

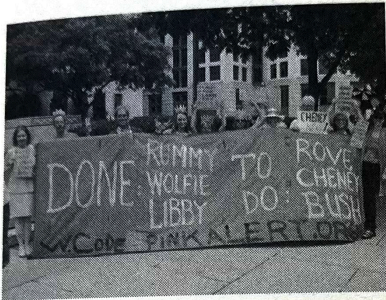
Brenda/Alice Trance Poem

Brenda Hillman has used trance to help create a state of consciousness more suitable for poetry, or at least more suitable for a certain kind of poem. In her 2009 book *Practical Water*, there is:

REPORTORIAL POETRY, TRANCE & ACTIVISM

AN ESSAY

Reportorial poetics can be used to record detail with immediacy while one is doing an action & thinking about something else.



Experience crosses over with that which is outside experience; the unknown receives this information as an aquifer receives replenishing rain. Meditative states can be used to cross material boundaries, to allow you to be in several places at once, such as Congress & ancient Babylon.

I recorded notes in Washington while attending hearings & participating in actions to make the record collective & personal. Working with trance while sitting in Congressional hearings i recorded details into a notebook.

If bees can detect ultraviolet rays, there are surely more possibilities in language & government. The possible is boundless.

Whether or not you have strength to resist official versions that are devastating the earth & its creatures, you could in any case send back reports. If political parties will not provide solutions, the good can occur when people gather in small groups to work for justice in each community using imagination without force.

People could leave their computers at least briefly to engage with others in public spaces. It is then the potential of each word comes forward.

If you have no time or strength, act without time or strength because they may follow. In the meantime you could imagine that you have them.



breath of life inside our spirit

& fog passed by byssoid wooly
each breath a soul we loved like women's art

a soul a fluttering between worlds

[depending on what you mean by that]

3-29-20 634,813

7-2-20 10,716,063

for CDW & FL

I'd wager the CDW to whom the poem is in part dedicated is the late poet C.D. Wright.

In a 2017 interview with poet and podcaster Rachel Zucker, Alice Notley discussed her own use of trance to create poems:

Rachel Zucker: I heard you read from *Mysteries of Small Houses* and talk about how you did a self-hypnosis technique by looking at photographs. Was it one photograph?

Alice Notley: No, not photographs.

Rachel Zucker: Oh, with picturing?

Alice Notley: No, it's explained in the first poem. But I wrote the first poem last. I gradually developed this process where I would self-hypnotize myself, but I didn't realize I was doing that at first. And I described what was happening to Doug and he got me a couple of books about self-hypnosis. I would imagine this house that I lived in when I was four-years-old in Needles. And I would walk up the stairs



into the house. In the house being four-years-old, which was my sense of when I was the most perfect and unspoiled by society, I was able to go into the part of my life I wanted to observe and remember about. And so I would go from there to this other part of my life and try to write about it. That was the process, it was self-hypnosis.

Rachel Zucker: And so, when you wrote this poem that you just read, you were writing it many years later?

Alice Notley: Yes. I wrote those poems in 1995, six, but I went back to 1972 in order to write that poem. But first, I went to 1949.

Rachel Zucker: So, you would go into the house in your mind, into this part of yourself. And then how would you get from the four-year-old self to the-

Alice Notley: I don't remember exactly. I'm trying to remember whether I sat down or not, but I think I just stood there. I stood there and then I learned some very simple tricks, like you go into the trance and then you see if you can make your arm too heavy to move it, or you count backwards by tens from 100. And that usually does it for me. And then I start to tingle all over. And if I go too deeply, it's like I'm in a state of grace and I can't write. So I have to not go too deeply in order to do that.

Rachel Zucker: The poem feels so present. It feels like you're in that experience, in that time of your life.

Alice Notley: That's what life I was trying to do. I was trying to be there. Do you know the theories of hypnotism that have to do with, if you have something wrong with you like a disease, if you go to



before you had the disease, you can be in a different body? It was sort of like that. I was really trying to be in that body.

Rachel Zucker: And did you continue that process?

Alice Notley: Yeah. I still do it. But at the moment, it's kind of hard. I feel as if I have brought my unconscious into my conscious almost entirely. And I can't go down and get something anymore. But I don't remember everything, so I might try to get memories again. I could try for memories.

Rachel Zucker: I was talking to Kristen Prevallet. Do you know her?

Alice Notley: Yeah.

Rachel Zucker: She was talking about how this whole notion of the unconscious is really not where it's at, and that it's the *co-conscious* mind.

Alice Notley: Well, it's a better word.

Rachel Zucker: I was thinking about that. But are there dangers and drawbacks to bringing the unconscious or co-conscious up or too close?

Alice Notley: I think so. I did these workshops where I got people to do this. Sometimes they were very resistant. And then one time a woman told me it was dangerous. She came up to me, it was kind of in the break, and said, "This is dangerous." There would be people who wouldn't want to go back to when they were four because something traumatic had happened to them. So my stepdaughter was taking a class in hypnotherapy. (Kristen's a hypnotherapist.) She



taught me this one where you go into the future. You put yourself into the trance and then you rise up as if you're flying above a river. And you follow the river into the future until you see a place where you want to alight. And then you go down into a house there. And I did that in a workshop. And there was a woman who did that. She went into the future, she was kind of an old woman. I think she might have wanted to go to her death or something.

Rachel Zucker: When you do these things, does it have to be in a special place or a special time? Or can it be anywhere, anytime? Do you have a writing-

Alice Notley: I write every morning, but you kind of have to be alone. But on the other hand, when I did the workshops, nobody was alone.

Consider going into a trance to write a poem. If you have concerns for your safety, do not do this, or have someone nearby who can help you if you become anxious while going into a trance. Try breathing or counting backwards from 100 by tens, or by ones, and once you find your consciousness altered, use Brenda's "[trance poem with the grey stone]" as a guide. (See the instructions for "Cover Poem" if you need guidance.)

Start with travel, as Brenda does in her poem, if that feels right. Include: a flower, an insect, a quote by a poet or philosopher you admire, a metaphor for breath, and at least one parenthetical thought, though Brenda uses brackets in her poem. If this composition experience is successful, you will feel a deepening of your altered state after you finish writing and become, as George Bowering says: 'the first reader of the poem.' It will seem weirdly not you, or different from you if you do it right. If it is successful, you may want to set aside a particular time once a week, or daily for a while, to experiment with this method and apply it to the serial



poem that is your life, directly out of your own personal mythology in the way that Jack Spicer suggested on page 61 of his *Collected Books*...

The trick naturally is what [Robert] Duncan learned years ago and tried to teach us – not to search for the perfect poem but to let your way of writing of the moment go along its own paths, explore and retreat but never be fully realized (confined) within the boundaries of one poem. This is where we were wrong and he was right, but he complicated things for us by saying that there is no such thing as good or bad poetry. There is – but not in relation to the single poem. There is really no single poem. (61)

Works Cited:

Brenda Hillman, *Practical Water*

“ *In a Few Minutes Before Later*

Alice Notley interviewed by Rachel Zucker for the Common Podcast:

<https://www.commonpodcast.com/home/2017/4/17/episode-26-alice-notley>

Jack Spicer, *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*.

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<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Alice-Notley-A-Baby-Is-Born-out-of-a-White-Owls-Forehead-Rachel-Zucker-Interview-Episode-26.mp3>

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