Joanne Kyger, *There You Are: Interviews, Journals, and Ephemera*.
Edited by Cedar Sigo.

Dale Smith: Your poetry is very much in your mouth. You hear the voice thinking and exploring, revealing . . .

Joanne Kyger: It's a physical voice, yes. I think that's the best you can do sometimes, trying to "score" it as closely as you can on the page. I'm always amazed that this isn't taught more. How to translate the voice to the page, to get the little subtleties of breath and tone, or change of tone or character emphasis.

There's one really good essay that I've never been able to find again, I think by Williams. He says, okay, let's get this all down: a period has three breath stops; a comma has a breath stop, a semi-colon, a breath stop and a half. Empty space means nothing goes on but breathing until you get to the next word, etc. You're scoring your reading. Otherwise you follow this boring convention of the straight left-hand margin, a kind of cookie-cutter block stamp.

DS: You've mentioned before your daily practice of writing in a journal.

Yes, and in this daily writing, you don't have to think of it as "poetry," you don't have to think at all about what "kind" of writing you're doing. You're writing some kind of un-self-conscious open utterance, being as clear as you can, or as muddled as you want. You're not writing for anybody. It's spontaneous.

DS: It seems definitely un-self-conscious. Because when you sit down to write a poem and think, okay, this poem's got to be this or that, that's when poems really get bogged down. They're most free when you can step out and not be self-conscious.

Right. Know how to step "out" of what you call a form; wake up. Keep word energy flowing. That's why I love travel writing. When people on trips write about what's happening, they're out of their own familiar habitat and experiencing something new, strange, awful. That can produce very fresh and inspiring writing. Very human, very vulnerable.

DS: You're very vulnerable when it's a place you don't know. Do you write for anybody in particular?

I think there's a kind of address that goes on all the time, especially to your peers in poetry. Once you've published, you do realize someone is hopefully going to read your words.

DS: Do you ever publish your journals?

Yes. For example, *Phenomenological* was a journal written in the Yucatan and was part of an "assignment" in a series of chapbooks called "The Curriculum of the Soul." A series published by the late John Clarke and Al Glover based on a list of "topics" by Charles Olson. As a form it contained many different kinds of writing: poetry, biography, quotations, dreams, travel observations, historical data about the Yucatan Mayans, conversations, etc.

DS: Did you know Olson, did you work with him?

I met him in 1965 at the Berkeley Poetry Conference. He also came out to San Francisco to participate for a month on an experimental television project at KQED. I got to know him a lot better then. Bill Brown was also working with the project. Bill had transcribed and published through his press Coyote Press, Olson's filibuster talk phenomenon at the '65 Conference. I remember him as being a brilliant and continuous conversationalist, his ear so keen.

Of course Joe Dunn had given me *Projective Verse* to read in 1957. I really studied it. I'd come out of the University of California at Santa Barbara studying Wittgenstein and Heidegger. I liked looking at what "thoughts" were about. I hadn't heard anyone trying to talk about writing or poetry that had a language, an articulation. I read *Projective Verse* over and over again, trying to "fathom" or absorb it. There was a field, an energy, energy on the page. The page itself was an energy source, and words and ideas were transmitted to it. As quick as ideas arrived they should be transformed into this field.

Robert Duncan, Snyder, and Ginsberg were articulating their own poetics. But for me, I could really understand how the page could start to hold these "energies."

Michael Price: That's interesting that you say that, because for me, just holding a book of Olson's has that energy. I've noticed that with your books too. I'm just getting to know them. The same with Philip Whalen. There's something about the presence of even the book itself.

Well, yes, the pages certainly look alive. I mean it's so boring to pick up a book of poetry and see that left-handed margin going evenly up and down the page like a little platoon of soldiers.

MP: It's almost like running up and down a staircase over and over again, instead of wandering everywhere.

DS: That's about the power of observation. Olson magnified it. I mean it was so ingrained with him. That Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn. *He says something like "just go study barbed wire."*

He didn't start writing poetry until his forties, so he had a very well-developed intellect, and was a wide reader. A person willing to go beyond the usual bounds of the Greek-Roman Empire, Judeo-Christian inheritance.

DS: What do you mean, as you say in one of your poems, "Me is memory . . . take me out, take me out."

You are composed of all of the ideas of yourself, so "you" are your memory, so "you" are your history. How you solidify a "me."

"Take me out" means take "me" out, so "I" can view someone else's memory. If you are going to try and go out to another time and history to tell someone else's story, you have to drop that "me" behind.

DS: What do you mean by "architecture of your lineage?"

Who your teachers are; how did you learn the architecture of your page, become aware of the "structure" of your thinking and the books in your life. Robert Duncan was especially important to me when I was young as he presented the "religion" of the household. He's a person who just unabashedly made a wonderful, magical home. Unlike Spicer who lived a lonely life in dreary apartment rooms. How do you make your household? How do you keep it together, to live a life that is balanced with beauty? A place to put your bookshelves. But not get tied down too much. The rucksack revolution of the Beat Generation was to be able to know how to get on the road too. You had to know how to earn your living, at a job that you didn't confuse with your "identity," but gave you the economics to travel, and time off to write.

DS: The architecture of "me." That's why I was wondering about the "me." Poetry does something to that "me" because it's "you" but not "you." "Well I myself, am not myself" you say. It's a distance, but it's very close. It's an inhabited distance of revelation. There's something, ultimately, in good poems that you just can't control. It just happens, and you're always stunned and surprised when you've done something really good, you see something you didn't expect to see.

That's when you understand that words have their own independent existence. They say what they want to. Like Spicer saying you are just the medium, the funnel for the words to go through. They have their own lineage, returning through you. The magic syllables, seed syllables.

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