

oral as in O of the mouth, and aural as in A-U of the ear

Seyðisfjörður Community Radio & EKA - - Tallinn, march 2026

Variations on the right to remain silent

Anne Carson

Yeah, Yeah, Yeah. Indeed. And Also

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Clandestine Happiness.

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By The Paris Review November 27, 2017



Anne Carson ~ Variations on the right to remain silent

from *A Public Space*, Issue 7 / 2008

variaciones sobre el derecho a guardar silencio es una bella traducción al español editado por cuadro de tiza.

Silence is as important as words in the practice and study of translation. This may sound like a cliché. (I think it is a cliché. Perhaps we can come back to cliché.) There are two kinds of silence that trouble a translator: physical silence and metaphysical silence. Physical silence happens when you are looking at, say, a poem of Sappho's inscribed on a papyrus from two thousand years ago that has been torn in half. Half the poem is empty space. A translator can signify or even rectify this lack of text in various ways—with blankness or brackets or textual conjecture—and she is justified in doing so

because Sappho did not intend that part of the poem to fall silent. Metaphysical silence happens inside words themselves. And its intentions are harder to define. Every translator knows the point where one language cannot be translated into another. Take the word *cliché*. Cliché is a French borrowing, past participle of the verb *clicher*, a term from printing meaning “to make a stereotype from a relief printing surface.” It has been assumed into English unchanged, partly because using French words makes English-speakers feel more intelligent and partly because the word has imitative origins (it is supposed to mimic the sound of the printer’s die striking the metal) that make it untranslatable. English has different sounds. English falls silent. This kind of linguistic decision is simply a measure of foreignness, an acknowledgment of the fact that languages are not sciences of one another, you cannot match them item for item. But now what if, within this silence, you discover a deeper one—a word that does not *intend* to be translatable. A word that stops itself. Here is an example.

In the fifth book of the *Odyssey* when Odysseus is about to confront a witch named Kirke whose practice is to turn men into pigs, he is given by the god Hermes a pharmaceutical plant to use against her magic:

So speaking Hermes gave him the drug
by pulling it out of the ground and he showed the nature of it:
at the root it was black but like milk was the flower.
MOLY is what the gods call it. And it is very hard to dig up
for mortal men. But gods can do such things.

MOLY is one of several occurrences in Homer’s poems of what he calls “the language of gods.” There are a handful of people or things in epics that have this sort of double name. Linguists like to see in these words traces of some older layer of Indo-European preserved in Homer’s Greek. However that may be, when he invokes the language of gods Homer usually tells you the mortal translation too. Here he does not. He wants this word to fall silent. Here are four letters of the alphabet, you can pronounce them but you cannot define, possess, or make use of them. You cannot search for this plant by the roadside or Google it and find out where to buy some. The plant is sacred, the knowledge belongs to gods, the word stops itself. Almost as if you were presented with a portrait of some person—not a famous person but someone you might recognize if you put your mind to it—and as you peer closely you see, in the place where the face should be, a splash of white paint. Homer has splashed white paint not on the faces of his gods but on their word. What does this word hide? We will never know. But that smudge on the canvas does serve to remind us of something important about these puzzling beings, the gods of epics, who are not consistently bigger, stronger, smarter, nicer or better-looking than humans, who are in fact anthropomorphic clichés from top to bottom, yet who do have one escapade up their sleeve—immortality. They know how not to die. And who can say but the four untranslatable letters of *MOLY* might be the place where that knowledge is hidden.

There is something maddeningly attractive about the untranslatable, about a word that goes silent in transit. I want to explore some examples of this attraction, at its most maddened, from the trial and condemnation of Joan of Arc.

Joan of Arc's history, especially the historical record of her trial, is one fraught with translation at every level. She was captured in battle on May 23, 1430. Her trial lasted from January to May of 1431 and entailed a magistrate's inquest, six public interrogations, nine private interrogations, an abjuration, a relapse, a relapse trial, and condemnation. Her death by fire took place on May 30, 1431. Thousands of words went back and forth between Joan and her judges during the months of her inquisition; many of them are available to us in some form. But Joan herself was illiterate. She spoke Middle French at her trial, whose minutes were transcribed by a notary and later translated into Latin by one of her judges. This process involved not only the transposition of Joan's direct responses into indirect speech and of her French idioms into the Latin of juridical protocol but also deliberate falsification of some of her answers in such a way as to justify her condemnation (this was revealed at the retrial twenty-five years after her death)[1]. Yet these many layers of official distance separating us from what Joan said are just an aftereffect of the one big original distance that separates Joan herself from her sentences.

All Joan's guidance, military and moral, came from a source she called "voices." All the blame of her trial was gathered up in this question, the nature of the voices. She began to hear them when she was twelve years old. They spoke to her from outside, commanding her life and death, her military victories and revolutionary politics, her dress code and heretical beliefs. During the trial Joan's judges returned again and again to this crux: they insisted on knowing the story of the voices. They wanted her to name, embody and describe them in ways they could understand, with recognizable religious imagery and emotions, in a conventional narrative that would be susceptible to conventional disproof. They framed this desire in dozens of ways, question after question. They prodded and poked and hemmed her in. Joan despised the line of inquiry and blocked it as long as she could. It seems that for her, the voices had no story. They were an experienced fact so large and real it had solidified in her as a sort of sensed abstraction—what Virginia Woolf once called "that very jar on the nerves before it has been made anything." [2] Joan wanted to convey the jar on the nerves without translating it into theological cliché. It is her rage against cliché that draws me to her. A genius is in her rage. We all feel this rage at some level, at some time. The genius answer to it is catastrophe.

I say catastrophe is an answer because I believe cliché is a question. We resort to cliché because it's easier than trying to make up something new. Implicit in it is the question, Don't we already know what we think about this? Don't we have a formula we use for this? Can't I just send a standard greeting card or paste in a snapshot of what it was like rather than trying to come up with an original drawing? During the five months of her trial Joan persistently chose the term *voice* or a few times *counsel* or once

comfort to describe how God guided her. She did not spontaneously claim that the voices had bodies, faces, names, smell, warmth or mood, nor that they entered the room by the door, nor that when they left she felt bad. Under the inexorable urging of her inquisitors she gradually added all these details. But the storytelling effort was clearly hateful to her and she threw white paint on it wherever she could, giving them responses like:

- ... You asked that before. Go look at the record .
- ... Pass on to the next question, spare me.
- ... I knew that well enough once but I forget.
- ... That does not touch your process.
- ... Ask me next Saturday.

And one day when the judges were pressing her to define the voices as singular or plural, she most wonderfully said: "The light comes in the name of the voice."

The light comes in the name of the voice is a sentence that stops itself. Its components are simple yet it stays foreign, we cannot own it. Like Homer's untranslatable *MOLY* it seems to come from somewhere else and it brings a whiff of immortality with it. We know that in Joan's case this turned out to be a whiff of herself burning. Let's pass on to a less dire example of the escapade of translation, but one that is equally driven by the rage against cliché—or, as the translator himself in this case puts it—"I want to paint the scream not the horror." [3] This you may recognize as a statement of the painter Francis Bacon in reference to his well-known series of portraits of the pope screaming (which are variations on a portrait of Pope Innocent X by Velazquez). Now, Francis Bacon is someone who subjected himself to inquisition repeatedly throughout his career, most notably in a series of interviews with art critic David Sylvester, which are published in a volume called *The Brutality of Fact*. "The brutality of fact" is Bacon's own phrase for what he is after in a painting. He is a representational painter. His subjects are people, birds, dogs, grass, sand, water, himself and what he wants to capture of these subjects is (he says) their *reality* or (once he used the term) *essence* or (often) *the facts*. By *facts* he doesn't mean to make a copy of the subject as a photograph would but rather to create a sensible form that will translate directly to your nervous system the same sensation as the subject. He wants to paint the sensation of a jet of water, that very jar on the nerves. Everything else is cliché. Everything else is the same old story of how Saint Michael and Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine came in the door with a thousand angels around them and a sweet smell filled the room. He hates all that storytelling, all that illustration, he will do anything to deflect or disrupt the boredom of storytelling, including smudge the canvas with sponges or throw paint at it.

When I say Francis Bacon wants to translate sensation to your nerves by means of paint I'm using the verb *translate* metaphorically. In our usual usage, *to translate* is an operation of language, not paint. Silence also is something proper to language and Bacon does at times evoke it literally, as in interviews when he says (more than once),

"You see this is the point at which one absolutely cannot talk about painting. It's in the process." [4] In this statement he is making a territorial claim, as Joan of Arc did when she said to her judges, "That does not touch your process." Two different senses of *process* but the same exasperated shrug toward an authority whose demands are unjust. One can sense this exasperation shaping most of the public actions of Joan's life—her military recklessness, her choice of men's clothing, her abjuration of heresy, her relapse into heresy, her legendary final words to the judges: "Light your fires!" Had silence been a possibility for her, Joan would not have ended up in the fires. But the inquisitors' method was to reduce everything she had said to twelve charges in their own wording, that is to say, their story of her solidified as the fact of the matter. [5] The charges were read out to her. She had to answer each with "I believe it" or "I believe it not." A yes or no question forbids a word to stop itself. Untranslatability is illegal.

Stops and silence of various kinds, however, seem to be available to Francis Bacon within the process of his painting. For instance in his subject matter, when he chooses to depict people screaming in a medium that cannot transmit sound. Or in his use of color, which is a complex matter, but let's look at one aspect of it, namely the edges of the color. His aim as a painter, as we have seen, is to grant sensation without the boredom of its conveyance. He wants to defeat narrative wherever it seeks to arise, which is pretty much everywhere since humans are creatures who crave a story. There is a tendency for story to slip into the space between any two figures or any two marks on a canvas. Bacon uses color to silence this tendency. He pulls color right up to the edge of his figures—a color so hard, flat, bright, motionless, it is impossible to enter into it or wonder about it. There is a desolation of curiosity in it. He once said he'd like to "put a Sahara desert or the distances of a Sahara" in between parts of a painting. [6] His color has an excluding and accelerating effect, it makes your eye move on. It's a way of saying, Don't linger here and start thinking up stories, just stick to the facts. Sometimes he puts a white arrow on top of the color to speed your eye and denounce storytelling even more. To look at this arrow is to feel an extinguishing of narrative. He says he got the idea for the arrows from a golf manual. [7] To know this makes me feel even more hopeless about understanding the story of this picture. Bacon has no interest in encouraging such hope; nor did Joan of Arc when her inquisitors asked, "What do your voices smell like?" and she answered, "Ask me next Saturday." Bacon extinguishes the usual relation of figure to ground, the usual passage of information at that place, as Joan extinguishes the usual relation of question to answer. There is instead a catastrophizing of communication.

Bacon has another term for this catastrophizing: he calls it "destroying clarity with clarity." [8] Not just in his use of color but in the whole strategy of his compositions, he wants to make us see something we don't yet have eyes for. He goes inside clarity to a place of deeper refreshment, where clarity is the same and yet differs from itself, which may be analogous to the place inside a word where it falls silent in its own presence. And it is noteworthy that for Bacon this is a place of violence. He talks a lot about

violence in his interviews. He gets asked a lot about violence in his interviews. He and his interviewers do not mean the same thing by this word. Their question is about images of crucifixion, slaughtered meat, twisting, mangling, bullfights, glass cages, suicide, half-animals and unidentifiable flesh. His answer is about reality. He is not interested in illustrating violent situations and disparages his own works that do so as “sensational.” He wants to convey the sensation, not the sensational, to paint the scream, not the horror. And he understands the scream in its reality to lie somewhere inside the surface of a screaming person or a scream-worthy situation. If we consider his study of the pope screaming alongside the painting that inspired it, Velazquez’s *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, we can see what Bacon has done is to plunge his arms into Velazquez’s image of this profoundly disquieted man and to pull out a scream that is already going on there deep inside. He has made a painting of silence in which silence silently rips, as black holes are said to do in deep space when no one is looking. Here is Bacon speaking to David Sylvester:

When talking about the violence of paint it’s nothing to do with the violence of war. It’s to do with an attempt to remake the violence of reality itself ... and the violence also of the suggestions within the image itself which can only be conveyed through paint. When I look at you across the table I don’t only see you, I see a whole emanation which has to do with personality and everything else the living quality ... all the pulsations of a person ... the energy within the appearance And to put that over in a painting means that it would appear violent in paint. We nearly always live through screens—a screened existence. And I sometimes think when people say my work is violent that from time to time I have been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens.[9]

Bacon says we live through screens. What are these screens? They are part of our normal way of looking at the world, or rather our normal way of seeing the world without looking at it, for Bacon’s claim is that a real seer who looked at the world would notice it to be fairly violent—not violent as narrative surface but somehow violently composed underneath the surface, having violence as its essence. I could say that Bacon “translates” the violence to paint, but I want to stop talking about translation metaphorically and take up the actual struggle of rendering a text from one language to another. So can we please shift our historical gaze to Germany at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century and give our attention to some words for the color purple. Our English word *purple* comes from Latin *purpureus*, which comes from Greek *porphyra*, a noun denoting the purplefish. This sea mollusk, properly the purple limpet or murex, was the source from which all purple and red dyes were obtained in antiquity. But the purplefish had another name in ancient Greek, namely *kalche*, and from this word was derived a verb and a metaphor and a problem for translators. The verb *kalchainein*, “to search for the purplefish,” came to signify profound and troubled emotion: to grow dark with disquiet, to seethe with worries, to search in the deep of one’s mind, to harbor dark thoughts, to brood darkly. When the German lyric poet

Friedrich Hölderlin undertook to translate Sophokles' *Antigone* in 1796, he met this problem on the first page. The play opens with a distressed Antigone confronting her sister Ismene. "What is it?" asks Ismene, then she adds the purple verb. "You are obviously growing dark in mind (*kalchainous*) over some piece of news." This is a standard reading of the line. Hölderlin's version: "*Du seheinst ein rotes Wort zu färben*," would mean something like "You seem to color a red word, to dye your words red." The deadly literalism of the line is typical of him. His translating method was to take hold of every item of the original diction and wrench it across into German exactly as it stood in its syntax, word order and lexical sense. The result was versions of Sophokles that made Goethe and Schiller laugh aloud when they heard them. Learned reviewers itemized more than a thousand mistakes and called the translations disfigured, unreadable, the work of a madman. Indeed by 1806 Hölderlin was certified insane. His family committed him to a psychiatric clinic, from which after a year he was released as incurable. He spent the remaining thirty-seven years of his life in a tower overlooking the river Neckar, in varying states of indifference or ecstasy, walking up and down his room, playing the piano, writing on scraps of paper, receiving the odd visitor. He died still insane in 1843. It is a cliché to say Hölderlin's Sophokles translations show him on the verge of breakdown and derive their luminous, gnarled, unpronounceable weirdness from his mental condition. Still I wonder what exactly is the relation of madness to translation? Where does translation happen in the mind? And if there is a silence that falls inside certain words, when, how, with what violence does that take place, and what difference does it make to who you are?

One thing that strikes me about Hölderlin as a translator, and about Francis Bacon as a painter, and for that matter about Joan of Arc as a soldier of God, is the high degree of self-consciousness that is present in their respective manipulations of catastrophe. Hölderlin had begun to be preoccupied with translating Sophokles in 1796 but did not publish *Oedipus* and *Antigone* until 1804. Judging his first versions "not living (*lebendig*) enough," he subjected them to years of compulsive revision, forcing the texts from strange to more strange. Here is Hölderlinian scholar David Constantine's description of this effort:

He warped the original to fit his own idiosyncratic understanding not only of it but also of his obligation in translating it Choosing always the more violent word, so that the texts are stitched through with the vocabulary of excess he was also voicing those forces in his own psychology which, very soon, would carry him over the edge. And in uttering them did he not aid and abet them? It is the old paradox: the better the poet says these things, the better he arms them against himself. So well put, are they not irresistible?[10]

Irresistible at least was the process of this violence. For it is remarkable that Hölderlin began at this time to revise also his own early work and he went about it the same way, that is, he would scrutinize finished poems for the "not living enough" parts then translate these into some other language, also German, that lay silent inside his own.

As if he were moving along a line, ripping the lids off words and plunging his arms in, he met his madness coming the other way.

Yet it was not altogether a chance meeting. From early on Hölderlin had a theory of himself. This from a letter to his friend Neuffer in 1798, which begins with the sentence, "Livingness (*lebendigkeit*) in poetry is now what most preoccupies my mind," then goes on to this lucid analysis of his own balance of being:

.... because I am more destructible than some other men, I must seek all the more to derive some advantage from what has a destructive effect on me ... I must accept it in advance as indispensable material, without which my most inward being cannot ever entirely present itself. I must assimilate it, to arrange it ... as shadows to my light ... as subordinate tones among which the tone of my soul springs out all the more livingly.[11]

This from a letter to Hölderlin's mother from his friend Sinclair in 1804:

I am not the only one—there are six or eight people besides me who have met Hölderlin and are convinced that what appears to be mental derangement is in fact nothing of the sort but is rather a manner of expressing himself which he has deliberately adopted for very cogent reasons.[12]

This from an 1804 review of his Sophokles translations:

What do you make of Hölderlin's Sophokles? Is the man mad or does he just pretend or is his Sophokles a veiled satire on bad translators?[13]

Maybe Hölderlin was pretending to be mad the whole time, I don't know. What fascinates me is to see his catastrophe, at whatever level of consciousness he chose it, as a method extracted from translation, a method organized by the rage against cliché. After all what else is one's own language but a gigantic cacophonous cliché. Nothing has not been said before. The templates are set. Adam long ago named all the creatures. Reality is in chains. When Francis Bacon approaches a white canvas its empty surface is already filled with the whole history of painting up to that moment, it is a compaction of all the clichés of representation already extant in the painter's world, in the painter's head, in the probability of what can be done on this surface. Screens are in place making it hard to see anything but what one expects to see, hard to paint what isn't already there. Bacon is not content to deflect or beguile cliché by some painterly trick, he wants to assassinate it right there on his canvas. So he solicits the interventions of chance. He makes what he calls "free marks" on the canvas, both at the beginning when it is white and later when it is partly painted or completely painted. He uses brushes, sponges, sticks, rags, his hand or just throws a can of paint at it. His intention is to disrupt its probability and to short-circuit his own control of the disruption. His product is a catastrophe, which he will then proceed to manipulate into an image that he can call *real*. Or he may just hang it up:

David Sylvester: You would never end a painting by suddenly throwing something at it. Or would you?

Francis Bacon: Oh yes. In that triptych on the shoulder of the figure being sick into the basin, there's a whip of white paint that goes like that. Well I did that at the very last moment and I just left it.[14]

Free marks are a gesture of rage. One of the oldest myths we have of this gesture is the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of paradise. Why did Eve put a free mark on that apple? To say she was seduced by the snake or longing for absolute knowledge or in search of immortality are posterior analytics. Isn't the simple fact of the matter that she was bored? Adam had just performed the primordial act of naming, had taken the first step towards imposing on the wide-open pointless meaningless directionless dementia of the real a set of clichés that no one would ever dislodge, or want to dislodge—they are our human history, our edifice of thought, our answer to chaos. Eve's instinct was to bite this answer in half.

Most of us, given a choice between chaos and naming, between catastrophe and cliché, would choose naming. Most of us see this as a zero sum game—as if there were no third place to be: something without a name is commonly thought not to exist. And here is where we can discern the benevolence of translation. Translation is a practice, a strategy, or what Hölderlin calls “a salutary gymnastics of the mind,”[15] that does seem to give us a third place to be. In the presence of a word that stops itself, in that silence, one has the feeling that something has passed us and kept going, that some possibility has got free. For Hölderlin, as for Joan of Arc, this is a religious apprehension and leads to gods. For Francis Bacon it leads to Rembrandt.

One of Francis Bacon's favorite paintings is a self-portrait by Rembrandt. He mentions it in several interviews. What he says he likes about this portrait is that when you go close to it you notice the eyes have no sockets.[16] Let us place this explanation alongside a sentence of Hölderlin's that haunts me and I can't say quite why. On the right-hand margin of a page on which he had already drafted a poem, Hölderlin at a later date began to write an essay. It contains this strange remark:

Öfters hab'ich die Sprache, öfters hab'ich Gesang versucht, aber sie hörten dich nicht.

Often enough I tried language, often enough I tried song, but they didn't hear you.[17]

Something about the way the pronouns in this sentence come face to face with themselves reminds me of Rembrandt's eyes. Those socketless eyes are certainly not blind. They are engaged in a forceful looking, but it is not a look organized in the normal way. Seeing is going on but (is it possible that) seeing is entering Rembrandt's eyes from the back. What his look sends forward, in our direction, is deep silence.

Perhaps rather like the silence that followed Joan of Arc's response to her judges when they asked her, "In what language do your voices speak to you?" and she answered: "Better language than yours."

To sum up. Honestly, I am not very good at summing up. The best I can do is offer a final splatter. I was trained to strive for exactness and to believe that rigorous knowledge of the world without any residue is possible for us. This residue, which does not exist—just to think of it refreshes me. To think of its position, how it shares its position with drenched layers of nothing, to think of its motion, how it can never stop moving because I am in motion with it, to think of its tone of voice, which is casual (in fact it forgets my existence almost immediately) but every so often betrays a sort of raw pity I don't understand, to think of its shadow, which is cast by nothing and so has no death in it (or very little)—to think of these things is like a crack of light showing under the door of a room where I've been locked for years. In his tower overlooking the river Neckar, Hölderlin had a piano that he sometimes played so hard he broke the keys. But there were quiet days when he would just play and tilt back his head and sing. Those who heard said they could not tell, though they listened, what language it was.

[1] Françoise Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire*.

[2] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*.

[3] David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*.

[4] Michael Peppiatt, "Interview with Francis Bacon," in *Art International* 8.

[5] Françoise Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire*.

[6] David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*.

[7] H. Davies, "Interview with Francis Bacon," *Art in America* 63.

[8] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated by D. W. Smith.

[9] David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*.

[10] David Constantine, *Hölderlin*.

[11] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, edited by Eric L. Santner.

[12] David Constantine, *Hölderlin*.

[13] Aris Fioretos, *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin*.

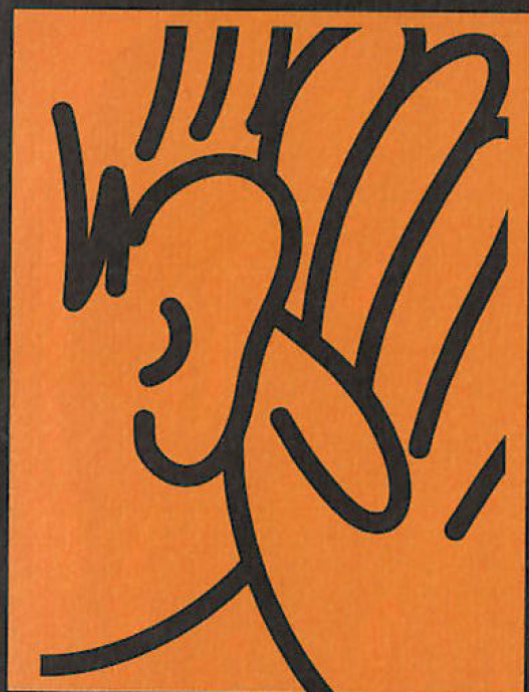
[14] David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*.

[15] David Constantine, *Hölderlin*.

[16] David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*; Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated by D. W. Smith.

[17] Aris Fioretos, *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin*.





YEAH, YEAH, YEAH. INDEED. AND ALSO!¹

Clara Balaguer and Carmen José

Time

Tuesday, April 12, 2022

17:12"

Keywords

voice, resonance, ventriloquism, moment, oral, cultures, people, resonate, power, sound, skill, talking, Ong, echo, exercise, reading, space, mimicry, thinking, text

Speakers

Carmen José	VOICE—ECHO—DUMMY—HAND (43%)
Clara Balaguer	VOICE—ECHO—DUMMY—WHISPER (45%)
Steven Connor	VENTRILOQUIST (7%)
Sepake Angiama	VENTRILOQUIST (1%)
Walter Ong	VENTRILOQUIST (1%)
Homi K. Bhabha	VENTRILOQUIST (1%)
Pauline Oliveros	VENTRILOQUIST (1%)
bell hooks	VENTRILOQUIST (1%)

¹ This is a transcribed mix-up of a conversation, complete with echoes and whispers, shared after a series of listening exercises in between two meals cooked online. It works towards a lecture about throated publishing and a workshop on the voice as choral publishing/circulating tool. It took place on trains and in three cities in the Netherlands (Arnhem, Utrecht, Rotterdam) at the following locations: Durum Time, Sonmat Korean Soul Food, BAK—basis voor actuele kunst, Varia, and BEAR ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem, in no particular order.

Clara Balaguer

The skill of being able to speak while hearing your echoes. This being a question of scale. Like, are you able to speak on a large scale? At a public rally or in a large arena, it's really necessary to be able to hold on to your train of thought, regardless of the ambient noise around you. And this speaking within earshot of your own echo is also an image or metaphor for when your ideas begin to resonate elsewhere. It calls to mind a grounding that you need to not be carried away by these echoes. Whether those are cacophonous or symphonic resonances, you still have to be able to concentrate on your voice as it rides on your train of thought. To not be distracted by the noise of the ripples of your voice, resonances in the proverbial room.

Carmen José

This reminds me actually of two things. One, when I was a teenager, I was part of a choir, which was part of a music school. And we did a lot of exercises in cannoning. We were different groups, and we would start singing a song, the same song, but entering at different times. Each group would start singing with a one-verse delay. So, you would have to focus on what you were singing while other people were singing. It takes

a lot of training to be able to focus on how to do it, to concentrate, follow up, and still match with the echo.

I was reading the other day that the deepest part of the right side of the brain is the one that understands music. So even if you have a big accident and you forget about your life, your family's names, everything, there is a high possibility like that you will remember the lyrics, melodies, etc.

DUMMY

02:06

Carmen José

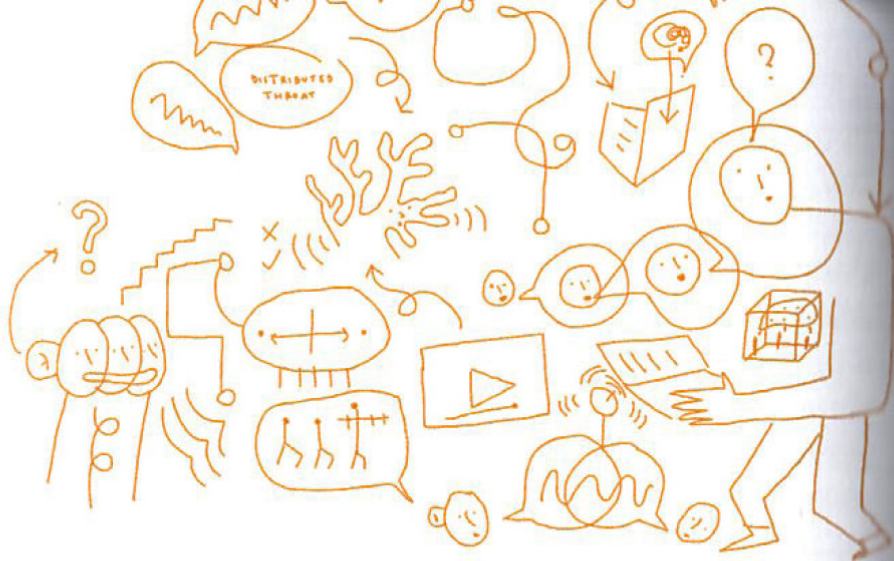
I was also thinking about when we did the slow launch of the publication *an education — documenta 14*, with Sepake Angiama who proposed this exercise 'Reading Out Loud' that I recorded.

VENTRILOQUIST

02:08

Sepake Angiama

We were in a room, walking around reading different books. Then she would touch different people on the shoulder for them to stop or start reading. You would try to focus on your text and make sense of it, as a speaker but also listener. You would always be influenced by what other people were reading.



VOICE

02:20

Carmen José

As I was recording, I was also moving, so the sound that went on the record went in and out. It was quite beautiful. The unison of voices, different voices, moving around, reading, a layering of all these texts and these voices in the room... That was something that resonated with me in the artwork you shared of... Paul Pfeiffer?

ECHO

03:42

Clara Balaguer

Yeah, Paul Pfeiffer.

VOICE

03:43

Clara Balaguer

Echoing Nancy Holt and Richard Serra's work *Boomerang*.

WHISPER

03:46

Clara Balaguer

[You can find both works of the same title on YouTube.]

VOICE

03:45

Clara Balaguer

This sort of choral declamation or group recital Pfeiffer used in the work is... hmmm... something very familiar to me. I grew up in the Philippines, a society that prizes uniformity. There's a lot of strange parallels to Dutch culture. Like that Dutch folk saying, the one that says flowers growing above or below average height must be 'beheaded' to maintain the pleasant nature of a flower bed. Maybe in the Philippines, it's more about *do not grow higher*. Like, it's okay to be average or below average, just do not grow higher. This thing of group recitation is, on the one hand, a really comforting thing to do. And on the other hand, it has tinges of authoritarianism and spectres of brainwashing and systems of oppression. But there's ultimately a lot of succour in unison. If you think of any movement, any revolution, whether it's on the right or on the left or any other point of the spectrum, there's comfort in doing things together.

ECHO

05:31

Carmen José

Yeah.

Clara Balaguer and Carmen José

Carmen José

Public [published?] speaking, publishing without a material strata. The act and matter of publishing as circulating information through or always, through the throat. In canon singing, you are in unison but echoing, listening to yourself through others. That is super hard to train. How to listen to yourself, to how you sound, how you make sound, what you're saying, the rhythm, the pauses.

ECHO

06:17

Clara Balaguer

Yeah yeah.

VOICE

06:18

Clara Balaguer

It's an exercise in resonance. When you say, 'Oh, it resonates with me,' it's usually a positive thing. We conceive of conversational resonance as desirable, generally, but sometimes resonance creates interference. How to train your speaking, your discursive capability in a conversation where there are negative resonances to your words. And how can you... listen in. Not just listening to your own drone but being able to modulate between inner and outer voices. How to tune out of your own internal dialogue and agitation to engage in a conversation, because your drone is getting in the way of the other person?

How do you move the fader between voicescapes when needed? It's a skill that dials in multiple directions.

DUMMY

07:50

Clara Balaguer

There's the one exercise of Pauline Oliveros I've done quite a lot.

VENTRILOQUIST

07:52

Pauline Oliveros

In this exercise, you're just supposed to release any sound. And it's a melodic result.

VOICE

07:52

Clara Balaguer

The surprise in the room is always that there is harmony. I rarely use the word 'always,' but here it is appropriate. We don't actually realise that our voices, when spoken together, are somehow already attuned. There's something about the frequency of several synchronous voices. Maybe it's that our bodies are built similarly, a consistently resonant flesh-architecture that creates this harmonic scale. I don't know why it's always surprising to me, even after doing this exercise so often, to realise that human voices from any body sound sweet together. It's a powerful epiphany.

ECHO 08:45

Carmen José

Yeah, true.

DUMMY 08:46

Carmen José

There's another exercise by Pauline Oliveros,
I don't know if we are talking about the same
one.

VENTRILOQUIST 08:47

Pauline Oliveros

You all throw sounds in the room and, at the
end, through time, you end up harmonizing that
arbitrary sound as a group.

VOICE 08:53

Carmen José

We tend to do that, find harmony, tune in to the
tones of people, the sound in the room. The more
time you spend listening, the more you become
aware of subjects and objects around you.

ECHO 09:34

Clara Balaguer

Indeed.

VOICE 09:35

Carmen José

Through the differences, you understand what

harmonisation actually means. What you share in difference is not the same as what you would find in similarity. Right? I'm also thinking of bell hooks, about the power of being in difference, of accepting the distance as well as the closeness of difference.

ECHO

10:13

Clara Balaguer

What text of bell hooks?

DUMMY

10:16

Carmen José

I think it's from *All About Love*. There's a quote about transformation.

VENTRILOQUIST

10:18

bell hooks

Transformation will fall on being together in difference, or, like, being together with the difference of each other.

VOICE

10:23

Carmen José

How to be in that space, that place? We tend to forge allegiances or groups by finding similarities, and we confront each other through these similarities. In these affinity groups, we tend to want to change other people, to preserve the status quo, to keep others similar to us. But what

happens when you try to just be with people that are very different in their opinions and their ways of being? And how do you do that?

VOICE

11:15

Clara Balaguer

I'll read to you a little excerpt of a book. Hang on. So, this book is about throwing voice, ventriloquism as a cultural phenomenon. It talks about what it means to actually throw your voice elsewhere. I've been thinking through ventriloquism as companion to the idea of mimicry.

DUMMY

11:15

Clara Balaguer

Homi K. Bhabha writes about mimicry in his book *The Location of Culture*.

VENTRILLOQUIST

11:16

Homi K. Bhabha

There's a whole chapter on colonial mimicry as dark talent. It's a cautionary tale about assimilation. Through mimicry, copying actions, we achieve mimesis, that status of being or becoming a copy. We reproduce colonial systems, internalising them to the point where we think they were ours to begin with instead of things we only inherited.

Clara Balaguer

Although I really like Bhabha's writing, I'm also wondering whether we could consider mimicry as the power to transcend through repetition, and getting better in that repetition. Every skill has a dark side, a negative resonance. How can we also position it also as a skill of light or as a way forward? I'm wondering how we can move from mimicry to ventriloquism, the ability to throw our voices elsewhere, reversing the source of what is being echoed.

The source of the 'superior' discourse has generally been coming from the west or from the north and then echoing towards the south and the east. So how can we actually boomerang that back? We already possess the skill of mimicry, so it's just a matter of funnelling our knowing-how into an act of ventriloquism. But without instrumentalising the dummy, the puppet, the marionette. Of course, there will always be this skewing of power towards whoever is doing the manipulation of volume. But if you observe ventriloquist performers, they seem to have this symbiotic relationship with their puppets. Actually, it's like there is a love there.

ECHO

13:44

Carmen José

Yeah, there is, indeed.

VOICE

13:46

Clara Balaguer

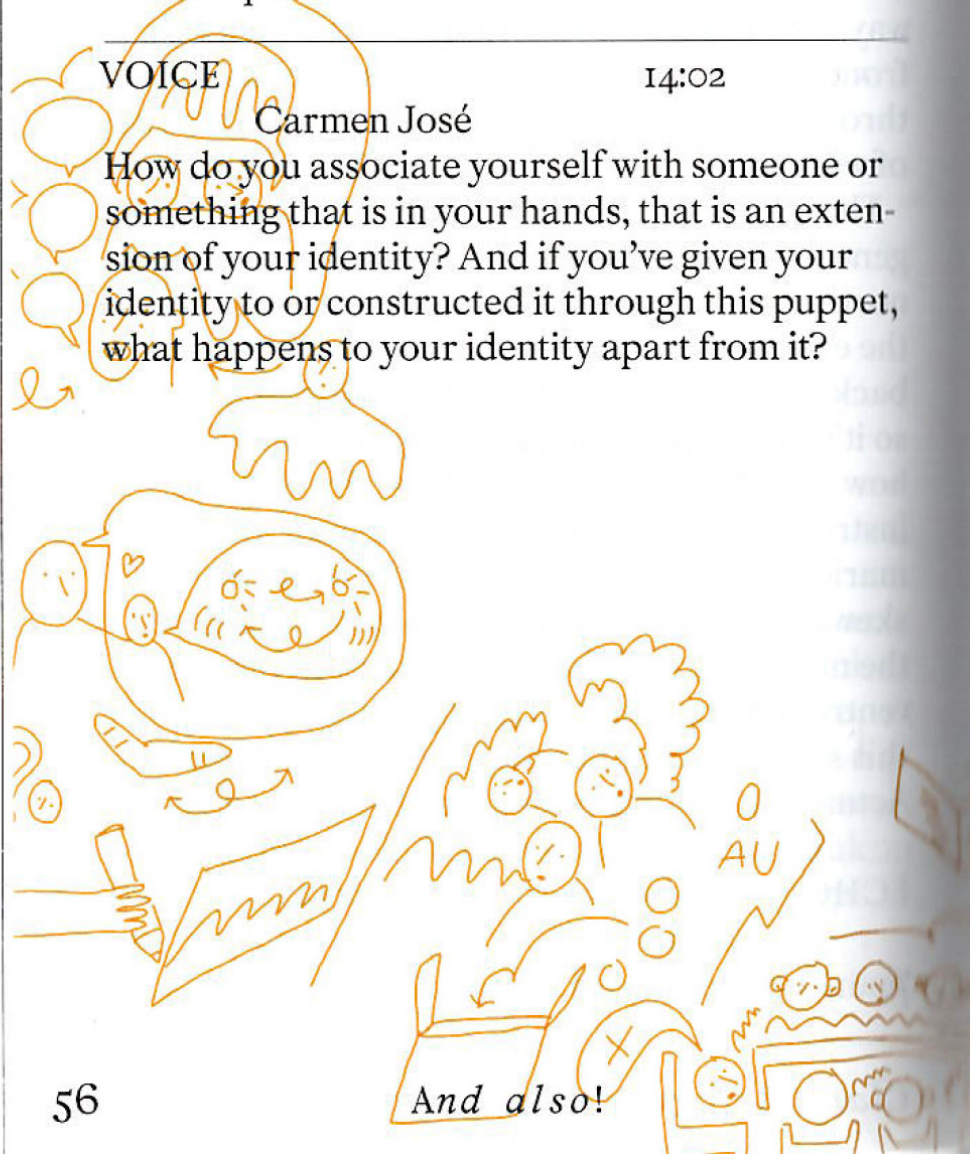
There's also that struggle of who is actually the better performer or the truer object of a public's attention. Whom do people love? Do people love me or do people love the puppet? Or I don't know, maybe I'm projecting. I'm not a ventriloquist.

VOICE

14:02

Carmen José

How do you associate yourself with someone or something that is in your hands, that is an extension of your identity? And if you've given your identity to or constructed it through this puppet, what happens to your identity apart from it?



DUMMY 14:18

Clara Balaguer

[Reads from Steven Connor's *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*.]

VENTRILOQUIST 14:18

Steven Connor

'Ventriloquism testifies to a remarkably persistent desire to believe in the autonomy of the voice, in the power of the voice, detached not only from its source but also from its subordination to site.'

VOICE 14:20

Clara Balaguer

Conner makes a lot of references to o-r-a-l and a-u-r-a-l. So, the mouth and the ear, how things travel from one to an other.

ECHO 14:20

Carmen José

Ah right. Oooooohhhh!

VOICE 14:23

Clara Balaguer

This also resonates with... what's his name? Ong?
Eric Ong?

WHISPER

14:23

Clara Balaguer

[No, LOL, that's my friend from Manila, a club-runner for decades and DJ who built a pirate CD music empire in the early 2000s.]

DUMMY

14:27

Clara Balaguer

Is it Ong? The guy who wrote about orality and literacy.

VENTRILOQUIST

14:30

Walter Ong

He talks about the difference between textual and oral cultures. Text-based cultures have a visual supremacy: the primary form of transferring and preserving knowledge is code that you have to consume through sight. As opposed to oral (or aural) cultures wherein seeing is not so necessary to ingest, share, or store knowledge.

DUMMY

15:43

Clara Balaguer

[Reads from Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism again]

VENTRILOQUIST

15:43

Steven Connor

'Where the eye works in governed and explicat-

ed space, the ear imparts implicated space. A world apprehended primarily through hearing is much more dynamic, intermittent, complex, and indeterminate. To be reliant on sound rather than sight is to be exposed to the sense of something going on, something active. The world of sight appears to be there, pressing on us without remission. The world of sound is only ever there at the moment of our hearing it.'

VOICE

16:24

Clara Balaguer

There's this interesting juxtaposition. Explicated space, the world of sight, or text-based culture is about putting things into boxes of words. Or it's about being able to locate things in space, much more static. Whereas oral cultures are about experience and interaction and understanding things as evanescent. And alive, I would say!

VOICE

16:55

Carmen José

Transformative as well, no? Because orality is not fixed. At least, how I understand it, information that is passed through oral transfer has more space to transform through the body that is transmitting.

ECHO 17:22

Clara Balaguer
Yeah. Yeah. And also!

VOICE 17:26

Clara Balaguer
There's oral, as in O, of the mouth, and aural is in A-U, of the ear, and then there's aural as in the A-U-R-A of the spirit. The aura of the speaker, the inflection that becomes a skill you can't quite put your finger on, but you can kind of see it as a chorus of different elements. Mostly, you can feel it. In text-based cultures, literacy is reserved only for a few, whereas in primarily oral cultures, there is a much more democratic distribution!

ECHO 18:02

Carmen José
Yeah, of course! LOL.

ECHO 18:04

Clara Balaguer
The declamatory skill is more widely honed.

ECHO 18:09

Carmen José
Also, what was resonating with me...

Carmen José

...from this book *Das Wesen der Stimme* I made together with Sabine Koop, a voice therapist from Germany. I made the illustrations of how you talk to yourself, this idea of getting to know the voice through talking to yourself. Your voice not only resonates throughout the room but also in your cavities, throughout the body. The last chapter is on transformation, and I was linking it to the aura, and the auditory, and the oral. The voice is something that connects you with the place you're in. There is an inside space-outside space relation to other bodies and where they're situated.

Earlier, we were talking also about this idea of hosting. When you're inviting someone into your space, you're aware of how their bodies and voices are going to be there, what they say, how they say it. In Spain, I was always very aware of how my family would lead conversations as hosts, asking specific questions or stepping in and out of the room in different moments... There was a consciousness of position, of their position, of what to put where and how to place people. I talked a lot too with Clare Butcher through the project 'Nourishing Knowledge' about this hosting paradigm called 'sobremesa.'

ECHO

20:12

Clara Balaguer

Can you explain sobremesa? I mean, I know what it means, but maybe... for the record?

ECHO

20:17

Carmen José

Yeah, for the record.

VOICE

20:18

Carmen José

Sobremesa is a specific time during meals, and it refers as well to an entire culture of food. It is sitting together after lunch or after dinner, especially after lunch. These long lunches where you finish eating and then you stay at the table for hours, just talking and digesting. Words mix together with what you ate, with the interests of that table, of the people who make that table—that moment—what it is... You're digesting the food through these long, slowly drawn conversations that end up sometimes in siesta. LOL.

VOICE

21:00

Clara Balaguer

Sobremesa literally translates to 'over the table.' Or 'on the table.' For my family, it was more of a dinner thing, because we mostly had dinners together, both of my parents worked a lot.

DUMMY

21:06

Carmen José

I remember my parents saying, 'You have to stay while the grownups talk. You have to respect that.' And they would also always say, 'Someone is coming, and you should listen because you have so much to learn.'

VOICE

21:25

Carmen José

This is part of non-institutional education. Or, well, you could understand the family, as an institution, but...

ECHO

21:32

Clara Balaguer

Yeah, like...

VOICE

21:34

Clara Balaguer

It's a form of oral education. Through listening, you're learning the languages of others. That's how I learned to speak Catalan as a child, at the *sobremesa*, the only place I was exposed to it through my father's conversations with visiting friends.

ECHO

21:50

Carmen José

And also...

Clara Balaguer and Carmen José

VOICE

21:50

Carmen José

I am thinking of how this relates to this idea of the curriculum or publishing or the moment of making public? There were so many things that my parents would not talk to us about, like money or work. But the *sobremesa* was the moment where they would share and you could really listen in and try to understand, in a public but also somewhat clandestine way. You're visible but eavesdropping. At the *sobremesa*, they wouldn't censor themselves as much. There were even conversations about sex with other adults. And much of what I learned about sensitive topics as a child, I did in those moments. It is an education, a very big part of it, though it's not really recognised as a form of schooling.

VOICE

22:35

Clara Balaguer

The difference in the performance of the relationship of my parents is what I remember. They didn't have a very harmonious relationship behind closed doors. But the way they performed civility and partnership at the table... that public moment bred this ability to...

VOICE

23:02

Carmen José

Find a common ground?

ECHO

23:04

Clara Balaguer

Find a common ground, yes. Negotiate.

VOICE

23:10

Clara Balaguer

The sobremesa was where I saw the best of my parents' relationship. In my experience, there is something about public speaking or making public that keeps you accountable, that promotes a being civil. Yeah, it was their moment of harmony. There's a lot to be said about privacy and being yourself in intimate spaces, but when there is disharmony, clashing, I feel like the public, the witness—in the best of cases—keeps things civilised.

VOICE

23:40

Carmen José

Which of course comes with like positive and negative sides.

DUMMY

23:46

Clara Balaguer

What's his name, Steven Connor says:

VENTRILOQUIST

23:47

Steven Connor

'So here is the essential paradox of the voice.

My voice defines me because it draws me into coincidence with myself, accomplishes me in a way that goes beyond mere belonging, association, or instrumental use. And yet my voice is also most essentially itself, and my own, in the ways in which it parts or passes from me. Nothing else about me defines me so intimately as my voice, precisely because there is no other feature of myself whose nature it is to move from me to the world and to move me into the world. If my voice is mine, because it comes from me, it can only be known as mine because it also goes from me. My voice is, literally, my way of taking leave of my senses. What I say goes. Perhaps the commonest proof of the voice's split condition, as at once cleaving to and taking leave from myself, is provided by the experience of hearing one's own recorded voice.'

ECHO

24:54

Clara Balaguer

I was thinking of what you said about the cavity.

VOICE

24:55

Clara Balaguer

For amplification to happen, you need a cavity, a void, a gaping space.

ECHO

25:03

Carmen José

Yeah.

Clara Balaguer

How do we take these moments of our own feelings of emptiness, exhaustion as, yeah... not nothingness? Void is a capacity to hold. How do we extract ourselves from space and take that ceding or disappearance as an exercise of negative power? I'm leaving this space (or I'm leaving space in this conversation) not as a weakness but actually as a form of amplifying power. My own power, in a way, because in that departure there is a choice that I make. To shut up and be silent is a choice. Choice is agency is power, even if the choice is surrender. Power for you and also power for the others who can then take that cavity and make it resonate at their will. Maybe as a woman, I struggle with this. Like, what does it mean to be told your entire life to just, you know...

ECHO

26:04

Carmen José
Lower your voice.

ECHO

26:05

Clara Balaguer
Lower your voice, exactly. Yeah.

Clara Balaguer and Carmen José

67

VOICE

26:08

Clara Balaguer

How to see this oppressive instrument—silence, self-silencing—that has been hardwired into us as a desirably docile trait and turn that... turn that... shadow into its light function?

VOICE

26:27

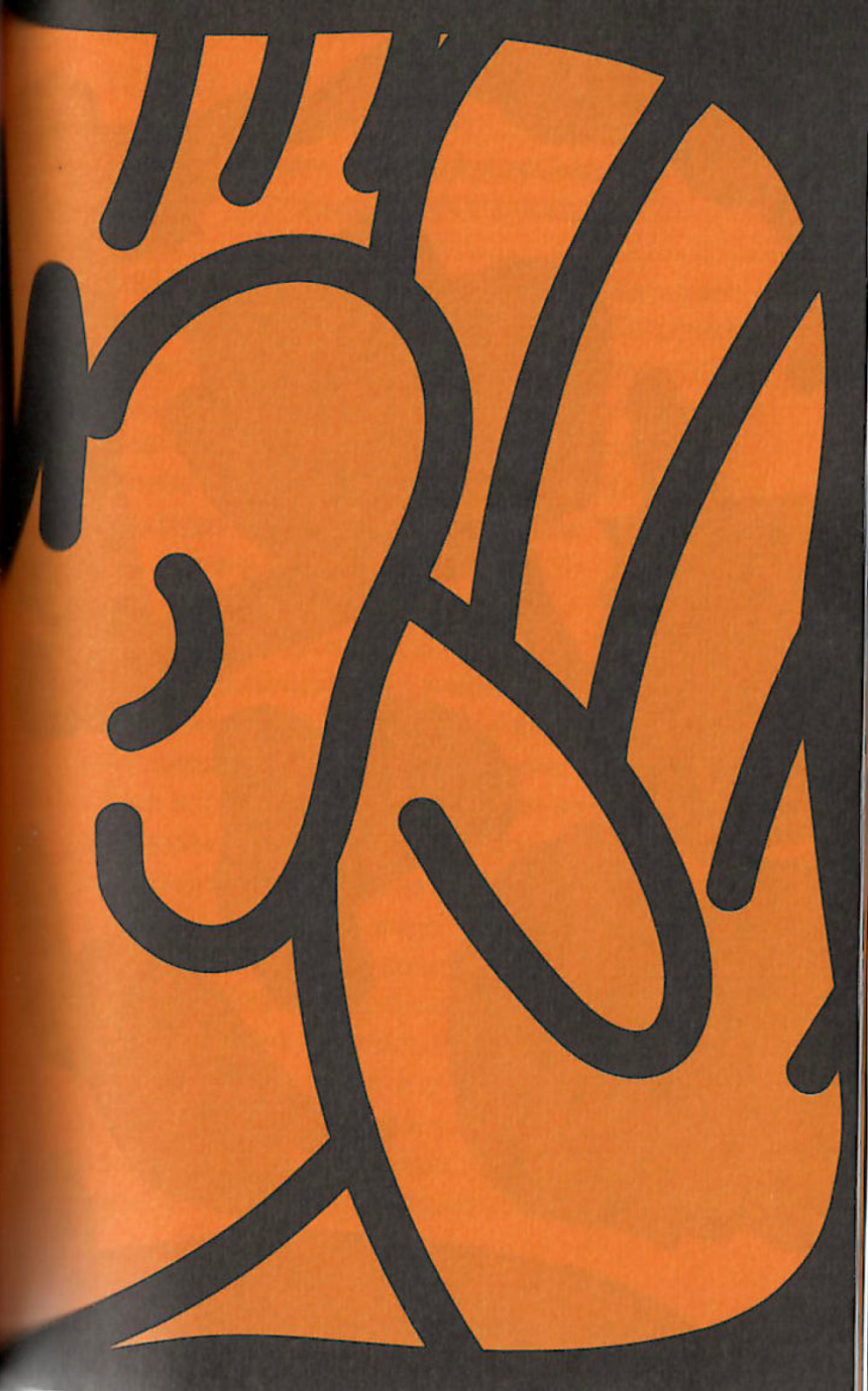
Carmen José

And how do you become aware of the energy you put into speaking up? And where and how do you want to speak up? Which is literally like, yeah, throwing the voice, throwing yourself into the room in the moments you decide. Throwing requires effort. That's part of the learning process. And how can other voices support find that space with you as well? Voices that resonate, voices that you feel, voices that you can harmonise with. But, I mean, we already established that any voice can harmonise with every voice, being together in difference.

HAND

Carmen José

Insert drawings 1–3 (This can be moved to slip in between any part of the conversation, at designer's choice).



Thanks to a high intensity laser, Anton Zeilinger was able to teleport light particles (photons) for the first time in 1997. The laser shoots photons in different directions, and the photons then form pairs called 'quantum entanglements'. In this binding, the union of the photons is stable regardless of the physical distance between them. When Zeilinger, in his experiment, changed a quality of one of the particles, the twin particle immediately and spontaneously underwent the same change. Teleportation is based on the physical property that allows information to be exchanged between two particles, once they have been entangled quantumly, at a rate faster than the speed of light. Although science neither thinks nor expresses itself in these terms, we imagine that within a few decades it will be possible to teleport a micro-organism and, soon thereafter, objects and, finally, human beings.

The mere statement of this astonishing discovery so crucial to quantum physics whets the imagination not only of physicists but also of laymen who know nothing of matter. The fact that the finding is called teleportation, a name taken from a literary genre – science fiction –, is also significant. The choice of that word set the details of the experiment travelling through worlds beyond the laboratory. Teleportation incites curiosity and manufactures the fiction of an almost intuitive understanding of the experiment's logic: one word suffices to join the familiar and the strange. The fortunate choice of this term cannot be attributed only to the desire to communicate the news, though of course that played a part. It reflects, mostly, the need to produce osmosis between knowledges of very different natures, and it posits that generating communicative forms of meaning is key to future discoveries.

Much contemporary art shares this intuition. And the oft-repeated but poorly defined expression artistic research is the term that best describes the precise and acute movements between areas of knowledge, between the senses and understanding.

In answering the question 'what is reality', Anton Zeilinger says: 'That which we can agree on. We need to undertake a thorough reconstruction of the basic concepts that we use every day – reality, time, matter, space, light – so that we can use them to define new situations both inside and outside the laboratory. We live our lives immersed in categories. If we want to use those categories to interrogate reality, just as a lawyer interrogates a witness, we

must understand what they mean at each moment. And that's where philosophy comes in; it is what best explains the historical dramatisation of those categories.'¹

Artists, like scientists, are pioneers when it comes to creating new forms of connectivity between worlds that seem to have nothing in common. They embark on writing novels, conceiving treatises, discovering archives, devising therapies and choreographing bodies, that is, on the endless study of everything that contributes to different formulations of what we call reality. It would be banal to describe all that as mere play. We find ourselves, rather, before a strange form of research that is more aware than ever of the parallel between producing art and understanding the world.

Since Marcel Duchamp, and perhaps much earlier – indeed, perhaps forever –, art has been eager to house a knowledge different from academic knowledge and to provide the ultimate reason for modifying that academic knowledge. Much contemporary art attempts to develop works and situations that make it possible to read the past freely, to take flight and approach the unknown.

There is a paradox that cultural studies and the heirs to critical theory consistently deny because it does not serve their purposes: artistic practice is temporal and atemporal at the same time. Art and culture must necessarily situate themselves in this contradiction in the attempt to be within history while escaping it.

Cultural studies recognise that they cannot be conceived in terms of progress, that there is no single Modernity but many, that universals are now always in the plural. Nonetheless, contemporary art runs the risk now more than ever of turning into a secondary source. Art and artists know themselves to be subject to a series of textual and institutional logics, and one of their achievements has been to reveal that fact in the sphere of artistic production and reception.

Artistic research names the effort to recognise the importance and explore the consequences of the following statement: meaning does not emerge from History but from Fiction. This names an effort, not a method. When we speak of artistic

1. *A conversation that took place at Traunsee Akademie on 21 July 2010. Anton Zeilinger is a full professor of quantum physics at the Institut für Quantenoptik und Quanteninformation of Vienna.*

research, we are not speaking of the fact that many artist engage in exhaustive research before making a work. Nor should we confuse artistic research with contemporary art's proximity to the social sciences and their methods. The term has been coined, rather, to alert us to the fact that art has also become a quantum phenomenon.

That is, the principle of indetermination is also operative in the social sciences, aesthetics and philosophy. In the very act of observing, we alter what we have observed. Neither theory nor philosophy nor criticism can aspire to determine what art is. It is simply ridiculous to question whether art exists or not, but forcing it to speak a single language, that of historical reconstruction, is sadly impudent.

The traditional hierarchical distinctions between theory and action, between criticism and creation are sterile. There is an obvious need to think of a more eloquent way of conceiving the aesthetic-cognitive back-and-forth between the production of art and the grammar of theory. Contemporary art practice has invited itself to the party of those who assume the complex mission of generating tools to grasp the world.

Taking artistic research seriously means accepting disorganisation in the relations between the disciplines that deal with contemporary art. The rise of cultural studies, critical theory and the many variations of post-Marxist understanding of the relationship between art and economics is fruit of an ungrounded – though perhaps historically necessary – confidence in the possibility of first unravelling and then stabilising the meaning of what happens in a work of art, as well as the 'creative' process as a whole.

Meaning cannot be explained by its context, though the context may help with its historical interpretation. If this were the case, the effort of art and artist to avoid juried shows and art academies would be pointless. Interpreting is not the same as understanding. Too often the description of the codes that constitute a system, of the relations that act on a work of art or any other cultural fact that can be reified, is geared towards passing judgment, to determining whether we are headed in the right direction. If contemporary art has strived to do anything, it is to teleport: to change green into red, to turn around the rules of the game to be freed of the constant allocation of meaning and thus 'unexpress

the expressable'.² For a long time philosophy has been saying that there are no outstanding rewards and no certainty waiting around the corner. Yet, both criticism and the exhibition apparatus are determined to contradict this as they strive to render the notion of History plural.

The new importance of philosophy and the social sciences in the sphere of contemporary art is related to an essential discovery: art today is located in a space uniquely productive for the interrelation of knowledges that would otherwise never intersect. This is similar to what Gaston Bachelard attempted to describe in the introduction to *The Poetics of Space* (1957). Space appears where the logic of causality ceases and another principle takes hold, mainly the principle of reverberation.

Stating that space does not emerge on the basis of laws of causality means that the public sphere is not constructed by merely ensuring a series of conditions, just as the existence of a parliament or alike does not guarantee that debate will take place. Something else must happen, and that is what Bachelard calls reverberation. Practice proves that transparency is not enough, that a system of logical argumentation does not necessarily unleash the will to change, let alone change itself.

Bachelard looks to *reverberation* as an image that expresses the movement between logics of thought and methods of work that have nothing in common. The possibility of different thinking depends on this so very abstract and difficult to define mental operation. Contemporary art attempts to exist in this space of reverberation, rather than in the work-commentary equation. Art is not a pretext for thought, but rather a thought that operates by means of the constant exchange between different systems that vacillate between the abstract and the concrete, and that make us vacillate between them as well.

Nothing productive emerges from translating ideas into images. The attempt to establish a correlation between ideas and their representation denies the unexpected and, hence, the hope for change. Reverberation names something quite different – and more complex – than interdisciplinarity, or the borrowing of ideas and concepts between sciences. Artistic research understands that artistic practice generates concepts on the basis of intuition and that the challenge lies in their formalisation. That amounts to affirming that art's relationship to theory should not obey a cause-effect logic. To be truly modern, theory cannot assume the role of the eternal

mediator between the work and the viewer; it cannot limit itself to speaking after the fact. Locating thought outside artistic practice means accepting that History is the final instance and judgment the only way to relate to culture in order to ensure that the last horizon is always normative; it means that there is only room for the dialectic between good and bad. There are countless examples of interpretations of cultural production on these bases.

It is necessary to think and express oneself in other terms. To walk down a different path we have to unlearn the learned and attend to concepts neglected by critical theory. The mission is not to renovate thought, but to venture into other logics and place them at the core of artistic and cultural thinking. Sustaining, like Deleuze, that meaning emerges from fiction implies realising that it is not philosophy that makes an emancipated viewer possible, but rather an artistic practice that has made an unprecedented effort to understand itself before the figure of the viewer. And that understanding implicates us all.

That is what artistic research consists of, and that is why an institution that wants to think through, rather than from, art is now inconceivable. The production of space is an act of trust, of future-ness.

According to Bachelard, the mental function that brings us closest to the enigmatic vastness of what's to come is daydreaming. For philosophy, it is a fundamental exercise. Daydreaming is a way of creating access to grandeur, that is, to a sphere radically opposed to the domestic and different from the social. It empowers an attitude so very exceptional that it takes the daydreamer outside this world, to another world that bears the mark of infinity. It points in the direction of a vital multiplication of mortal freedoms; it builds world and counter-worlds. Daydreaming is a constitutive space that suggests the ability to imagine consciousness itself.

Propposal for the Propposal of Exhibitions
from the book: Show and Tell: a chronicle of Group Material

Proposals for exhibition "forms and contents" should be presented to Group Material in this order:

1. Ideas for shows tend to come from the strangest places: in the midst of lunch, two seconds before you are ready to fall asleep on a Thursday night, during a drunken conversation, and so on. Rarely are ideas generated in one individual's head: the individual's idea is actually a synthesis of something seen or heard or investigated or thought of socially. But nevertheless an individual is inevitably responsible for giving an idea its voice. Ideas for shows should be *well thought* (as to appropriateness, feasibility, advantages and potential problems, history of the idea, etc., ideas as to concrete execution) by an individual or group and DRAFTED in the form of a loose proposal to be submitted to Group Material.

2. Discussion for show proposals should NEVER be discussed on the same day or meeting that they are delivered. Each member of GM should have a copy of the proposal outline to take home and TO THINK ABOUT, adding suggestions directly to the submitted proposal sheet.

3. At the next meeting, people come back with their complaints, their enthusiasms, their criticisms. Group votes whether to *develop* or *return* the proposal to the individual responsible. If returned, the idea is dropped. If developed, members return their written comments (on the proposal sheet) to the individual who tries to synthesize group opinion into a FORMAL PROPOSAL to be adopted at the next meeting.

4. PROPOSAL is presented at the next meeting and either agreed upon or not agreed upon. While a consensus will always be attempted, if a stalemate occurs impeding decision on adoption of show, then a majority vote must be taken.

5. The individual responsible for proposal becomes the SPONSOR for the exhibition, and creates a committee to do all the work for the actualization of the show, going through appropriate Officers (sec., treas., public relations, press, community liaison, art director, etc.) to ensure a successful and smooth operation.

6. Exhibition is held.

Group debates the colors of the wall. Julie proposes one wall red, the other gray. Pat expresses fear of looking like a "regular" art gallery—he is for painting the entire space red or Julie's "combination proposal." Yolanda is against a "neutral" gray—is for all red, the combination, or a darker charcoal gray. Lili is for the combination proposal with an emphasis on the red wall and office. Peter wants the entire space gray with the exception of the office space walls which will be red. Marybeth suggests that the context of the exhibition space shouldn't be over-emphasized and that the color should be comfortable. She wants gray walls with the office red. Hannah agrees with Marybeth, believing that all red would draw out the walls imperfections and would make the space intense and small looking. Beth also wants a gray space with a red office and a red toilet room. Beth suggests that what goes on in the space will contextualize the space and that wall colors are somewhat irrelevant. Tim passes out statement concerning the reasons for painting the gallery red. The group votes on three options: 1. Combo proposal of gray walls, red office. 2. All red. 3. All gray. Option one passes unanimously. Color chips that Tim researched are chosen. Tim is responsible for getting the paint. . . .

Group makes questions for each of us to answer for next meeting about first show:

How do you want GM to be represented in the first show?

Do you want GM to be represented as a collection of individuals?

Do you want GM to be represented as a group or collective?

How do we want to be represented in relation to the community where we are located?

How do we want to reach a broader audience?

What do you want to do for the show?

How do we want GM to relate, include other artists? Why include other artists?

What do we want our relationship to the art world to be?

Notes on first show plans (excerpt),
August 1980

An attempt should be made to avoid the first show looking like just a bunch of art. I think this could easily happen as the show will have no central theme and the works will not be ultra related to each other.

In my opinion the interest we need can be had through the way in which we treat our space as an exhibition salon. The function of the gallery must be realized in social and historical terms. . . . The interior design of our space and the displaying of art should be of optimal importance and should be determined by intellectualism, careful thought, and not taste, never taste. . . . We should strive to make this event fun. We absolutely must avoid snobbery, stuffiness and rigidity. (Brennan)

I think it is extremely important that our first show clearly demonstrates our belief in a working method that recognizes people organizing to work together in their own interests as the basis of political action—and our commitment to the forming of alliances necessary to do this. Any first show, no matter what its structure, would say, "This is who and what we are, and this is an indication of what you can expect from us. . . . One way to do this would be for GM to assume, at various points throughout the show, a more self-conscious voice of introduction. . . . could for example introduce a history of artists' groups "as GM"—or GM as an idea whose time has come—or as a certain notion of socialism / feminism, as workers, as a bunch of young artists committed to a comprehensible art (who like to scream at one another), as coming out of a certain class background—as \$45 a month, as teachers, as students, as neighbors, as coming out, as Diana Ross. . . (Nelson)

Theme—socio-political information.
Supplemental information—as important as the artwork (we must keep in mind that a large percentage of the traffic flowing through the first show will have had very little prior exposure to the content of GM or the artwork involved). 1. Flyers or a booklet containing the following info: A. What is Group Material—who is involved and what do we hope to accomplish. B. Background information on guest artists and GM artists whose work is exhibited. A poster or some other commemorative piece of paper. (Dones)

First show (FS) will determine our initial outreach, make clear who we see as our audience, and to what kind of a public we are committed to. . . . FS appropriate time to express how we see GM relating to community, operating in this particular location. . . . Address community by having all written statements a part of the show in Spanish and English, immediately bridging the language barrier. . . . Each GM member to participate in some way—either individual or group works or statements, some people will do both. That we make art—statements demonstrating where our commitments lie socially and politically—that we invite only individuals operating within political groups to show work. That other art groups engaged in social activism may present works representing their group that have been made under collective name. . . . The purpose of this show would be to establish our alliance / affinity to these artists . . . to show how firmly based we, as a group of artists, are in an emerging cultural activism, which is occurring on an international scale. This collection of artists / art groups makes a point about the relationship of "individual" to "collective" as a satisfactory personal solution, as a viable political strategy. (Jaker)

The organization of the first show must reflect our understanding of how we function, why we decided to originate, what are our histories, diversities, and similarities, immediate and long range goals. . . . I feel a Blueprint diagram or foundation should be constructed of how this communication is to take place. This also ties in directly to GM as a learning center. . . . The Diagram, Blueprints exhibition form should reflect the communication process built on struggle. A struggle practical enough to satisfy physical needs and progressive enough to satisfy intellectual and emotional needs. Communication is central to the articulation of social relations between people. (Szygula)

Eileen Myles and Jeremy Sigler Go to an Exhibition

By The Paris Review November 27, 2017



JEREMY SIGLER AND EILEEN MYLES AT "(RE)APPROPRIATIONS," TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY. PHOTO: ANDREW ARNOT

Not long ago, I found myself reading Jeremy Sigler's 2009 interview with Eileen Myles in *The Brooklyn Rail*. The occasion was a new book by Myles, but the conversation opens with banter about clothing—"I'm pretty critical of the J. Crew catalogue, which I have to confess I love looking through"—as though the pair had met for a drink instead of an interview. And then, toward the end of their time together, Sigler mentions Larry Rivers's famous nude portrait of Frank O'Hara: "I think this is my idealization of the poet," he says; Myles calls it "collaborated outrageousness." Earlier this fall, Tibor de Nagy Gallery opened a small survey of Rivers's work, including the O'Hara painting—an opportunity, in other words, for Myles and Sigler to continue their conversation, wherever it may lead.

MYLES: I guess we maybe want to start with the famous one.

SIGLER: Yeah. I've never seen this painting in person, actually. Have you?

MYLES: I feel like I have, but that may or may not be true.

SIGLER: I've seen the drawing that was on the cover of one of O'Hara's books.

MYLES: Right.

SIGLER: Which Andrew said is missing—the drawing is actually gone, he said.

MYLES: Who said?

SIGLER: Andrew.

MYLES: Really?

SIGLER: Yeah.

MYLES: Gone from where it was? Where was it?

SIGLER: A collector who owned it said it was stolen.

MYLES: From where? From their house?

SIGLER: Yeah, something like that. But this is ... this is really something else.

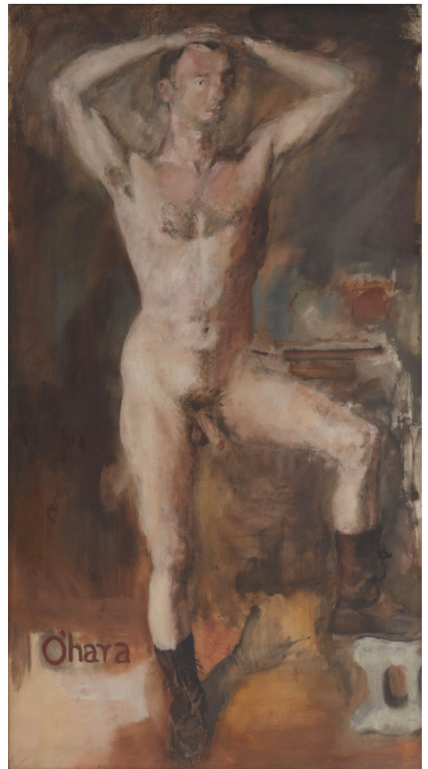
MYLES: Yeah. I think it's kind of a good painting.

SIGLER: Yeah. I mean, look at that cinder block.

MYLES: I know, I had the same feeling. The hair on his chest, too. And, of course, Frank's dick.

SIGLER: It's front and center.

MYLES: He's sort of boundaryless, which is



LARRY RIVERS, O'HARA NUDE WITH BOOTS, 1954, OIL ON CANVAS, 97 X 53 INCHES. COURTESY TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY © LARRY RIVERS FOUNDATION / LICENSED BY VAGA

amazing, like he's sitting in time in this fuzzy, profound way.

SIGLER: It's effortless, too—the painting just sort of comes right out. It's brushed right on there. I mean, of course that's what painters do, but he makes it look easy.

MYLES: It feels drawing-ish.

SIGLER: Yeah.

MYLES: But look where we are. One, two, three, four, five—five chicks, five ladies, and this is the only male nude. There is something feminine about it, too. The face seems to me very androgynous, but when I say androgynous, I'm used to saying androgynous when I mean “a woman who looks masculine.” But this is about a man who looks feminine—he could be a lady at the court.

SIGLER: He seems to understand the psychology of being naked.

MYLES: “He” being Larry?

SIGLER: Larry, yeah. Well, both. It’s an exhibitionistic painting—Frank obviously knew what he was getting into here.

MYLES: He agreed. It was hanging in MoMA originally, right?

SIGLER: I don’t know.

MYLES: I think so. I think there was a bit of a scandale, because you couldn’t have somebody who was working at the museum have a nude portrait of themselves.

SIGLER: Conflict of interest.

MYLES: This could be fake history, but I seem to remember this.

SIGLER: I mean, think about today, how politically correct you have to be in an office situation. If you’re not allowed to tell a joke—

MYLES: Well, that’s the story, but it seems to me that we’re constantly encountering contradictions. The whole Harvey Weinstein thing—like, how many guys just routinely invite females into corners and jerk off? And then years pass.

SIGLER: This “massage me” thing, “come over and give me a massage.”

MYLES: Well, that’s even further down the road. Most recently she was just in a little cul de sac and then he started jerking off.

SIGLER: Really?

MYLES: Yeah. That was his thing. But let’s not give him so much time. The thing that’s outrageous about this, continually, is that O’Hara’s male. That’s the thing that’s

completely unique about that.

SIGLER: I mean, it has to be the greatest nude male portrait. I can’t think of anything that rivals it.

MYLES: Until you get to Mapplethorpe.

SIGLER: Yes. It’s a beauty. How do you feel about the sexuality of it?

MYLES: What do you mean, “How do I feel?”

SIGLER: I mean, is it provocative to you?

MYLES: Well, yeah. I think it’s provocative to everybody, isn’t it? I mean, it’s a little bit softly demanding, seems to me.

SIGLER: It’s intimate.

MYLES: Yeah. It’s not a nude—he’s naked.

SIGLER: Oh, can we talk about the boots? We have to talk about the boots.

MYLES: Sure. That’s him giving Frank his butchness, I think. He kept his boots on. Then we have him as somebody who is a man fucking somebody. That means that he has some purchase on power. But tell me what you’re thinking.

SIGLER: I like the way we were talking about it a few years ago. Somehow we got into the concept that a poet should stand naked in his boots. I think you said that you identified with that idea, as a poet, that the metaphor of being naked and still having the boots on is like Duchamp traveling with his toothbrush—you’re ready to go.

MYLES: Exactly. I think it means that you can run. All you need is to throw on a shirt—otherwise you’re female.

SIGLER: So it’s a pretty important detail.

MYLES: It's a really important detail. How did they negotiate that? Did Frank say, Let me keep my boots on? Also, was this planned? Had they had sex and Larry said, Let me paint you? That's the implication here. I don't know if I think that's true, but it sort of seems like an announcement that they've had sex. It's all this abstraction business over here. The abstraction part of it is pretty good. I feel that about a lot of the paintings—the abstract parts are actually pretty great.

SIGLER: Well, he studied with Hans Hofmann, so it's almost like he just took that method of brushing a little this way, that way, up and down, across—these big, bold brush marks. And then he started putting objects and figures into the painting. Early Pop.

MYLES: It was someplace where you had Jane Freilicher, on the one hand, and de Kooning, on the other. And Pop is where it's going, but it's not quite there. It's sort of in the hallway, and I think that's probably why he's not so famous now, because he was ... What do you call that?

SIGLER: He was ambiguous?

MYLES: No, there's a name for something that's in between.

SIGLER: Equivocating? Something like that?

MYLES: Yeah, but it's a something figure?

SIGLER: Oh, literally in art?

MYLES: Yeah, or just in theory. Like an object that wasn't the thing you were really thinking about, but it's sort of holding the space.

SIGLER: These pinup girls are not as interesting, are they?

MYLES: No, I don't think so.

SIGLER: Is it that there's no tension? Or there's

no intimacy?

MYLES: For me, there's no ownership. I don't feel the feeling. I feel like he wanted to use different materials and do something else. Maybe this colored one I like the best, for some reason.

SIGLER: But they don't have any of that tenderness.

MYLES: They remind me of a piece ... What was his name? Lindner? Pop Art—the guy that did phone booths and these kind of techno beings? It was this cold-ass part of Pop Art.

SIGLER: When he's painting on canvas and there's this shimmering light, but also this nervous scratchy feeling in the line, it's almost like the soft light mixed with his anxiety, with his nervous system.

MYLES: Look at the drawing. He could really draw.

SIGLER: He also was a musician. I don't know how good he was at sax—was he any good? Did you ever hear him play?

MYLES: It was just part of being a poet. Larry Rivers and all the old guys would get up and play their jazz. It's like an old guy thing—I'm gonna have a band now.

SIGLER: Right.

MYLES: Doesn't Paul Muldoon do it? Anne Sexton did it! It's something I always meant to do.

SIGLER: You could be in a band.

MYLES: Yeah, let's not go there.

SIGLER: But I read that he was also friends with Miles Davis.

MYLES: Wow. But it doesn't mean

anything about how he played.

SIGLER: No, but it kind of gives him some cred. It has to be said that he's an uneven painter—that's sort of the point. It's hit or miss, right?

MYLES: So often I feel like his style is trying everybody else's style.

SIGLER: Yes. And he's also painting other people's paintings, literally. There's a Matisse in this one. There's a de Kooning.

MYLES: Did he have some sort of a career as a graphic artist? I think he might have had some commercial gig. Because this is like Jane Freilicher 3-D, right?

SIGLER: Yeah.

MYLES: Is this the Matisse?

SIGLER: This is the Matisse, yeah. But then he does a cheesy thing, like put a Matisse back there. Is he caught up in the moment or—

MYLES: Just for the sake of the recording, I'll say it's this yellow, cloudy shape, which is part of a garment, and it has these dark orange streaks in them, and there's something really satisfying and cool about it.

SIGLER: Right, but he must also be feeling very audacious as he's doing it, because he's appropriating. Because I feel like if he's painting it, he must be getting some kind of kick.

MYLES: When you paint in somebody else's style, that's actually not appropriation, is it?

SIGLER: Not really, no. It's more like an homage.

MYLES: I like the flowers, too. It's almost like it's a number of things that I would like alone. It seems like the art of removal.

canvas. He made a lot of work, and in the early work he left large expanses untouched. He played with letting light in.

MYLES: Yes! This one makes me nuts, because all I can think of is a side of beef, and the kind of restaurant that would let you know the cut you were getting. And what we're looking at is a female figure with nipples pointed out, and it says "Sutek." I guess we're getting a language lesson. Is it Polish? I don't know.

SIGLER: The sexism of the unabashed macho-male-testosterone quality of the work is offensive.

MYLES: Or simply the woman, as with the others, is what is there to be painted. It's a little bit up there with the "just grab the pussy." Maybe that's true, maybe everybody does.

SIGLER: What about this one? This one is really "grab the pussy" right there.

MYLES: I like it, though. I think it's really kind of a great painting. Well, what do you mean, "Grab the pussy?" Nobody's grabbing a pussy right there.

SIGLER: Uh, it's close.

MYLES: You have the spread eagle, you have two girls hanging out together. It's strange. It's a little bit censored. I think it's kind of beautiful.

SIGLER: This painting seems honest, to me. He has this one side of him that's inquisitive and curious, and then the other side is arrogant and in-your-face, like blah blah blah.

MYLES: Well, this seems like it's between a sketch and a painting. And it's also the thing you were just saying—there's an emptiness here. And this is a kind of Cy Twombly emptiness. And this—I don't know why I assume it's a bed back there, but whatever that is, that bright, hard pattern thing.

SIGLER: No one's gonna know what we're talking about.

MYLES: Well, that's why I'm trying to throw in a little description.

SIGLER: You're doing great.

MYLES: But over here too, they're both whited out. I don't know what that means, but it's interesting, because he knows that he's presenting a pussy, and then he's somehow bandaging it in white.

SIGLER: Isn't that maybe underwear?

MYLES: Well ...

SIGLER: I mean, I don't think he's bandaging it.

MYLES: Bandaging isn't the right word, but I don't know how else to put it.

SIGLER: It's sort of gauzy.

MYLES: It's like he's over-painting or repainting, but he didn't do it, and so, again, it's an in-between object.

SIGLER: It's hard to tell what's going on.

MYLES: And I like that. There's something literary about this one. This is the one, if I were to buy, I would take this. It has this kind of notebook drawing with flowers up here on the top, and this is kind of a weird collage.

SIGLER: It is nice. It's a little bit like Jean-Michel Basquiat.

MYLES: Yeah. This a very interesting thing, and it's the most in-between Larry that hits that note.

SIGLER: The line never lets up.

MYLES: Larry—was he an immigrant?

SIGLER
Yes, I think so.

MYLES: And was Basquiat?

SIGLER: I don't remember. I think so.

MYLES: We'll have to do some research. We have to tell Nicole to include a note.

SIGLER: Footnote.[1]

MYLES: There's so much pattern in this one. These little elbow marks down here, the stripes here and all the scribbles up here.

SIGLER: It's dirty.

MYLES: Yeah, it's dirty.

SIGLER: You feel that everything, at some point, got tossed on the floor of the studio or



LARRY RIVERS, *CREAM CAMEL*, 1980, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 50 1/2 X 39 INCHES. COURTESY TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY © LARRY RIVERS FOUNDATION / LICENSED BY VAGA

thrown around a little. He was not as careful with his materials as I think so many artists are these days. It's refreshing just to see him work, to do stuff. I don't think he had a master plan.

MYLES: It's a little bottley.

SIGLER: A little what?

MYLES: Bodily. The scale of it feels like you can feel the artist making choices and dancing and moving in front of it.

SIGLER: Let's talk about this Camel. This is essentially the most abstract pack of Camel cigarettes that you can possibly have, right?

MYLES: Right.

SIGLER: You can feel the nicotine, you can feel this sense of him burning up. I know he was a speed demon on his motorcycle, and he seems to have had I don't know how many wives, drug habits. It's like he's burning the candle at both ends, and my impression is that he must have been a heavy drinker.

MYLES: Though he's one of the interesting characters that endured. You don't hear those stories about Alex Katz—whatever his life was or is, I never heard about him being a wild man. Larry seems to be one of those who was endangered when he was young but made that decision to invest in a future—and probably the work changes then, too.

SIGLER: You mean like a survival ability?

SIGLER: If he had been a poet, and not an artist, he probably would have died younger, one imagines.

MYLES: Because he wouldn't have had any money? Is that what that means?

SIGLER: He seems to have been industrious, is what I mean. He used art to its fullest.

MYLES: And you mean poets are not industrious?

SIGLER: Yeah. We can't make work. You feel like he could fill a studio with work, and it could all feel like product, on some level.

MYLES: Yeah. We don't have work to do, and he did, and also he had a place to do it. Again, this is all based on the fact that he had a career, and he had gotten to a certain place, because lots of painters have no place to do it, or torture the people in their lives by making inappropriate places to do it, and everything else has to be subjugated to them, because they didn't become successful enough.

SIGLER: Was he always successful?

MYLES: Pretty early on, I think. There was something called The \$64,000 Question. Do you know this story?

SIGLER: No.

MYLES: It was a TV quiz show that he was on, and won. He had this weird life. Everybody said this about him, always—he was lucky. Talented and charismatic, but also, just, stuff happened to him.

SIGLER: That's what I was sort of saying—charmed in some way. It's not like he was burning out, though he was burning the candle at both ends. You think with Basquiat—Basquiat burned out pretty fast. I don't know if that's a fair comparison.

MYLES: But it's a fact. There also is the different way of being in the world as a big, tall white man, and not a smaller black guy, who was so wildly successful so young. They're just different human beings. Do you like the Camel?

SIGLER: I'm not so sure that it's a completely resolved painting, but I like that he painted a cigarette pack. I like that it's there. I feel comfortable in front of it.

MYLES: It makes me think about still lifes, which is to say that when I think about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painters in the studio, I think of skulls and flowers and female nudes and bones and apples and dead fish. But they didn't have "products" as such. Maybe they did, but you never see labels.

SIGLER: Well, I suppose the Dutch still lifes are filled with fishes and all

the things that you'd bring back from markets.

MYLES: Yeah, but the market wasn't a brand.

SIGLER: No. Well, there was no packaging, really.

MYLES: Yeah. It's the art of advertising—I guess that's another American flag, in a way. The Pop thing that you said earlier is really true. This is like, again, Pop abstraction. I'm embarrassed to say that I didn't get it was a Camel right away. And I like that—it feels like fuzzy photography.

SIGLER: When you put Warhol and his Campbell soup cans next to this, it's another animal, right? He took it to the point of—

MYLES: It is that.

SIGLER: Yeah. It is that.

MYLES: A little more Duchamp. And this is a little more Abstract Expressionist.

SIGLER: I'd like to see a hundred of them. I'd like to see him just do another one.

MYLES: And then another, and then another.

SIGLER: Just keep it going.

MYLES: That's really great. But I feel like just the fact that you say that is a critique. It seems to me that when you have somebody who continually has to do a new thing, another novelty every time ... There are moments of his art that we really love, but because he had this compulsion to keep being new, you see the wages of that in certain ways.

SIGLER: I think that's what I was saying before. I was hinting at that when I said the whole point is being uneven, that it's hit or miss. I think your way of putting it is much nicer, because in fact you have that love for novelty and you're always quickly moving onto the next thing, you're going to make a lot of bad choices.

MYLES: Right. And it's a little bit American. It's Pop in a different way. It's sort of like you're very mode of industry is American—serial production is something different. I wonder if I'm going to ruin our recording if I answer a text. What do you think?

SIGLER: Let's stop.

MYLES: Really? Don't stop. I don't think we should stop.

SIGLER: Okay. I'm just saying pause it.

MYLES: Can you pause? I don't know if you can pause.

MYLES: I think so. You're recording, right?

SIGLER: Yeah.

MYLES: I just have to say yes to somebody. I just have to meet Felix at two.

SIGLER: I have to say, this is a real dud. This is a problem.

MYLES: Well, yes and no. I mean, it's a de Kooning rip-off. Look at that face—crazy.

SIGLER: All right, I'll get really personal—I don't like the way de Kooning looks in the painting.

MYLES: Is that de Kooning?

SIGLER: Yeah, that's supposed to be de Kooning.

MYLES: So that must be a late de Kooning.



LARRY RIVERS, BILL AND ELAINE DE KOONING AND WOMAN I, 1991, OIL ON CANVAS ON SCULPTED FOAM BOARD, 66 1/4 X 66 X 7 INCHES. COURTESY TIBOR DE NADY GALLERY © LARRY RIVERS FOUNDATION / LICENSED BY VAGA

SIGLER: Yeah. I like the way his painting looks in the painting, but I don't like the way he made Bill look.

MYLES: Why?

SIGLER: He looks a little awkward, maybe a little pudgy, a little overweight. He doesn't look handsome the way de Kooning looked.

MYLES: Well, he probably knew de Kooning, so he probably knew a lot about de Kooning—maybe it's drunk de Kooning. I thought it was a diorama, which is really funny. It's like an art-world art history. He's doing de Kooning's painting, and then he puts de Kooning in it. It's like a funny anthropological take on his own culture. Yeah, I'm not crazy about it, but then there's something about the 3-D-ness of those figures that, I don't know, I feel amused or entertained, or slightly delighted. It's like Madame Tussaud's—it's so wrong that it starts to ... it's like the flowers. They start to jump out at me.

SIGLER: That's what I was thinking before about Pop in general. Putting this sort of bland banal object on the wall—is that an expression of interest in being obnoxious or irreverent?

MYLES: I think it's a gleeful Marxism that loves cash nonetheless. You're seeing that this is a labor that we're doing, making this incredibly well-designed can of soup. It's like social realism.

SIGLER: Right, but there's also some way in which the Pop artists were trying to outdo one another with the banal. Like, okay, I'm going to even out-banal you.

MYLES: But every time they landed on banal, it wasn't banal. It ended up being profound. Because you made the machine stop for a second. Who did the cartoons, the comic strips? Lichtenstein. Some of those are amazing.

SIGLER: They're amazing.

MYLES: And then he does some landscapes that are just cartoons. Have you ever seen those? I love those. He's doing what Larry Rivers is doing, in a different way. He's sort of laughing at the history of art in a Pop way. I guess Larry's the king of the intermediary object—that's the word.

SIGLER: It's true. He's on the cusp of Happenings, and that whole culture as well. I don't think he ever, like Rauschenberg, performed in intermediate Fluxus-type events.

MYLES: But he would have, if he were a minute younger.

SIGLER: That's where the sax comes in, and the jazz of the whole experience. He's sort of living in his own movie.

MYLES: But he's too messy for that, too. In a Happening, everybody is conscious of the nature of the

experiment, in this kind of awe. You're just doing your thing, but you're letting everybody else do their thing, too, whereas I feel Larry was on everybody else—more dominant. A lot of this is like a mouse crawling up an elephant's leg with the intention of rape. There's some hubris.

SIGLER: You could say this whole room is hubris. This moment we're living in—the Trump moment—is hubristic. You just feel like, Where are we headed?

MYLES: It's gallows hubris.

SIGLER: It's unbelievable. Even just his statement yesterday—"This is the calm before the storm," he said.

MYLES: And he's playing with the news cycle. He's playing with us. It was like, I have the power to push the buttons, and I might do it, I might do it tomorrow, and you don't even know why. Andy told me a story just moments ago about Tibor and Larry, and that they would come in together, and they were these unlike guys from different class backgrounds, and they walked away, and Tibor was like, I love Larry, and Larry was like, I love Tibor. And his hubris was somehow ... He was like the dog jumping up on you, but you would allow it because he was sort of adorable. People loved and were charmed by this man.

are, to Trump in that sense.

MYLES: Though I think the women in his life might have a different ... that's where the Trump comparison might start to be accurate.

SIGLER: There was a lot of womanizing, right?

MYLES: Yeah.

SIGLER: Like here, is the woman and her pubic hair, for example, the brunt of a joke?

MYLES: I don't think so.

SIGLER: But that's kind of vulgar, right?

MYLES: Yeah, but I think vulgar is not necessarily bad.

SIGLER: I'm just curious if this painting functions as a bad joke, the way de Kooning gets a lot of flack for his—

MYLES: Woman paintings?

SIGLER: Yeah. I could see a bunch of men standing around in the fifties laughing at this painting. It's kind of a grotesque.

MYLES: I wouldn't go that far with it.

SIGLER: I like the painting, actually.

MYLES: See, I think maybe I don't like the painting.

SIGLER: Well, it's all about the legs and the underwear, right?

MYLES: There's a heaviness, and it's all about what's going on in there.

SIGLER: But he definitely gets those big expanses to work, in the sense of a Hans Hofmann or a de Kooning—you can feel him still being, in many ways, an abstract painter.

MYLES: Oh yeah.

SIGLER: This little hairline—

MYLES: That's really my favorite thing in it. It's great.

SIGLER: New Jersey. It just says New Jersey in there. Hey look—there is another Camel. He didn't give up on it.

MYLES: Yeah. It's so weird—the Camels just remind me of the covers of poetry books and poetry magazines.

SIGLER: I guess he and Jim Dine were probably two painters who could do lettering that looks great on the cover of poetry books.

MYLES: And now they completely date those poetry books.

SIGLER: I guess Ted Berrigan has a few.

MYLES: Yes!

SIGLER: Kenneth Koch, definitely.

MYLES: Right. So sometimes it's hard to even see them as paintings. But that labeling strikes me as not accidental. They're literary paintings, in a way.

SIGLER: We should talk about the fact that we're standing in Tibor de Nagy and it's really historically the hub of the New York School. You came to New York, you once told me, and you really wanted to locate O'Hara. The poems themselves were like a map of New York City for you.

MYLES: Well, I came to New York and he was gone, so I was understanding this poetry community and characters like Larry Rivers all in relation to this absent poet.

SIGLER: And of course Larry gave the eulogy at his funeral, which was apparently very moving, very heavy.

MYLES: Weirdly, my new book is sort of based a little bit on that, because I understood that that was an artist's gesture, to say the most dramatic, horrendous thing as an homage.

SIGLER: What did he say?

MYLES: He talked about, literally, what O'Hara looked like in the hospital bed, dying, with tubes in and out of his body, and his head swollen. He painted it in words. It was an

amazing gesture. It struck me as, Is that performance art? Is that poetry? Is that painting? Is that sculpture? What is that? And the effect that it had had on an audience. So when I started thinking about a dog's dying, I thought of it really as an homage to that.

SIGLER: So it's really on your mind right now—

MYLES: In this funny way. But isn't it true that as poets we know Larry Rivers as Frank O'Hara's lover and friend? That's what defines him now.

SIGLER: Certainly. It's nice to be dealing with his art. I feel really happy that we have the paintings here to look at, and we're not just talking about him as a hipster or just a cool guy who was around a sort of mythologized figure, because his contribution is potentially very lasting, very permanent. I have a funny feeling a lot of this work, while it is kind of going in and out of being dated and not looking so good anymore—you wonder whether it's coming back.

MYLES: That same thing! That it's in and out of focus.

SIGLER: He represents not only the New York School, but he's also a Beat character, right? So in a sense you can look him the way we might look at Robert Frank, or some people of that generation.

School was a little Beat. It was sort of coeval. What was that thing O'Hara said? I'm a little too square for the hips, and too hip for the squares. Again, I would say that that was the case for this guy.

SIGLER: Right. I think that's what you were saying before about this—it's almost like he's a little too square here because he's actually being precise in a funny way about—

MYLES: It's all there. There's an absence of removal.

SIGLER: It's so uncool. It's a totally uncool painting.

MYLES: Yeah.

SIGLER: And yet the cigarettes—that's cool, right? In a James Dean way, that's almost like, Check it out, I'm painting a cool pack of smokes.

MYLES: But it's not cool, it's kitschy. Look at this one—'97.

SIGLER: Whoa!

MYLES: I know, right? I just saw that.

SIGLER: That's hilarious.

MYLES: Holy shit! So this is ancient history, it's not contemporary. It's really funny. It's an homage to de Kooning, which we always knew, but it's one that de Kooning never saw. I can't remem-

ber when de Kooning died, but if he was alive, he was so wet-brained.

SIGLER: He may have still been—no, '97, no, I don't think so.

MYLES: How do you know? When did he die?

SIGLER: Maybe '93.

MYLES: I don't want to stop our recording.

SIGLER: I feel like we've done it.

MYLES: I think we've done it—we're in our final waltz-through. Love this. Amazing.

SIGLER: We've got to make sure we get a picture of that.

MYLES: An elegant, perfect little painting. I love the lesbian couple. The way that I love that he loves women is this—he was absolutely the kind of man who would just love dykes, because it would be, like, more! More naked women! Women on women! I wouldn't disinclude him from being one the guys who would say, Hey, let me join in. But there's also a kind of awe at the party he can't be a part of but is excited about.

SIGLER: His bisexuality comes through, right?

MYLES: Yes, exactly. This feels like a

bisexual gaze. Though this feels very heterosexual Polack.

SIGLER: I guess that is his bisexuality—on one side, a very heterosexual gaze, and then on the other, a very homosexual gaze.

MYLES: I think there's a great lesbian in him.

SIGLER: I love thinking of it as a great lesbian painting.

MYLES: I do, too. Let's talk about that.

SIGLER: Let's try to nail this down, First of all, how cheesy is it that he puts the name O'Hara there? I mean, that's cheesy in an audacious way.

MYLES: But it also weirdly defines it as a historical painting. I feel like that makes it be a general—there's a triumph of some war won here. Even the hat is Napoleonic. It's a three-cornered hat.

SIGLER: Oh yeah, you're right.

MYLES: It's like a woman with a dick.

SIGLER: Yeah. I guess that would pretty much define it. But do you think he captured a side of Frank that he saw or that came out of their relationship, or was this the Frank that everyone knew?

MYLES: I think this is the Frank of history. It's intimate and loving, but

then the face is a little general.

SIGLER: It's a little too soft.

MYLES: I was just talking with a friend, a painter named Larry Collins, and he does portraits of guys who died in Vietnam, and he makes a point of the fact that it doesn't look like them, because that puts it more on the edge of Greek and Roman style. It's an idealized portrait. This is a little bit like that. It's almost why he had to say "O'Hara," because that face seems a little timid.

SIGLER: It's such a great painting.

MYLES: It's such a great painting.

SIGLER: It's really ahead of the others. No pun intended.

MYLES: Ahead of the others—where's the pun?

SIGLER: The head.

MYLES: Oh. I think we should take pictures.

SIGLER: I mean, it's a painting about giving head, right?

MYLES: I wouldn't have necessarily thought that, but you're right—it's an invitation.

SIGLER: Especially with his arms up like that.

MYLES: Right—so it's an offering.

SIGLER: Yeah.

MYLES: What's interesting is that he's making an offering of his lover, but kind of to history.

SIGLER: If I compare it to every other thing we looked at in the gallery, it seems like it's on another level, another plane—maybe because we love Frank O'Hara so much, too.

MYLES: But I do think the suggestion is that if you look at a poet in your life, if you paint him, you will become a legend, too. Because that's what this painting did for Larry Rivers. He saw the poet and the poet saw him, and he became part of something maybe even bigger than his own art career.

SIGLER: It seems like an impulse to record not just one's self but the whole scene—like that John Jonas Gruen book I was showing you before, all those portraits up in the Hamptons, of Jane Wilson, Leonard Bernstein ...

MYLES: It's that impulse to make us history, to say "our thing" and "our crowd."

SIGLER: I think you have that as a poet. I don't feel like I quite have that, because maybe I feel like I didn't spend enough time at the Poetry Project when I was in my thirties or something.

MYLES: You didn't come with a gang.

SIGLER: Yeah. I don't feel like I have a strong sense of poetry community.

MYLES: You mean that you think it's in my work?

SIGLER: Yeah, I think it just comes across in who you are and your work, don't you?

MYLES: I think the community gave me my work. It wasn't an M.F.A. program—it was that church, that crowd, that whole way of making things.

SIGLER: I see that as very much an extension of this.

MYLES: Yeah, you're absolutely right. It all came in the absence of this guy, so again, we're all sort of implicit in this painting.

[1]. Neither Rivers nor Basquiat were immigrants. Rivers was born in the Bronx to immigrants from the Ukraine. Basquiat was born in Brooklyn; his father was a Haitian immigrant. —N.R.

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