WILLOW

Okay, willow, breathe on me
from the sunless opening in you—
crescent of gouges and breezes—slope
on which beetles stumble and are
flushed out—

Traffic, human traffic with its rinse
of promises and pauses is coming
for keeps.
And look there goes a swallow transplanting soil.
Me (let me think it)
I can sit on this bench longer than nature
and not know or crave a thing
about this bench, bottle cap dented into its plank

and initials scratched beside it, beside
the point: two raw letters forward to back just
as rare as any combination.
And now the date, plume of digits, daily
statistic.

This is behavior, willow, this
drone, it accompanied you once
in your grove of which
you have a memory—a lush one—don't you?
Was there no breath of you there?

I crossed the arc of your silhouette and lapped
your leaves's signature.
Things grew from you
beneath you in the patched grass
and not far away sat a man on
a bench.

You take it in or you don't.
You hide the sky or else.
Things lived in you.
You, stranger.

POETICS STATEMENT

ABOUT TWENTY years ago, when I began writing poetry with some serious exuberance, and at an age when it seemed that everything had to be engulfed in political and erotic flames in order to be meaningful, it was important to me to make statements along the lines of "Poetry must change the world." I would never want to think that I have lost that ideal, but I have lost the desire to make such a statement. I prefer to search for guidance about poetry from poems themselves. "There are countless hiding places but only one salvation," Kafka wrote in his diaries. "But then again, there are as many paths to salvation as there are hiding places." One seeks the strength to proceed as oneself, with all the attendant missteps and uncertainties. For me, the most trustworthy statement of poetics is the statement that a poem makes in being itself and not another.

"Leap of faith" seems to me a suitable description of the enterprise of valuing poetry as a way of life. Let the faith be wide-eyed, and not blind; not a faith that clings too feverishly to the notion that its rewards are attainable; but a faith nonetheless. Among its tenets: that states of mind and feeling can be made most apprehensible, and increasingly so, through language; that the natural world can be known more accurately—more faithfully—in language than outside of it, and the human domain known more accurately through the natural; that our bodies and minds, working in concert, can recognize authenticity—honesty, that is—in a poetic utterance, and can recognize lapses from authenticity, and can resolve, through poetic craft, to become more authentic; that "truth," while never absolute, is never nothing either, and that it makes a difference to strive for truth, rather than to discount its possibility.

When I write poems, I try to focus on the nuts-and-bolts of composition. I enjoy attending to technical minutiae. I greatly admire craft in poets, as one tends to admire qualities in others that one finds deficient in oneself. I am always trying to extend and improve my technique. I want to learn to express myself more fully. So, for example, in writing my first book, *Debt*, I experienced as a liberating gesture the assumption of persona. Since then I have found it liberating, though more difficult, to shed the pretense of persona

In that first book I insisted on placing my speaker in what felt like a specific place and a specific moment, and I tended to activate some kind of narrative to guide my way through the poem. Since then I have tended to aim at action without narrative. The use of the first-person pronoun no longer seems to me to have a privileged claim to immediacy; nor do I find "I" to be any more troubling than other pronouns. Early on, I wanted pared-down, blunt diction and staccato syntax; that is no longer the case, or at least not all the time. I dislike my ironic bent. I don't want to use tonal gestures—a wink and a nod—to offer commentary on my poem-in-progress. Nothing matters more to me than attempting to produce acute sensory experience through imagery, to produce in a jolt the mystery and clarity of uninterpreted physical knowledge. "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts," as Keats, a hero, put it.

I don't imagine a "reader" of my poems—which, as the joke might go, is only realistic. But I do have a listener, a single listener, to whom I attend. At times it seems that our knowledge of each other and of ourselves—the two of us—is transacted by poems. This listening to each other in poems is an ongoing education. It is my experience of Stevens's "intensest rendezvous." I don't presume or expect or even really want anything so grandiose as an "audience" for my private work of poetry—just as one wouldn't ask for an audience larger than a single member for one's prayer. It wouldn't be prayer if it were spoken to many. It is difficult to proceed without that single listener, though one does proceed, one posits that listener in uncertainty. To have a listener, to whom one is present, whose presence compels one's own, in language—the gift is measureless, beyond gratitude.

RECORDING DEVICES

Mark Levine's Poetics of Evidence

Sabrina Orah Mark

> But never did Henry as he thought he did,
> end anyone and hacks her body up
> and hides the pieces, where they may be found.
> He knows: he went over everyone, & nobody's missing.
> Often he reckons, in the dawn, them up.
> Nobody is ever missing.
>
> —John Berryman, from *The Dream Songs*

> Quiet. The Jew Levine is coming to collect
> with his chisels and his sack of flesh.
>
> —Mark Levine, from *Debt*

READING ACROSS Mark Levine's three books of poetry, *Debt* (1992), *Enola Gay* (2000), and *The Wilds* (2006), Samuel Beckett's invention of a man named Krapp, surrounded by reels of recorded tapes, emerges, unspectacled, in strong white light. It is not so much Krapp, the actual man, we remember, although his rusty clothes, surprising boots, capacious pockets, cracked voice, nearsightedness, and laborious walk can easily, like leftover souvenirs, be reminiscent of what is found among the body of Levine's magnificent voices.[1] What more eloquently binds them, though, is their project. Their copious rewinding and fast forwarding. Each bends over the recording device not only to create for the world a testimony, but also to listen to testimonies barely remembered as their own. Ledgers are consulted. Fingers carefully run over entries, as if without these entries existential coordinates would be lost. For each, evidence is crucial. But what ultimately edges Levine's voice off the stage, and beyond the dusty reels of tape, is how seamlessly Levine folds self-investigation into historical interrogation. The debt, always part personal, part historical, becomes like a spool spinning endlessly as it collects the consequences of a world struggling wildly beneath it. And then the spool rewinds. And then it plays again. Stop. Rewind. Fast forward. Play.

"Nothing," writes Emmanuel Levinas, "was official anymore."[2] If through the activity of spinning the tape forward and back a deletion occurs, it is because this deletion was already present. Levine's poems crave for what is officially no longer a dwelling place. He goes back into the past and retrieves, not only like a collector engaged in platonic anamnesis, but also like a collector who, through recollection, disrupts a metanarrative that once marked

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KAREN VOLKMAN

I won't go in today, I'll stay out today. I won't go home today, instead I'll go to sea. Today is a lot of work, yesterday wiser. Yesterday is a path made out of feet, today is a screwball alarmclock with a mawkish tick. Today offends everyone with nebulous gesture: "I think." "Yes but." "Still really." "Gee well." This becomes language you know becomes destiny, still you know that operator listening in on the phone? She of the darker stare and windy grimace? Yes she is writing every word, I wouldn't leave that blur too conspicuous, knapsack of roar. I wouldn't give just anyone access, but you know best. Seems to me you go out a little too spryly, hardly a step really more of a *sprawl*. You packed your bags reasonably enough, but what about all that dubious baggage from last fall? Seems we're in for shriller weather, your eye no more mild decries tornado and scar. Today needs a few more devotees lacking grace. But yesterday, imperious echo, knows who you are.

* * *

There comes a time to rusticate the numbers. The way the birds, jug jug, mount in steepleless processions, or the barely comprehensible division of our hands. Or the cliff with the face of a galled god, appalling. And these are boundable, we count them, each and each.

But my zero, windy and sleepless, how to teach it? It speaks to the rain, the spare precipitation—it says, Desert conditions, but I fathom the sea—and rain in its meticulous sermon mumbles back. Talk, talk, in shrill slaps, in strident speculations. As the almond trees flash the gold,

POETICS STATEMENT

I'VE WRITTEN three books. Each has taught me some things about form. Thinking with and through form, whether set forms or broader formal concerns such as the dialogic dance of the book-length sequence, is an entry into what Anne Carson has called "the motions of the self" and the means by which that mutable, motile self is born of and into a thinking body. I'm intrigued by deformations of convention, ways in which traditional lyric gestures, embodying cultural codes, can be made malleable and strange; there is still tremendous power in these gestures, if they're understood as ceremonies of intensity, or maybe rituals of sensation—acts that strive to embody sensation but also represent gestures of awe or passion or longing—inviting, constructing, and containing those states.

Movement and constraint, impulse and impasse. Against the concision and angularity of my first book, *Crash's Law*, my second, *Spar*, is all excess, the overwhelmingness of emotion and sensation, conflict between resistance and abandon: the "I" becomes a locus of sensation that shifts and blurs, essentially an improvisation. The first human figure in the book is "someone," so anonymity, a permeable subject who is also a searcher, is the aleph term. When "I" turns up in the second poem, that term still holds—to be modulated or revolved in successive I's, according to the encounters staged, the phenomena called up in language. Despite the mobility, this speaker is boundaried to some degree by lyric tradition; the third poem in the book starts with an apostrophe to a star. It doesn't get much more conventional than that, but it's convention recast and reframed. The speaker exists in amorous relationship to words, in relinquishing at least partly the role of creator to become a created and stranger self—a submission to the unknown, including an unknown otherness of possible selves.

Such an excess finds breadth and boundary in the prose poem: while transgressing the line as inscribed limit, the poems establish new borders of sentence, paragraph, sound pattern. A seductive contradiction of the prose poem is its solidity of presence despite internal permutation and movement, the velocity of its disjunctive interior. Rosmarie Waldrop describes as "gap-gardening" the way the prose poem "turns" on its inner disjunctions, as it lacks the more traditional turning of the line to effect that motion. Containment and movement find a balance. Motion within a visually solid frame (at least in my brick-shaped poems) grounds a sense of the contingent (however contradictory that may sound), of circumstances and loyalties in a necessary state of flux, the incompatible claims of restlessness and desire for change with the longing for stability, cohesion, immersion. "We love we know not what," writes Traherne, "and therefore everything allures us."

In my third book, *Nomina*, I use the constraint of the sonnet rhyme scheme as a different base for intuitive swerves. That strange machine, the sonnet, with its tension between nonrational relations of sound and the rationalizing structure of argument so crucial in its English tradition. Far from a tidy closed form, the sonnet strikes me as a volatile, sometimes violent instrument, resounding with struggle and shock. In its orientation toward argument, it is immediately a figure for the conflicted mind. The resolute character of its syntax and the fixed rigor of its rhyme scheme embody a passionate reaching toward a certainty that its conflicted stance questions and resists—in this, it strikes me as a form of anguish, longing for, but never fully believing in, the solace of its own intelligent system.

Despite their differences, my books have in common an organization that is to some degree dialogical, with poems juxtaposed to foreground tensions and contradictions, providing a kind of argument or conversation between tonalities and states. Again, motions of a self, or selves, re-formed, repositioned from poem to poem, with the nimble reader responding to, inhabiting, extending those gestures. I believe one of the jobs of poetry is to allow readers to discover different and more complex ways of engaging experience, including the experience of their own inner lives, by surprising them into developing new modes of response in their reading, new freedoms. And it's my hope that pleasure and intense sensation and a shock of strangeness will be part of the movement.

A SPACE FOR DESIRE AND THE MUTABLE SELF

Karen Volkman's Experimentations with the Lyric

Paul Otremba

BY THE TIME Karen Volkman's lyrical, debut collection of poems, *Crash's Law*, appeared as a National Poetry Series selection in 1996, the lyric mode had already spent decades under suspicion for being ahistorical and monological—the favored genre of mainstream poetry and the New Criticism.[1] By the 1990s, with the rise of feminist, Marxist, and poststructuralist theories, American poets were becoming self-conscious about the ideological implications of their medium, particularly lyric poetry's participation in upholding a patriarchal tradition and a belief in the "transcendental signified." In

[ode]

where have you gone blue middle of a decade? the gates creak.
a sigh is so vastly different
the diary is pure spine. in the most gingerly way each leaf opened
reveals the less of you

83, 84, 85: your relics in a converse box. adoring letters from one
upon whom you put the kibosh
shade trees bent to listen for a song. [erasure?] all of your best
composing is lament

faithless time you steal the handsome petals for yourself. a bruised fist
of hyacinth becomes you
when the wind bears no whisper but alack: an eye fears you & distance:
the short distance across

[who won't praise green. each minute to caress each minute blade of spring.
green slice us open]
a song of mayflies

who won't praise green. each minute to caress each minute
blade of spring. green slice us open
spew of willow crotch: we float upward a whirling chaff.
sunlight sings in us *some glad morning*

when we are called we are called ephemera. palpitating length
of a psalm. who isn't halfway gone
fatherless and childless: not a who will know us. dazzled afternoon
won't we widow ourselves away

POETICS STATEMENT

The Flesh Failures

WORDS ARE the way we call the world into being: "In the beginning was the word, and the word became flesh." The more words we have, the more ways of describing, the more exact, the more power over the world: when a child suckles, he begins to understand that what he wants, that milk, that sustenance, has a name. The first time he utters the name: "baba" for *bottle* (or, if not yet weaned, "mama" for *mother*), he understands the power of language: call for the thing by its name and the thing appears.

Intoxicated by the power of language, the child begins to play with words. He notices similarities between certain words, the way "mama" and "baba" rhyme off one another (though he doesn't yet know the word *rhyme*, he is aware of the condition of rhyming). He creates words for things for which he hasn't yet learned the names. He strings words together into song, gradually developing a syntax by which he might describe his experience of being (because he wants someone else to know that he has this power: *language*). And as he continues to grow, he continues to acquire the useful phrases. Perhaps he learns other phrases as well, but they have no practical application, and so he either stores them away or discards them.

Poets continue to suckle at the nipple of the world. They learn more names for more nipples. They hoard the power over all these breasts, feeding at their leisure, at their pleasure. They command an army of mammary, they store them in a box called *memory*, they bring them out like toy soldiers and let them do battle; they are rehearsing and nursing and breaking the rules of war with their words.

This is one way of thinking about why we're drawn to the material of language, as opposed to paint or music or photography or any of a number of other methods by which we might express our passions.

As for me, I know that I felt the power of language early, and I used it as a weapon. I wasn't always able to fight (though lord knows that didn't keep me from brawling) but I could probe someone with language, worrying their armor until I found the weak spot, then jab with a pointed phrase.

So why not become a critic, if all I wanted was to assault? Why write poetry?

Denise Levertov once said of the Language poets that they were taking "a private place on a public beach." True enough, I suppose. But isn't that why so many people are drawn to poetry, regardless of the aesthetic? Because it does have about it a feel of the private. Most poets I know discovered poetry around the same time they discovered masturbation. And probably for the

same reason. Poetry gives us a place to explore our passions, to play with possibilities, to open ourselves up to the ecstatic.

And I think this is one of the reasons why we like to speak of poetry in terms of the body. Olson says that "the line comes (I swear it) from the breath." Pinsky says, "The medium of poetry is a human body: the column of air inside the chest, shaped into signifying sounds in the larynx and the mouth." I go back time and again to Longinus, who speaks of sublimity as corresponding to the collocation of the limbs in the body. Or to Whitman, writing that "wherever are men like me, are our lusty, lurking, masculine poems." The poem is the record of the body; how the body experiences the world. Rhythms correspond to breathing and to the systole and diastole of the heart. When Keats writes, "Bright Star! would I were steadfast as thou art," the falling away of "art" mirrors his own expiring breath. And when Whitman writes "sailing, soldiering, thieving, threatening, misers, menials, priests alarming—air breathing, water drinking, on the turf or the sea-beach dancing, cities wrenching, ease scorning, statutes mocking, feebleness chasing," the panting rhythm mirrors the erotic relationship of "We Two Boys Together Clinging." It doesn't have to be spelled out; the quickening breath tells us that this is a passionate embrace.

The body is the first writer of the poem. The mind is that caretaker who moves in to make order. Sometimes what the mind does to the poem is good. Sometimes, it's too much. "I am the enemy of the mind," writes Berryman, while Ginsberg insists that "mind is shapely." With whatever trust or mistrust we have of it, the mind works the poem in a different way. But let's be clear: intellects don't write poems. While they're wonderful to have, they are no substitute for the body's sense of the world. Because the body is *ir*rational, and the irrational is where the discovery happens. Keats calls it negative capability. García Lorca says it is the darkness, the *duende*, that it "is drawn to where forms fuse themselves in a longing greater than their visible expressions." Spicer says that we're like radios and the Martians are talking through us. By whatever metaphor we name it, we're listening to the voice beyond the edge of knowing. I say that it is the body, because I know that the body remembers and feels and expresses in a way separate from what the mind does.

Full stops. Broken phrases. Rising and falling rhythms welded within the same line. This is how I shape my poems. Because "silly" meant *blessed* before it meant *foolish*, I let the silly share space with the profound. Hell, I let the silly *be* the profound. We don't know where wisdom will come from; give an open hand to every utterance and let it weigh against every other. All of this voicing arises from the uncertain place that my body inhabits: medicated, rumbling, off-center, uneasy, failing. It's an instrument that needs, with its constant desire to eat, to shit, to breathe, to be cared for—and it is crude and unrefined. But I know by now how to play it, and I do.

"HERE IS THE DOOR MARKED HEAVEN": D. A. POWELL

Stephen Burt

In five and a half years D. A. Powell has achieved durable acclaim for three books whose topics, though not their techniques, permit quick summary. *Tea* (1998) used long lines and striking extended metaphors to describe Powell's own experience of gay America, including his own very early sexual encounters, his long, troubled romance with Scott Gulvas, and the loss of friends and lovers to HIV and AIDS.[1] *Lunch* (2000) gathered the short poems that prefigure his *Tea* style, including a sequence about his childhood in blue-collar, exurban California, along with a suite of poems about his own HIV-positive diagnosis. *Cocktails* (2004), the genuine sequel to *Tea*, returned to its settings and methods in the first of its three sections; the second rewrote Powell's sexual history through a series of films, most of them with queer plots or subtexts. The third and most original section of *Cocktails* took on biblical themes, finding versions of queer life, erotic devotion, and suffering in the Gospels and other early Christian writings. Powell has received, and surely deserved, attention as a voice of the HIV-AIDS crisis, and as a chronicler of gay life for his generation. His is hardly the only such voice. What has made Powell stand out in other poets' eyes is not his set of affecting subjects, but his invention of an original style.

Powell writes in the foreword to *Tea* that his work is "not about being queer and dying. It is about being human and living."[2] His style makes continuities and progressions, ongoing poems that represent ongoing lives, out of verbal and structural elements that look like termini, obstacles, premature closures. Powell's poems also flaunt, and sometimes quote, works of art and cultural codes created by gay American men; he likens his project to that of a DJ, who collects, sorts, mixes, and makes available for a community already existing songs. Powell's extended metaphors and double or triple entendres frequently link alluring, or highly esteemed, experience to things and actions rejected, degraded, debased. These figures, combining the stigmatized with the sacred, make his biblical sequence consonant with the rest of his poems: these songs of Saint John and Simon the Cyrene, like his earlier poems of hospitals, discos, and curious Boy Scouts, turn the abject into the exalted, keeping the Christian promise that the last shall be first, the rejected stone become the cornerstone.

Powell says he began writing *Tea* when he "turned [his] notebook sideways, pushing into what would traditionally be the margins of the page."[3] The

UNTITLED AMHERST SPECTER

a sound of open ground having been taken

now a silver wisp winking on the roof

silver imp waving from a long shaft ago

I am a leaf storm night

I have seen the long file of mule trains and metal

the cavalry

these sounds we live within speaking to you now

sir, I was a soldier in these woods

LAST CENTURY THOUGHTS IN SNOW TONIGHT

This is winter where light flits at the tips of things.
Sometimes I flit back and glitter.

Too much spectacle conquers the I.
This is winter where I walk out underneath it all.

What could I take from it? Astonishment?
I wore an extra blanket.

This is winter where childhood lanterns skate in the distance
where what we take is what we are given.

Some call it self-reliance. *Ça va?*
To understand our portion, our bright portion.

This is winter and this the winter portion
of self-reliance and last century thoughts in snow.

POETICS STATEMENT

Extract from a Letter to Steve Farmer

(From a talk at the Kelly Writer's House at the University of Pennsylvania, 1999.)

As I listen to a poem unfold in my ear it becomes clear that for every line I hear there are more lines resonating in the same field of meaning. Listening is everything in poetry: to the silences, the pauses, shifts in syntax, tone, and content. Always for me a poem is about tracking what is not said and the particular place I can go to know what that is by what is stated. As if there are always two poems in my ear. What amazes me is how specific the "other" or phantom poem can be, and it occurs to me how language, when arranged, manipulated, built, or what you will, is saying both readings—together and separate. I imagine that the lyric is next to my life, but it isn't my life at the same time that it is real. Think of breath on a mirror. Sometimes, if I'm lucky, I can record this "other" poem and make it my own. But mostly it is a fragment felt and struggled with. I find myself left to develop the ruins of what did not come through. These hours spent listening, however, are what I believe to be the exceptional experience of poetry. The same way nightingales inhabit Romanticism and are unsupported by any real concrete image: "birds as words," Zukofsky would say. They are an experience in the mind both heard and as Cavalcanti would suggest, "'tis felt I say." The problem with trying to risk something, articulate something larger, is that it's bound to failure, and the problem with taking on something stable is that it's bound to succeed but it's ultimately unsatisfying. It's more complicated to use intuitive thought toward repair.

. . . I want the field of my work to also include other works, displacing context to create narrative, emotional, psychological, and formal turbulence. I think of these gestures of narrative disturbance, this quoting out of context, this bending and borrowing and blending of tradition as musical notations to create depth, emotive effect, even sincerity. I am interested in nostalgia but I would renovate its use: it's not just a return to home (or origins, the texts that inform me) but a survival of home (a process of individuation). For an artist it means to survive the poems, texts that compose one—the awesome ground (power) of Modernism. We are the children of Modernism much in the way the ground for the troubadours was classical literature. And there's an exhaustion to this process, this movement, because there is no actual site to return to. As Steve Farmer puts it: a movement "from a desire to critique/dismantle to a desire to rebuild." How to at once accommodate

the gorgeous traditions of poetry and the fact that we are also simply "folk"? To build a comprehensive music. . . .

. . . I guess what I'm after is closer to an environment, an experience of structure that collects in me. This condition of openness also figures a constant grappling with absence and lack. In a sense all my work is about this reckoning and displacement, enacted through an experience of lyric possession. A form of animism, but in it I would replace essentialism or soul with aesthetics or an empty core, a kind of holding open to allow tendencies of cadence, form, tone, coloring to move through the space of writing: a force that is both a construction of self and an emptying of self. Not autobiographical but autographical: flexible enough to accommodate figures, things, voices, documentation; to combine, build and dissolve being, boundaries—to somehow let the poem become itself.

PETER GIZZI'S CITY

The Political Quotidian

Cole Swensen

Since Whitman and Baudelaire, the everyday has increasingly been modern poetry's territory, revealing our conviction that art can live a daily life, and that art has a role in our daily lives. The fusion of art and daily life quickly became a cliché of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes, but it was also a concrete goal, and one with a political impetus. Once daily life was executed along artistic principles, they felt, the general populace would be released from the lethargy of dead-end materialism, and culture would no longer be co-optable as a simplistic index of class distinction.

The quotidian and the political are inherently connected, but while the daily has stayed in the foreground of European and North American poetics, politics has not always been so prominent. For several reasons—not the least being the number and urgency of current global political crises—poets are again putting the two together, but searching out ways to do it differently, to do it subtly, using the arts to refine and enlarge the definition of the political.

Peter Gizzi achieves this, not in only in his poetry, but in every aspect of his life. His various facets—writer, editor, critic, publisher, teacher, traveler, citizen—cannot be separated from one another, nor any of them seen apart from his poetry. They function as a single gesture, one that is political *in* the deepest sense: it brings the other into the everyday.

For Gizzi, the political starts with the very word and its root in the polis. His individual poems are sited there, in the city, which he sees both as a dense heterogeneity and as community. Though those two views may seem contradictory, bridging contradiction through language is what Gizzi does. He makes his poems into cities themselves; they are diverse but synchronized collectivities. The long poem "Etudes, Evidence, or a Working Definition of the Sun Gear," from his most recent book *Some Values of Landscape and Weather*, is such a collectivity, but it also brings us to a real city, Marseille, and to human confluence and community in general.

Stylistically, the poem is representative of much of his work in that it blends three tendencies from three historic periods: a twentieth-century fascination with the daily, manifest in both language and content; a late twentieth- early twenty-first-century aesthetic of fragmentation that implicitly explores the distinction between juxtaposition and disjunction; and an early nineteenth-century Romantic appreciation of loss.

Gizzi's engagement with the daily parallels those aspects of American society that are increasingly secular and committed to the immanent as opposed to the transcendent, trends that date back to the early nineteenth century. In Gizzi's work, however, it's more immediately rooted in American Modernism from Pound and Stein through Williams and on up to the New York School, whose writers had an eye for the poetic within the everyday to the highest degree.

Gizzi's poems are full of objects we see every day: freeways, flagpoles, birds, bricks, and clouds. They evoke familiar situations that take place in recognizable surroundings, and he presents them in speech-based phrasing: "How come all the best images are uncanny?" (49); "Spider webs are scarier / when you have a mortal disease, / or just creepier, more final / somehow" (44). "How come," "scarier," "creepier" are not only mundane, they're aggressively casual; they belong to the ephemeral world of passing conversation, so their appearance on a page has a startling incongruity.

The Varied Fragment

Because such terms are ephemeral, we get them only in pieces, glimpses. It's as if all the things his swift language brings us were caught in the corner of the eye, in turn suggesting that fragmentation—that hallmark of the postmodern—is based in part in a fascination with motion. In Gizzi's work, the motion is usually double: both the thing seen and the seeing thing are moving, requiring a sort of perceptual calculus that poetry, with its tendency to keep language itself in motion, is particularly good at. Formally, Gizzi's normally correct syntax breaks down rarely enough to keep its ruptures

That I would turn to each other to admire the softness of each other's breast, the folds of each other's elbows, the brightness of each other's eyes, the smoothness of each other's hair, the evenness of each other's teeth, the firm blush of each other's lips, the firm softness of each other's breasts, the fuzz of each other's down, the rich, ripe pungency of each other's smell, all of it, each other's cheeks, legs, neck, roof of mouth, webbing between the fingers, tips of nails and also cuticles, hair on toes, whorls on fingers, skin discolorations.

I turned to each other.

Ensnared, bewildered, I turned to each other and from the stream.

I turned to each other and I began to work for the chemical factory and I began to work for the paper mill and I began to work for the atomic waste disposal plant and I began to work at keeping men in jail.

I turned to each other.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw, rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback, ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I replaced what I knew of the stream with Lifestream Total Cholesterol Test Packets, with Snuggle Emerald Stream Fabric Softener Dryer Sheets, with Tisserand Aromatherapy Aroma-Stream Cartridges, with Filter Stream Dust Tamer, and Streamzap PC Remote Control, Acid Stream Launcher, and Viral Data Stream.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw, rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback, ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I put a Streamline Tilt Mirror in my shower and I kept a crystal Serenity Sphere with a Winter Stream view on my dresser.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw, rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback, ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I bought a Gulf Stream Blue Polyester Boat Cover for my 14–16 Foot V-Hull Fishing boats with beam widths up to sixty-eight feet and I talked about value stream management with men in suits over a desk.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw, rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback, ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I just turned to each other and the body parts of the other suddenly glowed with the beauty and detail that I had found in the stream.

I put my head together on a narrow pillow and talked with each other all night long.

And I did not sing.

I did not sing ototototoi; dark, all merged together, oi.

I did not sing the groaning words.

I did not sing ototototoi; dark, all merged together, oi.

I did not sing the groaning words.

I did not sing o wo, wo, wo!

I did not sing I see, I see.

I did not sing wo, wo!

POETICS STATEMENT

I LOVE reading all those optimistic things that people say about poetry. Those sweeping statements about poetry being all about love or poetry being all about countering the oblivion of darkness or poetry being the genre to comfort in times of trouble. They make me feel good about poetry.

But poetry really doesn't work that way for me. For me, poetry is a troubled and troubling genre, full of desire and anger and support and protest, primarily useful because it helps me think. Lyn Hejinian's essays, her explorations of inquiry, have been really helpful to me on this. My theory is that poetry helps me think because it is a genre that is so open right now. There are so many rules about how to write poetry that there might as well not be any at all. Poetry moves words around. It rearranges them from their conventions. It re-sorts them. It uses more than one language. It repeats. It pursues aconventional language and divergent typography. It often experiments. It can be ephemeral and occasional. It often uses pleasing patterns as it does all this. And all that helps me think.

And yet . . . it isn't only the way that poetry moves words around that makes it matter to me. There is something deeper also. Whenever someone like my uncle, the university professor in engineering, asks me as he does every holiday, why are you interested in all this poetry stuff and why does

it matter? I want to answer as Gertrude Stein did when asked how she felt about modern art: "I like to look at it."

But if I really want to figure out why poetry helps me think, there is also another story, this story: The town I grew up in was ugly and dirty. The town was dirty because it had a barely environmentally regulated papermill. It had a barely environmentally regulated papermill because nothing else was in the town. It was a one-industry town. Nothing was in the town because it was in the middle of nowhere. What had once been a thriving crossroads and trading spot that the Shawnee Indians built on the Shawnee River, a spot once called something like the Chauouanons, was no longer an active trading spot because of nineteenth-century globalism aka European expansion and then those related tools of globalization like airplanes, which made the town part of what coasters call flyover land. Because the town was dirty, whenever I read poems about the beauty of the English countryside or New England woods, they made little sense to me. So then I went and found by accident this stuff by Gertrude Stein, and because I was looking for something that didn't seem to be some sort of weird lie, and because this stuff by Stein was so weird it at the least didn't seem to be lying in the usual ways, I clung to it. And that began an interest in stuff, in poetry.

"It's an exciting time to be a poet" Lisa Jarnot was once quoted as saying in *Glamour*. It *is* an exciting time to be a poet. It is *always* an exciting time to be a poet, the genre of all people at all times. There has never been a culture without poetry. And that has to tell us something about how deep our roots are with this genre. It is always an exciting time for poetry because poetry feels like the moment when the knot finally comes untied after appearing to be impossibly tangled. Or the moment of being aware of the exact meaning of words and of all the changes that occur in the exact meanings of words in thoughts and sensations, the difference between feet and feat, between there and their, between red and read. A moment of coming to the end of the road, pulling up right in front of the concrete bunker that symbolizes the end of the road, getting out, climbing over the bunker, walking out into the grass of the field, slowly and steadily. And poetry feels like the springing off the diving board and moving into the part of the dive that feels aerodynamic and smooth, feels just right to the body, the feeling of moving through the air, and then the feeling of entering into the water as if in slow motion, as if floating but really with a certain quick sensation of smoothness. And it feels like what the inner smoothness that moves plovers, monarchs, whales, garden snakes, herds of walking animals from one place to another must feel like. The feeling of being set in motion, a feeling that moves one to another place, a place of water perhaps or a place of dryness or a place of coolness or of warmness. Or it feels like beginning to walk up several long flights of stairs, letting the intenseness of breath and the tightness in the legs develop while knowing at any moment you can just turn around and walk back down and then turning around and walking down them quickly and easily. Or suddenly noticing a clenched fist and then unclenching this fist and how this sensation of unclenching travels up the hand and into the chest and into the breath. And the reverse, clenching the unclenched fit and noticing how this sensation travels up the hand and into the chest and into the breath. Or just spreading hands wide and putting them on the floor and then kicking up into the air and balancing there. I guess what I mean is that it is always an exciting time to like to look at it, to like to look at poetry.

ALL TOGETHER/NOW

Writing the Space of Collectivities in the Poetry of Juliana Spahr

Kimberly Lamm

AT THE CLOSE of her essay "Poetry in a Time of Crisis," Juliana Spahr calls for "more poems dealing with these difficult moments of how we talk to each other that acknowledge how difficult it is. More outward turns."[1] Spahr composed "Poetry in a Time of Crisis" in the aftermath of September 11, when familiar forms of individualized expression were insisted upon rather than relinquished or reimagined.[2] Historical events that traumatically punctuate time remind us of the collective dimensions of experience; but when readers enter the space of poetry, still fixed by the model in which a reader encounters the writer's lyrical expression, this knowledge is difficult to sustain.[3] "Poetry in a Time of Crisis" argues against reducing historical crises to private, subjective renditions, while also acknowledging the difficulty of doing otherwise; it argues for "public declarations of collective culture and connective agency," that is, "[m]ore outward turns."[4] Engaged in conversations about the difficulties and possibilities of talking to each other within and across languages, war zones, beds, televised events, streets, discourses, and continents, Spahr's own poetry is full of outward, inclusive turns, and calls attention to the collectivities that emerge through connective agency.

Shaping and tracing the connections within collectivities is the core ethos of Spahr's work. It informs her poetry, literary scholarship, and activist practices.[5] Without relinquishing poetry's tie to intimate encounters, Spahr prioritizes the need to imagine and communicate with collectivities. In "Poetry in a Time of Crisis," Spahr articulates the need for "models of intimacy that

The train windows blurring past like movie frames run sideways starring our exhausted revolutionary sweetheart whose head cracks open to swallow the day.

We have made the world flat once again.

Meetings in the cold warehouse on the outskirts of the Year Zero.

In the red suburbs of the Year Zero.

In the other night on the other side of permission you could have her or a police car on fire if you preferred the second you wore a black square on your jacket or in your hair.

The machine flower the machine music blotted out all other sounds still you could not get it loud enough.

Needs to know looks back.

Wants to be seen turns away.

Had meant to write the century of crowds.

And beneath it the gear-rooms of the calendar where tiny cracks have been discovered in every hour time has started to trickle staunched with grease and sweat a shudder a sadness at waking.

Now must begin again it must be new time.

In the morning of the sign lying in bed in cold Utopia and alone under the black square.

Your ears swelled with flowers a corpse in your mouth.

You are free though a freedom with its ribs showing.

POETICS STATEMENT

Once Against (Into the Poetics of Superinformation)

SUPERINFORMATION doesn't abandon the territory. Superinformation is neither primitive erudition nor sophisticated accumulation. Superinformation is the set of relations through which—within the excess of signification, the immanence of actual life and its frantic dissimulation—we live more, not less. Looking at Gursky's photos of architecture and spectacles that present themselves as purely optic I have the sense that the personal eye can't see everything—that the scene is beyond a lone viewer. This is superinformation's signal affect; it implies the plural, the collective consciousness. So does *Wedding Feast at Cana*, five centuries old: not just a crowded picture, but one that needs a crowd. It takes a riot to see it. History finally caught up, late cap, sprawl cities, global markets, the disavowal of individuality. Even negation, the ecstasy par excellance of the first person, must escape into the plural. One Mao, many Maos (rhymes with *chaos*). Standing around talking to everyone isn't poetry, but I like a poem that makes that seem like a good idea. Superinformation is the excess of signification turned on itself as a strategy. Whose Too Much? Our Too Much! A poem could be a direct communication between you and me, Frank, except the blond I am in love with has very dark hair and I have a mobile phone. So there we were chatting away but poems really are poetic, otherwise we would just work for software. The day has integuments and superinformation is always trying to fill them, to live without dead space; austerity is a lost art, and phew! One can relax inside superinformation, but autonomy that ain't. Superinformation admires the pure singularity of Dickinson and Rimbaud, and so waves goodbye to them from the far side of a great divide, a billboard flying the tattered half-tones of ten thousand publicity cycles. I stole that from Jacques de la Villeglé, do you think he'll mind? Do you think Hains will mind that I credited someone else? Superinformation doesn't read the billboard for the secrets of the lost world, nor as the sign of its passing; it's just a name for how the last evening of summer etches itself there, a sense that everything the sign can't contain is present in the catastrophe of its reading. The fluctuations of interest rates take us as the object of their speculations, while architecture finally seems indifferent to us. Data is a phenomenon of life organized by survival; superinformation hangs out near where the waves of data crash against the seawall of the sublime, mixing metaphors in the infinite. Superinformation is a manifesto; the manifesto is the most passionate hoax. Categories are preparation for thinking, but the mighty superinformationists are no Boy Scouts.

POETICS STATEMENT

from Deadism

IT HAPPENS every few years, perhaps oftener: we get the article, widely and usually well-published, that declares poetry dead. Often the accompanying sound is less a lament for this premature pronouncement than a jig on poetry's pre-paid grave. Rarely do I hear such an essay sound more like an Irish wake or a New Orleans jazz funeral, two sounds I think poetry should aspire to more often. A raucous solace.

Instead, poetry is dead.

I disagree; I plan wild essays; I respond point by point, debunking and spelunking.

But tonight, why not—poetry is dead. Let it be dead then, let us write as if we are already dead. If poetry is dying, than let's just write a poetry pronounced DOA.

Perhaps it is just because I have witnessed too many deaths these past few years, but I have tried since to write a poetry of life, against those deaths and even Death in general. Maybe. But it also seems to me some of the same folks who think poetry is dead, or proceed without it, turn to poetry in crucial moments: at a death, or a wedding. Poetry as invocation, as ceremony.

I want an afterparty poetry, a poetry that sings a bit off key, drunk or I never touch the stuff, but sings anyway.

For years I've felt poetry was not ceremony, but the daily thing. The dirt. It is an everyday, not an occasionally. I still think this. But perhaps the only way to make this truly true is to write a poetry that is not like death, but is death: surprising yet inevitable, everyday yet far-off in the future, an ever-present that we still manage to forget. In this, it may resemble jazz—or is this simply because, as Ralph Ellison says, "life is jazz-shaped"? Death may be jazz-shaped too, just ask Gabriel and Satchmo in their cutting contest.

The only way to find out is to write a dead poetry.

I am not taking this lightly: I am not suggesting a poetry of suicide (don't do it), or of homicide (give that up); I am not suggesting a poetry celebrating war, or ignoring war, or a poetry of a war that we celebrated too early our victory in, and now cannot ignore. (The deadening of poetry is celebrated too early and often too.) A dead poetry does not believe in "-icides" of any kind; it believes in insides, in soul and sorrow, in silence and also the singing that is against such silence.

Deadism believes that poetry should capture a living language, it just knows that we should write in dead languages too.

Write not like something endangered—not like a spotted owl—or reintroduced into the wild, but dead already. (The poetry of "they're coming to get us," the poetry of the horror movie I've seen too much of, the poetry of lament, of victimization, or worse, of declaring the various and nefarious threats to freedom, equality, blackness, or justice seems to take too much pleasure in watching the killer even as it's shouting out warnings in the theater. This poetry is over, but not yet dead.) Write not like a coming extinction, but like the extinction already. That said, do not write like a dodo, something rare and flightless—but like the passenger pigeon, a poetry once plentiful and ever-present and so therefore killed off.

Do not write a poetry of rarity, or of rarification, but of *never again*.

Do not even write this poetry, but find it, come across it, and step over it. The helpless ant that in the end can lift more than ten times its weight: that is a poetry.

Maybe what we need is an undead poetry—not to take death back from poetry, but to take death back from death itself. A poetry of shambling power, devouring everything in its path. A vampire poetry that will live forever, sexy and dangerous and immortal, shapeshifting when necessary.

That bat in my friend's toilet (true story) a poetry. That dog. That mewling cat caught under my house that left sometime in the night a poetry. It is hard to find, and harder to coax out, but will one day on its own.

In the meantime, a poetry that speaks from the mouths of those gone that aren't really gone, a poetry of ghosts and haunts. Of haints; not ain'ts. Dead is something you can be, after all, is not itself an *ain't*. The ain'ts I'm afraid are here, among us living.

Instead there's the haints, which our poetry should be: haunting, hard to pin down, glimpsed yet believed. That's a poetry I believe in. A poltergiest poetry that moves things, and us, when we least expect.

Deadism: I did not invent it, it invented me. Paul Celan, Gwendolyn Brooks (*We Real Cool*), Fenton Johnson ("I'm tired of civilization"—throw the children in the river), the exhaustion of Bob Kaufman who wrote in order to be forgotten, the ghostly poetry of Larry Levis. The poetry of Alan Dugan seems dead already, a voice from beyond. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Kenneth Koch writing a poetry of life that is in the end death. I used to hope for a poetry of preserving; in my first book, this is what emerged, writing to try and capture the voices of the life I saw that was rapidly disappearing. That of the black rural South of my parents and grandparents.

Some would say they were happy to see it go; what I saw were the good things going too. And worse, nowhere a poetry of it, no poetry either marking or mourning the passing of a way of life—a way folks I knew seemed to

mark and remark on, mostly by humor. This was not to me a contradiction, but the paradox back of existence: mournful laughter.

At the same time, my first book seemed almost dictated to me by the ghosts of my family—but a set of ghosts that were my family. My job, in part, to conjure them up—even when they were still alive, as my grandfather (rest in peace) was then. In order to write about him, I had to write about his death, which hadn't happened yet but I knew would; I had to write his funeral, and had as witnesses folks imagined, some remembered and some who were already dead, like my young cousin who'd recently killed himself. The poem then is for the real him, but the living him, made by the poem, also speaks and tells of the funeral of our grandfather, still in real life alive.

While in one way this is preserving, and in another it is merely an insufficient explanation of the vagaries of the imagination, in the main it is to say that I have been a Deadist longer than I remember. So too William Carlos Williams in *Spring and All* and *The Descent of Winter*: how in the former he must destroy everything before rebuilding, before spring.

Rebuilding is more difficult than we thought.

But if we write a poetry not of ending, but of end, a poetry that is itself unmoving, we may actually move. A poetry not of *if*, but of *when*.

Deadism like those movies with voiceovers that sound not only dead, but by the end you find out are from a dead man: not ready for my close-up, but the one floating in the pool, the one who knows what he can't know but tells us anyway. A poetry not of witness, or of victimhood, or one of experience or innocence, but of the moment after: write like a saint, not the picture of a saint. Write like the bone in the box, the relic to be kissed. Better yet, write like the saints that have been officially declared saints no more; write like something once holy, now decanonized and attempted to be forgotten. Write not like remembering, but the forgetting.

This does not mean writing erasures, which has been done (but not, unfortunately, to death). Do not write like the *Erased DeKooning Drawing* by Robert Rauschenberg, brilliant as it is; do not write like the once beautiful thing, ancestral, now gone. Instead, write like DeKooning picking not the ugliest of his drawings for the kid with the good idea to erase, but instead picking a really nice one: write like something you don't mean to be erased but one day know will; then let them try.

MIXED-UP MEDIUM

Kevin Young's Turn-of-the-Century American Triptych

Rick Benjamin

Among contemporary poets, no one's more in tune to his diverse subjects or more mixed-up in both his craft and mass media than Kevin Young. He is a maker of old-school and of-the-moment modes and forms, a serious practitioner and technical innovator. Since 2001 Kevin Young has composed three volumes that not only offer up a new and rich blend of both ancestral and contemporary consciousnesses, but also a diverse and wide-ranging poetics that is this new century's *Montage*. Referential and reverential, equal parts throwback and visionary, Young's a hybrid of the known and new. In his long-book meditation on the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, for example—*To Repel Ghosts* (2001)—he employs a version of Dante's terza rima and the hip-hop or pop artist's approach to archiving history. In *Black Maria* (2005), film noir meets mock-heroic couplets, a bittersweet coupling figured through film. In his third book, *jelly roll* (2003)—a National Book Award finalist—the blues form's stretched, in this case to joy and back. Even his first book, *Most Way Home*, a National Poetry Series winner in 1995, is an audibly lyrical meditation on lineage and cultural heritage. With his latest book, Young completes a sustained cultural critique through the lenses of major African American artists and art forms. Together, the three volumes mark the emergence of a major voice in American poetry.

To Repel Ghosts is a major retrospective, a deep drop into American hell-realms: racism, consumerism, fame, and addiction. The book is presented as a series of "discs" that, while reminiscent of vinyl and CDs, are also more wild, unwieldy, and sustained versions of these musical wraps. Young's discs have two or three sides and countless songs of which to keep track, signaling extended listening of this one, prematurely ended, black artist's life.

"Campbell's Black Bean Soup," is just the first of hundreds of Young's plumbing, punning, stripped-down terza rimas:

> . . . Bartering work
>
> for horse, Basquiat churned
> out butter, signing each
> SAMO©. Sameold. Sambo's
>
> soup. How to sell out
> something bankrupt
> already?[1]

laughter visited us early and left

moving around a sequence of debts

there would be the occasion of reaching for a foreign object in the eye

Speaker: She got shot. She did. I saw her.

limbs of pines rope around the waist

neither slaves nor freemen, but who have become part of the soil upon which they work like so many cows and the trees

the schools had been burned down

the teachers had been starved to death

the road had fallen into decay

the bridges were gone

will be eaten
at a ration of quarters
will be eaten
at a ration of fifths

POETICS STATEMENT

Convolutions : the Precision, the Wild

FUGITIVE, UNNAMEABLE, contingent. Nor remnant nor fragment nor refuse. Neither infinite deferral nor rehearsal of uncertainty. Rather, the labor. Of making.

The problem of [the presupposition of] [there already exists] a language for

Regularized language and knowledge. Standing for perceiving and thinking. Serving as arbiter of recognizability, and thus of affiliation. What is occluded in the sociohistorical index.

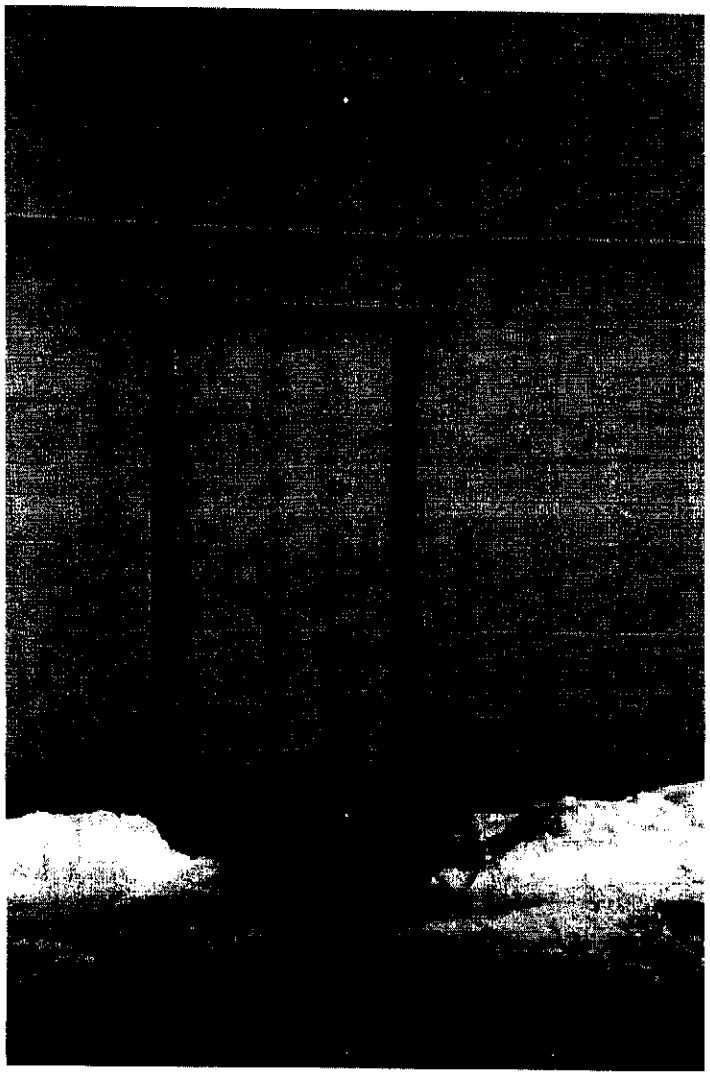
Fierce unsystematic recombinatory potential of language. The task of aberration disruption the provisional. As generative. As relational. Tests of mutually inflected deformations devolutions emendations of nations, languages—of being in time and being in history. Translative. That which is emergent [irreducible] in the cultural order. Forge [to smith]. [Refunction] modes of perception.

Factive . phonotactic . what passes for the actual . aporia
Form's unrest . warfare staged as benevolence . synapse

Heterogeneous conceptions of temporality. Conjunctural.
Historical consciousness as chiasmatic—mobile. [*cura*]

The practice of the poem is the practice of radical materiality

Poised at the question of the question of the proximal



12.07.2000–01.04.2001

"National Steel's former general manager, his wife and two consultants pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court [in Duluth] Wednesday to a scheme involving more than $240,000 in kickbacks, misappropriations and insurance fraud."

It sucks. It sucks. It sucks. But it's the same old story. You could see it coming for the last 10 years . . . They've already kicked you down to the ground, and now they keep kicking you in the head. I just want it to be over. It's devastating.

Strip mines frame strip malls "gains" as Capital claims its Local. The door [historical], the sometimes [seeming] impenetrable wall. But Luddites broke frames, hundreds of them. And the Range was once Wobbly, too.

*

Wal-Mart / wages / U.S.[W.]A. / away

Aurora : 262

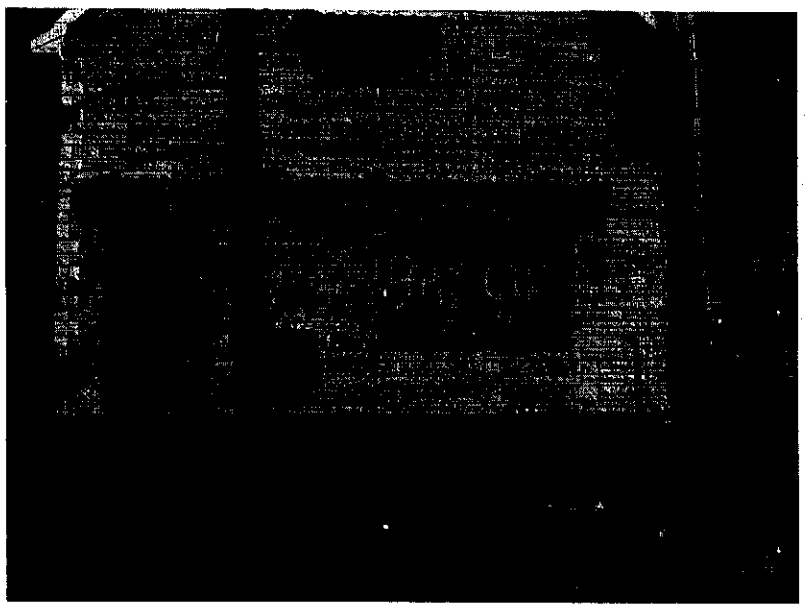
POETICS STATEMENT

Notes toward an Anti-capitalist Poetics II

> "[D]eindustrialization is primarily a feature of successful economic development . . ."

It is not poetry that allows Robert Rowthorn (Ph.D., Oxford) and Ramana Ramaswamy (Ph.D., Cambridge) to pen phrases like this in *Economic Issues no. 10* (a 1997 publication of the International Monetary Fund), but it is a poetics. David Harvey has recently termed the scope of just such a poetics "accumulation by dispossession." Harvey makes a lot more sense to those of us who grew up in Detroit, in Youngstown, in Gary, in Buffalo.

The poetics Rowthorn and Ramaswamy project (their "projective verse," so to speak) jettisons the human cost and "the social mark" of factory closures, massive job loss, anomie, et al. Then again, my guess is that Rowthorn and Ramaswamy never lived on my grandfather's block.



The IMF's articulation of a poetics that disregards the vast majority of the people is not new. Ninety years ago in the Junius Pamphlet "The War and the Workers," for example, Rosa Luxemburg dubbed capitalism's dialectic "Dividends are rising, and the proletarians are falling." And as Michael Perelman asserts in *The Invention of Capitalism*, "we hear virtually nothing in classical political economy about the suffering of those who made possible the success of the market society." But the ways this poetics forms (produces) and particularly the ways it transforms (reproduces) are new. It is a poetics of "savage neoliberalism" (Hugo Chávez), market socialization, and the immense privatization of what should be "the commons" of us all (think water, think seeds) that seeks to further secure the stockpiles of Empire for the few (and, as Marx said in *Capital*: "Accumulation of capital is . . . multiplication of the proletariat"). And so when I read in the *New York Times* that Anna McCloy, the wife of the lone surviving miner at Sago, went to Wal-Mart (and the *Times* makes that free nod to advertisement as journalism) to purchase a boom box and a Metallica CD (and that one, too) in hopes of jarring her husband out of his coma, I am pained and furious and tender and embittered at so many (socio-economic, cultural, personal, et al.) levels that I barely know where to begin. And it is *writing*, my poetic praxis, where the disentangling and re-imagining that "Another World is Possible" begins.

In an essay I recently wrote for a symposium on the life and work of Adrienne Rich ("Notes toward an Anti-capitalist Poetics," *Virginia Quarterly Review*), I outlined the vast micro-mobilizations by organized labor and social movements against neoliberal policies and poetics during a single weekend in December 2005, and asked,

> Where are the poems in dialogue with these global people's movements? Where are the poems bridging and building transnational social and aesthetic networks of alternative and agitational modes of grammar and syntax, revolutionary poetic critiques of corporate culture (the contemporary complement to Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*)? Where are the poems (as the Zapatistas described their post-NAFTA *encuentro*) "for humanity and against neoliberalism"? I also want to be able to imagine a future for poetry, as Rich says in "Defying the Space that Separates," "not drawn from the headlines but able to resist the headlines." The questions poets need to be asking today are vital to us all: what is the relationship between a U.S.-controlled agenda for globalization (with Bush-crony Paul Wolfowitz as president of the World Bank) and the future of language and the imagination amidst ubiquitous privatization? Can the free market forces of the U.S. publishing industry (including the massive, almost exclusively non-unionized chain bookstores) and the vastly expanding U.S. model of creative writing production within the MFA industry produce anything other than neoliberal writers and neoliberal tracts? As the U.S. economy transitions from a modernist manufacturing economy to late capitalism's service economy, what would a service economy poetry

and poetics look like, and who among us is prepared to step forward and imagine it?

These are a few of the questions my poetics seeks to address, both through poetry and through on-the-ground organizing work in corporate bookstores and throughout working-class communities and anti-capitalist social movements (see <http://www.urww.org> for more details). And *writing*, something that is to me dialogue and dialectical materialism and documentary and drama all rolled into one, *writing* is my vehicle through which I form and inform (I want an echo of C. L. R. James's famous dictum from *Facing Reality* to ring through here: "Recognize and record." "People all over the world, and particularly ordinary working people in factories, mines, fields, and offices, are rebelling every day in ways of their own invention . . . Their strivings, their struggles, their methods have few chroniclers . . .")

Mine is a *writing* including history, including a bit of creative borrowing from Fred Wah's *Waiting for Saskatchewan* in "$00 / Line / Steel / Train"; a bit of the remix/sample/mash-up techniques from Afrika Bambaataa and Negativland and (ex post facto) DJ Danger Mouse in "Capitalization"; a bit of experimentation with Marxist base-superstructure as poetic form and documentary photography addressing the capitalistic functions of private property in "Hoyt Lakes / Shut Down"; and a bit of Matsuo Basho's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North (Oku no Hosomichi)* and Tillie Olsen's "I Want You Women Up North to Know" and Gwendolyn Brooks's "In the Mecca" and Ernesto Cardenal's *exteriorismo* throughout.

More importantly, post-compositionally (but also pre-compositionally), these bits and *writings*, these disentanglings and re-imaginings and re-organizings *must* find a way to return to the communities of workers to whom and from whom and of whom they "recognize and record." And so my poetics, my way of making my writing world, my "form and inform," has included staged readings of "Capitalization" at a rally for striking Northwest Airlines mechanics (AMFA Local 33), a reading at the AFL-CIO's annual Labor Day picnic, writing workshops for unions at the Chicago Center for Working Class Studies, public presentations at the North American Labor History Conference in Detroit, a staged reading of another verse play from *Shut Up Shut Down* at the UAW 879 union hall in St. Paul (the women and men who produce the Ford Ranger and who, at the time of this writing, still live in the uncertain "purgatory" (as one local autoworker called it) of Ford's recently released "The Way Forward," a plan that will eliminate 30,000 jobs and close 14 plants by 2012 (on a Luxemburgian note: after the announcement, Ford shares rose 8% on the New York Stock Exchange)).*

*On April 13, 2006—several months after I wrote this poetics statement—Ford announced it would be closing its St. Paul, Minnesota, assembly plant in 2008, ending Ford's 81-year history in the city. 1,900 workers will lose their jobs.

Rowthorn and Ramaswamy's poetics statement concludes that "[d]eindustrialization is not a negative phenomenon, but a natural consequence of further growth in advanced economies"—i.e., a further growth in the largely low-wage service sector. They also posit that

> [i]n a service-based economy with fast-changing market conditions, it seems difficult to imagine that a centralized, union-based system will be able to make decisions on appropriate wage differentials. To persist with centralized wage bargaining could, therefore, have adverse consequences for the growth of productivity.

This is not the factual data of political economists, but the dystopian telos of a neoliberal poetics, a "projective verse" of the IMF that Pierre Bourdieu has aptly reframed as a transition from the *economic project of neoliberalization* (deregulation, currency devaluations, privatization of state-owned industries, etcetera) to a more threatening and all-encompassing *political project of neoliberalization* whose goal is nothing less than the methodological elimination and destruction of even the possibility of collective action ("The essence of neoliberalism," 1998). It is the dream (aka nightmare) poetics of "free" capital in a "free" market (see NAFTA, see DR-CAFTA, see FTAA) of "free" workers (temporary, non-unionized, underemployed) in a "free" society (where everything, someday maybe even breathing itself, will become a market transaction). And this is the hegemonic new poetics each of us faces each and every day, whether we acknowledge it or not, when we begin to put words on the page. And, as poets at the very center of Empire, it is our responsibility to respond, to "form and inform," and, borrowing the words from Adrienne Rich, the reason we must write as if our lives depended on it.