

The Insincerity *of* Poetic Candor

Kent Johnson, Araki Yasusada,
and the Authorship Question
on the UB Poetics List, 1995–2012



Edited by
Kristen M. Fabians

@poetics

The UB Poetics Discussion Group
A Reading Edition

The Insincerity of Poetic Candor

Kent Johnson, Araki Yasusada, and the Authorship Question
on the UB Poetics List, 1995-2012

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126 excerpts · 64 hands · 1995-2012

“the apparatus, and the response to it, is part OF the work”
— Aldon L. Nielsen, 12 February 1998

Editor's Introduction

Kristen M. Fabians

This volume is drawn from the archive of the Poetics List of the University at Buffalo, a mailing list that ran from December 1993 to January 2014 and carried something over a hundred and twenty thousand messages. It concerns one man and one book, and an argument about them that the room conducted, on and off, for seventeen years, and never settled.

The book is *Doubled Flowering: From the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada*, which presented poems as the work of a Hiroshima survivor and turned out to be a fabrication, credited on its title page to a further invention, "Tosa Motokiyu." The man is Kent Johnson, who has been named in connection with it since the summer of 1995 and who has never straightforwardly confirmed or denied the attribution. This edition does not settle it either. What follows prints the argument, not a verdict, and the reader who arrives wanting the question closed should be told at once that it is not closed here.

I had expected, when I began, to assemble a volume in which Johnson explained himself. That volume does not exist in the archive. He wrote three hundred and thirty-four posts to the list, and thirty of them touch Yasusada — nine in every hundred. Of the three hundred and eighty-five Yasusada posts, only those same thirty are his. The two subjects, which one naturally imagines fused, are very nearly disjoint sets. He is discussed in a further eight hundred and sixty-eight posts by other people, so that across the whole run he is written about two and a half times more often than he writes. He is not the most talked-about member — Charles Bernstein, Maria Damon and Ron Silliman are all discussed more, and in Bernstein's case more than four times more than he posts — but Johnson is the only one of them who was stopped posting altogether, and the only one whose absence made no difference at all to the volume of talk about him.

The consequence is the shape of this book. Its first two movements are given over to Johnson's own posting, and they are mostly not about hoaxes at all. The first faces outward: the Neruda quarrel, a Congressional campaign against a small press, a strike at General Motors, the killings in East Timor, the business of Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice, which he carried onto the list through 1998 with the persistence of a man selling papers outside a plant gate. The second is conducted inside the room, and its subject is the room: what a

poem may take from a culture not its own, what a form is, whether the reading community he thought he had joined existed at all, and who may speak here, how often, and at whose discretion. It ends with his last posts to the list. I have put both first because the three movements that follow are largely other people arguing about him, and it seemed to me indefensible to print those without first establishing that their subject was a person with positions, and not merely an occasion.

His last posts in his own name are of February 2000; two more arrive that June, headed *kent johnson (by way of...)*, relayed by the listowner, which is the condition the rest of this book finds him in. The argument did not stop. It ran another thirteen years, and its single busiest month — fifty-eight posts naming him — falls in October 2009, nearly a decade after his last word to the list. A room he had left went on arguing with him in his absence, which is either a tribute or a symptom, and this edition does not decide that either.

The join between the man and the book, and the reason they belong in one volume rather than two, is a question that neither of them ever quite escapes: whether a name is a person, and what a poet owes the dead. That question is asked in 1997 about a survivor of Hiroshima who never lived. It is asked again in 2004 about photographs from Abu Ghraib, and in 2009 about a man who bought copies of another poet's book and put his own name on them. The vocabulary changes completely — orientalism and hoax give way to appropriation, procedure, uncreativity — and the question underneath does not change at all.

There is a third thing he keeps saying, and it is easy to miss because it is never the subject of the thread it appears in. From his first months on the list he complains that the avant-garde he had joined is losing its politics: that the room can spend weeks on Ed Dorn's fascism or on the institutional implications of a poetics and say nothing at all when a small press is under government attack. In April 1997 he gives it a name — the movement is “evolving into a diffuse kind of aestheticism” — and the charge recurs, in 1998 against the Key Club of younger post-Language poets whose experiment stops at compositional method, and in 2004 and after against a conceptualism he thought had perfected the manoeuvre. Yasusada is the case that made him notorious, but this is the argument he was actually having, and the hoax is one move in it.

Two rules have governed the selection. The first is that where a charge was made against Johnson and he answered it on the list, his answer is printed, at

length, in the same movement as the charge. He appears here as a defendant often enough; he does not appear as one who was never allowed to speak. Where he did not answer, the headnote says so. The second is that positions I find unattractive are printed in their strongest available form. The argument was conducted by people who believed what they were saying, and an edition that tidied it into a moral would be worth nothing.

A word on who is not here. The charge of orientalism was argued most fully not on the list but in *Boston Review*, whose summer 1997 forum on Marjorie Perloff's essay carried a response signed by five Asian American writers — Juliana Chang, Walter K. Lew, Tan Lin, Eileen Tabios and John Yau. The list quoted that forum for a decade without ever printing it, and this edition would repeat the omission if it printed only the list's own traffic, in which their case is more often answered than made. So the forum is described, and "Displacements" printed entire, in the appendix. What the list itself holds is three excerpts in Asian American hands — Hoa Nguyen in 1997, Brian Kim Stefans in 2000, Timothy Yu in 2004 — and, on a question about the appropriation of a Japanese voice, one piece of Japanese testimony: Akitoshi Nagahata's, in the apparatus, correcting a point of fact. The other Japanese voice in the affair, Hosea Hirata's, reached the list only as a phrase on a book jacket. Kenneth Goldsmith, whose book was appropriated in 2009, never posted either. A room can only argue with the people in it, and this one kept arguing about people who were not.

A hundred and twenty-six excerpts drawn from one thousand four hundred and fifty-nine posts, in sixty-four hands, across seventeen years. Every excerpt is verbatim, and the list's own spellings and its net-speak stand as written; the list ran on plain ASCII, so where a writer marked emphasis with asterisks or underscores the marks are printed as typed. Editorial cuts within a passage are marked. Where a passage has been trimmed at its head or its foot, a note in the editorial colour follows the excerpt and says what was cut and what is in it. Words relayed from elsewhere are set as block quotation, and a note in the same colour names their true source. Where a large mass of the archive goes unprinted between two excerpts, a note in the margin colour says what is in it; everything those notes summarise is printed in full, and in sequence, in the monthly volumes of this series. The Sources appendix gives the length of each post as the archive holds it beside the number of its words printed here.

Two remarks about what follows, which I would otherwise have made at the end. The first is that the strongest arguments in this volume were made by people with nothing at stake in the attribution. Rod Smith's observation in 1996 — that the prosecution assumed the author was not Asian, and was therefore reading for motive while denying that it read for motive — is worth more than anything Johnson said in his own defence. So is Aldon Nielsen's remark that the apparatus, and the response to it, are part of the work, which concedes everything the defenders wanted and takes back everything they thought they had won: if the outrage is inside the poem, then the poem is a machine for producing outrage, and the people producing it have been conscripted. So is Christopher Winks's inversion in 2004, which nobody followed up — that the disappearance of the author, argued on this list for a decade as an emancipation, is also precisely the form official evasion takes when the responsibility for torture is distributed until no one is left holding it.

The second concerns the sentence the argument finally arrives at. The *Day* thread ends on 6 October 2009 with Alison Croggon, writing in exasperation rather than analysis: a work that has all its answers in advance cancels its own criticism, and that is deadly. She is describing *Day*. She might equally be describing the whole seventeen years — an argument so constructed that every objection to it can be read as proof of the point and every defence as complicity, and in which the only move unavailable to anybody is to stop. The room did not stop. It ran out of members instead. I have not said who wrote *Doubled Flowering*, because the archive does not know, and because I have come to think the not-knowing is the more interesting condition — the one the book was built to produce and the one this edition is obliged to preserve. Kent Johnson died in October 2022 without ever having said, and so the argument ends as it ran: closed by nobody's word, and least of all by his.

— *Kristen M. Fabians*

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I

Five Hundred Letters

1997-1999

Kent Johnson joined the list in December 1996 and left it in February 2000, and in those thirty-eight months he wrote three hundred and thirty-four posts — a heavy contributor though not, as was said at the time and has been repeated since, the second heaviest; across 1997 and 1998 he stands seventh. Almost none of what he wrote was about Araki Yasusada. It divides in two, and this is the half that faces outward.

He wrote about Neruda and Stalinism, and answered Mark Weiss not as a critic but as a former seller of Socialist Workers Party papers who thought the Popular Front record mattered more than the analogy. He wrote about a Congressional campaign against a small press, about a New Party then claiming Zinn and Chomsky, about an arrest in Uruguay that he said had turned him into everything he became. He forwarded the business of Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice with a doggedness that plainly irritated people. He wrote about Ginsberg's death on the day of it, and about Ginsberg's advertisement for Gap trousers, and did not find the two subjects incompatible.

The movement takes its title from the post in which he tells the list that five hundred letters need to be written to Rep. Pete Hoekstra, and it is a fair statement of the strand: he asks the room to act, and the room mostly declines, or answers with an amused shrug he then presses. David Bromige, pressed, writes back that he will write the letter but doubts it will do anything, which is the most the list ever offers him. What runs underneath is a question he asks in June 1998 and never quite drops — what any of it has to do with poetry.

It ends in September 1999 with the killings in East Timor, and with a post he thought good enough to send twice.

1. — Mark Weiss Sat, 22 Feb 1997 08:19 ↑ [Index](#)

Weiss opens the February 1997 thread on Pablo Neruda's lifelong loyalty to Stalin. A poet and translator of Latin American poetry, he is explaining rather than defending: how a poet's detector for falsehood could fail in Stalin's case, and what the American Communist Party looked like from inside a democratic socialist household during the cold war.

I'm going to suggest an explanation of why Neruda's "shit detector" malfunctioned in the case of Stalin. This will require a little history, both personal and more general. Although my family were what would be called democratic socialists in Europe (Eugene V. Debs and Norman Thomas were

tutelary dieties in our household), there were still a lot of Stalinists around when I was growing up. Some of them managed to hold on to the faith right into the sixties (My father's flirtation with the American Communist Party, like that of most American radicals, did not survive the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939). These were the fathers and mothers of some of my friends, and I knew them well. Most subscribers to the list are probably familiar with Ginsberg's description of a cell meeting in Kaddish. That really seems to have been what it was like. The party served a frunction for the believers not unlike the church for fundamentalist christians--it was the center of social life as well as ideology. As a result, members had little intimate contact with non-believers. My best friend's parents actually met and carried on their courtship at cell meetings. This exclusivity was enforced from the outside as well as from the inside. Police and FBI harrassment, during the cold war and before, were a fact of everyday life, and blacklisting, even in less than glamorous fields, was commonplace. The labor movement, in a bid to overcome the brutality of the suppression to which it was accustomed, was purged of anyone who could be suspected of radicalism. Religious schools reaped an ironic bonanza of cheap atheist labor in the form of teachers who could no longer teach in the public schools. Early television was dominated by McCarthy's show-trials--I used to watch them after school. And the trial and execution of the Rosenberg's, whatever their culpability may have been, was an extended nightmare for people who assumed that we were in the midst of a pogrom and who still were traumatized by the images (for some, who had been there, by the reality) of the death-camps. To outward appearances, weren't they a lot like us? Mrs. Rosenberg and my mother even had the same first name, and the full-page photograph of her body slumped over, straining against the leather restraints of the electric chair, that graced the cover of the Daily News the morning after the execution was the subject of many nightmares and is still etched in my brain. If even members of the ruling class, and Protestants, to boot, were not safe--we had seen Alger Hiss destroyed--what would happen to Jewish liberals and radicals? You didn't have to be particularly radical to be affected.

[Seven hundred and eighty words are cut from the foot, on the Rosenbergs and the photograph of Ethel Rosenberg in the electric chair on the cover of the Daily News, on Hofstadter kept out of a permanent job for views left of centre, and on his own father's fear that a youthful socialism would cost him his living.]

2. — Mark Weiss *Sat, 22 Feb 1997 21:20* ↑ [Index](#)

Weiss again, later the same evening, answering the charge that to explain Neruda's Stalinism was to justify it. He separates the delusion from the politics, and from Pound: a vicious racist system based on a perversion of genetics was central to Pound's work, where Stalin was never central to Neruda's, communism as an ideal of human justice was.

I don't think I was trying to justify Neruda's or anyone else's Stalinism. I was trying to explain how it was possible to be deluded, and to underline the importance of context in understanding behavior. But let's get this straight--I might be able to arrive at an explanation of how Pound came to feel and act the way he did, but I'd still be left with a poet incorporating into his work a vicious racist system based on a perversion of genetics. That was a central element of his politics. Stalin was not central to Neruda, communism (whether or not we think it practicable) as an ideal of human justice was. His delusion was accepting Stalin as the instrument thereof. But it was the pursuit of justice that was the motivation. While both men may have been deluded I think there's a world of difference between those two positions, and I hope that it's only the rhetorical habit of symmetry that keeps you from seeing that. And I don't think that anyone outside the Aryan Nation could justify Pound's position.

Just to pick at a nit, it's entirely possible that there were people in the west who thought that Stalin was better for their futures than Trotsky. That doesn't mean that they had the power to determine the outcome of the power struggle. Or do you have copies of the cheques from JP Morgan to Stalin's PAC? It's also not entirely clear (and here I enter into heresy) that Trotsky would have been such a bargain for the Russian people.

3. — Kent Johnson *Sun, 23 Feb 1997 00:47* ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Mark Weiss, who had accounted for Neruda's Stalinism by analogy with the pressures on rank-and-file American Communists under McCarthyism. Johnson, a former member of the Socialist Workers Party, the American Trotskyist organisation, argues instead from the record of the Popular Front, the Comintern's policy after 1935 of alliance with liberal governments against fascism.

The story is moving, but I'd argue that it is fairly irrelevant in terms of helping one to understand Neruda and in coming to terms with that great poet's

life-long and fairly visceral Stalinism. In fact, Weiss's argument that Neruda's "complex naivete" is analogous to that of U.S. rank and file CPers centers on his concluding statement that, "If things were bad for leftists in America, they were awful in the feudal societies of Latin America. The kind of quasi-official violence that marked US labor conflicts in the first three decades of this century persisted in Chile, with the brief respite of the Allende regime, until Pinochet." Yes, Chilean history is one of class conflict, and things were never exactly rosy for leftists there, particularly in moments of acute crisis, when, as in 1973, the full force of the native ruling class and imperialism comes down with an iron fist.

But an important part of the history of the Stalinized Communist parties everywhere during the 30's and through WWII (in line with Kremlin dictates that were driven by Stalin's desire to maintain a *modus vivendi* with the U.S. and Europe) is the renouncing of the direct struggle for power in the "feudal" societies of the "third world," in favor of CP alliances with the "progressive" and "nationalist bourgeoisie." This led in a number of countries--and Chile, in fact, is a prime example--to the formation of electoral alliances between the Communist parties and capitalist parties, so-called "popular fronts," which in a number of instances around the world momentarily came to power. Far from pushing forward a revolutionary program, the CP in nearly all these cases acted as faithful junior partner, working to hold the trade union movement in check, and often being in the vanguard of the ideological and legal attacks on activists who would not consent to these accommodationist policies (the classic and tragic case is Spain, where the most rabid and successful enemies of the powerful anarchist trade union movement were not the fascists but the PC of Spain, on which see Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*). But the old SWP member, Militant newspaper hawker in me is coming back and I'm getting long-winded. So how does this relate to Neruda?

In this way: Pablo Neruda was in no way a rank and file communist whose personal life was under constant and relentless harassment. Of course, he faced persecution in significant ways when the political winds weren't blowing the right way, and he faced those with great courage (e.g. his albeit poeticized flight across the Andes from the previously "progressive bourgeois" Radical Party government of Videla was undoubtedly heroic) but he was also a leading official of the Chilean Communist Party, its Secretary of Propaganda for an extended period in the 1940's, an elected CP senator during the "Popular Front" Videla regime, and consul and ambassador for "progressive" capitalist Chilean

governments on two or three occasions, all as an open member of the Communist Party.

On one of those "consul" occasions, Neruda was in Mexico for an extended spell during Trotsky's exile there. Far from being "naive" about the purges, show trials and summary executions of left-wing communists in the Soviet Union, Neruda knew about them well and approved of them, as any internationally prominent member in good standing of the Third International did. There was nothing all that secret about the purges within the movement. The crowning, orgasmic moment, of course, of the Stalinist terror, was Trotsky's murder in Mexico City at the hands of an NKVD agent (or was it KGB by then?).

[Eighty-five words are cut from the head and six hundred from the foot, the latter on Neruda drinking with Siqueiros while he was jailed for a machine-gun attack on Trotsky. Thirty of these forty posts are his, eight thousand words in all. He puts a question to the list: "Given this overwhelming fact of an eventual, sudden, and irreversible asteroidal extinction, what is the purpose or worth of poetry", and watches the answers come: "That a first remark on impending, irrevocable catastrophe would refine itself after 40 or so posts into commentaries on a Chinese poet who composes in ethereal, invented characters seems fitting and beautiful, even if I can't say exactly why." He also writes four times on the Korean monk Jung Kwang, twice on bpNichol, and on the Congressional move against FC2.]

4. — David Bromige Thu, 27 Mar 1997 22:55 ↑ [Index](#)

The reply Johnson found bewildering. Bromige is accounting for the list's silence over the Congressional campaign against FC2, Fiction Collective Two, the experimental fiction press whose publication of Doug Rice's Blood of Mugwump had drawn a threatening memo from Rep. Pete Hoekstra to the NEA. Johnson had been pressing the list about it for two days.

Maybe because theres nothing to say. What is remarkable about a congressman cynically affecting moral outrage in order to get money away from the poor so that it may be given to the rich?

Thanks for the tip, some list one, i looked under "whatsnew" and found the chapter from one of the novelists in question as well as an interview with Doug Rice. I liked the writing in the novel. Enjoyed the orgasm. Of course, its one more man writing abt woman's sexuality. Do any of the women on the list find it accurate?

The congressman might be genuinely outraged, i suppose. That he wasnt there to help. Perhaps he feels left out. But I really doubt that we need to hunt for

unconscious motives. That NEA money is needed for corporate welfare. db.

5. — Kent Johnson *Fri, 28 Mar 1997 09:39* ↑ [Index](#)

From the March 1997 thread on the Congressional campaign against FC2, whose publication of Doug Rice's Blood of Mugwump had drawn a threatening memo from Rep. Pete Hoekstra to the NEA. Johnson answers the post above, and Hugh Steinberg, who had written that the attacks wreck havoc on the organisations that support literature.

Total agreement, Hugh. But David Bromige (you, one of my favorite writers), I have to admit I'm bewildered by your response which seems to suggest there is nothing to do and bemused silence is the answer? Please correct me here if I'm misinterpreting. I want to ask: If a bunch of fascists came after your work, and you appealed to fellow writers for help, how would you feel if you got left alone? I guess I'm sounding like the moral yardstick here, but really, this issue strikes me as a matter of principle, honor and plain tactical necessity for all of us on this list. I say there's five hundred letters that need to be written to Rep. Hoekstra from this list. And we should be sharing ideas about how to contact others through this incredibly useful medium that brings us together!

Let me ask a hypothetical specific: If this gang can get away with this one, will it make it *less or more likely* that they will go after someone like, say, the publisher of Aaron Shurin's latest beautiful work?

I've got a call in to FC2 and left a message requesting that they post more detailed info here.

6. — David Bromige *Fri, 28 Mar 1997 09:17* ↑ [Index](#)

Bromige gives ground the next morning, and makes the practical objection: a letter is better sent to one's own representative than to Hoekstra, who is not going to be converted. Johnson had called for five hundred letters from the list, and had asked Bromige how he would feel if fascists came after his own work and his fellow writers left him alone.

Yes, Kent, now you let us know what action you wish us to take, I for one will take it.

I didnt think i sounded bemused. I was only attempting to account for the list's silence on this matter, which you were finding a puzzle. I believe I summed the

situation up quite crisply. I realize that more than style is at stake here.

I'll write a letter, but it's difficult to believe a ton of letters will make a difference. Once upon a time, perhaps. But by now, every voter in the nation must recognize the scenario on sight : who's going to support Hoffstra, except those we will never convert? Might be better to write to one's own congressperson, rather than to a man who can't or won't own his humanity. db.

7. — Kent Johnson *Fri, 28 Mar 1997 13:19* ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson takes the practical point, and adds the copy to Hoekstra's oversight committee. Then he corrects himself in turn: the word he had wanted for Bromige's shrug was not bemused but amused. Curt White, whose telephone message he mentions, is the novelist Curtis White, of FC2.

David: Yes, the letter to one's own representative is perhaps the most effective, with copy to Hoekstra's Oversight Committee. I'll be posting that mailing info as soon as I return Curt White's message taht I just picked up on the machine. I actually didn't mean to say "bemused"--I meant to say "amused." (i.e. what's so remarkable after all about this, just another right-winger jealous of the orgasm, etc.) But your last message makes clear you *do* think this is serious.

Ok, I'll be back shortly!

Kent

8. — Charles Bernstein *Fri, 4 Apr 1997 11:50* ↑ [Index](#)

The post that begins the list's Ginsberg week, from the news in that morning's papers. Bernstein had founded the Poetics List at Buffalo three years earlier and still ran it. Ginsberg had been diagnosed with liver cancer and given little time; he died the following day, 5 April 1997.

Allen Ginsberg has been diagnosed with liver cancer and is not given much more time to live. There are articles about his illness in today's New York Post and Philadelphia Inquirer.

I would imagine everyone reading this will have the same intense reaction I am having. It seems like Allen Ginsberg has been with me all my life.

9. — Kent Johnson *Fri, 4 Apr 1997 20:34* ↑ [Index](#)

Posted the day of Ginsberg's death, in the first hours of the list's mourning thread. The anthology referred to is Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry (1989), edited by Johnson with Craig Paulenich, in which Ginsberg appears; the Orono conference is one of the National Poetry Foundation's decade gatherings in Maine.

Here is the great equalizer, it would seem. Language is slippery, pronouns are fuzzy, poetry is not poetry. But death? Death is death, and there it is, no experimental messing with it.

I suspect Ginsberg would not want any sentimental sniffing. He's been talking about death for a long time. I remember at the Orono conference in--was it--'93? I approached Ginsberg after his reading there and introduced myself as the person who had edited the Buddhist anthology of contemporary American poets in which he prominently figured. I was sure he would be impressed, probably would embrace me warmly, since clearly this was the most important anthology to appear in post-war America, intro by Gary Snyder, numerous avant-garde poets along with big mainstreams, unknowns, etc. He had a red bandanna tied to four corners around his head, sipped deeply on a soda and said in a decidedly laconic way: Oh, so you're the guy who did that... And then he turned and started talking to someone else.

I felt hurt and felt resentful for a good time after that--especially after riding back to the motel in the same van with him and he was yakkety yakketing with Marjorie Perloff and Jerome McGann and it was as if I was not there. Invisible. Look Allen, I have adored you, wanted to be like you, wondered what it would be like to walk down the street with you, read you out loud with my friends in the bar, and all you can do after I edit a Buddhist anthology of poetry is treat me like shit.

Did I think to myself: I wish you would die, motherfucker. (but no, no, I don't mean that, that's a wrong thing to feel, that's just my drunkenness, I'm not that kind of person...)

And of course he will. And of course all of us will. The intensity comes out of the factness of death, doesn't it, like a beatnik on acid with beads, staring us in the face with all of his teeth? Now I realize death was probably teaching me a lesson, saying so what if you did so and so, you sorry idiot? No merit.

So don't be sad. I'll bet Allen wouldn't want it that way. But then again, I could be wrong. And only death will prove us all, in the end, immaculately right. Right?

[Thirty-six posts and forty-seven hundred words in the week after Ginsberg's death on 5 April, thirteen of them his. He needles Daniel Zimmerman — "it sounds like you might really be scared" — and asks what the first line of the renga will be, then feeds it lines: "Happening to notice the willow leaves in the garden, a braille page of words". Maria Damon tells him to spare her his sarcasm. He answers: "I didn't mean to offend. But I apologize, because the message was silly and unnecessary. I'm sitting here now, just having read Alan Sondheim's post. I feel really weird. Is anyone else out there crying too?"]

10. — Dale Smith Thu, 10 Apr 1997 16:24 ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Daniel Bouchard's reply to George Will's column on Ginsberg — Will, the conservative Washington Post columnist, had written on the poet within days of his death — and granting Will a point: the Gap advertisement. Smith was a poet in Austin, later the editor of Skanky Possum.

Actually, as pig-headed as Will is, his piece on GinsbErg does attempt to locate the poet within the cultural market in which he participated. And his implication of Ginsberg as a culture industry cynosure is not entirely off the mark. Ginsberg was a cultural icon, a marketable commodity. I remember seeing huge billboards in San Francisco with Ginsberg's image selling Gap khaki pants. His warmth and affability also made him an attractive PR spokesman for a group of writers in the 50's. He attracted the kind of media attention Kerouac would have preferred to avoid. But promotion is, you know, how to stay in business. And poetry is still affected by a relentless economic structure. What's interesting, and what Will doesn't mention, is how the culture industry makes its own social subversion into a marketable commodity.

The other relevant moment in the article is when Will writes:

“When Ginsberg came to Columbia 'there was a vast throng that had been unable to get in. They pounded on the doors and milled around. Ticket-holders entered between lines of police.'”

“Today no poet could cause such excitement on any campus, or any other American venue, so complete has been the supplanting of words, written and spoken, by music and movies as preferred modes of communication.”

This is a perfectly candid statement to hear as a poet, but the implication is that Ginsberg's writing is partially responsible for a deterioration in values which

has made the market more open to the movies than poetry. Will doesn't follow up on this point, but I find it an important acknowledgement of poetry's inability to maintain prominence in a market Ginsberg condoned and benefitted from.

Anyway, the rest of Will's piece falls apart with the Kerouac quotes, (he couldn't find Ginsberg quotes?), which are out of place and confusing because, well, Will wants to say Ginsberg sucks, but he can't say 'sucks' in public.

11. — Kent Johnson *Thu, 10 Apr 1997 20:53* ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Dale Smith in the thread on George Will's column and Ginsberg's Gap advertisement, and asking where the horizon of the cultural market is to be drawn. The scrambled spellings of Ginsberg's name are deliberate; Johnson explained a day later that they were a riposte to another poster's insistence on the letter E.

Yours is a very intelligent and provocative statement, opening a discussion that I suspect Ginsberg would have welcomed about himself. Just one question to throw out as first thought, though not necessarily the better one: this "cultural market" that you charge Ginsberg as being complicit in-- where do you see it, as they say, horizon? Did Ginsberg, in other words, step over some kind of threshold that you and I (cleaner in life than him) haven't? What is the qualitative difference, as you see it, between choosing to buy Gap pants and posing in them? And when we, for example, choose to polemicize on this list, are we not engaging in a gesture that is as fully inscribed in the cultural market as Ginsberg's marketing of his image? I know, I know, you talk about the "gap" between ideals and necessity, and you seem to grant that we all inhabit that and must necessarily negotiate, but isn't it a bit too easy for "uncommodified" poets to criticize across the gap between life and death, and say that the dead guy sold out when we haven't, even though you acknowledge that we've all sold out, inevitably, a little bit? [...]

Dale, I'll say this: I would like, when I say something on this list, to impress, to have people think: "Boy, that Kent Johnson sounds really interesting, I wonder what he is really like.." Wishful thinking, I'm sure, but I would like my posts to contribute, little by little, to a great poetry job somewhere, or to being invited to the party I never get invited to, to having an even modest cultural status I haven't yet had, to be thought of as a list insider who is known to be an insider by those who aren't. There, I said it! (And why, exactly, does it mildly startle every single one of you who just read this that I said this?)

I am wearing Gap pants right now as I write, and whatever you are or aren't wearing Dale, you are, by reading this, between your ideals and the necessity of the dollar, being called on by Ginsbuerg, in his koan-billboard, to think a little more deeply about your own critical certainties.

[Fifteen posts, fourteen hundred words, eleven of them his. Gary Snyder lectures in Freeport, Illinois, and Johnson drives him about: "It was quite incredible, frankly." He reports the magpie poem sung for Ginsberg, "When it's over he says, 'And then the magpie flew away'", and, the next day, "Took Snyder to the airport bus today and told him about the Will article. He didn't know about it." Hoa Nguyen writes to the list for the first time, quoting a passage of his on Ginsberg and asking the room to attend to it: "It is an incredibly honest personal statement."]

12. — Mark Prejsnar *Fri, 18 Apr 1997 13:22* ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Johnson's query about the New Party, the third-party formation of the 1990s, then claiming Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Cornel West and Barbara Ehrenreich, which sought power by cross-endorsing sympathetic Democrats rather than running against them. Prejsnar had organised for it in Georgia.

WARNING: LONG POST ON POLITIX, IN RESPONSE TO KENT'S QUERY

Kent--

I've been active off and on with the New Party. I might be more active if they were a presence in Georgia, as they are **extremely** oriented toward building right now at the local level. A few people (in Wisconsin?? in the midwest) founded it about 7 (?) years ago; the guiding light is generally considered to be Joel Rodgers, a poli sci academic by trade, who has authored or co-authored many of their public statements. There was a quite impressive essay in the Nation, which to some extent constituted a founding gesture as far as much of the country was concerned, and got hundreds of people (including myself) hooked up with the party.

Their platform is in flux and very vague, which has pissed off lots of people on the left, and led to many attacks. The NP says that this is because ultimately they want the folks who are building the party to draw up its detailed credo, and it is still in very formative stages. They claim I think a couple of thousand members, some of whom are of course paper. They have very active chapters in some major cities like Chicago. Their early, tentative outlines of belief/strategy emphasize elections and include what I would call a classic social-democratic set of details. One of their defining features is belief in a tactic called

fusion..This would involve placing a candidate (usually a Democrat) on the ballot (for anything from school board to President) under the New Party as well as her own party...The theory is that as the NP swings people to the left, it could demonstrate that it had been indispensable to getting and keeping that candidate in office...Said candidate would then (tho' a Demo and usually quite unwilling) be forced to move increasingly to the left, to retain NP support and not lose the next election.

13. — Kent Johnson *Fri, 18 Apr 1997 22:38* ↑ [Index](#)

Replying to Mark Prejsnar and Kristin Prevallet, who had answered his query about the New Party and its strategy of cross-endorsing Democrats. Johnson argues from his own history: the years in the Socialist Workers Party, the American Trotskyist organisation, and a spell in a state farm militia north of Managua in 1985, during the contra war.

Easy for me to say after ten or so years of drawing a Trotskyist pension I guess,(though I can at least say I was an active member in '85 of the San Jose state farm militia in northern Managua, Nicaragua, even if I did wet my pants the one time we came under [heavy] fire).

But if there is a "Republicrat" political structure, and if the two parties are primarily there to give vent to the incestual squabbles of this country's ruling class, why participate in the "obscenity", as you put it, of what's going on? Why try to "pull" local Democrats to the "left" via some kind of elaborate electoral blackmail when one can present an honest and unwatered program to the public, stating clearly that there is no hope ever of any kind of true change as long as we keep voting for the parties of imperialism? (is that term still in use?) Why not say clearly that those who are the most reprehensible of all are those "progressive" sophisticates who know the score, but still are seduced to vote for Carter, Mondale, Dukakis, Clinton, and seduce others to do so, just so we can have a little lesser evil? (ok, so we got the lesser evil with Clinton--how's it such a breakthrough over Bush? Explain to me what is so different.)

I underestimated my numbers in my last post when I said that Nader got half a million votes--he got about 700,000 in 26 states and he barely campaigned. The point would be that this intimates the potential of principled, radical gestures on the local and national arenas, if only intelligent progressives would stop doing 69 with the Democrats. If there's going to be a Deb's-like resurgence of independent, radical politics in this country it's going to require a simple but

firm step outside the hall of mirrors we're given, don't you think?

But what does this have to do with poetry, especially since I titled this post as I did? (I can picture Maria Damon with one of her inevitable two-liners, asking). well, simply this: I've been on this list for about five months now, and I have been startled that there is apparently such little interest in discussing issues related to how poets might integrate themselves into issues of broader political commitment. This seems strange to me since the background to the very existence of this list is a community of poets in 70's and 80's trying to figure out how the act of writing might lead and be led into a broader understanding of political engagement. If the Language movement is evolving into other things, it seems to me (and please correct me if I'm off) to be evolving into a diffuse kind of aestheticism that can go on for weeks slamming Ed Dorn as a fascist, talk intricately about the institutional implications of Bernstein's and Perelman's poetics, but say virtually nothing at all when an honorable publisher of avant-garde writing (the FC2 affair, which happens, luckily, to have come to temporary close) is under government attack and makes an appeal for solidarity.

What am I saying Mark Presjnar? I'm rambling, but I think I'm onto something, even if few will respond, because, after all, it's just me.

Kent

[Three hundred and twenty words are cut from the head, on the New Party gathering old CPers, DSA types, radical Christians and independents under one banner. Thirty-three posts, eighty-five hundred words, fifteen of them his. He points to the Yasusada exchanges in Countermeasures, a journal out of Denver, and in Lingua Franca, the academic monthly that had run a piece on the affair, and says Doubled Flowering will come from Roof this autumn. He asks whether anyone else found the Bowering and Bromige repartee suspicious: "I'm convinced these witty and sexed-up massages (oops, I meant E), are encrypted and hide more serious meanings." Then his posts start vanishing and he unsubscribes. Back in May he passes on gossip about Paul Hoover's National Poetry Series prize, and after Kevin Killian and Maxine Chernoff answer, apologises: "My post on 'dirty postmodernism' was idiotic and, like most dirty gossip, devoid of logical argument."]

14. — Kent Johnson *Fri, 30 Jan 1998 18:50* ↑ [Index](#)

Written in reply to a parable posted under the name Spandrift, at the close of a bruising January 1998 exchange with Henry Gould over independent criticism and the buddy system. Daniel Viglietti, whose song the boy at the barbecue sings, was the Uruguayan protest singer then banned; the repression Johnson describes preceded the military coup of 1973.

Your parable reminds me of an old Uruguayan saying, which begins, "Beware of the bull with three horns." I wish I could remember the rest, but I can't. But I do remember once when I was 19, being at a barbecue in Punta del Este before it was totally trashed by the Brazilian and Argentinian jet set. It was a big party of young YMCA members, about 25 of us, and everyone got a big hunk of fairly rare meat with the hide and fur still attached. I remember watching the 17 year old girl I loved pick this up in her hands and chew and laugh. A kid, about the same age, picked up a guitar and started to sing a song by Daniel Viglietti, whose music was banned at the time, and everyone joined in, singing. By and by a black van and car both full of plainclothes cops arrived and started arresting everybody, and the kid with the guitar, who started to complain, got a long, black club across the face. The cop who was dragging away the girl I loved conveniently grabbed her breasts, and I stepped forward and yelled Hey! But then I didn't say anything more, afraid that I might get hit too. She tried to kick and punch back, but to no avail. She screamed at them that they were fascist pigs. The van drove away.

It was me and three or four 12 year olds who didn't get taken in. I was American, so the cops just took down some info and told me to watch it. OK, I said, I will. I took the bus back to Montevideo.

About two weeks later I saw the girl back at the Y. Our eyes met and then she quickly turned away. I started to say something but only half of it got out. Here and there I saw her a few times, but never spoke to her again. The kid playing the guitar was in for more than two years. No one died. I have no idea why in the world I'm saying this on this list. I know my posts are sometimes among the most idiosyncratic here and certainly not among the most esteemed. I don't fault anyone for that. In fact, I have come somehow to even like those who don't like me! Isn't that strange? But what is wrong with me? Forgive me for this creepily personal post! Something about not remembering the old saying about the bull with three horns draws me to say it, and also to remember the way that beautiful girl turned her eyes from me. It occurs to me now that if it weren't for

what happened then that I wouldn't be typing this now on this list, whatever it might mean. It occurs to me that it turned me into everything that I became. I guess that sounds trite. And yes, ok, so I'm feeling a bit embarrassed, not very polished or admirable at all, aware that even this candor is another sad way of demeaning myself before all of you.

Oh, I really did feel like jumping over the cliff. Still do, actually. I wish poetry was a parachute that worked, but it doesn't, not when the cliff is real. I wanted, Henry, to say to you at the end, "Here, Henry, here is your purple hat." But now I don't want to say that--at least not in the clever way that I'd planned. Now I am feeling a little sad, sad for us both, but mostly selfishly sad for myself, and I feel like being quiet for a long while. I know that you might well be thinking that I don't need to be sad for you, and of course you would be right. And I guess in the end, after all this time, after all those years of trying to forget, that's all that I have to say about that half-remembered saying.

Kent

[Twelve posts, thirty-four hundred words, nine of them his. Henry Gould closes the bull parable: "Thou shalt be with me in Tricorn Heaven whilst the rest gnasheth their teetheth in bull darkness." In the "My Woman" thread he defends Breton's poem as "a strange, disturbing, funny, mesmerizing, joyful, life-affirming, truly erotic poem", and: "Breton the sexist transcends his plebeian sexism here. Hurrah for poetry." "It's nice to finally find something to disagree on with Mark P and Pat P," he begins, before conceding "I don't consider myself an expert, because I've only had sex once--when I was nineteen". He also holds that anything posted here is public domain.]

15. — Kent Johnson Wed, 10 Jun 1998 19:52 ↑ [Index](#)

Close of a June 1998 thread provoked by a poster signing as Morpheal, who had defended the tactical use of nerve gas on civilian areas by the calculus of lives saved. Johnson had answered first by savage parody; here he states the objection plainly. Chris Alexander had summarised the principle.

And an intensely-orchestrated version of the above, of course, was put forth as official justification for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is a catchall hypothetical scenario and can be easily construed to justify just about any war crime or to "ethically" circumvent any international treaty designed to restrain the world from spiralling into generalized barbarism. All one has to do is play the numbers speculation game (as Morpheal does, in theoretical defense of the "tactical" use of nerve gas on civilian areas) and argue that such and such an atomic, chemical, or biological act, however regrettable the "collateral

damage," may have been necessary to prevent "even more death." In the grip of such Strangelovian logic, the gassing of civilians comes to be described (as in one of Morpheal's posts) as either the most "viable" choice available to commanders or an unfortunate "mistake."

Maybe I'm just a hopeless essentialist, but my own feeling is that when one falls into this logic, one leaves one's humanity behind. And thus leaves behind anything we could call poetry. I think that's some of what Ginsberg felt and meant when he said "Go fuck yourself with your [nerve gas] bomb."

[Eight posts, sixty-six hundred words, five of them his, and most of the bulk is forwarded: the Scholars, Artists and Writers for Social Justice statement for the Flint strikers, Jane Slaughter's account of the strike, and the report of the group's founding conference. In between he has bought the Spicer biography: "I purchased Poet Be Like God a few days back and am well into it and it's an amazing book (though I wish it had more photographs!)."]

16. — Kent Johnson Wed, 29 Jul 1998 17:56 ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Marjorie Perloff, the critic, who had called his question creepy. Johnson had asked, in the thread on Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan, then in cinemas, whether the Second World War deserved its standing as the good war; David Bromige, Alan Sondheim and Maxine Chernoff had objected too. Here he says what he meant by it.

Marjorie:

You mentioned that you found my question creepy. But I think you (along with David B, Alan S., and Maxine C.) misunderstood my intent: I was not asking whether or not it was a good thing to fight fascism! Actually, if I could choose my death (imagining myself for a moment with courage I probably don't have), I think it would be to travel in time to die on a barricade in Warsaw or Madrid. That would be, from my perspective, a "good" death.

(Now here would be a "creepy" but fascinating thread for the List sometime: How would the different poets and critics here like to die?)

Really, what I was pointing toward (obliquely, I admit) is the way "good war" has become a a kind of propaganda buzz-idea, ideologically loaded and mobilized in the construction of an official myth of national "goodness"-- a myth that Spielberg's film will powerfully contribute to shaping and strengthening. It's a myth that continues to help obscure the real history of U.S. deceit, aggression, and subversion of democracy around the world in the wake of WW2. It helps obscure the fact that WW2 was a conflict between rapacious imperialist

states on both sides. It was certainly good that the side that lost, lost. But the side that won was not good, nor was it "anti-fascist" in any principled sense, as Washington's and Wall Street's support of fascistic regimes in the post-war period makes perfectly clear.

So the question I asked seems quite reasonable to me and also quite relevant to our current situation, for it won't likely be long before we have another Gulf War or worse, and we will all be asked to remember how the old Gulf War was a "good war", just as we were being asked to remember how WWII was a "good war" as we were being readied for the Gulf War.

In other words, the enemy might be clear, but for the sake of the future it is good to know for whom one is fighting. This is some of what I had in the back of my mind when I asked my question.

And by the way, David Erben, you should publish that fine analysis of the movie somewhere!

Kent

[Ten posts drop out here, twenty-seven hundred words, six of them his: an argument with Henry Gould about disjunction. He opens "What is this silly little black and white thing about Yeats contra Pound, as if that is really the point anymore?" and puts up "Jubilate Agno" against the choice, "a thoroughly paratactic poem that is deeply moving and overflowing with spirit. God dictated it." Gould answers that American poetry "is at a sort of dead end."]

17. — Kent Johnson Tue, 18 Aug 1998 08:24 ↑ [Index](#)

One of a run of forwards through 1998 by which Johnson carried the business of Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice onto the list: the founding teach-in at Columbia, the support statement for the Flint strike that had shut most of General Motors that summer, and this membership appeal. He posted no commentary beyond the framing lines.

Poetics folks:

The below appeal comes from one of the most interesting and promising new organizations the American left has seen in some time. Please read!

Kent

“Can we persuade you to join Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice (SAWSJ)? You are on our email list; you may even think you are a member, but according to our records you aren't -- yet. We've sponsored the Columbia University teach-in and thirty others, mobilized support for

the UPS and GM strikes, and helped raise the issue of the right to organize. With your support, and that of others, we can do much more.

“The primary aim of SAWSJ is to strengthen the relationship between the labor movement and its allies in the academic and cultural communities. Working together we can help to shape the terms of political debate, contest corporate dominance of politics and culture, and foster the growth of a vibrant, progressive, multicultural working-class movement, one that speaks to issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. [...]

“The labor movement knows that standing alone it can't win the right to organize, change the image of unions, or win political victories. Academics and cultural workers know that unless we connect with a larger movement, our voice will not be heard and we will miss the grounding and connections that can enrich our vision.”

[These are the words of the SAWSJ Coordinating Committee, which Johnson forwarded to the list.]

[Seventeen posts, thirty-two hundred words, ten of them his. He forwards a Borders manual on “Recognizing the Early Signs of Union Activity”, and writes up Bulworth, seen in a Motel 6, in which “Amiri Baraka, no less, plays a homeless sort who haunts Bullworth”. Then the cruise missiles hit Khartoum and the rest of the gap is his: on the silence of the list, on the pesticide chemistry of the bombed factory, and on writing to Sudanese poets, “How have we come to know so much about the French poets and their forms and so little about the Sudanese?”]

18. — Kent Johnson *Fri, 28 Aug 1998 17:19* ↑ [Index](#)

Days after American cruise missiles destroyed the al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant at Khartoum — struck in retaliation for the East African embassy bombings, on the claim that it made nerve gas precursors — Johnson forwards to the list an invitation to a translation conference in Khartoum, addressed to David Bromige and signed by a council that does not exist. He wrote it himself, and the joke is at his own expense as much as anyone's.

Dear Mr. David:

It is to our delightful attention that the poetry of Sudan is now discussed in the poetry of America with such suddenness. Thank you for being a section of this and for making a vision of a poet of Sudan. In ways I believe you do not suspect, you have entered the Arab nation's literature. It is my principle, nevertheless, that you must be delighted by this.

Please excuse my English, but I am writing to invite you, as a poet first of Canada and now, secondarily, of America, to what I now wish to present. I am speaking concerning a conference (International) devotional to translation in all the sense of this word. We are interested, with specificness, in the doubled (tripled!) voices passed through many mediators of history and cultural ignorance. Irony, as I feel you must conceptualize, is big here. Irony, in its bigness, becomes something other. It is like, for an example, you, a Sudanese poet speaking through an English tongue of brokenness. Or it is like many, many things: For an example, if I may twice say so: It is like two boys kissing in the shadows of a pharmaceutical plant. (They are like black and deep wells. Their lives inside are very, very rich.) The sun will come up over this dusty land and an ancient hatredness shall fill them.

I do not know if I put myself well. So may I directly ask. Will you come to Khartoum? Please close your heavy eyes and dream of my branching hand opened out to you.

We passion to invite another poet of America, Mr. Kent, who also is credenced in your two countries, and perhaps others, to be a racist. (In his reply to our Central Council, he spoke: "I am honestly not sure.") Still we are opened, and we have most little, but our flowing tents which appear (to all purposes and meanings) to be sailboats in the desert, are yours. Our young are fresh and eager, and they shall press into your soft mouth goat cheese with a hurt and surprised look in their eyes. Also, dark-skinned soldiers with golden and musical watches adorn every minareted corner. Yes, you will find Khartoum strange and hospitality-filled, except, as you realize, inside certain surprising circumstances. But lightning on a human is more likely, so really not to worry.

Ethnography, of course, is also interesting to every one of us and to all peoples. Our flowing tents, if I may say it repeatedly (for I, in an addition, am a poet), appear to be sailboats in the desert. Thus, after the morning session, we will convene in Building 242 for tea, the prayers of all religions, and the making of bombs. No one is to be insulted, not even if they do not know how. Then we will reconvene, as I have said, and talk concerning Ethnography, including the customs of Christian animists to the south, the poignancy of American magazines like _Look_ and _Cross Cultural Poetics_, and the rituals of Buffalo List of Poets.

Well, I am sorry. The situation is very complicated. But here, as the saying goes, we are.

[A hundred and nineteen posts and twenty-nine thousand words go unprinted here, four months, sixty-one of them his. Bromige answers the invitation in kind and the two duel: "In the gone and melodramatic game of youth you cede the victory to me; in the greater game of the postmodern ping-pong, I cede the victory, hats off, to you." A Spicer thread follows — "In Spicer, Poetry is the boat to make the crossing; in Stevens, it is the moat to keep the castle" — and then a Yasusada bibliography, a letter from Mikhail Epstein, and, to Henry Gould, "I have suffered what appears to be a nervous breakdown because of this List". The gap ends in the December posting wars: Ron Silliman's "Policing the List", Johnson's "My one post for December", and the letter to Charles Bernstein he made public under the title "Concerns".]

19. — Kent Johnson Wed, 15 Sep 1999 17:33 ↑ [Index](#)

Michael Neff, editor of the online magazine Web del Sol, had asked whether the violence in East Timor might not have happened anyway, without the West's part in it. The killings followed the August 1999 referendum in which the territory, occupied by Indonesia since 1975, voted for independence. Johnson answers by agreeing with him.

Michael Neff asks a fascinating question about the horrific violence in East Timor: Couldn't it have happened anyway, even (yes, alas) without CIA engineering of the 1965 coup against Sukarno, the ensuing massacre in a year's time of around 3/4 of a million people, the ongoing US-coddling of the IMF-loving Indonesian generals, and the green light of silence from the West as that Western-trained and supplied military invaded and scorched East Timor? It might seem as if we've been complicit in creating certain violence-enabling conditions on a macro scale, but how can we really be sure? As Neff puts it, lots of people are getting killed by natively-made machetes, so how can we really know this current explosion of violence wouldn't have happened sans our assistance anyway?

He's right, of course. As Hume asked, How can we be sure that the sun will rise tomorrow?

Or as Wittgenstein asked, more or less, How can I be sure that that man is truly in pain?

We can't! There is simply no certain relationship between our observation of the world and its "empirical" manifestations, no matter how stubborn the evidences may seem.

So if we can't be sure about the sun, or about human pain, even, how can we be sure about something like the consequences of imperialist policy in Indonesia, especially when people like to kill each other with rocks anyway?!

Life is a puzzle, and I agree with Mr. Neff. Now I'm going to read about American poetry at Web del Sol.

20. — Kent Johnson *Fri, 17 Sep 1999 10:42* ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Michael Neff, editor of Web del Sol, during the September 1999 killings in East Timor, on whether local violence can be read apart from the imperial history it sits in. This is Johnson's revised version; an earlier draft, "Beating drums," reached the list the same day, and he explained the duplication three days later.

Well, Michael, the caricature you draw above of those who find fault in your arguments seems the perfectly-traced image of the "dogmatism" you claim to despise!

No one has said that those wielding the guns and machetes in Dili are morally blameless. Where did you get that one? The reason people are upset with you, I think (though your argument is not worth getting as upset about as some apparently have in back-channel), is that you are so dismissive of something self-evident: that local legacies are implicated in global histories. And in a country like Indonesia, whose history and political present are inextricable from imperialist control and manipulation, this is quite evidently the case-- right down to the fine edge on machetes, still a widely-used tool, for example, in former colonies originally integrated into the world market as providers of agricultural raw materials to metropolitan centers.

But to you, it seems, the use of "primitive," non-Pentagon supplied machetes is some anthropological sign that shows the violence as autochthonous through and through-- yet one more primal spasm in a culture condemned to repeated blood-letting. You challenge people to prove otherwise. And so people (while not disagreeing that violence is, indeed, primal) have given you ample evidence that the current strife has manifested itself inside specific conditions that our government (along with other imperialist powers) has had a considerable hand in creating and perpetuating, having helped to install and then unflinchingly abet, as it has, the same party that now organizes the machete wielders.

The irony here is that it is up to you, really, to show that this history of which people have spoken has little to do with the past and present suffering in East Timor. You haven't. And you end your intervention in this discussion, even, by suggesting that the history doesn't exist except in the minds of America-Is-Evil

shouting poet-spooks trapped in a 60's induced psychosis. Deep denial is a form of psychosis, Michael. I wonder if there is a clinical name for the kind where the victim's ears are filled with the sound of beating drums?

[Five months and eighteen thousand words drop out here, forty-four posts, twenty-one of them his. He sends readers back to the archive for Kevin Magee's series: "politics and poesis interlocked and grappling and getting rough on each other and climaxing together. You can't help but watch." A post agreeing with Michael Neff on East Timor is taken straight, and he corrects it in capitals, then wishes Web del Sol luck: "May the sun never set on the empire of American poetry." His interview with Henry Gould goes up at Jacket #10 and Brian Stefans answers it at twenty-eight hundred words.]

II

The Key Club

1997-2000

The other half is conducted inside the room, and its subject is the room. What may a poem take from a culture not its own; what is a form; what is a community of readers, and had he invented the one he thought he was joining; who may speak here, and how often, and at whose discretion. He is not a disinterested party to any of it, and the movement is the record of his becoming an interested one.

The quarrel with Walter K. Lew and Dean Brink over the Buddhist anthology *Beneath a Single Moon* put the word orientalism against his name eighteen months before *Doubled Flowering* appeared, so that when the book did appear the charge was already made and only had to be repeated. And the parodic haibun with which he answered Brink, when Brink declined to give the close reading he had twice demanded, is the first place on the list where he defends himself by writing rather than by arguing — a move he would make again.

The title is his own. In January 1998, answering nobody in particular, he proposed that the younger post-Language poets stand to Language writing as the Key Club stands to Kiwanis: the experiment confined to compositional method, the frames polished and refined, the museum toured but never left. The same weeks hold the Catskill School of Poetry, a reading community he admitted he had more or less dreamed up, and the sonnets he sent to Annie Finch, and the answers they drew from her and from K. Silem Mohammad, which are printed here with them.

Then the argument turns on him. A Latin American anthology he had spent a sabbatical planning is scuttled by letters written about him to his collaborator; in December 1998 he objects to the listowner about posting limits and leaves; and the movement closes on a February 2000 exchange with Kali Tal about the poets excluded when the list moved to moderation, whom Johnson had called *los desaparecidos*. It is his last substantial post. The word was not well chosen, and Tal said so.

21. — Kent Johnson Wed, 18 Jun 1997 20:35 ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson forwards to Poetics his own reply, first posted to the CAP-L discussion list, to Walter K. Lew and four co-signers. Their response in the Boston Review to Marjorie Perloff's essay on Yasusada, "In Search of the Authentic Other", had named Johnson as the work's author and charged him with racism and opportunism. Perloff's essay had run in the April/May issue.

About a month ago there was a question on this list about the absence of Asian-American poets in *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry*, an anthology I edited with Craig Paulenich some years back. The question referred to Walter K. Lew's introduction in his praised anthology *Premonitions*, wherein our book is strongly criticized. [...] My first look at Lew's commentary was a couple of days ago, when I saw it quoted in the current Boston Review, as part of a response by him and four other Asian-American writers to Marjorie Perloff's essay ("In Search of the Authentic Other: The Poetry of Araki Yasusada.") which appeared in the April/May issue of the BR. This particular response [...] makes the claim that I am the Yasusada author and directly charges that I am an opportunist and a racist, fueled by the desire for "self-gain."

I'll say here, for what it's worth, that very few people have any real knowledge about the nature of Yasusada, and I would like to suggest that too many have jumped to conclusions about the origins, aesthetics, and motivations of this highly unusual work. [...]

In any case, back to the question of the BASM anthology. Here is the Lew quote I wish to comment on from *Premonitions*:

"The 45 American poets whose essays and poetry on Buddhist practice comprise the anthology are all Caucasian, and the book only mentions Asians as distal teachers (ranging from Zen patriarchs to D.T.Suzuki), not as fellow members or poets of the sangha...When one considers the relative obscurity of some of the poets included in the book, one wonders how it was possible not to have known the Buddhistic poetry of such writers as [Lawson Fusao] Inada, Al Robles, Garrett Kaoru Hongo, Alan Chong Lau, Patricia Ikeda, and Russell Leong... [...] Perhaps he should have also asked whether Zen and poetry, as reconfigured in American Orientalism, are racist."

[These are Walter K. Lew's words, quoted by Johnson from Lew's introduction to Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry.]

Before reading this quote, I was quite certain that we had probably missed, out of ignorance, Asian-American poets who should have been included in the anthology. But now I am not as sure. If Mr. Lew (and the other co-signers of the BR response) had carefully considered the Shambhala anthology, they would have seen that a fundamental criteria for inclusion was a serious background in Buddhist study and practice.

22. — Kent Johnson Wed, 25 Jun 1997 12:19 ↑ [Index](#)

Second week of the orientalism quarrel. Dean Brink, a doctoral student in East Asian languages, had charged Beneath a Single Moon, the Buddhist anthology Johnson edited for Shambhala with Craig Paulenich, and then Johnson's posts about it, with orientalism; the poet Hoa Nguyen had answered Brink, and this replies to Brink's reply to her. Brink later conceded he had not read the book.

Your reply to Hoa, from which I excerpt here, is very different in tone and substance from your initial diatribe against the personal integrity and artistic worth of those associated with the Shambhala anthology. Your last is quite a bit more reasoned and productive of useful discussion. Still, you make unsubstantiated charges and seem confused on some key points, and I want to point these problems out, because my calling attention to them in the first place was what sprung this many posted thread:

1) A question to start: Can you please enlighten me re: the "blatant Orientalism" in my "postings"? This is something new, since I don't recall you charging that there were any "Orientalisms" in my two posts per se, but rather in the book. So far as I can tell, you are the only one whose posts have been clearly deconstructed--by Nguyen--for their unacknowledged orientalist biases. I am directly asking you, then, since you make the specific charge, to undertake a close reading of my postings on this matter, and to elucidate precisely where my remarks on the BaSM anthology betray "blatant Orientalism." I am honestly open to consider that my words, like yours, hide paternalistic and patronizing views. But you must show how they do and not just make the accusation--hasty accusations without supporting evidence are the very reason we are talking right now.

2) When you say that

“Johnson represents a mainstream (affiliated or not with New Age phenomena) that naturally thinks that the aesthetic values, by which he judged the inclusion of an all-white cast of poets and exclusion of Asian-American poets, are not a form of bias. This bias is at best in bad faith, and at worst racist,”

you reveal the basic misunderstanding (which is also shared by Joe Duemer, btw, who admits he hasn't read the book!): You see--and I say this for the third

time--if you and Walter Lew had more or less carefully considered the book, you would have quickly seen that the anthology has rather specific parameters for inclusion that actually have little to do with our editorial "aesthetic values"! That is (and read carefully here, please) we only considered for inclusion those poets who were known to have a background in Buddhist study and practice. (tho we were not doctrinaire about the definition of those last two terms, and I would say actually that any "second edition" would definitely want to be more rigorous about those parameters.) The poets, through their affiliation with Buddhism, "selected themselves," and then we allowed them to select their own poems! Paulenich and myself were largely modest and non-judgemental compilers.

Aesthetic values? Any cursory look at the book will show that it is one of the most aesthetically eclectic poetry anthologies ever done, and this is one of its interesting points: Jackson Mac Low, Steve Benson, and John Cage, for example, in the same anthology with, say Jim Harrison, Jane Hirschfield, and Sam Hamill! During the three year course of putting the anthology together--a process that was greatly dependent on seeking out potential names from others--we did not hear of *any* Asian American poet with a past or ongoing personal practice in Buddhism. No Asian American poets were excluded, therefore, because we didn't like their poems. They were "excluded" because A) We were ignorant of Asian American poets who met the parameters we had set for the book, or B) there were Asian American writers with Buddhist practice who were aware of our open solicitation for potential contributors and chose not to submit their work. (I do not know if this is the case, but it may be.)

One could say, and very responsibly, that our acknowledged ignorance in "A" reveals a more complex problem (i.e. the relative invisibility, if you will, of Asian American poets in a culture suffused with Orientalism), but this is something very different from the libelous framing of your initial and ill-argued remarks--or from your comment above that we set out to construct a "white" anthology in "bad faith." You see, Dean, your indignation is built on a series of assumptions you have made without really looking into the facts in a responsible way.

[Two hundred and seventy words are cut from the foot, on the institutional causes of the attack on the anthology and on Brink's assumption of bad faith. Sixty-eight posts drop out here, sixteen thousand words from June to December, thirty-six of them his. He argues Buddhism, orientalism and Beneath a Single Moon with Dean A. Brink, and forwards a letter from Eliot Weinberger sent with permission to post it. Against Maria Damon and Rebecca Weldon's call to close the thread down he writes: "Of course Maria and Rebecca are free to call for silence around anything they want, but I can point

out too, can't I, that such a call is silly in the extreme." In August he reports the Asahi Shimbun on Yasusada, argues loyalty oaths with Pete Landers, and picks a football fight with George Bowering he then has to explain was a joke.]

23. — Dean A. Brink Sun, 7 Dec 1997 18:07 ↑ [Index](#)

Brink's whole answer to Johnson's second demand that he read Alan Sondheim's poem closely rather than call it orientalist. Sondheim, a poet and net artist, was among the list's most frequent posters; "iroiro", the word in the subject line, is Japanese for various things. The imaginary people of the last sentence are Yasusada and his circle.

History 101 for Kent Johnson:

You confuse the Japan that was a victim of imperialism (especially 1853-1900) and the Japan that was a champion of imperialism (economic and military, especially from the 1890s until the end of the War).

Maybe you should stick to imaginary people before you tackle the historical.

dean brink

24. — Kent Johnson Mon, 8 Dec 1997 17:29 ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Dean Brink in verse and prose after Brink declined to give the close reading Johnson had twice demanded. The form parodied is the haibun, Basho's mixture of travel prose and haiku. Johnson insisted the next day that the piece was "not intended as a poem; it was a reply to Dean Brink".

It is because what we say is unfinished, always, that we can say without fear. The gatekeepers themselves, in speaking back law, say only what they have been given to say by signs. It is always unfinished. Thinking of this I gathered courage, making prostrations. The land to the East or West of us is there because we are here, speaking of it. (My sister wrote that.)

Anyway, when I arrived at the first gate, I was told I could not pass. The guards were dressed in coats of black scales, with half-moons of gold covering their mouths. They spoke in tongues from the West and told me to return there. Beyond their head-sets, sparks flew in the night across the wooden houses, and I imagined that those of the foreign community inside were shimmering and transparent so that their bones mingled as one with the tea-fires and the frozen flight of the cranes. (Awkward, but I am writing quickly here.) And then, by

magic, Dean, the Western Guards became tethered to long and shiny poles of discourse (though it was dark and I couldn't quite see) and were spun round and round so that a breeze lightly scented with bream and salt cooled my face. I smashed the turtle's shell and passed boldly through the gate.

You see, it was the thought of Witter Bynner that led me on. I desired my dust to be mingled with his, forever and forever and forever. I also thought of the following things, though I would never dare to speak them openly:

The State of Hand Not Joined to Body The State of Being Perfectly Not Here The State of Disconsolate Thought of Wings The State of Myouka Writing "Hand Not Joined to Body" The State of Rose of the Snow Kimono The State of Poem Written on Throat of Turtle The State of Shikantaza as Loving Cunt Enfolding The State of Kissing Son on Loving Lips The State of Sons as Suicidal Aviators Exultant The State of Being a Staff or Whisk The State of Stillness in Self-Fulfilling Samadhi The State Where the Moon Swallowing Is Brought Forth

Weary, I took a piss, making great steam in the Autumn grasses. Then, preparing ink on a large stone, I wrote:

[xx] shungyo ya hito koso shirane kigi-no ame [xx] Which I choose to translate thus: [mourning his son he crosses the hills with a large sack of eggs]

When I arrived at the second gate it was May, and all was in the State of Three Heads and Eight Arms as Rain on the Trees. The guard of this gate had the corpulent face and body of Amida, but I knew that was just a disguise. He spoke in hoarse whispers and in a language I could only understand by imagining. He told me to display wares in my laquer-bone-poet-box, and I did so. He told me to ornately describe the Eastern Suburbs with their alleys full of squatting whores and peddlars, and I did this. He told me to squat thusly and shit in my beggar's hat and I did so. He told me to write one wonder-haiku on cicada husk's soundless cry, and I did this, his sword suspended in threat above. I wrote:

Towa x ni x ikitashi x onna-no x koe x to x semi-no x ne x to Which I choose to translate thus: [my soul passes through those of others: hydragena exhibit]

Thus, this apparition vanished, and I went deeper into the mandala, having no idea where I was headed (and admittedly half-wishing I had heeded the cautionary advice of my grad school advisors).

[Six hundred and forty words are cut from the foot, where the dream continues through the Room of Mud Within Mud and the Room of No Turning Back to a guard who appears "as an American executive from Toshiba" and demands a Poetry-Duel-to-Death.]

25. — Kent Johnson *Sat, 13 Dec 1997 18:30* ↑ [Index](#)

Addressed to Annie Finch during a list argument over New Formalism, the movement of the 1980s and after for a return to metre and rhyme, and cast in the form under dispute. Finch is a poet and metrist who had been defending formal writing on the list. The third and fourth sonnets, from which the closing passage is taken, turn on the fourteen-line poems of the Buffalo poet John Clarke.

Inclined Pole Where Tomorrow the Young Men

What makes some forms more interesting to
"New Formalist" poets than others? Would
you see the formal challenges of the
sonnet or villanelle, for example, as being
of more "poetic value" (or more worthy of
attention, or more relevant to our
times, etc.) than, say, any of the hundreds
of invented Oulipean procedural
constraints, or any of the hundreds,
for instance, of Jackson Mac Low's opera-
tional creations? I believe you will
say that no, there is nothing really
intrinsically "better" about the
old traditional forms, and answer thus:

The Poem Itself is the Final Pudding

But with so many poetic recipes at hand,
and most of them of recent design, why
do some "formalist" poets (a number
of them on record as being rather
arrogant about the whole thing) equate
"formal feeling" with accentual sy-
llabic strictures and old European
stanzaic structures? I know it sounds trite,
but sometimes I wonder if the content
extending form or the form extending
content (do you see a real difference?)
goes deeper than the poem. I mean, you know,
what is the dark-matter trunk of the sonnet
form and the severed head of the Tutsi child?

The Freedom That a Skeleton of Perceiving Has

And where and when does a sonnet cease to be a Sonnet? For example, John Clarke, whose mentor, somewhat paradoxically, was Charles Olson, consistently crammed massive amounts of cultural/historical matter into fourteen line poems that he called (and in no way ironically) "Sonnets." But his lines rarely scan iambically (though they are usually of ten syllables, with frequent alexandrine substitutions) and end-rhyme is little employed. No, it's not free verse: It's iambs being pounded into dactyls and spondees. It's the quantum rocks of rhyme thrown up (and washed throughout the poem) to show

[trailing couplet]

the world beneath (world of bright insects and invisible maze-cities appearing).

Are the Sonnets of Gioia Better Sonnets than the Sonnets of Clarke?

And I don't mean "better poems" because I know the answer to that one. And Clarke, too, would have said, I believe, that his poems come from a "Formal Feeling," but a feeling with such a volume and head behind it that only the major shape of sonnet form is left. Like the ruins of a temple pounded by history. The sonnet is like that, and that is partly the point, I think, that the words and the syllables are like the waters and the winds that leave their inscriptions _in the form_ of the ruins and give them their actual form. There is no language outside the ruin of form.

26. — K. Silem Mohammad Sat, 13 Dec 1997 22:28 ↑ [Index](#)

Four sonnets back, within four hours, each titled with its own first line. Kasey Silem Mohammad was then a graduate student at Santa Cruz and signed himself as here; the Flarf poems that made his name, built out of search-engine results, were five years off. The closing line is Thomas Nashe's.

Four Sonnets for Kent Johnson

"What makes some forms more interesting to"

What makes some forms more interesting to
"New Formalists" (though I'm not one of those),
specifically, e.g., the sonnet, has
to do not only with the metrics, line-
length, stanza-distribution, and so forth,
but also with the complex range of moods
evoked by literary history
and the awareness of tradition. Forms
we recognize because we know their _use_ --
their application in remembered texts--
have resonances stronger than the nonce-
forms generated arbitrarily
by methods such as you enumerate
(Mac Low's experiments, etc.).

"And that is not to denigrate Mac Low,"

And that is not to denigrate Mac Low,
or other innovators, whose inventions
have already begun to constitute
a "genre" with its own familiar surface,
one which provides a spur for further work,
but not as fully saturated with
the echoes of historical production
as those old European forms, which speak
to us because we've spoken them so often,
engraved them in a mental Norton-print:
verses of fourteen lines just "naturally"
remind us of a centuries-old practice
that has become inseparable from Voice,
or has decided for us what Voice is.

"A sonnet, one might say, ceases to be"

A sonnet, one might say, ceases to be
a sonnet when it ceases to remind
us of one: when the svelteness of its torso
dilates or dwindles in unlikely places
(and then, it arguably only ceases
to be a photogenic sonnet, no?);
or, alternately, when it is not flanked
by fellow poems similarly sculpted,
thus cancelling the cyclical effect;
or when it introduces formal features
that override its basic sonnet traits--
of course, such a scenario implies
it is a sonnet, albeit one that
has forfeited its formal heritage.

"No language outside the ruin of form?"

No language outside the ruin of form?
Perhaps. Perhaps all discourse constitutes
a filling-in, or colonizing of,
the fossil shells of primal semiotics;
but is that really saying anything
other than that there's not that much to say?
And what's that have to do with whether sonnets
are "good" or not? Do you mean "good" in that
they rhyme ABBA, and that the turn
comes at the proper junction? or that they
demand of us a rigorous engagement
with principles we took for granted? If
the latter, I'm with you. But then again,
I kind of dig the former meaning too...

"I must in hande with my familiar for a newe stratageme."

27. — Annie Finch *Sun, 14 Dec 1997 19:36* ↑ [Index](#)

*Finch answers the sonnets addressed to her, in metre for four lines and then
in prose. She had edited A Formal Feeling Comes, an anthology of poems in
form by contemporary women, in 1994, and was assembling another.*

A Dactylic Tetrameter-Based Envelope Quatrain, Followed by a Passage of
Prose, for Kent Johnson

Kent, since you ask (though implicitly--thank you) if
I have been privileging "traditional" forms in my
efforts to encourage the writing of form-poems, I
will tell you that thanks to a long-drawn-out tiff

on the subject of form that took place on this list eighteen months ago, I have already changed my ideas on the subject considerably. In editing *Formal Feeling*, I used a definition of formal poetry as "poems structured by the conspicuous repetition of any language-element." This definition does indeed encompass many Oulipian forms and Maclovian forms, and if you look at that book I edited you'll see that a "formal feeling" to me at that time (1994) included chants, unmetrical rhymed forms, pun-based poems, and in general a much broader range of forms than would be accepted by most "new formalists" (with whom my split, if one was necessary, probably started in the anthologizing of that book).

Since then my definition of form, as I said, has changed still further. I found that the word "conspicuous" incited heated resistance on this very list in the spring of 1996. People were talking about the poems structured by the repetition of imperceptible language elements, private forms, etc., as equally worthy of being called "formal." I had a hard time with this at first, as a lot of my own "formal feeling" has to do with the physically perceptible, physically pleasurable repetition of language. But finally I did change my mind. I found that for me the continuum of poetry, its essential unity as a way of "forming" language, was more important than drawing aesthetic lines in the sand (to evoke another simultaneous thread). I began to see the other point of view, and I decided to put my new point of view to work in the editing of a new anthology on form I was putting together.

[Sixteen posts, thirty-one hundred words, twelve of them his. He answers Mohammad's four sonnets one by one, and sends the list to Lorine Niedecker's calendar poems, found among Zukofsky's papers by Jenny Penberthy and printed in Sulfur 41: "What a find." He posts eleven web addresses for the Uruguayan visual poet Clemente Padín and then reports that none of them work, announces his correspondence with Akitoshi Nagahata in Jacket #2, and mistakes Hal Foster for Ed: "The sauce has messed-up my vision along with my memory."]

28. — Kent Johnson *Mon, 19 Jan 1998 11:51* ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Don Byrd, who taught at Albany and had corrected Johnson's impression that a reading community of Byrd, Robert Kelly, Charles Stein, Jed Rasula and George Quasha existed around Bard College in the Hudson Valley. Johnson taught at Highland Community College in Freeport, Illinois, throughout these years.

Just got back from ice fishing in Wisconsin to find Don Byrd's reply to my questions about community and the "Catskill School"--a group that I have apparently more or less dreamed up in my mind over the past several years. Thanks Don, though I sort of feel that I fell through the list's thin ice with that post (with a bigger splash than usual, that is), coming off pretty much like a secret Bloomsbury wanna be, longing for the drawing room and patter about books over tea.

Actually, I can trace this all back to the Sheraton lobby bar where I had a drink or two with Jed Rasula at the MLA in Washington D.C., which was in '88 or thereabouts. As David Bromige has recently shown, I don't have much of a memory, but I do know that after I told Jed I wanted him in the Buddhist anthology even though he wasn't exactly a Buddhist, I sat back and listened to Jed talk about his association with you and Chuck Stein, and about other people in and around Bard whose names I can't now remember, and the naive idea I got was, indeed, of an "ideally literary" community, a real *_comunitas_*, engaged in study and talk about some pretty heavy and weird stuff, some of which I remember Jed going on about at some length with frightening eloquence, bringing home to me that my best hope, really, was to be a decidedly third or fourth tier personage in the pantheon of postmodern poet-critics. And then I read Stein's anthology, and he says something there about all the close associations and then, too, the "Acknowledgments" page of *_Poetics of the Common Knowledge_* does too. So you see, I took that and stoked it wildly up, and here I've been, all this time, imagining poets strolling by the Hudson, or sitting around the fire two or three times a week, earnestly talking about Olson, Hegel, and high mathematics. Hoo boy...

Let me try to rephrase what my conjectural points were about this community question, and here I suppose I'm going to sound completely silly again, but so what, because as I recently said to someone b-c, I teach at a community college and don't really have an academic reputation to uphold. It's this: For poetic community, the presence of *_bodies in the flesh_*, gathered together inside the

sound of voices, is key. And it's key because only with mutual human presence can one witness and grow wiser from the falterings and awkwardnesses and qualifications and sudden synchronicities of thought and insight that are intrinsic to any movement toward understanding. I agree with you that this doesn't mean that e-mail lists are not a good thing! Far from it--obviously there's an incredible amount of intelligence that arises here and the medium makes that possible. But the medium also has its flip and "darker side" as I see it. And one thing that I've come to feel is interesting about this list (and correct me list-mates if I'm jsut projecting because maybe I am) is that it is a place, in the first instance, of positioning and performance, and one rarely finds a person and poet here openly vulnerable in the sense of groping and stumbling in the process of thought, certainly never totally at a loss for what to make of this or that. Nor, consequently, does one often find others entering, and sharing, and making use of, such falterings and false starts. To the contrary: "Thinking" here tends to be sheathed in the finish of performance (the best "finishes" being those that obscure such status), in posts that are eloquent and quite sure of themselves, quick to certainty and knife-edged irony, and quick to draw the line of defense. Long posts and bitty short ones. Very careful, everyone of us, and rarely a stutter to be heard.

[Four hundred and forty words are cut from the foot, on the medium's staging of thought and on his own revising as he types to sound spontaneous. Eighteen posts drop out, twenty-three hundred words, fourteen of them his, in one week of January. He wonders if Hughes's imagery might be "a frank and self-conscious recalling of his own racism", recommends Jim Hightower's radio spot as "an honorable little commando strike against corporate media", and writes "Hurrahs all around": "Hurrah for the two facing mirrors in which the young post-Language poet with the conference name tag is reproduced forever and ever. Hurrah for infinity and name tags, for there would be no poetry without them." He keeps the mode going for days: "Hurrah, above all, for Poe, wiht whom I shared opium one magical afternoon by the Milwaukee River in 1996".]

29. — Kent Johnson Sat, 24 Jan 1998 19:09 ↑ [Index](#)

January 1998, and the fullest statement of his position on his own generation's successors: that younger post-Language poets are to Language writing as the Key Club is to Kiwanis — the service club and its branch for high-school students — their experiment confined to compositional method. The generational quarrel he enters had been carried on by Mark Wallace, Steve Evans and other younger critics.

Is it possible that the generational anxiety vis a vis Language writing expressed by Mark Wallace, Steve Evans, and other impressively smart writers is the logical and inevitable result of younger poets trying to be "new" through an overly narrow reliance on _method_? While I ask this question tentatively (because I am not exactly steeped in the young turk critics), my sense from perusing the discussion is that this could be at the heart of the "problem".

How so? Young "post-Language" poets, like those represented in the anthology of Joseph Donohue, Ed Foster, and Leonard Schwartz (I'm sorry, I presently can't recall the title), are certainly wonderfully various and talented, and many of them will go on to be widely published and successful. But insofar as that young group (despite protestations) seems increasingly to Language writing as the Key Club is to Kiwanis, might it be due to this: that the horizon of poetic "experiment" and "originality" for this generational group is delimited by a deeply-ingrained set of institutional laws and protocols which (subliminally, for the most part) reduce and relegate aesthetic resistance to the printed page, that is, to strictly compositional method? The Key Club, to put it another way, puts itself in the position of polishing, tweaking, and refining paratactic, asyndetic, and juxtapositional frames of expression without any apparent thought to a sustained exploration of _conceptual displacements_ of institutionalized categories of authorship and the circulation of works.

This is sort of what I meant in my Hurrah post with my perhaps unfair reference to the young post-Language poet with conference name tag caught between two mirrors. It's also what I meant by my reference to Smithson's conceptualism, which is so powerful because it is at least a provisional move beyond--and "laying bare" of--the "museum." The Key Club, you might say, is still on guided tour inside the museum.

That's incredibly presumptuous of me to say, of course, and I'm sure the comment will be met with contemptuous silence, or, worse yet, by laconic and insouciant riposte with irony so subtle as to make the spring, at long last, go out of my rubber. But Hurrah for me, anyway, for being reckless and brash within the parameters of my own personal weaknesses and limitations!

*[But Aha!, someone out there is saying. There _is_ an obvious weakness and limitation in your "argument" --an argument which clearly attempts to make up for its theoretical thinnesses through transparent rhetorical affectations that are the marks of a latecomer trying to ingratiate himself with powerful poets like David Bromige: For didn't you say (says the person who said Aha) that

"Robert Smithson" succeeded in moving outside the museum? In other words, didn't Robert Smithson attribute his works to "Robert Smithson"? So why shouldn't we sign too?]*

[Good question, Jordan. But you see, I said "provisional". Robert Smithson's work, though his example still shimmers and glows like a jagged frag from the Roswell ship, has been slowly sucked, through the keyhole of his own name, back into the museum. In fact, beauty of beauties, there is even something now called "The Estate of Robert Smithson." This is why.]

OK, now many of you know that I am involved in an infamous work that deals at least implicitly with some of these questions, so allow me to elaborate on what I mean above through the following quote from an interview where some of these matters are tentatively discussed. And I promise, promise, that I will never, never raise the issue of Araki Yasusada on this list again, unless someone else specifically asks me to, and I'm pretty sure that that won't happen, so don't worry. OK? OK.

[Six hundred and eighty words are cut from the foot, on the market relations within which poetry is written and judged, and on authorship as their keystone. Eleven posts in one week of January, forty-nine hundred words, eight of them his. He tells Jordan Davis that "Yasusada was not at all written to make this or that point at all". The morning after the game he reports a disaster: "I started crying in the middle of a lecture on topic sentences. How will I face them now tomorrow? I feel like Clinton." The post goes on to the bar in Monroe, Wisconsin where the man beside him in a ten gallon hat turns out to be Tim Wood, of the Texas Poetry List. He also proposes a World Union of Independent and Apocryphal Critics.]

30. — Kent Johnson Wed, 11 Feb 1998 19:37 ↑ [Index](#)

Posted mid-argument about whether list posts are private property, and two days before his tenure hearing. The unnamed correspondent is identifiable from Johnson's December 1997 posts as the Uruguayan visual poet Clemente Padín, imprisoned under the junta; the book was to be an anthology of Latin American visual poetry from the Brazilian concrete group Noigandres on. The collaboration collapsed.

I hereby give Postmodern Culture, Lingua Franca, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Mike and Dale's Younger Poets, and anyone who would like, permission to reprint this message and to do so without first consulting me.

In the past months I have been engaged in correspondence with one of the world's most prominent visual poets (as well as theoreticians of visual poetics).

This poet is Latin American and is fairly out of touch with recent developments in the "non-visual" poetry scene in the U.S. This poet had enthusiastically agreed to collaborate with me in the editing of an anthology of Latin American visual poetries from Noigandres on, including essential theoretical works, and we had begun to discuss this in some detail, including plans for my visiting him in South America for a long stay during my sabbatical this year. My sabbatical is due to be approved (a formality) next week by the board of trustees of my college. My application is completely based on a description of the above project, for which there has been considerable enthusiasm and support here.

Two days ago I received a long letter from the poet I have mentioned telling me that he was greatly looking forward to undertaking this project, that he was organizing his "complete" archives of Latin American visual poetry, and assuring me that what would be produced would be a document of the first power.

This morning I received a letter from this poet and it said (I gloss and paraphrase) the following:

“ My dear friend Kent: I find myself in an extremely uncomfortable position. I have received various communications from close friends in the United States who strongly question my relationship with you. These are people to whom I owe my loyalty since some of them helped secure my release from prison under the junta and have helped my work in many ways..... I feel it is important for you to settle your situation with those circles of the American critical community which seem so antagonistic toward you. I hope you will be able to overcome this unfortunate situation and that we might be able to reestablish our collaboration. ”

Some important things stand out here: 1) It is quite evident, I think it's safe to say, that this sabotaging of an important and needed project is related to the opinions of certain people about another project I have been involved in and which has caused a fair amount of discussion and controversy. 2) That what is involved is, to some degree, an organized campaign, since the "various communications" arrived within the past two days. 3) That those involved in successfully urging an end to the professional and personal relationship that had been established between myself and the other person in question are willing to scuttle a good faith and seriously undertaken effort--one that aimed to give exposure to relatively unrecognized poets in Latin America-- and that they are willing to do this to placate their own discomfort and disapproval about

another body of work.

I want to make it clear that I hold no resentment whatsoever toward the poet for his decision to postpone our collaboration. He is a person who has worked with a great deal of vision and selflessness, and he is someone who has put his life on the line in the struggle for justice in his country. It is completely understandable that he would wish to exercise the utmost caution in light of such strong and unexpected warnings (eventhough he was aware of the controversy around the Yasusada work and I had sent him a copy of the book). I have written him that I understand that he has been placed in a very awkward and difficult position and that his loyalty to previous friendships is important.

*[A hundred and forty words are cut from the foot, an open appeal to whoever is poisoning the project: "Have the courage to approach me personally."
Thirty-nine posts, nearly twelve thousand words over four months, fifteen his.
He answers Kali Tal on intellectual property: "The fence is a phantasm, a shimmer of false consciousness, a little fart of history. Who wrote the deed you are holding in your hand?" A South American project is scuttled by letters written about him to his collaborator; after an exchange with Thomas Bell he leaves the list: "Going off list for some time. I can be reached back-channel."
Mark Prejsnar forwards for him in March. He is back in May on Bruce Andrews and the neighbour's dog fence, then Prigov, then nerve gas.]*

31. — Kent Johnson Tue, 8 Dec 1998 19:31 ↑ [Index](#)

The end of the December 1998 posting-limits controversy, which preceded the list's move to moderation. Charles Bernstein, who had founded the list at Buffalo in 1993 and ran it, had capped the number of messages a poster could send in a day; Johnson, himself the second most frequent poster that month, defends Henry Gould and Gabriel Gudding against the listowner. He left the list days later.

You are the Listowner and you make decisions as you feel they best serve the List as you understand its nature, purpose, and function. You make that point clearly and I have no argument-- as merely one of the hundreds who visit here-- with your right to run the List in any way you choose. The List is private, as you say.

My concerns were offered in sincerity and good faith, out of a sense that too heavy a hand was being applied to the situation you outline. And while I _do not_, to say it again, feel you have been guided by dishonorable motives in your recent decisions, nothing in your post changes my opinion about the politics of the matter. In fact, to the contrary.

Now, most people on the List seem fairly uninterested in the controversy (as I rightly ascertained in my last post) so I will try to be brief. Let me make just a couple of points, pausing here just to say that if you choose to reply you may call me just "Kent" and not "Kent Johnson," which repeated five times or so makes me feel somewhat like a thing rather than a person...

So now my response: You (unintentionally, I think) reveal, Charles, by going back to the situation "over many months," that the perceived problem of post volume coming from Henry Gould was actually getting better. Getting better in November, it seems, by 100%. Why, then, was Henry placed on "review" at a time when he seemed to be doing precisely what he was being asked to do?

I want to say that I apologize if I misunderstood Gabriel Gudding and misrepresented his situation to the List. You seem to be upset about this, but it wasn't my intent to offer "misinformation" in speaking of him as in the same category with Henry, and Gabriel can perhaps elaborate separately on the nature of his communications with you. But I was right, it appears from your comments, in asserting that Henry's "subscription status" was changed. I understand as well that two of the three posts Henry submitted while he was on such "special status" never appeared on the List. Because of your emphatic assertion that "no post has ever been censored from this list," I now assume that this must have been a technical glitch and had nothing to do with any implementation of special conditions governing Gould's "review" status. But I admit I felt concern about that when I learned of it.

And I still feel concern, frankly, about the issue of censorship. This does not mean that I feel you see your editorial actions as constituting such, but when you send a message reading

“You appear not to have been willing to reduce the frequency of your posts despite the request made to you earlier in the week. Daily posting is not an option. Please reduce your posts to no more than a few each week.”

to a person (Gabe Gudding) who is relatively new to the List and thus has no history behind him of "over-posting," you in effect selectively, and --according to my sincere evaluation of the overall situation-- **because of matters of content,** remove a privilege given publicly to all members of the List: a limit of five posts per day, which to my knowledge no one has come close to violating in any kind of systematic way. To my mind, candor behooves one to acknowledge such intervention as **censorship,** whether one is doing it for the perceived "greater

good" or not. For when in a community it is decided by someone who exercises a function of power that a few are not permitted to say what they would like to say, when they would like to say it, and in the form they would like to say it, _when others are given the full privilege to do so_, it becomes something akin to an opposition newspaper in a state-controlled distribution system being allowed the "freedom" to publish, but only with the supply of newsprint that the state has purposely and emphatically curtailed for the sake of the "common good." The state may well be benevolent and have the loftiest of goals, but it is censorship de facto, with the de jure hanging unsaid like a sword behind the screen. Why put someone under "review" if the threat of a post's possible erasure is not there and ready to be wielded?

Of course, this is a Listserv to discuss poetics, not Nicaragua when the Sandinistas were in power. But if I've helped make an issue of the situation it's because I've come to adhere to that school of head-in-the-clouds anarchist thought that believes that any repressive measures against wayward voices have future and noxious consequences that undermine the lofty vision one hopes to achieve. I suppose I believe that in poetry as in poetics as in the institutions enacted by "oppositional" poets for the democratic promulgation of new forms and contents, form and content must be one, or must be an interlocked figure, as someone once said, and that what appears to be plain madness may actually, seen in an unexpected light, prove to be a meaningful part, or, even stranger yet, prove to be part of the ancient and exciting Vedic poetic tradition of insult! Leaders of a community of poets searching wild and open form, then, faced with situations of a wild and sudden irruption of someone saying that other member's cocks and cunts, for example, are not so fine as claimed (see George Thompson's wonderful post of today) should not --in response to the scandalized "core constituency" of the community-- so quickly say to the wild one that daily posting is not an option; leaders may, rather, want to tell the upset valued members who are complaining to please remember that poetry and poetics is a wild, sometimes frustrating thing in its overwhelming heteroglossia and that if you go away it's probably going to be your loss. And please come back, if you change your mind. We'll always be here.

This is more or less what I meant by being so presumptuous as to suggest that it would have been simply best to allow each and every member to post within the stated limits of five posts per day without the threat of punitive measures. Rather than single some people out and tell them that "daily posting is not an option," it would be best to clearly remind those bothered that they can post the

same amount, delete any post with the undesirable name, or propose a change in the List's governing rules for posts per day which the Listowner will take into consideration. But never, in my personal and perhaps overly idealistic opinion, no matter who the person is who threatens to go away, should a leader say, OK, I'll put this guy under special rules in the hopes that he'll change his tune.

But clearly, the decision has been made. I think this is long enough. I will be leaving the List for a long time now. I have greatly enjoyed being here, and I thank Charles, as I did before, for making this space possible. But honestly, something I can't be a part of seems to be happening.

Kent

[Twenty-seven posts, eight thousand words over seven months, thirteen of them his. He signs off in December with a correction about an apostrophe: "Ah, my last post to the List, and see what I am reduced to. A fiddling with cocks and cunts." He is back by spring with Z Net material on the NATO bombing and pointed questions about list moderation; the listowner replies that "I withheld your message of Friday until today." In July he defends Tom Clark's Whalen review against David Bromige, then tells the list that "WCW was anti-semitic in a rather robust way, no less than Ezra and T.S."]

32. — Kent Johnson Tue, 13 Jul 1999 12:52 ↑ [Index](#)

Third day of the July 1999 thread on William Carlos Williams's anti-Semitism, which Johnson opened and which drew objections from Michael Magee, Steve Shoemaker, Chris Stroffolino and Michael Boughn. The Hiroshima remark at issue is Williams's letter to the poet Byron Vazakas of 7 August 1945, the day after the bomb.

The anti-semitisms of WCW, Pound and Eliot were indeed different, cast according to the idiosyncracies of each. I never said they were exactly the same. What I said is that WCW was "robust" in his anti-semitism just as Pound and Eliot were robust in proclaiming theirs. The record is there, and it is amazing and somewhat disturbing to see people more or less trying to sweep it under the rug. An essay on Williams that may cause the four listees mentioned above to reconsider is found in Eliot Weinberger's *_Works on Paper_*. There, Weinberger quotes an extraordinary exchange between Pound and Williams on circumcision. I would ask someone to write back about the "irony" in WCW's comments therein.

And on the Hiroshima quote, which the above Listees find slyly ironic or else innocuous: Why not read the comment in its most obvious and revealing sense--particularly given WCW's well-documented prejudices? The remark is

firmly in the classic knee-jerk blame-the-Jew reaction (a la Hollywood, big banks, etc.): Truman, Byrnes, Stimson, the Pentagon disappear, and it's the Jews (the small minority of Jews on the Manhattan Project one supposes) who are behind it all... One could ask: Would someone who was not anti-semitic be capable of making such a statement?

By the way, because I thought Weinberger would be interested in this exchange, I shared some of it with him. In response to Michel Magee's remark that

“ ... to simply call him anti-semitic or racist is to in fact say nothing at all. [...] As in his famous characterization of his poetry as coming "out of the mouths of Polish mothers." Just who were these Polish mothers, do you think? I'd suggest that, like the Polish woman in "A Face of Stone," they were Jews. ”

[These are Michael Magee's words, quoted by Johnson.]

Weinberger wrote:

“ Magee is totally wrong that the Polish mothers were Jewish: obviously he doesn't know much about New Jersey! (You can quote me on that one!!) ”

[These are Eliot Weinberger's words, quoted by Johnson.]

I point this out in the spirit of suggesting that when it comes to Williams, this matter of his vox populi as "mediated by ethnic voices" is not unmediated by the ideological aura of "quintessential Americanness" that has grown up around his figure. And it may cause us to jump to hasty conclusions.

[Twenty-four posts across two months, sixty-nine hundred words, nine of them his, and most belong to the Williams thread as it widens to Pound, Marx and Montaigne. He opens one at "May I indulge in some self-defense, please?" and takes the complexity argument back to Marx's "On the Jewish Question". Beside this he puts up five Jaime Saenz translations in Jacket and praises the Gary Sullivan and Nada Gordon exchange: "it's a bit, as I take it, like Dante on Dexedrine."]

33. — Brian Kim Stefans *Mon, 1 Jan 1990 00:32:* ↑ [Index](#)

February 2000. Brian Kim Stefans had written to Johnson back-channel — that is, privately, off the list — about Johnson's charge that the list was censoring him. Johnson asked him to post the letter; this is Stefans forwarding his own private mail, framing sentence and all. The URL he thanks Johnson for points to Skanky Possum, a magazine out of Austin, and "Henry" is Henry Gould. The date header the archive carries, 1 January 1990, is the sending machine's.

I had written this to Kent as a "backchannel" and he asked me to post it to the list. I haven't rewritten it, so please skip the tedious parts. He had cc'd me on the post.

Hi Kent,

Thanks for sending me the URL, it saves me the trouble of trying to get a copy of Skanky Possum, though I may anyway for the other stuff.

I rarely "backchannel" unless it's to perhaps apologize to someone for having written hastily and heatedly, or to address some issue (like with Henry) which someone raised with me. If I am upset about something on the list, I try to convert my feelings into some sort of "productive" post rather than rag on someone behind the scenes to calm my aching soul -- which is to say, I don't particularly care about my own ideas or how they have been changed, interpreted, perverted, admired, etc, in a vacuum. The only reason I write to the list is to be share ideas, not to circumscribe, for myself, my own ideas, which I can do alone. My hope is that my ideas will be attacked and turned-over, since I feel that I could be as bad a dictator as anyone.

Anyway, I'm writing to you "backchannel" simply because I haven't, in my brief time reading on this issue (and mostly your writing on it, though others as well) seen any development in thinking about this, and so in general don't think it's valuable for the list. I think I have (eh hem) things to write on the topic, but I'm pretty well aware that they are boring to other people, and I hate to bore people.

My problems with your reasoning, though, in your posts to Chris (who, I think, says about everything I would want to say, and even boldly with his full frontal statement that the list is "ideological") are basically the following:

1. Your use of the word "censorship" is misguided. "Censorship," for it to carry the moral weight that you intend it to, for it to be tied to some sort of contract of the "rights of man" that is at the heart of our Consitution (certainly the subtext of your rhetorical use of the word), and for it to resonate with the use of this term historically in regards to revolutionary activity, requires some sense of the totality of the control by authorities, which is to say these authorities would have to be "managing" all of dissemination of media in a particular, isolated location. An illustration: we generally champion Dostoyevsky for having written under "conditions of censorship" (i.e.

[Eleven hundred and seventy words are cut from the foot. He holds that what happened on the list is editing rather than censorship, setting it against a friend jailed four years in Korea for his novels and an uncle unable to return there, and finds the quarrel always centred on banishment and never on ideas: "This leads me to suspect that there were no ideas, only gestures."]

34. — Kent Johnson Tue, 22 Feb 2000 18:42 ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Kali Tal, a critic of the literature of trauma, who had objected to Johnson's use of "los desaparecidos" for poets excluded from the list after its 1998 move to moderation. Her charge is the block quotation at the foot: Johnson appended it below his own reply, and it is printed where he put it. He had lived and worked in Nicaragua and Uruguay in years when the practice was common. One of his last exchanges before a long absence from the list.

The title of my post was "los desaparecidos", not "los desaparicidos" or "los desaparacidos", as Tal alternately has it. (A small thing, yes, and my apologies if her wayward vowels were innocent typos, but before she writes any more tickets on the term, Officer Tal may wish to make a note of the politically-correct spelling.)

Which is not to say that Tal is not right in her general definition of the phrase, as no doubt everyone on this List knows : "los desaparecidos" famously refers to real or suspected dissidents grabbed by death squads and government forces and never seen again. Having lived and worked in two different countries during times when the practice was fairly rampant, and having spent a number of active years in the Central America solidarity movement during the 80's, I am well aware of the term's meaning and force. So, yes, in that my immediate reference was to an aspect of this List's history, I was, indeed, using it in the heavily figurative and ironic sense.

Specifically, I was alluding to those whose voices have been (translated carefully now into English) disappeared from the List for reasons not yet honestly acknowledged or explained (i.e. those former "contrarious" participants who have been denied access to the moderated post-'98 version). And I was alluding, as well, to the obvious and embarrassing "disappearance," among many of the self-proclaimed democrats and progressives here, of any will to question this selective, strategic silencing.

Yes, the stakes on a poetry Listserv don't exactly compare to those in late-70's Argentina. That's a no-brainer. But it sure is interesting how --both here in virtuality and there in the midst of dirty war-- those who ask where the bodies are and why invariably get called "paranoid" by Good Citizens with curling lips.

Kent

I find Kent Johnson expressions of paranoia not only tiresome but in extremely poor taste. "Los desaparecidos" is the term used for folks murdered by right-wing death squads and buried in ditches. Seeing those words appropriated to describe the alleged virtual hounding of the likes of Henry Gould makes my stomach turn and my lip curl the same way it did when Clarence Thomas claimed he was the victim of a "lynching." It's a rhetorical device of the lowest sort, and not in the slightest bit amusing (to me) even if intended as irony. Which brings me to Gerald Schwartz' question about the perception of humor. Comedy is all a matter of perspective. Tadeusz Borowski wrote stories about the Holocaust that made me both laugh and cry; I resonate to them and find them funny in the most painful way. On the other hand, the old riddle about the difference between a Jew and a pizza hits me at about the same level as Johnson's use of "los desaparecidos". As we were all instructed back in kindergarten: it's the difference between laughing **with** and laughing **at**. Not really that hard a concept to grasp. Seems like just about any joke can be understood in terms of the "we" and the "them" it creates.

III

Yasusada in Texas

1995-1998

The affair reaches the list in July 1995, before the book exists, as a rumour inside a renga. Rod Smith half-knows; Kevin Killian tells the story of a midnight telephone call and is the first to use the words *homophobic and racist*; and within a fortnight of the fiftieth anniversary of Hiroshima, Lee Chapman — an editor who had printed the poems — names Kent Johnson of Freeport, Illinois, and grounds the ethical charge on the anniversary itself.

Through 1996 the argument belongs mostly to editors, and turns on a market: whether what was being sold was poetry or pained subjectivity. Rod Smith makes the observation that the prosecution never answers — that everyone attacking the work assumes its author is not Asian, and that they are therefore reading for motive while denying that motive is what they read for.

1997 is the year the room argues. Marjorie Perloff's essay in the *Boston Review* brings in the Ern Malley comparatists in April; the *Boston Review* forum in June fuses the Yasusada question with the older row about the Buddhist anthology, so that orientalism and hoax become one charge and stay fused; Eliot Weinberger answers the charge of racism with a counter-charge of identity politics as career; Hoa Nguyen declines to have an Asian American position spoken on her behalf by either side. Then in November the book is published, Johnson announces it in terms that come as close to avowal as he ever came, Dean Brink calls for a boycott within the hour, and the day ends with David Bromige setting the whole thing to music.

By the following August the terms have moved. Mark Prejsnar, having just read the Spicer biography, files Yasusada under collaboration and lineage rather than under fraud — which is to say the argument has begun to lose its emergency and acquire a genealogy.

35. — Ron Silliman Wed, 26 Jul 1995 02:38 ↑ [Index](#)

The week the list first doubts Yasusada. Silliman relays what Rod Smith, editor of Aerial, had told him about publishing a discussion by three Japanese poet-critics he suspected of being invented, and adds what two translators have since told him. Ern Malley was the dead modernist James McAuley and Harold Stewart invented in 1943 to trap Angry Penguins; the comparison in the subject line is one the argument never afterwards drops.

Rod writes:

“ I feel an obligation to point out that it's not clear that Haraki Yasusada actually exists. I published a group discussion in *_Aerial 6/7_* >called "Renga & the New Sentence" by what purported to be three Japanese poet/critics. I suspected at the time that it might be a fake, but chose to publish it anyway, as it was simply too good to turn down. I've since had a conversation that **seems** to confirm my suspicions (No, I can't say more than that). Tho it's still unclear. ”

Both Avery Burns and Eric Selland swear that Yasusada is a fictive project, as are his translators. Selland, a translator of Japanese by trade who's spent years over there and knows the poetry scene intimately, should be in a position to know.

Still, the work in *Conjunctions* is very good. I posted an enthusiastic comment to this list when it first came out that I believe Luigi-Bob may have reprinted in *Taproot*.

Ron

36. — Kevin Killian Wed, 26 Jul 1995 08:18 ↑ [Index](#)

Kevin Killian, a San Francisco poet and one of Jack Spicer's biographers, gives the first sustained account on the list of contact with "Tosa Motokiyu," the name attached to the Yasusada papers as their keeper and translator. He answers Rod Smith and Ron Silliman, who had just raised the possibility that Yasusada was fictive, and is the first to attach the words racist and homophobic to the project.

I remember trying to get in touch with Tosa Motokiyu who for some reason had a P O Box in Sonoma County somewhere, and was sent a phone number-it was like a spy novel by Ian Fleming. Anyhow late at night, say, after midnight, a woman called me up and told me that Tosa Motokiyu was not to be bothered any more, that he was going through a painful divorce and no, no matter what I thought, neither the Yasusada circle nor the Motokiyu-Norinaga-Kyogin circle had any homosexual implications. No unlike the Georgekreis or the Spicer group there was no homosexual taint to either Japanese group.

"I was just wondering," I said defensively.

"You have been misled, by your own imagination," she replied calmly. "You don't understand the Japanese way of life."

This was so true I couldn't think of what to add. She explained that Japanese poets giggle at Western homosexuality.

After we hung up I had this uneasy feeling and started wondering whether or not Motokiyu had been honest with me.

Then I heard that the whole Yasusada corpus was very much a contemporary product of a middle-aged white male poet, well known in the US, but not well enough known for his own self-esteem as we say here in San Francisco. This man had come up with the idea of inventing a whole Hiroshima poetry to test the openness of U S magazines. He was frustrated that his own poetry was being rejected at every turn whereas people of color no matter how untalented were being published. "Yasusada" was to be his revenge on the whole idea of the "politically correct," "multicultural" range of writing being published & preferred today.

I was sent dozens and dozens of Yasusada's poems, and like Ron, was impressed. This was clearly a labor of love, if a little crazy and, by implication, way homophobic and racist. These events took place several years ago as I say. But I am still smarting from that dry little laugh on the phone from Sonoma. If Lee Chapman is on this list perhaps she could clear up how and when she came in contact with the poetry she printed in "First Intensity"? Thanks you all!

Rod writes:

37. — Lee Chapman Tue, 29 Aug 1995 21:45 ↑ [Index](#)

The editor of First Intensity, one of four magazines that had printed Yasusada, writes a fortnight after the fiftieth anniversary of Hiroshima. The others she names, Conjunctions and Grand Street, were among the best-placed American literary quarterlies of the day. Hers is the first post to name Johnson as the work's submitter, and the first to set the Malley precedent aside as incommensurate.

As one of the editors who recently published work by Araki Yasusada (Brad Morrow, CONJUNCTIONS, and Jean Stein, GRAND STREET, were others), I feel a responsibility to inform anyone who may have read the work (in FIRST INTENSITY #5) that it is more than likely a hoax; that is, a person or persons unknown to me at this time concocted the bio and writings of this supposed Hiroshima poet. The person who submitted the work to me refuses to confirm or deny the rumors of fakery, and with absolutely no evidence in favor of

Yasusada's existence, while there is plenty against it, I think it's safe to assume that the rumors are true.

I don't want to interrupt the flow of current discussions to use this forum for a big screechy diatribe on the ethical ramifications of such practices, but I want everyone to know that I did not know of the hoax when I accepted the work, which obviously I found very moving--and timely, of course. However, I believe that the author's deliberate targeting of some major literary magazines, such as CONJUNCTIONS, just in time for the 50th anniversary of the horror of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is indefensible.

If the purpose was to bring attention to this 50-year-old horror, well I think we are already perfectly aware of that--many of us have been living "under that bomb" for all our lives! If the author's purpose was to assure that he/she/they received closer attention by synchronizing their attack with the anniversary, well they succeeded. They got our attention. But now what are they going to do with it?

My main purpose here is to alert you all to this hoax, and to warn any publishers who may have been approached by anyone (such as Kent Johnson of Freeport, Illinois, who submitted the work to me) claiming to be associated with "Yasusada's editors."

The perps did a nice job of writing, but they trashed their own creation when they decided to trash their readers' hearts. Thousands of human beings died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and thousands of their family members are still alive today, to remember the horror personally. To use their pain as a springboard to some kind of notoriety is unconscionable. There are hoaxes (such as the Ern Mally affair in Australia during World War II, in which the target was a single editor) and there are hoaxes (such as Yasusada, in which the pain of millions of people--as everyone on earth is affected to some extent by what happened in Japan 50 years ago this month--was callously ignored, apparently in favor of personal gratification); this one really stinks.

I guess I diatribed after all. Sorry.

38. — Rod Smith Sat, 20 Jul 1996 15:23 ↑ [Index](#)

Smith, whose Aerial 6/7 gave Yasusada his first appearance in print in 1990, answers Herb Levy's proposal that forthcoming publishers be warned off. The exchange follows the four-page selection in the American Poetry Review, then the widest-circulating poetry magazine in the country, which had reopened the argument after a year's quiet.

As Yasusada's "debut" took place in _Aerial 6/7_ with an extremely well-informed, and very funny piece called "Renga and the New Sentence" I thought I'd weigh in on this again. [...] Whoever's doing it is a very good writer, who is I think aware of the complexities of what they're doing. [...] When I published the piece in _Aerial_ I suspected it was fake, or more accurately, was almost sure it was fake. I think on close reading it becomes obvious. The only thing I regret somewhat is the fake Spicer footnote, which I take some responsibility for. I have to admit at the time I published it I thought whoever it was wld come forward sooner. The questions raised re subsuquent publications-- "cashing in" on Hiroshima _are_ very problematic. However, interestingly, many of those who attack Yasusada assume the writer is not Asian or Asian-American-- my guess is they're right, but we don't know that to be the case yet now do we? Maybe "Yasusada" is making a point about "author as construct"-- which is that it's _not_ accepted. Motivation is given primacy within interpretation, & if you don't have an identity to hang that motivation on? Interestingly "the lid" came off at Conjunctions when Harpers wanted to reprint some of the material-- the question of where to send the check. [...] One might argue that, as long as Yasusada's identity remains obscure, the gesture is truly purely _literary_. I'm not sure I'd make that argument, & it's all this not-sureness which is fascinating. One is challenged to read the work on its own terms-- which quickly, even more quickly than usual, become our own.

39. — Robert J Wilson Sat, 20 Jul 1996 15:23 ↑ [Index](#)

Wilson, writing from Hawai'i, reads the project as a market phenomenon rather than a prank, taking up Ron Silliman's remarks on the magazines that had printed Yasusada. His claim about the name was corrected two days later by Akitoshi Nagahata of Nagoya University, who told the list that Yasusada is an ordinary, if old-fashioned, Japanese given name and Araki a common surname.

Re Ron's comments on the "Yasusada" effect in mags like Grand Street and APR, it is helpful to recall the devious page of acknowledgments that Jack Spicer affixed to the "Book of Magazine Verse": "None of the poems in this book have been published in magazines. The author wishes to acknowledge the rejection of poems herein by editors Denise Levertov of THE NATION and Henry Rago of POETRY (Chicago)." At the same time the books of magazine verse were being filled with (what Oppen called) "the Merwin" and "the Simpson" and so on, 'voice' a crafty crafted function of aesthetic/market consistency. So I take "Yasusada" to be a function of that same search for pained subjectivity, cum a glimmer of historical pathos and multicultural aura now that the market has shifted a bit, and a touch of Spicer thrown in for hip measure. By the way, as some Japanese allies here have advised me, "Yasusada" is not a Japanese name: "Yasu" is a name and "Sada" is a name but Yasusada is a hoax name, sort of like calling yourself "Sillimanwilson" and writing about Brass factories and your abjected Japanese aunt. Now Yasu/sada is a real poet, and he is a typesetter for Bamboo Ridge Press when he is not selling futures for Castle and Cook in a taro patch. Cynical reason rules at Grand Street, and I am trying not be cynical and morose about seeing Yasu/sada's face on the baseball-card-like cover of APR next month.

By the way, if you want to see one of the best, weirdest, and most disjunctive love lyrics ever written in USA, see "After the Pastoral, Driving With My Grandfather to the Place Where Scott Coles Died, the realities, an Aside for Rochelle" in Occident Vil 3 (spring/summer 1969) by "Ronald Silliman" who just at that point (as a kid as it were) was tossing off such poems in his sleep. I admired it then, and still do now, let the Yasu/sadas come and go like sneakers on the shelf life shelves.

[Nine months and twenty-six thousand words go unprinted here, a hundred and thirty-four posts, seventy-seven of them his. His first post to the list is among them, on Tom Meyer: "I joined the list about two weeks ago-- my first post." He recommends Mikhail Epstein on Russian postmodernism, proposes that a new dialect of invented words be called "listics", and remembers a Bern Porter reading at the Odd Fellows Hall in Belfast, Maine. He argues Neruda's Stalinism with Mark Weiss at two thousand words, then queries Eliot Weinberger about Trotsky's murder and offers a title: Twenty Love Poems and a Big Favor for Comrade Stalin? March goes to the Congressional attack on FC2 over Doug Rice's Blood of Mugwump, a book he finds repellent and defends anyway. He asks Henry Gould "What do you think of the recent attempt of the Christian fascists to use FC2 as a wedge against free speech in the arts?"]

40. — David Kellogg Sat, 19 Apr 1997 23:38 ↑ [Index](#)

Kellogg, at Duke, separates Yasusada from Ern Malley and from Alan Sokal's hoax of the year before: Sokal, a physicist, had placed a parody article in the theory journal Social Text, whose co-editor Andrew Ross then published an account of how it happened. Kellogg is disagreeing with David Zauhar about how incompetent the parody was. He closes by putting a dating question to the list.

Righto -- ma faute. I always misspell it, tho I had a copy of the Barrett Watten issue right by my desk.

Lemme preface this by disagreeing a but with Dave Zauhar on Sokal. It is a lot of things, but one thing it ain't is an incompetently written article. I agree that it should of course have been rejected, but the fact that it wasn't has, as even Ross's self-justifying account of his role in the fiasco suggested, a lot to do with the expectations created by Sokal's position as physicist. Sokal's hoax has different purposes, of course, and it's not nearly as subtle as the Yasusada case, but I think the differences there are of degree rather than kind.

Not so with Malley methinks. First off, of course, Malley was created to ridicule the editors of *Angry Penguins* in a wholesale fashion, and the poems were notoriously composed in -- what? -- an afternoon? Yasusada seems much more carefully constructed; it obviously took a long time to put him together -- although both "poets" include clues to their nonexistence in the poetic texts (and in Yasusada's case, in the notes and English exercises in APR). Further, Yasusada is *not* lampooning anything, at least as I understand that; he seems to exist more as an insider critique, to raise questions rather than attack practices.

Another question about Yasusada comes to mind. Perloff's article nicely points out some words, like "scubadiver," in the poems that are obviously anachronistic. She also cites a poem dated 1945 that contains the term "big bang". Does anybody know when the term was coined? Theories about the universe expanding were based on Edmund Halley's observations and arose I think in the late 1920's. And the Catholic Church officially embraced the Big Bang as a proof of God in 1951. So when *did* the term arise? If it's late (1945-1950, say) then "big bang" is also anachronistic.

41. — Philip Mead Sun, 20 Apr 1997 14:25 ↑ [Index](#)

Mead, at the University of Tasmania, answers David Kellogg's attempt to distinguish Yasusada from Ern Malley, and supplies the Australian detail: Max Harris and John Reed edited Angry Penguins, the modernist magazine the hoax was built to trap. The thread had been opened five days earlier by Rachel Loden, who posted the URL of Marjorie Perloff's Boston Review essay on the affair.

Yes, the immediate target of the Malley hoax was Max Harris and John Reed, editors of *Angry Penguins*, although as McAuley and Stewart stated, they were the epigones, in their view. Their real target was Herbert Read, as critic/advocate of the avant-garde and the English Apocalyptic group. But the hoax broke before the English half of the target could be drawn in.

But David's point about the careful construction of Yasusada vs. Malley probably needs the rider that while the Malley poems were written in an afternoon (apart from the first one, "Durer: Innsbruck 1495"), the context was English Apocalyptic writing, latter-day surrealism, automatic writing etc. That is, the chief virtue of the Malley poems as McAuley and Stewart (the perpetrators) argued was that they were produced *without* the "sovereign power of the shaping intellect." So it was exactly the free play of the unconscious/imagination together with textual pastiche that produced "hoax," that is, bad, poetry. The problem, of course, was that [...] it was exactly the eruption of the unconscious (or whatever we want to term it) and the zany pastiche [...] that gave the poems their strange appeal and resonances (as well as their bathetic clunks).

"Ern Malley" became, and remains, a kind of rallying point for radical modernist, postmodern and avant-garde writing in Australia. For the moralising anti-modernists of mid-century Australian literature, Ern Malley represents the possibility of an entirely amoral art. [...] In a chapter I'm currently writing, I argue that in fact Malley becomes the *authentic* origin of Australian (post)modernism.

Anyone thinking of embarking on a hoax should study the reception of historical hoaxes, they never seem to have quite the effects they were designed to.

[Eighteen posts across two months, forty-eight hundred words, nine of them his. He suspects the Bowering and Bromige repartee of concealment and applies de Saussure's anagram methods to it before conceding: "You guys are just plain good." He passes gossip about Paul Hoover, Marvin Bell and a prize, is corrected by Maxine Chernoff, and withdraws it. He also announces Doubled Flowering from Roof.]

42. — Jordan Davis Wed, 21 May 1997 11:43 ↑ [Index](#)

Davis, a young New York poet, registers an objection made on neither ethical nor racial grounds: that the gesture is an act of aggression against fellow feeling as such. He is replying to Mark Prejsnar, who had confirmed for the thread that the Malley hoaxers were hostile to modernism in general and not only to the version of it Max Harris was publishing.

Thanks Mark P (and Steve C backchannel) for verifying that if not out and out malicious the Ern Malley conspirators were hostile to modernism in general and not merely to the insufficient examples of modernism Max Harris was peddling (no Australians will speak to this?). Haven't been able to enjoy the Yasusada hoax for similar reasons -- too hostile a move to be worth appreciating -- hostile not merely to the magazines involved nor even to the 'poetry community' whatever you think it is but to sympathy in general. [...]

Is it so important to know all the sources and roots? is it so important to know what tones people are taking (toward you -- or the system)?

[Twelve posts, twenty-seven hundred words, five of them his. He points to a new site for Howard McCord's "Gnomonology," then writes on Alan Sondheim and Kim Dawn, surprised that Sondheim draws no comment while "the flame-driven naughtiness of Dawn" has "garnered so much chat of late." He calls Alan Davies's Signage "a book where poetry and criticism deeply fuse into strange and wonderful third things," and sets Bernstein, Silliman and McCaffery's "Thought is language" against Davies's "No it isn't." He proposes a list rule: "Anyone caught drinking behind the wheeeeeeeel (the e key keeps getting stuck) will be immediately reported to the authorities in Buffalo." The rest is book-contest entry fees.]

43. — Kent Johnson Wed, 18 Jun 1997 20:35 ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson's first substantial answer on the list to a charge against him. The bracketed passage is Walter K. Lew's, from the afterword to Premonitions, his anthology of Asian American poetry; Lew and four other Asian American writers had just named Johnson as the Yasusada author in the Boston Review forum, a set of responses to Marjorie Perloff's essay of two months earlier.

About a month ago there was a question on this list about the absence of Asian-American poets in Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry, an anthology I edited with Craig Paulenich some years back. [...] My first look at Lew's commentary was a couple of days ago, when I saw it quoted in the current Boston Review, as part of a response by him and four other Asian-American writers to Marjorie Perloff's essay [...] This particular response, part of a fascinating and varied section of brief essays on Perloff's

piece, makes the claim that I am the Yasusada author and directly charges that I am an opportunist and a racist, fueled by the desire for "self-gain."

I'll say here, for what it's worth, that very few people have any real knowledge about the nature of Yasusada, and I would like to suggest that too many have jumped to conclusions about the origins, aesthetics, and motivations of this highly unusual work. Further materials are scheduled to appear, including the complete collection (with an appendix of "critical" materials) from Roof Books, and I would urge those interested in the meaningful issues provoked by the "Yasusada affair" to read carefully and reserve final judgement at least until after the book appears.

In any case, back to the question of the BASM anthology. Here is the Lew quote I wish to comment on from *Premonitions*:

“The 45 American poets whose essays and poetry on Buddhist practice comprise the anthology are all Caucasian, and the book only mentions Asians as distal teachers [...] not as fellow members or poets of the sangha [...] perhaps he should have also asked whether Zen and poetry, as reconfigured in American Orientalism, are racist.”

Before reading this quote, I was quite certain that we had probably missed, out of ignorance, Asian-American poets who should have been included in the anthology. But now I am not as sure.

44. — Hoa Nguyen Tue, 24 Jun 1997 13:44 ↑ [Index](#)

Nguyen, then a young Vietnamese American poet, answers Dean Brink, a graduate student in East Asian languages at Chicago who had carried the orientalism charge from the CAP-L list to Poetics. The bracketed passages are Brink's. The Forché anthology she names is Against Forgetting, a gathering of the poetry of witness. At issue is who may speak on Asian Americans' behalf.

I have been thinking alot about "orientalism", "racism" and editing an anthology. I would like to go through Brink's message as a way into this dialogue about *Under a Single Moon* co-edited with Kent Johnson and its subsequent scrutiny by Walter Lew in his anthology *Premonitions*. In Lew's editor's afterward (which Kent supplied earlier so I won't duplicate his efforts) Lew pointed to a lack of Asian American voices in American letters. Lew also used the C. Forché edited anthology *Poetry of Witness* as an example of editor bias in action (suggesting that certain atrocities, when by the hands of

the American government, where not "witnessed" here by Asian eyes). I want to also encourage a response to this criticism from Carolyn Forché and others familiar with the Witness anthology. Also would like to know if the CAPL is discussing the Witness anthology as well as USM. (Apologies if this discussion took place before I joined).

Brink said:

" I find this discussion about the place of Buddhism in American poetry to be representative of the mainstream - from Gary Snyder to any number of poets that employ Asian imagery for superficial exotic effects. We need to turn the anthropological eye back on the non-Asian Americans who have convinced themselves that they are the superior, true Buddhist poets of the day. "

This assertion itself lacks the very "anthropological eye" that the writer calls for-- indeed what is "Asian imagery"? Rice paddies, water lilies? I do not know which Americans he is referring to as being "convinced of their superiority as true"-- I know that Phillip Whalen, whose health is failing along with his eye-sight at the Zen center where he is abbot, could not be held guilty of this. Nor could his poetry.

" What is exposed by the anthology and the defense by its contributors, editors, and others is the extreme to which Orientalism is indeed a unacknowledged part of American poetry and poetics. It goes hand in hand with a rhetoric of sincerity and is always riddled with "

bad consciousness" born out of its blindness to the historical."

I agree that Orientalism is often unacknowledged in American *anything*, including poetry.

" Who gains from this? Certainly it does Asian-Americans no good."

" What? My only response to this is "

SAYS YOU!!" But seriously, I am frustrated by this smug paternalistic attitude.

" Poetry by Asian-Americans tends to include poetry highly conscious of stereotypes, orientalism, racism, and the many ironies born of the ahistorical ignorance exhibited in Kent Johnson and his associates. "

I am sorry to break Mr. Brink tidy bubble of how Asian Americans tend to be-- (as a representative of the not-so-model-minority)-- but Asian-Americans can model the very stereotypes that are offered as models of Asians-- Frank Chan, in his foreward to __ The Big Aiiiii! __, was in fact, highly critical of fellow Chinese American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan for what he read as embracing the white-Christian assumptions about the misogynistic and incompetent Chinese male character. And Garrett Hongo's _Open Boat_ anthology was equally criticized for its narrow aesthetic decisions for it excluded experimental writing by Asian-Americans, which, it was contended, furthered an image of what Asian Americans wrote like-- traditional, narrative, image-driven lyric.

“That Lew and others are angry should be Mr. Johnson's first clue that he may be in the Buddhistic loop of consciousness, but he's out in apple pie left field otherwise.”

That Lew was the first to voice his concern about anthologies-- using Johnson and Forche as two examples-- says more.

And what does it say for editors/editing practices when my work-- which is "experimental" in approach-- is accepted for an anthology edited by (white) editors (with similar experimental tastes) and also rejected by the (Asian) editors of an anthology of Vietnamese American poets (with a more image based lyric narrative take of poetry)? (see #3 below).

“That Asian-Americans would be excluded is obvious: the editors of the anthology sought to reinforce a ”

vision" of Asia (for which Buddhism serves as a metonym) that is less-than-discretely post-colonialist in tone. The white Buddhist tribe represented in the anthology purveys the myth of the Christian missionary superiority as it expropriates candy Buddhism. Buddhism becomes a commodity among a New Age people ('in search of deeper truths') who sample various religious imagery to evoke a sensibility that peaks with their pleasantly bourgeois conundrums, or offers a refreshing disorientation vis-a-vis the logocentrism of everyday life."

That there were no Asian Americans in this anthology was suprising to me given the geographical origin of Buddhism. This to me does also say something about the social pressures that are exerted between groups. Mr Lew said as much--

and I agree that anthologizing in general is a tricky thing. Buddhism is commodified because-- hello look around you-- editors have to find a handle for poetry in the market place. Calling yourself a school of something has a similiar affect-- even when the "handle" groups disparate approaches to writing.

Buddhism is not held as the property of Asians-- and the whole point is to practice and give-- to suggest that it is "expropriated" feels to me another way of making Asians subverient to the dominant.

I want to make further points but am running out of time (have to go to work) and want to post this for Kent Johnson's response before he takes off for vacation. So in brief--

- 1) Is there any anthology that does not reflect the interests, cohorts, and tastes of the editor?
- 2) Is there any anthology that is pure from the wider social constructs the editor operates in?
- 3) Wouldn't it be closer to the truth for any editor to write something like "The poets/poems in this collection are my friends, people I admired and/or work I am interested in that I happened to see or was sent to me. I have presented them in book form because I want others to see it and hope that there is enough interest in these poets so that I can continue to publish poetry-- because we all should have more poetry".

45. — Aldon L. Nielsen Tue, 24 Jun 1997 18:03 ↑ [Index](#)

Nielsen reviews for the list the nine responses Boston Review had printed to Marjorie Perloff's essay on the Yasusada texts. He quotes the poet Charles Simic, then Greg Glazner and Jon Davis, and closes on Eliot Weinberger; the block quotation is Weinberger's. His target is not the hoax but the use made of it by critics who blame the affair on literary theory and multiculturalism. "Displacements", the response signed by five Asian American writers, he does not mention; it is printed in the appendix to this volume.

Have just finished reading the responses in the current Boston Review to Marjorie Perloff's earlier article on the Yasusada texts and their publication (yes, it takes a while for things to reach me up here in the mountains --

more interesting to me even than the "original" success de/du scandal(e) is the mode of response here -- the "Yasusada" affair becomes a screen upon which a

writer might project his or her anxieties of the day -- for example:

Mr. Simic tells us "With the rise of literary theory in the last 20 years and the quick turnover of critical approaches, not only American but world literature lost out." Now, this is preceded by the complaint that "Our big secret, our unspoken literary scandal, is the near total ignorance by our writers, editors and academics of literature being written elsewhere in the world." Mr. Simic appears to believe that the place on the coffee table once held by Robbe-Grillet (or "even" an anthology of Spanish poetry) is now given to a succession of THEORISTS -- which only goes to show that Mr. Simic visits a different class of coffee tables from any I have ever experienced.

but it would seem that this theory is not read any more closely than the texts of Yasusada were -- for Greg Glazner and Jon Davis tell us in their response that "Michel Foucault's writings, which focus exclusively on uncovering social power structures, lurk in the background of this confused literary scene." EXCLUSIVELY?

more close reading of the same sort: Simic concludes his letter -- :Only in our academic circles is the claim being made that it's philosophically impossible, even for an experienced cook, to judge whether the meal prepared by someone else was cooked badly or not." the which makes me wonder if Simic's experience of literary theory has in fact been confined to coffee tables.

of course, there is a bit of theorizing going on in Glazner and Davis's contribution -- They would distinguish a "true multiculturalism" from whatever it is they think is going on, one in which "'Excellence' would have to return . . . " immediately adding "that standards for such a complex range of work would never achieve anything approaching certainty"

well, as my good buddies Romy and Michelle would say, duh --

so, the problem is that all this politically correct relativism and victimology has taken us away from true standards of excellence, which we need to get back to as fast as we can, though we can never be certain what those standards may be --

Mr. Weinberger adds:

"Yasusada occurs at a moment when the Eng. Dept. has split into two contradictory 'post-modernisms': multiculturalism and deconstruction (and its spin-offs)."

[A hundred and seventy words are cut from the foot, ending the quotation — “One side wants to hear the stories that haven’t been told, and the other doubts that stories can be told” — and answering it. He doubts that people read closely, quote accurately or fairly represent the positions of others, and sends readers to the current Boston Review for the full text and Marjorie Perloff’s “most restrained reply”.]

46. — Kent Johnson Wed, 25 Jun 1997 19:47 ↑ [Index](#)

June 1997. Johnson answers Aldon Nielsen and Stephen Ellwood, who had read Charles Simic’s contribution to the Boston Review forum as an attack on literary theory. The APR selection Simic admits to having read is the four-page group of poems the American Poetry Review had printed the previous summer. It is the only place in the archive where Johnson defends the poems as poems rather than the project as a project.

As someone who has been close to the "Yasusada affair," I'd like to say just a few words regarding the Aldon Nielsen and Stephen Ellwood contributions on Charles Simic. To be direct, but in a friendly tone: "What the hell are you guys talking about?" Simic's response to Perloff has a few sentences, at most, that relate (and in the most impressionistic and light-hearted way) to the privileging of "theory" over poetry in the academy. How you squeeze all of that heavy critical juice out of a couple nutmegs of Simician wit?

Simic's central argument (tho he admits he has only read the APR selection, a small part of the Yasusada/Motokiyu oeuvre) is not complicated or at all difficult to see. It is that Yasusada's poetry is most unremarkable and that any poet worth her salt can see such. As illustration, Simic quotes two stanzas from a poem titled "Loon and Dome," (see Aldon's post from today) claiming that if a Frank Kowalski from Milwaukee had submitted such writing that it "wouldn't stand a chance." But Simic's choice of stanzas is interesting, because in the context of the complete poem, the section in question is clearly intended by Yasusada ("clearly," that is, even given what I will say below) to be read as poignantly trite and sentimental. The whole poem is available in the APR "special supplement."

Now, it's possible to satirize a good many poets through out-of- context quotes, and I think Simic has the perfect right to do so with Yasusada if he likes. But that CS chose this particular passage as representative seems to either A) suggest a lack of attentiveness on his part in reading and evaluating Yasusada's work, or B) suggest that he is more or less struggling to find a passage he can poke good fun at so as to bolster his thesis. (And now that I'm thinking about it,

I guess the same could be said for Aldon Nielsen, who approvingly quoted the passage!)

It's not a bad thing that Simic doesn't like Yasusada. As Marjorie Perloff--who in her summary strongly disagrees with Simic's assessment--puts it, the most notable area of disagreement in the Boston Review mini-essays has to do with the question of Yasusada's poetic value, and contention around this point (after all the near-unanimous gushing from "mainstream" and "avant-garde" corners alike) is a not unwelcome development to all those who have been intimately involved in AY's fascinating life. In fact, this could be seen, I think, as a new issue or phase, if you will, in the general Yasusada problem: how should works which are not strictly poetical but also highly elaborate gestures of critique be judged--particularly when such works have no solid writerly source against which to press judgement? To say that the poems are "good" or "bad" as *poems* (or as drafts, letters, English assignments, shopping lists, etc.) is one way of reacting, but I think it is more complicated than that; there's a whole complex aura (tho there must be a better word) that has developed around Yasusada that by now substantially complicates the matters of reading, classification, and critical ranking.

In the eight Boston Review responses, Eliot Weinberger is the only one to hone in clearly on this issue, and while Simic's piece has some amusing moments, Weinberger's (ok, I'm biased) is even better. In fact, I heard from EW just the other day after he got back from the Rotterdam Poetry Festival. He told me that he met with Simic there and that they chatted at length about the Pearl poet and disagreed vehemently about Yasusada. And then they parted amicably and went their own ways, each surrounded by small throngs of swooning and screaming Dutch girls and boys, reaching out their books of Serbian and Spanish translations for signing, straining to touch even the sleeves of these two immortal heroes of late 20th century American letters.

There are still some places where people care about poetry.

Kent

47. — Kent Johnson Thu, 26 Jun 1997 17:44 ↑ [Index](#)

The bracketed text is a private letter to Johnson from Eliot Weinberger, the essayist and translator, forwarded with permission. Weinberger had been one of the Boston Review respondents; here he answers Walter K. Lew and Dean Brink directly, and reports what Charles Simic said about Yasusada when the two met in Rotterdam. Daniel Bouchard objected on the list to Johnson's forwarding a private letter to two listservs in his own defence.

Folks: I just received this from Eliot Weinberger. He has given his permission to forward to the list. It touches on some issues that have been recently under discussion here. Provocative and honest, as is EW's style. Kent

“ Dear Kent--

“ Thanks for sending me the various letters from Buffalo and Cap-L concerning Orientalism, your American Buddhist anthology, Yasusada, etc. Buffaloes, however, tend to stare stolidly into the dirt, paw the ground, and charge. I'm afraid they will not take your (wholly invented) description of Simic & me besieged by Dutch groupies as satirical. Simic & I did discuss Yasusada in Rotterdam. His position was essentially: 1) nothing against "hoaxes" per se; 2) Yasusada is a mediocre poet; 3) tremendous anger that the only way a foreign poet can be published these days is if there is a melodramatic biographical story attached to the work. On the last point he's quite right-- what I want to emphasize is his rage is directed against the current nationalism of US poetry, and not against Yasusada. I'm not sure this is clear in his Boston Review article. As for Walter Lew and Dean Brink: The history of the 20th century is that the Left fights each other on small points of doctrine, and the Right triumphs. (I'm so glad I read "Homage to Catalonia" as an impressionable youth.) Lew and Brink are merely the latest wrinkles in this perennial game: Playing the "identity" card for maximum self-promotion (in the case of Lew), their targets are inevitably white liberals in the powerless world of poetry, rather than the genuine purveyors and sources of racism in this country. "Yasusada" is a racism to be condemned, but Proposition 189 or quotas for Asian-Americans at many universities is a problem for others to worry about. [I should note that Lew has attacked me in print as a "Cold War demonizer of China" for publicly stating two incontrovertible facts: 1) a vibrant generation of Chinese modernist poets of the 1930's were entirely silenced by the revolution; and 2) many of the best Chinese poets have been in exile since the Tiananmen massacre. Of course, with people like Lew you can't win: My writings on Chinese poetry can only be Orientalism; my small

efforts for Chinese poets mere paternalism. Had I no interest in China, there would be no reason to single me out as a racist. In short, there is nothing more Sinophobic than a Sinophile.] As for the "racism" of your American Buddhists anthology, this ignores the fact that Buddhism (like Christianity and Islam, unlike Judaism and Hinduism) is a proselytizing religion that has been spread by missionaries and conversion. From the point of view of its various institutions, an anthology of white American Buddhists is a token of success, not of appropriation. ”

[Three hundred and ninety words of Weinberger are cut from the foot, on D.T. Suzuki as a Japanese nationalist and on the difference between stereotype and racism. Forty-one posts, ninety-six hundred words from June to November, twenty-five of them his. The Buddhist anthology quarrel with Dean Brink burns down; he sends in his unsub command, is told he has been removed, and comes up to find ninety messages: "It is sure difficult to free oneself from the pull of this list." On Charles Alexander's image of George Bowering encased in light: "one of the most beautiful images I had ever laid eyes upon, whatever that means".]

48. — Kent Johnson Wed, 19 Nov 1997 19:39 ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson announces Doubled Flowering, the Yasusada book Roof Books was about to publish, prompted by Jordan Davis's remark that he had gone quiet. Roof was James Sherry's New York press, at the centre of language writing's publishing. The closing paragraph is as near to an avowal as Johnson came on the list in these years, and it is what set off the November argument.

I've been lurking every so often in the archives this semester and lurked yesterday to find Jordan Davis's post, "Yasusada, Watten, social texas." In it, he says that "Kent Johnson seems to have taken a vacation from the Yasusada updates."

Well, you can hardly expect me to not respond to that! Hi Jordan. And by the way, you still owe me \$20 from last summer.

But anyway, I'd like to second Jordan's remarks about the Financial Times article ("Mind Food: On the Art of Writing Wrongs"--on the FT web site) because it's pretty interesting, but to say also that its views about heteronymous authorship are pretty restricted. Check out, for example, the views of the Granta editor, or the concluding analogy, if that's the word, of the article's writer, Christian Tyler: that literature should always carry a "warning" or "origin of production" label (however small, he qualifies), like the food you buy in a

supermarket! (And I don't think he's being tongue in cheek.) Also of related interest just out in UK is a section devoted to Yasusada discussion in the new issue of Poetry Review, including letters from Stand editor Jon Silkin, an interview with me by Peter Forbes (PR editor) and an exchange of letters between myself and Akitoshi Nagahata (part of a by now larger correspondence about issues relating to Yasusada that we intend to publish somewhere--Mikhail Epstein and Eliot Weinberger also enter this debate). Akitoshi Nagahata is on this list, and his criticisms of Yasusada are far and away the most thoughtful and thought-provoking I have encountered so far.

But the main update I'm back from vacation to post is that *_Doubled Flowering: From the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada_*, is just out from Roof Books, quite beautiful in production and available for \$14.95. I believe James Sherry will be putting a more complete notice on the list shortly. The book is 170 pages, including a 45 page "critical appendix."

I know many of you have been assuming that the book is by me. Well, here it is. "Who it's by," if that's important, is present there. But you can read it, too, without playing detective. Hope you'll give it a look!

Kent

49. — Dean A. Brink Wed, 19 Nov 1997 18:58 ↑ [Index](#)

Dean Brink answers within the hour, and puts the charge in its shortest form. Brink was a graduate student in East Asian languages who had been pressing the orientalism argument since the summer. John Treat, whom he cites, wrote the standard study of Japanese atomic-bomb writing; Borders was a large American chain bookshop. He has not read the book.

Sounds like Kent Johnson would like all of us to read the Yasusada book even if it isn't by Yasusada. Splendid attitude.

Now the question is Why not use your own name? Again, the specter of Orientalism underlies your self-deploying fanfare.

Your lackadaisical nonchalance regarding the falsification of A-Bomb survivor literature is tantamount to forging Jewish Holocaust literature just to make a buck at Borders (a similar point was made to me by John Treat recently).

50. — David Zauhar Wed, 19 Nov 1997 21:18 ↑ [Index](#)

David Zauhar, teaching at the University of Illinois at Chicago, entire. He is answering Brink's post of the same evening, which had called the Yasusada book a forgery of A-bomb survivor literature on the strength of the pieces that had appeared in magazines. Zauhar's two sentences are the whole of his contribution, and they set the terms of the quarrel that ran through the next day.

Thanks for another self-congratulating condemnation of yet another book you haven't bothered to read.

David Zauhar

51. — Dean A. Brink Wed, 19 Nov 1997 19:56 ↑ [Index](#)

Brink calls for a boycott an hour after Johnson's announcement. In the post immediately preceding he had written that Johnson's "lackadaisical nonchalance regarding the falsification of A-Bomb survivor literature is tantamount to forging Jewish Holocaust literature just to make a buck at Borders." Zauhar had answered that in a line, and this is Brink's reply to him. He has not read the book.

I would like to discuss this issue further, but you must refrain from personal attacks (how am I "self-congratulating"?) and speak to the contents of my insinuations (in this long-established discourse). The issue is the forging of the book not the quality -- which, as has been established from the pieces in print, is less than satisfactory: predictable attempts at entrepreneurial Orientalism, riddled with affective clichés and revealing a shallow understanding of Japanese life (to be expected of an American ignorant of Japan); devaluation of the lives of actual Japanese who experience the effects of the A-bombs still today.

A couple years ago in Japan a major magazine ran an article on the fact that the Jewish Holocaust never happened. Should this be ignored too? (The magazine folded soon after, to take responsibility for the outrage.)

Last week a judicial nominee withdrew his name after admitting to have falsified stories of tragic racial violence against a member of his family in the 1940s or 50s. He took responsibility for using historical tragedy for personal gains.

Similarly I think informed readers should know what they're buying and boycott the Johnson book if they don't want to contribute to the distortion and consecration of historical tragedies (note that racism figures in all these example of the Jewish Holocaust, the decision to drop the A-bomb twice on Japan, and the murder of African Americans in the pre-civil rights US).

I can't imagine anyone seriously reading the Yasusada book except as a case study in an ethics course, or a literary theory class discussing the limits of postmodernism (I hope no one actually does this, wouldn't want to fuel his projects).

52. — Maria Damon Thu, 20 Nov 1997 08:14 ↑ [Index](#)

Maria Damon, who taught at the University of Minnesota and wrote on Beat and outsider poetics, declines the terms of Zauhar's defence — that a book must be read before it can be condemned. She is not defending Brink's language; she is refusing the premise that the book itself is what the argument is about.

i don't necessarily think this is the point. "the book itself" --whatever that may be --is not the only thing worth discussing in cases like this.--md

53. — Kent Johnson Thu, 20 Nov 1997 08:59 ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson's answer to the boycott call, the following morning. John Whittier Treat's Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb, published two years earlier, was the standard study of hibakusha writing — the literature of the bomb's survivors — and Brink had cited Treat's disapproval in support of his charge. Johnson asks the list how to reach Treat.

Dean:

Strong feelings, to be sure. But just to clarify, in case you weren't aware: the AY work has been known to be a fiction for a year and a half now.

My own strong feeling is that the Yasusada writings spark issues that are a good deal less settled and more ambiguous than your formulations below would allow. There is a long interview in the book, actually, that attempts--if tentatively--to bring some of these difficult questions forward.

I suppose I could only ask you to first read the book. It's at least possible, I think, that you might soften your judgement after considering the whole work.

Would you (or anyone else on list) happen to have John Treat's e-mail? I admire Writing Ground Zero a great deal, and would like to exchange some ideas with him.

54. — David Zauhar Thu, 20 Nov 1997 09:03 ↑ [Index](#)

Zauhar, teaching at the University of Illinois at Chicago, answers Brink the same morning. The Turner Diaries he goes on to describe is the neo-Nazi novel of 1978 that had been in the news after the Oklahoma City bombing. Maria Damon rebuked the post within the hour: "there are enough ideas at stake here to make personal attack unnecessary [...] even kent himself in his response was not so virulent."

I think that the actual real A-bomb devalued the lives of its victims a hell of a lot more than any poem ever could.

Does Kent Johnson, or anyone else, deny that A-bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

Thanks for the update, but I read the papers and listen to NPR, too.

You've been living in the world of discourse for too long. No one denies that these events are catastrophic and evil. What I object too, and called "self-congratulatory," was the assumption that you are the lone crusader, on this list, for justice. And I object to criticizing books you haven't read. Even if you know they're evil. Some time back when I worked as a free lance journalist I wrote about the Turner Diaries, assuming before I read it that it would be vile and disgusting based on what I'd heard. But before I wrote about it, for the now defunct Minneapolis City Pages, I read the book. Guess what? I read it, wrote more intelligently about it than I would have otherwise, and still to this day have not lynched a single person of color or feminist. I also object to the assumption that it is impossible for someone to write in a persona, to IMAGINE what it might be like to be a survivor of the Atomic bomb. In the Yasusada poems I've read, it seems like the poet does an adequate job. I could be wrong. You could even demonstrate to me that I've read badly, that I'm wrong, but not if you haven't read the poems yourself.

Who was your critical mentor, the Ayatollah Khomeini? For he too knew all about certain books without having to read them. The discourse of Orientalism is problem, and when it distorts the lives and experiences of other people, it should be criticized. If the Johnson book actually does that, go after it. But you

don't really know if it does or not. Is this what you are learning in graduate school, how to make authoritative pronouncements about books you haven't read? I don't think that's what your teachers really want.

David Zauhar

55. — David Kellogg *Thu, 20 Nov 1997 10:33* ↑ [Index](#)

David Kellogg on Brink's imagination. The relayed passage at the head is Brink's, quoted by Kellogg from a post of the same morning, in which Brink had said he could not imagine anyone reading the Yasusada book except as a case study in an ethics course. Kellogg, who had argued in April that the Sokal and Yasusada hoaxes differed only in degree, takes the remark as reason to read it.

“I can't imagine anyone seriously reading the Yasusada book except as a case study in an ethics course, or a literary theory class discussing the limits of postmodernism (I hope no one actually does this, wouldn't want to fuel his projects).”

So, Dean Brink can't imagine why I might want to read the book? Wow, I guess I won't read it then. . .

Perhaps you shouldn't give your imagination so much credit. Just because you can't imagine why somebody would read (or do) something doesn't mean they don't have legitimate reasons for doing exactly that. That aporia is precisely enough to further my interest.

Cheers, David

56. — Maria Damon *Thu, 20 Nov 1997 10:07* ↑ [Index](#)

Damon again, refereeing, and stating where she stands. She is answering Zauhar, whose reply to Brink had accused him of casting himself as the list's lone crusader for justice. Damon agrees with Brink's substance while declining his vehemence, and refuses the suggestion that raising social justice and the ethics of appropriation makes a person a dupe of theory.

jeez dave, there are enough *ideas* at stake here to make personal attack unnecessary. even kent himself in his response was not so virulent. i tend to agree w/ dean, tho i'd probly express myself in milder terms. and why assume

that people who raise the issue of social justice and the ethical problems with appropriation are dupes of something you call "discourse?"

57. — Christopher Alexander *Thu, 20 Nov 1997 10:37* ↑ [Index](#)

Christopher Alexander on how an argument about a book becomes an argument about the people having it. The bracketed passage is Maria Damon's, on escalation. Alexander holds that Zauhar's ad hominem cannot be separated from the phrases that provoked it — Brink's "self-deploying fanfare" and "lackadaisical nonchalance" — and that the list rebukes the second insult rather than the first.

Maria writes:

“ discussions about controversial topics are always subject to this pattern of escalation--which is why you can start off arguing about who is to do the dishes, & end up being called or calling someone "asshole" & the like. ”

while I agree with Maria here, that we might be able to have this discussion without that sort of interference, I wld also like to point out that escalation is something like a virus: it comes from somewhere & it goes somewhere. in this case, I think it's a little silly to jump on Dave Zauhar for an inflammatory ad hominem post without acknowledging that Dean's remarks about "self-deploying fanfare" & "lackadaisical nonchalance" hardly meet the standard of disinterested criticism he's bearing.

incidentally, I wonder if we can look a little more closely at the frequently levelled accusation that (assuming for a second that which is by no means a foregone conclusion) Kent constructed this project to enrich himself either in terms of monetary or cultural capital (I think the statement in this case was "tantamount to forging Jewish Holocaust literature just to make a buck at Borders"--not an outright accusation, but the implication is there). now, before folks start jumping on my head, let me say this isn't quite a defense of the project--which **does** have very serious ethical implications of which **all** of us are aware-- so much as it is a wish to drop excess baggage. does anyone seriously believe that the AY author is going to make his/her fortune from the sales of this book? that it's going to get him or her a great job somewhere? from what I've seen so far, Kent, as the most prominent figure in the affair, isn't rolling in ill-gotten gains, be they monetary or, again, cultural capital. in fact, except for a few supporters & a few more temperate critics, he's been

absolutely reviled at every turn as an unredeemed racist who tells the worst kind of lie--the one we believed.

now, I'd love to have this discussion again, but first can we all go back to our corners & figure out what's really at stake?

best, Chris

58. — david bromige Thu, 20 Nov 1997 18:22 ↑ [Index](#)

David Bromige closes the day's argument in the register the list often used to relieve it. He wrote from Sonoma County, which the subject line folds into Yasusada's name; the Motokiyu address Kevin Killian had chased in 1995 was a box there. The "sherry-man" is James Sherry of Roof Books, the publisher of Doubled Flowering; the tune is "Yes Sir, That's My Baby".

yasu, thats my sada
nosu, dont mean nada
yesu, thats my sada now

and on that day
yes on that day
i'm gonna walk up to that sherry-man & say

roof books, do my sada
yasu, dont mean nada
roof books, do my sada now

it's not a hoax
it is a hoax
the author's dead & here we have the quotes

& if it floats
yes if it floats
or if it sinks or swims kent proudly boasts

yasu thats my saga
now, fans, dont go gaga
get on line buy yasusada no-ow

now here's my point:
creation's joint
the eye of the beholder proves my point:

yasu, thats _your_ sada
nosu, thats _your_ nada
send _your_ dough for yasusada no-ow!

[Ten posts and twenty-eight hundred words, seven of them his. "It's Buy Nothing Day, and I haven't bought a thing", he begins, before turning to Marx on the commodity: "Thus, what we don't see is more real than what we do, and so on." He finds Alcaics and Sapphics in Bromige's Turkey Award entry. Then he presses Dean Brink twice to give a close reading of Alan Sondheim's poem rather than call it Orientalist: "Here's your chance to go beyond jargon-slinging."]

59. — Poetics List Administration Mon, 8 Dec 1997 20:38: ↑ Index

8 December 1997, and the book itself arrives on the list — the publisher's announcement, forwarded by the list administration. Roof Books was James Sherry's New York press; the copy is the first place on the list where the succession of authors is set out as fact, Motokiyu writing as Yasusada and Johnson as his literary executor. It is the only place in the archive where the affair is described in the neutral register of a catalogue.

Doubled Flowering

The materials of the Japanese poet Araki Yasusada (1907-1972), a survivor of Hiroshima, were published in Grand Street, Conjunctions, Abiko Quarterly, First Intensity, Stand, and The American Poetry Review. Gradually the rumor began circulating that Araki Yasusada did not exist and that the poems were a "hoax" perpetrated by the Japanese-American author Tosa Motokiyu or by his literary executor, the American poet Kent Johnson. On August 9th, 1997, Asahi Shimbun, Japan's leading newspaper, published a front page story on Araki Yasusada, accompanied by his apocryphal penciled portrait. The article, along with a subsequent feature story in the Asahi, has made Yasusada an emerging literary sensation in Japan. Indeed, no other poetry in English in recent memory has provoked such wide-ranging international discussion and controversy before book publication. In major publications in the U.S., England, Australia, Mexico, Russia, Spain, Israel, and Italy, poets and critics have expressed excitement, hostility, and bewilderment toward Yasusada's idiosyncratic work. They have judged it as everything from a "racist inspired hoax" to an "imaginative gesture of profound beauty and empathy." Presented here for the first time in complete form, readers now have the chance to draw their own conclusions about Doubled Flowering and-if they read with understanding and care-to perhaps gain access to the mysteries of its origins.

Critical Acclaim for Araki Yasusada

"Yasusasa's' writing is an entry into a spiritual space . . . It is a work of art in the largest sense." - Carolyn Forché

"The 'scandal' of these poems lies not in the problematics of authorship, identity, persona, race or history. Rather, these are wonderful works of writing that also invoke all of these other issues, never relying on them to prop up a text. In a time and place where book jacket blurbs routinely claim that X or Y poet has written a work that has "found that which is essential" in whatever, this book makes the argument for anti-essentialism. That it has done it so well infuriates folks with a proprietary interest in categories. Thank you, Araki Yasusada!

[Six hundred and fifty words of the publisher's copy are cut from the foot: the rest of the notices for the Yasusada book, among them Weinberger's "both the greatest poet of Hiroshima and its most unreliable witness", and then a second announcement entire, Yunte Huang's SHI: A Radical Reading of Chinese Poetry. Hosea Hirata's clause, which the copy gives as praise, ends an objection; his response is printed in the appendix.]

60. — Kent Johnson Tue, 9 Dec 1997 09:59 ↑ [Index](#)

The occasion is a run of Japanese-inflected poems Alan Sondheim, a prolific writer of early network texts, had been posting, which Dean Brink and Mark Wallace criticised as orientalist. A haibun is the Japanese prose-and-haiku form the poems imitate. The bracketed sentence is Wallace's. Johnson's argument is that the two charges laid against Yasusada, essentialism and cultural error, cannot both be answered.

This is all fascinating stuff and pretty complex. eh? More complex than the great suspended sword of "Orientalism," which kind of makes everyone shut-up and mind their manners at the table... But good on Dean Brink for the thoughtful reply, and wow to gaijin Sondheim, who comes spinning like a Noh-top out of the Seventh Underworld!

Just a quick question before running to class: Mark Wallace wrote--

“If you're going to write from a Japanese persona, in other words, you might want to be a bit more rigorous with yourself.”

The wild irony of calling on Sondheim to be "more rigorous" with himself aside, this raises an interesting question, at least for me: Wouldn't being "more rigorous" in this context perhaps mean, in part, a deconstruction of essences--an

effort toward a showing of the Western in the Eastern, and vice-versa, and the fascinating complications, paradoxes, and poetic propellants such volatile mixtures create? I ask, because infamous Japanese persona Yasusada has been lambasted *_both_* for being essentialist in an Orientalist way (see Dean's earlier posts, for example) and for his obvious and shameful corruptions of Japanese cultural and poetic conventions. It would seem (or am I wrong--*_how should_* one do it, Mark?) that when it comes to inhabiting a cross-cultural persona--or having that persona inhabit you--that you (plural) just can't win.

61. — Patrick Pritchett Tue, 9 Dec 1997 12:10 ↑ [Index](#)

Pritchett defends Sondheim's and Johnson's Japanese pastiches as parodies of orientalist translation rather than exercises in it, and appends the post he answers. The bracketed words are Alan Sondheim's, withdrawing from the thread after Dean Brink's criticism; they are the list's sharpest statement of the view that the outrage is itself a policing of who may write as whom.

As for Dean Brink's criticisms, they are, I'm sure, valid as far as they go with respect to Orientalism per se. I think, though, the project Alan has in mind is altogether different in intention, that is, it has little interest in merely reproducing Japanese figures of speech as a way to evoke "the otherness of the Orient," with all the colonial nostalgia that implies, but rather uses these tropes to arrive at a reconfigured pastiche in which the language (process) itself is the focus, and which, as a by-product, offer a critique of those nostalgias, the way they articulate an impossible desire: an erotics of the Other.

In one way, at least, his recent poems here (and Kent Johnson's last incredible post), function as deliberate parodies of the style of translation which Dean condemns. For instance, Kent's witty mention of Witter Bynner. Far from encouraging a stereotypical deployment of Oriental tropes, Alan and Kent have problematized the way we read the idea of the East. The playfulness of their language points up the linguistic opacity of the Other.

How do others read this? Patrick Pritchett

Well, I feel I have been sufficiently chastened and it makes me sick to my stomach. So see, it's ok to write out of Lautreamont or take say Gertrude Stein apart (yes, I've spoofed her and it's in archives now), but God forbid we touch other cultures because after all they're precious and we should only work out of contemporary otherness, or maybe not even that. So I will watch my words care-

fully on this list, as far as the politics go, I didn't give a fuck about them but brought them up in response to Dean and you, see? But it's clear now, what's acceptable to the poetics community and I stand corrected.

No more of this fucking shit will pass your way!

Alan, PC to the hilt.

[Ten posts, twenty-five hundred words, seven of them his. He points to Eliot Weinberger's tribute to James Laughlin in The Nation. Then "Four Sonnets for Annie Finch", a single question about New Formalism carried across four titled sonnets, ending: "what is the common dark-matter trunk of the sonnet form and the severed head of the Tutsi child?" To Mark Weiss he says: "Well, actually Mark, you didn't get it, and if you keep misreading me like this, why, I'll just have to bring up Neruda's NKVD connections with you all over again!"]

62. — Maria Damon Wed, 17 Dec 1997 09:55 ↑ [Index](#)

Damon, at Minnesota, had earlier sided with Brink while dissenting from his terms. Here, in a list of her end-of-term reading, she turns on the formula by which the work's defenders had answered every ethical objection — "the poem itself" — and locates its cost. The essay she found it in is Charles Bernstein's "A Blow Is Like an Instrument," written for Daedalus; Bernstein was the list's founder and owner.

hey all, remember when we used to post what we were reading? here's my end-of-quarter catch-as-catch-can listing:

john wieners 707 scott st, just my cup of tea! loneliness, poetry, drugs, anonymous sex and religion; reminds me of russell fitz-g's obsessed-w-bob-kaufman diary from the same period. thank you for publishing this douglas messerli!!

chas bernstein's article for daedalus, called "a blow is like an instrument." cute and engaging, w/ lenny bruce gig and all, a real pleasure to see that in a "serious" humanities rag. one q, though, is in his thumbnail precis of the yasusada brouhaha he refers to "the poem itself." is there any such thing, is what i'd like to know. obviously i think not. charles's discussion is framed in terms of questions, so i'm not imputing certainty to him, but the phrase "the poem itself" can function, in current academic climate, as a gauntlet of aestheticism thrown down in a gesture that erases almost all post-'68 thinking in the humanities.

a heavy dose of barrett watten, after his ILS tour de force. no comment yet.

a ms on gertrude stein for a univ. press. no comment yet.

snippets of Puerto Rican Jam (U of MN Press), a group of essays by young PR scholars mostly sociology etc, and Nestor Garcia Canclini's book abt entering and leaving modernity, what's it called? slipped my mind. it's in the other room. the former not as helpful as i'd thot it wd be, the latter very interesting, esp the foreword by renato rosaldo.

hoping to delve into hannah weiner and nate mackey more thoroughly during my upcoming single quarter leave YAY!--md

[Sixty posts over three winter months, seventeen thousand words, forty-three of them his, and he is at his most sociable: manifestos, Clemente Padín in translation, requests for help, a post that is only a list of first names. He corrects Ron Silliman on "Guantanamera" and reports that a Ron Silliman-admiring brother of a friend is stationed at Guantanamo, "a naval mechanic of some sort, so the New Sentence and Tjanting (I know this for a fact) is present on occupied Cuban soil!" Later he asks him about Stalinism as "a curious old trot here who spent a good many hours of his youth selling The Militant outside factory gates in Milwaukee".]

63. — Dale Smith Thu, 12 Feb 1998 17:15 ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson had told the list that morning that a Latin American visual poet had withdrawn from a collaboration after receiving warnings about him from friends in the United States. Smith, a young Austin editor, takes the withdrawal as retaliation for Yasusada and demands the list respond. "Listpods" is his own word for the list's subscribers.

So what about KentJohnson's troubling post earlier today about his sabotaged project in latin america? Is this just gonna slip by in silence? Or are listpods so jealous and complacent that they want to see an important project go to pieces? This is a bit more than a "snafu". In fact, it confirms the sort of petty, self-serving and snivelling fealty I have come to expect from this 'community.' The Yasusada poems have contributed more to poetry than almost anything else in recent years. If it's true that some petty acts have prevented Kent from engaging another project then this sabotage should be addressed. Or maybe we wanna go on yapping about baseball or the etiquette of email publication. What **is** the problem behind the Yasusada works anyway? That maybe those poems aren't the works of a nuclear holocaust survivor? Who cares? The poems speak for themselves and contain an astonishing sympathetic, if not vulnerable, clarity. And Kent, to whatever extent he involved himself with that project, aided in bringing some real beauty to the world. Kent's post this morning demanded our attention and decency. Are there any thoughts?

64. — Aldon Nielsen *Thu, 12 Feb 1998 18:49* ↑ [Index](#)

Nielsen answers Dale Smith the same evening, having already asked Johnson for details that would let the list judge what response the sabotage required. The second paragraph is the movement's most economical refutation of the defence that had been offered from the beginning — that the poems speak for themselves — and it turns the defenders' own claim for the work's ambition against them.

uh . . . there have been some responses already -- and I've asked Kent if he can provide us any more specific information so that we might be able to judge what further response is appropriate -- If somebody was attempting to disrupt a collaborative project by means of a poison pen letter, then that is to be condemned -- and perhaps some public revelations would be in order? Does anybody really think that the response of the jealous would be silence? [...] At the risk of contradictory thinness -- IF the poems speak for themselves, and if no one should care whether or not the poems are the work of a nuclear holocaust survivor, then what is the purpose in presenting them in the guise of the work of a nuclear holocaust survivor? My reading of the Yasusada works is that the entire "package" is part of the work -- I think it does a disservice to the work to ignore what appears to be a primary feature of its shaping and presentation -- If this were of no importance, wouldn't the author simply have submitted the poems "themselves," without the surrounding apparatus, and let them meet whatever editorial fate was theirs to meet? The apparatus, and the response to it, is part OF the work, no?

65. — Christopher Alexander *Fri, 13 Feb 1998 11:33* ↑ [Index](#)

Alexander, who had defended Johnson against Brink in November, here declines the choice the argument had been offering for three years: poems or project, aesthetics or ethics. He is answering Nielsen's post of the previous evening and, by implication, Dale Smith's. The names he runs through — Ojiu Norinaga, Okura Kyojin, Javier Alvarez — are the further authors and keepers the book layered behind Motokiyu.

I think this should be clear enough, right? it's certainly the allure of the project — that beyond some really beautiful poems, there's this tremendous edifice of thoroughly spurious authorship (and thoroughness is definitely part of the effect, here); more than that, masks on masks on masks, AY concealing Tosa Motokiyu, itself a name (a noun) obscuring other, apparently numerous figures,

Ojiu Norinaga and Okura Kyojin, Kent Johnson, Javier Alvarez, who knows who else — and who knows who for sure? more than a deconstruction of authorship, the project casts a shadow over the stability of the subject itself — hence the proliferation of accusations that encompasses even commentators on the project, rumors that x person isn't real or isn't who s/he claims to be — spurious rumors about spurious selves, and all of the above dim in their origins, as these things go.

but there is the aspect — or possibly the spectre? of this project, that it's portrayal cuts in both directions. I.e., yes, I think it's a very sophisticated — arguably the most sophisticated yet — action against our reliance on the subject as a stable, discrete entity, i.e. the molar subject (and one has only to be doing grad. school applications to see how far our use of phi. and theory has taken us from subjecting ourselves to these modes ha ha) that is, "it's a very good schizo dream". And yes it can also be taken up as a poke at good old American anxiety over Hiroshima — a discomfort so well deserved , not to mention a generalized anxiety over ethnicity (or the sometime academic game of Find the Subject Position) etc. etc. But on the other hand, Double Flowering really is haunted by the subject in question — Araki Yasusada, Hiroshima survivor , which isn't just a comment on our terror and our crime, but has to be read as a question — an anxious question, and one I really can't answer — what does it mean to manufacture such a person? what does it mean that Araki Yasusada is manufactured?

And, unlike some of the folks who've commented publically (i.e., who've published comments) on the work, I don't think these matters are ultimately separable.

Bill Marsh wrotht:

“ but the hasty lynching that other list members might be looking for seems as heinous as the "sabotage" Kent has described ”

I don't think anyone is calling for a hanging yet — but it's been well and thoroughly discussed that that dynamic does seem to be a part of the list functioning (another topic I'm not anxious to get back to). I would like more information, certainly, and perhaps I should be clear that my reaction in the previous post is based on what information I have — it isn't meant as a call to arms. Folks: no circling of wagons on my account, please.

best, Chris

[Seventy-one posts and twenty-four thousand words, across seven months; thirty-eight are his. February closes the affair of the scuttled visual-poetry project: "It seems that there have been, in some form and degree, a certain number of defamatory things said about me without my having the opportunity to know what was said and who said it." He apologises to Bob Grumman and answers Thomas Bell twice. He returns in May on Bruce Andrews and the dog fence: "This is largely why language poetry grew exhausted and failed and why smart younger poets influenced by them are obsessively writing about their identity crisis." Then Prigov's stutter with Ginsberg leaning in to say "B-B-B-Bravo!", nerve gas, Saving Private Ryan, Bulworth, and four forwards for Scholars, Artists and Writers for Social Justice.]

66. — Mark Prejsnar Mon, 31 Aug 1998 12:54 ↑ [Index](#)

Prejsnar, an Atlanta poet and labour activist, writes after finishing Poet Be Like God, Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian's life of Jack Spicer, published that year. Ten months after Doubled Flowering, the terms have shifted from ethics to literary sociology, Spicer's idea of poetry as the work of a community supplying the frame. The argument's first wave closes here, with Yasusada assimilated to a lineage rather than tried.

One of the most striking things about Spicer's life and career, which i think will in many ways grow in importance in time to come (as will the influence and ubiquity of his work) is his insistence on poetry and poetix as being constituted by the shared projects of a community. In a way, he almost completely dissolved for his own world the distinction between "the audience" and "the poets", replacing it with a more demanding and fierce idea, of a community to which people had a commitment. Thus his (seemingly bizarre) insistence that magazines and publishing projects with which he was associated, and his own published works, not be distributed outside the Bay Area. This gets into many other odd directions, such as his angry belief that Duncan had "sold out" for money, because of having national acclaim of a sort and nationally-distributed books. (i found this part especially bemusing, as one can just imagine what "big bucks" RD was getting from his New Directions sales in the first few years of the '60s!)

The point is, that there are ways of thinking about the ongoing activities of poetry, which confront the extremely corrupt nexus of publishing-academe-middlebrow PR that seems so hopeless and destructive to me. I don't advocate folks refusing to publish or distribute outside their own city; but i take Spicer's deliberately "quixotic" approach as a kind of challenge and inspiration. Many of the most vital ongoing approaches to poetry distribution/reception/support right now, have some of the same insistence on

the guerilla dimensions of liliputian resistance/lilliputian creativity. Small xeroxed mags and similar "fugitive" forms; a strong emphasis in some cities on local exchange of work and readings and discussion meetings; the highly creative and beautiful work the small presses have been doing. There are even several quasi-magazines, distributed only to their contributors, which are a sort of workshop/collective space, for poets who share similar interests and directions. This latter phenomenon seems to be consciously based on the Spicer circle's Open Space project.

I believe that even the emergence of a really fine poet *who has no body or legal biographical existence* (Araki Yasusada) is in part one form of resistance to contemporary publishing/careerism patterns. In this respect, Yasusada's ghostly career shares certain dynamix with the striking emergence (in the last 15 years) of *collaboration* as a major mode of poetic activity in the U.S. This also is a way in which the work is given its own right to live, within a self-evolving community; like Yasusada, creating and publishing collaborative work turns the attention away from a fetishized Poet as celebrity/personality; and like Spicer's mad imaginings, it foregrounds poetic community within an ideal of fiercely-committed collective practice.

IV

The Long Middle

2000-2005

This is the shortest movement, and its shortness is the point.

Johnson is gone from February 2000, and what happens to the argument in his absence is that it stops being an event and becomes a citation. Philip Mead files Yasusada beside Ern Malley and the Aboriginal art forgeries. Jacques Debrot reads it as *After Lorca* crossed with *Pale Fire*. Jeffrey Jullich, three weeks after September 11, reaches back to the summer's outbreak of invented posters to explain noms-de-guerre. Yasusada has become a thing you invoke to explain something else, which is what happens to scandals that survive.

Johnson himself reaches the list only by relay in these years — forwarded by Herron, by Gatza, by Belz — so that the man is now present in exactly the way Yasusada was: as text that somebody else vouches for. The irony is available to everyone and almost nobody takes it.

Two arguments give the movement its centre, and both are in 2004. In July the thread titled *TIAWANESE / Pound / Yasusada* runs for a fortnight and does the most serious thinking about race and translation that the affair ever produced on this list: Lucas Klein defending Pound's *Cathay* against John Yau's charge of imperialism and reading Yasusada in the same light, Timothy Yu answering that he cannot win either way, Richard Jeffrey Newman describing his own commission to translate Saadi from a Victorian translation of a text no longer thought authoritative, and Murat Nemet-Nejat closing the strand with the only criterion anybody offers — not whether a voice is one's own, but whether it has touched anything.

And in May 2004 the question returns without warning in a new war. Johnson's poem on the Abu Ghraib photographs crashed its publisher's server, and the list argued for a week about whether a poem indicting the poetry world for its comfort was an honest reckoning or a way of changing the subject. Alison Croggon put the objection that has not been answered since: that a poetics of universal complicity leaves nobody standing who is entitled to object to anything.

The volume takes its title from a subject line of November 2002, in an argument between Patrick Herron and Maria Damon about whether the solitude of the mainstream lyric is itself a performance. Neither of them was discussing Yasusada. That is why it is the title.

67. — Aldon Nielsen *Thu, 13 Jan 2000 10:10* ↑ [Index](#)

Aldon Nielsen was in the room. Johnson had asked the list for details of a paper on white rage delivered at the Modern Language Association convention under Charles Bernstein's name; this is the answer. Bernstein founded this list at Buffalo; Nielsen is a poet and a historian of African American experimental writing.

I can understand why Kent might be interested in hearing more on this topic -- I hate to be the one to tell him, but it never happened -- I was there -- Some other guy appeared instead of Charles Bernstein and read an obviously faked paper, probably intended precisely to smoke out Kent and get him on-line ,hungry for details -- The entire affair appeared some strange stunt indeed -- I actually met somebody in the room who pretended to be Hank Lazer --

68. — Philip Mead *Mon, 17 Jan 2000* ↑ [Index](#)

Philip Mead, an Australian critic writing from Tasmania, answers Johnson's enquiry about an MLA panel that Aldon Nielsen had already reported did not take place. He files Yasusada among Australian forgery scandals — Ern Malley; Wanda Koolmatrie, the Aboriginal memoirist who proved to be a white man; Helen Demidenko, whose Ukrainian ancestry was invented — where the anger over fakery is inflected by race.

I wasn't there either, but my paper on Ern Malley, which was read by the real Bob Perelman (as far as I know) touched on the issue of anger and the avant-garde. One of the questions that motivated my thinking about the Malley hoax (in 1940s Australia) was: why do some people get so angry about experimental art? This question is very much still with us I think. [...] But I just wanted to add a note here that might interest non-Australian listers, about the question of authenticity in relation to indigenous cultural production. There is a great deal of heat at the moment in the various institutions of art in this country over the 'authenticity' of some works of Aboriginal art. [...] The stakes in the art world are of course much higher than in the literary world, given the much greater and immediate economic value of the 'signature' in visual art, but there have been analogous cases of indigenous literary fraudists recently too: the American ex-chiropractor from Missouri, Marlo Morgan's *_Mutant Message Down Under_* (1993) and Wanda Koolmatrie's 'autobiography' *_My Own Sweet Time_* (1994). [...] Leon Carmen, a while male Sydney taxi driver admitted to the deception of 'Wanda Koolmatire', whose book was published by an indigenous

publishing house in Broome, Western Australia. Aboriginal and Islander people have been very angry about these literary fakes. On the other hand, the anger in the case of the (alleged) fake paintings seems mostly, though not entirely, on the side of white art dealers and entrepreneurs. I gather the Yasusada case was inflected for race too, in crucial and obvious ways. (But not Sokol?) The Toby Forward/'Rahila Khan'-Virago case of 1987 is probably the paradigmatic contemporary instance here, but I haven't come across an analytic account of this one. Whatever, from Ern Malley through to the faux-Ukrainian Australian novelist Helen Demidenko, Australian painting and writing is starting to look like a good subject for a culture-specific history of inauthenticity.

[Thirteen posts go unprinted, sixty-eight hundred words, five of them his. He announces Rhizomes and forwards an appeal on the NEA, which he had sent once before: "I sent one of these in a couple weeks ago and it never appeared." From Edge he passes on an astrophysicist's "There Are No Things", with the aside that "I suppose his response really doesn't exist, according to its own claims". Elizabeth Treadwell raises his Skanky Possum essay on censorship; he points readers to it at FlashPoint and recommends Henry Gould's Stubborn Grew: "It's quite extraordinary." Brian Stefans's back-channel letter, posted at Johnson's request, runs to sixteen hundred words.]

69. — Dodie Bellamy Wed, 23 Feb 2000 ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson, who had called Dodie Bellamy's account of the 1998 expulsions "confused", was arguing that the posters banned that year were the list's disappeared; the subject line takes its term from Argentina's dictatorship. Bellamy turns the Yasusada precedent against him: a man who invented one poet may have invented the martyr too. Henry Gould, whose existence she doubts, was a frequent poster.

Glad to see that Kali and I are on the same side of an issue.

Since my "confusion" has become an issue here, I must say that I have a nagging doubt about Henry Gould's existence, after the Kent Johnson/Yasusada stuff and all. I'm assuming that Henry is indeed a flesh and blood person, that others on the list have seen him, talked to him?

Freedom of speech versus verbal abuse/censorship versus protection of others--the lines of demarcation are sloppy and there will never be any agreement here.

And I should add that in a past message I wasn't intending to attack Elizabeth Treadwell. If it sounded that way, please forgive my oafish email style.

70. — Rachel Loden *Mon, 19 Jun 2000* ↑ [Index](#)

Rachel Loden replies under the persona of Suzy Creamcheese, the Zappa character, to a Johnson post ridiculing older poets, quoting Doubled Flowering back at him line by line. The bracketed matter is Yasusada's verse as printed in that book; the signature is Loden's invention answering Johnson's.

Kent J.,

You seem an odd one to get your kimono in a bunch over acts of literary buffoonery--

In a poem called "Telescope with Urn," Yasusada wrote:

“The image of the galaxies spreads-out like a cloud of sperm. ”

Now you've spread sperm on _Keats'_ urn. Is there some connection?

Yasusada wrote:

“Here the young are speaking of virility and all the hidden forms. ”

But apparently the "middle aged and/or geriatric" are to stay hidden while the young speak.

Yasusada wrote:

“The voices of the sorority girls sing of fucking in a plaintive way. ”

Perhaps he meant: it is like the idea of a nymphet, opening within the idea of a nymphet. The sorority girls I know sing about beer, briefs v boxers and bulimia. But speak softly, Buffy, and carry a big lollipop, because the customer is always right

And who said the unexamined life isn't worth living?

Younger than springtime, Suzy C.

P.S. Thanks for the bitchen poems.

[Seventeen posts across a year, thirty-eight hundred words, and not one of them his; he has stopped posting. His name keeps surfacing anyway. George Thompson asks why abuse is tolerated "while Kent Johnson is removed for expressing a preference for somebody other than Langpo's." Joe Safdie enlists him, with Nada Gordon and Hoa Nguyen, for a poetry cookbook: "Why is there no poetry cookbook anthology? One is needed, and the need is urgent." Jacques Debrot reports that an issue of VeRT was held up "for more than a

week due to several thinly veiled threats of lawsuits" over their epistolary poems, and Mark DuCharme asks, "Is this a joke?"

71. — Patrick Herron Wed, 6 Jun 2001 ↑ [Index](#)

Patrick Herron had just relayed to the list a Johnson post asking why radical poetics stops short at the poet's legal name. Answering it himself, Herron sets Doubled Flowering beside Barry MacSweeney, the Newcastle poet dead the year before, as the more complete instance, since the book's own authorship remains in question.

There is indeed such a shortage because the discussion and explanation of the subject is reduced to an oppositional dyad in traditional English-speaking intellectual culture. Poetry, however, should not take sides (yes I am using this as a criteria for judgment). The poetry is in the third thing, the unseen, the that-which-is-of-keats-but-not-of-keats,

that-which-is-wordsworth-but-not-of-wordsworth: the notion that, well, selves may or may not exist. the notion that we just have no fucking idea whether selves are real or essential, the notion that we cannot answer the question, the notion that, as far as poetry should be concerned, the question itself is the answer. contradiction, manifest repugnance, ambiguity, paradox, agnosticism: the poetic space of self rests in these worlds that push and possibly exhaust the very possibilities of language. but then, isn't poetry supposed to do just that: push and possibly exhaust the very possibilities of language?

to quote from Eliot (this quote isn't strictly about Jesus, I assure you):

Who is the third who walks always beside you? When I count, there are only you and I together But when I look ahead up the white road There is always another one walking beside you Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded I do not know whether a man or a woman —But who is that on the other side of you?

neither side of the *traditional* oppositional dyad exhausts the possibilities of self, neither side is inspired, neither side is radical. it is when the agnostic/ambiguous space of the self in poetry, this third that walks besides us, is expressed, when the question itself is made the answer cast into poetry, that radical possibilities open. sadly, we have not seen such wisdom in poetry frequently. but when we do, it is, at least to me, incredible, beautiful, chilling, inspiring. such poetry has something special that is rare but beautiful. To me.

I will give three examples that are an inspiration: Araki Yasusada's Doubled Flowering Barry MacSweeney's Pearl and "I am Lucifer" from Postcards

from Hitler_.

Both of the above works from MacSweeney capture the ambiguity and contradictory nature of self without rejecting the possibility that the self does exist in a way different from _DF_. In both of MacSweeney's works, the narrator IS and IS NOT the author, IS and IS NOT the subject (crucially) of the poem. "I am Lucifer" the poem reads repetitively, but who is the "I"? Is it Lucifer? Is it Barry? Are Barry and Lucifer the same? They are the same, then they are not, back and forth. MacSweeney's works capture a more aesthetic end of such notions but they do fall short of realizing the role of language, books, and authors in the world. The book, after all, is still Barry's.

72. — Jacques Debrot Thu, 30 Aug 2001 ↑ [Index](#)

Jacques Debrot, Johnson's collaborator on the "Dear Lacan" letters then circulating on the British-Poets list, argues that Doubled Flowering belongs to the genre of literary admiration — Spicer's After Lorca, in which the dead poet supplies the preface, crossed with Pale Fire — and treats the charge of inauthenticity as a claim about what readers require of sincerity.

It would be great if Andrew Felsing's brilliant interview w/ Kent Johnson at the new _VeRT_ <<<http://www.litvert.com/>>>; directs attention back to its instigating text _Doubled Flowering: from the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada_. Bill Friend, I think, can talk w/ more authority about Johnson's theories of authorship which, though articulated w/ nervy energy and a complicated, baroque intelligence, strike me as something like a first person collage in which the implications of post-modern authorship are relentlessly faced up to (absurdly), instead of lip-served and evaded.

If all writers are of course *positioned*, writing itself is also, I'd argue, a form of schizophrenia, a "magical psychosis" of alternate selves and proliferating coincidences. Johnson himself writes from the position of being nobody and nothing. The abjectness of this strategy is apparent in his sometimes humiliating behavior on various listservs. But it has other implications; as Perloff notices, literary hoaxes are essentially end-runs around the incestuous bureaucratic processes of cultural legitimation. Johnson, moreover, continues to play out the Yasusada hoax (in ways that perhaps no one is yet aware of) w/ an entirely new savoir-faire. "Fooling you" is for him practically only an ancillary aim.

Doubled Flowering is itself more—but not at all less—than Yasusada's extraordinarily beautiful notebook entries. It's framed, if you haven't yet seen it, by vertiginous appendices from Perloff and others, so that it reads really like a po-mo novel--accessible in ways that much of po-mo writing isn't, inaccessible in the way that po-mo writing always attempts to, but often fails to be.

Is it racist? Does it present an exoticized--an in*authentic*--and a sensationalized --as opposed to a *sincere*--version of Japanese culture? The question itself reveals the deep investments we still retain in so-called reactionary ideologies. The premise of the book though is, from the pov of perpetrating a hoax, ridiculous. Jack Spicer of all people turns out, improbably, to be Yasusada's principal influence. The logistics of this scenario (considering that Yasuada's latest work dates from 1972) are--think about it for a second--impossible, really. Not to mention all the other fairly blatant anachronisms throughout the Yasusada notebooks. Perloff argues, for this reason, that Johnson, far from trying to pull off a fraud, deliberately loads the book with clues as to its inauthenticity. Perhaps. But I think also that Doubled Flowering is, at its core, an historical romance: imagine a Japan (the Japan of Barthes's Empire of Signs, a Japan as unreal & as aestheticized as Proust's Paris) inhabited somehow by Jack Spicer (the Spicer of Johnson's own fascinated projections). If the book is a hoax, it's one directly inspired by After Lorca as well as being an extended meditation on, and a funhouse reflection of it. I think in fact that DF belongs ultimately to the genre of literary admiration.

[Sixteen posts, thirty-seven hundred words, and not one of them is his. Jacques Debrot corrects himself over who interviewed Johnson and adds "Though I have heard that Friend really is Felsinger", which Bill Freind unpicks point by point. Jeffrey Jullich promises that "The identity of Yasusada is now known by more parties than originally involved" and that the author of the fake Ashbery poems in readme is the same man. David Bircumshaw links to the Skanky Possum pouch, "where Dale Smith abetted by Kent Johnson achieves the almost unimaginable feat of being more yawnworthy than Alan Sondheim".]

73. — Jeffrey Jullich Thu, 4 Oct 2001 ↑ [Index](#)

Three weeks after September 11, Jeffrey Jullich returns to the summer's outbreak of invented posters — "Lester", the Julu and Jennifer of Alan Sondheim's postings, the forged Ashbery poem printed in the online magazine VeRT, his own "Jennifer Julu" — and reads the practice at once as a Language-poetry inheritance and as a theft of the names of the dead. "Heteronym", in the subject line, is Pessoa's word for an invented author with a life of his own.

I'm glad to hear that our American amnesia reflex isn't affecting every citizen. Yes, there actually was a September 10th, and a 9th, and an 8th, and --- although myself a Manhattanite as deeply disoriented by trauma and mourning as any of us who have been left physically unscathed, comparatively insulated by living on The Palisades, --- I too believe that this summer's List heteronym meltdown is important enough (tactically identical to "terrorist" theft of names of the dead, noms-de-guerre) for the subject not to be dropped too easily, despite the eclipsing. Maybe ~more~ important now to be looked at. It is, in its own way, a literary-historical extension of the post-Language/Language rejection of the subject-position. Can heteronyms cry better than their authors?

Strangely, some of the parties most strongly denouncing the latest presumed heteronym stink bomb were, in August, intimately involved in sustaining and ~commissioning~ identity theft.

Apparently, the end-of-August/beginning-of-September line that marked the boiling-over point of the heteronym expose' here coincides with the return to campus of a largely .edu-populated List, and many signed back in simply oblivious/indifferent to how hot summer got. (There's a definite List member tendency to enter ~in media res,~ too, simply checking back in, seeing what's being discussed right at the surface that day, that week, without looking further into what might have been larger dilemmas or the real, ongoing field of action. Das ungluckliche Kind der Augenblicke [sp.?].)

I really feel that some public forum on the heteronym "crisis" is called for. The List may not be adequate, with its many threads, and comings and goings (~and~ its heteronym subversion, so that you can't tell who you're talking to half the time).. I'm sorry I'm not being an editor right now. It's reached the proportions that demand some sort of colloquium or "special issue" devoted to the question.

Meanwhile, I personally am ~of mixed feelings.~

What seemed wrong to me this summer was the identity theft (with its near-criminality), the character assassination, the homophobia, the hate literature and, perhaps, the tombstone vandalization that was being carried out under heteronyms (and allonyms: Ruthven).

On the other hand, in pure theory, it strikes me as one of the most ingenious, liberatory language games I've encountered since Clark Coolidge's return to a Gertrude Stein English and the asyntactical Language that grew out of that. There are many conflicts that I experience in regard to my public roles, and they could more conveniently be handled by simply assigning different noms-de-plume to each foot I maintain in opposing camps.

What I do not understand (and what I would encourage heteronymists to "purge" their movement of) is the ugliness and bad spirit that emerges once the mask of a fake name is in place. A sort of Freddy Kruger hockey mask Halloween effect.

[Six hundred and twenty words are cut from the foot, reading the impulse as unresolved material and an exclusively male game fostered by the password system. Thirteen months and thirty-three thousand words go unprinted here, sixty-seven posts, and not one of them is his. He is on the list by proxy. David Hess forwards "A Peace Proposal?" under a line of cover: "This message was sent to me today by Kent Johnson, who asked that it be forwarded to the list." Joe Brennan forwards "Poetics unedited?" the same way, and the list divides over the exclusions it protests: Tom Beckett is opposed to them, Wild Honey Press answers, "What twaddle. There are umpteen poetry lists." Geoffrey Gatza posts an interview with Stephen Ellis "From the desk of Kent Johnson." His interviews with Eliot Weinberger and Rachel Loden go up in Jacket, and Alan Sondheim reads The Miseries of Poetry: "I've read the text and quite quite liked it".]

74. — Patrick Herron Tue, 26 Nov 2002 01:30 ↑ [Index](#)

Maria Damon, of the University of Minnesota, had written that the solitary struggle of mainstream lyric is always performed for a craft-conscious audience looking over the poet's shoulder. Patrick Herron answers at half past one in the morning, under the subject line "disingenuous", asking whether performance must be fake, and puts Doubled Flowering among the works that mock the solitary struggle.

Maria Damon wrote of "mainstream poetry":

“disingenuous of course, because always, the evaluative, "craft-conscious" public is looking over the shoulder of this solitary struggler, so the solitary struggle is a performance for an audience.”

BUT

Maria (Hi!),

Is this because performance is itself fake in some way, inauthentic, manipulative? On that level, I'd say **all** art is disingenuous to some extent, even for those mocking/faking/hoaxing the solitary struggle (e.g., Doubled Flowering), or for those not quite sure about the metaphysical status of their performative actions (e.g., Spicer). But on another level, can not performance be candor itself? I find that performance often makes candor possible where it otherwise was not. That is, at least for me, I am more able to say what's on my mind in a performative space than in a private space. Not that I am confessional in most stretches of the critical imagination. (This need for performative space as an opportunity for candor may not be the model of psychic health or "balance", but there it is, the exception, nonetheless--it does happen.) I know you were speaking of "mainstream" work, but I fear that such a distinction seems only to occlude evaluation of such an analysis as the one reflected in your above statement.

I'm not saying at all that I disagree with the gist of your post. I am just wondering about the genesis/origin of your statement about sincerity and performance.

75. — Patrick Herron Tue, 26 Nov 2002 ↑ [Index](#)

Patrick Herron and Maria Damon are disputing whether the solitude of mainstream lyric is itself a performance. Earlier the same day, under the subject line "disingenuous", Herron had named Doubled Flowering among works that mock or fake the solitary struggle. Here he turns to the money, and the prizes that reward authentic solitude. The subject line supplies this volume's title.

I do agree with this. Perhaps in order to close our seeming linguistic gap, we could say that such a poem as Frost's is **deliberately** disingenuous, and perhaps its deliberately so for marketing purposes. I don't really know about the market intents of that poem of his in particular, or any others for that matter, but of course it seems it is a reasonable guess to say that it is. Authenticity, especially authentic solitude, is good business in poetry. Get one of them thar \$100k prizes for poetry...that's not any piddling amount of dough. Even in Manhattan that's a decent down payment on a piece of real estate. Some people

will do "what it takes," or rather, what takes it: the money. Oh the fame, & the seeming immortality--those too.

But how or why, I now wonder, do we want to draw a line between us and those mainstreamers crap-ola-ing poetry? I mean, I saw that article in the NYTimes (was it there?) about Bernstein. Here's more "one of us" than "one of them" though he is regularly accused by people I respect highly as just another "one of them." That article was just awful, sophomoric, cheap, and done in front of so many people. Maybe Bernstein's largest audience. That was the outside world drawing a line around some of us right here. Anyway, this sort of us/them gesture getting anywhere near poets is beginning to make me nervous. I'm just as bad, if not worse, than the next person. Maybe it's because my wife is teaching me how to pick my battles--I think I am finally beginning to understand this concept. And so I'm afraid now to pick battles with other poets, because to the world outside of poetry looking in, we're all nothing but shit it seems--every last one of us. Just in time for America to create its own spin-off into a world domination machine repressing just about everything inside or out. Confessional or no, a poet might just equal a problem to everyone that's not a poet soon enough. (At least outside urban areas...so many non-poets in NYC seem to be sympathetic to poets, for example. There are of course exceptions and they will remain.)

I am in mind of the myth of the Jesus story about not casting the first stone: maybe telling people it is wrong for some fantastic reason instead of telling them the truth is more effective. It seems more poetic in some fucked up way. If a person casts a stone, others are more ready to cast stones, and we might just end up getting a whole lot of stone-throwing. But telling people the truth won't stop 'em: so give the people "sin." *Something* other-worldly: tell them it'll put them on a never-ending hayride through hell.

[Three hundred and seventy words are cut from the foot, on a candour that is also artful: "I can't be sincere in order to be sincere." Thirty posts, fifty-three hundred words, none of them his; he appears here only as a name in other people's announcements. Anastasios Kozaitis singles out Immanent Visitor: Selected Poems of Jaime Saenz, translated with Forrest Gander, as "a breath of electric, fresh air." Oasis brings out Dear Lacan: An Analysis in Correspondence, with Jacques Debrot, in fifty copies. Jim Behrle bills him at Wordsworth Books with Gander and adds, "And if you don't like it start your own event series." Gabriel Gudding's blog notice runs: "I describe a pre-breakfast conversation with Kent Johnson. I describe listening to the post-Kent-Johnson Wordsworth reading. I mourn for my book."]

76. — Dale Smith Tue, 8 Apr 2003 08:15: ↑ [Index](#)

April 2003. Dale Smith, who ran Skanky Possum and its press in Austin with Hoa Nguyen, announces a book of translations from the Greek by Johnson and Alexandra Papaditsas (1960-2002), with a prefatory "Vestibulum" credited to the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. The announcement runs to four thousand words, most of it blurbs.

Announcing: The Miseries of Poetry: Traductions from the Greek, translated by Alexandra Papaditsas (1960-2002) and Kent Johnson. Vestibulum [spora tradere], by Slavoj Zizek; Preface, by Kent Johnson; Introduction, by Alexandra Papaditsas; Afterword by Pan-Abbot Father Savvas. Twenty translations. 50+ pages. \$6. First 25 copies, B through Z, signed by Kent Johnson. Advance signed copies ordered directly through the publisher: Skanky Possum Press * 2925 Higgins Street * Austin, TX 78722

Praises and Confusions for The Miseries of Poetry

We have all always desired the eyeless goddess, the handsome whore-boy, the Megala Louloudia. Here they are. Ever since the cache was discovered at Montazah Palace, we've been waiting for translations suitable for Greek menus everywhere. Had the Greeks invented fortune cookies, they could not have foretold the strange beauty of these versions.

-Eleni Sikelianos

I'm doubled over by the Miseries of Poetry, folded into a mirror world of literature and here live on moth-ambrosia, play happily with possible ancillas of the Pre-Socratics.

-Garrett Kalleberg

Like the Jews, if Kent Johnson didn't exist, someone would have to invent him. His mind leaks nomads constantly naming world-historic hinges as if inscription were always underfoot. You can't pull Catullus out of the 'incubated / god, writhing himself into being' but you can pull the door open. Literature is close to fraud, evanescent and trembling in these times of incipient terror. Johnson's approach deconstructs and exacerbates that fraud; I think of his work as returning to the (re)creation of language - political and sexual language, the languages of the last people speaking on earth.

-Alan Sondheim

If they ever need a Classics Geek on "Beat the Geeks," Dr. Kent Johnson is their man. The Miseries of Poetry is an operatically nerdy intervention in the transmission of ancient lyric, a scurrilous, fantastical, erudite, shameless, and often very moving addition to the Geek--er, Greek--Anthology. More faithful in its peregrinate Sapphic incontinence than most of the last two centuries of vanilla-flavored translations, this sheaf of cracked-amphora smut will change the way people misinterpret Linear B forever. Roll over, Richmond Lattimore: this is not your father's Mimnermus.

-Kasey Silem Mohammad

In the realm of ethics the ends rarely justify the means; in the realm of art they always do. This complex translation by Alexandra Papaditsas and Kent Johnson is flamboyant, provocative, and brilliant. In three or four thousand years, when English has long sounded more Asian than European, The Miseries of Poetry will no doubt be inciting tremendous passions at the KGB Bar.

-David Lehman

..still...moisture on the long papyrus fragments, vivid charm and cultural codes transposed on a spit the tang of the Johnson mystagogus, with live voice on quitch-grass carnal and refined, the then swag of buddhistic pomegranites, the bull-leapers..

[Three thousand eight hundred words of further blurbs are cut from the foot, among them Ashbery's that Alexandra Papaditsas be canonised as a saint of translation. Six months and ninety-six hundred words go unprinted, twenty-five posts, none of them his. Mike Magee announces the New McPoets: "I confess to being the owner of the rubber Kent Johnson mask that wrote 'The New McPoem (1)'. " Gabriel Gudding recommends Miseries of Poetry: Traductions from the Greek, written with Alexandra Papaditsas, as "ungodly witty. strange book.", and interviews him for Skanky Possum under the title "What Appears to Be a Yacht in the Distance." Murat Nemet-Nejat tells Alan Sondheim: "This is a passage worthy of Kent Johnson." The gap closes with VeRT beginning to put up the Coyote interview conducted by Rodrigo Garcia Lopes.]

77. — Geoffrey Gatza Wed, 22 Oct 2003 18:32 ↑ [Index](#)

October 2003. Geoffrey Gatza forwards an interview Johnson gave to Rodrigo Garcia Lopes of the Brazilian magazine Coyote, printed in the online VeRT — the fullest statement of his position to reach the list in the years he was not posting to it.

Q: How do you see the world and the United States after September 11th and the war on Iraq? What can poetry do in a world that is increasingly becoming violent, complex and unpredictable? Is poetry still necessary, or even a necessary discourse?

KJ: I have my outward positions, of course, and like most people, I like to sound like I know what I'm talking about. But like most people, too, I'm very uncertain about what the world is or where it may be headed. And it seems to me that poetry must resist the temptation to assume a defining "mission" or "role" in these times when we are all hungering for firmer bearings. Perhaps what we need to do, as poets, is plug our deepest recesses into that great and encompassing uncertainty, fear, paradox, and, yes, dark comedy of the current conjuncture and just see what happens. Allow our selves to be shocked and lit up by the horror. To be transformers, as it were. Needless to say, there are as many cords and plugs as there are snakes in Medusa's head; and there are as many open outlets as there are orifices in Hades. So while we must be bold, we need also, I suppose, to be careful and have the polished shield handy!

So I guess I'm saying I'm not sure that poetry can or should aspire to "do" anything, really. To the extent that poetry does do work beyond its general aesthetic circumference, it seems to do so most meaningfully when it remains steadfastly what it most "politically" is: an autonomous zone of spirit and conscience, a zone that should be understood by those who enter it as multifarious and many-guised, beholden to no ideology of politics or art. Oppen and Zukofsky were onto something not yet sufficiently explored when they talked about sincerity as the ground of the art. Too easy to dismiss the concept as a sentimental cliché; harder to view and follow one of its countless paths waiting there.

Auden writes in his elegy for Yeats,

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper, flows on south

From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.

Perhaps in moments of crisis like we are now in, powerful poetry may reveal the connections of the "political" to that mysterious "mouth" Auden evokes. Maybe one could say that the poet's "political" task is to show how the "Real" is never separate from that dark space. But, well, I guess you can see that I am struggling with this answer!

78. — Steven Shoemaker Wed, 22 Oct 2003 ↑ [Index](#)

Geoffrey Gatz had posted an interview in which Johnson — off the list for three years — invoked Oppen and Zukofsky on sincerity as the ground of the art; the word is Zukofsky's, from the Objectivist issue of Poetry in 1931, where it is paired with objectification. Steven Shoemaker answers with Oppen against him. Bracketed phrases are Johnson's, as relayed by Gatz.

I like the admonition against reducing poetry to a political "position," but on the other hand, I'm less sure about the suggestion that we should

“allow our selves to be shocked and lit up by the horror.”

As that reads to me, it seems we might run the danger of falling for a kind of facile poetic sensation or excitement (though who **doesn't** like a little sensation and excitement in a poem?). And since Kent quoted Oppen I will too: "They await / War, and the news / Is war / As always / That the juices may flow in them / Tho the juices lie." Yes, even though they can feel so powerful, so true, so damn poetic, the juices lie. That's the problem with the adrenaline rush (I might call it the Baraka problem, but that's another argument) and perhaps also the trouble with getting all goose-bumpy and

“lit up by the horror.”

[Twenty posts, fifteen thousand words, none of them his. Steven Shoemaker pastes his replies into the list and takes issue with the phrase "to make the poem a scary, haunted house ride, all ideologies admitted": "I don't want to start flogging a dead horse in the middle of our tennis court, but I did look, and it wasn't clear, at least to me." Mark Wallace answers under the heading "ideological horror show." Tim Peterson and Nick Piombino argue at length about whether blogging is a different activity from other writing. Nearly two thirds of the words are a four-part poem headed "Godzilla," sent in by a poster

signing as barleydog.]

79. — Aaron Belz *Sun, 4 Jan 2004* ↑ [Index](#)

Aaron Belz posts to the list an open letter to Michael Atkinson, whose essay "Hyperauthor! Hyperauthor!" in The Believer — the magazine McSweeney's had launched the year before — accused Johnson of betraying the reader's trust. Belz concedes the premise and disputes the history, citing the unidentified "E.K." who annotated Spenser's Shepheardes Calender, Levine and Eggers. Bracketed epithets are Atkinson's.

I generally agree with everything you say about the direction of our literary culture in your recent article, "Hyperauthor! Hyperauthor!" It seems to me important to know who wrote a given essay, play, novel, or poem. Like you, I don't buy into the deconstructed author or the abstracted text, at least not in the total form that it has been presented by the likes of Barthes and Foucault. When I'm reading a Roald Dahl book to my kids at bedtime, "The Death of the Author" strikes me as a lot of theoretical gamesmanship.

However, the way you lay into Kent Johnson, calling him a "gold-bricker" and a purveyor of "pure cock-and-bull," seems a little naive. The trust you accuse Johnson of betraying didn't really exist in 1996, at least not in as pristine a form as you imply, and it doesn't really exist today. There's a good chance it didn't even exist in Shakespeare's time.

Who wrote the footnotes and dedicatory epistle to Spenser's "Shepheardes Calender"? One doesn't have to swear by Foucault to recognize that "E.K." was certainly Spenser himself, though he never declared the fiction. And how does one read Chaucer's notorious "retraction"? That short bit of writing would seem to throw his whole canon in jeopardy. Chaucer, in a final brilliant stroke, proves himself even more radically artful than the tales themselves reveal. Or does he? As preoccupied with "entent" as he is, Chaucer engenders multiple interpretive possibilities.

In contemporary literature other examples abound. Philip Levine, by his own private confession, dressed his autobiographical *Bread of Time* in untruths--or emotional truths that are not completely factual. And yet the book gives the impression of being a non-fictional account of the poet's personal history. David Eggers made up portions of *Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, yet never provides a caveat. How is the reader to discriminate between fact and exaggeration in contemporary non-fiction? Is ascribing one's own real identity to a false work any less unethical than ascribing a false identity to a real work?

At the very least, Kent Johnson's art should be taken seriously, not written off as a MacGuffin. What he has done with Yasusada is play according to rules handed down to him by some of the most revered critics of the 20th century. You are entitled to disagree with their conclusions just as you are entitled to disdain Johnson's cubic zirconia text. But I believe he embodies postmodern authorship in all earnestness, not as the cackling narcissist you portray.

In the end, isn't all art essentially *trompe l'oeil*. We struggle to teach a reality-TV jaded generation that fiction is not a lie; it is, in its own sense, true.

[Twenty-six posts drop out here, ninety-two hundred words, and none are his. Andrew Loewen forwards, at two thousand words, Johnson's contribution to Joan Houlihan's roundtable at Boston Comment, which opens "An American poetic avant-garde?"; Ken Springtail answers the whole thread with "C'mon guys, 'radical' is a moment; only change is forever." Ben Basan spends two months on his blog answering "Kent Johnson's Quiz on Architectural Poetics." At the end of the gap BlazeVOX posts his Abu Ghraib poem, "Lyrical Poetry After Auschwitz, or: 'Get The Hood Back On,'" and reports that for the first time ever its server crashed from the traffic.]

80. — andrew loewen Thu, 27 May 2004 ↑ Index

Johnson's Abu Ghraib poem, "Lyrical Poetry After Auschwitz, or: Get The Hood Back On", had gone up at BlazeVOX, Geoffrey Gatza's Buffalo press and journal: the guards speak in cheerful talk-show American, then a poet joins the chorus to tell the prisoners that poetry cannot help them. Two days earlier the traffic had crashed the server, and the poem was mirrored at Starcherone Books. Andrew Loewen asks whether a critique of authorship can indict anything beyond the poetry world.

I'm willing to take Kent Johnson's agit-prop indictment of the poetry-world to heart (however it may be constructed in the piece — academic, experimental, web-based, whatever); but it's only a mirror-image of what I, and I'd suspect others, are already up to viz. an awareness of one's complicity, not doing enough, etc — and I'm not American (or British). [...] Does the centripetal movement of poetic energies (around the individual author/name) which smacks of hypocrisy and acquiescence to some (including me at times — but then, I've got little at stake compared to many) need redress? I'm sure I'm not the only one who's long been struck by the irony that many of the de-centered works one encounters (at least by what I would consider the canonical experimentalists — Bernstein, Andrews, Silliman, Jarnot, to name a few I know of) tend to be instantly recognizable or bear the stamp, trace, and hell, *whynotsayit*, poetic VOICE of their author. Part of me thinks Johnson's critique (as I continue to

deploy 'him' as my critical shield) merely wants the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E crew to come out from behind the curtains, stand in a neat row, and read some sort of statement to the tune of "He, he, sorry folks, turns previous calls for the death of the author were exaggerated by some of us. Actually, we like our name recognition and quite enjoy the privileges, symbolic and otherwise, of being muckity-mucks. Thank you." It's kind of an old saw. Even in prose, zero degree writing shifts voicing away from a body onto the text or language, as such, but this shift doesn't alter the material reality of production and distribution, or does it?

[A hundred and eighty words are cut from the foot, where he puts the question to the left — "Come on you Marxists and Benjaminites!" — and cites Silliman's blog on a poem being "only fully meaningful, at least for him, when attached to (under) its maker's name", against his dislike of titles. He ends: "I know almost zilch about theories of heteronymity".]

81. — Christopher Leland Winks *Fri, 28 May 2004* ↑ [Index](#)

Answering Andrew Loewen. Christopher Leland Winks turns the volume's question inside out: the disappearance of the author, argued on this list for a decade as a poetics, is also the form official evasion takes when responsibility for torture is distributed until no one holds it. Loewen had asked whether Johnson's indictment reached past the poetry world.

Johnson's piece worked insofar as it emphasized the pathology of "American" (read: US) normality in the torturers' cheerful talk-show monologues. Then, by bringing in the "poet"'s voice, it raised the nasty issue of class, through which so many nice, good-liberal university-educated and employed citizens distance themselves from the "trailer trash" who perpetrate such crimes. Interesting to see that Loewen considers the LangPoets as "canonical experimentalists." Revealing word, "experimentalist," especially as in their own ways, the post-Auschwitz, post-modern torturers at Abu Ghraib were "experimentalists" of inflicting pain and sensory deprivation (or would the average post-structuralist say, "bodily abjection"?). [...] Regarding "modes of authorship," this is also part of the Abu Ghraib matter, where the "zero degree of writing (on the body)" translates into a "zero degree of responsibility" for the atrocities, from Bush and Rumsfeld to Karpinski and Sanchez to England and Sivits. No one wants to claim authorship, here, so the whole thing becomes a kind of "collective text," as decentered and, yes, experimental as the perpetrators wanna be. There are authors here, and if they may not necessarily be "dead," they're certainly in hiding. As for "theories of heteronymity," my advice is: read Fernando Pessoa,

it's all there in practice.

82. — Alison Croggon Sat, 29 May 2004 ↑ [Index](#)

Alison Croggon, writing from Melbourne, where she edited the online journal Masthead, replies to Johnson and to Ethan Paquin, his editor at BlazeVOX, after they had answered her charge that the poem's turn was too easy. Her objection is that a poetics of universal complicity leaves no one standing to object to anything.

Maybe I've been reading too much Orwell lately, and the sentiment was too familiar: the issue of class, of bourgeois "progressives" who distance themselves from the trailer trash whom they find in fact disgusting, seems as relevant now as when Orwell spoke in the 1930s of English middle class socialists who on encountering actual working class persons found their class prejudices more embedded than they realised, and retreated straight into the charms of Fascism. And yes, anyone who is protesting this kind of stuff in the Western world has to acknowledge that the clothes one wears, the energy one consumes, the computer one writes on, the economy one lives in, is dependent on the exploitation of the poor, especially in countries far far away where desperate people slave in Nike factories in conditions that aren't very far from caricatures of 19C capitalist wickedness. One's complicity is inescapable. I was also thinking this morning that some things need to be said crudely because they are in fact crude.

Still: I'll stick by my wondering (like the boy in Keats' poem). I am quite happy to wonder. I think, with Kent, that is a good thing; I should make clear that I am not attacking the poem. I meant "easy" not because I necessarily disagree with the thrust of the poem, but because a logical conclusion to draw from the poem is that any response to the outrages of one's government, as an intellectual, as a writer, is inevitably hypocritical. And this is so close to the kind of things that right wing commentators say about "chardonnay socialists" and wanker intellectuals in this country (Australia) that it gave me pause. Words and what one does with them, the exposure of murderous lies, matters very much: why would our governments spend so much ink and hot air justifying the credibility of their actions otherwise? And also: is a poem, even a "self righteous" poem, really equivalent to these acts of torture? (Though I can think of certain readings...) And also: does Kent's response of self disgust (for so I read it) stymie in some ways the possible humane and decent reaction to things like

torture at Abu Ghraib? Because the humane and decent reaction stemming from a humane empathy is the only response that has the faintest chance of changing these things; that is, if it leads to action, which is not historically unprecedented.

There's another point, which is the way the huge dissemination of those Abu Ghraib photographs made us all voyeurs, participants in the act of torture, simply by the act of looking: for by so looking, we extended the original act of torture, which was crucially about public humiliation, about being seen. That was one of the taintings which I found most difficult to negotiate about the whole business. In that sense, I would totally agree with Kent, but here the poem, not the act of looking, is an instrument of torture.

83. — Timothy Yu Sat, 3 Jul 2004 22:34 ↑ [Index](#)

The charge the thread is answering. Andrew Loewen, a Canadian then living in Taiwan, had posted a poem, "Why do the Tiawanese", which drew Timothy Yu's objection; Lucas Klein had called the objection paranoia. Yu writes on American poetry's long romance with Asian culture.

There is a particular unpleasantness, when one is raising issues of race, in having one's criticisms dismissed as "paranoia." But I will do Lucas Klein the favor of leaving that to one side.

If "Asian"--as opposed to Chinese or Taiwanese or Japanese--only means something "in the diaspora," well, I can't help it if that's where I live. In fact, Lucas's dismissal is one I frequently hear when I raise questions about Asians and Asian Americans in poetic circles. American poetry--and American liberal politics--has for decades been marked by a certain romance with Asian culture, which means that poets in this country are much more likely to have read Asian literature, spent time or lived in an Asian country, and be acquainted with Asian people than their non-poet peers. In most respects this is entirely laudable. But in discussions such as these, knowledge of Asia can be used as a club against Asian Americans, who find their own positions being displaced by lectures on the "true" meaning of Chinese or Japanese culture--cultures of which they are viewed only as attenuated representatives. (Apparently such knowledge can even be used against the Taiwanese themselves: as Andrew's poem asks: "WHY CAN'T THE TAIWANESE / get their Buddhism and Taoism straight".)

It is, of course, true that few people born and raised in the People's Republic of China or Taiwan would primarily identify themselves as "Asian." It is also certainly true that there are many people in North America who are perfectly capable of distinguishing between Taiwan and the PRC and Japan and Korea. But it also seems clear to me that Andrew's poem has little interest in making those kinds of distinctions--in wondering what is particular to the politics and culture of Taiwan as opposed to that or, say, Korea or even the Chinese mainland.

84. — Lucas Klein *Sun, 4 Jul 2004* ↑ [Index](#)

A poem by Andrew Loewen about Taiwan has drawn a charge of racism from Timothy Yu. Lucas Klein, an American translator resident in China, defends it by placing it in a line with two precedents he holds were wrongly dismissed — Pound's Cathay, the 1915 versions made from Ernest Fenollosa's notebooks without Chinese, and Yasusada.

As has been made clear, when the poem "Why do the Tiawanese" moves from Andrew in Taiwan to Timothy in North America, it's going through a large transition from one complex and confused conglomeration of cultures to another. That's good. The issue here is how to define its racism, or rather, who (which conglomerate of cultures) gets the contextual upper-hand in saying whether the poem's statements are racist. Andrew says it's not, Timothy says it is. In Taiwan, even from the hand of a Candian, it is not; in America, especially in the eyes of an Asian-American, it is.

I suppose a part of me wants to find a more objective way of qualifying racism, and that is why I--a white American for the moment living in China, as I have been on and off for ten years--reel against the ease with which you, Timothy, can label the poem as racist. It reminds me of John Yau's dismissal of Pound's Cathay as imperialist--Pound was many things, few of which are today politically acceptable, but imperialist? because he was a translator?--or of Juliana Chang, Walter K. Lew, Tan Lin, and others reacting against the Yasusada poems because of some kind of "orientalism" in the creation of that nuclear poet. I think the writing is worth more than a dismissal as racist. How the poetry--Pound's, Yasusada, "Why do the Tiawanese"--reacts and responds with the ideas and assumptions of racism, that's a more interesting topic, to me. And hey, that's what we've got here, actually. But to dismiss it, to criticize it, because of something read into the poem rather than inherently part of it, well,

that goes too far, too.

And this is why I'm intrigued and impressed by Rich's comments about how culture shock and cultural stereotypes play into each other. It's something, in all my experiences with other cultures, I never bothered to think about. To be frank I don't _enjoy_ thinking about it, incriminating as it may be to my whole time over here, but I do value the idea as something I'd better think about. And how this plays out in Andrew's poem is, I think, the question to be discussing, rather than simply whether it is or is not racist.

As for lectures on the "true" meaning of Chinese culture being used to cudgel against Asian Americans, that's all just crap and I'm sorry if what I said put you in that direction. There is no "true" meaning of any culture--hence these damned debates!--and while you as an Asian American may be an attenuated representative, so are Lee Teng-hui, Coco Li Wen, and Wai-lim Yip. The biggest problem we as North Americans have may be in seeing that all cultures--races, continents, countries--are as complicated and diverse as we are ourselves.

[A hundred and thirty words are cut from the head, apologising to Yu for calling him paranoid and distinguishing North America, where "Asian" is a racialised concept, from Taiwan, where it is not. Ninety are cut from the foot, on the close of Andrew's poem: "I don't read the end of his poem with as blanket arrogance as you see in it."]

85. — Timothy Yu Tue, 6 Jul 2004 ↑ [Index](#)

Yu answers Klein, taking as his authority "Displacements", the joint statement by Juliana Chang, Walter K. Lew, Tan Lin, Eileen Tabios and John Yau in the Boston Review symposium of 1997, five Asian American poets writing on the Yasusada affair. The closing sentence is theirs, quoted by Yu and applied to Loewen's poem.

Again, I want to echo Rich's very good point that "imperialism" and "racism" are not merely situational, deriving from the conscious intentions of doing harm by a particular actor at a particular moment. To say a work is imperialist, or marked by imperialism, is not to say it is just bad and that no good can come of it; it is a statement about the conditions of global and cultural power under which that work is written.

I am guessing that you provide the quote from Chang, Lew, Tabios, and Yau as an example of the extremity of their rhetoric--implying that such a charge is (like the charge of "imperialism" against Pound) simply unfair. But I must say

that I find their analysis of the Yasusada affair nuanced and entirely apt, precisely because they look beyond the simplistic claim, "Well, if the poems themselves are 'good,' all other questions are moot." Instead, they recognize that such "extrapoetic" issues--authorship, nationality, politics, race--are in fact **precisely** the point of the Yasusada project, since these poems are a conscious attempt by a white American writer to speak in the voice of a Japanese poet (a victim, moreover, of an American horror) and then to disavow his own authorship. The reception of Yasusada, even before the revelation of the "hoax," shows that these issues guided and aided the reading of the text among American writers, and that the poems' author quite consciously played upon American expectations about Japanese writing and subjectivity in order to make his point. Chang, Lew, Tabios, and Yau's final point describes precisely what I think is going on with Andrew's poem and the subsequent discussion: "he wants the taint of scandal without having to take responsibility for the stereotypes he celebrates."

In this sense, Yau's remark that Pound is just "a man of his time" is a way of letting Pound off the hook--perhaps, given his own circumstances, he did the best he could. But the flipside is that we, writing today, ought to know better. A poem such as Andrew's **knows** that it is dealing in racist stereotypes, and does so with the intention of disavowing responsibility for such stereotypes when called out on them.

Finally, on the "dog-eating" issue.

[A hundred and eighty words are cut from the head, on Yau criticising Pound while showing his influence, as Pound called Whitman "pig-headed" while acknowledging him as a "father." Four hundred and fifty are cut from the foot, on the chapter in Frank Wu's Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White that asks "Do Asians eat dogs?" and answers "What is the point of the question?", and on R. Zamora Linmark's "They Like You Because You Eat Dog."]

86. — Richard Jeffrey Newman Wed, 7 Jul 2004 16:58 ↑ [Index](#)

Richard Jeffrey Newman, a translator of classical Persian, answers Lucas Klein's objection to judging older work by present values. Klein had defended Pound's Cathay and Yasusada together, as precedents he held were wrongly dismissed, and had asked that neither be faulted for failing our current standards.

I do not know Yau's work or the essay that and other material that Lucas and Tim and others have been referring to and so I cannot take on the question of

whether Yau was doing what Lucas suggests he was doing, but I do think it's important to say that calling a work from another period racist (or sexist, or whatever) does not have to mean faulting it "for failing to meet up to our current standards"--a formulation which suggests, I think, that somehow what we (whoever "we" are) write now is not informed by racism and sexism and other values that we might prefer to be able to disown.

There are two points here, I think. The first and perhaps more obvious one is that we may be more conscious of how those values work now, and we might expect a writer trying to do now what, say, Pound tried to do in Cathay (whatever that was; if this is a bad example, please substitute an appropriate one) to be more conscious of how racism/imperialism/colonialism/pick-your-ism works in writing/translation, but it is important to acknowledge, I think, that those values would still be present in whatever he produced, in ways he could not control, and so if the standard is to eliminate racism (or sexism, etc.), we are always already failing and so the standard is out of reach. (I should be clear that I am not being defeatist here; it's just that I don't believe in utopia. The oppressive values that are part of our culture are part of our culture. The best we can do is be vigilant in making sure we, as individuals and institutions, don't hurt people as a result of them.)

87. — Murat Nemet-Nejat Wed, 7 Jul 2004 17:39:22 EDT ↑ [Index](#)

Murat Nemet-Nejat, entire, on the afternoon of the seventh day. He is a Turkish-born poet and translator, and his anthology of Turkish poetry, Eda, appeared that year. The distinction he draws here — between a translator's misreading and a poet's own words — is the one the thread returns to and cannot settle.

When is a translation "racist," when is it not? Since, in my view, translation is only possible through a misreading of a text, every authentic translation is to some extent exploitative (does that make it necessarily racist?).

That exploitative violence is what Spicer is after in "after Lorca."

Pound was unquestionably "misreading" Chinese texts to bring a previously absent quality to the English language. Did that quality exist in Chinese poetry or was it purely a phantasy which Pound used prejudices about China as a prop to develop ? Only in the latter case can one think of racism?

Also, it seems to me, we are merging two different issues. If I remember correctly, John Yau's piece appeared in *The American Poetry Review* in response to Elliot Weinberger's modernist anthology. E's talk at The Poetry Project on the occasion of the publication of the same book elicited a very strong negative response also from Amiri Baraka.

In Eliot's case and in the case of the poem discussed in this thread, the criticism is against a writer's own words: "why the Taiwanese...", etc.

In my view, a poet is always responsible for his or her words, now and ever.

Of course, the distinction between "poet" and "translator" is much more blurry, ambiguous than I made for rhetorical reason; but that is a blur one should confront directly.

Murat

88. — Timothy Yu Wed, 7 Jul 2004 ↑ [Index](#)

Yu answers Klein on the fifth day of the thread. Chang et al. are Juliana Chang, Walter K. Lew, Tan Lin, Eileen Tabios and John Yau, five of the Boston Review respondents of 1997, none of whom belonged to this list. Yu is the only Asian American poet arguing here in his own voice.

I will confess to being a bit exhausted by this thread, but I'll try to respond, though I fear fatigue is making my tone increasingly defensive.

I realize I can't win on the issue of Yau and of Chang et al. If I try to distance myself from Yau I am still associated with his point of view and expected to defend him (or repudiate him); if I express approval of some of his opinions and those of Chang et al. I am accused of toeing the party line, assigned the status of "co-writer."

If, as Lucas claims, Yau says that no one should ever read Pound, then obviously I wouldn't agree with that. If, as Lucas suggests, he was settling some kind of political score in a review that I haven't read then that's none of my affair. I've tried to explain what *I* mean by racism and imperialism; perhaps Yau simply uses the words differently.

I suppose Lucas is right: this really is, and has been all along, about the politics of race in North America. Lucas gives us an image of an America in which political correctness has run amok--that bad old '80s and '90s world of campus

speech codes and racial separatism; in this world, it would seem, "racist" and "imperialist" are far more threatening terms of abuse than racial slurs. In part I think this perception is due to the odd position of contemporary poetry: often nourished by the academy (although in constant agony over such connections) and generally wedded to left politics. The result is what I sometimes find to be a rather upside-down view of American politics: the fact that the academy is hypervigilant about issues of racism and sexism (though not always with real results) does not mean that the wider society behaves the same way, or that a charge of "racism" carries the same weight for a wider audience. That the self-flagellation of intellectuals and academics over race occasionally reaches the level of absurdity doesn't change the fact that racism and sexism are real--that white men still earn more money than anyone else, for example, or that racial minorities receive far worse health care and education. So I hardly raise such issues lightly or without a sense of their political charge.

There is a strong implication by Lucas that nearly any charge of racism or imperialism is irresponsible and likely to destroy someone's career and reputation. I see little evidence that this is the case; when it is, it's usually not because non-white people have gained power but because those currently in power are trying to fend off criticism--cf. Trent Lott's loss of the Senate leadership over statements perceived to be in support of segregation.

[Five hundred and twenty words are cut from the foot, on Lott and Howard Coble suffering no lasting damage for what they said, on the Yasusada controversy having increased the work's circulation rather than destroyed it, and on motives that cannot be reduced to an author's intentions: "That one can have the best intentions and yet produce work with all kinds of unintended consequences should surprise no one."]

89. — Richard Jeffrey Newman *Thu, 8 Jul 2004* ↑ [Index](#)

Newman answers Murat Nemet-Nejat's proposition that every authentic translation is to some degree exploitative, by describing his own commission. The question the thread cannot leave alone — what authorises a voice — is here answered with a chain of custody rather than a principle.

I am in the process of producing a literary translation of Saadi's "The Gulistan." To my knowledge, mine will be the first such translation in English, post-1940, that will encompass selections from the entire work. I speak some and understand a decent amount of conversational Farsi, but I neither read nor write the language, and I certainly have no command of the language as it

existed in the 13th century when Saadi wrote. I am using as a trot Edward Rehatsek's 1880s translation of the entire work, which, I am given to understand by the people who hired me and by my reading, is generally recognized as the most accurate English-language translation of the text that we have. In a sense, then, I am translating a 19th century British English translation that is not literary into 21st century literary American English. (I know I am playing fast and loose with the term literary here, but please bear with me.) I do have a copy of the original text and access to informants, scholarly and otherwise--my wife, who is Iranian, is one--who can read and translate it for me as necessary, but I have discovered that the Farsi text of the Gulistan that I was given is not the same version that Rehatsek used when he did his translation; there are passages in the Rehatsek text that are not in the Farsi text that I have, and vice versa. And so not only is my translation going to be a misreading of a misreading, it is a misreading of a text that is a translation of an original that is no longer considered authoritative, that is, in other words, considered now to be a misreading/misrepresentation of that "actual" original manuscript. So there is a lot of textual and cultural exploitation going on here, but I don't think exploitation in and of itself is always bad, if by exploitation we mean to use something for one's own purpose. It depends on what the purpose is, which is part of what Murat's point was in his post, I think.

The organization that hired me to do this translation is the International Society for Iranian Culture, started by a man who is a former cultural attach to the Iranian mission to the UN. He is, as far as I know, and I have some pretty authoritative information on this, not at all aligned with the conservative forces in the Iranian government.

[Ninety words are cut from the head, quoting back the proposition of Nemet-Nejat's that the post answers. Twelve hundred and ninety are cut from the foot, on the commission he has taken to render Saadi's The Gulistan from Rehatsek's nineteenth-century English, on the book's Enlightenment and colonial uses in Britain, and on his own version as "circumscribed by Rehatsek's in ways I am not even aware of".]

90. — Lucas Klein *Thu, 8 Jul 2004 02:26: ↑ Index*

July 2004, under the subject line "Yellowface". Lucas Klein relays a poem Johnson had sent him, forthcoming in the magazine Antennae, together with the question Johnson attached to it. A haibun is Bashō's form, prose carrying haiku. The first four lines are a sentence Johnson had posted to this list in November 1997, in his reply to Dean Brink, printed earlier in this volume.

Kent Johnson also sent me this poem, about (or already) to come out in Antennae.

Kent asks: "Is this poem racist?"

Lucas

ORIENTALIST HAIBUN (with Cups of Sake Four)

It is because what we say is unfinished, always, that we can say without fear. The gatekeepers themselves, in speaking back law, say only what they have been given to say by signs. It is always unfinished. Thinking of this I gathered courage, making prostrations. The land to the East or West of us is there because we are here, speaking of it. (My sister wrote that.)

Anyway, when I arrived at the first gate, I was told I could not pass. The guards were dressed in coats of black scales, with half-moons of gold covering their mouths. They spoke in tongues from the West and told me to return there. Beyond their head-sets, sparks flew in the night across the wooden houses, and I imagined that those of the foreign community inside were shimmering and transparent so that their bones mingled as one with the tea-fires and the frozen flight of the cranes. (Awkward, but I am writing quickly here.) And then, by magic, Mack, the Western Guards became tethered to long and shiny poles of discourse (though it was dark and I couldn't quite see) and were spun round and round so that a breeze lightly scented

with bream and salt cooled my face. I smashed the turtle's shell and passed boldly through the gate.

You see, it was the thought of Witter Bynner that led me on. I desired my dust to be mingled with his, forever and forever and forever. I also thought of the following things, though I would never dare to speak them openly:

The State of Hand Not Joined to Body

The State of Being Perfectly Not Here

The State of Disconsolate Thought of Wings

The State of Myouka Writing "Hand Not Joined to Body"

The State of Rose of the Snow Kimono

The State of Poem Written on Throat of Turtle

The State of Shikantaza as Loving Cunt Enfolding

The State of Kissing Son on Loving Lips

The State of Sons as Suicidal Aviators Exultant

The State of Being a Staff or Whisk

The State of Stillness in Self-Fulfilling Samadhi

The State Where the Moon Swallowing Is Brought Forth

Weary, I took a piss, making great steam in the Autumn grasses. Then, preparing ink on a large stone, I wrote:

[xx] shungyo ya hito koso shirane kigi-no ame [xx]

Which I choose to translate thus:

[mourning his son he crosses the hills with a large sack of eggs]

When I arrived at the second gate, Chuck, it was May, and all was in the State of Three Heads and Eight Arms as Rain on the Trees.

[Eight hundred and twenty words are cut from the foot, the remainder of the haibun: a guard with the face of Amida who exacts a wonder-haiku at swordpoint, and a poetry duel with an executive from Toshiba brandishing "a scroll of unfair treaties". He ends by speaking his

Orientalist dreams “into the black hole of his succulent, papery ear.”]

91. — Lucas Klein *Thu, 8 Jul 2004* ↑ [Index](#)

Lucas Klein, an American translator resident in China, on the subject line that gives this argument its name. John Yau’s charge against Pound’s Cathay, made in the American Poetry Review, becomes the lens through which the list re-reads Yasusada seven years after the book. Yau is a poet and art critic, and one of the five who signed the Boston Review statement of 1997.

What's interesting is that the translations of Asian poetry that were popular before and after Pound's Cathay were, for the most part (Arthur Waley's astounding versions aside) full of Chinoiserie and Japoniserie, or translations in the language of geisha girls and fortune-cookie monks (this may be anachronistic; I don't know when fortune cookies first appeared). It was this kind of imperialist prejudice — they're so different! they're so mystical! — that Pound was reacting against. He was the first translator into English who allowed the Chinese to speak plainly, the way we do. In John Yau's argument (sorry to bring this up again) this proves his imperialism — call it takeism — because the imperialists went out and conquered and brought back whatever they wanted. So while a certain kind of imperialism may have gone unexamined, embedding it even further into the cultural view of China, it was simultaneously an embodiment of its own examination of imperialism, trying to dislodge it from English language and literature.

[Thirteen hundred and ten words are cut from the foot, where he answers Nemet-Nejat and others line by line: he remains “wary of the accusatory tone of much of this kind of criticism”, holds translation to be an act towards world peace, and argues that Pound, having broken the pentameter, “made possible a literalism previously unimaginable”.]

92. — Murat Nemet-Nejat *Thu, 8 Jul 2004* ↑ [Index](#)

Murat Nemet-Nejat, answering Richard Jeffrey Newman, closes the translation strand of the thread; Newman had described the Persian commission behind his own version. His last sentence is the nearest thing the archive offers to a criterion: not whether a voice is one's own, but whether it has touched anything.

That a translation satisfies a need in the host language (or culture), to me, is indubitable. A translator should acknowledge that. Even the cultural attache who commissioned you is "more interested in finding a poet/writer who could produce the kind of text he (*italics my own*) wanted in English than he was in working with someone who is fluent in Farsi."

Important translations, such as The King James Bible or Chaucer's major poems or Pound's The Seafarer, are integral to the social, political and poetic arguments of their time. It is interesting to compare what King James's version finally retains and what discards (misreads) from the Lutheran version, which is itself based on an earlier Greek text. Rehatsek's Sadi translations, I suppose, belong to the political climate and purposes of 19th century England.

My own "Eda: An Anthology Of Contemporary Turkish Poetry" is, from one angle, a poetic manifesto for a new kind of poetry in American poetry. On the other hand, I am asked by a Lebanese newspaper (Daily Star) to write an essay on contemporary Turkish poetry -using the writing of the anthology as a basis- to discuss Turkey's place in contemporary Middle East. Is Turkey an Asiatic (Islamic) or a European country, a question looming around the war in Iraq and about which Turkish poetry and the antholgy have a lot say, particularly as subtexts.

The best translations are always polemical trying to change (misread?) their times. In that sense chains of translations constitute a single text (what Benjamin calls ideal language), a continuum.

Where is the "original" language in all that, Hebrew, Aramaic, Persian, Turkish, Chinese? An elusive there. But, as in photography, this thereness is essential. One can misread it, distort it, fragment it; but that contact is the source of all energy.

93. — Michelle Reeves Thu, 8 Jul 2004 19:49: ↑ [Index](#)

The only reply the question receives. Lucas Klein had put Johnson's "Orientalist Haibun" to the list at half past two in the morning, with Johnson's own question attached — "Is this poem racist?" — and seventeen hours later Michelle Reeves sends back nine words.

Why don't you tell me what you think?

[Thirteen months, sixty posts, twenty-eight thousand words, and none of them his; he is here only in other people's announcements. Christine Murray passes on the Jaime Saenz feature in Jacket 25 — "Kent Johnson asked me to pass this on to y'all, which I gladly do" — Geoffrey Gatza forwards a letter to Campus Watch in defence of Ammiel Alcalay, Ken Rumble and Tim Peterson book him to read in Chapel Hill and Cambridge, effing press publishes Lyric Poetry After Auschwitz, and Jim Behrle answers with Lyric Poetry After Kent Johnson. Jesse Glass's entire contribution is four words: "Always keeping himself busy".]

94. — Michael Magee Fri, 26 Aug 2005 ↑ [Index](#)

Michael Magee, who published Combo in Providence, announces the second Yasusada volume, nine years after Doubled Flowering. Tosa Motokiyu is the name Johnson and Javier Alvarez have given as the author of the papers, said to have died in 1996. The bracketed matter is blurb copy by Marjorie Perloff, Benjamin Friedlander and Tony Tost, each measuring the work against a precedent — Pound's Propertius, O'Hara's "poem in blackface" — rather than against the authorship question.

It is my distinct pleasure to announce the publication of the latest Combo Book, ALSO WITH MY THROAT I SHALL SWALLOW TEN THOUSAND SWORDS: ARAKI YASUSADA'S LETTERS IN ENGLISH.

Written under the pseudonym (or hypernym) Tosa Motokiyu, edited by Kent Johnson and Javier Alvarez, beautifully and painstakingly designed by Christian Palino and Prototype Syndicate, perfectbound with a gorgeous cover involving UV spot-lamination and other things I don't understand, you must get your hands on this book!

It will be available momentarily from Small Press Distribution <http://www.spdbooks.org> but you can also order it (and put significantly more dough in the Combo Books coffers!) by sending cash or check to:

Combo Books c/o Michael Magee 7 Old West Wrentham Rd. Cumberland, RI 02864

The price of the book is 12 dollars.

Here are some examples of advance praise for the book and/or the Yasusada project generally:

“(The Yasusada Author) has done a brilliant job in inventing a world at once ritualized and yet startlingly modern, timeless yet documentary, archaized yet au courant -- a poetic world that satisfies out hunger for the authentic, even though that autentic world is a perfect simulacrum...Like Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, the Yasusada notebooks force us to go back to the 'originals' so as to see what they really were and how they have been transformed.”

--Marjorie Perloff

“These pidgin English fantasies of poetic mastery are awful and incredible. Like Frank O'Hara's 'poem in blackface' they give us pause by giving delight. The delight, dear reader, is a ruse.It's the pause that constitutes their gift.”

--Ben Friedlander

“Here in America, where even our best experimental writers seem to be constructing gigantic monuments to their own talents and are eager to lie beside Wordsworth in some canonical garden, (the Yasusada) project, whatever it ultimately is or ends up having been, strikes me as either the most moving, unsettling and important thing going on right now, or as the most egregious and dangerous self-delusion in American letters.”

--Tony Tost

“Joyce and Stein gave us an idea of how the ego talked, Mallarme and Proust the superego. Now, for the first time in our era, an unearthing of Araki Yasusada's shattering letters and sublime poem-fragments...shows us how ego and superego would talk to each other, if only they spoke the same language.”

--David Rosenberg

My own hope is that the book will provoke the intense conversation I think it deserves. Please forward this announcement to other lists and, if you don't mind, post it on you blogs.

V
Day, and After
2006-2012

The question comes back in 2008, and it comes back speaking a different language.

Conceptual writing had made authorship arguable again on new terms — appropriation, procedure, uncreativity — and the list, which had spent 1997 asking whether a poet may impersonate the dead, found itself in 2008 asking whether a poet need write at all. Gabriel Gudding's taxonomy of the avant-garde poet who plays at being cultural criminal names the Yasusada controversy in a parenthesis, and thereby turns a thread about masculinity into a thread about Johnson. David Chirot carries the argument into Marjorie Perloff's Tucson symposium. Maria Damon discovers her own name attached to machine-written poems in *Issue 1* and reports being flattered. By November Johnson is being enrolled in a genealogy rather than charged with a stunt.

Then, in September 2009, *Day*: copies of Kenneth Goldsmith's retyping of a day's *New York Times*, bought from the publisher and reassigned to Johnson with stickers. Sixty-one posts across September and October, the largest single thread about him in the archive. Bobby Baird asks the best question of the movement — who is permitted to be uncreative, and whether the permission runs through the schools and the salaries rather than through the work. Murat Nemet-Nejat, alone, measures *Day* against *Doubled Flowering* and finds the later gesture wanting, because the earlier one cost its author something. Herb Levy supplies the case law, from Rauschenberg to Oswald, showing the brave act to be the safest available.

It ends on 6 October with Alison Croggon, again, and with a sentence that describes the structure of every argument in this volume: the work has all the answers in advance, and any criticism is instantly self-cancelling, and that is deadly. Nothing after it advances. The thread dies of the thing it has just diagnosed.

95. — Jesse Glass *Thu, 23 Mar 2006 23:41* ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson's Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets, which names its subjects and versifies them one by one, had appeared in February 2006 from BlazeVOX, the Buffalo small press run by Geoffrey Gatza. Glass, a poet long resident in Japan and an old acquaintance of Johnson's, reviews it in kind: a rejoinder in rhymed couplets, posted to the list.

These epigrams of yours can barely work--
 an ounce of lard in which a thought might lurk;
 or an attempt to hurt dressed in a bramble
 of brittle thorns that break off as you ramble.
 Precise and gleaming, wit's lightning blade
 Requires rhyme to buttress what is said:
 One cannot stab with daggers made of dough,
 Or vivisect with blades of melting snow.
 It's rhyme that sets the epigram apart
 And gives the snicker snack to this fierce art.
 (Or at least in English--other poets may
 Autopsy dullness in a classic way
 With stressed and non, their feet may sharply kick
 But their translated spurs can barely stick.)
 Slapdash free verse with line breaks here and there
 Cannot be honed to an instrument of fear,
 But brings down brick-bats on the careless head
 And resonates with dullness when it's read.
 So the effect is quite the opposite intended,--
 The offender becomes the jest of those offended:
 An easy target for their japes and jeers,
 A roaring fool; the sheep to his own shears.
 Whitman was not a wit, Rochester was:
 The rhymester wins hands down in witty wars.
 So, Kent, instead of "epigrams" of wood,
 Recast your lines, and then seek to draw blood.

96. — Geoffrey Gatza *Sun, 23 Apr 2006 10:59* ↑ [Index](#)

April 2006. Gatza, who had published Epigramitis at BlazeVOX two months earlier, announces a recording: Johnson reading "Thirty Three Rules of Poetry for Poets Twenty Three and Under" and a series of epigrams naming living poets, taped, he says, on a Radio Shack cassette Johnson was given for Christmas in 1978. The exorcism, with Franz Wright and Charles Bernstein among the exorcists, is Gatza's own fiction.

Great radio! Now available at:

Kent Johnson Comes Back! America's most beloved poet returns with a new poem -- Thirty Three Rules of Poetry for Poets Twenty Three and Under -- and with many new epigrams.

Epigrams for Josh Corey, Stephanie Young, Galway Kinnell, Ryan Daley, George Bowering, Bob Perlman, Joe Amato, Dan Borzytski and others.

Recorded on the same Radio Shack tape Kent received for Christmas in 1978 or thereabouts!

The Devil in Kent Johnson-- Part One Exorcism on a wet afternoon. Join me as I travel to Castle Dracula on the express invitation of Andrei Codresceau and am trapped into witnessing the Exorcism of Kent Johnson by Franz Wright, Charles Bernstein, Rob Silliman, the Flarf Gang, Louise Gluck, Ted Kooser and other great Pezzonovantes, Poobahs and Bonzes of American poetry. Appearances by Jim Behlre and Curtis Faville and many others!

WARNING: This podcast contains some of the most frightening conversations ever heard.

The Devil in Kent Johnson -- Part Two The Exorcism continues and then...transcendence! And more.

[Six posts, sixty-five hundred words, none of them his. Two of them correct the announcement of his reading: Jesse Glass writes that "I obtained my M.A. from the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars in Baltimore in 1979", and Geoffrey Gatzapologises "to Jesse and to the venerable Johns Hopkins University". Stephen Baraban answers "The Devil in Kent Johnson" by advertising the first post of his new blog, "The Earth With A City In Her Hair", which is about Bernadette Mayer. A subscriber posts the word "unsubscribe" above an entire day's digest, and Jacket 29 is announced twice in identical words.]

97. — Geoffrey Gatzap Wed, 28 Jun 2006 15:24 ↑ Index

Gatzap, Johnson's publisher, relays Ammiel Alcalay's Editor's Choice notice from BOMB 96; the quoted matter is Alcalay's. It is the fullest defence on the list of Epigramitis as political rather than merely personal practice, and it sets Johnson in the line of Robert Duncan, who in his Vietnam-era quarrel with Denise Levertov chose to strike at complicity rather than to oppose the war in public.

The following Editor's Choice review, by Ammiel Alcalay, appears in the current issue of BOMB Magazine.

To order the book, please visit <http://www.blazevox.org/bk-kj.htm>

Best, Geoffrey

Geoffrey Gatzap BlazeVOX [books] www.blazevox.org

BOMB 96 Editor's Choice Ammiel Alcalay on Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets by Kent Johnson

At the height of the war in Vietnam, Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov articulated the best of radically different political practices. While Levertov worked in public opposition, Duncan went "underground," striking at the heart of complicity: "We want peace because we are agonized to realize how much we are involved with and subject to the will of murderous and conceited men; but the Vietnamese who are fighting for the truth do not want peace at the sacrifice of their vision of the good--we, not they, are the ones who need immediate surrender of the war for the good of our human souls." These many years later, when the terms of debate and the scale of protest have been entirely predictable, where it is almost impossible not to be affiliated with the corporate body of the nation and complicity pervades every core of our being, poet and translator Kent Johnson has taken up arms in a seemingly marginal segment of society, that of the "post-avant" poetry scene.

In *Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets*, Johnson makes us understand that the 118 mostly not very well known poets and their readers whom he satirizes and praises may not be so marginal after all. In fact, at the receiving end of Johnson's considerable conceptual acumen and wit, they may very well be representative. The point is that the consensus of public discourse upon which political power consolidates itself has to start somewhere, and Johnson takes a scalpel to these mechanisms in the world he knows best. This insight fuels what can be a scary book, making readers squirm as they recognize friends, enemies and poets of "reputation." But precisely because Johnson names names (each epigram bears a poet's name), we as readers are called upon to judge our own responses to his mix of invective, humor and admiration. As the great poet Ed Dorn wrote on an early batch of these epigrams: "It's about time for something of the sort, what with the ass licking that rules the day." So far this time bomb has been tossed around gingerly, but one hopes it explodes in true debate.

Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets is published by BlazeVOX [books] Buffalo, New York.

[Seventy-seven posts and more than thirty-seven thousand words over twenty months, and not one of them his. He appears in the third person throughout. Jeffrey Side asks the list "Can someone contact Kent Johnson for me?" and Geoffrey Gatza later posts on his behalf that mail should go elsewhere because of email trouble. David Chirot forwards a reading announcement calling him "Mr. Kent" in some of his poems, like Burroughs' being "Mr. Lee"; mIEKAL aND asks how he can be sure it will actually be Kent Johnson who appears, and

George Bowering answers: "If he's smoking on the porch, you got him." In February 2007 Joe Amato forwards a note from him on Santoka and Hosai. In August the list picks over "the recent row at Lime Trees", Gatz's posting of a Johnson reply, which Kevin Thurston cannot locate: "where did geoffrey post that note? i see/saw kent's, but not the one you posted below".]

98. — Gabriel Gudding Mon, 4 Feb 2008 19:35 ↑ [Index](#)

Gudding, who had read with Johnson in Chicago the week before, posts a taxonomy of avant-garde author-types drawn from his blog: the outlaw, the sacred heretic, the misunderstood messiah. The parenthesis "(see Yasusada controversy)" is the only naming in it, and it is enough to make the thread, which ran to a dozen posts, about Johnson.

Description: the poet plays the role of righteous underdog, cultural criminal or sacred heretic.

Elaboration: to play the underdog, the outlaw, the "angry outsider," the untrusted, the unloved, the suspicious, the sacred transgressor, the misunderstood messiah, announcing oneself the maverick, the criminal. To hang one's shingle as a disinterested shaman. To declare oneself the Complicated Outlaw Genius Shaman. To declare oneself the Angry Righteous Disinterested Transgressing-yet-Victimized Author Ghoul. To declare one's friends the apocalypse.

Purpose: To display oneself as the sacred heretic is basically to tout oneself the next winner in the dialectic of orthodoxy by enacting ritual sacrilege (Weber). The basic purpose is threefold: to display one's disinterestedness in profit in order to display one's purity of intent and pure devotion to the art; to display one's high mind via one's principled disgust at the sycophancy and interdependent nature of the field; to make a show of one's supposed autonomy in an energetic fantasy of defiance toward the literary community.

This tactic elides the history of collective labor against external restraints by appropriating that history of labor and putting one's label on it. Iteration of the romantic "single actor" or "small cadre" theory, essentially denying the interconnectedness of all cultural work, or at least that work that went into making the badboy victim-transgressor author.

There is further a homologous denial of the interconnectedness of all being and emotion, which speaks to the masculine privilege of "anger" or "being a jerk" as a mode of appropriating needs and dealing with perceived non-affiliates. The so-called transgressor masks this collective history and suppresses his

connection to the field of production by emotional spectacles (sometimes masked as intellectual spectacles [flares of argumentation]) intended to draw attention away from that masking, making it easier to be touted as “the” origin rather than one result of the entire work done by the host of beings in that field from readers to reviewers to truck drivers. This is a ready made author type whose vogue waxes and wanes but is overall adopted surprisingly frequently. To borrow a metaphor from Stan Apps: the “transgressor” is a retail product that one buys and then pretends one found at Goodwill.

Common tactic: to tout what one does as “shocking” or to start or further arguments and then call notice that one has been attacked as rebel/heretic/apostate (see Yasusada controversy). And if one is ignored, to say that one is being suppressed or disappeared and that one will be exonerated by history.

Poetic bioregion (where found): The tactic of the “sacred heretic” is used by groups on both the left and right; this is because the tactic as a meme is homologous with masculinity in general and not with any one flavor of political aesthetics in particular.

99. — Jason Quackenbush Mon, 4 Feb 2008 19:28 ↑ [Index](#)

The first reply to Gudding, posted within the hour. Quackenbush does not defend Johnson by name; he objects to the form of the argument, which he takes to be unfalsifiable — a scheme in which any disagreement counts as further proof of the thing complained of. Gudding declined to answer him, saying later that he would reply only to “polite posts.”

I just don't see where this idea can be productive. [...] Any ideology, and don't kid yourself that this position you've taken is above ideologies, that in it's basis co-opts and subjugates any opposition as mere confirmation of its own truth, which to my mind is what you're doing by equating argumentation with the behavior you're speaking out against, the masking of the interconnectedness of culture. it also seems to me that you're denying agency and a multiplicity of motivating factors to any possible opponents. If I disagree with you and I like the role that the sacred heretic or outlaw genius plays in our culture, it can't be for any of the reasons I do find such antiheroes appealing, but is instead just my own petty self-aggrandizement in service of my cultural power as a member of a privileged group. What you've created is a closed system that brooks no dissent, and that's not liberating anybody from any form of oppression, it's just another

mundane totalitarianism. Finally, and most troublingly for me, your approach has implicit in it the assumption that anyone playing the role of sacred heretic lack self awareness of the station they're taking to the larger culture. You seem to be saying that this is something adopted purely as a commercial or political tactic and not as a legitimate engagement in ones own world fully considered and selected for good reasons while remaining aware of the many drawbacks that position holds. [...] Denying that your opponent has good reasons for doing what they do [...] you are denying that those who disagree with you have the ability to freely and authentically engage in the world as they choose to given the possibilities presented to them by the world. To deny that ability, to my mind, is to dehumanize a person, and so, i have to ask, is this argument you're making not in the end the same thing in its ends as the system that you are criticizing.

100. — Eric Conrad Sat, 1 Mar 2008 14:56 ↑ [Index](#)

The query that opened the thread. Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak, an anthology of verse by men held at the camp, collected by their lawyers and cleared for publication by the Pentagon, had appeared the previous year. Conrad, working with the book, asks the list for other recent poems addressing Guantánamo.

I'm doing some work with the recent Poems from Guantanamo collection and I am looking for examples of recent poems that address Gitmo. Do any come to mind?

Thank you so much for your help.

-e

101. — David Chirot *Sun, 2 Mar 2008 07:38* ↑ [Index](#)

Chirot answers the query, describing a series of pieces written around Poems from Guantánamo and one linking the waterboarding of the fifteenth-century poet François Villon to the technique used on the detainees. The list's argument over what a poet may take from the tortured — the Abu Ghraib quarrel of 2004 — returns here without Johnson's name attached to it.

since late last summer i've been working on a series of pieces growing out of and around the appearance of the Poems in book form, as well as via selected poems being quoted prior to that in various media-- and also their various receptions via reviews, blogs, articles and as well this e-list--

Wordforword will be publishing one of these pieces, "Waterboarding, Translation and Poetry," which links the waterboarding the 15th Century French poet Francois Villon underwent numerous times with the same technique being employed today on the detainees--and how poetry is produced in relation with "being forced to speak" even more than "being censored" into silence--

these pieces (called for now "Annals") are comprised of various elements--usually i use examples from the poems of various writers, or of the situations created by the poems' publications and receptions--in relation with other aspects of "poetics" and other American discourses, along with various kinds of documentary materials from history, the military, the Media--

In many pieces i'll employ photographs and documents found on-line or in print publications, to "show" several different ways in which the image of Guantanamo itself is not as "isolated" a phenomenon as it's physical site is meant to invoke--but instead a symptom in language and image of the society which is "paying for this" in the trillions of dollars and thousands of its own lives and forcing millions of others also to "pay for it"--in every way imaginable--

a long piece i am very close to completing for example involves the "Projections" exhibition of Jenny Holzer and the recent announcement that for the most docile of detainees, there will be movies shown and classes offered in Pashto, Arabic and English--the commander who made this announcement said also that a wide range of subjects including Oceanography is also being gradually introduced--to be taught to students who are shackled to the floor but allowed to sit on hard plastic chairs at non-threatening desks--and may even be allowed to know they are "living" close to the famous Bay--

the Commander speaks of using "the humanities" to help calm down the anger which can erupt and be a threat to the guards--

as well, he notes--this will give the selected detainees "something to look forward to every day"--

this method of "winning hearts and minds" and using the "humanities" to "pacify" the "population" one may find operating also in the Holzer exhibition--

which, curiously, has elicited, similarly to the Guantanamo poems, reviews and responses which use eerily over and over almost identical phrases and "key words"--which it turns out Holzer herself also uses-

[Thirteen hundred words are cut from the foot, where he reads the detainees' poems as a first "New Extreme Experimental American Poetry" produced by torture and censorship, "the fascism of language, which is not censoring by silence, but by forcing one to speak", and holds that in dismissing them as "bad poetry by bad people translated badly" the poetry establishments serve the same function as the torturers.]

102. — Barry Schwabsky Tue, 4 Mar 2008 07:37 ↑ [Index](#)

Two fabricated memoirs were exposed in the same week: Misha Defonseca's account of crossing wartime Europe among wolves and Margaret Seltzer's of running drugs in South-Central Los Angeles. The bracketed matter is the New York Times report as Schwabsky, an art critic, quotes it. His last sentence is the nearest the movement comes to a formulation both sides could accept.

I was surprised, btw, that you did not mention the story in today's times about yet another literary hoax--headline, "Gang Memoir, Turning Page, is Pure Fiction" [...]

The article begins:

“ In "Love and Consequences," a critically acclaimed memoir published last week, Margaret B. Jones wrote about her life as a half-white, half-Native American girl growing up in South-Central Los Angeles as a foster child among gang-bangers, running drugs for the Bloods. The problem is that none of it is true. Margaret B. Jones is a pseudonym for Margaret Seltzer, who is all white and grew up in the well-to-do Sherman Oaks section of Los Angeles, in the San Fernando Valley, with her biological family. ”

Like you, David, I am fascinated by such cases, however, I can't take a moralistic stance toward it. I'm sure it is done in part, as you say, "for fame and

advancement"--well, that's what Freud said was the motive behind all art; and the same would have been the case if the memoirs were "authentic." But at the same time, as you say with regard to the fake Shoah memoirist, there is a genuine emotional identification at work. What's interesting is how intertwined empathy and exploitation can be.

103. — David Chirot Sat, 22 Mar 2008 23:31 ↑ [Index](#)

The bracketed passage is from Doubled Flowering, quoted by Chirot. He reads the Yasusada notebooks as an "After Spicer" to Jack Spicer's After Lorca of 1957, a book of invented translations prefaced by Lorca from the grave. Twelve years after publication this is the closest thing on the list to a sustained reading of the book as literature rather than as scandal.

One of the most interesting meditations on Spicer and especially After Lorca, is the way that the figure and work of Spicer make their appearances interwoven among the other figures and works which inhabit Doubled Flowering From the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada. Doubled Flowering is in effect, an After Spicer to Spicer's After Lorca, assembled and annotated by the editors of Yasusada's Notebooks in a manner suggested by Yasusada in a November 7, 1967 letter to his friend Fusei:

I am so taken by the conception of the book (After Lorca), that I have decided to correspond with Spicer in a like manner. . . . After I finish, I will allow him the opportunity to introduce the collection with the same generosity of spirit that he extended to Lorca . . .

Since "one knows" that Yasusada is a fictional poet, one finds a fictional being wanting to correspond with a dead poet, just as that poet corresponded with a dead poet. Along the way are "translations" which themselves are fictions--of Lorca, of Yasusada--framing a discussion of "real lemons" and "real moons" by both Spicer and Yasusada within the contexts of fiction, and, in both cases, with correspondances with dead poets. Fictions corresponding with ghosts take up the issue of the real, and what makes any of it "real" is that the poets WRITE of poems which will be real and independent of images. So real that a cloud which has nothing to do with the poem will cover that moon. And if the moon is that moon which exists in writing--a cloud may indeed, having nothing to do with the poem pass over it--as it is there on the page--the moon one literally sees in the four letters which create the word--a literal cloud may pass overhead and cover it-- Asked what he meant in his writing, Rimbaud replied, "I mean it literally and

in every sense." Literally, "m--o--o--n" IS the moon, and literally a cloud passing overhead could cover the four letters making the moon seen--THERE--on the page-- And that "m--o--o--n" is independent of images, and that cloud has nothing to do with the poem. And since from the "after life" Lorca writes with Spicer "After Lorca," so Yasusada, a fictional "after effect" of his own "After Spicer," writes with a Spicer himself now in the "after life." As one moves from the moon of Spicer, a "real" poet's moon written of to a dead "real poet," to the moon of Yasusada, which is a fictional poet's writing to the now dead "real poet," of the moon he has essayed creating, the one constant, the one "reality" literally existing among the historical poets, ghosts and fictions is this REAL "m--o--o--n" literally existing on the page from one text to the next.

[A hundred and twenty words are cut from the head, on an office sign — "If it's not in writing, it never happened." — and its inversion. Six hundred and thirty are cut from the foot, where the moon moves between texts as a loon answers its own echo, and a last letter to Spicer is given at length: "the real washes up like a dream from the unreal."]

104. — Aldon Nielsen Wed, 2 Apr 2008 11:31 ↑ [Index](#)

Nielsen, poet and critic and one of the 118, opens the second Epigramitis thread two years after the book's publication. The joke about whose permission he should seek before printing "a previously undiscovered sheaf of Yasusada poems" recalls his own intervention in the first controversy, when he had called the writings a hoax. He presses the charge that the book is replete with demonstrably false claims.

A friend just sent me the URL for a description of this book, which, I must confess, had escaped my attention when it was published last year. I find that I am one of the fortunate 118, but also find the illin' epigram under my name utterly incomprehensible. I'm not at all sure why Kent Johnson bothered to include me, unless it was his odd way of thanking me for bothering to inquire of him whose permission I should seek prior to publishing a previously undiscovered sheaf of Yasusada poems that had come into my possession.

While I am not at all sure what to make of this thing, I note that it is replete with demonstrably false claims, such as : "Not a single Language poet has ever said a single word about Will Alexander. " -- So I suspect that this book, perhaps Kent Johnson himself (if you click on his name at the Amazon listing for the book, it takes you to a series of volumes on model railroads) is another hoax.

105. — John Latta Thu, 3 Apr 2008 12:25 ↑ [Index](#)

Latta supplies the defence — the small false statement as vehicle for a larger true one, so that “Not a single Language poet has ever said a single word about Will Alexander” points at the middle-class whiteness of Language poetry rather than at Alexander’s reception. He also states the fact that governs the movement: Johnson has not posted to the list since February 2000, and cannot answer for himself. The banishment Nielsen speaks of was widely believed on the list; the archive records no such ban.

Aldon,

That book's not only not a hoax, it's a terrific book. I don't have it at hand right now, so can't attest to the intelligibility of your own "illin' epigram," but I'd wager that you'd agree that some higher truths get said best by tinier, humorous falsehoods, so that "Not a single Language poet has ever said a single word about Will Alexander" points rather magnificently to the overwhelming middle class whiteness of Language poetry. Kent Johnson, of course, could say this all much better and throw in a guffawable or two besides. But then he's not here, still languishing under the banishment from these pristine List premises, dating back, what, *nine* years now?

and is a delight, a savage delight.

106. — Aldon Nielsen Fri, 4 Apr 2008 13:31: ↑ [Index](#)

Nielsen, who had speculated in 1996 that the Yasusada poems were a hoax, explains what he meant by the word: not a judgement of quality but the assigning of a work to a much beloved genre. His example is James Weldon Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, published anonymously in 1912 and read for years as a memoir. He notes that he appears in Epigramitis himself.

hmmmm . . . upon reading the first few Yasusada poems that I caught in print, I speculated that it was a hoax (and assumed the editor was in on it) -- I obviously had not read the whole -- I didn't think I was thereby dismissing it -- I did think I was thereby assigning it to a much beloved genre --

Epigramitis, which I have since read all of, does indeed appear to posit opinions often based on one or two passages of work that Kent clearly has not read much of -- so I guess that makes it journalistic reductivism -- I don't think that laebling something a hoax has anything to do with making any judgment

about the quality of the work -- THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN EX-COLOURED MAN was published with no author's name attached and was, as event, something of a hoax, and it is also one of the greatest works of 20th century American Literature -- REPORT FROM IRON MOUNTAIN was entirely a hoax but was also extremely well done and sparked crucial debates about defense policy and the economy --

I had thought that suggesting Kent Johnson was a hoax was sufficient signal that I wasn't exactly writing a book review or rendering a judgment on the writing --

The Aldon Nielsen who appears in EPIGRAMITITIS is entirely a hoax -- so?

107. — Jason Quackenbush *Fri, 4 Apr 2008 18:34* ↑ [Index](#)

A post that had failed to reach the list, forwarded. Quackenbush sets Epigramititis in a line of literary frauds running back through Gaddis and Cervantes to Greek tragedy, taking in Chaucer, the confidence-game structure of Jan Potocki's The Manuscript Found at Saragossa, and the novels of passing Nielsen had raised — George Schuyler's Black No More among them.

This didn't go to the list for some reason. Aldon's more recent post regarding autobio of an ex-colored man is also a good example (although I prefer "black no more" of the novels dealing with passing during that era). but there are lots of cases of things dealing with fraud all through literature. there's a certain sense of fraudulence in a couple of the canterbury tales, wife of bath and the summoners tale if I remember right. There's a hoaxish element to don quixote. almost all of shakespeare's best comedy's have some element of fraud to them. there are whole books built as confidence games like the manuscript found at saragossa, and the topic of deceit is as greek as greek tragedy gets. it also was one of the big obsessions of William Gaddis and played a part in every novel he wrote from the recognitions to agape agape

108. — Murat Nemet-Nejat Sat, 5 Apr 2008 12:57 ↑ [Index](#)

Nemet-Nejat, a poet and translator from the Turkish, states the strongest version of the claim made on Johnson's behalf, and states it as a claim about Hiroshima rather than about authorship: whether, in an age of infinite reproduction, a hoax may be more real than the real. It is the volume's question in its plainest form, and no one on the list answers it directly.

I though the issue of something being a "hoax" or not referred to the public information about the work, surrounding the work. It is closely related to the idea of "fake." I do not think anybody thought Don Quiote was a real person or that the fact Don Quiote was not real makes the novel a "hoax." [...]

If one goes back to the original idea of a hoax (which what The Doubled Flowering is), one can see a veryinteresting question underlying the concept, particularly for a post modern sensibility. Is a hoax more real than the "real"? In an age of infinite reproduction (for example, in literature, the infinite permutations of a text's algorithms digitally as poems, or in art "perfect" digital reeactments), which modern technology allows us, doesn't the idea of the "real" get subverted or, to use a more neutral word, change? It is the subversion that is crucial. My sense is that Kent is claiming in The Doubled Flowering (or in Epigrammatis or The Miseries of Poetry for that matery) his sense of "suffering" in that work is more real than many real writings on Hiroshima. Interesting, this idea is as old as Aristotle, claiming drama (?) is more real than history.

109. — David Chirot Fri, 30 May 2008 02:02 ↑ [Index](#)

Marjorie Perloff's symposium "Conceptual Poetry and its Others" met at the University of Arizona Poetry Center from 29 to 31 May 2008, gathering the writers — Kenneth Goldsmith among them — who had made a programme of unoriginality and uncreative writing. Chirot, a contributing exhibitor, posts his statement, and asks why boring, unoriginal, impersonal work requires colourful personalities and brand names to sell it.

Note: I was invited to send Visual Poetry works to the Symposium on "Conceptual Poetry and its Others," along with artist's statements regarding the works. As a participant, to express my sense of and thankfulness for this, I decided it would be nice to include also a brief statement re the "Conceptual Poetics" under discussion. [...]

a few examples of further questions among ever so many more--

Why is "boring, unoriginal, impersonal work" promoted by "colorful personalities," just like any other product? Does this not create "a Line" produced by a Brand Name, the Original Author possessed of an "originality" in creating this "radical, new form"--to be marketed as "the latest thing," for the development of new jobs in English/creative Writing Programs--the "newest way" to "make an impression" by the "original" creation of an impersonal boringness? Is this in itself a "new way" of mass producing standardized and conforming "conceptual poets" who "carry on" the work of the Great Originators?

Are monkeys controlling robotic arms with their thoughts on the way to creating a Conceptual poetry?--

What are the interrelationships of possibilities of Conceptual Poetry for use in Propaganda and advertising? For starting wars, altering Wikipedia, sending out false news items and etc etc-- [...]

I find in thinking with what a Conceptual Poetry might be, that I've begun with a point of view of paradox. That is, considering the conceptual to be the absence of a material object, a conceptual poetry would be the absence of the poem as a "realization" of its "idea." If "the poem" as an object is not to be realized, in what ways may it then be said to "exist"?

[Two thousand words are cut from the foot, arguing that a concept realised as an object ceases to be conceptual: "Are the words then simply a gravestone or monument to a now absent concept?" Seven posts, sixteen thousand words, none of them his, and every one an announcement. Joshua Kotin has a Chicago Review summer issue on Barbara Guest; Justin Katko announces New Critical Documents in its own idiom: "Do crease fake a road map to bead this thin portent of a mass itch". Geoffrey Gatza announces Homage to the Last Avant-Garde from Shearsman in a message with nothing in it. In October Steve McLaughlin announces Issue 1, an anthology of poems attributed to three thousand poets who did not write them, and Alan Sondheim answers at seven thousand words.]

110. — Maria Damon Sat, 4 Oct 2008 21:39 ↑ [Index](#)

Issue 1 attached software-generated poems to more than three thousand named poets, living and dead, without their knowledge, and released the result as a 3,785-page PDF. The bracketed lines are from Stephen McLaughlin's announcement. Damon's is the mildest of the responses on the list; others reached for the language of identity theft, and Alan Sondheim for that of Yasusada.

“Announcing the release of Issue 1, edited by Stephen McLaughlin and Jim Carpenter. Now available here as a 3,785-page PDF. [...] This issue features new poems by Nada Gordon, Evelyn Reilly, Julianna Mundim, Emmy Catedral, Enid Bagnold, Richard Siken, Stephen Ratcliffe, Michael Gottlieb, Jodie Childers, Norman J. Olson, Brent Hendricks, Sean Kilpatrick, Tom McCarthy, Stacy Doris, Michael Rerick, Corrinne Clegg Hales, Mark Decarteret, Hadewijch of Antwerp, Darren Wershler-Henry, Letitia Trent, Debra Di Blasi, Laura Elrick, Bruna Mori, Popahna Brandes, Robert Sheppard, Diana Magallan, Kristine Danielson, Ed Higgins, Drew Gardner, Kyle Kaufman, Matthew Thorburn, Tiel Aisha Ansari, Christopher Wells, Vanessa Place, Simon Pettet, Grace Vajda, John Bennett, Ian Patterson, Joseph Hutchison, John Cotter, Cheryl Lawson Walker, Scott Esposito, Jason Nelson, Daniel Kane, Kimo Armitage, Alan May, J.D. Nelson, Bob Hershon, Jennifer Karmin, Kim Rosenfield, Nathan Austin, Pearl Pirie, Rosmarie Waldrop, Tara Betts, Donald Revell, Jim Ryals, Danuta Kean, Jeff VanderMeer, Alfredo Bonanno, Irene Latham, Michael Hennesy, Dick Higgins, John Hanson, Billy Merrell, Sam Ladkin, Jeff Ward, Debra Jenks, K. Lorraine Graham, Kenji Okuhira, Sean MacInnes, Adam Seelig, Steve Halle, David Mus, Monique Wittig, Joyelle McSweeney, Daniel E. Levenson, Luke Daly, Henry Thoreau, John Palattella, Abby Trenaman, Kristen Taylor, Vassily Kamensky, David Jhave Johnston, Gene Tanta, Cate Marvin, Alison Roth, Shad Marsh, Asher Ghaffar, Henry Gould, Justin Theroux, Susan Grimm, Bernard Wilson, Ateet Tuli, Laura Moriarty, Mark McMorris, Cruickshank-Hagenbuckle, Jeffrey Cyphers Wright, William Shakespeare, Nick Trinen, Daphne Gottlieb, Magdalena Zurawski, A.K. Arkadin, Mattheue Roth, Douglas J. Belcher, After Bitahatini, Neil Schmitz, Liz Henry, Tom Hansen, Craig Saper, Pris Campbell, Afua-Kafi Akua, Amish Trivedi, Chris Hutchinson, Cath Vidler, Sarah Weinman, A.E. Stallings, Robin Blaser, Roland Prevost, Mac Wellman, Steven Schroeder, Joy Garnett, Mark Lamoureux, Julie Clark, Bob Garlitz, Jeff Hamilton, Kara Dorris, Maureen Thorson, Irv Muchnick, Frank O'Hara, Robin Magowan, C. Allen Rearick, A. J. Patrick Liszkiewicz, Tony Leuzzi, Bhanu Kapil, Sage U`ilani Takehiro, Shellie Zacharia, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Camille Martin, Eliot Weinberger, David Nemeth, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Iris Smyles, Bertolt Brecht, David Forbes, Colin Herd, Sergio Bessa, Zach Wollard, Adam Ford, Claudia Keelan, Hank Sotto, [...] Lawrence Lessig, Allyssa Wolf, and Snezana Zabic.

hey i'll try adding "my" poem to my CV at "merit review" time to see if i can actually cash in on it for a better raise...that would be really great payback for

having lent my name, however unwittingly, to this enterprise. i was sorta flattered, like, now i'm a "real" poet if someone's trying to fake me...

[Five posts, seventy-seven hundred words, none of them his, all of them downstream of the fake anthology. Murat Nemet-Nejat writes on "the delight and anger towards the process", and returns in November on appropriation, quoting David back to him: "so that quoaition may become a form of erasure". Geoffrey Gatza reports that Sarah Palin "made a viscous attack on America's cultural landscape" and named BlazeVOX in it. Brian Clements, asked for accessible poetry, recommends Nada Gordon, Evelyn Reilly and a long run of the Issue 1 names. Steve Halle posts a series of "Traductions" from Homage to the Last Avant-Garde at Seven Corners.]

111. — Wystan Curnow Sun, 2 Nov 2008 01:01 ↑ [Index](#)

Curnow, a New Zealand poet and art critic writing from Auckland, answers Murat Nemet-Nejat, Tom Orange, Barry Schwabsky and David Chirot on the second day of the appropriation thread. It is the first time on the list that Johnson is enrolled in a programme rather than accused of a stunt. Curnow objects that the term flattens what it names: Chaucer is a great appropriator only if a modern law of authorship is read back on to him.

Murat, Tom, Barry, David, As we are seeing "appropriation"'s precursors are varied and commonplace, to the extent that the term itself appears reductive--Chaucer's only 'a great appropriator' if his practice is presumed to be informed by a modern idea (and its attention laws and prohibitions)of authorship. I am more interested in the varieties of contemporary 'appropriation' --it seems such a dumbly provocative term, so post-modern fer crissakes--which is the way Murat's remarks about recent 'attacks on authorship and orginality' are pointed. The value of a geneology of appropriation, or a pre-history of authorship seems to be that it may help generate a typology of current practices and possibilities in which re-use, refried, is understood as more like the norm than the exception. Wystan

112. — David Chirot Sun, 2 Nov 2008 14:10 ↑ [Index](#)

Chirot answers Nemet-Nejat on the difference between a translation and an "after". Spicer's After Lorca, his own After Rimbaud's Illuminations and the Yasusada notebooks' "After Spicer" stand on the same footing: works written out of long immersion in another poet, offered as love and thanks rather than as the carriage of a text from one language into another.

Dear Murat--

Many thanks for your response.

First-- Spicer's work, like a series i've done--is "After"--which is to say--not a translation.

I do not know really, but as far as I am aware, the Spicer "After Lorca" aren't translations at all, nor are my "After Rimbaud's Illuminations"-- nor would be Yasusada's "After Spicer"--

they are works which are inspired by aspects of the originals, with which one lives intensely for a period of time, whether themselves (originals) as in fact already translations, or one's own readings in the originals, without having the desire to translate them, but rather use them as a means to show one's love, respect, thanks, to the other poet, and at the same time, launch what one has been inspired by into the trajectories of one's own work, life, spirit etc--

I agree with you about the form of translation which Benjamin writes of. My point is that in thing as complex and myriad faceted--or hydra headed!--as translation and appropriation, rather than decide on solely one approach at the expense of investigating several or many as possible of the others, is to in a sense make too narrow an aperture for, my one so put it, "Illumination."

Translations can lie as easily as any other form of writing--a translator knows the correct meaning, and, not liking it, as it does not fit in with the "message" which the translator wants the text to bear--ignores that and instead chooses another word, set of words, phrases, etc--and so alters completely the meaning of the original.

113. — Murat Nemet-Nejat Mon, 3 Nov 2008 08:24: [↑ Index](#)

November 2008. Nemet-Nejat answers Chirot on the preposition in Spicer's After Lorca: "after" means not only in imitation of or in homage to but in pursuit of, and carries a predatory sense. A true translation, he argues, is an act of violence against the autonomy of the original, tearing it up as collage does. He asks whether Chirot knows Eliot Weinberger's essay "Notes on Translation".

David,

At the bifurcation they part Y one sling, yet in my heart one sling shot.

The word "After" in Spicer's poem does not only mean "in imitation of" or "in homage to." It also means "in pursuit of; it has a predatory connotation. In fact,

Lorca's reactions from the grave to Spicer's solicitations is one of annoyance." A true translation is always an act of violence -loving or otherwise, that is the issue- against the autonomy of the original. It literally must tear it up -fragment it- to open it up to a future life, the life of the text. This fragmentation does have the elements of collage. Are you familiar with Eliot Weinberger's essay, "Notes On Translation" [?] of about fifteen years ago about which Kent Johnson wrote an article which appears in the last issue of ALTA's *The Translation Review*?

In your comments, you focus on what a text loses in translation, through misreading (intentional or not) what gets silenced . My feeling is you are particularly thinking of the Guantanamo translations. One should also think of what it gains: what starts as a "complete," closed text opens and becomes a potential one, which is its life through time.

A bad translator sees, detects no resistance in the original. If so, as you state, the "philosophy" of the translator turns the original into a text totally in the translator's image. That is an act of exploitation, the very reverse of what I am talking about. An original resists to be translated. That's why Benjamin says what gives a text translability is distance. The translator translates, integrates that distance. That is why a translation has a tangential relationship to the second language, the distance, expressed as style, existing as an ideal, a template of potentiality for it.

Ciao,

Murat

[Ten months without him: twenty-four posts, eighteen thousand words, from November 2008 to September 2009. David Chiro, Murat Nemet-Nejat and Wystan Curnow work through a long thread on appropriative poetics; Geoffrey Gatza sends the seventh annual Thanksgiving menu poem; John Tranter announces Jacket 37. His name arrives in other people's posts instead. Christopher Leland Winks tells Dean Brink, who is looking for poetry on the American occupation of Iraq, to check out Lyric Poetry After Auschwitz; Jeffrey Side announces Day; and CA Conrad asks, "Has everyone had a look at this latest article by Kent Johnson about The New Chicago School of Poetry?"]

114. — Jonathan Ball *Mon, 28 Sep 2009 21:45* ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson's Day — copies of Kenneth Goldsmith's 836-page retyping of a single day's New York Times, bought from the publisher and overlaid with stickers assigning authorship and copyright to Johnson — was announced on the list on 26 September. Goldsmith, who runs the UbuWeb archive, had made that retyping the model case for what he called uncreative writing. Ball's is the first substantive response, and sets the terms.

I presume the "blurbs" in support of Johnson's book are also appropriated or fabricated. This is a clever joke, but I don't see how it is conceptually interesting. Unlike Goldsmith's DAY, which recontextualized text in an "uncreative" gesture (a Duchampian raising of "journalistic" prose into the realm of poetry), and thus produced a rich text, replete with previously dormant meaning, Johnson's DAY does little more than repeat the gesture, and thus the only significance it seems to hold is to question the validity of assigning such a work to any single, particular author, something already implicit in Goldsmith's project and only superficially interesting in the first place.

115. — Bobby Baird *Wed, 30 Sep 2009 09:28* ↑ [Index](#)

Baird edited Digital Emunction, the blog where Day had first been advertised. His question — who is permitted to be uncreative, and by whose leave — is the strongest case made for the book, and he presses it by holding Ball to Goldsmith's own rejection of originality as a measure of value. He notes in passing that Johnson cannot reply.

It's interesting, Jonathan, that you'd defend Goldsmith's DAY (and dismiss Johnson's DAY) in the name of originality ("produced a rich text, replete with previously dormant meaning"), when this is the regime of value that Goldsmith explicitly and repeatedly rejects. (See Goldsmith, internet, passim.) I presume that you, like many other people, accept that rejection as a pose, a mere mockery of public modesty, even though Goldsmith, apparently, does not see it that way. ("In fact, every time I have to proofread [my books] before sending them off to the publisher, I fall asleep repeatedly. You really don't need to read my books to get the idea of what they're like; you just need to know the general concept.")

Or maybe you take Goldsmith's word for it that "In conceptual writing the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an author uses a

conceptual form of writing, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair." If that's the case, then tell me, please, what makes Goldsmith's idea interesting? Given that the same idea has been had, and executed, by thousands of others, including Richard Prince, Sherri Levine, and anyone who's "written" a found poem, why should we see Goldsmith's project as any more or any less interesting than Johnson's?

But here's a thought: what if the dismissal of Kent's DAY as "superficially interesting" was exactly the point of his project? I don't say that it is; Kent can speak to that (or could, if he weren't banned from this list, though I'm sure he'll find a way to participate somehow). But what if? What if one took the annoyed response to Johnson's DAY as exactly the reaction he wanted, since it proved the fact—which you may take to be obvious, but which no one seems willing to publicly acknowledge—that there is a bright line between the kind of people whose uncreative writing allows them to reap every reward the culture industry has to offer—publication, glossy magazine interviews, fellowships and tenured academic positions—and those whose **identical** uncreative writing gets them shunned as wannabes? And what if that bright line has nothing to do with the work, or the ideas behind the work, and everything to do with the fact that one has gone to the right schools, lived in the right cities, and licked the right boots? I think you'd have to admit that it's a superficially interesting thought, at the very least.

Bobby

[Sixteen posts, nineteen hundred words, none of them his: the middle of the thread headed "'Day' by Kent Johnson", arguing his retyping of Kenneth Goldsmith against Goldsmith's retyping of the newspaper. Mairead Byrne remembers where she first heard of it: "I think I read it in the New York Times actually! Could it be?" Murat Nemet-Nejat asks "How come when Goldsmith copies the entire New York Times, he is a conceptual artist; but if one copied the whole text of a Paul Auster novel, for example, one will be hit with a law suit?" Maria Damon ends it: "in my experience, which admittedly is limited, kent johnson isn't funny."]

116. — Jeffrey Side *Fri, 2 Oct 2009 07:13* ↑ [Index](#)

Off the list since February 2000, Johnson answers through Side, who relays a comment Johnson had posted at Digital Emunction. The bracketed words are his. He argues the case through the theorists of the readymade — Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster, who take exception to Peter Bürger's wholesale dismissal of the neo-avant-garde, against the Arthur Danto his interlocutor had quoted. "Kenny" is Goldsmith.

Kent asked me to post his response to someone on the Digital Emunction blog:

“OK, Bren—nen, but if it isn't, then what is it I might have plagiarized? I'm not saying I haven't, I'm just curi—ous what you mean.

“I see that you are think—ing about this at your blog in terms of recent art his—tory and theory, quot—ing Danto, and I think that's great (Kenny should think it's great, too, since he's sup—pos—edly all about reflec—tion and dis—cus—sion).

“In their writ—ings on the Duchampian ready—made and its neo-avant-garde recy—clings, I find crit—ics like Buchloh and Foster more inter—est—ing than Danto. Though they take strong excep—tion to Burger's whole—sale dis missal of the neo-avant-garde, they—re also very crit'i'cal of ways the great, orig'i'nal ready—made move has been cut and pasted ad infini—tum into the art market since, say, Nou—veau real—isme recy—cled ges—tures with this or that generic tweak or nov—elty, that is, emp—tied of any rad'i cal, anti-#8203;institutional charge ready-#8203;made, as it were, for rapid cap—ture and incor—po—ra—tion by the net—works of Museum Culture.

“This recy—cling, I'd say, is trans—par—ently the case with the work of Kenny Gold—smith (Gold—smith and Bok, to be sure, who despite their polemics for the ben'e'fits of ego-#8203;less uncreativity seem to have been drunk for the past few years on some kind of secret Author Func—tion Ego Juice, are quite exu—ber—antly open about their desire for the Museum). KG's work is uncreative and boring not just as affec—tive exten—sion of its pro—claimed poetic and ontological premises; it's uncre—ative and boring because it's so damn old hat: an attempted impor—ta—tion of decades- #8203;old ges—tures into a Po-#8203;Biz scene that, as Gold—smith him—self puts it, is forty years behind art, and thus likely (at least part of its crowd) to take his conceptual banal'i'ties as excit—ing and new. In some cir—cles, they call it snake oil.

“ But it’s MY Day, Bren—nen, that is truly new, you see. The Authen—tic Item. Because no one has ever done it quite like this before. I’ve taken his whole bookum and made it mine, in single deci—sive act. And doing so, I’ve put his pla—gia—rized bookum into the dust—bin of sub- ​poetic sub- ​ history. I am being both funny and seri—ous, in saying that. Dou—bled in my intent, so to speak, like the red- ​hot Doubled K poker that K. dream—ily men—tions in his blurb to my Day, where he acknowl—edges me, his mir—rored K, as his master. And it’s why he’s going to put my book up on UbuWeb.

“ And one more thing, though here I’m not kid—ding around: What they call Conceptual poetry? It’s forty years behind Broodthaers and Insti—tu tional Cri—tique.”

117. — Jonathan Ball *Fri, 2 Oct 2009 08:39* ↑ [Index](#)

Ball answers Side on the second day of the thread, restating the position Baird had challenged: that Day extends the rhetoric of a conceptualist like Goldsmith to its logical extreme rather than exposing it, that thievery as art and the questioning of authorship are dry notions by now, and that what makes Goldsmith’s books audacious is the poetic richness of the texts his method throws up.

Thanks Jeffrey, however I did read your post when you originally sent it around. My original point is to take issue with your statement, as I claim that there is nothing innovative or audacious about this appropriation by Johnson. Its conceptual value is not to earmark thievery as art, or to question categories of authorship --- both dry, boring notions by now --- but rather to extend to its logical extreme the rhetoric of a conceptualist like Goldsmith.

My point is that Goldsmith's rhetoric of conceptulist value being the only value is already dry and boring. What makes Goldsmith's texts, such as DAY, innovative and audacious works is the actual poetic richness of the texts produced under these "uncreative" constraints, not the their conceptualist underpinnings. Therefore, Johnson's act, aside from being hamfisted satire, is just "more of the same" insofar as conceptualist writing is concerned. Goldsmith makes use of conceptualist tactics to defamiliarize language (in this case the language of journalism and advertising) through a reframing in order to produce poetic texts. Johnson is taking a work of conceptualist poetry as his source, and turning it into more conceptualist poetry no such radical

defamiliarization of language has occurred (in other words, no poetry is produced through a shift of the text's framework).

Moreover, the act by Johnson will not lead to legal action --- Goldsmith suing over somebody stealing his previously stolen text the thought is absurd. The original act by Goldsmith is the only one subject to legal action. In any case, whether or not a poetic act is subject to legal action is no source or guarantor of its artistic value.

Jonathan

118. — Mairead Byrne *Fri, 2 Oct 2009 10:06* ↑ [Index](#)

Byrne had written two days earlier that "the charge was in the concept," a phrase Ball took up. Here she separates the two men by temperament rather than by argument: Goldsmith, who built the UbuWeb archive in the spirit of Abbie Hoffman's Steal This Book, she finds energizing; Johnson's work she finds mean and flimsy. The image of the policeman is the sharpest personal characterisation of Johnson in the whole archive after 2000.

Other aspects of the artistic practices of KG and KJ are worth considering. KG has brought Abbie Hoffman's Steal This Book to vital and extraordinary development in the stunning super-energizing panoramic UbuWeb. He's also an A1 performer: live, on paper, and conceptually. Ever seen/heard/sat under his Bern Porter piece? I agree with Maria that he's a LOT of fun. KJ is kinda fun too, and appeals just as heartily to some senses of humor as KG does to mine. The work often seems mean to me, not just mean-spirited but flimsy. A lot of what KG is doing is energizing the poetry world by importing and writing (in VERY large letters) ideas from the art world. KJ, to me, is a kind of policeman (CIA man?), setting off small bombs to injure poets, or at least crumple their horny toe-nails. This policeman is an upstanding citizen as teacher and translator though, maybe he even loves poetry there. But at night, he puts on his little cape, and runs round sticking needles into thingsYIKES now he's heading for me....

119. — Murat Nemet-Nejat *Fri, 2 Oct 2009 11:57* ↑ [Index](#)

"John" is a slip for Kent. Nemet-Nejat measures both books against Thoreau's night in jail, which he calls the first work of conceptual art in the United States, and finds that neither Goldsmith nor Johnson risks anything by his gesture. He is the only participant to set Day beside Doubled Flowering and find the later work wanting: the 1997 gesture cost its author something, the 2009 gesture nothing.

For me, Thoreau's going to jail for his civil disobedience (even if only for a day) is a piece of conceptual art. In fact, he may be the first conceptual artist, at least, in the United States. That act itself is followed by words, the essay "Civil Disobedience," which actually is a manifesto of conceptual gesture transformed into political act.

Let's face it, neither Goldsmith nor Johnson expect to go to jail for their acts. Both lack, I think, an element of risk. Therefore, essentially they become conversation pieces as conceptual works. On the other hand, *Doubled Flowering* is truly a conceptual gesture, and John has paid and is still paying a price for it.

I have a question: how many on this list has read Goldsmith's work through? Jonathan, have you read it through? I am curious how many of us are talking about works that we actually read? What does reading of a conceptual mean? Is it the same as any other reading? Jonathan, talking about the "richness" of Goldsmith's text, you are implying that you have read it through. Have you done so?

[Thirteen posts, twenty-seven hundred words, and he says nothing in any of them — one October day of the same thread, in which the list argues over him without him. Christopher Leland Winks calls it "Kent Johnson's taking the piss out of Kenneth Goldsmith"; Nick LoLordo answers: "Killing trees? Kent has merely killed a few stickers. It's Kenny who killed the trees." Alison Croggon objects: "You can't measure artistic courage by suability, or every tabloid journo would be Pound." Jeffrey Side, arguing for him three times, concludes that "people just don't like Kent". Steve Dalachinsky is unimpressed: "well none of that shit is poesie conceptual or not".]

120. — Herb Levy Sat, 3 Oct 2009 12:55 ↑ [Index](#)

Side and Nemet-Nejat had both argued that Johnson risked prosecution where Goldsmith did not. Levy, a composer and critic, answers with the practicalities: the copies were bought and not stolen, The Figures has its wholesale money from Amazon, and Goldsmith has every reason not to sue. His list of artists who were in fact sued or suppressed is the most exact contribution to the thread.

The only reason that I can imagine Johnson's act resulting in some kind of legal action, would be if the copies of the Figures edition of Day were stolen. & that doesn't seem to be the case.

My reading of this is that it has to be just about the safest "brave" action that anyone could make. Regardless of what Goldsmith may think of Johnson and this act, I think he's smart enough to understand any of the aesthetic & PR ramifications of Johnson's action and would be very, VERY unlikely to bother to sue. The Figures is getting whatever their wholesale price to Amazon is, so they have no reason to sue either.

This isn't about someone claiming to make an original one of a kind object that's an exact copy of another original one of a kind object. It's about someone buying a book, apparently at retail price (so Goldsmith and the Figures are getting paid already), and charging more for it with some added stickers.

In the software business, this is called "added value."

If there are ten people out there who want to spend \$7 extra for some stickers, a signature and an aesthetic concept, that's great. But that doesn't seem too much different to me than the fact that there are people who were willing to spend \$22 extra for the book without the stickers and a slightly different aesthetic concept. Because ANY of these people could have originally bought the NYTimes for that day for a buck or less, & they could still get a copy of it from the NYTimes for less than the price of the Figures book.

This isn't Robert Rauschenberg erasing a real drawing by Willem de Kooning and exhibiting the erased paper as his own work. It's not Kathy Acker getting sued by Arthur Hailey for using large chunks of his novels in her own work. It's not John Oswald reconfiguring music by the Beatles, Michael Jackson, etc and being forced to destroy all the undistributed copies of the recordings. It's not Todd Haynes being forced to stop exhibiting and distributing Superstar for it's use of music by the Carpenters.

If Johnson wants to make a brave gesture concerning authorship and copyright, let him try to sell copies of books by Dan Brown or Patricia Cornwall as his own work.

This is about one relatively esoteric artist trying to make some noise while pulling the chain of another relatively esoteric artist. Sure, Goldsmith has some more visibility than Johnson, but neither of these guys have any visibility in the mass culture we live in the midst of. We're talking about artists that may be known to a couple of thousand people in a world with a population of 6 billion.

121. — Wystan Curnow Tue, 6 Oct 2009 00:29 ↑ [Index](#)

Curnow, in Auckland, answers the Australian poet Alison Croggon point by point. She had objected to the smartarse complacency of the publicity and to a transformation that only shifts language from literature to more literature; he takes the wrapping to be deliberate, a faux-avant register strategically judged, and proposes the comparison the thread had not made: not which appropriation is more original, but what Day does inside each man's work.

Alison wrote: 'what's mostly getting up my nose is the smartarse complacency of the publicity, which is, I guess, the point of the whole exercise.' It is part of the point, but not the whole point. But it's a separate point, 'Conceptualist poetry' comes comes rhetorically wrapped, because I read it as faux avant wrapping, and take its serio-comic register as strategically acute, I do not find it complacent, and it does not get up my nose, let alone my smart arse.

Then she wrote: 'the supposedly radical transformation is not radical at all, it just shifts the language from literature to more literature'. True enough, except that there's much to be said for, and has been said of, shifting language from literature to more literature. To start with what is of interest in a comparison of Johnson's appropriation with Goldsmith's appropriation, relies less on the matter of 'originality' than on the comparison of the role Day plays in Goldsmith's oeuvre with the role it acquires within Johnson's.

Wystan

122. — Christopher Leland Winks *Mon, 5 Oct 2009 10:37* ↑ [Index](#)

Winks had written three days earlier that Goldsmith "richly deserves" the taking of the piss. Here he supplies the genealogy neither party invoked: Isidore Ducasse, who rewrote Pascal and Vauvenargues line by line in the Poésies, and the détournement formulated in the 1950s by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn. His is the thread's most balanced verdict — the gesture is farce, and the object of the farce is real.

None of this goes as far as Guy Debord's "Hurlements en faveur de Sade" in terms of provocative anti-aesthetic moves, nor does it even approach the theory of "détournement" formulated in the 1950s by Debord and Asger Jorn, following Isidore Ducasse's systematic practice of creative plagiarism (of Pascal, Vauvenargues, etc.) in the "Poésies" from the second half of the 19th century. Maybe it's the case, following the fashionable phrase, that "everything old is new again," but to me it seems like literary history repeating itself as farce. And Kent Johnson, whose work I admire, is certainly a good *farceur* who at least indicates the fundamentally farcical nature of po-biz and oxymoronic "writing communities" populated by herds of independent minds.

123. — Jeffrey Side *Mon, 5 Oct 2009 21:00* ↑ [Index](#)

Johnson's second direct answer of the movement, again relayed by Side. The bracketed words are his, including the opening sentence about being unable to post, and the typo he notices and keeps. He answers the charges that the book is trivial, a tempest in a teapot, a gesture devoid of risk, counting the indignation it has raised at Poetics and the two other major poetry lists as evidence against them. Croggon he answers by name.

Jeffrey Side wrote, kindly offering to send in a response by me to recent posts here. It would be easier to post directly, of course, but that doesn't seem to be possible.

Just to say I'm a bit bemused by the many earnest comments (at Poetics, at the other two major poetry lists, and at the initial first announcement of the work here [I just noticed the typo, I'll keep it] www.digitalemunction.com/2009/09/22/advertiseme...) that dismiss my new book as "trivial" in nature, as a "tempest in a teapot," as a gesture devoid of "risk," and so on. You have to admit: For a "publication" so trifling, the book sure seems to be generating a lot of indignation!

The thing is, these comments on the work's triviality are quite correct and obviously so. And I am sort of disappointed that part of its conceptual point seems to have been missed by so many. Alison Croggon's "yawn," for example, is perfectly poignant, inasmuch as she seems unawares that the Goldsmith wing of "Conceptualism" feverishly advocates Boredom as a poetic principle! So why my book would be dismissed because it out-bores KG's is beyond me. The muse that paid me a visit, you see, *instructed me* to be boring and to really go all the way, not just halfway, as with the case of KG's dime a dozen neo-readymade move. My Day aims to be, precisely, a dialectical advance in the concept of boredom. Which doesn't mean it's original (well, OK, maybe it is a little bit), or risky, or worth the paper it's not even written on.

I hope that helps clarify things.

Still, it's pleasing to see there are as many poets expressing enthusiasms about my book as there are those in a snit about it. Today, for example, Charles Zito posted the following comment at Digital Emunction, and I share it, eager that the many of you who are avant-garde academics will use it as he plans to use it. Perhaps after the full-page ad comes out next month, in a publication widely available at your local chain bookstore, more of you will? I hope so, as sales of the book (of which there already have been an unexpected few!) will help the continuing work of BlazeVOX, to which fabulous press I am donating all royalties. Anyway, here's what Charles Zito wrote:

“After watching a video on Kenny G, I wondered how far this conceptualism, with its lack of concern for originality or copyrights, could go. That it has resulted in this “reproduction” is truly entertaining. I just wanted to let you know that, as a result, your accomplishment will be discussed in my graduate poetry workshop. Thought you might enjoy that knowledge.”

Further, just as an informational note (and I promise I am not making this up), I have heard in the past couple days that there are tentative plans in the UK for the publication of a *_Day Variorum_*, both texts, KG's and KJ's, in one volume, set in parallel columns for ease of comparison. Hopefully, some of the hefty copies will be adopted in future seminars at those new citadels of Conceptualism, U. of Penn and Princeton.

124. — Alison Croggon Tue, 6 Oct 2009 13:06 ↑ [Index](#)

Croggon, addressing Curnow and answering Johnson's statement of the previous day, states the objection that closes the thread: a work built so that every response confirms it, and that has all its answers in advance, cannot be argued with. She grants that the provocation succeeded on her, and holds that the whole of it is literary politics. Eleven days and some eighty-five posts after it began, the Day exchange ends here.

I can't believe how my fingers itch reading this stuff, the way it makes you want to open your mouth and comment, although you know it would be better not to. And then you regret it. And here I am again. I guess in that way Kent's action is a hugely successful provocation.

I was never exercised with its "originality". It's a complacent action because it has all the answers in advance, and any criticism is instantly self-cancelling. I think that's deadly. It's boring because all it is about is literary politics, all that strategic acuteness you mention, as if there isn't a world out there (yes, I am perfectly aware of Kent's background and involvement, and am grateful to him for introducing me to contemporary Russian poetry - I know he can do more interesting things). It presents itself a risk - or at least Jeffrey is presenting it as risk, to be fair I'm not sure Kent is - when it involves no risk at all (it would have been much more risky, and maybe if the question of contemporary authorship was the issue would have had more point, as someone else said, to plagiarise Dan Brown). As if Goldsmith is going to bother to sue. I do think the fact that the book is simply a matter of putting stickers over KG's name is funny, because - as I said in some comment earlier - it's a better joke if the book doesn't exist at all, and it clearly doesn't. But it takes about two minutes to get the punchline, and then I find myself here, being part of the performance, so that Jeffrey can go "aha! you see? what an interesting literary controversy!"

Jeffrey, of course KG "recontextualises" the language in DAY, whether he says he does or not. He takes the text of the NYT and puts it between the covers of a book. If that's not recontextualising I don't know what is. And of course that "defamiliarises" it. I've seen Goldsmith perform his found texts (is this what is meant by "not reading" them?) and it's far from boring, whatever his own intentions - more a sudden levitation of the mundane and unheard into vivid life. I guess this is also a performance of sorts, but really, what for? It assumes a whole lot of things about literature and then goes out to prove them, like bad science. And here I am helping it along. Mouth zipping up now.

xA

[Forty-nine posts and close to fourteen thousand words over twenty-seven months. The Day argument runs on without him. Aldon Nielsen confesses he needs new glasses: "I read that as 'nerds of independent minds'". Jonathan Ball puts the objection plainly, "But if the concept is all, why execute it?", and Mark DuCharme cuts it short, "No. Because it's just another CONCEPT. Get it?" Geoffrey Gatza posts a production film of the book. Thereafter Johnson appears as a link Jeffrey Side forwards, an interview and the first reviews of A Question Mark Above the Sun, and the naming thins out and stops.]

125. — Freind, William Joseph Mon, 23 Jan 2012 21:08 ↑ [Index](#)

Freind had announced his own edited collection of essays on the poetry of Araki Yasusada the day before. Here he advertises Johnson's Doggerel for the Masses in a series of invented anecdotes, each about a borrowed or stolen identity — Kathy Acker lifting her wardrobe from the neighbours' clotheslines, Brion Gysin placing poems as W. S. Merwin. The quotation marks around the author's name in the last line are Freind's, and are the point.

In the 1980s Kathy Acker changed her name to Marjorie Lord and moved to Massapequa, NY. Her entire wardrobe consisted of outfits she'd lifted from her neighbors' clotheslines. Once, she forced a window in search of a burgundy pants suit. As part of her work release program, she reorganized the card catalogue at the local library, thus ensuring that each author was properly denominated.

Brion Gysin submitted poems under the name of "W.S. Merwin" to Antaeus, Poetry and the Paris review, all of which were accepted. The actual Merwin was so pleased by the work that he claimed it for his own, publishing the poems in his collection "Opening the Hand."

Willem de Kooning was an inveterate prank caller. (These were the days before caller ID.) Robert Rauschenberg, who famously could not take a joke, was one of his frequent targets, and Rauschenberg responded by making weekly trips to the Dutch master's house in East Hampton where he left bags of burning dog excrement on the porch.

Craig Dworkin might have said "Signing a text that one hasn't written will surely become less remarkable, and the next frontier of propriety will materialize when conceptual writing antagonizes the institutions of poetry by signing for others under texts that they have not written." Whether he meant it remains to be seen.

Just out from BlazeVox: Doggerel for the Masses: A Post-Scandal BlazeVox Booke by "Kent Johnson."

126. — Jennifer Karmin *Mon, 8 Oct 2012 13:01* ↑ [Index](#)

The last posting in the archive to name Johnson at length: a Chicago reading series announcement, listing him with Quraysh Ali Lansana and Daniela Olszewska under the title "Person/Persona: Are You Yours". A Question Mark above the Sun, which argues that Kenneth Koch wrote the poem published as Frank O'Hara's "A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island", had been threatened with suit and then honoured; an expanded second edition had appeared a fortnight earlier.

Red Rover Series {readings that play with reading}

Experiment #58: Person/Persona: Are You Yours

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13th 7pm / doors lock 7:30pm

Featuring: Kent Johnson Quraysh Ali Lansana Daniela Olszewska

With guest co-host Davis Schneiderman

at Outer Space Studio 1474 N. Milwaukee Ave Chicago, Illinois suggested donation \$4

logistics -- near CTA Damen blue line third floor walk up not wheelchair accessible

KENT JOHNSON has published more than two dozen books as poet, translator, and editor. His most recent, released just two weeks back, is an expanded second edition of *A Question Mark above the Sun: Documents on the Mystery Surrounding a Famous Poem "by" Frank O'Hara* (Starcherone/Dzanc), whose first, fine-press version appeared in late 2010 despite pointed legal warnings. Last December, it was chosen as a "2011 Book of the Year" by the *Times Literary Supplement*. He's read numerous times in Chicago over the years, and is pleased to do so again for the venerable Red Rover Series. He lives in Freeport, Illinois.

QURAYSH ALI LANSANA is author of five poetry books, three textbooks, a children's book, editor of eight anthologies, and coauthor of a book of pedagogy.

[Two hundred and eighty words are cut from the foot: the remainder of the contributors' biographies, a note that the series, founded in 2005, is curated with Laura Goldstein and that "Each event is designed as a reading experiment", and the November and December

listings.]

Kent Johnson

1955 – 2022

Kent Johnson was born on 23 June 1955 and died on 25 October 2022, at home, of cancer. No source records where he was born. By 1961 his family was in Montevideo, and he lived in Uruguay through 1971, returning for a further stretch in 1975 and 1976, the first two years of the civil-military dictatorship — the country he wrote about on the rare occasions when he wrote about himself. His politics were formed there and were Trotskyist for a decade afterwards — he described himself once as “an ex-Trotskyist railroad mechanic” — and in 1980 and again in 1983 he went to Nicaragua as a volunteer literacy instructor in the rural zones; in 1985, he told the list in passing, he served in the San Jose state farm militia in northern Managua, “even if I did wet my pants the one time we came under [heavy] fire.” The literary result was *A Nation of Poets* (1985), his translation of the Sandinista poetry workshops.

He took his graduate degree at Bowling Green State University under the poet Howard McCord — the same Howard McCord who appears, transposed and fictionalised, inside the Yasusada correspondence, a joke almost nobody was placed to catch. An essay of about 1987, written under McCord and against him, was among the first defences of Language writing from outside that circle, and brought him letters from Bob Perelman, Michael Palmer and Marjorie Perloff, “out of which began for me a sporadic but very fruitful intellectual association with her” — an association that would matter a decade later. The early books are anthologies and translations: *Waves of Drifting Snow* (Ox Head, 1986); *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry*, edited with Craig Paulenich (Shambhala, 1990), itself later attacked on this list as an exercise in the orientalism Yasusada was accused of; and *Third Wave: The New Russian Poetry*, edited with Stephen Ashby (Michigan, 1992). In 1989 he travelled to Leningrad with the Language poets. From 1991 he taught English and Spanish at Highland Community College in Freeport, Illinois, and there he stayed; in 2004 the Illinois Community College Board of Trustees named him State Teacher of the Year. He was punctilious about the rank: “when you teach at a community college (even with tenure) you are an instructor, not a ‘Professor.’”

Araki Yasusada — a Hiroshima survivor, born 1907, widowed by the bomb, dead of cancer in 1972 — first appeared in Rod Smith's *Aerial* in 1990, and over six years in *First Intensity*, *Grand Street*, *Conjunctions* and, in a 1996 supplement, *American Poetry Review*. Wesleyan had the book under contract. Johnson was the clearing-house, the man to whom editors wrote and, afterwards, the man from whom they demanded their fees back. Emily Nussbaum's report in *Lingua Franca* made the fabrication public in November 1996; Wesleyan cancelled; Roof published *Doubled Flowering: From the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada* entire in 1997. His account never moved. The writings were by Tosa Motokiyu, who had written some ninety-five per cent of them, who had died of cancer, who had asked for anonymity, and whose name was itself a pseudonym; Johnson's own contribution ran to about ten pages; he was executor, not author. "I am not Yasusada," he said. Against him stood the poems he had published in *Ironwood* in 1986 as Ogiwara Miyamori, and Perloff's observation that whatever the truth of Motokiyu he was "at the very least the middleman and facilitator." The attribution has been treated as settled ever since by nearly everyone who has written on it, and rests on no document at all.

He posted here in thirty-three months, first in December 1996, last directly in February 2000, with two further posts relayed by the listowner that June; he is written about in a hundred and fifty-nine. What the affair did to his thinking is plainest in a sentence he wrote to this list in February 1998, which would organise the rest of his working life: "I would reject the argument that 'empirically verifiable' authorial claim is some kind of essential index of personal and political responsibility."

The work after the list divides between translation, which he did with great seriousness and no visible irony, and satire, which he escalated. With Forrest Gander he brought the Bolivian Jaime Saenz into English in *Immanent Visitor* (California, 2002) and *The Night* (Princeton, 2007); he edited *Hotel Lautréamont: Contemporary Poetry from Uruguay* (Shearsman, 2011). On the other side stand *Also, with My Throat, I Shall Swallow Ten Thousand Swords* (Combo, 2005), which extended the Yasusada archive rather than closing it; *Lyric Poetry After Auschwitz* (Effing, 2005), the Abu Ghraib poems that produced the second great quarrel of his career; *Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets* (BlazeVOX, 2005), which insulted most of the people likely to review it; *Homage to the Last Avant-Garde* (Shearsman, 2008); *Day* (2010), the conceptual gesture aimed at conceptual writing that occupied this list for two months in the autumn of 2009, before the book existed; *I Once Met* (2015); and

Because of Poetry, I Have a Really Big House (Shearsman, 2020). *A Question Mark Above the Sun* (Punch Press, 2011; expanded, Starcherone, 2012) argued that Kenneth Koch wrote “A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island” and left it among Frank O'Hara's papers as an act of love; the two estates and Random House sent cease-and-desist letters to the micro-press, and Johnson printed the refusals and replaced the quotations with visible redactions. From 2016 to 2020, with Michael Boughn, he ran *Dispatches from the Poetry Wars*, the two of them signing as Fric and Frac.

He was survived by his wife, Deb, and two sons. A last book, *Nuper Verba [Late Words]*, containing versions of Horace he had been posting to Facebook in the spring of 2022, was with Shearsman when he died. His publisher called him American poetry's “foremost gadfly and its anti-institutional conscience”; Jeremy Noel-Tod, a week after his death, called him “a unique, enigmatic, humane, funny, needling and generous figure.” He left no statement about *Doubled Flowering*. Eric Powell's formulation is the most honest that has been offered: “Kent never publicly admitted authorship, but it's become something of an open secret (perhaps incorrectly, and I suspect that there's more to be discovered).” Quotations given a date are from this archive; the rest of the record here rests on his own author notes, on Nussbaum and Perloff, and on the memorial notices by Powell, Paul Nelson and Noel-Tod. None of them names his birthplace.

Contributor Notes

Notes on the contributors, drawn where possible from their own posts to the list. Where an identification could not be reliably made it has been omitted rather than guessed. Johnson is not among them; his own note is the section before this one.

Alexander, Christopher Poet and editor, then in Buffalo; he signed variously as Christopher Alexander and Christopher W. Alexander.

Baird, Bobby Editor of *Digital Emunction*, where *Day* was first advertised.

Ball, Jonathan Canadian poet and critic, of Winnipeg.

Bellamy, Dodie Poet and novelist of the New Narrative circle, San Francisco; editor with Kevin Killian of *Mirage*.

Belz, Aaron Poet and critic.

Bernstein, Charles Poet and critic; co-founder of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. He started this list in late 1993 and moderated it.

Brink, Dean A. Then a doctoral student in East Asian languages at the University of Chicago; later a scholar of Japanese and Taiwanese poetry.

Bromige, David (1933-2009) British-born poet long resident in Sonoma County, California; taught at Sonoma State University.

Byrne, Mairead Irish poet resident in the United States; taught at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Chapman, Lee (1946-2020) Editor of *First Intensity*, one of four magazines that printed Yasusada poems before the book appeared.

Chirot, David (1953-2021) Visual poet, critic and archivist of Milwaukee, who signed variously as David Chirot and David-Baptiste Chirot.

Conrad, Eric Then teaching at the University of Missouri.

Croggon, Alison Australian poet, novelist and theatre critic, of Melbourne.

Curnow, Wystan New Zealand poet, art critic and curator; taught at the University of Auckland.

Damon, Maria Poet and critic; taught at the University of Minnesota, later at Pratt. Among the list's most continuous presences.

Davis, Jordan New York poet and editor, associated with *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

Debrot, Jacques Poet and critic; Johnson's collaborator on the "Dear Lacan" letters.

Finch, Annie Poet, translator and metrist; editor of *A Formal Feeling Comes* (1994) and *After New Formalism* (1999).

Freind, William Joseph Critic; editor of *Chrysanthemums and Scubadivers: Essays on the Poetry of Araki Yasusada*, and taught at Rowan University.

Gatza, Geoffrey Poet and publisher; founder of BlazeVOX Books, Buffalo, and Johnson's publisher.

- Glass, Jesse** American poet long resident in Japan, where he taught at Meikai University.
- Gudding, Gabriel** Poet and essayist; taught at Illinois State University.
- Herron, Patrick** Poet and programmer, of North Carolina.
- Johnson, Kent** Poet, translator and critic; taught at Highland Community College, Freeport, Illinois. Named in connection with the Yasusada authorship since 1995.
- Julich, Jeffrey** New York poet.
- Karmin, Jennifer** Poet and educator, of Chicago; co-curator of the Red Rover Series.
- Kellogg, David** Critic; then in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Duke University, later at Northeastern.
- Killian, Kevin (1952-2019)** Poet, novelist and playwright of the New Narrative circle in San Francisco; co-author with Lewis Ellingham of a biography of Jack Spicer.
- Klein, Lucas** American translator of Chinese poetry, then resident in China.
- Latta, John** Poet and critic, of Ann Arbor; author of the blog *Isola di Rifiuti*.
- Levy, Herb** Composer and critic, of Seattle.
- Loden, Rachel** Poet, of Palo Alto, California.
- Loewen, Andrew** Canadian poet and student, writing from Vancouver.
- Magee, Michael** Poet, of Philadelphia; editor of *Combo* and a founding practitioner of flarf.
- Mead, Philip** Australian poet and critic, then at the University of Tasmania; a scholar of the Ern Malley affair.
- Mohammad, K. Silem** Then a doctoral student at the University of California, Santa Cruz; later a founding Flarf poet and editor of *Abraham Lincoln*.
- Nemet-Nejat, Murat** Turkish American poet, translator and essayist; editor of *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry*.
- Newman, Richard Jeffrey** Poet, essayist and translator from the Persian, chiefly of Saadi and Ferdowsi; taught at Nassau Community College.
- Nguyen, Hoa** Vietnamese American poet, then in San Francisco and shortly afterwards in Austin, where she co-edited *Skanky Possum*.
- Nielsen, Aldon** Poet and critic of African American and avant-garde poetics; later Kelly Professor of American Literature at Penn State.
- Nielsen, Aldon L.** Poet and critic of African American and avant-garde poetics; later Kelly Professor of American Literature at Penn State.
- Poetics List Administration** The listowner's account, used for announcements, for publishers' notices, and for relaying messages on behalf of members — including, in June 2000, two of Johnson's own.
- Prejsnar, Mark** Atlanta poet and labour activist.
- Pritchett, Patrick** Poet and critic; later taught at Harvard and Amherst. The passage he quotes here is Alan Sondheim's: writer, musician and theorist of codework, and the single

most prolific contributor to this list.

Quackenbush, Jason Poet.

Reeves, Michelle Poet.

Schwabsky, Barry Art critic and poet; art critic of *The Nation*.

Shoemaker, Steven Critic; a scholar of Objectivist poetics.

Side, Jeffrey British poet and editor of *The Argotist Online*.

Silliman, Ron Poet and critic; author of *Tjanting* and *The Alphabet*, and from 2002 of the blog that carried the argument off the list.

Smith, Dale Poet and critic; co-editor with Hoa Nguyen of *Skanky Possum*, Austin, which published Johnson and Alexandra Papaditsas's *The Miseries of Poetry* in 2003.

Smith, Rod Poet and editor of *Aerial*, which gave Yasusada his first appearance in print in 1990; proprietor of Bridge Street Books, Washington.

Stefans, Brian Kim Poet and critic; author of *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics* and proprietor of the Arras site. Teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles. He assembled the reading editions of this archive from which this series is drawn.

Weiss, Mark (1943-2023) Poet, translator from the Spanish and editor; his *The Whole Island: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry* appeared in 2009. He grew up in New York among the children of Communist Party members.

Wilson, Robert J Poet, writing from Hawai'i.

Winks, Christopher Leland Translator and critic of Caribbean literature; taught at Queens College, City University of New York.

Yu, Timothy Asian American poet and critic; later taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Zauhar, David Taught at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The Argument Off the List

The Boston Review forum, 1997

The charge that shaped everything printed in this volume was not made on this list. It was made in *Boston Review*, which ran Marjorie Perloff's essay "In Search of the Authentic Other" on 1 April 1997 and, in the summer issue, nine responses to it: Charles Simic's "Our Scandal", Hosea Hirata's "Longing for the Real", John Bradley's "What Is 'Authentic'?", Eliot Weinberger's "Three Footnotes", Stephen Owen's "The Paradox of Values", Greg Glazner and Jon Davis's "Bring Back Excellence", Arthur Vogelsang's letter, Perloff's reply, and "Displacements", signed by Juliana Chang, Walter K. Lew, Tan Lin, Eileen Tabios and John Yau.

The list read that forum closely and quoted from it for a decade. It quoted Simic on the ignorance of American writers, and Glazner and Davis on the return of excellence, and Weinberger on identity politics as career; Johnson answered Lew's paragraph on the Buddhist anthology at length, and Aldon Nielsen went through the responses one by one. What it did not do was print "Displacements", and a reader of the archive alone would come away with the impression that the case against the work was made by people who were, at best, quoted at second hand. It is printed here entire.

The same is true of Hosea Hirata's response, and in a way that touches this volume directly. When Roof Books announced *Doubled Flowering* in December 1997, the publisher's copy — forwarded to this list, and printed in Movement III — carried Hirata's last clause as a blurb: that the poetry is "evil, and eerily beautiful." It is a scholar of Japanese poetry writing about the bomb, and about his own family, and the sentence the jacket lifted is the end of an objection.

Displacements — Juliana Chang, Walter K. Lew, Tan Lin, Eileen Tabios and John Yau

Marjorie Perloff's essay "In Search of the Authentic Other" offers a groundbreaking assessment of identity politics and its relationship to poetic taste. There are three additional things to note about the Yasusada hoax.

1. The hoax worked equally well in both mainstream and experimental circles. Here, after all, was a victim of the bombing of Hiroshima, who also wrote experimental poetry in which he acknowledged not only that catastrophic event but also extreme states of human feeling. Thus for mainstream poets, who believe that feeling and personal anecdote are the generating principles of a poem, Yasusada provided a way to honor otherness, in the form of an experimental writing linked to an unthinkable historical event. For experimental poets, Yasusada's practice of avant-garde techniques offered an escape into writing that was also deeply and openly moving. For both groups, in short, Yasusada embodied a break from prevailing aesthetic agendas, and an archetype of readily assimilable difference: he lived in another country and another time; he wrote in another language; he was a victim of a catastrophe engineered by human beings; he had experiences we will never have. Because he fulfilled these qualifications, Yasusada represented the emblematic Other, removed from historical time, a creature of myth. Thus the "hoax" demonstrates something very real: that the myth of the Other refuses to die.

2. It is disturbing that Kent Johnson, the alleged perpetrator of the hoax, found it necessary to reprise the stereotype of the deferential Asian in order to point out the relationship between a classical Japanese form, renga, and the postmodern practice associated with Ron Silliman's "new sentence." In so doing, as Perloff notes, Johnson displaces and diminishes the accomplishments of contemporary Japanese poets. This is not an isolated incident: *Beneath a Single Moon*, the anthology of contemporary American Buddhist poetry that Johnson co-edited with Craig Paulenich, similarly displaces Asian American poets from the practice of Buddhism. As Walter K. Lew has written of that volume:

"The 45 American poets whose essays and poetry on Buddhist practice comprise the anthology are all Caucasian, and the book only mentions Asians as distal teachers (ranging from Zen patriarchs to D.T. Suzuki), not as fellow members or poets of the sangha [...] When one considers the relative obscurity of some of the poets included in the book, one wonders how it was possible not to have known the Buddhistic poetry of such writers as [Lawson Fusao] Inada, Al Robles, Garrett Kaoru Hongo, Alan Chong Lau, Patricia Ikeda, and Russell Leong. [...] [Gary] Snyder's introduction deliberates the question — 'Poetry is democratic, Zen is elite. No! Zen is democratic, poetry is elite. Which is it?' [...] perhaps he should have also asked whether Zen and poetry, as reconfigured in American Orientalism, are racist."

3. Like most hoaxes, Johnson's is fueled mainly by the potential for self-gain. And like all hoaxes it is complex — his act of yellowface at once plays into an existing and apparently vigorous orientalist fantasy, exposes American ignorance of both Japanese poetry and recent Japanese history, and levels a critique against an experimental writing community to which the author also seeks to ingratiate himself. In this last respect, Johnson's act is doubly disturbing: he wants the taint of scandal without having to take responsibility for the stereotypes he celebrates.

[The Lew passage is from his editor's afterword to Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry (Kaya, 1995). "Displacements" appeared in Boston Review, summer 1997, and is online at bostonreview.net, where the whole forum can be read. Permission to reprint it here has been sought from its authors and from the magazine.]

From "Longing for the Real" — Hosea Hirata

Hirata is a scholar of Japanese poetry and the translator of Nishiwaki Junzaburo. His response runs to some fifteen hundred words, of which these are the last four hundred. The clause the publisher took for the jacket is the one that ends them.

“Poetry is weak in face of the nuclear horror of Hiroshima. Yet shamelessly poetry must approach the Real that such an unspeakable event contains, for it lost its “author” of the Real. What we read in the literature of the atomic bomb is not only the rage of the people but the shame of language. Hiroshima is not merely an improbable but an *impossible* site for poetry. But that very impossibility beckons our poetry. It is our perverted envy (call it guilt, if you will) of the victimhood, of the ultimate horror, of the Real.”

“Would such a “hoax” upset the people of Hiroshima? I believe so. Let me state this again: Hiroshima is the impossibility of poetry. Nothing can represent, express, replace that annihilation adequately. Every time I visit Hiroshima, my own cousins who survived the bomb repeatedly remind me of that fact. If they learned that an American poet assumed the identity of a *hibakusha* in order to write “good” American poetry, they would be offended. But they may simply ignore such a case. Who cares about such a trivial thing called poetry now?”

“The assimilation of Foucault's writings to the now-pervasive mentality of “political correctness” has diminished the Nietzschean, demonic force of his

original thought. We have become so careful not to offend the integrity of the other that we don't know whether to bow or shake hands. But, as Bataille recognized, we need to acknowledge the primary capacity for evil that literature embodies. [...] Knowing its fictitious nature, with a slight sense of disgust, I find Yasusada's poetry evil, and eerily beautiful. ”

Marjorie Perloff's essay and all nine responses are at www.bostonreview.net/forum/in-search-of-the-aut.... Nothing in this appendix was posted to the Poetics List; everything else in this book was.

Sources

Every excerpt, in order, with the month of the archive in which it stands. Dates and subject lines are as the list carried them. The final figures give the length of the post as the archive holds it and the number of those words printed here, so that the extent of the editing is visible.

1. Mark Weiss, *Neruda and Stalinism*. Sat, 22 Feb 1997 08:19. February 1997.
2. Mark Weiss, *Re: Neruda and Stalinism*. Sat, 22 Feb 1997 21:20. February 1997.
3. KENT JOHNSON, *Weiss, naivete, Neruda*. Sun, 23 Feb 1997 00:47. February 1997. 1,301 words, of which 617 printed.
4. David Bromige, *FC2 & attempts to censor/punish*. Thu, 27 Mar 1997 22:55. March 1997.
5. KENT JOHNSON, *fascism and surrender*. Fri, 28 Mar 1997 09:39. March 1997. 207 words, of which 206 printed.
6. David Bromige, *doing something*. Fri, 28 Mar 1997 09:17. March 1997.
7. KENT JOHNSON, *Re: doing something*. Fri, 28 Mar 1997 13:19. March 1997. 96 words, printed entire.
8. Charles Bernstein, *Allen Ginsberg*. Fri, 4 Apr 1997 11:50. April 1997.
9. KENT JOHNSON, *Allen Ginsberg's death*. Fri, 4 Apr 1997 20:34. April 1997. 408 words, of which 407 printed.
10. Dale Smith, *Re: Will's column/ my reply*. Thu, 10 Apr 1997 16:24. April 1997.
11. KENT JOHNSON, *Re: Will's column/ my reply*. Thu, 10 Apr 1997 20:53. April 1997. 488 words, of which 381 printed.
12. Mark Prejsnar, *Re: The New Party*. Fri, 18 Apr 1997 13:22. April 1997. 843 words, of which 328 printed.
13. KENT JOHNSON, *L+A+N+G+P+O and New Party*. Fri, 18 Apr 1997 22:38. April 1997. 884 words, of which 569 printed.
14. KENT JOHNSON, *Ojo al toro con tres cuernos*. Fri, 30 Jan 1998 18:50. January 1998. 680 words, of which 679 printed.
15. KENT JOHNSON, *Re: What it all has to do with poetry*. Wed, 10 Jun 1998 19:52. June 1998. 217 words, of which 202 printed.
16. KENT JOHNSON, *Was it a "good war"?*. Wed, 29 Jul 1998 17:56. July 1998. 385 words, printed entire.
17. KENT JOHNSON, *(Fwd) Join SAWSJ*. Tue, 18 Aug 1998 08:24. August 1998. 1,015 words, of which 241 printed.
18. KENT JOHNSON, *(Fwd): Khartoum Translation Conference*. Fri, 28 Aug 1998 17:19. August 1998. 979 words, of which 530 printed.
19. KENT JOHNSON, *Will the sun rise tomorrow?*. Wed, 15 Sep 1999 17:33. September 1999. 266 words, printed entire.
20. KENT JOHNSON, *The sound of drums*. Fri, 17 Sep 1999 10:42. September 1999. 369 words, of which 362 printed.
21. KENT JOHNSON, *(Fwd) "Buddhistic poetry"*. Wed, 18 Jun 1997 20:35. June 1997. 766 words, of which 423 printed.
22. KENT JOHNSON, *Orientalism: reply to Dean Brink*. Wed, 25 Jun 1997 12:19. June 1997. 925 words, of which 713 printed.
23. Dean A. Brink, *Re: Iroiro and Orientalism*. Sun, 7 Dec 1997 18:07. December 1997. 79 words, of which 54 printed.

24. KENT JOHNSON, *Orientalist haibun (with cups of sake four)*. Mon, 8 Dec 1997 17:29. December 1997. 1,260 words, of which 624 printed.
25. KENT JOHNSON, *Four Sonnets for Annie Finch*. Sat, 13 Dec 1997 18:30. December 1997. 452 words, of which 450 printed.
26. K. Silem Mohammad, *Re: Four Sonnets for Annie Finch*. Sat, 13 Dec 1997 22:28. December 1997. 420 words, printed entire.
27. Annie Finch, *A Dactylic Tetramete-Based Envelope Quatrain, Followed by a Passage of Prose, for Kent Johnson*. Sun, 14 Dec 1997 19:36. December 1997. 693 words, of which 330 printed.
28. KENT JOHNSON, *The Catskill School of Poetry*. Mon, 19 Jan 1998 11:51. January 1998. 1,113 words, of which 670 printed.
29. KENT JOHNSON, *The Key Club [or: The Museum]*. Sat, 24 Jan 1998 19:09. January 1998. 1,312 words, of which 629 printed.
30. KENT JOHNSON, *A personal appeal*. Wed, 11 Feb 1998 19:37. February 1998. 803 words, of which 636 printed.
31. KENT JOHNSON, *A response to Charles Bernstein*. Tue, 8 Dec 1998 19:31. December 1998. 1,238 words, of which 1,237 printed.
32. KENT JOHNSON, *The good doctor on circumcision*. Tue, 13 Jul 1999 12:52. July 1999. 419 words, of which 404 printed.
33. Brian Kim Stefans, *To Kent Johnson*. Mon, 1 Jan 1990 00:32:. February 2000. 1,614 words, of which 448 printed.
34. KENT JOHNSON, *Disappearances (or: the humor of Cultural Capital)*. Tue, 22 Feb 2000 18:42. February 2000. 531 words, of which 527 printed.
35. Ron Silliman, *Yasusada = Ern Malley*. Wed, 26 Jul 1995 02:38. July 1995. 168 words, printed entire.
36. Kevin Killian, *Re: Yasusada = Ern Malley*. Wed, 26 Jul 1995 08:18. July 1995. 424 words, of which 379 printed.
37. Lee Chapman, *Yasusada = Hoax?*. Tue, 29 Aug 1995 21:45. August 1995. 525 words, of which 464 printed.
38. Rod Smith, *Re: Hoaxification*. Sat, 20 Jul 1996 15:23. July 1996. 358 words, of which 287 printed.
39. Robert J Wilson, *Yasu/Sada*. Sat, 20 Jul 1996 15:23. July 1996. 351 words, of which 348 printed.
40. David Kellogg, *Re: Perloff on Yasusada*. Sat, 19 Apr 1997 23:38. April 1997. 369 words, of which 330 printed.
41. Philip Mead, *Re: Perloff on Yasusada*. Sun, 20 Apr 1997 14:25. April 1997. 366 words, of which 289 printed.
42. Jordan Davis, *sweet virginia / le medecin malgre lui*. Wed, 21 May 1997 11:43. May 1997. 166 words, of which 115 printed.
43. KENT JOHNSON, *(Fwd) "Buddhistic poetry"*. Wed, 18 Jun 1997 20:35. June 1997. 766 words, of which 326 printed.
44. Hoa Nguyen, *Re: Buddhism and Racism*. Tue, 24 Jun 1997 13:44. June 1997. 1,058 words, of which 1,045 printed.
45. Aldon L. Nielsen, *Re: Is the self-evident evidence of a self?*. Tue, 24 Jun 1997 18:03. June 1997. 616 words, of which 451 printed.

46. KENT JOHNSON, *Light from Another Country*. Wed, 25 Jun 1997 19:47. June 1997. 690 words, printed entire.
47. KENT JOHNSON, (Fwd) *Eliot Weinberger*. Thu, 26 Jun 1997 17:44. June 1997. 866 words, of which 473 printed.
48. KENT JOHNSON, *Yasusada in Texas*. Wed, 19 Nov 1997 19:39. November 1997. 383 words, printed entire.
49. Dean A. Brink, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Wed, 19 Nov 1997 18:58. November 1997. 103 words, of which 79 printed.
50. David Zauhar, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Wed, 19 Nov 1997 21:18. November 1997. 27 words, of which 18 printed.
51. Dean A. Brink, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Wed, 19 Nov 1997 19:56. November 1997. 289 words, of which 285 printed.
52. Maria Damon, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Thu, 20 Nov 1997 08:14. November 1997. 39 words, of which 28 printed.
53. KENT JOHNSON, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Thu, 20 Nov 1997 08:59. November 1997. 150 words, of which 143 printed.
54. David Zauhar, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Thu, 20 Nov 1997 09:03. November 1997. 380 words, of which 371 printed.
55. David Kellogg, *Fw: Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Thu, 20 Nov 1997 10:33. November 1997. 109 words, printed entire.
56. Maria Damon, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Thu, 20 Nov 1997 10:07. November 1997. 75 words, of which 64 printed.
57. Christopher Alexander, *Re: Yasusada in Texas*. Thu, 20 Nov 1997 10:37. November 1997. 404 words, of which 370 printed.
58. david bromige, *latest hit theyre hummin in yasonoma county*. Thu, 20 Nov 1997 18:22. November 1997. 127 words, printed entire.
59. Poetics List Administration, *Two New Books from ROOF*. Mon, 8 Dec 1997 20:38:. December 1997. 1,013 words, of which 346 printed.
60. KENT JOHNSON, *Orientalist haibun*. Tue, 9 Dec 1997 09:59. December 1997. 233 words, of which 232 printed.
61. Patrick Pritchett, *Re: Iroiro*. Tue, 9 Dec 1997 12:10. December 1997. 388 words, of which 328 printed.
62. Maria Damon, *wieners & bernstein*. Wed, 17 Dec 1997 09:55. December 1997. 291 words, printed entire.
63. Dale Smith, *Hello?*. Thu, 12 Feb 1998 17:15. February 1998. 194 words, printed entire.
64. Aldon Nielsen, *Re: Hello?*. Thu, 12 Feb 1998 18:49. February 1998. 222 words, of which 211 printed.
65. Christopher Alexander, *Re: Hello? Kitty*. Fri, 13 Feb 1998 11:33. February 1998. 502 words, of which 487 printed.
66. Mark Prejsnar, *The Anxiety of Nonfluence, Or, Spicing it Up*. Mon, 31 Aug 1998 12:54. August 1998. 583 words, of which 469 printed.
67. Aldon Nielsen, *Re: White rage*. Thu, 13 Jan 2000 10:10. January 2000. 90 words, of which 80 printed.
68. Philip Mead, *Re: White rage*. Mon, 17 Jan 2000. January 2000. 550 words, of which 336 printed.

69. Dodie Bellamy, *Re: Los desaparecidos & humor*. Wed, 23 Feb 2000. February 2000. 133 words, of which 121 printed.
70. Rachel Loden, *from the notebooks of suzy creamcheese*. Mon, 19 Jun 2000. June 2000. 166 words, printed entire.
71. Patrick Herron, *Re: self/no-self*. Wed, 6 Jun 2001. June 2001. 550 words, of which 481 printed.
72. Jacques Debrot, *Kent Johnson interview*. Thu, 30 Aug 2001. August 2001. 527 words, of which 491 printed.
73. Jeffrey Jullich, *Re: let's see... [HETERONYMS/NOMS-DE-GUERRES]*. Thu, 4 Oct 2001. October 2001. 1,115 words, of which 492 printed.
74. Patrick Herron, *disingenuous*. Tue, 26 Nov 2002 01:30. November 2002. 248 words, of which 246 printed.
75. Patrick Herron, *the insincerity of poetic candor*. Tue, 26 Nov 2002. November 2002. 967 words, of which 490 printed.
76. Dale Smith, *42 blurbs: Miseries of Poetry*. Tue, 8 Apr 2003 08:15:. April 2003. 4,310 words, of which 469 printed.
77. Geoffrey Gatza, *Kent Johnson interview*. Wed, 22 Oct 2003 18:32. October 2003. 505 words, of which 458 printed.
78. Steven Shoemaker, *Re: Kent Johnson interview*. Wed, 22 Oct 2003. October 2003. 164 words, of which 155 printed.
79. Aaron Belz, *open letter to Michael Atkinson*. Sun, 4 Jan 2004. January 2004. 541 words, of which 470 printed.
80. andrew loewen, *Re: Kent Johnson's Abu Ghraib poem is up again*. Thu, 27 May 2004. May 2004. 567 words, of which 301 printed.
81. Christopher Leland Winks, *Re: Kent Johnson's Abu Ghraib poem is up again*. Fri, 28 May 2004. May 2004. 266 words, of which 210 printed.
82. Alison Croggon, *Re: Kent Johnson's Abu Ghraib poem is up again*. Sat, 29 May 2004. May 2004. 540 words, of which 499 printed.
83. Timothy Yu, *Re: WHY DO THE TIAWANESE*. Sat, 3 Jul 2004 22:34. July 2004.
84. Lucas Klein, *Re: WHY DO THE TIAWANESE*. Sun, 4 Jul 2004. July 2004. 738 words, of which 495 printed.
85. Timothy Yu, *Re: WHY DO THE TIAWANESE*. Tue, 6 Jul 2004. July 2004. 1,009 words, of which 381 printed.
86. Richard Jeffrey Newman, *Re: TIAWANESE / Pound / Yasusada*. Wed, 7 Jul 2004 16:58. July 2004. 2,649 words, of which 299 printed.
87. Murat Nemet-Nejat, *Re: TIAWANESE / Pound / Yasusada*. Wed, 7 Jul 2004 17:39:22 EDT. July 2004. 231 words, printed entire.
88. Timothy Yu, *Re: TIAWANESE / Pound / Yasusada*. Wed, 7 Jul 2004. July 2004. 992 words, of which 471 printed.
89. Richard Jeffrey Newman, *Re: TIAWANESE / Pound / Yasusada*. Thu, 8 Jul 2004. July 2004. 1,798 words, of which 417 printed.
90. Lucas Klein, *Yellowface*. Thu, 8 Jul 2004 02:26:. July 2004. 1,290 words, of which 470 printed.
91. Lucas Klein, *TIAWANESE / Pound / Yasusada*. Thu, 8 Jul 2004. July 2004. 1,646 words, of which 170 printed.

92. Murat Nemet-Nejat, *Re: TIAWANESE / Pound / Yasusada*. Thu, 8 Jul 2004. July 2004. 340 words, of which 304 printed.
93. Michelle Reeves, *Re: Yellowface*. Thu, 8 Jul 2004 19:49:. July 2004. 9 words, printed entire.
94. Michael Magee, *Combo Books publishes the new Yasusada*. Fri, 26 Aug 2005. August 2005. 441 words, of which 436 printed.
95. Jesse Glass, *Advice to Kent on his Art [Review]*. Thu, 23 Mar 2006 23:41. March 2006. 219 words, of which 209 printed.
96. Geoffrey Gatza, *The Devil in Kent Johnson*. Sun, 23 Apr 2006 10:59. April 2006. 198 words, of which 168 printed.
97. Geoffrey Gatza, *Epigramitis review in BOMB*. Wed, 28 Jun 2006 15:24. June 2006. 426 words, printed entire.
98. Gabriel Gudding, *masculinity and playing the "transgressor"*. Mon, 4 Feb 2008 19:35. February 2008. 542 words, of which 472 printed.
99. Jason Quackenbush, *Re: masculinity and playing the "transgressor"*. Mon, 4 Feb 2008 19:28. February 2008. 432 words, of which 344 printed.
100. Eric Conrad, *Guantanamo in poetry*. Sat, 1 Mar 2008 14:56. March 2008.
101. David Chirot, *Re: Guantanamo in poetry*. Sun, 2 Mar 2008 07:38. March 2008. 1,781 words, of which 447 printed.
102. Barry Schwabsky, *Re: reading, Ed Foster anthology, & Holocaust Memoir Turns Out to Be Fiction*. Tue, 4 Mar 2008 07:37. March 2008. 2,750 words, of which 214 printed.
103. David Chirot, *Re: Literal lemons, Artaud, metaphorization of the real*. Sat, 22 Mar 2008 23:31. March 2008. 1,242 words, of which 479 printed.
104. Aldon Nielsen, *Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets*. Wed, 2 Apr 2008 11:31. April 2008. 225 words, of which 173 printed.
105. John Latta, *Re: Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets*. Thu, 3 Apr 2008 12:25. April 2008. 157 words, of which 129 printed.
106. Aldon Nielsen, *Re: Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets*. Fri, 4 Apr 2008 13:31:. April 2008. 988 words, of which 221 printed.
107. Jason Quackenbush, *Fwd: Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets*. Fri, 4 Apr 2008 18:34. April 2008.
108. Murat Nemet-Nejat, *Re: Epigramitis: 118 Living American Poets*. Sat, 5 Apr 2008 12:57. April 2008. 270 words, of which 206 printed.
109. David Chirot, *essay by Chirot to go with works at the UA Poetry Center Conceptual Poetry Symposium*. Fri, 30 May 2008 02:02. May 2008. 2,587 words, of which 279 printed.
110. Maria Damon, *Re: Issue 1 Release Announcement*. Sat, 4 Oct 2008 21:39. October 2008. 65 words, printed entire.
111. Wystan Curnow, *Re: appropriative poetics: genealogy/history?*. Sun, 2 Nov 2008 01:01. November 2008. 586 words, of which 132 printed.
112. David Chirot, *Re: appropriative poetics: genealogy/history?*. Sun, 2 Nov 2008 14:10. November 2008. 2,006 words, of which 273 printed.
113. Murat Nemet-Nejat, *Re: appropriative poetics: genealogy/history?*. Mon, 3 Nov 2008 08:24:. November 2008. 322 words, of which 306 printed.
114. Jonathan Ball, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Mon, 28 Sep 2009 21:45. September 2009. 114 words, of which 112 printed.
115. Bobby Baird, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Wed, 30 Sep 2009 09:28. September 2009. 468 words, of which 443 printed.

116. Jeffrey Side, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Fri, 2 Oct 2009 07:13. October 2009. 554 words, of which 553 printed.
117. Jonathan Ball, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Fri, 2 Oct 2009 08:39. October 2009. 324 words, of which 275 printed.
118. Mairead Byrne, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Fri, 2 Oct 2009 10:06. October 2009. 512 words, of which 188 printed.
119. Murat Nemet-Nejat, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Fri, 2 Oct 2009 11:57. October 2009. 207 words, of which 190 printed.
120. Herb Levy, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Sat, 3 Oct 2009 12:55. October 2009. 559 words, of which 473 printed.
121. Wystan Curnow, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Tue, 6 Oct 2009 00:29. October 2009. 520 words, of which 177 printed.
122. Christopher Leland Winks, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Mon, 5 Oct 2009 10:37. October 2009. 125 words, of which 124 printed.
123. Jeffrey Side, *Statement from Kent Johnson*. Mon, 5 Oct 2009 21:00. October 2009. 498 words, printed entire.
124. Alison Croggon, *Re: 'Day' by Kent Johnson*. Tue, 6 Oct 2009 13:06. October 2009. 464 words, of which 427 printed.
125. Freind, William Joseph, *Doggerel for the Masses by Kent Johnson*. Mon, 23 Jan 2012 21:08. January 2012. 261 words, of which 239 printed.
126. Jennifer Karmin, *Red Rover Series / Experiment #58*. Mon, 8 Oct 2012 13:01. October 2012. 471 words, of which 195 printed.