

12b~Pierre Joris to Adrian Clarke.**“weary/wary of any ontology”**

Dear Adrian Clarke,

Maybe a reading of Maimonedes' *Guide to the Perplexed* is in order: for you, who claim to be so perplexed by my essay “Towards a Nomadic Poetics,” but, why not, also for me as I feel quite perplexed by your “open letter” – open, I feel, only in that it is public, but not open, at least not for me, in terms of what it wants to say about the essay or in how it goes about saying it. Maybe we could get around a table someday with Maimonedes as guide – but that will have to wait.

Meanwhile I'll try to address a few of the tesserae in your critical mosaic – & why not start with the one you start with & come back to several times under different guises: the question of “home,” domus, etcetera. You are worried, it seems, that my refusal to feel “at home” in language means that I “submit uncritically to those larger forces that require our mobility...” and that my “flight through language risks a refusal of any real engagement with the coercions inscribed,” etcetera. Well, I'll maintain the opposite: it is only when constantly aware that the writer is not “at home” in language (or anywhere else, for that matter) that any real and critical engagement with the enemy forces is possible. Our language(s) of daily (& not so daily) use are indeed pluralized and unstable – & that condition has to be not only acknowledged but actively used. You can't go home again – especially as there never was a home in language. To think otherwise is to live in a fiction, a dangerous fiction I would argue, the fiction of some genuine “being” or “dwelling” (yes, those Heideggerian concepts cannot be simply de-politized, carelessly translated away from their “Blut und Boden” roots in his mindset; the “Volk” that comes to the rescue in the later parts of *Sein und Zeit* is the same “Volk” in whose name he will in the thirties espouse fascism and the Führer, both the man & the principle). ((This is obviously too quickly said, here; if interested, I parse these matters more clearly in 2 essays you can check out: on the purely political level in “Heidegger, France, Politics, the University,” & in relation to Celan & poetics in “Heidegger/Celan: Translation at the Mountain of Death.”))

What I'm getting at is this: that I'm extremely weary/wary of any ontology (onto-theology, really) of “being” and “dwelling” as it is that abstraction that generates the various nationalisms (from the nation-state to national-socialism and back to tribal nationalisms & their disastrous effects in, say, ex-Yugoslavia & elsewhere) that have made Europe into the basket case it is today. Salvation lieth not that way – for Heidegger's *Nachgebur*, neighbor, may dwell near-by but always too far to coincide with one's own genuine “being” & will always serve to guarantee one's own genuine “being” by being (made) different & thus the other, the non-genuine, the enemy to be killed. This insane mechanism will go on until we give up those notions of true being and dwelling. Until we become nomadic, until “becoming” is what we want. Becoming-nomadic, becoming-man, becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-neighbor. Be done with being, become!

And we have some catching up to do: the enemy (late global capitalism) has been thinking nomadically for a long time & until we are able to think through that one we will not be able to mount any successful counter-measures. The multi-nationals (from oil to food & everything in-between) do not dwell, they move, here today, gone tomorrow, elsewhere the day after: you cannot pin them down with some nineteenth-century Marxist scheme. The lure, the simulacrum they dangle in the face of the Volk is that power has a *home* & that that's where the enemy is: fixed, in place, say, in the *Domus Blancus*, the White House, and that therefore change will come by changing the in-dweller in said domus. It just ain't so, it just ain't so.

Your strictures re the net & cyberpoetics are banal: Of course e-commerce as the cyber-version of late capitalism got a hold of it as soon as it was able to do so. You should also have reminded our readers that to start with, the net itself was a technology developed by the cold war military-industrial-academic complex for its own paranoid purposes. We know that & the dangers inherent in this and any technology, but we also have to think through the new poetics such a medium will/should give rise to, in order to use it rather than being used by it. The “naked lunch” you suggest we should continue means exactly to be aware of what it is that is dangling at the end of our fork, and does in no way imply some return to a nude/purist primitivism that would save us from disgusting unnatural acts of technology that surround us so nasty... Writing and thinking had to do with technology from the beginning on, as I go to some pain to point out.

Simply tuning out is not a solution: just imagine a writer or poet refusing to use the technology of print because 99% of the Gutenbergian revolution has been bought out by the nasties & is being used to print advertisements for your local porn shop or racist diatribes or 132 different language versions of that old phallocratic bestseller, the Bible?

What interests me in terms of poetics in the new media is that we now have a medium multiple enough to allow the creation of works making simultaneous use of the old alphabetical (& non-alphabetical) writing systems (while submitting the latter to a range of torsions and explorations that could renew their usages), visuals and sound. So, what you have is a multiplication of possibilities and potentialities, and that, to me, is exciting, to say the least. We are at the very beginning of this “cyberage” – & though it is necessary to step gingerly, we certainly do have to take those steps.

You are somewhat snide, my friend, and a rather hasty & careless reader to boot, when you suggest that I “wait for the caravan (No more oasis stops needed, boys – metaphoric or otherwise!)...” May I send you back to the text & ask you to reread the sections on the *mawquif*, the needed “stations” as temporary resting places, oases where poesis is possible & gets done. It is not for nothing that I called my latest book of poems *Poasis*.

Re waiting for this or that caravan: the most recent update of *Towards a Nomadic Poetics* uses the following poem by the Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi as second epigraph: “I’m not the nomad / searches for the well / the sedentary has dug. // I drink little water / and walk / apart from the caravan.” Maybe the problem has to do with location, geographical & cultural: the island you’re on has no desert or steppe, it’s countryside is nearly totally subjected to a grid that reterritorializes the landscape out of geography onto a millenarian past history and requires a sedentariness, I, who lived there for a good dozen years, found stifling in the extreme.

And no matter how much I loved the man Basil Bunting & his great poem “Briggflats” I think he was wrong if he suggested, as you say, that “the world changed too quickly in the twentieth century for a long poem.” At least here in North America it is not so and immediately come to my mind a number of long works, of very different character & poetics, for example: Edward Dorn’s *Gunslinger*, Robert Kelly’s *Axendendron Tree*, *The Loom*, and *Mont Blanc*, Robin Blaser’s *The Holy Forest*, bpNichol’s *Martyrology*, Ronald Johnson’s *Ark* – or, of my own generation, several of the book-length works of Lynn Hejninian and Leslie Scalapino, or Nathaniel Mackey’s *Songs of the Andouboulou*, Charles Stein’s *theforestforthetrees*, etcetera etcetera. And, come to think of it, over there in England it is not so either – Allen Fisher’s *Gravity as a Consequence of Shape* or Tom Raworth’s *Writing* are certainly such “long” works, which I see as part of a nomadic poetics.

But beyond the question of the “long” poem, the more urgent argument I want to return to has to do with something your own dislike and irritation with a nomadic poetics leaves unstated, though I sense it there, looming behind the mosaic of theoretical quotes you wield. It is summed up best in a quotation by Maurice Blanchot: “Everything that allows men to become rooted, through values or sentiments, in *one* time, in *one* history, in *one* language, is the principle of alienation which constitutes man as privileged in so far as he is what he is, [...] imprisoning him in contentment with his own reality and encouraging him to offer it as an example or impose it as a conquering assertion” (*Blanchot Reader* 202).

By the way, how many languages do you speak, how much have you translated from other languages or cultures? Your slur on ethnopoetics is incomprehensible to me. Jerome Rothenberg’s work over 40 years in that area of gathering and translating exemplifies exactly what you claim it does not, namely Homi Bhabha’s “stranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations.” That statement does not, as you suggest, “implicitly [critique] any outright rejection of linguistic ‘at-home-ness’” – such a reading seems to me a desperate effort to try to anchor the “stranging sense” in a “relocation,” (accent on ‘location’) that finally cannot deal with the condition of extra-&-cross-territoriality. Again, this seems to me a specifically British problem (or maybe only English? – the conquered / colonized peoples at the edge of Angle-land certainly have a more complex relation to such matters).

Or, to take it all on last time back to somewhere else in Europe, let me quote Paul Celan, writing to his wife from Germany where he was giving a reading: “The language with which I make my poems has nothing to do with the one spoken here or elsewhere.” The implications of such a thought go far beyond your rather facile strictures re “dematerialized is immaterial” which you tease out of Andrews’s reflections on materiality and graphic immediacies – maybe pointing out the sleek anorexia of his/your *signifieds*. And all this brings me back to where I started in, i.e. Heidegger. As Julia Kristeva argued last week in Paris (the quickness of the web has its uses & pleasures!) in a talk pitching Celan against Heidegger in which she

shows how the philosopher wants to “dwell,” to “inhabit” to root himself while the poet as “radical stranger” wants (can?) only “tenir,” – hold (on), stand – because poetry is “a tension held in the fragmentation of languages, of being and of extreme solitude.” (Or as I have written elsewhere: “Philosophy is the enemy of the nomad because, as Novalis knew, philosophy is only a sort of home sickness, a need to feel everywhere at home. Poetry is the opposite: a desire to feel everywhere estranged, out of touch / in reach with the other – out of house & home. In a tent, maybe, the basic push of poetry is thus nomadic.”)

Obviously your letter makes, or tries to make, more points than I am able to address here right now; they will have to wait for another occasion – thank you, however, for this occasion that permitted me to think through some of these matters. Be assured that – material or immaterial as they may prove – those points I was unable to touch upon do *dérivent* somewhere in my mind, as I now have to go *dériver* both in the hanging city and in “the labyrinthine passages behind and beneath the Superhighway...”

Pierre Joris
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