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Language Writing and Louis Zukofsky's "A"-24 : Three Interviews

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- This series of three interviews with poets Carla Harryman, Bob Perelman and Barrett Watten focuses on the twenty-fourth and final movement of Louis Zukofsky's "A". "A"-24 was composed by musician Celia Thaew-Zukofsky and given to her husband on the occasion of his sixty-fourth birthday in January 1968. Therefore, it should be considered as one of those numerous "found objects" which only became part of Zukofsky's "poem of a life" through a process of quotation. Over two hundred pages or so, the score redistributes quotations taken from Zukofsky's poetic, critical, and dramatic works and spreads them among four different voices or parts: "Drama," "Thought," "Story" and "Poem." Nine pieces taken from Handel's *Harpsichord Works* complete this polyphony and determine the speed at which each section should be read. A powerful synthesis of Zukofsky's writing career on the page, "A"-24 nonetheless remains an elusive work on stage. The overload effect tends to overwhelm, canceling out any metaphorical reading of "A"-24 as the resolution of a life-work attaining the condition of music. With no real equivalent in the American modernist landscape, "A"-24 relentlessly questions such notions as "voice" or "authorship," but it also raises issues as to the critical and theoretical implications of a practice of poetry that must now be thought of in its relationship to the stage. A difficult and relatively confidential text, "A"-24 has been performed only five times since it was first published in 1972. Two of these performances were set up in San Francisco in 1978 by poets Steve Benson, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, Kit Robinson and Barrett Watten. In the interviews that follow, Watten, Perelman and Harryman explain how the Language Poets then approached the difficulties raised by the staging of a text which is still often considered today as an anomaly within the genre of the American long poem. The discussion then embarks on their reassessment of Zukofsky's influence on contemporary American poetry and poetics. From there emerges a reflection on the dynamics of deference, preservation, and rejection underlying the conversation that

the works of the Language Poets entertain with each other, and with those of their predecessors.

- 2 The first two interviews compile several exchanges that took place between 2013 and 2022, either by email or face to face. Carla Harryman's interview was conducted in April 2022. It continues a conversation which started in November 2021 on the occasion of the "Correlations and Conversations in Poetics" symposium jointly organized by Nanterre University and the École Normale Supérieure.
- 3 The recordings of the two performances are available on Pennsound:
https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Zukofsky/Zukofsky-Louis_A-24_UC-Davis_11-16-78.mp3
https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Zukofsky/Zukofsky-Louis_A-24_Grand-Piano_SF_6-30-78.mp3



An Interview with Carla Harryman

- 6 An innovator in poetry, prose, and interdisciplinary performance, Carla Harryman is the author of twenty-four books of poetry, prose, plays, and essays. Her books include *A Voice to Perform: One Opera / Two Plays* (2020), *L'Impromptu de Hannah* (2018), *Sue in Berlin* (2017), *Adorno's Noise* (2008), *Gardener of Stars: A Novel* (2001), and two volumes of selected writing: *Animal Instincts: Prose, Plays, Essays* (1989) and *There Never Was a Rose without a Thorn* (1995). *Open Box*, a CD of music and spoken text performance created with composer and musician Jon Raskin was released in 2012. A recording of *Occupying Theodor W. Adorno's "Music and New Music,"* is forthcoming as a collaboration between Harryman, Raskin, and percussionist & pianist Gino Robair. An active collaborator, she is one of ten co-authors of *The Grand Piano, an Experiment in Collective Autobiography: San Francisco, 1975-1980* (2006-2010). Carla Harryman has received the Foundation for Contemporary Arts award in 2004 and other grants and awards from the Fund for Poetry, but also Opera America Next Stage (with composer Erling Wold) and the Distinguished Faculty in Creative Activity Award from Eastern Michigan University where she teaches Creative Writing.



Carla Harryman

BENOÎT BONDRIT: Dear Carla, first of all, thank you very much for accepting this follow-up interview to our meeting in Paris in November. I would like to start by reading from a quote that you selected for the roundtable we organized at Nanterre University:

ZUKOFSKY. OR Zukofsky and Pound. Or Zukofsky and Pound and Olson. But Zukofsky... Creeley gets stuck in somewhere, then Pound. Williams, back to

Zukofsky. I say Balzac! and not just to be a brat. Or even more outrageously, what about George Sand? (not as good) so what? (as Eliot) but... a game I play in my head. Blake, Rabelais, Spicer, and Sappho if you want some poets. (Rabelais?) He-he-he. Gertrude Stein. Frank O'Hara and Anne Waldman wandering in the woods! Turn left to Baraka. And Zukofsky. Okay, but... Williams NOT Pound. No Bollingen Prize—hugging for me. Give me a tree not a ship's hold. Excuse my vanity pulled up but...
(*Grand Piano* 5 120)

I find this excerpt quite intriguing since at least two different voices can be heard here: yours, which is clearly identified as such by the use of the first-person singular pronoun "I", and another voice, which comes across—perhaps—as the voice of the other poets in the group. Interestingly enough, that "other voice" remains linguistically disembodied in the absence of personal pronouns or verbs that would foreground the connection between "what is being said" by that voice and one or more originating (and possibly gendered) speaking subjects. Although this "disembodied voice" is busy making sense of the literary past in a way that seems quite political, it nonetheless animates a patrilineal model of literary transmission. What we've got here is a list of names and a play on the connectors "or," "and," "then" and "but" which gradually leads us from "Zukofsky and Pound," to "Zukofsky [...] then Pound," to your own "Zukofsky Okay... but Williams NOT Pound." As the text moves forward, that voice seems, among other things, to try and negotiate Pound's difficult legacy and to define a relative and decentered position for him as one of the forebears of language writing. In spite of its politics, however, what that voice does could easily be interpreted as the unconscious assertion of a male-dominated genealogical discourse on literature and tradition—one that is even reinforced by the voice's attempts at substituting "value" for "chronology," thus emphasizing linearity through the difficulties of reconfiguration. Here, while coming together with this disembodied voice yourself, and taking part in the de-centering of Pound through your "Zukofsky Okay... but Williams NOT Pound," you nonetheless offer some sort of relief to your readers. Indeed, before reaching that conclusion, you start by interrupting the process that is going on in a way that challenges the patrilineal model of literary transmission itself. This is especially visible in the list of names that you put forward since it includes poets and writers who are not necessarily male, not necessarily modernist, and not necessarily American, but who, at the same time, are in no way exclusively defined by their gender, their origin, or their position in literary history. What results is not the articulation of an alternative literary genealogy, but rather the undoing of any such genealogy through your playful disruption and rejection of the linearity which the patrilineal model foregrounds. Would you say that such notions as lineage, genealogy or linearity belong to an oppressive structure which automatically gives rise to male-centered discourses on literature, tradition and influence? In which case, how does your own disruption of linearity, and therefore of the structure itself, compare to the strategy that would consist in putting forward an alternative canon based, for instance, on a matrilineal model of literary transmission? Finally, how do you interpret your own polyphony here since you manage to continue what the "disembodied voice" has started through your "Zukofsky Okay... but Williams NOT Pound" while simultaneously debunking the discursive framework which conditions the interpretation of that sentence?

Carla Harryman: The passage you quote, selected from my *Grand Piano 5* essay "Community" is retrospectively addressing a context of the collective autobiography. There is polyvocality, as you note, in which one of the voices comes from "nowhere." I think of this voice also as a plural voice, as variously ventriloquizing, puncturing, and punctuating. I don't so much think of it as the voice of the specific group, even as this group is a part of the voice and the interlocutor of the writing. This non-identity is animated through the suspension of narratives related to literary tradition and identification with these. Perhaps this undoing of a narrative of affiliation is not only an activation of feminist critique of the patrilineal tradition, which it is, but also a tribute to the liveness and diversity of poets' conversation when that conversation is seen from a wider, more open frame.

I'd like to place the polyvocal riff in the context of the entire *Grand Piano 5* piece, as the citation is a fractal: the entire piece invokes incommensurate scenes pressured by a simple formal constraint, in which the composition of each part is broken off at the end of a U.S. standard letter-size page. Comprised of micro-essays with varying topic headings related to specific communities or efforts at forming community, "Community" was an account and activation of community-plural or of a "coming upon" contradictory, conflictual, and stirring instances of community: the Arab-American community gathering place in Starbucks at my local shopping mall, the dysphoric and wishful community in my poet's novel *Gardener of Stars*, the polyvocal Zukofsky "game," *teatro campesino* as cultural expression of striking labor force, gay bar dancing, Gail Scott's novel *Heroine*, and a critic's hijacking of a conference on feminist poetics, which had implications for rethinking community. The interruptive form of the micro-essays was a performative gesture responding to *Grand Piano* collaborators who were critical of the length of some of the essays, including (or perhaps especially) mine. I was ambivalent about the complaint. And yet I saw responding to it as an opportunity to improvise within a constraint.

I have an essay forthcoming in a volume titled *Other Influences*. It's an anthology in which feminist experimental poets discuss influences on their work. My essay focuses on the topics of conversation, interpretation, and collaboration; thus, I do not follow a form through which influence is understood as lineage, passed down from generation to generation or mother to daughter. Instead, I take a (multi) conceptual approach to "other influence," interpreting influence itself as other to the way that it is normalized as lineage. While I remain critical of conventional narratives of influence, I know very well that these received modes are influencing my own, more and less, antagonistic relation to them. I am currently writing an expanded essay tentatively titled "(my) poetics as conversation," which effort, still on-going, resulted in our adding "conversation" to the title of the symposium seminar at Nanterre. This essay will focus on a literal conversation which took place in Paris in 2018. This is an example of a *given* occasion extended into a next iteration in a different form.

Zukofsky was given within the community I came upon before it was the community that would take shape within literary history or before it became a "tendency" in Barrett Watten's terms. I consider my own contributions to, or voice within, that community formation to be other to a configuration of it within Pound to Zukofsky modernism. Perhaps the interruptive spirit of performance has something to do with this. An interest in genre leads to new form: between poetry and X. With regard to the American canon, Williams' *Kora in Hell* was a motivating work as was Creeley's prose and poetry, and Stein's. My poetry begins both in a performance-poetics and in a poetry-in-prose that is also not the prose poem in any conventional sense. I read Zukofsky partly because of the astonishing diversity of the works in "A" and partly because a conversation was emerging through Zukofsky, a conversation that also circulated around questions of the politics of language, materiality, and non/narrative.

The disparate references in the passage from "Community" indicate (gulp) a kind of freedom of encounter and movement in, around, and between *oeuvres*. The polyphony is the poetry of the prose, the condensation that animates this playful pushback. So yes, I do agree *that such notions as lineage, genealogy or linearity belong to*

an oppressive structure which automatically gives rise to male-centered discourses on literature, tradition and influence.

BB: In the paragraph we've just discussed, your mention of "a game that I play in my head" is actually quite surprising in the contrast it suggests between a radical assertion of agency, on the one hand, and the silent nature of that assertion, on the other. Would you say that your questioning of the patrilineal model of literary transmission was an essentially personal, introspective, and therefore silent process? Or were you able, at the time, to discuss this issue with other language writers?

CH: As Vygotsky has written, "inner speech is social" (225). As for silence, no, I was not silent, even as there were gender dynamics that needed sorting out and that could be quite irritating. My writing certainly was not silent. I think any of the West Coast Language poets would have understood that *Property* (1982) is a radical unwriting of patrilineal tradition, where "property" is the propriety of male authorship. My play *Third Man* (1979-1980) was overtly queer. *Third Man* is a woman performing "Third Man": cross-dressing as narrative flicker. Loop, another entity in the play, is a metamorphic figure, who variously obscures performative gendering and performs exaggerated versions of masculinity. "The Middle," a talk I gave at 80 Langton Street in 1981, was a bricolage of appropriated works, language games and daydreams, that resists linear narratives of affiliation (or should I say filiation) and literary inheritance.

BB: A little bit further, you write "I (more than) like(d) Zukofsky" (120): your typography and use of parentheses suggests at least two different readings here, namely "I more than liked Zukofsky" (in the past) and "I like Zukofsky" (in the present). Paradoxically maybe, "I like Zukofsky" doesn't necessarily come across as a lesser version of "I more than liked Zukofsky." It could be read simply as a more distanced, reflexive, or mature approach to his work. Could you please comment on the evolution that is suggested here?

CH: I see that statement not as evolutionary but as accurate across time, in both senses: I did and I do like Zukofsky. I suppose that the intensifier subvocalized and theatricalized by the parentheses in "I (more than) like(d) Zukofsky" could be read as a bit flirty or snarky, a shaded tease performed just as much or more in the present of the writing as in the past. Such gestural language may obscure the past or allude to what remains unstated.

BB: You participated in the two performances of Zukofsky's "A"-24 which were given at the Grand Piano in 1978 and you interpreted the "Drama" part on both occasions. To be precise, the "Drama" part was split between Steve Benson and yourself. I have always wondered why you decided to do so back then. Did you see that as a way to treat performance poetry primarily as poetry? Or, to put it in a slightly different way, was that a refusal to "create character" precisely where character might have emerged more naturally given the obvious connection between those lines and theatrical performance?

CH: I have been continuously interested in different types of language-centered performance, so I wouldn't see a contradiction between genres of presentation per se. I did feel some limitations with the Zukofsky performance, but they were consciously understood by everyone in advance. The piece had a conventional and minimal performance set-up, and thus the delivery was everything.

Having the two voices in "Drama" allowed for more collaboration between Steve and me. I was moving around a lot in those days, so my memory is a bit fuzzy, but I think I was living with Steve and my brother on Hampshire Street at that time. The performance decisions in this case are based on who is participating in the performance. This is a value I have retained in making performance, and perhaps this

early performance experience encouraged my inclination to make works that can expand and contract the numbers of performers, something that influences the form and sonic qualities of the text.

I take your question about splitting up the part as related to but also distinct from the question of character and performing poetry. My work for theater is anti-dramatic, and thus to some extent follows from avant-garde critiques of drama literature. One approach to the "Drama" line would be to play Drama as a metacharacter, one that itself would perform its multiple characters: the laborers, the nurse, the son, etc. This approach would require acting and would absorb the language of the composition into the acting vocabulary. In this case, the part might be performed by a single virtuosic performer. Another way to approach Drama as poetry in "A"-24 would be to voice the language using whatever means of activation one has access to at the moment it is performed, with the experience of rehearsing being a large part of what makes these means available to the performers. I have always swayed toward this latter kind of approach to performance myself: it requires an awareness of listening as much as communicating. In "A"-24 the difficulty of processing both the musical line and the verbal phrasing invites continuous re-responding to the language, especially in the Drama segment, because one is voicing multiple parts. Working closely with someone on the same line of the score enhances and challenges the listening mode. I don't feel that I got as far as I might have with what was possible in the performing of "A"-24. Back then, Steve Benson was a more sophisticated and confident performer than I. Over time, I have come to understand that I need a lot of time to prepare.

BB: As compared to the other Language writers involved in these two performances of "A"-24, would you say that your academic background in performance studies or your own practice as a performance poet changed the way in which you approached Zukofsky's work?

CH: No, I was just trying to keep up. Through my studies, I became interested in conceptualism, performance within the visual arts as (unstable) critique of the commodity, and the question of "language" within the context of anti-dramatic theater and physical theater and performance art. The only kind of performance practice I engaged in my studies was movement; and, speaking of influence, movement had a significant influence on my writing, even as my practice-encounter with movement was not sustained beyond some coursework and workshops.

BB: My next question focuses on your two recent performance works, namely *Good Morning* and *Cloud Cantata*. Writing performance poems—i.e., works of sociality—during the Covid-19 lockdown certainly was a very powerful gesture. To what extent would you say that "sociality" itself became not only the form but also the subject-matter of these experiments?

CH: Almost all of my performance writing is intended for the page, with the possibility of the page becoming a score for performance. *Good Morning* is now published in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* and *Cloud Cantata* is forthcoming from Pamanar, a poetry press. I consider these publication occasions to be felicitous expressions of this double action between poetry and performance. I think this question about sociality is a little tricky, but I like it a lot. I do think that I am often interpreting weird fantasies or dreams into social banter; and also, some of the dialogue is riffing on remarks made in actual conversation. I am also testing how far one can stretch dialogue into language-thought threads and patterns that are not

dialogic and still retain the sense of dialogue in the whole. And I am also interested in breaking with the dialogue while recursively reflecting its language, for instance in a couple of sections entitled "fugue" in *Cloud Cantata*.

I have been exceedingly fortunate to have someone to talk to when "sheltering in place" and the relative degrees of sheltering over the last two plus years. Performance has always been a means of breaking out of a sense of isolation, getting out of my own head, and making something in present time with others. Along with their companionable and playful sociability, these writings are also iterations through and investigations of isolation in a context in which the social, actually, is overbearing: regulatory, unfair, tragic, violent, hypocritical, ignorant, exhausted, and politically chaotic. I think, perhaps, that sociality is drawn into the social, while this negativity of the social is mediated in an improvised, dialogic mode.

BB: In our interview together, Bob Perelman explains that the trouble he finds with Zukofsky is precisely a "thinness of sociality" in his works. Do you agree with that statement? And if so, do you see Celia's score for performance in "A"-24 as redemptive in any way?

CH: A first response is that I wouldn't be the one to consider Celia Zukofsky's composition an act of redemption—politics of gender (here I am being social again!). The composition is an astonishing "take" on the recursive "life-poem" as discussed already.

But I may not be entirely understanding the question. My sense is that you are bringing Bob's comment on sociality and Barrett's critique of redemption together. Barrett makes a case for the work as authorless, because of the Zukofskys' recursive quoting of one another. Is this authorlessness theological or revolutionary? I wonder why the arrangement wouldn't be also a blending of authorship. A pluralizing, as an event of returning to the scene of the relationship between experience and the poem in a recursive fashion. When Barrett writes, "*A"-24 seems to offer redemption everywhere but defers it always—making a theological corrective to the political project of revolutionary Marxism*, a gigantic gap opens up between cottage industry and revolutionary Marxism. There is a problem with the imagined scene of the making of the work. I find myself falling between this as a generative and deadening problem, which I suppose has everything to do with the gender politics I mention above. I evade positioning Celia within this narrative to some degree.

I can say this about my own values regarding "redemption." My performance works are unrecoverable, irredeemable. They work against the logics of repertory theater: one has to remake the work, not reproduce it as if there were an original performance. There is no eternity for the performance. The performance begins with the text and the performers. An audience for *Mirror Play* would experience it as performance for speaking voice and jaw harps at the Poetry Center in San Francisco, as a multi-media "happening," with improvised physical performance, image projections and noise and improvised music at a Detroit Metro gallery, and as a bilingual choral performance with four voices at the *Hölderlinturm*. The language in these performances would have radically different inflections, would be sensible in entirely different ways. This underscores what I love about the poetic: how language can resonate through different bodies, different ears, and how a work changes within temporal and spatial contexts. Even as some of my works are more contained than what I have described of *Mirror Play*, I am antagonistic to literary values for redemption. Improvisation is often what most interests me, the relationship between

structures given or decided in advance and how these can enable what cannot be anticipated in advance.

In any case, I like the idea of “thin sociality” being a negative influence on Bob’s work, which is often quite sociable. And perhaps “A”-24, encouraged me in a negative sense to make work that favors a non-identity between page-based text and intensely collaborative and social performance interpretation of the work that works against expectations of replication. Yet, “A”-24 is also a work that has not been fixed, because it is impossible perhaps; and this too might have informed my thinking.

BB: The note on *Good Morning* that you provided us with ahead of your reading at the ENS in November is quite surprising. Here, instead of stating what a performance of the work should look like or sound like, you actually insist on the freedom of interpretation which is granted to the performers. You give many different examples of how the work might be read and performed, but you don’t seem to be setting any strict limits. Would you say that, in a sense, your note invites “misreading” as a practice just as much as it cancels out the very possibility of “misreading” as a critical concept?

CH: I realize this is a bit of a twist on the term *misreading*, but in improvised music a mistake is not a mistake; my writing and the performance of it is variously informed by and/or deploys structured improvisation. The question for me would be how does this open up the possibilities for reading? Toward performance, there are parameters that structure or limit what’s possible yet do not determine the result. One of the “limits” is the text itself, but how the text is taken as limit is also a matter of interpretation within a particular situation. One might begin with the idea that the text is its own instruction, and that some people are going to “hear” the text—experience it sonically—and others are going to find “themes” and stress these as a way of creating continuity for themselves, and others are going to want to play with, mock, or intervene in the “couple dynamic” of the dialogues. Hannah Weiner had an idea about interrupting the sentence on the page, and I think that there is something kindred in the way I imagine performance interrupting a relational dynamic or affect. I am interested in your idea of canceling out misreading as a critical concept. Perhaps performance can “perform” such canceling and therefore defamiliarize the critical concept so that one can question assumptions about the critical term.

BB: Did your own experience of performing “A”-24 comport with Barrett’s remarks on “misreading” in the section he dedicated to your two stagings of the masque in *Grand Piano 1*? In which case, would you say that your 1978 performances of “A”-24 influenced the way in which you approach performance poetry today?

CH: Let me quote part of the passage from the *Grand Piano* you refer to: “For all our careful scoring of textual emphasis, were we of the avantgarde the original misreaders? In the event, I had a suspicion that something like that might be the case, that we had in part misrecognized Zukofsky’s endorsement of our own, arguably more radical, project” (14).

Barrett slips from “misreading” to “misrecognition,” thus eliding the distinction between the rehearsals of the composition and Zukofsky. His comment is curiously blurry; and it is also about the desire to be seen or recognized and to “refunction” Zukofsky as precursor to language writing. “At the same time we wanted his endorsement; we wanted to claim him as our own” (14). I use *refunction* in quotes above, because it has been a term of interest to Barrett, dating back to his early writing on Zukofsky.

While it is entirely possible and even likely that our “reading” would be a misreading given “the obduracy of his writing,” not to mention the demands of the score on the untrained voices of poets, there would have been no way for us to produce the “right” reading. What kind of cultural capital, or financing for that matter, or theory of performance put into rigorous practice, would we need in order to attain such a reading is up for speculation. Still it was a proposition that Zukofsky should be read and recognized: and this was an event, an act of reading, whatever Zukofsky might think of what we did with it. The question of influence goes back to my interest in poetics as conversation; and this was a conversation that had a deadline. I am perhaps inordinately interested in performance time and performance deadlines, to the extent that I have made a number of pieces that are performed over years in entirely different ways, and I think of these all as part of a work-in-progress and, contradictorily, as entirely discrete events or “whole fragments,” to borrow a term from Ann Lauterbach.

I am not sure that performing “A”-24 changed the trajectory I was on even if it did add texture to it. I could also say that any meaningful performance is influential and becomes part of the critical toolkit. In the two years before the performance, I had been involved in performance practices that would include movement and also language-based improvisations with Steve Benson. I was interested in conceptualizing experiments between performance art and poetics; for instance, “Walking Backwards with *The Maintains*,” a performance in Bob Perelman’s Talk Series, was a messy event that involved using the entire loft, domestic items in the loft, a reconfiguration of audience engagement, and my walking backwards reading Clark Coolidge’s *The Maintains*. This was an investigation of site specificity and audience (to what extent would the audience accept feminist antagonism and playfulness?) as well as an investigation of time-based performance, distributed authorship, and documentation. Performing “A”-24 was all the more interesting, because it amplified a particular engagement with literature that would be obscure to and intersect with critical conversations in the arts. People in visual and performing arts would complain about poetry readings as lackluster ritual. I was both appreciative and skeptical of these ubiquitous takes on poetry, because they seemed as much about the dread of poetry as about the routinized reading form. At the same time, the Zukofsky piece would not exactly answer this complaint because of the density of the language that made listening challenging; and the attention was still on “reading” as opposed to, for instance, *mis en scene* or high-quality sound, which we had no control over in any case.

BB: The definition you purport of “poetics as conversation” seems to imply a constant interplay between reading, writing, and performing, but also an ever-renewed dialogue between literary forms and genres which is itself, in a sense, performative. Your own *Adorno’s Noise* seems quite exemplary in that matter and the work itself resists classification. Would you say that you read Adorno as a poet, or rather as a critic/theoretician?

CH: I would have to say that I was reading Adorno as a poet with a bent toward critique/theory, so this is a simple response; but I would like to complicate it. Reading Adorno, specifically *Minima Moralia*, in translation, making note of the negativity of his language, while thinking about the objects of his commodity critique in combination with the “subject” and the “damaged life” results in a hybrid response that actually aligns my reading of Adorno with “the essay” as both literary

and theoretical. On one reading of his book, I was struck by the different categories of negativity in his language, from grammatical bits like “no,” “not,” “never,” “no one,” (“Let no one represent you”) to metaphors and similes, such as “passions like cheap jewelry” that saturated his work of cultural critique and subjective reflection on “damaged life.” Then there is the essays’ connection to Los Angeles, a part of my cultural background, though “my L.A.” has a different immigration story, which includes a grandfather living in Compton who immigrated from the Dust Bowl and made a living as a janitor, and a grandmother who walked down the street every Sunday to an integrated Methodist Church on the corner; how L.A. sounds to me as it meets Adorno’s American commodity culture is pretty noisy. *Minima Moralia* is exemplary of the essay as form. What is a poem or an essay if one is a poet but not a lyric poet? Such a question is possibly somewhere lurking in the back of my head quite often.

BB: In this context, would you say that your pun on “Adorno” / “Adore-no” somehow intersects with Barrett’s remarks on negativity in *The Constructivist Moment* and *Questions of Poetics*³?

CH: I think my response above is absolutely pertinent to Barrett’s multifarious negativities. In the essay in which the pun appears, I was thinking about the erotic and the political. I was thinking about the young women revolutionaries baring their breasts at Adorno at the moment of their sense of betrayal. I was thinking about how I was writing with and against the author; how mockery can be close to adoration; how a mind can turn one on to “no.” How antagonism can go together with regard.

BB: Barrett made it clear in our interview together that he disregarded the idea that performance could be seen as a means of resisting the commodification of literature. Do you agree with that statement, and if that’s the case, where do you locate the politics of performance poetry?

CH: His statement is perfectly Adornian, an expression of negative dialectics. I would disagree that there is a singular politics of performance poetry. I would like to codify this more explicitly in order to say something more about the diverse politics of performance poetry now, but this will need to wait. As Heidi Bean states in *Acts of Poetry: American Poets Theater and the Politics of Performance*, “The relationship between performance and poetry changes over time, not wholesale but locally, in relation to specific communities in specific moments, and as part of a network” (25). My own work sustains a conceptualization of performance as a site for rethinking political narratives; but it also, as Heidi Bean has written, involves a conceptualization of the audience as “an interpretive community marked, paradoxically, by discontinuity and dispersion” (27).

My work in the San Francisco Bay Area Poets Theater back in the day, begins with the possibility of the poetic text as writing that can be performed but is not understood to be simply a work for performance; the performance is the transposition of the text into another medium. I began with this question “how can the non/narrative language centered text further polyphonic rather than monovalent interpretation, given the interaction with the reader it invites?” For me this has everything to do with questions of gender, of diversity and difference, of sociality, and of authorship. It also had to do with questions related to improvisation.

I have found your discussion about music and speech in your interview with Barrett interesting, because it has given me a chance to reflect on the importance of music to

my work in performance. In the last two decades, text based language frequently becomes a score for music improvisation: the interpretation of the score typically underscores the distinction between language and music as well as opens up the possibility of sonic moments in which one can't separate the sound from music; because the sound of words, syllables or letters are made in the instrument of the voice, which if the frames "music," "performance" and "poetry" are left open can bring these together without obliterating the categories: they are in conversation.

BB: Perhaps a final and more personal question if you agree? In spite of your questioning of his "centrality," would you say that Zukofsky is a "presence" in your own poetry still? How do you—as a poet—negotiate this "presence"?

CH: One carries one's reading along in time. So yes, Zukofsky is present as ambient ghost-text. The most salient connection to Zukofsky is I believe the radical particularity of the poetry. The "A"-24 performance was something else, a what-if experiment. Poems-in-prose such as "Property," and "For She," which Ron Silliman uses as an example of the New Sentence, are not only early examples of a pressure I put on phrases, differentiating one from another, while shifting levels or scales—for instance from sense to non-sense or from sonic abstraction to discourse—within narrative and poetic language. These could be codified differently than the way Silliman discusses the unit of the sentence. I think also of the distinctions of form within "A," which could perhaps be traced to *Adorno's Noise*, although I have never thought about this before now.

The values for the literary are very different. Zukofsky seeks a place in the eternity of authorship through the ages, as defined by modernist literary value. My concerns are with the possibility for literature, for the writing subject, other to a patriarchal eternity. This view of poetry is of emergence; it exists in a mode of becoming and perhaps an investigation of the relationship of "making" to practice. Performance as an aspect of this practice, in act and in conceptualization, is corrosive. It materializes time, and variously weathers, eats, and stills time; it lends time a plasticity that loosens the controls on the consequential future, and does so, to quote a famous dead philosopher, "without metaphysical appeal."

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NOTES

1. <https://z-site.net/>
2. http://media.sas.upenn.edu/Pennsound/authors/Zukofsky/Bard_1972/Zukofsky-Louis_10_A-24_Bard-College_Annandale-Hudson_11-9-72.mp3
3. "Negativity is common to a range of concepts that includes: nonidentity, antagonism, nihilism, revolt, defamiliarization, rupture, opposition, dissociation, conflict, delusion, void, emptiness. Negativity as it occurs "in the field" so to speak, with the radical forms and interventions of the avant-garde, partakes of any or all of these modes—even as its final horizon, a denial of positivity, locates each instance as a potential form of critique" (Watten 2003 240 / 2016 165).

INDEX

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