WITZ

Contents

Some Speculations on the Mystery of Araki Yasusada

By Mikhail Epstein

The work of Araki Yasusada has been appearing in numerous publications of late and has been provoking quite a bit of discussion in the world of poetry. I say "world" because poets and critics are not only avidly speculating about the work in the United States, but they are also beginning to do so in England, Japan, Russia, and Mexico, where selections and critical commentary have recently appeared. It is understandable why the Yasusada phenomenon has caused such fascination and controversy, for it is, without doubt, one of the most enigmatic and provocative authorial mysteries of 20th century poetry. And the mystery is provocative, above all, because the poetry itself is infused with mysteriousness. In Yasusada's poems, a deep remembrance and poignant emotion is rendered by means of a highly original conceptual idiolect. Here, for example, is a brief poem upon the death of his daughter, Akiko, entitled, "Telescope with Urn":

The image of the galaxies spreads out like a cloud of sperm.
Expanding, said the observatory guide, and at such and such velocity.
It is like the idea of the flowers, opening within the idea of flowers.
I like to think of that, said the monk, arranging them with his papery fingers.
Tiny were you, and squatted over a sky-colored bowl to make water.
What a big girl! cried we, tossing you in the general direction of the stars.
Intently, then, in the dream, I folded up the great telescope on Mount Horai.
In the form of this crane, it is small enough for the urn.

What are the origins of this poetry? Originally presented in various journals as translations from the posthumously discovered notebooks of Yasusada, a purported survivor of the bombing of Hiroshima, the writing has recently been revealed by its "caretakers," Kent Johnson and Javier Alvarez (two individuals whose existence is empirically verifiable) as the creation of their former and now deceased roommate, Tosa Motokiyu, who has been credited in all previous publications as the main "translator" of Yasusada's work. Johnson

and Alvarez assert that Tosa Motokiyu is the hypernym for an author whose actual identity they are under instructions never to reveal.

As the reader shall see, I came into contact with this work through two fortuitous occurrences, first in 1990 and then in 1995; but it was in January of 1996 that I became more intimate with it, when I received a letter and package of Yasusada materials from Motokiyu, who explained that he had been urged by "our mutual friend" Kent Johnson and his own admiration for my recent book, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, to write to me. In this letter he acknowledged himself to be the empirical writer of the Yasusada materials, and he asked for my thoughts on the implications inherent in such a scrambling of authorial identities. Indeed, I wrote him back a lengthy reply, only to learn from Kent Johnson this past summer that Motokiyu had died not long after receiving my letter.

Like some other critics and scholars, I have reflected on the matter of Yasusada in these past months. As I have done so, certain curious coincidences and parallel strands have emerged. Is it possible that my connection to this work has a personal tie that I was not at first cognizant of? Is it possibly the case that the author whose hyperidentity is Tosa Motokiyu already knew of me many years ago, when we both were citizens of the bygone Soviet Union, and that his announced "death" is meant as a metaphor for his "death as an author"? I believe that the answer to these questions is very possibly "yes," and I write now to offer the following two hypotheses concerning the authorial origins of Yasusada. I do so not to try to "solve" the matter (for paradoxes are not to be solved), but rather to suggest possible layers of hyper-authorship whose considerations may enrich the further interpretations and evaluation of this many-dimensioned work.

Before beginning, I think it is worth making mention of Emily Nussbaum's recent feature article in *Lingua Franca* ("Turning Japanese: The Hiroshima Poetry Hoax," Nov. 96), as this has sparked considerable discussion about the Yasusada matter. In this article, Ms. Nussbaum states that the "prime suspect" for the "wizard behind the curtain" is Kent Johnson. In support of this thesis, Ms. Nussbaum makes mention of the inclusion of Yasusada's poems in Johnson's Ph.D. dissertation, completed sometime before the work began to publicly appear. It should be clarified that this "suspicious connection" does in no way settle the question of the Yasusada authorship. In fact, as I believe my remarks will suggest, it is perfectly feasible that Johnson placed this work in his dissertation at the request of its actual author. Such a gesture would have been perfectly consistent, for example,

Mikhail N. Epstein's recent book is After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture *(University of Massachusttes Press).*

with the "conceptualist" aesthetic of one of the writers I discuss below. I might further say, in regards to this matter, that I happened to be a guest lecturer in Bowling Green, Ohio in the spring of 1990, and was invited to attend Johnson's dissertation defense, which fell, by strange coincidence, on the day of my arrival there. As he began, in front of a table full of solemn professors, to speak about the poems of Yasusada, two other graduate students seated on the floor behind him began (carefully following notations set down in copies of Johnson's lecture) to loudly exclaim certain utterances in English and Russian, and to blow, strike, and drum on an array of Asian musical instruments. This they did for the next fifteen minutes or so, while Johnson presented a collage of theoretical and poetic propositions. Although the professors on Johnson's committee seemed very perplexed, I can attest that this was truly a strange and memorable event, one very similar in flavor to a conceptualist poetry evening in my native Moscow.

This parallel was all the more vivid to me because my lecture at Bowling Green and the subsequent conversation with Kent Johnson and his colleagues was devoted in a significant part to conceptualism and the construction of multiple authorships. The following passage from that conversation relates directly to the current discussion on the authorship of Yasusada's poetry:

After deconstruction comes an epoch of pure constructivism. Anything can be constructed now. As one of my philosophical characters says—most of my recent works are constituted not by my own thoughts, but by those of my characters—a word cannot be exact, cannot be precise, so it must be brave. Deconstruction demonstrated that a work can't be precise, it can't designate any particular thing. But what remains to be done with the word? To be brave, to use it in all senses that are possible to it. This [is] the new domain of construction which comes after deconstruction...[1]

Included into this domain is, first of all, the construction of authorship, as implied in those philosophical characters in my own work about whom and on whose behalf I am speaking. This explains why I became so intrigued by the phenomenon of Yasusada and now attempt to look into the enigma of his origin. Now it depends on the readers of this article to decide if the following hypotheses pursue the goal of deconstruction of Yasusada or rather can serve as an example of critical constructionism.

Hypothesis #1: The Yasusada manuscript, *Doubled Flowering: From*

the *Notebooks of Araki Yasusada*, was originally composed in Russian by the famous writer Andrei Bitov and then translated by Kent Johnson and at least one Russian-speaking informant into English. I'll try to substantiate this version with irrefutable facts. Bitov, born 1937, is Russia's major contemporary novelist, the principal representative of, and, to a certain degree, the founder of Russian Postmodernism. His work generated a number of famous hyper-authors, among them Lev Odoevtsev, a literary scholar and the protagonist of Bitov's major novel, *Pushkin's House*, and Urbino Vanoski, a writer of mixed Polish, Italian and Japanese origin, the hyper-author of another of Bitov's novels, *A Professor of Symmetry*, which is annotated as "a translation from English without a dictionary."

I have been maintaining friendly ties with Bitov since the late 1960s and have first-hand information about the following. In the mid-1960s Bitov—by that time already one of the leading figures of the so-called "youth prose"—received an invitation to visit Japan through the official channels of the Soviet Writers' Union. However, he was denied an exit visa by Soviet authorities, who claimed that he was too ideologically immature for such a responsible trip to a capitalist country (he was suspected to be a hidden dissident, almost rightfully, as presumably 80% of the Soviet intelligentsia were at that time). One can easily imagine both the excitement and disappointment of a young writer who spent two or three subsequent years reapplying for this trip and reassuring the authorities of his "maturity" in vain. This bitter experience inspired him to write a novel *Iaponiia* (Japan) about the country he never saw but tried to reinvent in his imagination. Two planes alternated in this novel: the bureaucratic trials of a young author haunting the thresholds of high Soviet authorities, and imaginary landscapes and poetic visions of Japan, including fragments of an imaginary anthology of contemporary Japanese poetry. Incidentally, though Bitov never considered himself a real poet, he has hyper-authored several brilliant poems allegedly written by some of his characters (in particular, Aleksei Monakhov, the protagonist of Bitov's "dotted" novel *The Days of a Man*). I assume that Bitov's novel *Japan*, whose initial title was *Dreams about Japan*, was a kind of symmetrical response to the 18th century Japanese masterpiece *Dreams about Russia*, written by Kodayu Daikokuya, a treatise which mixes pseudoethnographic description with lyrical visionary passages. This book was twice translated into Russian, and I have no doubts Bitov was intimate with it.

With the coming of glasnost, Bitov intended to publish his novel *Japan* after some additional stylistic elaboration. I was highly intrigued by this plot, especially after *A Professor of Symmetry* came out,

with a brilliant stylization of a contemporary multi-ethnic Western author, slightly in Conrad's or Nabokov's vein (English was not the fictional Vanoski's native language; hence Bitov's translation from English into Russian of a novel which itself was presumably translated from his mother language into English, at least in the bilingual imagination of the imagined author). I expected that Bitov's *Japan* would again induce a case of "doubled authorship," now with a Japanese hyper-author. According to Bitov's account, *Japan* was almost finished. But gradually all rumors about its pending publication disappeared, and my direct questions addressed to Bitov failed to receive any definite answer. Bitov complained that he was burdened with numerous urgent literary projects and administrative responsibilities. Indeed, since the early 1990s he has been the president of Russian Pen-Club. Thus, the publications of *Japan*, with a poetic anthology as its supplement, was postponed for an indefinite period.

The last time I saw Bitov was December 11, 1995, when he visited Emory by my invitation to give a lecture on Russian Postmodernism. In our conversation he confirmed again, with a visible reluctance, that *Japan* will be published in due time, but probably "in a modified form" (he did not go into details). On December 29 of the same year, in downtown Chicago, at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association, I met by chance Kent Johnson, whom I had not seen for several years. He shared with me news in the recent posthumous star of Araki Yasusada, and gave me some copies of Yasusada's publications. Not immediately, but with an increasing feeling of right guess, I recognized Bitov's stylistic charm in these English verses allegedly translated from Japanese...But why not directly from Russian? The point is that Kent Johnson (as the compiler and editor of a well-known and critically acclaimed anthology of contemporary Russian verse, *Third Wave: The New Russian Poetry*[2]) had much more grounded and first-hand familiarity with Russian poetry than with Japanese. The question that is raised in this: Is it possible that there is a connection between Kent Johnson, who is now prominently connected to Yasusada's legacy and Andrei Bitov a master of hyperauthorship and the author of the still unpublished novel *Japan*? Let me further explain.

I first met Kent Johnson in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad, the native city incidentally of Bitov) in 1989, at a conference on contemporary Russian culture. Kent was then busy collecting materials for *Third Wave*, his English anthology of the newest trends in Russian poetry of 1970s-80s. This anthology came out, with an afterward essay by myself, from University of Michigan Press in 1992 and had a significant success, particularly in the world of Slavic literature. It

was the first book in English representing the new wave of Russian poetry, and most valuably, it contained, in addition to verse, theoretical manifestos of the poets. Kent Johnson and his coeditor, Steven Ashby, managed to make a superb choice of authors and their representative works, as well as of skillful translators, for this unique collection. This project by itself would have justified Johnson's trip to St. Petersburg, but, as I suspect, it was in Russia that he got the impetus for the preparation of another anthology, this time a Japanese one, subsumed under the name of a central hyper-author (Yasusada), but including two of Yasusada's renga collaborators (Ozaki Kusatao and Akutagawa Fusei) and their three contemporary translators (Tosa Motokiyu, Okura Kyojin, and Ojiu Norinaga). I am amazed with what subtle skills this anthology has been translated from Russian into English in order to be finally presented as originally Japanese. Now I can also understand why Bitov withdrew his intention to publish *Japan* under his own name. To become a part of a foreign culture is a more inspiring, generous, and at the same time ambitious enterprise than just to add still another piece to the treasury of one's native language.

Yasusada's work is conceived not just as a poetical collection, but as a novel with its own sub-plot (the editorial piecing together of the fragmented record of a Hiroshima survivor), cast in the multigeneric form of diaries, letters, verses, comments, etc. The metagenre of "novel in verses" is deeply rooted in Russian literary tradition, with Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* as its prototype—the major source of Bitov's inspiration throughout all of his creative search and especially in his major novel *Pushkin's House*. No wonder that the novel *Japan* proved to be not just a novel with "poetic supplement" as was intended initially, but a "novel in verses," or more precisely, "a novel with verses." Every reader of Yasusada's texts will agree that verses constitute only one aspect of its larger literary whole which, like both Pushkin's and Bitov's novels, include numerous self-commenting pages, lyrical digressions, and critical reflections. This is truly a poetic novel of Yasusada's life, a novel in the traditions of Russian literature which now, with the aid of Kent Johnson's mediation, again invests its inspirations into the treasury of Japanese literature, but now even in the more palpable and congenial form of "a newly discovered author."

In Russian literature, authors like Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov, were for a long time the moral and artistic authorities for Japanese literature; now, with Bitov-Johnson's contribution, Russian literature becomes an indispensable part of Japanese literature, of its novelistic flesh and poetic blood. As a scholar of Russian literature, I can only rejoice at the fact of this transcultural interaction and

the resulting synthesis.

Hypothesis #2: This, I believe, is the least hypothetical of the two, being merely a combined statement of several well known facts. Among Russian authors presented in Kent Johnson's anthology of contemporary Russian poetry, one of the most preeminent figures is Dmitry Prigov, a close acquaintance of Bitov, and a central proponent of Russian Conceptualism, who is known for his poems and whole collections written on behalf of various characters and mentalities belonging to different cultures. As Prigov puts it in his manifesto published in Johnson's anthology, "the heroes of my poems have become different linguistic layers...A shimmering relationship between the author and the text has developed, in which it is very hard to define (not only for the reader but for the author, too) the degree of sincerity immersed in the text and the purity and distance of the withdrawal from it..."[3]

In 1987 or 1988 Prigov circulated a collection of verses on behalf of a Chinese woman poet, thus helping to fill the gap of female authorship in the highly developed but almost exclusively male-oriented Chinese classic tradition. Further, he planned to expand the cultural geography of his hyperauthorship by introducing a collection by a Japanese poet with "a rather universally comprehensible fate and sensibility." This collection was never published under the name of Prigov himself, and I submit that in this case the project of hyperauthors, hypereditors, etc., went along the lines of a global poetic plot (imitating and parodying the 'Zionist-Masonic conspiracy' as exposed in *The Protocols of Zion*). Prigov, in the spirit of 'new sincerity,' once confessed to me his "Masonic" conspiracy for the triumph of creative impersonality throughout the world of art.

Precisely by the time Prigov's Japanese collection was due to be finished (1989), Kent Johnson came for his first and only visit to Leningrad to meet with Prigov and other poets participating in the future Russian anthology. From my continuous personal talks with Prigov at this time (we even spent a rather sincere night of discussions and confessions in the apartment of our common friend, poet Viktor Krivulin) I could conclude that along with the poems he passed to Johnson for this anthology, there was an additional set of materials large enough to form a separate collection which, it is easy to conclude, came to be known as *Doubled Flowering* by Araki Yasusada.

I want to underscore once more that everything aforesaid is offered in the spirit of hypothesis, though all mentioned facts are true. I daresay these hypotheses do not need further factual verification, inasmuch

as the true identity of the person named Tosa Motokiyu (who, as I mentioned earlier, is now claimed by Johnson and Alvarez to be the "real" author of the work) is never to be revealed, according to his own last will. A question poses itself: Whose will is this, if its author refuses to be attributed its authorship? This is the same type of paradox that we find in the most famous of all logical paradoxes of "liar's type": "The liar says that he is always lying. Is it a truth or a lie?" If we believe Motokiyu's testament (that is, his statement that his true name is not to be revealed) then this is not Motokiyu's testament.

A vicious circle? But is not the same circle inscribed into another declaration of authorship? Is Shakespeare Shakespeare? Let us suggest that whoever Shakespeare was he succeeded to produce, in addition to *Hamlet* and other classical plays, the most enigmatic of his creations—the author named "Shakespeare," the one who wrote both prophetic *Hamlet* and his own almost illiterate will.

The vicious circle is a creative one. An author's imperative: to create an author. How can we trust a doctor who is permanently sick? There is a biblical saying: "Physician, heal thyself." How can we trust an author who limits himself to inferior characters, like tsars, generals, business people, etc., and cannot create an Author? Thus, we should be grateful to Motokiyu, who succeeded in creating Yasusada and, with astounding believability, his friends, translators, editors, and executors.

But who created Motokiyu? And who created his creator? The answer is infinitely deferred, to use the deconstructionist cliché, but what is more important and goes beyond the realm of deconstruction is the construction of infinite authors in the place of the absent single one. By this I do not mean to imply that the questioning of and quest for an original authorship should be qualified as a critical fallacy; the point, rather, is that the dispersion of creative origins is an artistic provocation that brings forth the possibilities of infinite answers. Why shouldn't such provocation productively exist alongside genetic paradigms of authorship? If the goal of creativity is the excess of meanings over signs, then the excess of authors over texts should be welcomed as a heretofore underappreciated vehicle for imagination. In hyperauthorship, each additional authorship is a way to change radically the overall meaning of the text. Each text is allowed to have as many authors as it needs to have in order to become infinitely meaningful.

Vladimir Nabokov once remarked on what makes literature different from the "true story" or "the poetry of testimony": "Literature was born not the day when a boy crying 'wolf, wolf' came running out of

the Neanderthal valley with a big grey wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when a boy came crying 'wolf, wolf' and there was no wolf behind him."[4]

A friend of mine with whom I shared this observation, remarked pessimistically: "In our wretched times, when the boy runs in crying 'wolf, wolf!' no poetry is born whatsoever—he will simply be dragged to court for 'making false statements' and 'disturbing the peace' of the pedestrian-minded." Some will regard such a view as overly gloomy, but it does suggest why, in our times, the boy might do well to disappear together with the ghostly wolf he dared to so bravely herald. In other words, the author is drawn to become fictitious in the way fiction is itself; the author shares the destiny of her characters and becomes one of them, like a chameleon—an illusion among illusions. Perhaps a new kind of literature is being given birth these days, one where neither the wolf nor the boy is to be found, even though the heart-rending cries go on echoing in the villagers' ears.

But wait, object the villagers, for in the meantime rumors about the wolf and the boy who supposedly are "never present" become more insistent and repetitious. Isn't this play of language with no ground exactly what we know as Postmodernism? If the wolf in this little parable represents the objective truth of classical art, while the boy, the subjectivist pathos of modernism, what, then, is the truth and the pathos enacted by their vanishing? Is it not blasphemy to "post-modernize" such a deeply pathetic experience as Hiroshima, the landscape of Yasusada's poetry? If everything becomes fiction, including the author, what is left that is real?

Theodore Adorno, with even deeper pessimism than my friend above, famously proclaimed that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz. We might likewise conclude that there can be no poetry after Hiroshima. But is this true? Could it be, instead, that poetry, as humanity on the whole, must become wholly different from what it used to be in order to fulfill its human calling after Hiroshima? If so, then the work of Yasusada can be seen as pointing toward one possible form of renewal. For in it, poetry reaches beyond the individual's original self-expression, beyond the "flowering" of one person, to become something other: a shared imagining and expression of humanity—of Russians, Japanese, Americans, of any nationality. We might say that in this work there exist as many potential authorships as there are individuals in the world who are aware of Hiroshima and associate themselves with the fate of its victims and survivors. Yasusada's fragments, letters, and mysterious poems become, through the egoless generosity of a person or persons we call Motokiyu, an appeal for a transpersonal (and thus selfless and in a sense authorless) empathy.

In conclusion, I must state again that all facts cited in this letter concerning real names, persons and historical circumstances, are true. It is only the interpretation of these facts which can claim the higher status of a hypothesis.

POSTSCRIPT: On November 15, 1996, my way crossed with Andrei Bitov's at a Slavic conference in Boston. I told him very briefly about Yasusada and shared with him my hypothesis about his potential authorship. He thought for a while and then noted: "The more hypothetical is one's approach to an author, the more truthful it may finally prove to be." "Does this relate to this specific case?" I asked directly. He evaded the direct answer and continued: "The value of hypothesis is to predict a thing which cannot be observed. The value of an authorship is to make possible what is impossible. A critical hypothesis about an author is just a reversed projection of his own creativity and does not need any further justification. As you know, some of my characters are literary scholars, which presumes that some literary scholars..." At this moment—we were strolling around the book exhibition—an acquaintance of Bitov approached him and distracted us from the conversation. Unfortunately, later on this day we had no opportunity to talk privately, and none of us wanted to bring this topic to public attention. Two details of this short exchange need to be emphasized. 1). Bitov didn't ask me what Yasusada's works were about. 2). Anyone familiar with Yasusada's style cannot but recognize its echoes in Bitov's manner of coining paradoxes.

NOTES

1. Ellen E. Berry, Kent Johnson, Anesa Miller-Pogacar, "Postcommunist Postmodernism: An Interview with Mikhail Epstein," *Common Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, 1993, Vol. 2, no. 3, p. 110.

2. *Third Wave: The New Russian Poetry*, ed. Kent Johnson and Stephen M. Ashby. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1992.

3. *ibid.*, p. 102.

4. *The Writer's Quotation Book: A Literary Companion* ed. James Charlton, New York: Penguin, 1986, p. 9.

Notes on Memory, Hypertext and Poetry
Exposing the Nerve

By William Marsh

I. Memory

> *my memory is*
> *the history of time*
>
> Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*

> *I have no way of remembering a day.*
> Bernadette Mayer, *Memory*

Between these two gestures, a 'crisis' in memory.

One claims the inclusion of self in a vast memory, which sweeps through history. The other implies the exclusion of self ("I have no way") from history, which sweeps through memory, erasing it. The one demands an immense accountability, for which "my memory" is the preferred scapegoat. The other negotiates (celebrates?) a release from such accountability, for which a person "remembering" would otherwise provide the agency.

Charles Olson's "memory" documents a fading biological memory which wants to remember its origin in the human body (myth and speech).

Bernadette Mayer's *Memory* documents a careening external memory which strives to remember its origin in language (words and writing).

* * *

I remember something my older sister said to me a few years ago after the arrival of her first and only child. "I can't remember," she said, "what life was like before the birth."

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I want to say, likewise, that human beings cannot remember life before language, but how would I say that? There seems to be evidence to the contrary. But.

Memory fails.

* * *

N.B. Each of these sentences progresses from head to fingertips to keyboard to screen. Any concept of "memory" articulated here is therefore progressively and irretrievably pushed out, or *externalized*, rather than *called up*, from memory. I think I memorize "memory" as I write it here.

(Mayer's *Memory* makes this point relentlessly.)

The issue is problematized if one accepts, as Douglas Hofstadter tells us, that "it is the organization of memory which defines what concepts are" (qtd. in Slatin 124). The *concept* of "memory," then, becomes a question for which the organization of memory suggests an answer.

* * *

Language, according to Merlin Donald's *Origins of the Modern Mind*, was initially used "to construct conceptual models of the human universe. Its function was evidently tied to the development of integrative thought—to the grand unifying synthesis of formerly disconnected, time-bound snippets of information" (215).

From the beginning, then, the circular *language—memory—concept—language...* by which the "snippets" are bound, integrated, networked.

* * *

First, though, the four stages of cognitive development in Donald's *Origins*:

Episodic (primate): Lives lived "entirely in the present, as a series of concrete episodes" (149). Episodic (internal, biological) memory "stores the specific details of situations and life events" (151).

—*first transition*—

Mimetic (primate/human): Development of "generative, recursive capacity for mime," "unlimited modeling of episodic events," and "primitive ritual (group mimetic acts)" (198).

—*second transition*—

Mythic (human): Emergence of spoken language and the first "conceptual models," preserved in stories (the first storage systems). The myth is "the prototypal, fundamental, integrative mind tool" (215), "the supreme product of the narrative mode..., the authoritative version, the debated, disputed, filtered product of generations of narrative interchange about reality" (258).

The first tool of conceptual modeling, then, is the vocal apparatus, the physical mechanism that enabled "sustained, high-speed production" of speech output (238). Let's also say that spoken language emerges as the first promise of an *externalized* memory, since spoken myth *confirms* (on the outside, in the "authoritative version") stories held (hidden/*caché*) in biological memory (on the inside).

—*third transition*—

Theoretic: Lives lived on the outside. Governing cognitive structures "exist mostly outside the individual mind, in external symbolic memory representations" (274). Furthermore, where the first two transitions followed the emergence of new biological hardware, i.e., the vocal apparatus, "the third transition was dependent on an equivalent change in *technological* hardware," specifically on devices or "mechanisms external to the individual biological memory" (274, author's emphasis).

Written language emerged as the first fully external memory storage system. Written language *stores* biological memory for selective retrieval.

*   *   *

By the time we get to Olson, in fact, distinctions between internal (biological) and external (technological) memory are irremediably blurred. *My* memory is the history of time, retrievable across epochs, storable across individuals.

This "across" implies the *trans*phenomenality of life in a theoretic culture. We are all linked across time and space.

"Individuals in possession of reading, writing, and other visuographic skills thus become somewhat like computers with networking capabilities; they are equipped to interface, to plug into whatever network becomes available.... Individuals connected to a cultural network can access an exterior memory bank, read its codes and contents, store new contributions in permanent form, and interact with other individuals who employ the same codes and access routes" (Donald, 311-312).

Donald, 313: "Of course, it is historically more accurate to reverse the metaphor and say that, in constructing computers, we have unreflectively emulated this feature of human society."

History reverses its metaphors after the fact.

*   *   *

The Computer:

John M. Slatin announces in 1990 that the "shift to machine memory may be as significant as the shift from orality to literacy," evidently because our uses for machine memory have "no precise analogue in the traditional text environment" ("Text and Hypertext" 124). However, while the shift to electronic digital storage may herald an unprecedented technological advancement, the use of technology itself (today, the computer) does in fact have a precise analogue in the traditional text environment: namely, in the use of *traditional text* as a memory storage system. Computer memory takes textual storage to the next level, or rather, to the next *accretion* of memory management: Digital storage promises to accommodate the "unlimited size" of the external symbolic storage system (ESS) as well as the "great increase in the number of symbolically encoded things that [can] be known" (Donald 319-320).

The computer, and the online information retrieval/dispersal systems which it serves, represents little more than the latest triumph of external memory.

*   *   *

What happens to biological memory? It becomes *map*—containing "information about the structure and access routes of the ESS"—and *cache*—temporary storage space for "the relevant parts" of the ESS (Donald 321).

Cache: from the French *cacher* (to hide): a hiding-place for treasure, provisions, ammunition, etc.

II. Hypertext

The Modern era, if it can be reduced to any single dimension, is especially characterized by its obsession with symbols and their management. Breakthroughs in logic and mathematics enabled the invention of digital computers and have already changed human life. But ultimately they have the power to transform it, since they represent a potentially irreversible shift in the cognitive balance of power toward complete ESS-based dominance of human cognitive structure.
Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind*

Most everything I have read recently on hypertext proceeds with a celebratory tone that underscores the apparent triumph of external memory. The "hypertext revolution" celebrates what could be called the deferral of the internal in favor of a clearly exchangeable (perceivable) externality. Cyberspace transcribes the abstraction of a fully externalized memory into a concrete system of nodes and hyperlinks whose function is to "retrieve" information for us, even though, paradoxically, it is "us" who provides the information.

* * *

Ted Nelson's utopic vision of the "docuverse" represents no more than the culmination of our collective hope to inhabit a universe of *externally perceived memory*, where once an invisible memory inhabited us, silently directing our thoughts and actions. Nelson envisions nothing less than a new storage system which "will represent at last the true structure of information…, with all its intrinsic complexity and controversy, and provide a universal archival standard worthy of our heritage of freedom and pluralism" (0/12). Quite fittingly, Nelson's name for his "framework of reunification" is Xanadu.

* * *

Oddly enough, the transfer of knowledge and thought processes to a hypertextual environment may represent a *return* to a time of exter-

nalized social exchange which the age of print had misplaced. Michael Joyce, quoting Walter Ong, suggests that the advent of print technologies "interiorized the idea of discrete authorship and hierarchy." Now, "as we move closer to a truly electronic, digital culture…, we *re-externalize* ideas and make them continuous rather than discrete, reciprocal rather than empowered, contextual rather than hierarchical. Value once again becomes embedded in the social fabric rather than the distributed product [i.e., the book]" (93, my emphasis).

So, the externalization of knowledge embodied in online hypertext systems is actually a *re*-externalization.

Or—

Online hypertext continues the process of externalized connectivity begun in the steady progression from speech to writing to print and finally to computer memory storage.

The prefix of Joyce's "re-externalized ideas," in other words, attempts to re-fix a cultural phenomenon already permanently installed.

* * *

"New era" projections contained in many discussions of the hypertext revolution are not utopian strictly because they are "techtopian." Rather they envision utopia in the transference of internal processes to an external environment, or "the spread of memory through an associational network" (Ulmer, qtd. in Glazier).

Joyce finds in Olson's notion of "proprioception" the perfect model for this kind of transfer. "Proprioception is the body's knowledge of its own depth and location, its internalized perspective of 'how to use oneself and on what,' in Olson's phrase" (2). Hypertexts, virtual realities and other computer-assisted thought environments serve to "externalize the internal" and "insist upon the permeability of the 'self' and the 'what' and the uses made of each. Cyborg consciousness invites us to turn proprioception outward…" (3).

Inside memory. Outside memory. In between: hypertext.

* * *

Hype or Text?

For many, hypertext has the appeal of 'the new' precisely in its offering a new locus of reader interactivity. That's all.

For some, that's enough: "hypertext's capacity for literally interactive reading *and co-authorship* represents a *radical departure* from traditional relationships between readers and texts" (Slatin, "Reading Hypertext" 159-160, my emphasis). Evidently, the "radical departure" comes in the form of an "authoring" capability on the part of the reader/user which may involve "composition of text, but also screen layout," "interface design," and "a certain amount of programming" (Slatin 160).

But similar occasions of "interactive reading and co-authorship" existed even in pre-alphabetic attempts at cuneiform interpretation. The early reader of cuneiform writing encountered meanings "presented in *visual clusters*...." The order apparently was not absolutely fixed at the earliest stage of cuneiform writing, and the reader was left with the task of reconstructing the message in each box, or visual cluster (Donald 288, author's emphasis).

Obviously, the "traditional relationships" to which Slatin refers are those of the conventional print environment, against which he hopes to position the 'new media' environment as a locus of reader interactivity by which reader becomes agency in the creation of meaning (rather than the interpretor of the ideational intent of the author, as in my cuneiform example). Certainly, the computer and electronic hypertext make such forms of interactivity more visible, more easily mapped, more *real*, in that reader productions within the permeable space of a hypertext creation become *visibly part of* the text being created.

Given the ostensibly refreshing newness of this kind of reader proactivity, a zealous celebration of hypertext's potential for revitalizing "our heritage of freedom and pluralism" (Nelson 0/12) seems understandable.

But the idea of a constructive and participatory reader is hardly a new thing. Nor are related notions of intertextuality, author/reader interchangeability, non-sequentiality, spatial rather than temporal arrangements of text—i.e., the now-familiar jargon of postmodern poetics

with which most discussions of hypertext and "new media" poetics are currently saturated. [1]

In *Hypermedia and Literary Studies*, editors Paul Delaney and George P. Landow admit that hypertext has its analogue (and heritage) in "major points of contemporary literary and semiological theory, particularly with Derrida's emphasis on decentering, with Barthes's conception of the readerly versus the writerly text, with post-modernism's rejection of sequential narratives and unitary perspectives, and with the issue of 'intertextuality.' In fact, hypertext creates an almost *embarrassingly literal embodiment* of such concepts..." (Delaney & Landow 6, my emphasis).

Why "embarrassing"? And why is the embarrassment so invasive as to merit repetition four pages later in the same introduction?: "Such notions are hardly novel to contemporary literary theory, but here

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[1] *Visible Language* 30.2 provides a good example. The issue, titled "New Media Poetry: Poetic Innovation and New Technologies," does a splendid job of gathering critical essays by such notables as Jim Rosenberg, John Cayley, Eduardo Kac (guest editor for this issue) and others. Topics of interest include Rosenberg's "Interactive Diagram Sentence," videopoetry, virtual poetry, holopoetry and interactive hypertext. Depth and diversity of analyses aside, the essays share a common debt to post-structuralist (typically French, mostly Derridean and Kristevan) literary theory, a debt paid in full via repeated and often stifling appeals to that institution's hard-line terminology. A quick survey yields the following examples (many echoed from essay to essay) of what could collectively be called the 'p-s speak' of recent literary theory: "juxtaposition," "non-linearity," text as "operational space" in which the relationships "author/text" and "reader/text" are applied, reader as "actor and not consumer," poem as "verbal galaxy of signs" [quoting Mallarmé, post-structuralism's *example préférée* of non-linear poetic text], letters and signs gaining "movement of their own" [echoing Kristeva's *gramme mouvant*], "exploratory reading," written language as "system of signification and meaning creation," "multi- or non-linear" poetics, "radically indeterminate" literature, "textual instability," "fluid sign," "inbetween meanings," "syntax of disruptive events," language that "evades and deflects" interpretation, "fragmentation," words that "twirl," "stretch," "deform," "contort" and "collapse", textuality as "signifiers in motion" [again echoing Kristeva], etc. In short, the "new poetry for the digital age" promised by its practitioners clearly owes its poetics to a groundwork post-structuralism, and very rarely (in this particular issue and elsewhere) is the debt directly acknowledged. When it is [as in my next note], the acknowledgement inspires an interesting reaction.

again hypertext creates an almost embarrassingly literal reification or actualization of a principle or quality that had seemed particularly abstract and difficult in its earlier statement" (10).

Embodiment. Reification. Actualization.

Making solid and real the abstract and disembodied. Codifying theoretical abstractions in the concrete space of the computer screen. As the typewriter codified abstract notions of 'open field' composition, so does the networked computer codify notions of 'hyper' or 'inter-textuality.' (Both terms, it helps to point out, were introduced at roughly the same time in the Sixties, in the contexts of Nelson's and Kristeva's early writings, respectively).

Perhaps the embarrassment lies in this analogy—that hypertext represents for the most part a simple shift to a new medium, albeit a medium that, again, *makes concrete & visible* the abstract and invisible processes of inter- and meta-textuality popularized (and generally misunderstood, as some have argued) in American post-structuralist theory and criticism. We find it embarrassing that the "brand new" of computer hypertextuality is the *sorte passée* of post-modern textuality.

* * *

Or perhaps the embarrassment lies in the possibility that hypertext, as a cluster of proprioceptive instances "played out" externally on the computer screen, gives us an all-too clear look at our associate minds in action. Naked in front of the mirror, among a community of naked and equally mesmerized onlookers, we are embarrassed to "see" ourselves think—*physically inverted* before the screen on which the formerly internal thought network assumes an external reality whose potential precision and exactitude is enough to bring a blush even to the most austere of witnesses.

* * *

The story begins with Vannevar Bush's insistence in a 1945 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* that "the human mind...operates by association...in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain" (qtd. in Joyce 22). Then, roughly twenty years later in 1968, Douglas Engelbart develops the first "full-blown prototype hypertext system" which begins his "lifelong exploration into what he terms 'a

co-evolutionary process—new knowledge processes and new tools evolving together in real working environments'" (Joyce 22). This notion of *hyrbrid* evolution is echoed in Donald: The recent combination of our "cognitive architecture" with electronic media and global computer networks "has changed the rules of the game forever.... At the very least, the basic ESS loop has been supplemented by a faster, more efficient memory device that has externalized some of the search-and-scan operations used by biological memory" (358). Enter the cyborg....

Meanwhile, as Engelbart is developing his prototypical hypertext system, Theodor Nelson begins work on a program designed to keep track of what one writer for *Wired* called the "frantic multiplication of associations his brain produced.... [Nelson's] great inspiration was to imagine a computer program that could keep track of all the divergent paths of his thinking and writing. To this concept of branching, nonlinear writing, Nelson gave the name hypertext" (Wolf 140).

It is interesting to note that Nelson operates in a cognitive zone that psychology has termed "attention deficit disorder," defined in part as the inability to negotiate a strictly linear sequence of thoughts. (Memory fails). One might want to think of hypertext, therefore, as a vision of the world according to Ted Nelson—with "deficit" converted to "asset," and "disorder" reinscribed as "order" in the multiplex environment of online space. It also may help to remember that for Generation X-anadu, A.D.D. is literally the *order* of the day. Even Nelson sees in his memory predicament "the general human failure to remember" (Wolf 141), and in his hypertext modality the perfect solution to the problem.

* * *

So, we inherit hypertext as the external memory manifold in which we trace, map out, our associative leaps *as* they occur, *before* they disappear.

Hypertext = the end of forgetting.

* * *

As a *simulated* end to forgetting, hypertext shows us how we think (exposes the nerve). John Slatin points out that "everything in hypertext depends upon linkage, upon connectivity between and

among the various elements in the system…. A hypertext link is the electronic representation of a perceived relationship between two pieces of material…. That is, the link *simulates* the connections in the mind of the author or reader; and it is precisely because the electronic link is only a simulation that problems will arise" ("Reading Hypertext" 161).

One has to wonder (Slatin doesn't pursue the question) what kinds of "problems will arise" due to the fact that the "link is only a simulation." Problems of error? misdirection? reduction? Will the hyperlink forge an associative path which belies the path I could/might have followed if my search mechanism were only a dictionary and an index finger? Or will the problems run a little deeper, in the false representation (in a finite hypertext-as-memory) of an otherwise infinite manifold of human memory (the history of time)? Will memory collapse into itself, having already forgotten itself in the complete surrender to externality theorized in Donald's prediction of a "potentially irreversible shift" toward "complete ESS-based dominance"?

* * *

It could be argued that herein lies another embarrassing aspect of hypertext, i.e., that it simulates, and simulates *poorly,* a cognitive process that works a lot better *in the abstract.* Hypertext productions could easily be accused of 'doing the work for me,' of supplanting the imagination and the general appeal of creating my own "link" from material A to material B, and of removing or at least restricting the possibility for error and digression that often leads to the pleasure of discovery. In exploratory hypertext, paths are decentered, borders between discrete texts eliminated, authors effaced and readers empowered, but there's nothing 'open' about the *potential* permutations of paths, nor are target frames random or accidental. Hypertext may embody abstract intertextuality, but it operates within a closed parameter whose boundaries lie in the set of specified directions written into the program, by the programmer(s).

Perhaps in response to this general limitation, Michael Joyce offers an alternative in what he calls "constructive hypertext," which "differs from the transitional exploratory hypertext in that its interaction is reciprocal rather than empowered" (179-80). The interactive hypertext artisan, in other words, builds form and meaning (building links, designing interfaces, for example) *in coordination* with pre-pro-

grammed structures, so that even these nascent structures evolve in response to reader input. Likewise, however, a "constructive" hypertext also simulates a cognitive process whose "ideal" analogue lies in the mind's constructive capabilities. Again, it seems, we learn from hypertext how we think (associate, link, create, construct), and also perhaps how we learn—which lends authenticity to the pedagogical uses to which hypertext programs are often put (admittedly, Joyce's chief concern in his discussion). What we don't learn from hypertext is how this simulation adapts, or even enhances through duplication, the practices of abstract thought.

Once again, we're in front of the mirror, at first blushing but later admiring and celebrating the intricacies of a vastly externalized human cognition. However, we are nowhere near knowing how to *inhabit the reflection*—despite claims by celebrants that computerized hypertext marks just such a change in habitat.

III. Poetry

> *in order for the third body to be written, the exterior must enter and the interior must open out.*
>
> Hélène Cixous (qtd. in Joyce 221)

We can postulate two bodies. Let's call the first the "internal" body— the body of biological memory, of self, of Olson's memory. Let's call the second the "external" body—the body of digital memory, of hypertext, of Mayer's impossible "remembering," of the new *other.*

This second body is created inside-out, its neural pathways exposed, coursing vein-like not under but over the skin. I think of Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil* and its ubiquitous system of air ducts—only in the real world of hyperconductivity, the conduits are electronic, and our collective memory nodes—externalized and inverted—are the walls along which these conduits run, firing thought "snippets" at the speed of light.

* * *

In this belabored context, perhaps Olson's "proprioception" *is* the key. "Proprioception is depth perception," Joyce summarizes, "from the body (even the body of the text) outward…" (171). Depth is the first

simulation effected by computer hypertext. We follow the links down/back/out to different levels of text and imagery, and so occupy a network of places whose chief dynamic is the *writing* of places, or "a writing *with* places, with spatially realized topics" (Bolter 112).

"Our intuition is that we write proprioceptively, as the child's hand does, summoning the space of memory outward" (Joyce 171). And to amend: summoning the space of memory inward, writing the third body in the circular breathing path *qua* hyperlink connecting internal and external memory.

* * *

In a poetics of hypertext, "the child's hand" writes with a mouse and a keyboard, although even the latter, the last link to the biological, to the alpha-beta, already seems archaic, outdated, despite its continued functionality.

The child's hand points and clicks, and surfaces give way. To other surfaces. "It is a dream of depth, expressed in the depth of an elastic and windowing world" (Joyce 171).

* * *

Hypermedia poetries promise an exchange of *surface tactility* for *depth permeability*. Some want to use the word "touch" to describe this experience of depth: "I wanted to create text that gave way(s) before the touch, that could be caressed into motion or repose without end," Michael Joyce says of his hypertext work *afternoon, a story* (187), seeking metaphors in the concrete and tactile world of physical touch for a writing process suddenly abstract again. For there is nothing "deep" about hypertext, and the screen is no more window-like than the page, despite the disparate textures of each. Writing once-again-as-always is an art of surfaces *giving way(s)*, as Joyce intimates, to other surfaces.

* * *

"We are in the late age of print; the time of the book has passed" (Joyce 97).

Despite claims to the contrary by even the most astute defenders of 'new media' poetries, electronic writing will most likely not *replace* books or print anymore than written language replaced speech or

print replaced handwriting. There's certainly the possibility that we will *forget* the book, except as a *virtual* reality, a simulation. We might forget its pleasures, as perhaps in Western culture we have forgotten the real pleasures of a shared communal orality: of gathering, story-telling, of myth, of information exchange before written languages and the book codified its conventions. I imagine a future generation quite simply estranged from the tactile pleasures of book reading—or one for whom the tactile pleasures of electronic writing (web sculpting) serve instead: "The feel for electronic text is constant and plastic, the transubstantiated smear that, like Silly Putty, gives way to liquid or, like a painter's acrylics, forms into still encapsulated light," writes Joyce in a curious deployment of painterly metaphors that may only serve to point out just how devoid of "feel" current electronic texts are.

Electronic writing will most likely, however, simply *nudge* books and print technology into a new domain, one whose margins currently seek definition. There is also the possibility that books will become (or already are, as Joyce argues) "an obscure pleasure like the opera or cigarettes" (97). But not, it seems to me, if we are *clear on the domain* in which printed books exist.

Print culture "disappears" under web or hyper-culture in the same sense that "orality" disappears under literacy. The spoken word sustains itself via a 'domain-shift' whose chief exemplar is the *conversation*. (Interestingly, new media enthusiasts often extol the virtues of hypertext by analogy to spoken interaction. Michael Joyce, for example: "It is not a transmission but, rather, a conversation we must keep open" [182].) Likewise, print undergoes a domain-shift whose principal advantage now lies, oddly enough, in its supposed limitations in relation to electronic writing: "Print stays itself; electronic text replaces itself" (Joyce 186).

* * *

Print stays itself. Electronic text replaces itself. We should pause here.

In both definitions, a shared activity (or potential for activity) for which the term *motility* (capability of motion) seems appropriate.

Electronic text replaces itself in that it exercises its capability—with

manic and relentless precision—to yield to other texts, constantly giving way(s) to "some mutant foliage" (Joyce 111). The potential movement of electronic text is always realized as *actual movement*. In the electronic environment, we find, as Charles Bernstein has said of visual poetry, "words freed from the tyranny of horizontality, or sequence...." (qtd. in Glazier).

Print stays itself, however, in that potential movement (of the letter, the word, the phrase) stays potential. The printed word *documents a stasis*, a non-movement, and though we have learned to understand the illusory nature of this stasis—that the word is in fact a "moving gram," to borrow Kristeva's term—the emergence of an electronic environment for hypertextual writing, oddly enough, *frees the word to be solid again*, to not move, to exercise motility *without* exercising mobility.

* * *

"Only in the late age of print can we again see the word in its awkward freshness..." (Joyce 225)

A *motility poetics*, committed to resolving the ostensibly complicated differences between writing for the page and writing for the web, concerns itself entirely with "the word in its awkward freshness." As motility, the word can either "stay the same" as printed text or "replace itself" as electronic hypertext—and the play between environments (on or offline) becomes more than just a stage for debating poetry's preferred domain in the 21ˢᵗ century. As motility, language occupies both domains concurrently, and composition becomes a matter of exercising potentiality in either *placement* or *replacement* of the word in page or electronic space. Theory in this environment should set itself the task of *charting word motility* as one of the first steps in linking any discussion of conventional text and hypertext—and avoiding dangerous dismissals of either as outmoded or faux-progressive, respectively.

The question for poetry has been: Does electronic hypertext offer a new methodology for writing, or simply a new medium for the practice of familiar methodologies? To consider language as motility (the potential to place or replace) revises the question: How do words behave in on and offline space, and how do we construct a methodology that comprehends practice in both domains?

If electronic hypertext occupies the seam between internal and external memory—a tentative conclusion in need of further investigation—then as an "interim" environment it does bring forth a revised (third) body, and one for which the writing of hyperpoetry becomes a proprioceptive event: to practice a kind of "depth reading" that runs from the internal to the external and back again. Writing on the way-giving surfaces of hypertext invents the internal as it maps the external, and vice versa. Memory (and the writing of memory) thus resides in *both* the internal and the external in that it ultimately resides in *neither*. Memory inhabits the *reflexivity* of internal and external, of biology and technology. Cyborg consciousness is the reflex re-fleshed, and then refreshed.

Each replacement in hypertext (a screen giving way) subverts its reflexivity and becomes strictly a placement, a place. A place meant. Each node in the linked environment is, each time, the primary location, the real place, the "only" environment—although it constantly gives way to the assertive presence of other nodes whose location is likewise primary.

That we exercise a reflexive proprioception "on the screen" matters only in the sense that we defer once again (as we have with verbal and written language and print tools) to ever-more external technologies, to externality itself, as the chosen/preferred venue of perception. We devise mechanisms on the outside to harness, direct, construct, functionalize the vast process of ideation that began on the inside.

A reflexive poetry (on or off line) is as always hypertextual, conflating the first and second into the third body. Electronic hypertext is the "refresh zone" in which this third body glows in the light of its own reflection.

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Readings & Responses

The Good, the Bad, and the Fuzzy
By Chris Stroffolino

THE FUZZY LOGIC SERIES BY JOE ROSS (TEXTURE PRESS, 1997)

Joe Ross's *The Fuzzy Logic Series*, in its hope or fear that "tomorrow would come even if we decided not to write" (28) and its on-again, off-again belief that "too much thinking / isn't a good thing" (43) includes some of the most engaging poems I've read in the maximalist mode since Jane Reavill Ransom's poems in *Generator #6* (1994) and since Bob Perelman turned his back on the "rennetless" achievements of *Face Value* to opt for more academic engagements. It is, for me at least, Ross's best book since his early *Guards of the Heart* (Sun & Moon, 1990) and the poems gathered in the unfortunately out-of-print, limited edition *De-flections* (1994), even if my saying so runs the risk of labeling me one of his "post-language school friends" who would "laugh at or find trite" anything resembling a love poem (38), those smug, inhuman, implied interlocutors Ross sometimes addresses and other times simply assumes as a backdrop he needs to remind himself of in order to separate himself (and perhaps us as well) from.

If one of the achievements of this book is the way it questions the role an implied audience plays in its authorship, it is not simply the unnamed "post-language" writers that are challenged here, but also those who may expect more traditional forms of lyric beauty—for Ross's book is not a "pretty" book, but "an earnest act of necessity"(1) that includes many lines that are "too personal to read or consider when sober" (46) and challenges *any* aesthetic assumption one may bring to the act of reading. This, of course, is a strenuous standard to hold oneself to and Ross, ever aware that there is a disturbing and sometimes painful tendency for "needs to become ideas on the way to justification" (3), must at times relent and allow himself to partake in the various aesthetic pleasures, strategies and even "devices" (22) that have been known to characterize various 'competing' poetic aesthetics (or ethical postures) that only seem incompat-

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Chris Stroffolino's books include OOPS *(Pavement Saw Press),* Cusps *(Aerial/Edge) and* Light as a Fetter *(forthcoming from Situations Press).*

ible from the point of view of what Perelman would call "prior genre commitments" or Plato's "one man one role" formula for a well-ordered society. The result is a densely polyvocal book in which everything may seem, at first, to be permitted. On repeated readings, however, it becomes clearer (though beyond the scope of this present review) what Ross rejects.

The book begins at various places: 1) "Where Western Logic Ends," 2) where "there is nothing left to build," and 3) where "suddenly words mean loss"—to name but three. What these starting places have in common is the sense of *reckoning*, of coming to terms with certain assumptions (such as the "American dream" of ambition, greed, impatience, imperialism) that may sneak up on even the most resolute antiestablishmentarian, unconsciously, and despite one's most desperate attempts to distinguish oneself from them. Ross tries a different tactic here and turns such desperation against itself in hopes of achieving a certain casual ability to live without "baggage" (5) and in the present, even when there is not as much time ("and students / or critics") (14), or space, as one would wish to write in.

One rhetorical strategy appealed to in this "quest" is paradox, which he employs to open a gap in language (or is employed by to *discover* the gap in language) and rescue meaning from tautology (look, for instance, at what happens to the word "simple" in this sentence: "And how simple / logic disintegrates upon / too simple conversation"). There is, however, more than a merely linguistic truth to Ross's repeated realizations that it is often difficult to reject obscurantism for simplicity, his awareness that "the steam obscures but that's too easy" (2)—for such obscurity is "the paltry measure" wherein we are "dressed up in indecision" (5), even if the alternative to such a costume, to "never try to say anything without first taking off your clothes" (5), may be comically unrealistic, especially if poetry is an always already "public act" in which TVs are "in your head" (32) and the reader is *always* mistaken to identify his or her 'ego' with the speaker who is *not* the lead singer of Pearl Jam (17).

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to downplay the role of the need for a kind of "naked poetry" in *The Fuzzy Logic Series*. The war with impatience, with worrying about the future, with how others perceive you, with war itself (and baggage), is quite seriously engaged in this book, even in its very comedy. When Ross writes, "Go grab the hammer ground into sand" (1), one may think not only of Blake's injunction to see a world in a grain of sand, but also of his unfallen Los, the representative of the poetic imagination, hammering away at his own desire to constantly destroy until he reaches the point of recursive return, to a harvest of acceptance of his own limits which are no longer seen as flaws. Something like this occurs in the love-poem "Frozen Dinners" where the realization that the "frame" is part

of the "picture" (1) allows Ross to heed the voice that says "But let's wait" rather than the corporate-backed voice of impatience that tells him (and us) "we're running out of time." (4)

In these "contemplation songs" (46), we see "the contest / that's thought" (8) in which "several competing voices drive the machine in turn" (7). It would seem that one has to be stuck in this machine to be able to engage in an "immanent critique" of it, but in poetry, of course, one does not always do so (as fellow Washingtonian Rod Smith suggests in "Bad Ashbery But Fun" in which "a musical event" need not be taken for "a lyric kingdom"). In fact, I almost forgot, there is a tradition that says that poetry is *supposed to* step outside of thought, and embody a kind of "out of the argument experience." But, wait a second, if I am aware that a tradition says it, how do I know that I'm *feeling* it? How can the feeling of being outside the machine *not* be colonized by the machine? This, I take it, is one way of phrasing the central question of Joe Ross's poetry and in the *Fuzzy Logic* poems it's presented as a daily, even momentary, task: "Too even discussion / is pointless unless valued in the act" (7) that rejects "theory in favor of the ride" (13). Ross *wants* these points, gets these rides, and gets them through the speed of his drunken discursiveness and the disjunctive periods and commas of this sentence-based work.

The *machine* comes in various guises, and may be where one least expects it—i.e., it may be in the desire to live in the moment. This desire is *not (always) the same* as actually living in the moment, and when it's not, when one feels a doubt that overrides feeling (i.e., when every feeling seems in doubt, and therefore doubt seems like the only feeling), one may need to appeal to ritual, to ceremony, to "feeling / the history" (9) and other "hand rails" (9) such as the (necessary) lie of security in order "to replace the romance lost" (10): "So that's fine / that security is a lapse of release / on its way to an all night burden." (10) As O'Hara once put it, "our responsibilities didn't begin in dreams though they did begin in bed." Some say that the urge for security is what creates many of the problems of our society. Others say that many of the problems of our society create the urge for security. Ross alternately tries on each of these "competing voices." This does not make him noncommittal, but it does show an ambivalence not easily pinned down ("There's nothing accidental nor is everything on purpose")(11), except by a moment, by an urgent necessity, even if it is the urgent necessity casualness must sometimes come off as in order to be heard. The fact that it's *fine* that there is a lapse of release and an all night burden may be ironic, but I feel that the weight of this sentence is tipped *towards* rather than away from security. There seems to be a suspicion here that, in certain circles at least, "release" has gotten better press than it deserves and Ross's joke may be very well on the cult of indeterminacy, the *carpe diem* "release"

proponents that dress themselves in airs, and are probably too good to be true. In this sense, and in his desire for "gravity's recourse" (rather than its mere rainbow), Ross is an equalizer, a grave digger, akin to the cleaners that "have a lot to do before even the introductions can begin" (5).

The gravity of Ross's project reaches its apotheosis (if not its *logical* conclusion) in the second half of this book. There is a decidedly different character to the later poems in *The Fuzzy Logic Series*. They are much more lamenting of socio-political realities and myths. Here we see the pressure of the lack of time most clearly *impinging* on poetic license. Here the possibilities of a pure poetry become derogatory "straps to keep me or you from internalizing too much of this... america [that's] killing you nonetheless." (41) Such a tone affords Ross access to more than a few ruminative twists on what such 'devices' as allusion and symbol come to mean in a conspicuous consumption society (for instance, "Each flag means a ship or a new pair of Nikes or whatever / company I think might be around long enough to make it to / this time when you read it." (43) Yet this Brechtian alienation between writer and reader contrasts starkly with the more utopian hope (or denial of such a gap) of "End Stop" in which "local time / matches arrival time" (16) on the plane it is difficult to tell whether Ross is on or not; and it reminds us that just because he doesn't "have anything *more important* to say than an close hug or a peaceful sleep with breast cupped in hand) (31) (emphasis added) doesn't mean that the other issues are *less* important.

This is not to say that there isn't a kind of Dionysiac pleasure in the way Ross seems to relish the pressure "of the outside"—as evidenced, for instance, in "Fuzzy, Fuzzy Night": "We...put the top down to trickle up some breeze to / cool our over heated expectations of living in some / semblance of our collective American dream. So the / car needed a new muffler to keep from drowning out / the sky watcher's traffic reports while idling...." (46) But there is, for me at least, an even more engaging pleasure in the mode of intimate address Ross has discovered in poems like "Proof Marks" ("But I guess / that's alright because I can tell you really love me by the way you've started / to remake me") (18), and if Ross is actually able, as I think he is, to manage to think his way out of thinking in the best of these poems, this may explain why these excerpts do not do him justice—for his drunken discursiveness does manage to provide a kind of shelter for what may seem here to be mere confessionalism brought to you by whatever capitalism I think might be around long enough to make it "after a prolonged appetizer of wait." (28)

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A Response to Jefferson Hansen's "Anarchism and Culture"

By Stephen Ellis

In his essay on poetic practices in *Witz* (Fall 1996), Jefferson Hansen employs the terms *culture* ("previous notions of good taste") and *anarchism* ("explor[ing] new questions and evolv[ing] new standards"), which he posits as being poles of a continuum. "Every poem," he says, "is produced within a poetic network," and "[a]t the moment of composition a poem is at the nexus of four forces: the writer, the assumed audience, potential publishing venues, and potential performance venues."

The tenor of Hansen's piece has to do with the varying degrees to which both anarchistic and cultural norms occur within the individually necessary workings-out of poetic form. While he claims at the outset, that his definitions of these and other terms are "provisional," he also insists that "[i]t is impossible for a poet to follow a personal vision. Poetry is irreducibly social, like language itself. There is no such thing as poetry of value operating outside a network of audience, writers, and publication venues." If the results of individual poetic acts can be valorized only with respect to a social function, then where does the moral aptitude resident within such a function come to term? Hansen concentrates the thrust of his essay on an over-view of 'forms' within a poetic community, without foregrounding an equally essential fallibility amongst peers that would critique what he claims is the primary value of a poetic function, i.e., the social, and each individual's *place* in it.

The moral element inherent in social mechanics is diminished here in favor of what I take to be Hansen's concern for a certain 'careerism'—the idea that poetry is a deliverable product related most primarily to a 'distribution network'—i.e., remuneration for one's practice socially in the form of publication and reputation, in which 'anarchism' is simply another kind of institutionalized technique through which one's own practice may discover 'new terms' that do little more than produce more work and 'open up' further sites of investigation in the altogether far-too-generalized medium of poetic

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networking, a kind of self-congratulatory sanitational kissing off of those for whom one has no actualizing use.

While a network of readers and other writers may be essential in learning of what one's position among them *is*, and can become, it seems a real mistake to reduce an address concerning the function of poetics to a network in which broader moral questions are eliminated in favor of a codification of ideas that institutionalize poetics in a hierarchical justification of reputation, 'useful techniques' and niggardly self-servitude.

A function of poetics far broader than any network of like-thinkers *does* exist, not so much in literal numbers of readers, but in the subtler combine of aesthetics *and* moral redress, i.e., that one may address a community 'at large' by addressing the moral ground within which the community operates, and which, to a certain extent, compels a *particular* form of it. The inclusion of moral elements vis-a-vis the ways in which *language use* upholds certain values and represses others is more essential to both poetic *and* public practice, whether daily or 'millennial,' than any gloss of the possibilities of poetics as a commodity; the fact that Hansen puts more weight on a general view of poetic form than on an intimate practice of moral implication ritualizes individual volition right out of the picture; in his view, identity formation results in a *product* that caps the process that produced it, vis, for example, his statement, "[w]hen considering distribution, poetry is most effectively thought of as a product, not a vision. Sorry." If vision is simply 'a world view,' then what, exactly, does Hansen suppose is the otherwise essential thing being "distributed"? Isn't the *value system* that runs through a society the broadest 'distribution system' of all—& one that deals, not *in* products, but *with* actions? And don't one's gestures within a particular value system have a residual effect on that system, not through any standard distribution network, however factionalized, but simply because ideas themselves have a tendency to 'leak' into the system at a variable rate having little to do with the value of the ideas as such? Like gossip, *I saw what you did*, etc.: material.

The isolation and marketing of 'a poetics economy' may be the result of textual over-confidence inthe matters of aesthetic production, one's own 'telemetric embrace' thought to be nothing less than *the world itself*, privatization sold as 'public interest.' This seems an extremely limited view, despite Hansen's praises toward a 'plurality of praxis'; the text, no matter how 'plural,' is still the single result of merely *habitual* production, a tact wrought of ritualization. In this regard, the following, from the *Tao Te Ching*, seems pertinent: "...when Tao is lost, there is goodness. When goodness is lost, there is kindness. When kindness is lost, there is justice. When justice is lost, there is ritual." Is this what we've come down to: the production of poetic forms for the sake of the form itself, a distributive quality that commands an aesthetic including neither moral aptitude nor even the means toward asking, if not *why we do it*, then at least *who we do it for*?

Aesthetic production that reduces its means to the monotony of making more of the same must perforce claim a useful social role for its own continuation; this is the centerpiece—left unsaid—of Hansen's argument. But when the authority for such a continuum is partner to ritualization, cognition becomes an endless sequel to itself, apparent 'newness' is never *felt* as such, its presence swapped for a future toward which the profoundly common as a moral guide becomes so much abstruse baggage that gets left behind. While the question of who and what poetic production is *for* may remain suspended toward such time as the practice itself begins to make its answers clear, can't we say that as production becomes ritualized, and ritual a king, we'd best cut out the fat from any easy moral sublimations? *Knowing what we do* (who we are) does remain a strengthening activity, but only insofar as others are present in the activity as witnesses and participants; while these persons may comprise a factionalized sector of a society, more or less sympathetic to one's particular activity, let it be said that they may also be whoever one approaches.

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