

PhillyTalks 15

Kevin Davies / Diane Ward

Tue. Jan. 18th (2000), 6 pm, free
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"PhillyTalks" invites two poets to begin a dialogue on each other's work, then have the resulting exchange published in newsletter form & made available to readers prior to the event. The poets, following their poetry reading, informally extend their dialogue. The audience then joins in. A future newsletter will feature a transcript of the event, as well as written responses to previous newsletters. CALL FOR RESPONSES: Please email lcabri@dept.english.upenn.edu, or write: Louis Cabri, 529B - 19 Ave SW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2S 0E3.

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Kevin Davies: To ask a stunningly banal question – pure *Paris Review* interview style – how do you think your writing changed after the move to LA?

Diane Ward: I don't think how-my-writing-has-changed is such a banal question – my answer would have to be very involved, I think.

I think there have been some big changes in arts and the idea of an arts community in the past two decades. I moved to NY in 1980 and had already been involved in DC in collaboration with artists from other disciplines, worked in workshops and as co-editor of poetry magazines always with a group of other writers/artists. The 1970s was still informed by a cooperative/communal/group sensibility and, as a young artist/writer, I wanted group – I still do. New York in 1980(s) continued that but it was a larger, more intense scene. I was lucky to work with musicians, dancers, filmmakers, visual artists; being intimately involved in the process of another mode of expression I think affected my own process.

KD: Did conceptual art have any direct influence on your activities?

DW: Conceptual art did have an influence on my activities by focusing my attention on intention, process, audience, and the interplay between them. I think that a writing project that lays out a path of progression, instructions about how to read a piece, etc., would not be as successful as a conceptual piece that USES writing as a tool to indicate what is to be done with, among and between people, groups of people, objects (the relation thing) – I guess writing as a statement of intention becomes instructional on some level and loses a dynamic as a primary activity . . . I think some of Bernadette Mayer's (and others') instructions for workshop/writing exercises approaches conceptual art.

KD: I found I wrote a lot after moving to New York at the beginning of the nineties, but, despite the large number of wonderful and committed writers here, I didn't feel like I was in the middle of a dynamic writing community, in the sense of being constantly in contact. Quite the opposite, in fact, after the intensity of Vancouver. And that suited me fine – I was burned out. People here work their butts off, all the time, at their regular jobs. Me too. I think I wrote a lot for the same reason I worked a lot – fear of homelessness. But what bugged me a bit was the segregation by discipline I encountered. In Vancouver I'd had more contact with other kinds of artists.

DW: You teach, I assume by your email address, at NYU? What do you teach?

KD: I teach, or rather taught, composition to fresh“men” and sophomores. I’ve never taught creative writing (except, I suppose, when I imported some “creative writing”–style procedures into the comp class). Right now, due to my lack of proper credentials, I’m not teaching for a year or two and am trying to turn myself into a grad student. So, I still work there as a writing tutor and academic advisor (and do financial proofreading two days a week downtown), but I’m not teaching classes. My work week has shrunk from 70-plus hours to about forty.

Teaching comp for four and a half years had a big effect on my life. The questions you are confronted with (that is, that the *situation* presented both to my students and myself) are both basic and profound. How do you make sense in a given context? Who is the audience? What techniques can be employed to “invent” proofs for arguments? What happens when writers collaborate? How have computers changed the ways we think and write? How can we *further* change the ways we think and write? (And this, of course, is connected to the question of what assumptions we bring with us to the acts of composition.) What can we learn from the more than forty (in fact, more than 2,500) years of research in written and oral composition? Once I was confronted with my own near-total ignorance, I immersed myself in rhetoric and composition, an academic field of which I had until then been totally ignorant. I’m still at it, right now most involved in “post-process” theories in composition and the neo-sophistic “turn” in rhetoric and related disciplines.

So, you’d *think* this would have had a profound and useful affect on my own writing. And I hope, in the long run, it will. In fact, though, I haven’t written anything in a year and a half. Actually, I guess it’s two years now. Remember Alan Davies’s piece “If Words Had Meaning,” in which he denounces everyone and explains why he hasn’t been writing?¹ Well, nothing like that in my case! I was just very busy teaching and very “confused” about the whole process. Actually, not a bad feeling, but I’m looking forward to starting up again.

DW: I’m impressed that you’re able to accommodate these theories of composition; that your mind can work on what seems to me a very abstract way of being in the world. My mind doesn’t work that way: I move images around, utterances become images, images become explanation,

create dialog amongst themselves, etc. But I need to be in a visual world and can’t sit around writing all the time. I don’t think poetry supports life. I think it has really ugly teeth and life likes that threat.

KD: Right! A very Spicerian sentiment. It’s good to be reminded. But I want to start to figure out exactly *what* life likes about that and why.

As to “abstraction”: I think I’ve given the wrong impression. I’ve been pretty systematic in my reading, yes, but actually the way I’ve experienced the pedagogy of composition is anything but abstract. And right now my main activity is tutoring. I sit and listen to people talk about their (very “concrete”) writing problems and processes. I often encourage people to talk about what they think they can’t do, which leads to a discussion of what they *can* do, and we go on from there. It’s particular as hell. .

DW: Writing/not writing or preconceived notions of the act of writing – that’s another starting point. I think I’ve produced a book approximately every four years since I was nineteen years old and, aside from collaborations on visual installations or a couple of performance pieces, these books represent a large percentage of the writing I’ve done.

KD: I’ve nearly always faltered or withdrawn at or before the point of publication, no doubt for uninteresting “psychological” reasons, whatever they are. I’ve published one book and two chapbooks in (since I started in my mid-teens) about twenty-four years. I had many long manuscripts, series, prose things, etc., but I’d usually decide, nah, and “turn them under,” a few scraps emerging in later conglomerations. *Pause Button* is mostly made up of that composting process. And now another book is coming out, combined with a bunch of recent magazine publications of older stuff, and my writing friends say to me, gee, great to see you’ve been writing so much. And I’m, huh? Haven’t you been listening to me read versions of these things since the late forties? I don’t even recognize most of the things I’m publishing.

DW: Someone once said to me that it didn’t seem I was producing as much since I moved to LA and what’s true is that I’m not in the middle of a high-profile community (or one that’s perceived historically that way) so that my involvement is not as “documented” (“validated”) by being seen in the context of serious, successful writers. But it’s a little like relativity in that it’s the vantage point that determines what’s foregrounded or deemed more

important. I'm concerned that there's less and less room for the unattached and more eccentric existences; the more serious feel they must become attached to an institution as early as possible in their "careers" – but I don't think there are bad, power-mongering academic people so much as there's a reality-based perception that there's a have-or-have-not gauntlet, economically, and it seems to follow somehow that the reputation can't be built without that validation/support. I'm exaggerating maybe. I've been in mass consumerville (LA) which is a very different existence than NY.

KD: I'd love to be a bad, power-mongering academic person, but Juliana Spahr has rightly advised me that the odds of that happening are very long indeed, and that in any case the gig looks better from the outside than the in.

Are you an active visual artist? I'm fascinated, not just by the direct references to art, but by the level of "visual information" in your poems. Looking.

DW: I am primarily a visual artist I think. My memory is visual, my initial conception of a piece of work is visual. I work with words almost as I would work with materials to create a visual object – I often gather my "materials" (my vocabulary) before I begin working; a poem may flow from top to bottom/beginning to end (the mind's eye follows the meaning's surface) but each section is equally important (my personal cooperative) and a first line becomes an entrance to a PIECE, a last line an exit – almost arbitrary. They exist like fields in which something has caught my attention and drawn me in and that PORTAL (sorta) is the invitation of the first line, after that a theme that defines the field in more and more detail.

KD: That's sort of how I've always *imagined* myself writing, the way I've *wanted* to write, but in fact did not. The way you describe the process, the structure of the process, seems simultaneously very classical and very romantic.

DW: I've never thought of my work in very classical or romantic terms! I'm curious why that comes to your mind.

KD: No offence! I'm probably using the terms idiosyncratically. I think maybe I brought them up because your statement reminded me a little of Robin Blaser, who once claimed to be growing more classical while I continued to read his poetry as romantic – that is, as a wildness within a form. A certain trust in form, or method,

or structure (not that they're equivalent terms). And I would say I lack that trust in my own writing. The structure of your composing process struck me as an order that itself produces unpredictable thought, image, sound.

DW: I think this structure is very transportable; my writing has changed over the years as I've refined that process and has changed as my materials (my life) has changed. New York is the street and constant encounters with other people – varying in intensity, intimacy, etc. Los Angeles is broader strokes, it's bigger spaces, bumping into nature/natural events; so, perhaps my work has become more abstract or perhaps more polarized between the personal and the other, prompting more of an examination of the intersection between the two.

KD: With my media-eye view of LA, it's strange to think of it as "nature/natural," beyond palm trees and the odd backyard orange (I think of W. C. Fields at the end of *It's a Gift*), and the occasional earthquake, which is pretty damned natural. Mostly I think of South-Central and of speeding down highways and of Rockford being chased through garbage-strewn alleys. But yeah, I suppose it must be, compared to New York. For me, moving from Manhattan to Brooklyn in '94 was like moving to the country, even though most westerners would be appalled by the "urban squalour" of our immediate environs. Brooklyn has really brought out the pastoral sap in me – thus the intense lyrical nature of all the poems I'm not writing.

DW: Hmm, who's gone romantic here? Brooklyn's probably simply less densely populated than Manhattan and seems somehow more stable in its neighborhoods; fewer people do a Brooklyn-or-bust than a Manhattan-or-bust, I suspect. In Los Angeles, where the single-driver car dominates, I can drive ten minutes west from my house and be at the Pacific Ocean; one hour northeast and be five thousand feet up in a pine forest overlooking desert, or drive east two hours or so and be in Joshua Tree National Park; and you can never forget that – the mountains as near-distant nature are always on the horizon. It's decidedly unromantic, though: dumb real-estate development encroaches on natural environs with predictably disastrous results (wildfires destroy housing, the hill beneath the foundation slides away . . .)

KD: Aside from the wild fires, it sounds like Vancouver. "Water ski and snow ski in the same afternoon! Stand in

stunning landscape and take pictures that will become treasured memories! Live in a big, stupid, ugly house!"

DW: And how do *you* approach a piece of writing? I'm impressed by the way you personalize and sensualize a wide range of vocabulary: political, scientific, theoretical, the way you allow these bits of information relate to one another. A sort of melding or collage while retaining a personal voice – more than the triumph of the individual over greedy fragments, it's an expansion of the definition of individual . . . or, what?

KD: I'd say that the one thing I don't do, whatever my intentions, is approach a piece of writing. The words, on hundreds of scraps of paper, get accumulated over a given period, during which I am in the midst, as are we all, of various rhetorical situations, both as speaker and auditor. Most of the "notes" are either assertions or shields. A few are silos. One or two might be reedy exhalations with vegetal imagery. I take it all personally, even the bureaucratese and excerpts from how-to manuals. Or especially those. Sooner or later, someone asks me to give a reading, at which time I look for a box arbitrary enough to jar some of its own produce. The struggle then, usually in the week before the reading, is to force the liveliest and most contrary piglets to arrange themselves serially within the container. I ask them to please try to be interesting.

On a superficial level, this might be thought to resemble Bruce's method, but actually it's the opposite.

Hmmn. So what I notice about what I've just said is that I'm an occasional poet, in two senses: I write (or assemble) for specific occasions (readings), and I'm occasionally a poet.

DW: Please compare and contrast to Bruce Andrews' method for me. All I know is that Bruce used to (maybe still does) always have lots and lots of little slips of paper and little notepads for jotting which he never didn't do; but he definitely has a VOICE like no other.

KD: *Of course* he still writes things on little slips of paper. If he ever stops, we'll know the body snatchers have got him. The thing is, he's incredibly systematic and what I would call disciplined. (A few days ago he finished his "Millennium Project," which is a gazillion pages long and will be published electronically.) And I am neither systematic nor disciplined.

But this question of Bruce's "voice" is an interesting one, and I've heard other people mention it. I don't think it's so true on the page, where the voicing gets done by the reader, but yeah, there's definitely a Bruce Effect when he recites his verses in public, no matter how diverse the materials might be. This is perhaps an irony? That a writer who goes to such lengths to resist the habitual, to resist the integrating function of what we usually think of as voice, might sometimes achieve the opposite effect.

DW: I'm very interested in the role a cooperative like the Kootenay School of Writing could play now in LA. I'd like to hear your opinion about this re:

** A bottom-up organization as opposed to a writing program enabled by a university.

** What sorts of links it could have to a cooperative structure outside of itself – with artists in other disciplines, cooperative organizations outside the arts, unions, etc.

** Is the non-geographically-specific internet making these corporate/cooperative distinctions less important?

KD: Yow. Okay. First, you should know that although I was a member of the KSW collective for quite a while, I was less involved in charting institutional strategy than I was in setting up chairs, making posters, buying beer, and returning the empties for refunds. Sort of like a punch-drunk ex-fighter who gets a job as a greeter in a casino, as a favour to a promoter.

But I think there are many advantages to nonacademic writing formations, whatever the level of organization. What you need, first, is need. You need people who need to do it, who need to have a certain kind of intense contact, who need to bring something new into the world without getting any tangible reward beyond the contact and the satisfaction of seeing their labours affect and possibly transform the writing of others. (*People, people who need people . . .*) As to the second question: it depends on what kinds of goals emerge from the initial gathering together of writers and agendas. KSW started out with a self-consciously anarcho-syndicalist set of organizing principles (which I'm not sure is made clear enough by the selections in the otherwise excellent recent anthology of writings from the collective, though the introduction reflects on a lot of that stuff);² I think that's why it has persisted so long, despite its several changes in orientation.

As to the last question: yes. Many “needs” are now met by the internet, and many of these new formations are *made* cooperative by the nature of the medium (though many would argue with that assertion). I’m involved in the Subpress collective, a publishing cooperative that emerged out of a listserv. At one point, I asked the list what ideological, literary, and aesthetic concerns had brought this diverse group together. In other words, what is the organizing principle? Dan Bouchard replied that the organizing principle is the internet itself. Because it is now possible to “meet” this way, therefore we meet, and therefore we embark on collaborative projects. There’s something deeply dissatisfying about this answer for me, but in a lot of ways I think Dan’s correct. The press, though, is going to be almost incoherently heterogeneous. Publication (and/or the editorial instincts of individual members, since that’s how it works in this case) is taken as desirable in and of itself, a response to the lack of venues open to younger writers. I’m not sure what the effect will be, but I’m glad at least to be doing something.

DW: I believe there’s a real need and desire in Los Angeles; there’s a lot of work being done here and there’s a lot needing to be done in terms of defining politics. It’s interesting that there seem to be many people here who are writing “experimental” poetry but “experimental” doesn’t always represent the same goals to everyone. There is a group of writers here that seems itching to “talk” about how and in what context writing is presented, about who holds the perfect-bound strings. There’s also a strong contingent committed to publishing international writers: Sun & Moon, *Green Integer*, and now the editors of both *Rhizome* and *Ribot* are going to quit those publications and begin a journal devoted to international writing. But publishing international writing doesn’t mean an interaction with local communities from various nationalities. Los Angeles is an amazing city in its diverse population and it’s daunting to conceive of an identity with the place. Heterogeneity is a given in a metropolis. I know that Will Alexander has said that L.A. is, for him, not so much a place to live but a place to touch down for a while, in between excursions. $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ magazine was my first experience with a non-geographically centered identity for poets; now, it seems my community is absolutely not here but there.

KD: Andy Levy’s scared he won’t be able to write after his kid’s born (due early January). Pretty funny, really – the way Andy churns it out, I’m sure he’d be bringing over new manuscripts in the midst of a famine. And it’d be great

famine poetry! But to return to *Paris Review* style (and I suppose this is like asking “How do you write while holding down a job?” or “How has moving to Malaysia affected your writing?”): parenthood – what’s the deal?

DW: No deal! I think it’s best to approach parenthood as “all bets off.” Reproducing yourself (which is definitely NOT what happens when you create offspring) places you precariously in the future as well as in the past and so I think it’s a very humanizing experience. But it creates very mundane and pragmatic problems concerning who cares for the child and how much: you, a partner, a daycare teacher, a network of friends – it’s time consuming. I look at it as an opportunity to have an intimate relationship with the unpredictable. And, of course, you’ll write – you’re a writer. And why should you change; what’s more valuable to offer another person than yourself?

KD: If we stipulate that there *is* a self, I’ll agree. No, I’ll agree without the stipulation.

DW: I’ve been thinking a lot about *Pause Button* and how it has a generous give and take with information. It seems that, by its pauses and what is “stopped” (framed) by them, it respects many possible sources of information and allows for their ability and right to self- and systemic-critique of content. Your voice is not foregrounded but your voice is not lost, either. The relation between source-voices becomes, for me, a compelling and additional level of meaning which is layered on top of the (my) awareness of formal choices in presenting the poetry. It’s exciting to experience how you (what is you?) bubble up out of that field of informational ooze.

KD: I’ve never felt the same about the title of that book since Nick Piombino did a quick psychoanalytic reading of it. “Pause Button . . . Pause Button . . . Ah! Paw’s Button! So, what is your relation to your father’s button? Do you want to take it from him or share it with him? Or do you wish to destroy it utterly?”

That “voice” that you speak of is, for me, the single most unpleasant aspect of the book. Whether or not the voice “works” in an interesting or meaningful way is something I’m not able to judge, since its appearance usually causes me to put the book back on the shelf. Not that there aren’t parts I’m fond of . . .

DW: I’m sorry that I seemed to focus on an aspect of the book that’s unpleasant to you; I’d like to hear more about

the source of that unpleasantness. When reading *Pause Button*, the relationship between you and what you chose to use from your world was very interesting to me.

KD: And I was exaggerating shamelessly. I've recently taken about a quarter page of notes for a new thing that will not include the word "I." I expect the question of voice to surface constantly in it. You're right: the "source of that unpleasantness" is probably my main subject. But I guess this is why I still consider myself a poet of sorts: I can only investigate that subject in a jagged, "intuitive" poetic project, unlike many brilliant people I know who are capable of taking it on in more discursive and normative ways.

DW: Relation is a very important consideration for me in my own work.

KD: *Relation* has been and continues to be an important consideration in my life.³ I can't remember if it came in the mail or if I bought it through Lisa Robertson's bookstore, but I remember having it at home and just looking at it for a long time. The cover is beautiful and deeply disturbing. I remember I read the second poem, "Penny for Your Life," out loud at a table in a bar (in Vancouver we were almost always in bars – "beer parlours," they called them then, but do so less often now) and insisting to everyone that they had to buy the book and read that poem over and over. Which I think several people did. I had been an avid reader of what I then mistakenly thought of as your first book, *Never Without One*, and was struck by both the similarities and differences. Although there are pieces that look and even sound like the work in the earlier book, the newer poems seem less dense, less concerned with producing the effects of density, possibly more argumentative. How do you see the differences, if you see them?

DW: The cover is by an anonymous photographer and I chose it because I thought it could illustrate "relation" as in compared-to as well as the secret narrative that seems to be unveiled by the girl's act of pulling back the curtain.

My earlier book *Theory of Emotion* started an experiment with trying to write from an emotional intelligence, an exploration of that, and then it became more "refined" (maybe) in a formal way, a formally experimental way. I tried to find a form that would perfectly fit the content – and vice versa. I think it was, in a way, an attempt to continue what I read in Gertrude Stein – the affection for

emotional content without the relinquishing of intelligent formal experimentation.

I wonder if your not writing isn't serving as a manifestation on a larger (within your own writing project, more systemic) scale of your "pausing." There *is* an ever-growing field of "experimental" poetry which at times approaches white noise. . . .

KD: I have to confess that I read only about ten per cent as much new poetry as I once did. But I'm not aware of that having an effect on my writing. Although there is clearly a relation between reading and writing, I have always experienced them as two separate activities. I'll say: yes, there seems to be a lot of work employing once-radical formal strategies that seems to be unmotivated beyond that employment. (And I think sometimes this is a mistake on my part, as a reader.) But "good" work always makes me forget about that.

DW: You know Phyllis Rosenzweig and I co-edit *Primary Writing* and we've been told people actually read it because it almost always consists of one or two poems by one or two people! Short.

Here's a copy of the ms. of an upcoming book – it's a collaboration with an LA artist, Michael McMillen, whose work is made from things found (in alleys, etc.), the castoffs, and who's worked as a model-maker in movies (I think he did *Bladerunner*, some *Star Trek* stuff, etc.). I hope you can open the attachment.

KD: I have opened the attachment. Here's what I find: A manuscript (*Portraits and Maps*) in four sections, the titles of which are "Portrait Signifying Space without Visually Enclosing It," "Portrait Manifested in Numbers," "Untitled [Dracula's Daughter Piece]," and "Home Maps: A Rough Sketch." I pause long over these titles. *Portraits* reminds me of Stein, a not unexpected connection; *Dracula's Daughter* makes me think of Dodie Bellamy, which *is* an unexpected connection. On the next page are two quotes, from Lacan and Joseph Cornell, which I'll leave to future readers to pore over for clues. I read the book. It is awesome and disorienting. Intensely visual but not in any sense "imagism" – the decay is too rapid for that; the reader (which reader?) is not allowed to settle on (or for) anything so complacent as a single image. *an imaginary transparent plane / depicted as imaginary lines. . . . outline of foot on side . . . The eye entirely surrounded / with one color: a room of one color / a face without movement.* Non- (or

extra-) visual elements of “portraiture”: *one leg removed / the poem’s a collection of disparate sounds / finger drums, head throbs, doorknob turns.* The book is full of actors who see and move rather than objects who are described. *standing up to disrupt a self: / “Thorny Emotions Embrace Crumbling Walls!”* Useful if difficult advice: *to figure out the scale of a figure / figure out scale and figure.* Theoretical assertion: *rationality reinvents its portrait / surrounded by silence.* Things that scare (thrill) me: *I wanted to be virtuous somehow / like other poets / internal dividers / and create a space for you / a total blank.* Repetition: *a small part of anything split / a small part of anything split.* The “Dracula’s Daughter” piece is unsettling and beautiful and I love it, but I don’t understand it. Where is the bloodsucking? I admit that a head is bent over a neck and other things, but the fangs are merely implied. The last piece is sentence-based. The first line reads: *The divers refuse the water. They are poor toys.* The last line reads: *Lights out: we’re biologically jumpy.* In between them are many wonderful sentences. It is a hot, weird poem. That is as critically insightful as I ever get. It’s unclear to me how the collaboration worked.

DW: “Dracula’s Daughter” is the title (generated by McMillen) of the installation that includes the centerpiece (a single-page poem) of the book; my contribution is a poem which is untitled and begins “clear to high, whining trill.” (I never actually questioned him regarding the origin of the title and simply started writing after hearing a description of the physical aspects of the installation.) I wrote it as it appears in the first version and then reversed the order of the lines when I rewrote it. It was to be clipped at the top corners and held up by wires running through a series of pulleys mounted on the wall, connected to a motor concealed inside a suitcase (also mounted on the wall), and would be dipped slowly and repeatedly into a vat of salt water; over a two-week period the water evaporated and left the poem encrusted (from the bottom up) with heavy, shiny salt crystals. I reversed the order because I realized the poem would be read (really consumed by the crystals) from the bottom up. It’s a spatial piece of writing in that it occurs in discrete fields all over the page; it also became clear to me that the order had to be one that radiated and made sense no matter which point the reader chose to begin. The salt crystals stopped (the installation was disassembled) just at the line “Seeping, all alone?”

KD: Damn, I wish I could do cool things like that. However, my artist friends know better than to collaborate with me.

DW: I started to think about the top-to-bottom order and about how that really didn’t matter much to me in terms of making meaning in a poem. Or, maybe calling attention to that is really what matters to me, now. I’m working on something called *Injections and Infestations*, which I plan to write from the center out and have it “injected” with found text from some parts and “infected” from others. Thanks to Tina Darragh’s recommendation, I’ve been reading *Flexible Bodies*, about the role of immunity in American culture, which is the result of an anthropological study of how various interviewees conceptualized immunity – us and not us.

KD: Right, *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture – From the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* by Emily Martin, 1994. A couple of semesters I used a large chunk of it in my composition classes. Very upsetting for several students! Your new project based on this stuff sounds intriguing in several ways. In compositional terms, what do you see as the advantages of working this way, processurally and procedurally?

DW: This relates to the way I’ve been thinking about what is and what is not – but not really as a battle resulting in a conquering identity. I’ve been writing portraits for the past few years and I’ve thought of them as sort of negative-space portraits, not “person” objectified but all context. I’m not sure how successful I’ve been in that respect. I responded strongly to your manuscript *Comp.* (especially “Apocryphon”) because it seemed to assume this approach and to go on with it.

I’m working on “Injections and Infestations” as a way of exploring self and not-self issues in writing and to see what matters. This has a lot of very personal sources in my life, but I write from my life so that seems appropriate. Anyway, when is the text the author and when is it not? What can come “from outside” and enhance and expand and what can destroy? These may seem old themes in a way but I haven’t explored them thoroughly in my work and I feel the need to do it, now.

I think that this way of approaching a piece of writing (by focusing on a tension between the writer and the multi-sensual and progressively redundant claims to importance from the surrounding mediant) could, in some ways, be suited for hypertextual generating, BUT I want the human contact still, I don’t want it to be electronically mediated (I wonder if it’s relevant to think about who wrote, marketed,

distributed the word-processing programs and what's not possible because not saleable?) and I don't want the time-element (stressful feeling of being observed by technology, of not saving within the allotted time intervals, etc.) I feel when using a screen-based literature delivery device (how fast are those letters appearing left-to-right across the screen?).

So, maybe in that way I'm a visual artist.

Besides, I always had a little role-confusion when I read O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter" because I identified more with Mike Goldberg's methods of taking everything in and weeding out what didn't work than of O'Hara's centralized poet-sun sending out waves of enlightenment.

KD: I think I always identified with the sardines.

Notes (by KD)

1. Alan Davies's essay "If Words Had Meaning" is in his collection of essays *Signage* (New York: Roof Books, 1987). For those who haven't read the essay, here is a brief anthology of sentences from it: "There is nothing, now, here or elsewhere, that I have written, that makes me want to go on. It lost me so easily, almost as if there were better things to do." "Why anyone would want to push a considerable quantity against any resistance at all is beyond me." "It's no easier to mobilize stupidity than insight, but it's commoner. No, actually it's a hell of a lot easier." "If you've been having any kind of trouble living, any kind at all, you should stop writing. It's the best thing for it." "Most of our writing is impertinent. Demanding, and somewhat stupid, like brushing our feet and then putting our shoes on, and feeling good about it." "Unfelt literature is dead, and writing without feeling kills the writer. Writing without direct, unintellectualized feeling requires a problematic change in the state of all of the materials of that action, including the state of the one acting. Don't waste your time." "Isn't literature rather too often something with which we wash our hands after whatever we have been able to manage of living?" "Putting it in print for others is a bit much. We could at least take some time first to put it in perspective for ourselves, and some time before that to put ourselves in perspective." "Literature suffers not half so much from literariness, which is after all only a surfeit of good grace, as it does from the religion of writing. There is a religiosity dyed into the fabric of our making art that makes of faith a blasphemy and of hope a

chapel. It lays life waste. ¶ The literary world is a small cloister of abbots so overfrocked with notions of their actions that they can pretend to themselves that they are naked, or transparent, or that they are making beautiful, before the cult of their own consumption." "The world is where and what we live, and language is a noise we make, usually because we can't help it."

2. Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden, eds., *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1999.

3. DW was here referring to the noun/concept *relation*, but KD took it as a reference to her *Relation* (New York: Roof Books, 1989). Doh.

Kevin Davies

from *Karnal Bunt*¹

*

I have more or less exhaled this romance

Corrupt as Rhode Island politics

Less visible to the touristed enabler than a burnt and buried map of Tajikistan in crisis

Monocultural

Lysenkoist

Phrenologies.

. . . farewell, and good luck with the insurance fraud schemes,
don't let your zombie master learn your new number,
live for love . . .

¹ "Karnal Bunt" is forthcoming in Kevin Davies's *Comp.* (Edge Books).

*

That pleasure lent from these ends of instructibility,
the expansion of the universe, and the hypothesized existence of language
to lives that are conceived as such, ongoing,
reflected, moved, and fucked, pausing now, buzzed, getting down.

Phobic

nook, proletarian character bed, rank with rented Free World prototypes, golf
course pork medallions.

Anonymity breeds content.

You get what you get, in time.
Are got at.
We're willed to the guesswork
of event, the eventual
abstract, a blurring of madrigals.
A pledge is a principle of physics.

Translation: Croppies lie down.

*

Speaking
as a fingerprinted alien
a feasting wedge of antimatter in socks and shoes

Butch feels better after dialysis
though he's angry Andrea hired Tony to shovel snow.
Cookie needs two dollars and forty cents for crack.

All this will have to be radically cut back to save the suburbs.

*

Prolife shutterbugs
amongst the dahlias of their reward

The assassination of Pinochet as he stands gobbing into lily pond

Blank

Pathos a stretch fabric in the gap of utterance

So,
I think you think doubt is childish
Embargoed cigars in the foreground
The problem with one-party American democracy is its obnoxious dream life
Knotted into public adjectives, polluting the water table
Scratching its ass on the lens of the camcorder while passing sentence. Doubt

it.

Pathos a stretch fabric.

The tracking of haywire manatees . . .

An unstartled auditor can't replicate. Is that
it? The Buddha died horribly, food poisoning or bad water.
He was an old duffer with hangers-on.
I've never been able to make sense of the glosses.

*

Welfare recipients as potential scab force

The completion of modernity, the washing up, the beers after

Small or
large machine made of birds

jailed by

pentagons of reversible terms, collapsed amidst the globalized clearcut

Endophasia a device for accelerating protons

That's what happens when you give a community of teenagers a truckload of
pixelvision and tell it to start shooting.

Squamiform

*

Drafty, blowhard world. Is nuts
to cheekbones of animal ratio.

Easier just to keep working than it ever is to stop.

A flat tax.

The noted social anthropologist.

I'm comfortable with my attention span.

To become a mere episode
in the history of indoor compost is to reclaim a garden
in the craters of chronology.
Dogs upon a narrative marsh . . .

I can't think without devils!

Diane Ward

**PORTRAIT SIGNIFYING SPACE WITHOUT
VISUALLY ENCLOSING IT**

1.

moon burns yellow in
every room of the violet landscape

feet outline the floor
little tiny muzzle

fixed, placed outside
as if I've one eye
conceived from many points

and lingers too long so
explodes the view
from the body

I hand you both sides, each time's
memory as the apex in my cone of vision

every single exposed edge
counts as a peg
on which burst turns

an imaginary transparent plane
depicted as imaginary lines
out-and-out

2.

true size of components
(nothing smacks stylish today)

and as
if it were
glass sheets
come to rest on you

back and top depart
skeletal system swept away

so many fingers spread apart
who've been together

end point of shaped inner edge

floor's long strokes
diminish distance
horizon pushes you below

standing up to disrupt a self:
"Thorny Emotions Embrace Crumbling Walls!"

I've declassified myself
middling frame member
in body contour map

to figure out the scale of a figure
figure out scale and figure

3.

an after-image pass-through
and our world
buzzes its vanishing points

sound confuses its ground with self
shrinks larger in relation
front lip and tiny windows
contain exterior precision
ward off vast interior

inside its hideout
outline of foot on front
lips' delineated touch

unseen projection
no topographical senses
no fingers
no toes

outline of foot on side

none of the that, here
we move in constant this

4.

rationality reinvents its portrait
surrounded by silence
groove for panel
for subtle body
terrible stiff and still

what are the targets?
a stable end and a door, clinched

move closer, your context
recedes yet defines you

touch filled with force
rules more simple

shape of beginning
impulse transmitted to
one, gone from the other

without holding much
fingers grow dim

bottom of front leg

because it's fixed, *has place*
outside the picture plane
as if you've been sighted
by one eye come to rest

5.

tilting button
plunged into a short splice:

to make us human
the arteries
the brawny turnaround
outline of arm

fondling picture-memories
winking envy

"at long last, another sun
with a family of planets"

curly arms
what hangs behind walls
when the observer
moves back

upper end of leg
nervous system
drink up

nearly all the oppression upon the walls
due to the effect of their own weight

6.

flat surface on front
the eye entirely surrounded
with one color: a room of one color
a face without movement

the object observed – itself reeling

pedestal turning
my gender thing
in which *I* gaze at you
and both ends of the
exchange
blink

cross-lap joint
bloodletting points
dream you're knocking on my
cellar door
hand plays a mindless tune

one leg removed
this poem's a collection of disparate sounds
finger drums, head throbs, doorknob turns

mind fooled into dizziness
into a belief of its own movement
retaining plug

7.

I hear the echo
fills the universe
with its effect

so when the hurtling stopped
the mind continued to follow it down
inferring the subtle body
detail collar

it matters that I am where I am
a slanted afternoon now

interior view
of life's trajectory
inaccessible indication of a building
stairway leads up
simply because there's nothing below

filler piece
dissection of womb
nothing above, too, though the future

I wanted to be virtuous somehow
like other poets
internal dividers
and create a space for you
a total blank

8.

behind eyelids' stability
unshakable spot for sharing
underface of front
failure is due to lack of stability
not to lack of strength

Skeleton
moments of dull reddish-yellowish
sidewise edge's of M
gone malleable

body as blank projection screen
body as symbol and of life
worn outside itself
wormholed

lip on side and ends
glass jar as organizing principle
its existence not its contents
delegate desire

you're not imagining the effect:
upper parts of regions
a body being shaken

wound figure
illness figure

9.

on the edge of sides
unlaying the ends of both
wretched plunge

there's a film over your face
which reflection makes me tremble

lower front corner
a pocket-sized din, collectively
blocked (oral or anal stage)

uniting them so their strands
upheave, always looking in

on purpose: to rock cradle
into pictorial assembly

then tuck each over and under the other's
circle several times

anatomical scrolls
and pedestal turning

horizontal frame members

Underside of Pedestal

Upcoming . . .

Sianne Ngai / Abigail
Child

April 13th, 6 pm