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THREE POWER DANCES

First Dance: God Who Walks Like a Bear

a great Female Bear
wide as a house         sings
out of Her dark cave
   under Her fringed roots      sings
   up from Her furred clutch    sings
that hides the mouth of Her hunger sings
out of Her sounding womb hung
with vines warming the honey       sings

sweetheart let Me grieve you
with a new music
made of old men’s bones
   loosen your tongue
   loosen your blood with music
too stiff to move with Me
   walk you from word to word
thick at the joints with knobs
   bang our sweet bones together
sweetheart let Me empty you
    hollow you out with moving
cric crac cric crac
I am too old to dance with you
but I will dance you a pretty dance
cric crac

sweetheart let Me skin you
    with rhythms of My furred touch
My great hairy shapeless hands
    so soft you'll never feel
    through brush of my drums

how the layers slide off you
    to lay you bare to love
while every stripped muscle cries

let the old She Bear lie
down and hold you in Her arms.

Second Dance: The Bear Dancer's Stomp

woke from Her hungry sleep
    all the winter moons long
    rumbling with it, stomped:
I'll come away My lovely man
    to stamp with you, to shake with you
My great shambling animal dance
    that changes the hunting moon

hear how the night rides Me
I'll walk you first a beaer Bear
    shaggy at elbow
    heavy the broad back wide as your Mother's house
old Woman of the mountain massive and black lipped
to squat in My man's door
I'll crow you a Rooster Bear heavy with feathers, shake out scraggly wings,
strut high with My curved spurs, shake wattles, shake tail,
Bear painted with dawn stripes,
clawed Singer of morning, Mate of the Sun

come strut out beside me, you, screaming, My Stallion
I'll snort you a Mare here, flare wide My nose holes,
with My Horse lips sneer, shake a mean snout,
Bear rearing and screaming to strike with My hooves hard hammer your skull, split the cup, spill the brain

see Me snap now, the swamp God / Bear edged with scissor teeth,
whip with My ridged tail, My lizardly loves churn,
Bear grown all Alligator, Bear of the swamp’s heart,
to snip you right through the trunk, slice the heart’s tree

shriil with My sharp beak I’ve ciroled above you, rode your night’s veils,
Bear with an Eagle’s wings, Mother of all high death,
My eyes have screeched plunged to you
My beak missed down to hum home in your eyes

see how I fly you blind
Bear with My wing span that measures the edge of sight,
mountain and gorge sounds, covers the sun from you,
home to My call letters
hear how I mark My scent
rat-tat on the dust skin, be: pound you flat, be: dance you down;
be: My spurs to strike such music up, be your teeth to jingle at My waist/
your head be My hooves’ bell
you heart be My steel drum
hair, scales, hooves, wattles, furred beak, ridged tail
this is My power dance
this is My Bear stomp
this My bones sail and ride

as I plummet to lie like you
bound in My hide
Third Dance. The Last Bear’s Going

you have made the world unfit for me
your air not my air
the sour juice your veins make
shrivels my tongue

gently the moon down
the hills down the long down
leaves of the world’s fall
glides down to sleep
the snow down deep
drift bellied winter out

not to be mine again

oh and as i go
naked in your human night
my skin dress my coarse hair
covers the bones i wear

i die
i slide
i ride
into your moon
into your blood
the spilled night out
here where my salt rough sea tongue works
through caverns of your mouth
slow

Master of Earth

how thick
flows
this Your life

that chokes me
Your long night down.

Judith Johnson Sherwin
PEACE

I have heard the crowd of the spanked speak about dignity, says the Master of Ho. And I did not laugh.

New laws have been drawn up. The new laws are come. Laws accumulate, says the Master of Ho, but always they are the edict of the old crone, the dwarf, sparse leaves of a tree already uprooted.

Peace, says the Master.

Peace and restlessness. These are the peregrinations of the doe and the panther until at last they come together. Oh the moment! Oh the extraordinary moment! when everything will become so simple, so simple.

Peace, says the Master of Ho.
LE CALME

J'ai entendu la foule des fessés parler
de fierté, dit le Maître de Ho. Et je n'ai
pas ri.

Les lois nouvelles ont été préparées.
Des lois nouvelles sont venues. Les lois
s'accumulent, dit Le Maître de Ho, mais c'est
toujours l'édit de la vieille naine, feuilles
éparses d'un arbre déjà déraciné.
Le calme, dit le Maître.

Le calme et l’inquiétude. Ce sont les
pérégrinations de la biche et de la panthère
jusqu'à ce qu’enfin elles se rencontrent. Oh
moment! oh moment extraordinaire! et tout de-
vient si simple, si simple.
Le calme, dit le Maître de Ho.
SPHINXES

Everything comes down, says the Master of Ho. Everything comes down, you're wandering already through the ruins of tomorrow.

The Man who's speaking to you is a Sphinx. The man that you were, the father that you had were sphinxes. All right, what sense did you make of the Sphinx who mastered you?

He who does not melt the man who comes to him, a Sphinx is formed of him and it is of the Sphinx that one dies.

Everything hardens, says the Master of Ho, everything hardens and comes back to the head. Your unfinished deed, the failure of your heart, the remark that strikes your ear

The smile, the pure face, that greedily you watch, it's he, it's he himself, misunderstood, who will give you your wound, and who, when the time comes, with never-ending hard rocks will weigh you down

Everything settles. Everything yields stone, says the Master of Ho. From the lip to stone, from the honeycomb to ruin
LES SPHINX

Tout tombe, dit le Maître de Ho. Tout tombe, déjà tu erras dans les ruines de demain.

L’Homme qui te parle est Sphinx. L’homme que tu fus, le père que tu as eu était sphinx. Eh bien, qu’as-tu compris au Sphinx qui te fut soumis?

Celui qui ne dissout pas celui qui vient à lui, un Sphinx s’y forme et c’est de Sphinx que l’on meurt.

Tout durcit, dit le Maître de Ho, tout durcit et revient à la tête. Le geste inachevé, la défaillance du coeur, la remarque qui frappe l’oreille.

Le sourire, le visage pur, que avide tu regardes, c’est lui, c’est lui-même, incompris, qui te fera ta plaie, et qui, le temps venu, de durs rochers sans fin t’encombrera.

Tout dépose. Tout fait pierre, dit le Maître de Ho. De la lèvre à la pierre, du rayon à la ruine.
WORLD

He whose fate it is to die must be born.
Alas, a thousand times alas for births, says
the Master of Ho. Theirs is an embrace, which
is an intertwining.
By winning, you lose. By coming closer,
you slip back.
The girl with the narrow yoni, so big that
it could be her heart, has a defect. So much
for compliments.

Keep the erudite man away from me, says
the Master of Ho. The coffin of his learning
has limited his reason. "Oh! Freedom!" says
the Master. Keep away from me the man who
sits down in order to think.
First speak. Speak and you will not be
ignorant. First attain and afterwards you
will come close.
Everything abounds, says the Master of Ho.
Everything overflows. Everything is there.
With dragonfly wings a glance alights on
the woman who is loved, and he who must cele-
brate it, makes poetry of the World without
knowing it.
MONDE

Celui dont le destin est de mourir doit naître. Hélas, mille fois hélas pour les naissances, dit le Maître de Ho. C’est un entrelacement, qui est un entrelacement.
On perd en gagnant. On recule en approchant.
La fille au yoni étroit, si grand que soit son cœur, a un défaut. Il en est ainsi de bien des choses.

Eloignez de moi l’homme savant, dit le Maître de Ho. Le cercueil de son savoir a limite sa raison. “Oh! Liberté!” dit le Maître. Eloignez de moi celui qui s’asseoit pour penser.
Parlez d’abord. Parlez et vous ne serez pas ignorant. Átteignez d’abord et vous approcherez ensuite.
Tout afflue, dit le Maître de Ho. Tout déborde. Tout est là.
Un regard aux ailes de libellule se pose sur la personne aimée, et rime le Monde sans le connaître celui qui doit le chanter.
LABYRINTH

Life is a labyrinth, death is a labyrinth,
Labyrinth without end, says the Master of Ho

Everything goes under, nothing sets one free.
The suicide is reborn to new suffering.

Each prison opens into a prison
Each hallway opens another hallway:

He who thinks he’s unwinding the coil of his life
Unwinds absolutely nothing.

Nothing gets out anywhere
The centuries too live underground, says the
   Master of Ho
LABYRINTHE

Labyrinthe, la vie, labyrinthe, la mort
Labyrinthe sans fin, dit le Maître de Ho.

Tout enfonce, rien ne libère.
Le suicidé renaît à une nouvelle souffrance.

La prison ouvre sur une prison
Le couloir ouvre un autre couloir:

Celui qui croit dérouler le rouleau de sa vie
Ne déroule rien du tout.

Rien ne débouche nulle part
Les siècles aussi vivent sous terre, dit le Maître de Ho.

Henri Michaux
EPREUVES, EXORCISMES

translations by Geoffrey Gardner
LABYRINTH

Life is a labyrinth, death is a labyrinth,
Labyrinth without end, says the Master of Ho

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The centuries too live underground, says the
   Master of Ho.
LABYRINTHE

Labyrinthe, la vie, labyrinthe, la mort
Labyrinthe sans fin, dit le Maître de Ho.

Tout enseigne, rien ne libère,
Le suicidé renaît à une nouvelle souffrance.

La prison ouvre sur une prison
Le couloir ouvre un autre couloir:

Celui qui croit dérouler le rouleau de sa vie
Ne déroule rien du tout

Rien ne débouche nulle part
Les siècles aussi vivent sous terre, dit le
Maître de Ho.

Henri Michaux
EPREUVES, EXORCISMES

translations by Geoffrey Gardner
FOR SHE

How old am I?
39
Fading memory
Like dandelion wings
Riding the wind.
Confused mind
In a mud puddle
I want to die.
Why?
I had hands to hold.
A mouth to feed from my breasts.
But the mouth has bitten me.
The hands have slapped me.
The enemy has stolen my milk.
WHO WANTS

I quit my job as a barmaid
I had to get away
From young men with painted faces,
Women panting for my cunt on rocks.
They were everywhere
Nightmoths eating me.
I have been evicted from my home
Sleeping in the basements of friends,
I have been ashamed
To let them know I was there.

I have laid my head on a basement floor.
My head
My head
My head
I left it there
Begging crushed
& Crumpled in a corner,
Asking for a sofa like a cat
To lie on
Like a cat
A cat
I am a cat without a home.

& Where can I find my womb?
In a jar?
They took it and I lost my name
A woman pulled the stitches
She
Seeded her sex in my womb bed
My daughter has accused me
Of stealing her lover
He is a boy
16
How old am I?
39
TO KILL

My childhood dipped in hot wax
Is solid and burning within me
Soft dough of my grandmother’s kneading
She hit me
Again & Again
Her words were stones
High pitched and screaming in my ears
Thrown away Trash Unwanted
Not my father’s child
Cinderella she called me
I burned in her anger
Like the logs I cut
Like the logs I placed
In the fire
For the food I cooked
For her husband
Who was smaller than she
& so afraid he trembled
When he thanked her for the meal
She was black
She was evil
She was a bear.
I HATED HER
(Jesus forgive me)
I sang when she died.
My money put the earth over her face
So the vultures could not find her unmarked grave
I left my eyes in the lid of her coffin
To watch her til judgement day.
So she can never come back,
They say you can come back
As an animal A tree A blade of grass
I am afraid she has come back
She hid herself (She was a clever woman)
In the womb of my daughter
Who offers her smile & sells her skin
To anyman
Now her face rides like a mask
On the face of my grandchildren
Her voice tears at me like the whirlwind
From my daughter's throat
She spits at me
Hissing over the phone
Accuses me of lying with a child
Kicks me like a mother cow
Jealous of her udders

HERSELF

I vomited librium and alcohol
In the back of a police rescue van
I wanted to die in that phone booth
Die outside a bar with winos and drunks
& no goods like me
Die with the world spinning
Die with the phone off the hook
& A voice at the other end begging
Was it my daughter?
I don’t remember
I think it was suicide prevention
& I told them where I was
They tied me down and brought me here
Screaming curses into the night.
They asked me questions
Poked me with sharp needles,
Took the blood from my veins
But the walls of my flesh
Are already destroyed
I have been burned alive
My ashes have already settled into the earth
& When I leave here
I will seek my home.

Rikki Lights

19
MARGI IDE BROCKMAN:
portfolio of photographs
photographs by Margi Ide Brockman
DRY RIVER

When we came
You were dry as an old cow.
Dying calves

Swarm away by the thousands
Mottled with stones,
You lay on your bed

Like a long, dead fish.
The trees feared fire
On the mountains,

The people trembled together
Like stones. Weather
Touched the red fox to tinder.

The sky was blue and malicious
Or ice-grey and solid.
It thawed.

Now you are pulsing with blood.
The bank flowers
Have lost their heads,

Speaking underwater.
I tried your current.
It was murderous.

You hid your stones
Leading to safety.
I hung to the old rope, twirling.
Your blood will be pure.
You will climb into your ice skin

Racing and freezing,
Racing and freezing.

It will be eons
Before anything crawls from your belly

And stands.
"Leave us."
Your season. Yours only.

Susan Fromberg Schaeffer
THE PERMANENCE OF FRANK O'HARA

"A free man thinks nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is not a meditation upon death, but upon life"
—Benedict Spinoza
from Ethics, Fourth Part

In the twentieth century sudden death through accident, adventure or premeditated violence, often taking the young and innocent, is so frequent and so widely broadcast that few can avoid a certain sombre impact from it. The car and airplane take so heavy a toll that you can hardly escape the feeling that it may be your turn next. And there is always the danger, whether you are a fighter or a non-combatant, that the far-flung ferocities of modern war will claim you as a victim, which leads me to my first inquiry. When poets die, do they really die, that is, do they stay dead?

Life after death is not an impossibility. Frank O'Hara's death, bound up as it is with very personal feelings, memories and associations, is far too intimate and sorrowful a thing for me to enter a great deal into any intimate details. Our memory of Frank O'Hara may possibly not hold all the particulars of his life when he was among us any more than from day to day or year to year. In relation with me, I would say that Frank might, at times, have been turned off by my enfant terrible "symbolic murders", my self-confidence, which others of his circle mistook for arrogance.

Keeping this premise in mind I begin writing on Frank with the continuing conviction that the issue of personal existence after death remains one of the most significant and yet at the same time overlooked themes for poets, especially poets writing in America today. It will be some time before a standard text of his poems is released to the general public, yet all the poems O'Hara managed to have published in his lifetime do not give an adequate idea of either his range or his depth, and the most intelligent of professional poet/critics writing on contemporary American poetry have not as yet borne out his poems, his gift for spontaneous expression as he lived his poems so spontaneously in life. I wonder what Randall Jarrell, himself the fatal victim in an accident involving an automobile, would have to say about the work of O'Hara, if he were alive today. I do not intend to follow suit by claiming that it is possible, even for Jarrell, one of the most intelligent, fierce and dynamic critics this country has ever produced, to learn everything there was to
know about O'Hara from his poems or to understand and thus appre-
ciate the poems themselves, not having given them the atten-
tion O'Hara deserved during that period in which both Jarrell
and O'Hara lived.

First of all, O'Hara's admiration for the French Surrealists grew
out of preoccupation with the struggle for a new and more appro-
priate language. But the substance which that language should
communicate was the everyday occurrences that bombarded all his
senses of being and of being alive. He adored such writers as Whit-
man, Pasternak, Mayakovsky, Pierre Reverdy, Apollinaire, Lorca,
William Carlos Williams, Pound, Hart Crane, Edwin Denby, and
John Wieners with such enthusiasm to the extent of citing most of
these names in his poems as well as verbally acknowledging their
sphere of influence on his work the sheer ecstasy to share his
knowledge of them with everyone. He was too busy himself, al-
ways witty, graceful, and charming, to be self-conscious about his
growing position in the arts and the world of contemporary letters.

The life/style in his poems has been outstanding in its influence,
both good and bad (even when he was alive) and it has now served
as a model for a new generation of younger poets of the Sixties and
undoubtedly will serve many future generations of poets to come.
But how many of these young poets can claim to lead that kind of
clockwork existence that he so vividly expressed in his work?
work?

The experience of thinking or having ideas is distinguishable
from a poet's other activities, but not existentially separable. The
poet Lewis MacAdams has exquisitely expressed such possibilities
in his elegy to Frank O'Hara, entitled "Red River", which I take the
opportunity to quote in its entirety:

Peter and Linda in my car gone to Easthampton.
In a bar on Third Avenue, The Rail. Enough money
from this job for beer. Swampy, unpleasant day
Phoebe coming in mad, and rightly so. False claim of facts
No one home on the lower east side, streets are filled
with me too, uptown to dinner. Peter talks poetry,
explains circumstances, the food is rotten
Linda says at the funeral friends stood in clumps,
like people in galleries who know each other
Fire engines go back down Broadway
Peter downtown writing all the details.
Phoebe and I go home too tired to straighten out.
The girl is sleeping, I'm smoking, inelegant
as was never allowed in his poems
which spoke of the small graces we must master
to live in ecstasy in New York City.
Words are more than sounds, and are liable to carry with them the associations and atmosphere of their usual context. The point to keep in mind is that whatever distinctions we make within O’Hara’s poems, they are always distinctions within the same poems, and that whatever distinctions we draw between O’Hara and the people evolving around him in his life and in his work, they are always distinctions within the same life/style depicted by and in his work. For the poet who is thinking to himself ideas are private and to that extent subjective. But ideas are also objective in that poets can communicate them not only to one another, but to someone other than themselves (the poet Leonard Cohen is an excellent example) who can understand these meanings when they are adequately defined.

O’Hara emphasizes at various areas throughout his poems his thoughts on immortality. His position is summed up in a poem entitled “Hotel Transylvania”, filled with display passages and Byronic cadenzas and containing one of the most powerful Wagnerian endings:

where will you find me, projective verse, since I will be gone?
for six seconds of your beautiful face I will sell the hotel and
commit
an uninteresting suicide in Louisiana where it will take them a
long time
to know who I am/why I came there/what and why I am and
made to happen

12/12/69

Dreams and trances reinforce here with “Hotel Transylvania” the testimony of everyday life. And death comes to give the most convincing and dramatic of verifications. the body and the personality disappear but the essence remains in the form of all his written works, in the form of photographs. This is because when we are thinking of absent persons, whether they are dead or alive, we invariably visualize their natural forms, their bodies through which alone we have known them and been aware of their personalities. Photos and portrait paintings, and even home movies, are our favorite and most vivid reminders. The workings of association are so strong that for a time at least we tend towards identifying a dead man with his body. Second, I find it extremely difficult to imagine Frank as non-existent. It is, through his death, his sudden departure, that we, as poets, not unlike himself, but unlike each other in our own individual life/styles, find that it is extremely difficult to imagine ourselves as non-existent. We may envisage our own death and even our funeral, but it is we who do the envisaging. We are there witnessing the events after our death. Was it for Frank O’Hara also? No matter how far forward we reach with our
imagininations into the future or how far back into the past, we ourselves inevitably remain the audience at the passing pageant of ourselves in the later part of the twentieth century. The egocentric predicament overhauls us in its awe-inspiring powers and it allows us to believe in a life without end.

No poet can work throughout his lifetime without coming face to face with this very real situation. Not for Frank O'Hara in his lifetime, anyway. Thus, in the modern world, little else remains for the poet to do but to function as the benevolent purveyor of mortality. It is perfectly clear that only immortality can provide definite compensation for the ills of this still very imperfect world and especially for the loss of loved ones, friends. With human personalities going on to the end of time, Heaven, or the idea of Heaven, would not be necessary to preserve one's being, one's aura. So, in the end, a poet can do little without the realm of immortality.

I feel it is safe to mention here that the desire for immortality is potentially present in each one of us (I speak here of poets I have known, and of all other living poets), although poets do tend to take the continuity of life for granted, it is Frank O'Hara's death that reinforces the idea of the fact of death that has to be taught to us. Any poet can understand the simple meaning of life after death of the physical body, but it is a wise poet who can comprehend his life as a byproduct existing without him after death, or even while alive and continually inspired.

Such free men as O'Hara cease to meditate on death because they come to understand its meaning and its place in the world that is their home. But the necessary prelude to this understanding must be for every living poet long and careful reflection on this inescapable event which comes to all human beings.

It was the inevitability of O'Hara's own earthly end which did not cause him to think seriously about mortality and immortality, that led to the writing of such poems on the death of friends, of utter strangers, of men and artists he admired, of the human race. His poetry was immersed in the manifold activities of daily life. By saying this, I do not mean to imply that it was one of his favorite topics of discussion or even, for the most, the basic recurrent theme in his works. But the problem of immortality as distinct from belief in immortality has unquestionably been of great consequence. Once confronted with the fact of the problem as distinct from belief in immortality O'Hara had to come to some conclusion about it, here, quoted at random from what poems of his I have collected over the past ten years, which appeared in various magazines and anthologies, is what he states on the subject:

We are sick of living and afraid
that death will not be by water, o sea

—“Ann Arbor Variations”

31
I shall live to finish this cigarette
and the turnpike roars up a lesser hill,
gleams the nether pond and the wire towers
on the horizon.

—“On A Mountain”

For a young actor I am begging
peace, gods. Alone
in the empty streets of New York
I am its dirty feet and head
and he is dead

—“For James Dean”

Men cry from the grave while they still live
and now I am this dead man’s voice,
stammering, a little in the earth.

—“For James Dean”

A couple of specifically anguished days
make me now distrust sorrow, simple sorrow
especially, like sorrow over death

it makes you wonder who you are to be sorrowful
over death, death belonging to another
and suddenly inhabited by you without permission

you moved in impulsively and took it up
declaring your Squatters’ Rights in howls
or screaming with rage, like a parvenu in a Chinese laundry

disbelieving your own feelings is the worst
and you suspect that you are jealous of this death

YIPPEE! I’m glad I’m alive.

—“Ode to Michael Goldberg
(‘s Birth and Other Births)”
The spent purpose of a perfectly marvellous
life suddenly glimmers and leaps into flame
it's more difficult than you think to make charcoal
it's also pretty hard to remember life's marvellous
but there it is guttering choking then soaring
in the mirrored room of this consciousness.

—"In Favor of One's Time"

There are several Puerto
Ricos on the avenue today, which
makes it beautiful and warm. First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollack. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?

—"A Step Away From Them"

and the senses
of the dead which are banging about
inside my tired red eyes

—"Three Airs"

my life held precariously in the seeing
hands of others, their and my impossibilities.

—"Poem"

The way in which this problem of immortality is settled affects
most seriously almost every poem O'Hara ever wrote. And without
a settlement to this problem I don't feel any other living poet can
pretend to offer a complete and satisfactory rendering of O'Hara's
work.

Frank O'Hara has become part of that historical immortality
through the irreversibility of the past and the permanent place that
every life necessarily has in the simple truth and succession of exis-
tence—but even more so, on his own part, in social or influential
immortality through his enduring fame and the unending effect of
his life and writings he had on the minds and acts of the succeeding
generation of poets of the Sixties.

33
Can anyone doubt that spiritually it is the quality rather than the duration of a life that counts when he considers the examples of a Shelley dying just short of thirty, an Isadore Ducasse dying near the same age, a Keats dying at twenty-six, an Alden Van Buskirk dead at the age of twenty-four in Oakland in 1961, a James Agee at forty-five, and a John Wheelwright hit by an auto at forty? the same age of O’Hara when he was struck down.

Perhaps, poets, like everyone, will be subject to fatal accidents. But with this qualification it is conceivable that men might ultimately learn how not to die. Frank O’Hara enjoyed his life to the utmost while it lasted and contributed a high and joyous quality to the life of others. Death could not alter this fact, for however death may affect the future, it cannot touch the past.

Immortality is founded on what seems to me the obvious significance of the whole historic process, the training of character. This stand, if held to uncompromisingly, would imply that were it by chance established that O’Hara had not, as a matter of fact, survived death as a conscious personality, his life, in spite of ennobling effects, would now become futile.

No matter what changes occur in the fashions and movements of poetry, O’Hara’s work will endure. Thus the feeling of personal continuity and identity in O’Hara’s poems not only on the faculty of memory, but on the memory of only a comparatively small part of his past, will continue in uniting, relating, and ordering images in experience. In their habitual cast of personalities the sweeping expressions in O’Hara’s poems quietly mirror his inmost feelings and that period that emphasized Abstract Expressionism in painting during the late Fifties and early Sixties.

We cannot be sorry for him as dead, but only for him as dying and as dying unwillingly, conscious that he was leaving this life prematurely with much of his rightful human experience being denied him. But there may come a time in the career of any person when to die will prove more effective for his central purposes than to live, when through his death what he stands for will become more clear and convincing than in any other way. Life affirms itself through death, which during an early era of evolution was brought into existence by life and derived its entire significance from life.

But the tragedy remains. The sting of death may be tempered, but it cannot be removed. O’Hara came into existence and has passed out of existence. Yet between the birth and death he lived his life, has made his actions count with a scope and meaning that the finality of death cannot defeat.

Each and every one of us involved in shedding some light on his life and being can ask ourselves whether death is the end of his story or merely the introduction to a new chapter.

Gerard Malanga
photograph of Frank O'Hara by Gianni Bates
ON CONTACT IMPROVISATION

If the time for completing a transition arrives, but one lacks the strength and the means for carrying it through do not force it on. Instead bring a new situation into being. Engage capable and reliable helpers, then make decisive steps.

_Taoist Book of Days_

I am reluctant to write today. There is clearly something in the process that is threatening. I am not sure whether it is simply that Contact Improvisation is by definition transitory, or whether (writing about a form and an experience that is close to me) I fear a personal loss. In any case, momentarily halting the flow to view, to reflect, to criticize, and to fix Contact in words seems a great risk. When the words do finally stop, and they will, I will once again have to tear my consciousness, painfully leaving words behind, and search for a new door, if not a new path, to the cosmic. Inherent in this ramble is a question that continues to shout at me. Can Contact Improvisation, or any other form of magic, continue to serve as “the way” once its techniques and tricks are exposed? Is innocence necessary for enlightenment? Must we always be duped? I very much want aggressive enlightenment, the American Dream I suppose.

Contact Improvisation is a duet form, the deuce dance, faster than thought. It deals with the flows of gravity, your partner, and yourself. Somewhere between jitterbugging, wrestling and making love.

— David Woodberry, _Contact Newsletter_, November 1975
Contact improvisation is a new movement form, improvisational in nature, involving two bodies in contact. Impulses, weight, and momentum are communicated through a point of physical contact that continually rolls across and around the bodies of the dancers.


Each party of the duet freely improvises with the aim to working along the easiest pathways available to their mutually moving masses. These pathways are best perceived when the muscular tone is lightly stretched to extend the limbs, although not to the degree that obscures the sensations of momentum and inertia. Within this flexible framework, the shape, speed, orientation, and personal details of the relationship are left to the dancers who, however, hold to the ideal of active, reflexive, harmonic, spontaneous, mutual forms. The ideal creates the attitude, which is manifest in the quality of energy use.

— Steve Paxton, *The Drama Review*, March 1975

Using Contact Improvisation as a vehicle, we can see in to the stuff to which form applies, we can see out from the specific material and apply that information to considerations of the larger whole, further, we can see through the work and thereby investigate process. Contact can be not only a way of moving, but also a way to see movement.


Contact Improvisation is a dance form that stretches the motion and the meaning of dancing. It was initiated by Steve Paxton at Bennington College in 1971, and has been continued by scores of dancers and movers in centers across the U.S. Inspiration for Contact has come from sports, martial arts, yoga, cybernetics, Haiku, improvisational games, and much more. I was introduced to Contact by Nita Little in September, 1974, while living in San Francisco. I was then at the San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop, teaching, performing, and doing administrative work for Anna Halprin. My belief in improvisational forms, as vehicles for performance and personal exploration, led me to workshops, classes, and performances looking for new information and new directions. Thus far, I had found movement improvisation forms to be either fleeting mirages that could not be recaptured or rubbery skeletons that could not be relied upon to consistently support strong performances. I desired a form that would allow the dancer maximum freedom to create. Contact Improvisation is the first form I have found that is truly repeatable, remains open, and implies specific techniques that increase one’s ability to perform.
EXERCISE  Imagine a writing instrument is located at the top of your head, at the soft spot where the bones of the skull meet. Imagine you can draw with this instrument as a skywriting plane draws in space. The space around you is a three-dimensional canvas. Allow your writing instrument to draw pathways on the canvas, letting the rest of your body be loose and responsive. Adjust your body to accommodate your drawing pathways, always letting the top of your head lead. Explore different speeds, levels, and degrees of locomotion. Allow your eyes to scan, seeing all but focusing on nothing. Work to the point of disorientation and stop Repeat many times.

![Images of a person in various poses]

DEFINITION: Pathways in space are energy pathways. At any given point on the pathway there is implied speed, direction, torque, and momentum.

Contact class at the Natural Dance Studio in Oakland began with a series of exercises designed to familiarize the would-be contactor with new ways of thinking and experiencing movement. We rolled on the floor to overcome our fear of falling and to learn how to change downward momentum into tumbling curves that could skim across the floor and pop up again. We leaned on walls and each other learning how to give weight to be supported, and how to give weight to support (something that gave the sensation of being a human flying buttress! We locked wrists with a partner and leaned away learning how to pull with equal energy and thereby counterbalance our partner’s weight. We stood on our hands, did flips and somersaults, played body bumper cars, and climbed on each other. Initially the experience was purely physical, a range of sensations layering themselves on my body. Bruises that recalled high school football practice were covered by caresses that would arouse feelings of intimacy. The gentle nudging of a mare urging a colt to walk; the friendly resistance of sibling scuffles, the terrified grip of a climber about to fall off a cliff (my body), a cradle of strong arms lifting and carrying, all this ended in a pulpy heap of warm wet bodies on the floor, exhausted from doing battle with gravity.
EXERCISE  Stand face to face about 18 inches from your partner. Take your partner's left wrist in your right hand and his right wrist in your left hand. Have your partner do the same so you lock wrists in boy scout fashion. Together lean back until both your arms and your partner's arms are stretched to their full length. Adjust your weight to your partner's weight so that you do not have to use any strength to support your partner. Release the tension in your arms while maintaining your grip. Explore giving different amounts of weight to your partner while adjusting to the different amounts of weight your partner will give you. Always try to accommodate by giving or not giving weight, rather than by using your arms to pull or lift. Work until tired. Try the same exercise with other partners of different weights and sizes.
DEFINITION Counterbalance is achieved by giving weight in varying degrees. To change the amount of weight given, the body must change its relationship to the counterweight. Counterbalance is in constant flux (even when change is very slow), so the body must be in constant motion.

Contact is primarily a duet form. The principles and techniques do carry over to group dancing, but the possibilities become more static as communication becomes less direct. Solo improvisations based on energy pathways, momentum, and fluctuating centers for movement are possible, but solos can be indulgent in ways duets cannot. A relationship with another person, whether emotional or motional, requires giving of self. The act of giving by each partner translates into a new emotion, a new energy, and a new motion. This dance of synergy can reach beyond personal habits and explore territory previously unknown to either the dancers or the viewers. Each new combination of partners produces markedly different patterns of relating. Each new meeting of old partners is both a renewal and a discovery. Since their last meeting each partner has changed in some way, and remained the same in some way. The dance becomes a vehicle of exchange that structures a meeting, an exploration, and a transformation. The dancers couple once again, sometimes with great ease and sometimes with great pain. Contact is a loving way to dance. Trust, openness, and willingness to give and receive are more important than technical skill or natural ability. Freeing the mind of judgements, of preconceptions and postevaluations, is the most important technique to learn. Contact is a form of meditation in motion that you share with another person.

Today was a terrible day at dance. Before coming I had an interview regarding my meditation, and words were just raining emptily all around me. I’ve had an overdose of words at Naropa, although I crave and love them. Anyway, my body was feeling grey and fragile, and I ended up dancing with one of the more experienced students who assumed somewhat of a teaching role, explaining certain principles to me. Words. Of course I understand the principles. Don’t you see it’s all a matter of trust? Somehow you wanted more risky action. I wanted close slow connection. We weren’t making it. I was nervous. You didn’t seem able to relate to my hesitation. I couldn’t give you what you wanted.

— Vicki Giella, Contact Newsletter, Fall 1976

EXERCISE: Stand facing your partner and take your partner’s head in your hands. Caringly bring your own head in contact with your partner’s head. Give enough weight so that you both can easily feel
the place where your heads meet (but not so much as to cause discomfort). Both partners, close your eyes and focus your attention on the point where heads join. Wait until the point begins to move in space, then follow the point wherever it goes, adjusting your body to effortlessly accommodate your partner and the point. Allow the point to travel on the surface of your head and your partner's head, while it travels in space. Always maintain pressure at the point of contact. Continue until contact is broken. Repeat with the same partner or new partners. Try this exercise with your eyes open, scanning.

DEFINITION. The point where your head meets your partner's head is the contact point. This point can travel anywhere on your body or your partner's body while simultaneously traveling in space. The path this point makes in space is the energy pathway. The contact point is a source of information. Through it you can learn about your partner's weight, direction, energy flow, and degree of stability. This point on your body becomes a movement center which the rest of your body serves. Your movement is led by the contact point, and this point is in constant motion.

Moving against my partner, the point of contact becomes a window through which I can see our common Gestalt. This window is more than a transmitter of mechanical information. Through it I can experience a "state of being" made up of fear, excitement, impulses, caution, and hidden secrets. Different parts of my partner's body reveal different things. Some windows are transparent, some only translucent, and some opaque. I experience my own body as a surface covered with tiny frames of glass. Each frame is a window through which I can look out and a mirror in which I can reflect. Each frame of glass is activated by my partner's touch. At first I see things as a confusing montage of many frames, looking out and looking in at the same time. The information is blurred. The contact point is too large and indecisive. Next I begin to see more clearly, a few frames at a time, but I don't always like what I see. My own repulsion, or my partner's repulsion, closes windows or paints them black. I want to leave windows open only to rooms in my soul that are picked up and in order. The mechanical information (speed, di-
rection, weight, etc.) is still there and so we still perform our duet mechanically, with only an occasional glimpse of something more. The dancing becomes patterned and the duet reflects the habitual motions common in nuptial coupling. New partners retain mystery, and promise to clear the windows for a time, but in the end I am faced with the need to confront myself and my partner. We both must work with commitment to open the windows again, examine our contents, and learn to love the messes inside. Dancing becomes work, inseparable from life.

EXERCISE. Stand back to back with your partner and lean against each other, each giving enough weight to support the other. Concentrate on the amount of pressure at the point of contact. Explore increasing and decreasing the pressure while allowing the point to travel on your body. Take turns being a mobile wall that supports a moving body. The body explores all possible ways of leaning and climbing on the wall, and the wall adjusts itself to easily support the body by giving weight and resistance where and when needed. Learn to know where the contact point is and always to know its direction and speed in space and its pressure on your body. Begin to work faster until your mind can no longer monitor the point. Allow your body to monitor and follow the contact point, releasing the mind. Repeat many times.

DEFINITION. Contact Improvisation is two bodies moving together each dependent on a point of contact between them to transmit needed information about the speed, weight, momentum, direction, and stability of their common energy pathway.

In January, 1975, four months after I started taking classes at Natural Dance, Nita Little, Steve Paxton, Curt Siddall, and Nancy Stark Smith put on a series of Contact performances called Reunion. This was the first time I had seen Contact performed by experienced contactors (I had watched many new students perform duets that were halting and tentative, with occasional bursts of exciting motion). Reunion consisted of six duets, all possible permutations of the four dancers. Each duet was very different and each had moments that were plodding and uninteresting to watch, but,
unlike the student duets I had seen, a great percentage of the time bodies flowed through tender, careful, rough, risky, and athletic motion. Spectacular lifts and off-balance suspensions would appear unexpectedly out of simple rubbings and bumpings. The kinesthetic sympathy between the performers and the audience was clear and strong. Viewers would gasp as performers found themselves in precarious situations, and sigh relief as the pair rolled or slid into comfortable embraces. Contact was exciting to watch. The duets contained all the ingredients I demand from a good dance performance: a strong sense of motion, energy exchange between performers and audience, insights into the human condition, honesty of purpose and presentation, and a clear philosophy or way of seeing movement.

Contact is a good example of the new social awareness that has become part of dance in the last ten years. Dancers are seeing new roles for themselves. They are performers who create while performing, not just instruments in someone else's creation. They are taking responsibility for the moral implications of their presentations. Contact takes a social stand. Dancers (people) need to give fully to each other in order to create and experience life fully. Contact cannot be faked. You are on or you are not on and everybody knows it, you, your partner, and the audience. Performing is risky. Dancers (people) must be willing to take risks, emotional and physical, because only through risk-taking can they grow. Contact, in the best meaning of the word, is a political statement. It indicates the possibility of a new social order. This is true of many of the forms and working structures recently evolved in dance. In many ways, I believe this is the most significant contribution of the New Dance.

Viewing Contact Improvisation demands a new commitment from the dance audience. It is not entertainment. The dancing cannot be pre-designed to present only spectacular and breathtaking movements. The audience must be willing to wait for the unexpected, experiencing the thrill of discovery along with the performers. The atmosphere is much like a sports event. Anticipation, emotional involvement with the performer, and physical danger are all there. The difference is that no one wins and no one loses in Contact. The objective is to join your partner; not defeat him.

Often, in the heat and excitement of a game, a player's perception and coordination will improve dramatically. At times, and with increasing frequency now, I experience a kind of clarity that I've never seen adequately described in a football story. Sometimes for example, time seems to slow way down, in an uncanny way, as if everyone were moving in slow motion. It seems as if I have all the time in the world to watch receivers run their patterns and yet I know the defensive line is coming at me just as
fast as ever. I know perfectly well how hard and fast those guys are coming and yet the whole thing seems like a movie or a dance in slow motion. It’s beautiful.
— John Brodie (quarterback for S. F. 49ers) in an interview with Michael Murphy, *Intellectual Digest*, January 1973

**EXERCISE** Using a large mat, stand some distance from your partner. Have your partner and others (one at a time) run and jump on your body. As the jumper makes contact, absorb the shock by moving in the same direction as the jumper. Try to carry the jumper’s energy into a new pathway, sometimes up, sometimes down, and sometimes around. Provide resistance to support the jumper, but do not strain to catch or hold the jumper. Use your strength to help the jumper reach the floor gently with forward or spiral momentum instead of downward momentum. Try catching different kinds of jumps and offering different body surfaces to the jumpers. Take turns jumping and catching.

![Images of people jumping](image)

**DEFINITION** *Impulses* can be inserted into the energy pathway, providing new sources of motion to work with. Jumping, bumping, sliding, and rubbing all add individual energy to the common energy of the duet. *Impulses* are needed to break inertia, but should be used sparingly. When you insert an *impulse* you will break the common flow, requiring your partner to adjust to you.

In June, 1975, I was in the midst of transitions. Leaving the Dancers’ Workshop to take a teaching post at Temple University in Philadelphia meant leaving old friends and making new ones. It meant changing roles. I would soon have to invest more of my time as a purveyor of dance instead of an explorer and innovator of dance. I went to Vancouver, B.C., to teach a workshop in Contact Improvisation for Linda Rubin, the founder and director of Synergy. Synergy is a center for new approaches in dance that attracts Canadian artists seeking stimulation and growth. This would be my first experience teaching Contact. I was excited and apprehensive. I had many ideas about ways to present the form but recently had been frustrated with my own ability to progress.
Teaching proved to be an important step for me. With no experienced partner to demonstrate what Contact could look like, I had to learn to do Contact with beginners who had little or no idea how to meet my energy. I was forced to meet theirs. I found I could perform duets with anyone in the class. I realized I only had to give up my desires for the spectacular, and the unexpected and spectacular would appear.

When I returned to San Francisco, I went to a Contact session and danced duets with two friends, dancers I had experienced frustration with earlier. The results were electrifying. Both partners had skills and experience. Together we were able to enter a time warp, where movements seemed to slow and heightened awareness allowed me to observe my body gliding and flying over, under and around my partner's body. Each move seemed exactly right and led comfortably to the next. At the end of my second duet, I stood head to head with my partner. My body was sweating all over and my circulation seemed heightened, but I was not tired. My breath was calm and my pulse steady and strong. I had been dancing vigorously, lifting and being lifted, for over an hour. I was exhilarated, my tiny windows were all clear.

Flashing shining parts
a swirl of trails and vapors
falling from sudden peaks
flying into wind struck
cavernous pockets
buoyed as if by air alone

I mean skip if you will
the stuff about needs and inquiries
and notice character,
explain to me later
proportioned flight of stellar bodies,
today what I like is rubbing together
in search of common suggestion
This is the dream, the one that disrupts
shackled designs of brittle reason,
watchful nature of a whispering monk.
— Alan Potash, "Inlets" (an excerpt), Symposium Remains,
June 1976

EXERCISE (Round Robin): Have your group of contactors stand in a large circle (twenty to thirty feet in diameter). Two contactors enter the circle and perform a duet. At any time, someone from the periphery can join this duet. One of the original dancers leaves, allowing the partner to perform a duet with the new person. Repeat this cycle over and over, a new person joining and an old person
leaving. Allow time for the transitions to evolve naturally so the exchange of partners retains the flow of the original duet and transfers that flow to initiate the new duet.

Contact Improvisation suffers from the same paradox as other improvised dancing. It offers a simple syntax that can release the dancer’s stored creative energy, but it relies almost completely on the individual’s will, or willingness, to part with that energy. At first, the magic of the idea twists the perception and entices the dancer to be open. Later, two different barriers begin to get in the way. No one wants to be open all the time. It is hard to look at your own patterns and limitations and not be judgemental. Judgements, during improvisation, make connections impossible. On the other hand, once the dancer has experienced prolonged successful duets, it is very hard not to try to duplicate those past successes. But Contact cannot be forced; the only way it works is by not trying. The barriers are success and failure, and the paradox is that it is necessary to regard some improvisations as successes and others as failures in order to progress, and at the same time, the recognition of success and failure impedes progress. This is the internal dilemma of the performer, in sports, in theater, in dance. Contact, like other open improvisational forms, crystalizes the dilemma, making the paradox the center of attention.

Forms can do more than frame a paradox. There is something in the structure of a good play, a dance, a musical score that enables the performer, and the audience, to lean back a little. The form of art has just enough weight to offer a counterbalance to the weight of substance provided by the performer. It is as though the performer and the form are locked wrist to wrist in a perpetual duet, giving and taking weight. The form of Contact Improvisation does not give the needed weight to consistently balance my substance. Too often, I have to rely on myself for support. Contact has articulated a new way to see dance. It has changed the framework for viewing, performing, sensing, and valuing movement. With other improvisational forms, it has shifted the emphasis to the performer, to personal revelation, to nuance, to perpetual motion and flow, and to the “now.” I believe Contact indicates a strong and positive new direction for dance, but it is only an indicator. The door has been opened to vast amounts of new information. Contact has given at least one way to view that information. What remains for the artist is to build structures that will display the new ideas so they shimmer and glow.

The process of the dancer demands attention to form, a constant search for new and weighty materials; and attention to performance, to ensure that risks are still taken. I continue to teach
and perform Contact, it is an exercise that challenges my dancing
and my will. I continue to look for new forms, intricate and finely
polished, with little crannies to curl in, indulging in the embrace
and support I occasionally find.

John Gamble

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A Documentary

Akhmatova, and Ives

who composed for the 14½” ruler
who suggested on a score that the chorus be omitted
who wrote only one horn note in his fourth symphony
who orchestrated parades, a party

they were the artist I would be
that’s my kind.

33

a Poem by Marjorie Fletcher
UNLIKELY MARRIAGE

In the dusty dollhouse
John Ashbery and Emily Dickinson
man and wife
have been asleep for years
with their six children
(one is lost)
that won't grow up
assorted dogs and cats
a wooden mouse and artificial flowers

In their colonial bed
turned to each other
they look uncomfortable.
Picasso prints are pasted on the walls

(The real John Ashbery
with a moustache
may not like
Dickinson's life style;
but here they are. They have no choice)

After an interlude
of climbing ladders and being hugged
they wait
he in a flannel suit
she with long hair
their arms outstretched

for the next generation.
A glass of plastic beer
on the red kitchen table
and manuscripts.

Annette Hayn

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If we had no bodies or if we only had bodies.
—Lynne Dreyer

I can't dissipate my energy on little star points!
—Alice Notley

... a similar light doesn't state 'there's some trouble with the light to which I'm similar.'
—Bernadette Mayer
WHO NEEDS IT

The skaters dodge the way you lie across the ice
Down again! Most friends will dodge you too
noting only the color of your sweater the
amazing sheen of your frozen gloves as they
glide past netting blue & silver light.
It is equivalent to the feeling things aren't
going to go the way you planned. He has handed
you a slip of paper on which nothing is written
yet it says "At a certain age
you will toss your morals to the wind"
Oh Daphne!

Who refused Love from the start
I too want to be done with the folly of beginning!
We clapped and clapped when the terrible singer had finished
so relieved it was over we rose to our feet and descended
Only those trying to impress their escorts were smiling.
There are others with such irreversible clarity that
lying beside you at night they will simply say --
Please take your elbow out of my eye -- or will remain
full length on your bed watching you Rebuff
to answer anything

Sobriety that chokes the heart!
One would have better luck speaking to a landscape!
because of this my life has been
The Soggy Pillow Testimony
When Hemingway shouted up "What am I going to do? I
have no typewriter!"
Dorothy Parker leaned over the rail of the Rotterdam
and threw down the brand new portable she had bought
to use on the voyage. Had it been me
I would have shouted back "Sell some of your fishing tackle!
.....Ernest"
I can get dressed by myself
I know which way is North
Even without Nietzsche, Milton, or Wittgenstein
I know enough to ask Where is the gate to paradise?
I can walk
I can answer
I can bend
with the one who ties his sneakers and says
"I'm leaving this circus"

Maureen Owen
The Song of Zimmer

Zimmer, who made you?
Do you know who made you?
Gave you air, gave you water,
Gave you son, gave you daughter,
Gave you poems, gave you wife,
Gave you strength to live your life?
    Zimmer, who made you?
    Do you know who made you?

    Zimmer, I will tell you,
    Zimmer, I will tell you.
This book is his primer.
He calls himself a Zimmer.
    He is meek, and he is mild;

He pretends that he is wild.
You are Zimmer, he is Zimmer,
Slimmer, trimmer, grimmer.
    Zimmer, God bless you!
    Zimmer, God bless you!
Leaves of Zimmer

You Zimmer! Whimpering, heavy, mumbling, lewd;  
Does America sing you a sad song?  
It is a trifle! Resign yourself!  
Nothing is without flaw  
Confess that you feel small buds unclutching again!  
Confess that the rich sod turns up to you always  
as your lover!  
By God! Accept nothing less than this for  
affection:  
The stars dangling like green apples on the  
distant peaks,  
The sea foam combing itself through rocks;  
No foolfoo can strip you of this!  
No mountebanks can take this away!  
If one is deprived then all are deprived;  
America will love us all or it will not love.  
Camerado! Give me your hand.  
All of us will go! Boatmen and trappers,  
Bridegroom and bride, sailors and drifters,  
Woodsmen, mechanics, preachers, lawyers, fishermen.  
We must also raise the insulted and injured,  
Even the President will come!  
If one of us falls the others must wait.  
For lacking one, we lack all.  
Camerado! My left hand hooks you round the waist,  
My right hand points to America.  
Let us feel the country under our boot-soles;  
Let us seek it in the air we breathe.

Paul Zimmer
I LIKE KITCHEN SMELLS

I like kitchen smells
and corn bread grease
laughte
soaked in potliquor,
being wild and singing loud in circles
go round go merry go
happy scraped knees
and mommy's big tummy
mommy's big tummy.

Missing a tooth
and mommy's big tummy.
no fairy kissed coins
on dull cloud days.
just empty horror faces
moving around in grey stone poor houses.
mommy stopped smiling
at her big tummy.

Wild chanting go round
sing Liza
steal Liza.
we're singing around
a children-go-round
go round
go round
go round.

d Rikki Lights
THE END
OF THE ICE AGE
---

Ed Ochester

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One is solicitous of it
as a unique Himalayan rosebud
smuggled out of Nepal.

The great painters never picture men
washing it with care—it’s always the ladies
of Degas—though even
Thomas Alva Edison
did.

The mirror tells you it is utterly ridiculous

Still you powder it.
Some perfume it.

Our culture would be different if
like certain monkeys’ tails the penis
were prehensile.

My father used to say
"if you shake it two times after urinating
that is sanitary,
if you shake it three times
you’ll go crazy."

Watching it crowned with soapsuds,
goofy as a homecoming queen
at a cornball college,
one understands finally
the limit of intelligence.

Ed Ochester
O MY GENERATION

And Other Poems

by Aram Saroyan
LIFE IS A DREAM

Life is a dream.  
Boulders on the beach assume the form  
Of animals. No man is certain. Death  
Speaks in the wings, coaching, prompting  

Emotion, the love of wood  
Burning, the child's face waiting, laughing.  
The sun comes up so many times, lighting  
The life that is there to be seen.  

We have been traveling through this tunnel  
In eternity. Rocks persistently speak  
To us, saying something so pure it is only  
Feeling. This and that, this and that.  

The buildings of the mind shut down  
Before the advance of this truth.  
We are here for good. There is no one  
To be us instead. We are alive and dead.  

by Aram Saroyan  
BLACKBERRY BOOKS  
1976
RETURN II

in new york city
there are always
puddles of pee
in the elevators
and the stairways
are all pisstained

it is the smell
of urine that
prevents the trains
from running on
time

that chokes the
minds of nine year
olds and forces
them to slice
the throats of babies

it was this same
smell that elected
the underdog
john lindsay

and tricked the
baltimore orioles
into losing the
world series to
the mets

E. Ethelbert Miller
ROUND MIDNIGHT

my father looks like an
old jazz musician
a bebopbebopper
with his beard
and funny looking hats
sometimes when he comes
home late from work and I
see him resting at the
kitchen table I mistake
him for monk
playing 'round midnight
before it’s time to
go to sleep and get ready
for the next set

E. Ethelbert Miller
SPARROW

The lone sparrow comes
and settles in on the feeder
as the light fails
us and her
    she is pregnant,
allows us
to come close enough to see that, and when
we are almost
    too close
she moves off. twig, to another
twig to a branch
cross space, to another tree
her movements are economical;
she watches
us, and we too watch
as if her life mattered
    we stand there
in regard of her namesake, the small
sparrows in her;
it is no coincidence
we lack mastery.

We call it grace or the absence
of grace,
    insouciance,
 fact of the mother
swollen, to her instinct to rest:
the nesting urge.
she watches
and in the morning he rises
  complicatedly beside you
from clarity of sleep, puts
bare feet on cold floor;

who is the simpleton?

the hawk will eat her
in regard of his namesake;
her bones crack
brittle, spectacular in her death

to us
who watch her
  flammable in shadow
(which obscures her)

we are the fire

Toby Olson
A NOTE

I thought today it would not rain
and it didn’t
    and I was right again
Clouds
all day long, opened and closed
with a certain symmetry
    letting the light in
and that too is accurate

Sometimes, I’m so certain about
such things that it seems
the future
    is predictable you called
5 minutes ago, said you would be late—
    and I’m going out.

What I wanted to tell you is that
the sun made that circuit you spoke of
around the apartment, in a pace
    that today the clouds changes
into a kind of cuckoo clock:
each room, at odd hours, lit up.

    I was wrong again:
they’ll be no one to tell that to.
I’m going out soon

Ok.

I’ve hard boiled an egg for you.
It’s in the refrigerator the one
with the face on it.

Now you are smiling
And I am right again.

Toby Olson
IN MEMORIAM. YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHER

Opening your shutter wide
to infinite subtleties
you fixed your own on film

David of all the images
imprinted on your eyes
only a few survive

sad shadows cast by stones

fishermen caught in the intricate meshes
of their nets

a tangle of pilings crowned with
white birds like transient thoughts

roustabouts riding a chain of elephants
down a mean street at dawn

the indifferent
surfaces of steel

a grandmother
her years casting a long shadow

a lily pond
writing on water

Ruth Feldman
STEPHEN McCONNELL

TRANSIENT LOVER

shadows of pulses
tangle your hair.
you can’t sleep quiet
under the pull of absent hands,
can’t bring the covers down
over your head
when dust of floors
glimmers like milkweed
and breath of the moon
shivers black wet wings
off trees

Stephen McConnell

MANNEQUIN

you’re not even done yet
and everyone calls you beautiful
soon you will have real hair and eyes
buyers will look at you
fat ones will stand back dreaming
passengers will know what part of town it is
by your gloves.

and when they disperse
maybe one will wait awhile
to cruise your still beauty
and you will want to smile.

Stephen McConnell
SEURAT

A boy in a red hat
and red trunks stands
waist-deep in the
river, his hands
to his mouth, calling.
his back is
immense lungscape
hunched with power.
tied with ribbons
his voice floats
over the water, bands
of pure color, silk
and rayon, sexual.

Robert Peters
POETIONEERS

Those who practice poetry without singing.

Paul Mariah

PARADOX

The question to which there is no answer is neither here nor able to be asked

Paul Mariah
a meditation upon the study of violations

I have seen how easily my spirit flies
It unnerves me Unnerves.

"Why touch?" asks Angel Alta

Touch is a station in the removal of fear
Touch is a power in healing hands.
Touch is a verve in light of knowing.

To touch the ignorance of the innocent
to prepare for the cruelties of this world,
this century One knows when one violates

another spirit We bruise each other
with our whispers, we singe each other
with our eyes

Paul Mariah
October 1972
POET

    for Marina Tsvetaeva
    first invocation

    a heavy smoker
    you only had a corner
    of the room. They hated
    smoke

    You had to go outside
    into the freezing calm between
    translating Peter Pan
    and deep
    exhaling;

    Smōke
    poured

Frenzy. Stones and rotting
wood. Furies. Words the
words!
POET

Marina Tsvelevoy
 pervoe obrashchenie

kurila mnogo
i byl ugod komnati
v kotoroi nenauideli
dym

Ty vykhodila v merzluui tish'
mezhdv glubokim yydokhom
i perevodom Pitera Pena,

Shel dym
otchaian'ia

Derev'ia Kamni Neistovstvo
slov Slova!

POET

Марина Цветаевой
первое обращение

курила много
и был угол комнаты
в которой ненавидели
dым

ty vykhodila v merzluui
tiamь между глубоким
входом и переводом
Питера
Пена;

щел дым
отчаяньia

Камни. Деревья
Neistovstvo slov
Slova !
to smoke
you had to go outside
into the winter, emptiness,
the
sky your
violent gaze still
empty still
the poems;

figures slammed into the
sea where there is suddenly
light in your blood
one image floods the
other through the
cold the
smoke, your
life your
life
Marina Tsvetaevoi
vtoroe obrazhchenie

kurit'
ty dolzhna byla vykhodit'
v zimu v pustosh' v nebo
tvoi
neistovyi vzgliad
pust
tikh
stikhi;

obrazy vlivaiutsia
v more gde neozhidanno
svet u tebia v krovi
obraz nabegaet na
obraz skvoz'
kholod dym i
zhizn' tvoiu
zhizn'

Марина Цветаевой
второе обращение

хурить
ty dolzhna byla
vykhodit' v zimu, pustosh', nebo,
tvoi neistovoi
pust
tikh
stikhi;

образы вливаются в море
gde neozhidanno svet
u tebia v krovi
obraz nabegaet
na образ сквозь
холод, дым
i zhizn'
tvoe zhizn'

73
POET

for Marina Tsvetaeva
third invocation

a heavy smoker

you had a corner
in the room. The other
people, strangers, hated
smoke. You had to go outside
into the frozen
calm of Russia through the smoke;
turbulence

the images
one on the other
running in your
skull like heat
delirium of hands
of head of weather

all there was.
POET

Marina Tsvetaevoi
tret’e obrashchenie

kurila mnogo

i byl to’ko ugol
komnaty. Drugie
liudi chuzhie nenavideli
dym. Ty dolzhna byla vykhodit’
v merzliu tish’
Rossii skvoz’ dym
otchaian’ia

obrazy
odin za drugim
podymaiutsa u tebia
v mozgu kak zhar
goriachka ruk
golovy pogody

i eto vse

POET

Марина Цветаевой
третье обращение

курила много

и была только угол
комнаты. Другие дяди,
чужие ненавидели дым.
Ты должна была выходить
в мерзлую тьму
Россия сквозь дым и
отчаяние

образы один
за другим
подымались у тебя
в мозгу как жар
горячка рук
головы погоды
и это всё

Alexandra Grilikhes
tr. by Valentina Sinkevich

75
The Beat Book. Arthur Winfield Knight and Kit Knight, eds P O box 439, California, Pa 15419 Vol 4 of the unspeakable visions of the individual $10.00

Most of the following will in one way or another bear on Arthur and Kit Knight’s excellent publication, The Beat Book, in which many of the ephemera of that period are recovered, reconsidered, re-consumated. Among the many represented and representative figures included are Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, John Clellon Holmes and Gary Snyder as actors/historians, and Carl Solomon, Neal Cassady, Herbert Huncke basically as actors. As might be remembered, Huncke and especially Cassady’s rather full-tilt, flat-out life with Kerouac, et al., were later to be transformed into mythical characters in On the Road and other Kerouac works.

Anyway, apropos The Beat Book, the question arises and attempts must be made to understand what it is in the Beat Movement that sirens us to its recall. Of course, there is the element of nostalgia. But nostalgia alone does not explain its beckon. There are other factors. Firstly, there is the enormous fact of Allen Ginsberg whose poetry, life style and laid-back honesty have helped keep the Beat Movement a part of living history. Secondly, and somewhat ironic to kept press purposes, the Beat was the first artistic movement to be covered by television, to that point That made it infinitely more accessible—especially to younger people and the proletariat—than any other movement in history. These folk have continued to evince and reflect a heimweh and a smatter of knowledge of something to which they ‘normally’ might not have been exposed, i.e., through books, museums, poetry readings.

But even these reasons are not most significant. After all the romanticizing and idealizing, speaking astrologically, perhaps the key reason the Beat Movement is reverently remembered is it occurred at the end of the Piscean period. As such it cusped the dawn of the Aquarian age with its attendant liberating hopes and aspirations (A hope which was to further bloom briefly through to the sweet flower-power/hippie movement until it, too, was of course, destroyed.)
The Beat Movement—the kept-press called it beatnik, thus distorting it into a pejorative. Whereas its meanings were beat as in welschmerz/longings for heaven-on-earth; beat as in weary/laymy-capitalist-burdens-down, beat as in cosmic-Pythagorean-jazz-rhythm, and finally, beat as in spiritual states of grace/beatitude. Its materialistic 'real' effects were miniscule. If you want to record its accomplishments in the world of 'pure reason' (see Jack Levine's painting of the same name), then only Ginsberg/Kerouac/Holmes, a few others may be tenuously counted among its accomplishments. But in the Platonic world of ideas the Beats were wired into the eternal/the infinite/the sublime and their—holy—effect on the peoples of the world is immeasurable. They spawned the Hippies, they spawned flower-power, they spawned the end of the Vietnamese War, they spawned the reading of poets; they spawned doing one's thing, they spawned dropping out of the rodent-wrangle; they spawned being one's own leader, they spawned a faith in 'god', they spawned a belief in the beauty of life, and they spawned the certainty that love and truth are irradicable. For these reasons—consciously or not—they are revered.

Their lives? Like ours, some ups, some downs, some kicks/some pricks—but their sources of energy gave us the certain knowledge and re-reminded us that no in-spirited and peace-becqueathing power came from killing-ground Wall Street plugs. Their lives argued there was another source, more efficient-constant-cleaner-sweeter, the Beats called it love/god/zen/beauty/it had nothing to do with stocks (as in jail stocks) and bonds (as in bondage) it had to do with the way seagulls float on nothingness; and that it was easier to banish the economic big-bad-wolf than to build yellow/brick/shithouses, and that one butterfly's waffle could support all the heavens and all the angels and all the earths. and all the devils, too—by god!

And so, The Beat Book becomes almost a religious tract. Some of it explicit in languages, photographs, poetries, and some of it implicit—seeping in like sun through our dusty-window visions. And some of it occurs like summoning rain,—the lace of grace—all together, which is a sensible thing since we are all/all together/together.

The Beats created a revolution. Peaceful, quiet, Socratic, Christ-like but nevertheless a revolution and the kept media and its myrmidons grabbed for the Movement's jugular vein. As they were later to do with even greater finesse with the Hippies, the kept media realized because of the beauty of the Beat ideals it had to use a double-gambit. Ridicule on the one hand. Beats were dirty, lazy, rigger-loving dope fiends that scuttled about mumbling dig-that-crazy-franafranz, And co-optation on the other businessmen sold 'Beat' costumes (berets/beards/sandals), advertised 'Beat'
parties, sausaged 'Beat' cartoons. Of course, the power structure succeeded (Whatever else did you think was that iron around your heart?) Sincere but stupid critics, plus insincere but stupid critics; sincere but stupid editors (bishops/professors/senators/college presidents (how else did you think they got their jobs? Good ole boys means dutiful-obedient good-little-boys!)) all helped bury the Beats.

Conversely, inhuman-inhumane systems can never succeed/not in the happy/buddha/fatface of eternity. Either we will live in peace and harmony—demented Captain Ahabs and all—or we shall not live at all. And in the meantime, in between-time, the Beat Movement stands, as do the Impressionist, the Classic Greek, all the continuing unbroken bohemian citizens of the universe laughingly reminding us in the face of the crotch-sniffing censors that it is possible to be at peace, to love, to have breads on the table, to be free of terror even surrounded by a sick-souled system whose prime commodity is terror (of poverty, of health, of hunger, of shelter, of life).

What the Beats did accomplish in the more 'practical' sense was an appreciation of the existential solutions of blacks, an awareness that we are all german-jews, that we are all irish-catholics, that we are all south-african niggers, a humbling acceptance of the cosmic rhythms of this dancing universe, a belief that all men are brothers, all women sisters, a conscious knowledge of the unconscious, a joyous excitement in joyous excitement, a sensitive usage of soft drugs (pot/wine) to aid in one's contacting godheads, a certitude that we are all saints/angels/bodhisattava, an acquiescence to the gracious patterns of nature, a faith that less 'effort' is more, and a sense of inexorable justice—in spite of the mad (i.e. the illogical) that all is in all/all is well/all is/all.

The ten dollar price for The Beat Book may seem a bit steep, but if you only frame the cover of Jack Kerouac/looking half-mad/half-wild, carrying a kewpie doll—you've got your dime's worth. Not even going into the rare and historical/scholarly/aesthetically valuable goodies—essays—and Fred W. McDarragh photos The worst is you'll go partially wrong, which is mostly your usual state anyway—isn't it?

reviewed by John Pyros
BEAR CUT

A mile up the coast
from Nixon's
Key Biscayne retreat
gulls & cormorants
hunt the vast colonies
of sea life like
B52s over Asian
villages. A century
past, the Seminoles
& their runaway black
brothers from Georgia
& the Carolinas
were hunted like wolves
out here. We’ll wipe out
a species or two but
the rest mutate
& survive. The mangrove,
the sea urchin, the
violet snail & the kingdom
of the bryozoans. We
can’t destroy it all &
we won’t reign forever
I tell you this from
where a hundred years
ago bear roamed on
the northern tip
of Key Biscayne—
Cape Florida.

Steve Kowit
AMERICAN MUSIC

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  Stalks And Trees And Drops And Clouds
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