradition of a new American and new World poetry as it has come to him in his lifetime and ours. And like the poetry itself, it is the voice, always, of a man talking & self-exploring, with a casualness of tone amid a loaded plethora of knowledges and day-by-day observations & protocols: the presence too of a comic temperament that's as serious as it gets — from a master of multiple languages and of language-secrets that he freely shares with us. Much to our enlightenment and downright pleasure.

— JEROME ROTHENBERG, Encinitas, California, 2022

Always the Many
Never the One



Pierre Jovis



Also by Pierre Joris

POETRY

- Fox-trails, -tails, & -trots (Poems & Proses)* (Black Fountain Press, 2020)
The Book of U / Le Livre des cormorans (avec Nicole Peyrafitte)
(Éditions Simoncini, 2017)
Canto Diurno (French Selected; Le Castor astral 2017)
An American Suite (Inpatient Press, 2016)
Gulf Od Vraku K Pohromé (Czech translation; Prague, 2016)
Barzakh (Poems 2000–2012) (Black Widow Press, 2014)
Mawqif: Poemas y ensayos (Mexico D.F.: La Otra, 2014). Spanish Translation
Meditations on the Stations of Mansur al-Hallaj (Chax Press, 2013)
The Gulf (Between You & Me) (The Crossing, 2013)
learn the shadow (unit4art, 2012)
Canto Diurno #4: The Tang Extending from the Blade (ebook; 2010)
Aljibar & Aljibar II (Éditions PHI, 2007; 2008)
Routes, not Roots (Audio CD, 2007)
Meditations on the Stations of Mansur Al-Hallaj 1–20 (Chax Press, 2006)
The Rothenberg Variations (Wild Honey Press, 2004)
Fin de siècle-Phantombild; Ausgewählte Gedichte 1974–2000 (PHI, 2004)
Permanent Diaspora (Duration Press, 2003)
Poasis: Selected Poems 1986–1999 (Wesleyan U.P., 2001)
h.j.r. (Otherwind Press, 1999)
out/takes (Backwoods Broadsides, 1999)
La Dernière Traversée de la Manche (PHI, 1995)
Winnetou Old (Meow Press, 1994)
Turbulence (St. Lazaire Press, 1991)
The Irritation Ditch (Parentheses Writing Series, 1991)
Janus (St. Lazaire Press, 1988)
Breccia: Selected Poems 1972–1986 (PHI, 1987)
Net/Work (Spanner Books, 1983)

The Book of Luap Nalec (Ta'wil Books, 1982)
make it up like say (Arc Publications, 1982)
Tracing (Arc Publications, 1982)
The Broken Glass (Pig Press, 1980)
Old Dog High Q (Writers Forum, 1980)
Body Count (Twisted Wrist, 1979)
The Tassili Connection (Ta'wil Books, 1978)
Tanith Flies (Ta'wil Books, 1978)
Hearth-Work (Hatch Books, 1977)
Antlers I–XI (New London Pride, 1975)
A Single-minded Bestiary (Privately Printed, 1974)
Trance/Mutations (1972)
The Fifth Season (Strange Faeces Press, 1971)

PROSE

Arabia (not so) Deserta — Essays on Maghrebi & Mashreqi Writing & Culture (Spuyten Duyvil, 2019)
Adonis & Pierre Joris, *Conversations in the Pyrenees*
(Contra Mundum, 2019; bilingual edition)
The Agony of I.B. (Theater; Éditions PHI, 2016)
Justifying the Margins (Salt, 2009)
A Nomad Poetics (Wesleyan U.P., 2003)
Global Interference (Liberation Press, 1981)
The Book of Demons (with Victoria Hyatt, as Joseph W. Charles) (Simon & Schuster, 1975)
The Entropy Caper (radio play; 1973)
Another Journey (Privately Printed, 1972)

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Always the Many,
Never the One

PREFACE

Why, when, & how?

During October 2017, Pierre Joris was in Luxembourg with his wife Nicole Peyrafitte for their exhibition *Domopoetic Works* at the Galerie Simoncini. I had started reporting on Joris & Peyrafitte's work at the beginning of my work as a journalist, in 2015; it was therefore only natural that I would meet Joris & exchange a few words, in order to craft an article on the exhibition & its opening performance. But, this time, something special came up. In the summer, Joris had been conducting a series of conversations with Syrian poet Adonis that would result in the book *Conversations in the Pyrenees*.¹ He had enjoyed this experience so much that he was thinking of working on a conversation book of his own: tucked in between essay & interview, in between oral & written, such a book would represent, according to him, a new & enjoyable genre to blend poetry, life anecdotes, & theoretical thoughts. And I was to be his partner to make this happen.

That Joris asked me to work with him on this project was at first puzzling, if not intimidating. After all, why would an award-winning long-time practitioner of poetry trust a former information technology manager only recently turned proofreader, journalist, & poet to perform a good enough job on such an important book to him? To which I know Joris would answer, in his usual manner, "Why not?" I suspect that, in his mind, the keen poetry reader I am, combined with interviewing skills & my lack of an academic background in literature, would help drive the book to the in-between he consistently strives for.

1. Adonis & Pierre Joris, *Conversations in the Pyrénées* (Contra Mundum Press, 2018).

It took a while, however, before we started working concretely on the project — although it remained part of our subsequent conversations. The year 2021 gave us a push that could not be resisted: first, Joris was finally allowed to travel to Luxembourg to receive the Batty Weber Prize awarded to him in 2020, a year shaken up by the coronavirus crisis; second, he turned 75 on July 14th. The Luxembourg National Literature Archive (Centre national de littérature) not only hosted the award ceremony, but a few days later also helped set up a more intimist, yet public, birthday celebration on its premises in Mersch. Joris & I decided that the first part thereof would be an interview of him by me, to kickstart our series of talks that would become a book. It was followed by seven others, this time online.

Improvisation plays an important part in Joris's work. That is why I prepared this whole series by digging deep into his books (poetry, translations, & essays alike, as well as essays on his work) but never shared questions upfront. He would discover them during our interview sessions, each one preceded by a preliminary talk in order to discuss more mundane matters. After each session, I would transcribe it as faithfully as possible & send the text to him, which he would in turn revise & expand or clarify. That is why this book oscillates between oral & written style, something that we did not want to remove in order to preserve both the spontaneity of speech as well as the depth of written language. That is also why we did not reorder questions or answers too much: there is a flow in this entire work that comes from our choice of a carefully led improvisation. Some themes return regularly, some questions are “queered,” some anecdotes alluded to may come in another book — it is a living, not too polished, yet constructed work you are about to read. An in-between. But this in-between can also be seen as an “entre-tien”: Joris & I usually talk in French (a remainder of my shyness to use his native Luxembourgish, an acquired lan-

guage to me, back in 2015), yet conversations were held in English, the language he chose decades ago to be his writing language.

Hours after Joris's birthday celebration on July 14, 2021, severe flooding affected the building of the National Literature Archive, whose cellar was under several meters of water for many days. This dramatic episode led me to write a relatively long poem, finally published in early 2022 in a series of books for which the publisher requests an interview between the author & a person of their choice.² It was obvious to me that I had to ask Joris. This additional interview, in French, is therefore also included in this book, because it shares the same starting point as the eight conversations that precede it. Because of the link with the Batty Weber Prize ceremony, this book also features the speech Pierre gave on this occasion, originally published as a booklet by the Centre national de littérature.

It is now time to read our conversations & listen to what *Pierre Joris* has to share. May you feel comfortable in our *entre-tien*, our *in-between*!

FT

2. Florent Toniello, *Mélusine au gasoil* (Facteur Galop, 2022).

1st Conversation³

July 14, 2021

FLORENT TONIELLO: *At one point, in Conversations in the Pyrénées with Adonis, you talk about including down-to-earth subjects, that is social & environmental ones in poems, & this gets cut somehow. I'd like to know more about that. How does this relate to the work of the poet?*

PIERRE JORIS: During the reading after our interview I will read a poem that outlines the role of the poet in three verses.⁴ I'll be much broader now. My ideas about this come from meetings with people & books: coming to America — I had already been seduced by the Beats & their very public jazz-inflected poetry & prose — meant leaving Europe & its way-too-narrow lyric-poetry scene. I was lucky enough to immediately run into poets such as Robert Kelly, who introduced me to the work of Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, & the other Black Mountain people. Kelly has a beautiful essay where he calls the poet “a scientist of the whole.”⁵ He — but others too, such as Muriel Rukeyser, who also brought science into poetry, insisting that they were complementary ways of knowing

3. This first interview took place in the Centre national de littérature in Mersch, during a public celebration of Joris' 75th birthday. Fellow writers guests were the writers Nico Helminger, Alice Notley, & Habib Tengour, as well as Nicole Peyrafitte, who moderated the reading session following the interview. Both interviewer and interviewee would like to express their deepest thanks to all staff at the CNL for this memorable evening, on the eve of a tragic flooding that severely affected the building.
4. The Poet's Job // Pick up everything that shines / Discard the gold // Keep the light.
5. *A Voice Full of Cities. The Collected Essays of Robert Kelly*, ed. by Pierre Joris & Peter Cockelbergh (CMP 2014) 103.

the world — opened a new space for the poem: the poem as an open field, to use the Olson/Duncan terminology, into which any kind of information can come. So it's the job of the poet to organize the various multi-sourced information she feels relevant so as to create a poem on the page. And that can be her dailiness, whatever happens in the morning as the poet gets up. There the lingering dreams of the fading night can meet up with the milk delivery man & cart & start the work off, & from there you can get into the garden, & there are those flowers, & they are not just flowers, like metaphors, they are specific kinds of flowers, & they're useful for this & that, medicinally, herbalistically, eco-logically... That's the way. Then you open a book, maybe check some background info on that flower, or get an email from a friend, & that too can enter the poem. *Voilà!* What I discovered was that anything & everything can & should in some way enter the poem & in the process help create a more open, a wider structure. Robert Duncan's sense of the poem as "grand collage" is still useful to me, & I love the long works (not "epic" — at least not in that Western-Civ very young male-warrior mode, which is not useful to think with or through in our own day & age, even if we probably have as much if not more carnage than in the days of the Trojan War), the long works of a range of my contemporaries who rather than glorifying military success, try to propose non-bellicose ways & means of understanding & living on this endangered planet.

The concept of anything entering the poem is quite interesting, because in the anthology of Luxembourgish poets that was just published in France by Jean Portante, Lignes de partage, there's this poem by you where you even write about a baseball game. It's a poem for Robert Kelly's birthday. Now, social & environmental subjects, is that because you feel a certain responsibility to bring these to public attention?

Well, yes, & unless you only look back & take poetry as this navel-gazing occasion, the world is bigger & the world is in trouble. In truth, we're up shit's creek without a paddle. So what we need to do as poets is to deal with that predicament. Of course, we can also do small funny things, or write love poems to our lovers, there too everything & anything can come into the poem, but unless we address what is going down in the world, what's the point? The ecological is obviously core to what our contemporaneity is all about. It's not necessarily easy to find ways to do this. A so-called "ecopoetics" can also very quickly become relatively academic or over-romantically feely-feely, feely-touchy "nature-poetry." That's not what we want — because that risks too much repetition, or restating what we already know, & for me the successful poem (or simply any successful piece of writing) is the one that tells you (the reader, or me, the writer) something we didn't yet know. Writing has to be explorative, has to be discovery.

You mention baseball in my poem for Robert Kelly: so yes, there you have a so-called "occasional" poem, a birthday poem, & the baseball reference has at least a double sense: Robert & I love that New York baseball team, the Mets, & love talking about them when we get around a table — or even just on the phone. But it is wider than that: it is also a thank you note to Robert. When I got to Bard College in 1967, I asked him what was the best way to improve my spoken & written English — which was still a bit stilted & British because acquired in a Luxembourg high school from an Oxford-educated teacher, even if American movies & meetings with G.I.s & listening to early rock had also sharpened my appetite for the US version of English — as I wanted to be a poet in this language, & he told me to listen to baseball radio broadcasts as that was one of, if not the richest & most diverse ways in which the American language was used orally. I did & it was a true initiation into American culture.

Now, about the target audience: who would you say you want to touch?

Listen, a target is something you shoot at. I don't shoot at anybody, so in that sense I don't have a target audience. I mean, of course, I'd love everybody to read me, but I'm a realist. 246, or at best 863 people, roughly, on average, something of that order for a book of poems? Maybe a few more at some point. But the important thing is for the work to be there & available. If it is needed, it will be picked up. I have that kind of confidence that people, young people — & I've seen that during the years I was teaching — are looking for things & will find what they need (& for me teaching is exactly that: not imparting knowledge you have & they don't, but laying out techniques enabling both the students & you to find out things you didn't know but need to know or didn't even know you needed).

In the introduction to An American Suite, Tamas Panitz recalls that Robert Kelly once answered a question from an audience member that said "Where would you put [classify] Pierre Joris's poetry today?" by saying: "In the hands of any reader or to-be reader of poetry." I think that's very consistent with what you mentioned. Now, how do you reach out to would-be readers? Because you say that it's available out there, but, of course, you do more: you perform, for example.

Indeed, there isn't just one audience, there's at least two: those who buy books to read in the traditional silence of their rooms & those who come to readings & performances. Obviously, they overlap to some extent, & reinforce each other to some extent too, but that return to the oral performance of poetry & the integration of poetry/text/language, whatever you want to call it, into performance art has expanded the visibility & the enjoy-ability of poetry.

Nicole Peyrafitte & I do a lot of performance work together, often calling on musicians to contribute — we both love to perform with a variety of musicians & musical takes, from jazz to more

classical or more electronic incarnations of that sound-language called music. You've witnessed both in Luxembourg, including the latest one with your son Colin on digital piano! We also often include videos & moving images. Both our sons are in movies: obviously, they have a bigger built-in audience. With me in poetry, & Nicole as artist & performer, our audience is of course different from a movie audience.

NICOLE PEYRAFITTE: *Although today we are live on Facebook.*

How many people are following the feed?

A million & a half!

Wonderful, now it's time to recite some poems!

Nicole & I have a fight about this, actually. She calls me an old whore, because I have accepted everybody on Facebook & now I have 5,000 "friends."

There's also another way to possibly widen the audience; it would be to go beyond poetry. It's also in the book with Adonis: you talk about the novel. I know your dislike for this genre, but you don't develop it in that conversation. Can you speak a bit more about that?

I can develop it fully in four words: *the novel is dead*. That's something I learned very young. It seemed to me that the novel was very much a 19th-century genre. There is some writing with justified margins, which is very good & that I love reading. [*Looks at Nico Helming in the audience.*] Nico does this, for example.

This was not rehearsed!

It's writing of the intensity of poetry but with justified margins, that's all. David Antin once quipped that prose was just a special kind of visual or concrete poetry with the limiting formal requirements of justified left & right margins (suggesting that "prose" as we know it is a development of technology & in its modern form only comes into existence with the invention of the printing press). The novel as the literary genre that proposes imagined "characters" whose "character" & actions develop after some very serious event or insight, & that the writer invents, understands & moves about, shadowing them like that white-bearded male Judeo-Christian god is supposed to shadow his "children," well... The thing is, if you walk around a city, any city, you can meet people who are way more interesting than anything you could "invent" as a character. So why invent characters? For me at least, this was never interesting. This may just be my own prejudice — as much writing I like gets characterized as "novel" or "roman" (as probably more commercially viable *appellations contrôlées* than "text" or "poem" would be), from Kafka to Gertrude Stein to Samuel Beckett or Maurice Blanchot, *und so weiter*. Writing a poem, gathering information that clashes & surprises when I juxtapose it, wow, that's way more interesting. Because it can surprise & thus change *me*. So the traditional, 19C "novel" is not a genre that interests me. Now maybe that's so simply because I'm incapable of writing one. I did try once, in a hotel in Paris, over a 48-hour period, on amphetamine, when a new girlfriend after a very intense affair over a few days left me for her fiancé who had arrived from Stockholm. They were on the 6th floor, & I was in a room on the 3rd floor, very desperate. So I took all the amphetamines I could find & for three days typed away. I had 120 pages when I was done. I never published it. It was bad. Bad, fake Kerouac — I was probably as awed by his novel *Tristessa*, written in 24 or 48 hours sitting on the john, high on whatever, in a junkie's pad in Mexico City, as I was by my brief love affair.

NICOLE PEYRAFITTE: *When was this?*

1971 OR 1972.

It sounds like an obsession, because the first thing — or almost the first thing — you ever said to me, during our first interview for my newspaper, was: “The novel is dead.” I do remember that very well. And yet, in Justifying the Margins, you feature essays about Arabic writers that you praise for their novels, because they write in French, conveying with the language of the oppressor what they have to express. Is that the exception for you, the margins justified?

Absolutely. When I went to Paris, I went to medical school, dropped out in my second year, & decided to become a writer in English because the poetry in this language was the most alive, interesting, honest, groundbreaking (add whatever adjective you want!) I had come across. Not that some prose wasn't great: I already mentioned Kerouac whose “spontaneous jazz-bebop prose” had seduced me when I was a teenager, but now in Paris I also fell for the prose (the novels, but I soon switched to the essays, which I keep reading & rereading to this day) of James Baldwin. My roommate at Shakespeare & Company — my dad had cut me off financially because of my dropping out — turned out to be a Moroccan writer called Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine. He showed me early Moroccan avant-garde writing, both poetry & prose — the work of the *Souffles* group, primarily, to which he belonged with Abdellatif Laâbi — & turned me on to the Algerian novelist Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*. Here was a writing that was at boiling point in terms of language, with an intensity that simply did away with those formal genre borders of “poetry” or “prose.” This was “writing writing” as Gertrude Stein would have said! Writing by someone who wasn't French but who used French in ways the French had never thought of using it. As Kateb Yacine said when he was asked after Algerian independence

was won, whether he was henceforth going to write in Arabic: “No, we won the war. We’re keeping French as the spoils of war. And we do with it what we want.” In that sense, he invented a new poly-lyrical (yes, “political” sounds along here) language, as Habib Tengour does too. [*Turns to Habib Tengour in the audience.*] That made a difference, compared to the Parisian “ron-ron” of that big laundry basket of novels that come out every fall — actually, the best, if not the cheapest sleeping pills I know of.

You say that you didn’t publish this wonderful, I’m sure, novel.

It was terrible!

Yet, when you gave An American Suite to me, you wrote on the front page “mes erreurs, je veux dire errances de jeunesse.” What I got from that, but also from your whole work, is that there are very few things of which you say, “Well, I was young . . .” It seems that you still cherish the things that you wrote at a younger age. So I was wondering why that novel would be treated that way. Because it’s a novel?

I’ll tell you why. One of the poems in the book you mention recalls a concert conducted by Pierre Boulez. My readings of Boulez’s writings as well as my experience of his music, & the context of that experience in London’s Round House allowed me to create a structure for that poem. It’s a playful investigation of how a musical structural thought like Boulez’s can, if it can, enter a poem. That aborted novel was about me not getting laid because the girl I thought I had in bed went off with somebody else — that’s the most boring possible subject in the world, & the level of my writing wasn’t able to move it into some other sphere either.

OK, but wouldn’t that fit into a poem?

A bad poem, yes, most of the time! That's what I told my students when I had to teach creative writing. The first thing I told them on opening day — in order to shock them out of any complacency — was: "How many of you are there in this class? 25. In five years, only one of you — at the most! — will still be writing. How can that be? Because you will all get laid, i.e. come into a more or less good & satisfying sex life & have a partner & forget all about writing." This was for undergraduates. There's a basic sense I have, namely that people want to be creative in some, even in many ways, & are, & try writing or painting or acting or singing & there's nothing wrong with that, of course, to the contrary. But in my area, poetry, the universities have instituted a wide gamut of creative writing courses — financial milk-cows for the institutions — which amount to a way of artificially creating "professional poets." After 2 or 4 or 5 years they hand you a creative writing degree that claims that you are now officially a poet. I don't think this works & it is not good for poetry. It's a weird con job, really a classical Ponzi scheme: the universities make money because the students pay, once they have their degree certifying them as poets, & one or maybe 2 books published by small presses or presses dependent in one way or another on the writing programs in the universities, as there is no money in poetry as such anyway, all they can do is look for a job teaching — creative writing! And so the creative writing departments get larger & new ones are set up, & more people become certified poets looking for jobs teaching creative writing . . .

And most of those courses & departments depend on a poetics that does not interest me, the poetics of the personal narrative where the judgment of how good the poetry is based on how "true" it is to the writer's experience. That inane question of "finding your voice!" I always told my students: "Why don't you get cough syrup if you lost your voice? You have your voice, there's nothing you can do about it. So listen to other people's voices. Translate. Go & find what is happening around you & elsewhere in the world. That's

where the poetry is.” I basically stopped teaching creative writing & changed those “writing” courses into translation seminars with a theoretical background of comparative literature.

I think we're back to poetry, because we've exhausted the novel subject. When I read the title An American Suite, it reminds me of Bach's music: French Suites, English Suites... Yet, in your poetry, classical or baroque music doesn't come often, it's more contemporary music (you cited Boulez) or jazz; looking at my notes, I can find examples of Stockhausen (Gesang der Jünglinge), Wagner (Tristan conducted by Furtwängler)... Is there a reason for that, or could it be that I didn't spot references to baroque or classical music? Because the title really makes me think of it.

Well, a suite can be classical or contemporary. There are rock albums that could be called or that were conceived as “suites.” My sense of music is this: I have a rather dead or just bad ear. I cannot play an instrument; I cannot sing ... The tune you all sang earlier [*The session started with the audience singing Happy Birthday*], please don't ask me to sing it. Nicole claims the opposite, that I need to sing, that I should sing, & that I could sing if I only let go.

When I was raised in Ettelbruck — 15 miles from here, & they now call it Ettelbrooklyn, which sounds weirdly funny to me —, the escape was American culture. We were “Pattontown” from the mid-1950s on, because the Rundstedt offensive had come through here & had been pushed back by General Patton's troops, so we had American soldiers coming every year to celebrate this win. On those occasions I would buy second-hand *Playboy* magazines & resell them in high school. I would hear American speech. There was jive talk, southern twangs, Brooklyn intonations — various accents I recognized from the American movies I had seen in grandmother's *Cinéma de la paix*. This was very exciting. I was listening to American AFN radio stations & heard rock 'n' roll & jazz. The very first piece of writing I ever published was a kind of potted biography of

Charlie Parker in the magazine of the *Jeunesse étudiante catholique* — I belonged to this organization for two months before losing my faith. So jazz was core. I often locate the date of my arrival in New York as being “three months after John Coltrane passed.” This was very important, because jazz was the essence of music to me, & was certainly essential in my approach to poetry.

Perhaps the one who said this best was an American poet, my old friend Clayton Eshleman, who passed four months ago. He explained that he, as a Midwestern boy who was set down as a kid on the piano to learn how to play, once on the radio heard a song he knew, played by Bud Powell. He listened & said: “Wow! You don’t have to imitate exactly what the score in the songbook demands. You can play with that; you can make it up as you go along. You can take off from those indications, vary the song, invent, improvise!” That opened up Eshleman to poetry, to invention, to creativity.

I don’t think my interest in jazz came out of an absolute occasion like Clayton’s, but there was that same thrill to it. Then in Paris, when I was still in medical school, the little jukebox at the *Petit Bar* on the Place du Petit-Pont — we used to hang out there a lot, but it no longer exists — was playing Bob Dylan, I remember to this day that “D9” was “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35.” And two blocks across & up the road was *Aux Trois Mailletz*, where Memphis Slim would play, & we would go there. And in the Rue de la Huchette were *Le Caveau de la Huchette*, *Le Chat qui pêche*, where traditional & avant-garde jazz was available. To me, this was an incredible opening up. I only came back to classical music later, because when we were driven in high school from Diekirch to Luxembourg City to the *Jeunesses musicales* concerts, the third time you heard the same symphony you dashed out as quickly as you could to visit the bookstore nearby & hang out at the just-opened new American-style place for teenagers, Walter’s Milk-Bar.

So when I got to America, in 1967, this was a great moment: jazz was very much alive, rock ’n’ roll was very much alive. In 1969,

I was on a boat back to Europe after graduating with my parents when Woodstock happened, so I missed it. But I returned three months later to New York, & moved into an apartment one & a half blocks away from the Fillmore East. I could go to concerts there — for free as I had a job as editor of the underground magazine *Corpus*, & thus a press card. This also enabled me to interview Jerry Garcia of the *Grateful Dead*, Ed Sanders of *The Fugs*, & others. So rock 'n' roll was there for those years. But it quickly had to deal with the deaths of the big ones, Hendrix, Joplin, & the one who styled himself as a Rimbaudian poet, Jim Morrison of *The Doors*. Somehow I lost interest in much of rock 'n' roll, but got back into jazz — & have remained there to this day. When I moved to London in 1972 one of my close friends & teachers there was a man called Eric Mottram. My other close friend Allen Fisher & I would be invited every Thursday evening by Eric to his house. He had the best collection of 20th-century classical music. So we would eat together & then spend two hours listening, over a couple of years, to the whole of contemporary music. My education in that area came from Eric. It is also around that time that I saw Pierre Boulez conduct *Parsifal* at the London Opera.

2nd Conversation

September 3, 2021

The beauty of a series of interviews like this one is that we get time to revise previous conversations & I get to think of follow-up questions I didn't think about in the heat of things. Here's one. You mentioned that the novel is a 19th-century genre, mostly with invented characters; you also mentioned that both of your sons are in movies, & from what I know, you actually do like movies. Is it because you grew up watching them in your grandmother's cinema, or do you find something particularly interesting in movies as a 21st-century genre? Because they do mostly have invented characters as well.

I could say that the novel is dead because there is cinema. However, for me, a big problem with cinema in its fixed Hollywoodian genre was to take 300-page novels & adapt them into 90- or 120-minute films in the old days. In that sense, the form that saves what a novel narrative can be is television. You can take any, even a very large, book — let's say Tolstoy's *War and Peace* — & make an even 3-hour movie out of it: you may like the actors, the action or the landscapes, it's still not Tolstoy's book. But if you take, say, Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* & have Rainer Werner Fassbinder make a 15-hour TV series out of it, you can get its depth, its richness, different perspectives, & the camera can be very different from the all-knowing *Deus ex typewriter* that the narrator of a novel is. So television helps; there are displacements possible that the 19th-century novel point of view doesn't give you. I think film & television are now extremely interesting for their possible narrative developments. Now, I'm not involved in film myself, or only very liminally via Nicole Peyrafitte who is a filmmaker & video-artist, besides being a painter & performer. But our sons are. Joseph Mastantuono

is in Venice right now, because on September 7th & 8th the feature he produced, *Mon père, le diable* — directed by Cameroon-American Ellie Foubi —, has its premiere.

During the festival?

Actually, their script was chosen & financed by the festival as part of the Biennale Film College. So it's not in competition as such. And my son Miles just made a sequence of six half-hour or 35 minutes films that are going to be picked up by a television network for streaming. He wrote the script of what is genre-wise a thriller-drama & filmed it as a series: it's a very different sense in the creation, blocking, & so on, than it would be if you'd condense a novel into a 90-minute film. I think seeing people in films, actors & actresses — but also on stage, as I love theater —, enacting characters & bringing them to life is something totally different from reading a novel & extracting the character from print. So yes, film is relevant. Inescapable, in fact, for my generation of writers. Even at the level of the family: it was my father's father who built the first movie-house in Ettelbruck, the *Cinéma de la paix*, facing the church — I have written in detail about this elsewhere, so won't repeat it all here — but certainly my enduring love for traditional genre films, detective thriller but before all westerns came as much from the films I saw as a kid than from the Karl May novels. But I would learn a lot after leaving Ettelbruck — first in Luxembourg City, then in Paris, & later in New York — from more avant-garde, experimental films, made from the 1950s to the 1980s in America, but also other places, like Europe, France for example — but the French always think they're *the* avant-garde! — but also majorly from Germany's new cinema. My friend Ody Roos & I were together in Paris as students, him at the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques & me in medical school: he stayed on to become a filmmaker in France & I went on to become a poet in the United States. He once said

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Against Tyranny: Selected Essays 1972–2018 (2023)

ON PIERRE JORIS

Pierre Joris: Cartographies of the In-between, ed. by Peter Cockelbergh,
with essays on Joris' work by, among others, Mohamed Bennis,
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Christine Hume, Robert Kelly, Abdelwahab Meddeb, Jennifer
Moxley, Jean Portante, Carrie Noland, Alice Notley, Marjorie
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Oasis #18 (London: Ian Robinson, 1977); new poems by P.J.

Essays on P.J. by Eric Mottram, Clayton Eshleman, Robert Kelly.

Interview of P.J. by Allen Fisher

ABOUT FLORENT TONIELLO

A Lyonnais for as long as he can remember (1972), an Australian for a year, a Brest & Lille inhabitant during his studies, a Belgian for nearly 15 years with an interval in Amiens, a Luxembourger since 2012, Florent Toniello got lost in the maze of a multinational company that manufactures consumer goods for a long time, mainly in information technology ... before meeting poetry.

Since then, he has published poems, short stories or reviews of poetry collections in numerous magazines & anthologies, has written a few books published in Luxembourg, France, & Belgium, & has even had a play performed. He now earns his daily bread from his work as a proofreader & cultural journalist for the Luxembourg weekly *worx*, while proofreading novels & poetry collections for several publishers & authors.

Publications include the novel *Ganaha. Un conte futur dans une langue passée* (Jacques Flament, 2020) & the poetry collections *Mé-lusine au gasoil* (Facteur Galop, 2022), *Vidée vers la mer pleine* (PHI, 2021), *Foutu poète improductif* (Rafael de Surtis, 2018), *Apotropaïque* (PHI, 2018), *L'Oreille arrachée* (maelstrÖm, 2017), *Lorsque je serai chevalier* (Jacques Flament, 2017), *Ptérodactyle en cage* (PHI, 2017), & *Flo[ts]* (PHI, 2015).

ABOUT PIERRE JORIS

Pierre Joris has moved between Europe, the US, & North Africa for 55 years, publishing over 80 books of poetry, essays, translations & anthologies — most recently *Fox-trails, -tales & -trots (poems & proses)* (Black Fountain 2020) & the translations *Memory Rose Into Threshold Speech: The Collected Earlier Poetry of Paul Celan* (FSG 2020) & *Microliths They Are, Little Stones: Posthumous Prose of Paul Celan* (CMP 2020). In 2020 he published *A City Full of Voices: Essays on the Work of Robert Kelly* (co-edited with P. Cockelbergh & J. Newberger) (CMP 2020), & earlier, *Arabia (not so) Deserta: Essays on Maghrebi & Mashreqi Writing & Culture* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2019), *Conversations in the Pyrenees* (with Adonis) (CMP 2018), & *The Book of U* (with Nicole Peyrafitte) (*Poems*) (Simoncini 2017).

In 2011 Litteraria Pragensia, Charles University, Prague, published *Pierre Joris: Cartographies of the In-between*, edited by Peter Cockelbergh, with essays on Joris' work by, among others, Mohammed Bennis, Charles Bernstein, Nicole Brossard, Clayton Eshleman, Allen Fisher, Christine Hume, Robert Kelly, Abdelwahab Meddeb, Jennifer Moxley, Jean Portante, Carrie Noland, Alice Notley, Marjorie Perloff & Nicole Peyrafitte. A PDF of his book is available here: https://litterariapragensia.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/cartographies_pierre-joris_peter-cockelbergh.pdf

When not on the road, Joris lives in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, with his wife, multimedia praticienne & often times collaborator, Nicole Peyrafitte.

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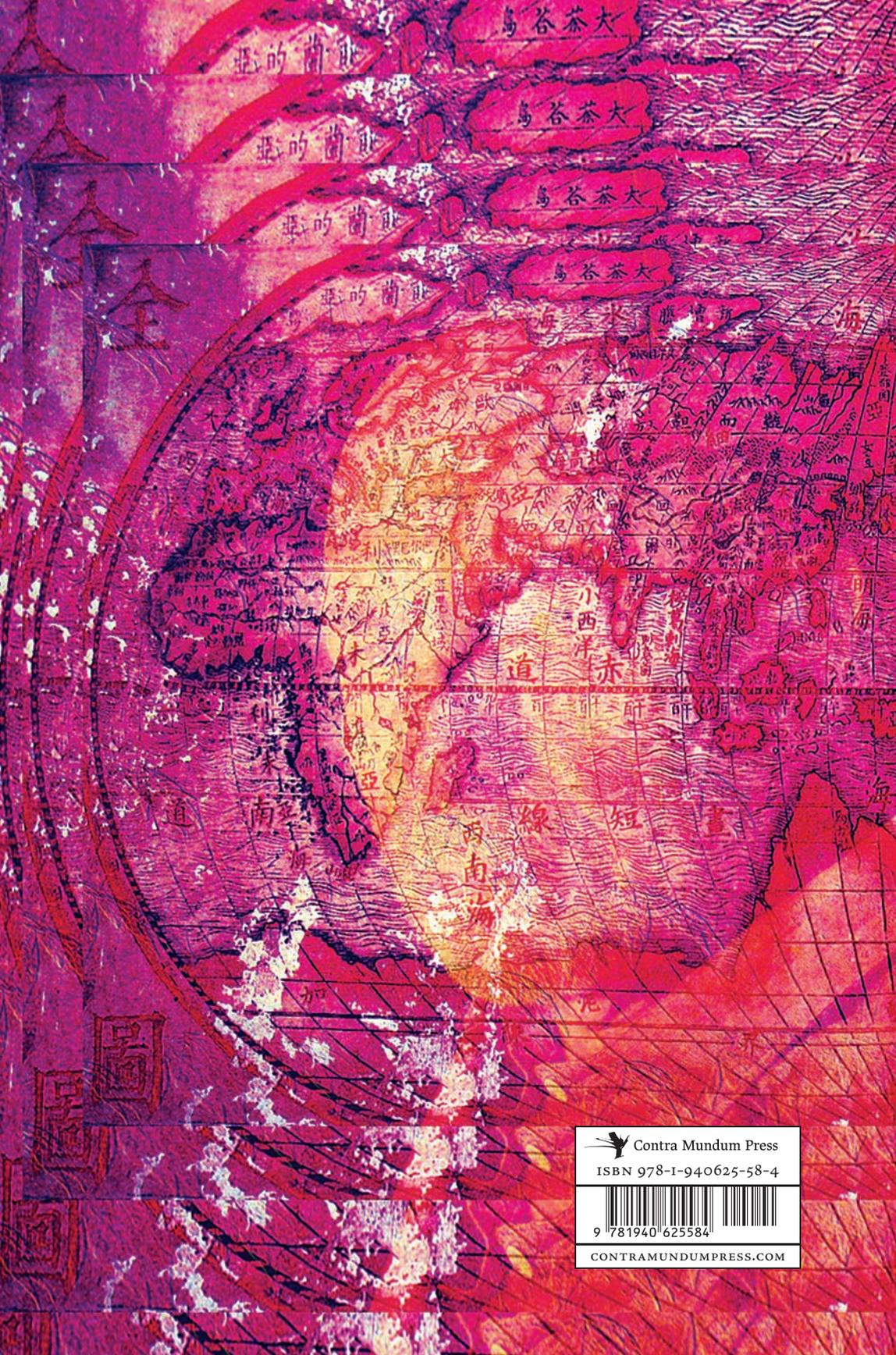
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