

PhillyTalks 10 Farmer/Gizzi
March 1st, 1999 7 pm
Kelly Writers House 3805 Locust Walk Philadelphia

Steven Farmer

from *Medieval*
(Krupskaya, forthcoming)

Cloak the blueprint of hills

color the likeness

versus royalty

comic will hurt

entendre

life in a panel

back up human & animal

minus. . . . and all that begins with a minus

how I pray

barbiturate

history

work site. . . . will you go away

golem

oven room

rune emission

circuit timed to fire trees
silver berry
punitive jolt
rigged arm of attentive staff
the pulling, remote
near description of caste
knocking. . . . broken. . . . given
usable petrification
circuit

wind of Crom
conquest capitol
grey sky cloud grid
silencer tympanum
sound won't be mentioned
district abstract
calls up individual memories
recognition verdigrised

stray light
base unhinged
brass children turn away
dried plant appetizer
happier homes are pictured
personal sand

sentry arrives with paychecks
misfortune smiles a history
creased and denied
exhaust hood & sky crack
cloud at land's underbelly. . . . fish
mold or wreath of black gelatin tonight

flag light is out of a tower
dunce of speech to escape

corrosion rogue
proletarian cake
invited to rule
frozen lease
misinformed trimming
job of the ambler
holiday bird is a plant
prevalent Average Merchant Fever Day
they're not paying me
I'm not showing up

farm in a matrix
there isn't a ritual
death is for shivering medical file
young buyers will not be young
Kensington daughter stockpile
rustic
I have one
the envelope please. . . . somehow
award the region its missing
when she's near the farmwork patches shadow
modulate
loomer sepia

plates disengage
wir forest
Emily threads her back to a lathe
ice tree crystalline
shaken crest
no longer people
ethereal lattice
reference somehow realm of the comic
signal eyes comb thermal backlight
awash, rogue of greater sins list abdication, know them
intruder, their world is more complete than ours
they walk around like creeps

tangible town / yellow lights

aspire ownership

tangible town

by-products poison the storyboards

toxic wards of the state, sleep

the bells of the courtyard rang for mackerel

put on your game face

this week's shifts

imagined romance of occupation

commensurate with experience

pay commensurate with class

let ring soften to flavor

the romance of isolation

on your own, targets are flowers

protector was hit, press any key to return

permanent light sought in forms

feel better knocked out

self-predator having distanced

measure my craft by how I have distanced

sheer numbers free to damage

great shadow is not to leave

vowel trench

obeyer curse

white poison had taken

. . . . white poison had taken the legend. . . . yellow land

& unripe fruit have promise / bad things are fuel

Peter Gizzi

from *Artificial Heart*
(Burning Deck, 1998)

TOY

You resist an ocean evaporating outside your head
You resist rain discovered outside small rooms

You resist daybreak invisible from grief
And the hollow inside is the shape of a flower

So the mouse has a purpose within its tiny office
And the butterfly isn't alive as a symbol ever

So that the smile independent from a person
And those glad tidings becoming empty

Look away from the joy of restorative morning
Easily opening to complete the long night

You are done in by sunrise and rightfully so
And those renewed theatrics of the skyline

Undo the hygiene of the visible body
Unlike a dove closing its wings at dawn

Go with a simple song, unbind yourself
Making sure to hide your giddy surface

CAPTION

But where are the snows of yester-year?
—Villon

One less body is lost in snow
The dying one (in time) becomes a landscape,
do you remember how it came about?

Snow unlike glass, glass unlike a corpse
Moon unlike a torso boldly colored in
with bark, with slate, with soil breaking up

in the furrows of another eroding shape

Or a severed line, bringing us together for the first time
March unlike Spring or an almanac out of date,
nomenclature: everywhere

Evidence, perception, conclusion
Unlike a dull pool on a brown tire track,
earlier I said landscape

How did it come about?

Grief unlike truth, truth unlike snow
Body unlike its outline

LAST CIGAR

A ball drops from a high place, its orbit spent.
If it were that simple they'd've already called
the dogies home for supper. End of story.
Instead the workers are scattered wide
upon the plain, stuck in their own voice-over.
Listen. One is carried upstream,
another further off into distant steam,
some remain in one place while others
hurtle equally through space. Buckshot
across a field. A sharp cackle spoils the breeze.
They sure were busy out there
ignoring the triangle's gay tinkle.
It's like this every night, the reporter
casually smiled. What could they be doing
forever? The boss came round from time to time
to make sure no one of them actually came
to anything, anything close to anything,
that is, and the ambiguity between somewhere
and nothing, something and nowhere
was maintained. It's a beautiful thing
the song sang, "smoke in your eyes," right?

A TEXTBOOK OF CHIVALRY

Learning how to give in to hate, or how to take, in love,
 won't recuperate joy, or avoiding joy
 might become a paradigm easing a pain unwanted to dissipate.
 Is the love a syringe or merely a placebo that becomes habit,
 full of promise? Keep the score card close, Cheat.
 The earth is still tonight, without a breeze to compensate
 for the mind's emptiness. Imagination creates a mother
 letting you go free amidst the enemy
 because unwanted the cravings grow too, laughing
 when promise fulfills its tiny shape. Never
 is also part of the greater composition, looking away at the toy horizon.
 Who will die from happiness, knowing that their ungainly self was loved
 and the clumsy heart embraced? Dinner is never dinner this season,
 living in a bubble, the I sinks, I decline too
 in this construction even and if only even as the putative author
 of these lines, this subject. The subject matters,
 wrote the good scribes in disbelief. Wrote the poor.
 These slums speak to everyone, don't they, though no one is listening
 are they, chevalier? are they? The tribulation of water is heavy.
 Out here it is an ocean carries this raft towards something,
 something unlike rest, or knowledge of where the surf will crash.
 The story of the woman who left the man to drown is the same story
 that taught him to swim. When you learn to read water
 your fluency increases thirty percent the guidebook says.
 The surface is moving as the groundlessness that surrounds one
 is more immediate and lowly than historically determined crises of self.
 I am waiting for my man, my man has a number in it.
 Staged and inconsequential. This may be tendentious
 but it's hysterical. Though love is never a joke, even if it feels like a joke:
 the clown tumbles to stand up and they are made brighter by their laughter,
 give them bread & circus. Oh *book*, you are a strange friend
 but a good one, definitively a path opening on all sides,

as all eyes open, and don't merely gape, but dilate and focus
as with the apertures of the heart. Open, to receive, *become*,
to see, and is it only for honesty in letters that the will founders
before it immolates. Who cannot die, continuing to die,
who has become dead, becoming dead, who will never be dying,
as the hard copy corroborates a twin and the emptiness creates a slave
and the wood recorder releases a sweet note ascending
to embrace these actual clouds in an actual landscape
unwittingly there to coax joy out of air?
Where we are is on a street whose bodies linger, sweat pouring
unlike diamonds onto the hot pavement where
cellophane wrappers say 79¢. Days accrue a hollow dispensation
for time served. The job done. Though some folks sit to themselves
speaking, to no one, neck bent, face twisted.
Is thy bread more stale? Outside is not as far as you imagine.
The voice of a child greeting night.
As a wash of cruelty sets out unlike an imagined river
abrading the tin shell of self-reflection, wanting to be seen.
To be permitted to march against the current
to the "higher ideal" of an unnatural self-reliance,
which seemingly one despises or despises oneself, let go.
To not worry about realism for once, to wonder
without becoming dry. If time is more than movement
of a clock's face, who will witness the supporting parts
before they disappear? To buy back the empty lot, to build
a fascinating life so it takes another lifetime to read it,
never to understand why one is here, or why now,
or who or what they shall become, whence written down.

Steven Farmer

Dear Peter,

So let's start by looking at your book, *Artificial Heart*, and mine, *Medieval*. In general, I'd agree with Hung Tu's comment after our last talk, that it seems that our intentions are similar though our prosody differs. Both of the works turn to the themes of the Dark Ages in their composition, and both were written over the same period of time (roughly 1991-98) unbeknownst to either of us. I think this is an interesting coincidence, and one I'd like to continue to cull meaning from.

To begin with, I'll re-state the end of my statement in the *Writing from the New Coast* anthology:

"Postmodern poetics have brought the nature of meaning and expression into question; now its huge task might be more one of assimilation. From a desire to critique/dismantle to a desire to rebuild...."

In your model of this rebuilding, a "renovated trobar" (song) is used, tracing the bloodflow's simulation in a mechanical paradigm of emotion. It's a lyric address that echoes the concerns of troubador poetry, set in the negative spaces of contemporary life, where, as you say, "a missing tooth on the gear bangs blank." *Artificial Heart* in many ways reads like a litmus test for the lyric poem in 1999, where, as you say in "Pierced:"

The heart of poetry is fatigue

The title of this piece, *pierced*, implies dramatic images of the romantic (Cupid,) the violent (bodily injury,) and the psychological (self-imolation.) "The heart of poetry is fatigue" you say in this striking piece, a deflation rather than a conflagration; and it is this essentially negative trope that feels akin to my work in *Medieval*. The piece has a diastolic nature to it, filling up and emptying out again as it weaves through a familiar and unfamiliar landscape of what we live in every day and deal with *not* as poets:

a skinny leg inside a blown-out shoe
at the side of an ocean
at the mouth of the delta
at the foot of a glacier
dunghill, mini-mart
burial mound and parking lot

a bleak, exact but leaking landscape where "The populist's vision dims / dented at the moment of ascendancy." When, later in the poem, the line occurs

come as you are

it is hardly a hearty invitation, and reads more like a deadpan warning; and the problem is (the cruel joke is) we're already there. The poem proceeds to investigate (and even question) lyricism's efficacy as it casts outward to the world around it:

And what difference would it make
if the face were projected
from the bole of an oak

or, what good is an image — even of fatigue? Or even, what good is writing? Other pieces in the book like "Zero Elegy," "Mourning & Materiality" and "Last Cigar" all probe these cul-de-sacs of negation where

... the ambiguity between somewhere
and nothing, something and nowhere
was maintained. It's a beautiful thing

which of course, it isn't. What I identify with in this work is an underlying sentiment similar to Spicer's, that the endeavor of writing is in some sense a very serious (and sobering) joke. Subjectivity figures strongly in your approach, where the straw man of narrative is placed up against forces far greater than it, sort of like a sacrificial lamb. For me, this work is exemplary of what Alan Gilbert, in Philly Talk #5, called "the struggle over the content with which a sign is imbued," and certainly it addresses "a renewed emphasis on questions of agency and subjectivity" in the poem. In light of this, your first lines from "Fables of Critique:"

You are not outside this film (or movie)
Without a subject a page signals to no one
You are not outside a field (or yard)
Unable to wake free from the tall grasses
Several grasses yield a specific poison
These leaves are not pretty, they are camouflage

The general feeling being that none of us are outside the film, nor can we afford the luxury of assuming we are: the times won't allow it. And much of *Artificial Heart* is timely, juxtaposing contemporaneity with the past (as is also the case in *Medieval*.) From "A Textbook of Chivalry:"

Out here it is an ocean carries this raft towards something,
something unlike rest, or knowledge of where the surf will crash.
The story of the woman who left the man to drown is the same story
that taught him to swim. When you learn to read water
your fluency increases thirty percent the guidebook says.
The surface is moving as the groundlessness that surrounds one
is more immediate and lowly than historically determined crises of self.
I am waiting for my man, my man has a number in it.

"The ocean" "out here" is the domain of poetry's address to the unknown, the site of your narrative echoing Spicer, Homer and chivalric trobar forms simultaneously. Your almost comic reference to "the guidebook" makes it known that we are not in control here (I suddenly flash on the image of *The Handbook for the Recently Deceased* in the film "Beetlejuice,") that this is a site of discovery, of experiment, an essentially perilous ground where, as Spicer would say "Don't go there, kid." And Spicer's pessimism is also echoed: our "fluency increases" only "thirty percent...." The guidebook is the work of previous poets. Here, the problems of poetry are never solved, only invoked, as in Spicer's "A Textbook of Poetry:"

Where one is in a temple that sometimes makes us forget that we are in it. Where we are is in a sentence.

Or, where we are is on the page, the battleground of form, where, as Bataille notes: "it is not the empire so much as the impotence of poetry." This is of course an endless frustration for poets—who, as Spicer says, participate in "A system of dreaming fake dreams./ Being faithful to it."

But what is seen or expressed in those fake dreams is important, even if, as Spicer says, "this is idiocy." Chivalry is invoked because it takes guts to put on the armor that invariably turns into striped rags: it's a venture fraught with risk.

Throughout *Artificial Heart*, your unabashed use of a lyric approach to poetry brings with it a kind of vulnerability or risk that I can see as a value that supercedes any claims to vanguardism. "...the groundlessness that surrounds one is more immediate and lowly than historically determined crises of self." If I can take this line at anywhere near face value, and as representative of one trajectory of your poetics, it is as if you're saying that there are other areas of concern, other forces at play in the human predicament than social forms— that current poetry and thought might deal with (— or even return to) things that are not necessarily "historically determined," things that may reside outside of or beyond such (man-made) notions. As if to state that the subject is a socially constructed entity, and language is the major constituting force there, sure, but that's not all there is to being.

Likewise, it could be said that a part of what my work is currently attempting (in *Medieval* and elsewhere) is a recovery of those tropes in writing that have been appropriated by cliché, and the expression of those emotive states which have been appropriated by capital. Or, the re-invention / re-situating of a language that might re-include emotive content in a way that is palatable to our current ("postmodern?") sensibilities: part of what has been taken from us, what we now seem to lack a vocabulary for that isn't hackneyed.

But an enterprise such as this risks vulnerability in a way that much experimental poetry today appears to go to great lengths to avoid. What has surfaced instead in many instances is a consistent use of irony — a kind of over-intellectualism that can tend to read pretty hollow these days. And by that I mean those instances in all of our writing where the "voice" is positioned in such a way as to set itself above (or hold itself superior to) the conditions it "criticizes," usually in a relatively sarcastic mode of address. Not that "baring the soul" or a similar simplistic attitude towards subjectivity would be a value, nor that irony hasn't served us well in helping to dispel such myths, but. . . I don't feel that irony is an effective shield any more — it won't hold up (it excludes too much.)

Not that I'm "against" irony, I just see it as being over-used — sometimes it reads like a crutch. There is irony in my work (and yours,) and humor, but they are troubled. I'm suggesting that irony as a strategy has been played out, and that it is not strong enough a tool anymore for the kind of investigation we've (all of us) undertaken in our work. It is perhaps similar sentiments that have brought forth a resurgence of lyric poetry in some recent experimental writing. Would you agree with this?

Also, in one of our previous conversations, you stated that the lyric is there to disrupt. Can you repeat and elucidate this point?

And I'd like to ask how in *Artificial Heart* you went to the particular forms used by the troubadours (whereas in *Medieval* I did not.) Can you expand on these forms? What are they and where did you use/ adapt /respond to them in your book?

And, what of all this?

yours,
Steve

Peter Gizzi

Dear Steve,

A letter like this one begins with an apology. I agree with much of what you say and yet I feel whatever I say will be inadequate to articulate the hours we spend in a condition of poetry, or I find it difficult tonight to separate myself from my work and my work with the world. It is an unruly drama of desire and its depiction. A shape, or a sound, a sentence to compose what is and what isn't. A circulation that travels an ellipse; sometimes it wobbles and then breaks and from that a poem will begin to take form. A figure announcing itself beside itself. It needn't be fancy: not unlike a dog barking at its shadow, confusing its own sound as the other's. Or a solitaire in front of the television speaking back to it out of habit. A mother singing in the nursery. A stoner at the light talking to himself with the radio blasting "it's like this and like that and like this and a." I balk at description. It fails me just now. I question even this rhetoric.

We were talking recently about "aporia," the difficulty of trying to say what you do at the same time that you mistrust the form in which you have to express it. When you have a sense that things are in free play, that things (the context, the movement of the poem) are more intuitive than outlined, it's difficult to name what is happening. To work from poem to poem, from project to project. I distrust the notion of a signature style. What I'm talking about doesn't have to do with style or mode but something like what Spicer tried to articulate—that there's something at the moment of creation that's illegible and unknowable. So it's hard to know how to talk about it.

As I listen to a poem unfold in my ear it becomes clear to me that for every line I hear there is another one or more lines resonating in the same field of meaning. Listening is everything in poetry: to the silences, the pauses, shifts in syntax, tone and content. Always for me a poem is about tracking what is not said and the particular place I can go to know what that is by what is stated. As if there are always two poems in my ear. What amazes me is how specific the "other" or phantom poem can be, and it occurs to me how language, when arranged, manipulated, built, or what you will, is saying both readings—together and separate. I imagine that the lyric is next to my life, but isn't my life at the same time that it is real. Think of breath on a mirror. Sometimes, if I'm lucky, I can record this "other" poem and make it my own. But mostly it is a fragment felt and struggled with. I find myself left to develop the ruins of what did not come through. These hours spent listening, however, are what I believe to be the exceptional experience of poetry. The same way nightingales inhabit Romanticism and are unsupported by any real concrete image, "birds as words" Zukofsky would say. They are an experience in the mind both heard and as Cavalcanti would suggest, "tis felt I say." To "risk vulnerability," as you say. Which is why irony, I agree, can "read like a crutch," in that it generates a paradoxically stable (static) reading. And too often it's dismissive. And while it's sexy to be ironic (right), it's not altogether interesting anymore, like saying "I'm an avant-garde poet." So? The problem with trying to risk something, articulate something larger, is that it's bound to failure, and the thing about taking on something stable is that it's bound to succeed but it's ultimately unsatisfying.

It's more complicated to use intuitive thought toward repair, the way your work collects fragments to open the possibility of meaning through the means of expression. Like you, I am fascinated by the varieties of emotive experience. Illumination happens in your poem on the level of word (vocabulary), phrase, and through accretion ("a leaking landscape") of several phrases. While you use known terms, all of them undermine anything like narrative expectation for that vocabulary.

I relate to the purposeful mixture of dictions in your poem to create sonic distortion—to recode the images (clichés as you say) into new relations. The stanza:

hello sugar tongue
 sound displaced the meaning
 honeyed form became the critical
 eradication cycle
 we begin—are you infected
 what is seen
 black significance
 sing, play the spinnet
 template's order song
 erase

(pg. 100)

Or the couplet:

the populism of Nashville
 the exchange of tortured madrigals

(pg. 98)

are at once funny, degraded, historical, and asymmetrical in their framing, allowing for a wobbling narrative to occur.

I find that in your poem that the personal and the social are always twinned, in the foreground or background of your image and speech clusters:

tangible town / yellow lights
 aspire ownership
 tangible town
 by-products poison the storyboards
 toxic wards of the state, sleep
 the bells of the courtyard rang for mackerel
 put on your game face
 this week's shifts
 imagined romance of occupation
 commensurate with experience
 pay commensurate with class

(pg. 50)

To compose the present in a way as to reflect the porous nature of narrative thought and the significance of generating meaning as an individual reader. If one were to consider what is exactly pleasurable about reading fragmented texts it is the ability to see the beauty of the ruin as ruin. Page as landscape. Mosaic? This is one way to account for fragmentation as a way to express time.

participants are reluctant
 in the description of the field

participants are reluctant
in the description of the field

compliant and basic visual concepts
of altar intimidation and zeal

participants are reluctant
in the description of the field

(pg. 54)

The overall tone of the book is both critical and vulnerable. There is also a sense that this book is working off a larger ground, the way that medievalism works off of classicism. I am curious how you would define that ground. I notice that there's a use of abbreviated words like "Crom" for Cromwell, and other instances of archaic diction & imagery sometimes creating a kind of hermetic shorthand that resonates within a closed system. Through the use of fragments the page becomes extremely porous. The consistent use of this technique makes almost any page stand in for the whole. The sheer range of nomenclature overwhelms historical perspective into a fiction, at times knowing or degraded, and at times both at once. I see the poem as a musical score, with its swells, with staccato, and with recapitulation of themes and gestures (not unlike medieval madrigal), building to the final sustained song, which I find very moving and beautifully done.

Given the notion of the chivalric (a feudal system of knights), I find it striking that your book before this one is called World of Shields; and now this long poem entitled "Medieval": How do you see conflict as generative to your creative practice?

To speak to our interest in troubadour models: on my end Artificial Heart initially began as "A Textbook of Chivalry" for which I wrote a number of formal poems—a villanelle, a sestina, etc. The canzoni "Decoration Day" is the only one that remains in the collection. It was a way for me to do my "homework" as a poet, to reach into the masterbox and help get me started toward a conversation, a project. I was interested in various notions of trobar—which simply means "invention."

trobar leu—easy song ("How to Care for a Small Bird")
trobar ric & trobar clus—rich song and hermetic song ("A Textbook of Chivalry" [trobar ric], "Zero Elegy" [trobar clus], etc.) Also there is the "planctus"—which is a lament, a grieving song, ("The De-evolution of the Father," "Mourning & Materiality," "Caption," or "From a Field Glass"; all of them voicing a kind of inexplicable celebration of survival as well). For me the figure of the planctus could be represented as the grieving vowel, O, the lyric enunciation of desire, or the zero of the fool.

In one sense my work recuperates the concerns of the 11th-century troubadours—their oblique display of love, politics, statehood, and grief. But, as the book developed I became increasingly interested in mixing ancient and contemporary textures. As a result, the folktale became more attractive—with its flexible narrative gestures, trenchant intertextuality, transformational space, asymmetric groupings of events—which gave me a way to recognize how I work—and I began to see it as a dynamic model for contemporary lyric practice in an age of the "mix," sampling, and collage.

As for my poems that come out of other work, I imagine these poems behaving much in the same way the folk tradition works. Or the way John Cage's "Cheap Imitation" works in relation to Eric

Satie's "Socrate"; or for that matter how Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice" is a version of Johnny Cash's "Understand Your Man." Likewise one could probably find an antecedent to the Cash song. Or the way David Byrne was writing 60's soul songs in the late 70's in a new cultural context. There are endless models, and being receptive to this enfolding is one way to create community, context, ground (in the musical sense as well). The new work isn't a replacement of its predecessor, but exists along with it, beside it, in consort with it. None of the work stands alone but it also doesn't entirely depend on it either. Even Da Vinci had a "master." I want the field of my work to also include other works, displacing context to create narrative, emotional, psychological, and formal turbulence. I think of these gestures of narrative disturbance, this quoting out of context, this bending and borrowing and blending of tradition as musical notations to create depth, emotive effect, even sincerity.

But I wanted to resist the positivism of canned sincerity, and so I started experimenting with negation as a way to say something new. For instance, I discovered that to use a negative simile—to say something is "unlike" something else—brings into focus the gap between the two things rather than the objects themselves. Not in ideas or things but in the space between them. It creates a field around a body and makes that space (song) palpable ("makes space around a toy majestic"). I employ the notion of the "toy" throughout the book as a complex sign for the corpse we carry; the corpse we are becoming; the body of the text that we enact and perform through our reading and writing. The "toy" is something that can be (and is finally) abandoned; yet it maintains its integrity as a form. It's also strangely what one becomes in an infantilizing media culture, in an age of celebrity.

When I moved to California I was in the middle of writing Artificial Heart as well as in the middle of working on Jack Spicer's lectures on poetics. In the midst of this work I began reading a remarkable book by Isabel Fonseca entitled Bury Me Standing, which is a history and a linguistic mapping of the Eastern European gypsy culture. The model this book provided came at a perfect moment to bridge both of my projects. As Spicer recognized, poetry is a subculture in much the same way that the gypsies remain a subculture—or, for that matter, the way the troubadours were a subculture within the larger court system. But the most important aspect of this comparison is that the gypsies actively maintain themselves as a marginal culture; it's what gives them their identity and their way of life. This is of course also true for poets—we have our own codes that give meaning and a context to our social and textual activities.

You mention "Pierced" which (like "Another Day on the Pilgrimage" and "Ding Repair") is, among other things, a meditation on the "long road" (the lungo drom). In her book, Fonseca describes the lungo drom as a nostalgia for utopia or (as she translates it) "a return to nowhere." Home is established only in the act of singing, the moment of song. I read this return as an evolutionary movement, the way Zeno's arrow has multiple sites on its arc. I am interested in nostalgia but I would renovate its use: it's not just a return to home (or origins, the texts that inform me) but a survival of home (a process of individuation). For an artist it means to survive the poems, texts that compose one—the awesome ground (power) of Modernism. We are its children, much in the way the ground for the troubadours was Classical literature. And there's an exhaustion to this process, this movement because there is no actual site to return to. As you put it: a movement "from a desire to critique/dismantle to a desire to rebuild." How to at once accommodate the gorgeous traditions of poetry and the fact that we are also simply "folk"? To build a comprehensive music.

I guess what I'm after is closer to an environment, an experience of structure that collects in me. As you said "the diastolic nature" of it, "filling up and emptying out again." This condition of openness also figures a constant grappling with absence and lack. In a sense all my work is about this reckoning and displacement, enacted through an experience of lyric possession. A form of

animism, but in it I would replace essentialism or soul with aesthetics or a core that is empty, a kind of holding open to allow poetic tendencies of cadence, form, tone, coloring to move through a flexible core—a force that is both a construction of self and an emptying of self—not autobiographical but autographical—flexible to accommodate figures, things, voices, documentation; to combine, build and dissolve being, boundaries—to somehow let the poem become itself.

Yours, / Peter

Steven Farmer

Dear Peter,

I share your ambivalence toward the term "avant-garde," though I recognize it's pretty much the tradition we're working in. And I am an adherer to/inheritor of some of its most basic tenets, but I feel a lot of its assumptions are also extremely questionable. In many ways I feel more affinity to John Steinbeck than Gertrude Stein. That is to say that I like disjunction, but I like soul too.

Robert Fitterman says that he wants relevant forms (see Tripwire #2,) not necessarily new ones, or, formal innovation is only as good as it is relevant. And when you say that what matters to you most is not style, tone or mode, I would agree, saying that style is the lowest and least interesting level of analysis anyway (though it is of course, at least an entryway.) Perhaps the whole emphasis on the notion that forms carry with them ideological positions (and the ramifications of those positions) has been eclipsed by the question of function. Like you say... "So?"

I'm still intrigued by your notion of the lyric as being disruptive to our daily experiences; I think you've got something there that works well within the framework of what you practice, and I'd like to take that up during the discussion.

As regards your question of how I would define the "larger ground" Medieval works off of, I'd like to defer that to the discussion also, though, simply stated, that ground could be the present. The book uses a kind of erased subjectivity that is both reaching out to and trapped by a shared social reality of the present, and in this sense it is definitely not a hermetic approach. In other words, I'm not building castles and moats; Medieval is not escapist. In light of this, Rodrigo Toscano says the work is to some degree contaminated. "But in a good way," he adds. Perhaps we could jump off from there....

yours,
Steve

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