

NoOnesRose: An Interview with Pierre Joris

Charles Bernstein

Charles Bernstein: *Ten years ago, in 2012, you and Habib Tengour edited an anthology of poetry from the Maghreb, ultimately titled Poems for the Millennium, volume 4: The University of California Book of North African Literature, though I know you would have preferred to call it a dīwān, a register or logbook. What was the reception of this groundbreaking work in the United States? At the time the book came out, there had been a lot of political turbulence in that region, but I know less about Maghrebian poetics and poetry as it connects to that. What would you add to the dīwān?*

Pierre Joris: Yeah, *Diwan Ifrikya* was the original title because “Ifrikya” was the name of what is now called the Maghreb in ancient times. But that sounded too esoteric to the publisher, who insisted we change it to what it is now. To put it bluntly, the reception of this—the very first such compilation and translation covering those specific and extremely rich cultural areas—was rather lousy. I don’t have the numbers handy, but this book sold between ten and twenty times fewer copies than the first two volumes of

Poems for the Millennium, and the absence of critical essays and reviews was of the same order. The political turbulence that has been inherent to the Maghreb over the years, only really got any attention in the West, especially the US, during the two years of the so-called Arab Spring—i.e., 2010–12, though strangely enough this upsurge in interest doesn't seem to have helped the book when it came out.

There were two core reasons why I wanted to do this anthology starting way back in the seventies: here was a multilingual, hybridized, and creolized (to use three terms dear to Édouard Glissant) part of the postcolonial world producing an amazingly alive, challenging, and inventive literature that, so I thought, would interest American readers and writers. The second reason was more personal: in the sixties I had to decide on a language to write poetry in, unable and not wanting to do so in the *mameloshen*, *Letzeburgesch*, Luxembourgish, the cultural languages at my disposal were those of the one-time or would-be colonizers of Luxembourg: French and German. To the rash eighteen-year-old I was, current French poetry seemed stale, except for a rare few such as Henri Michaux—the rest either late pale riders on the broken-in and -down mare of surrealism or of an effete (it seemed to me) aesthetically precious post-Mallarméism, that seemed absolutely incapable of saying anything relevant to this, my, post–World War II world. German was a different matter, given that as a kid my reading had been mostly in that language: wonderful late nineteenth-century translations ranging from Gustav Schwab's version of the corpus of Greek myths and *Märchen* to translations of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* to the seventy-two volumes of Karl May's adventure stories. I came to poetry when in high school I heard Celan's "Todesfuge" read aloud, having already discovered Gottfried Benn (a special favorite, whose acidic word creation "Siphylisation" I used again a couple days ago, whose "Weinhaus Wolf" prose essay I used to reread on a yearly basis, and whose poetry I made use of again a few years ago for automatic homophonic translation experiments), and being introduced to Trakl, Rilke, and some of the contemporary poets, Karl Krolow, Günter Eich, et cetera. Still, the post–World War II problems core to the German writers' consciousness, political or metaphysical, were not mine: we had been overrun by the Nazis and knew what to think about them and had nothing to overcome. There was also the sociological fact that I hailed from the Luxembourg bourgeoisie, a deeply Francophile and -phone class, who certainly in those years avoided Germany and German matters, cultural and others.

That left my fourth language: English. A voracious reader and lover

of Whitman, Mickey Spillane, Hemingway, Ginsberg, Raymond Chandler, James Baldwin, and Burroughs, foolishly young me decided that I could surely find a way to write in that lingo. And so on to the midsixties, Paris, Shakespeare and Co.—a swerve back to your question re: Maghrebi literature. Well, my roommate at Shakespeare and Co. in early 1966 was the Moroccan poet Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, who introduced me to the new Maghrebi literature, his first poems (a chapbook, *Nausée Noire*, published in 1964 by our good friend Claude Royet-Journoud) and the novels of Kateb Yacine and a few others. There I saw what could be done in French, and what these Maghrebi writers were doing with it, in their postcolonial situation. I always loved Kateb Yacine's answer to the reporter who asked him in 1962 after Algeria's independence had been won, if now he would return to his mother tongue and write in Arabic. "No," Kateb said, "we won the war. We are keeping French as the spoils of war." A wee Luxembourger did not have—and/or could not have taken—that formidable liberty with the language: writing "literary" French was something to be aspired to, something maybe attainable by servile imitation of the great models—i.e., something I had no intention of doing. The books in Shakespeare and Co. and the jazz around the corner in Memphis Slim's Trois Mailletz Club or in the several clubs on Rue de la Huchette were opening much more interesting possibilities for me.

My love and admiration for that great Maghrebi writing has stayed with me to this day, and—to finally get back to your question—if I could go back to Habib's and my *Diwan Ifrikya*, I would not only reinstate the original title and add the three hundred pages we had to cut from the original version but also add another three hundred or so pages of new poetry. Indeed, there is a fair amount of excellent new writing—much indeed concerned with the political and cultural upheavals of this past two decades in standard and—more and more—colloquial Maghrebi Arabic mostly, some of it in French, but also a good amount in Amazigh—i.e., in Berber, the original languages of that part of the world. Indeed someone has just contacted me having finished a large Amazigh anthology translated into English, and I will try to help him get it published.

CB: *Your anthology makes available poetry largely unknown to its potential readers. It's a thrilling experience to be introduced to this work. But, to cross over into US official culture, you might have done better with a cookbook or a book of love poems or organized the anthology as "poems for a spiritual journey." In the United States, the unknown needs to be translated*

into the known to become known. Which takes me directly to the poetics of the “nomadic,” a term that has been central to your work as poet, scholar, and translator. You have already sketched a bit of what unlanded you in the nomadic. Do you see this in relation to Celan’s “Niemandrose” (from “Psalm”), which could be translated as no-man’s-rose, or nobody’s rose; you translate it “NoOnesRose” (fig. 1)? “Gelobt seist du, Niemand,” which for me could be the prayer of what Eliot called the “free thinking Jew,” the much-reviled rootless cosmopolitan. In a time of persistent ethnonationalism, “nomadics” might be a fundamental (anti-fundamentalist) poetics of resistance. But what about those long-marginalized people (subaltern) who struggle for “national liberation” (including in the Maghreb) or in the US who work to shore up racial and ethnic identification as a necessary resistance to white supremacy? What of Blake’s “Nobodaddy,” the hidden Dark force, “Father of Jealousy”? Who or what is the rose of the nomadic?

PJ: Let me detour back through the geography of your first question, as it links—for me at least—the nomadic and Celan’s NoOnesRose. Over the three years I was teaching in Constantine, one of the great pleasures was to leave that dry (climate- and booze-wise) city behind to drive south and then east into Tunisia to load up on wine, though that was secondary. First the drive south, through the High Plateaus to Batna, from there into and through the Aurès Mountains and their miles of red bougainvillea lining the road, to Biskra, the oasis between the mountains and the Sahara, where way back when André Gide was able to liberate his repressed sexuality, even though not with the Ouled Nail girls so famous for plying the oldest trade in the city’s streets. I’d get gas and then head into the Sahara, another three-hour drive to reach the goal of this quasi-Situationist *dérive*, the little oasis town of el-Oued in the region called el-Souf. There I would get a room in the strangely named (the nostalgic remains of a French colonial chain of hotels) “Hotel Transatlantique” and work for a few days, either in my room, or in the garden, on poems and on my Celan translations. Though of course I’d also visit the surroundings, especially the desert and the Chott El-Djerid, that huge endoheric salt lake just across the border into Tunisia—and with which I was familiar from childhood on via the opening chapter of Karl May’s first volume of “Reiseerzählungen,” *Durch die Wüste*.

A Saharan oasis may have been the oddest place in which to translate or rework existing translations or simply think about Paul Celan, but maybe it was exactly that *dépaysement*, that *Verfremdungseffekt*, that made a fresh look at Celan possible. If Celan’s landscapes range primar-

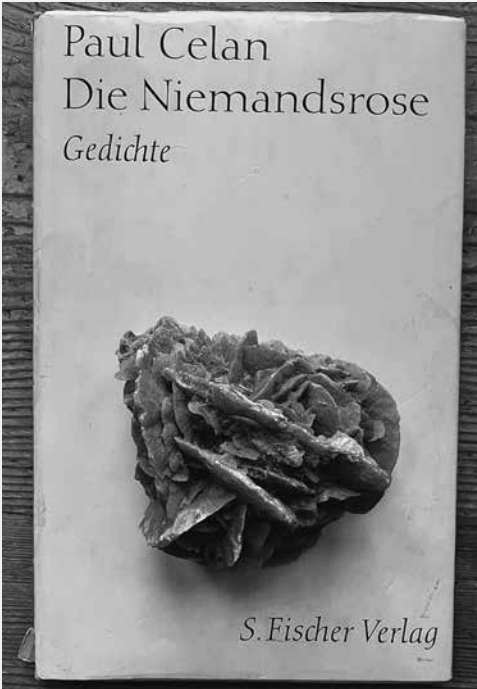


Figure 1. Photo-collage of cover of Paul Celan's *Die Niemandrose* (1964, S. Fischer Verlag) with Saharan sand rose. Photograph by Pierre Joris.

ily from his native Bukovina to the geography of Western Europe, France, Germany mainly, the late poetry certainly moves beyond those literal ones to imaginary spaces allied as much to sand- as to icescapes. His cleansing of the language, getting rid of all the *Mitteleuropa* lushness and metaphoric overabundance that early on he had sucked up in the poetry of Rilke and others, left behind very solid, highly articulated and Zen-gorgeously arranged word-constructs not unlike the pure, clean white-bone skeletons you can find in the desert. Shining and absolute. And so it was that when I picked up somewhere on the desert floor on one of my walks what is called a sand-rose, and brought it back, I couldn't help but suddenly come to the conclusion: ah, this is Celan's NoOnesRose! It is a stone rose that belongs to no one but to itself and to the desert, that place of nomadcity, and it travels out of there because humans are startled by a resemblance with one of their favorite flowers, the rose. In Celan's opus the rose is there from the start, coming probably on the one side from his love of botany (he had notebooks full of botanical info and lore) and on the literary side from Rilke, but repeated through the early books it moves—nomadically, you

could say—through a wide range of literary allusions and meanings and links (also see the commentary sections of the books) including hermeticism, alchemy, and so on. But my sense is that even if Celan never once uses the composite *sand-rose*, both the terms sand and rose populate the work enough to bring them together—at least in the late work where Celan is busy creating new, you could nearly say posthuman landscapes, where geology and poem and any number of stone formations are core referents, that sand-rose belongs if only as a peculiarly apt image of the late Celan poem.

The rose, including all the infinite load of meanings we have put on it over the millennia, may also need this independent, self-declared and -made mineral guise as one way of escaping the wrath of Nobodaddy? I am writing this on the first anniversary of the January 6 attempt to overthrow American democracy, and I hear all you're saying in your question about "ethnic identification" and "ethnonationalism." You also indicate what is indeed my way of trying to think and act through and beyond those when you write that "'nomadics' might be a fundamental (anti-fundamentalist) poetics of resistance." It is that indeed, a resistance that always stays on the move and will work for ongoing change, to unfreeze that Blakean bad guy, to undo identity, or the sterile headlock one gets paralyzed into when "identity" gets used as more or less useful resistance against white supremacy. Let me call Édouard Glissant [2020: 9] to our aid here, as I am a firm believer in this sentence from his book *Treatise on the Whole World*: "Let us extend the imagination by an infinite bursting forth and an infinite repetition of the themes of hybridity, multilingualism and creolization." The sand-rose, come to think of it, is such an interspecies hybrid that speaks the language of stone and that of flora.

CB: *Let's stay in the desert, where a rose is arose and aroused, to echo Gertrude Stein. Edmond Jabès is a poet of the Egyptian desert, Biblical and modern, whose work crisscrosses Celan. How do you see the relation of Celan and Jabès in terms of the nomadic, diasporic, and (Jabèsian) exile—and may I ask you to put those three terms into dialogue? So much of the philosophical commentary on these writers buzzes around the "unsaid" and "unsayable," about ruins, the limits of language, and the necessity of silence. But I am also struck by the opposite, how much Jabès and Celan do say, how much they make possible in and through language, how much their poetry is not silent but expressive: celebrating (yes, an odd word here) the exuberance and persistence of meaning in*

the face of, well, pretty negative stuff! (I like Rosmarie Waldrop's [2002] phrase for Jabès: "lavish absence.") I'd even say, against all odds, that these two are radically pragmatic poets. So, yes, "apophatic" but also emphatic, the dance and play of words; splendor. This comes to a head when too many of the reviews of your magnificent Celan translations don't materially address the poems or the translations. With Celan, your work is all about the specific textures and choices of his poems and what they make possible for poems in English. And that seems to me where you, as a poet, go bouncing off Celan—and Jabès. How does your poetry enter into this? Jabès [1990a], in your 1990 translation of his From the Desert to the Book: Dialogues with Marcel Cohen, offers a starting point: "Maybe the desert is the pulverized beyond of the question: at the same time its disproportionate humiliation and triumph."

PJ: I am in fact more familiar with Jabès's desert than with Celan's—even if I am from a northern latitude and a wooded geography very similar to that of Celan's and spent fifty-five years trying to elucidate the latter's land- and word-scapes. I drove into Jabès's actual sand-desert, be it the way more Western—Maghrebi—part of the Sahara when I had just turned thirty, but I had dreamed of it since at nine or ten I had read about it in Karl May's adventure tales. And I drove into it with some of the same intentions Jabès had: to discover that silence, that absence and thus risk discovering my own silences or absences—or, hopefully to get to hear something by me never heard, i.e., experienced before, that may help opening up not only one's sensorium but also help renew, open up one's approach to poetry. By one of those so-called "chance"—"objective chance," to go Breton-surreal—occurrences, on that first trip the Hotel Transatlantique in el-Oued, the oasis I wanted to stay in, was full or wouldn't let me in after midnight, the time I got there because of a four-hour delay waiting for gas in the previous oasis. So I drove on, trying to reach Touggourt, the next oasis, but when I stopped along the road to pee, the sand closed around and held the wheels of the car, and I had to sleep in the car for my first night in the Sahara. Woke up tickled by the rising sun glinting off the single building visible now, a *One Thousand and One Nights*-like domed and gilded palatial villa built right there in the middle of the desert by some upper-echelon party hack with money ripped off the people. A family of nomadic herders driving camels to market help me push the car back on the road a little later—and I could reach the Hotel Transatlantique—where I spent many days in that and the next two years reworking my Celan translations of *Breathturn* [Celan 2014], translating the

1930s (even if in the late 1940s he went through a brief period of writing in Romanian) and would continue to do so for the rest of his life (spent in Paris as a French citizen). Jabès had started to write in French as a young man in Cairo under the influence of modernist French and especially surrealist poetry, and would continue to do so in Paris (in that sense, repatriation into the native lands of his writing tongue was nearly a way of escaping another exile as his Cairo family had chosen Italian nationality in 1882, so Italy would have been the “logical” country of his “exile-homecoming.”)

Inside that double exile, both men would however return to, or turn toward, yet another exilic aspect of themselves which as young men they had tried to leave behind: the fact of their Jewish origins. In Jabès’s work it becomes central after he settles in Paris, triggered by an anti-Semitic experience, and leads to the sequence of books we know as *The Book of Questions*. It is deeply fascinating to watch him leave behind the near-trad-modernist lyrical verse mode of the early poems—all of which are gathered in the one four-hundred-page volume, *Le seuil le sable: Poésie complète, 1943–1988* [Jabès 1990b]—published in 1990 with only the last seventy or so pages overlapping with the writing of the *Livre des questions*, the first volume of which comes out in Paris in 1963 (and the whole of which was translated by Rosmarie Waldrop as *The Book of Questions* [Jabès 1991], published by Wesleyan University Press in four volumes between 1976 and 1984).

Pour la petite histoire, to speak in Edmond’s language of both exile and home, in the mideighties when living in Paris again, I would often visit him and Arlette, and over tea and cookies we would discuss poetry and poetics. Edmond wouldn’t simply let himself be interrogated or interviewed by me, the younger poet, but insisted on querying me about my own poetry and poetics, the link of my work to English and current American poetry—what interested him was exchange, dialogue. Celan of course often came up, and Edmond spoke admiringly and lovingly of both the man and the poet, their meetings at his flat, but also retelling on several occasions how one night, looking out his window into the Rue de l’Épée de Bois, he saw this figure in a trench coat slipping into the street walking somewhat furtively along the walls of the houses until he got to Jabès’s, and then jamming a wad of papers into the mailbox. He had recognized the figure as that of Celan, and went down, but the man was gone: the wad of papers was a copy of Celan’s current poems—and Edmond remained puzzled as to why Celan had not come by in daytime as he did on other occasions to give him the poems and read them aloud.

I saw this in retrospect as a quasi-symbolic aspect of what these two figures stood and stand for: Edmond—whom I have at times called the great M&M, the *Mediterranean Mensch*—open and inviting, loving to share *de visu* and in daylight, while Celan is to a great extent the *Nacht-Mensch*, the bruised, weary, suspicious survivor who prefers to communicate through his poems, poems meant to “witness for the witness,” to use one of the questions when he asks, or has a poem ask “who witnesses for the witness” (to which he doesn’t give an answer). And so the desert in Celan and his work is not the Egyptian or southern desert of sand lit at night by millions of stars, but rather the dis-aster (literally the de-starred—see Maurice Blanchot’s [1980] *L’écriture du désastre*) night of absence of star and sun in our post-Khurbn and post-Hiroshima world. This makes the present (and future?) world into a dark-matter affair where the truth is or resides or remains visible only in the frozen glaciers and the geological structures of stone. Day and night, thus, but also horizontal (implying a horizon, thus change in the present and possible future) in Jabès, and vertical (a digging below the horizon, into history, be that of earth or of language, trying to learn from that how to create a present language that be truthful to history) in Celan.

Not that Jabès is in any way unaware of history, et cetera. *The Book of Questions* speaks to that but does so not only in Jabès’s “own” voice but also in the voices of the multiple fictional rabbis who discuss the matters at (or under) hand, updating a long Jewish oral tradition. In Celan we do find Rabbi Loew, the Maharal of Prague and one of the great cabalists, addressed and admonished by the “I” of the poem in a raspy voice in relation to the “one” of the poem’s title (“To one who stood before the door / one evening”): “This / one’s word, circumcise it, for / this one, write the living / Nothing on his spirit, spread / this one’s two / cripplefingers into the re- / demptive saying. / For this one. // The evening door too, slam it shut. // . . . / The morning door, throw it open, Ra- —” (Celan 2020a: 287). Note the last word, broken off. A desire to be done with the past? Or is erasing the last two letters a sort of inversion of that cabalistic practice where circumcision means erasing letters of the name as in the Loew’s golem story where the erasure of the first letter of the name inscribed on his forehead—*emeth* (truth)—gives *meth*, meaning “he is dead”? To open to the present? Of course, to some extent, but there is an interesting line in a 1950 poem (“The whitest of doves”), Celan will use much later as a marginal note in his copy of Jabès’s *Book of Yudel* (1964) next to the lines attributed to Rabbi

Zack: “Ce lieu est amour. Il est absence de lieu” (“This place is love. It is the absence of place”).¹ Celan’s line has a certain absoluteness to it and reads, “we never were.” Though at another level of reading, Celan’s word-circumcision of deleting the last two letters could also be read as a return to a pre-rabbinic figure, the Egyptian godhead Ra. In the poem “To Stand” from 1963, commentators link the lines “für dich / allein” (“for you / alone”) to a quote, often cited by Celan during the Goll affair years, by Rabbi Hillel from the German edition by Reinhold Meyer, and which says, “Wenn ich nicht für mich bin, wer ist dann für mich” (“If I’m not for myself, who will be for me?”). The Talmudic text continues, “And when I am for myself, what am ‘I’? And if not now, when?” But let me stop there, or my non-Jewish rabbinical side will lead me into too-long-winded considerations of the “but on the other side . . .”

These matters, as already mentioned above, have of course found their way into my own work and if not all that often in a literal manner of quoting either poet, certainly in my thinking about poetics. But in fact you asked me to put the three terms “nomadic, diasporic, and (Jabèsian) exile” into dialogue. Well, the diasporic is nomadic in the word itself: an English word from Greek διασπείρω (*diaspeirō*), meaning “I scatter, I spread about” that in turn is composed of διά (*dia*), “between, through, across” (core words in my search for “in-betweenness”) and the verb σπείρω (*speirō*), “I sow, I scatter.” But used most of the time (and with a capital *D*) to speak of the Jewish exile. The original Greek use of the term referred not necessarily to a forced exile, but to emigration to a conquered land for the purpose of colonization—i.e., to assimilate the territory into an empire—even if the first use in English 1876 in refers to “extensive *diaspora* work (as it is termed) of evangelizing among the National Protestant Churches on the continent.”² So diaspora (with the nostalgia for its originary language and culture) can have that colonialist aspect—even the Jewish diaspora in its Zionist version, where the return to the promised land—i.e., the possible end of diaspora—led to a now seventy-four-year-old new diaspora, that of the Palestinian people.

The nomad, of course, also carries at least traces of the place of origin in the form of portable art and language-art, but is less determined by it—unless the core of that nomadic desire is again that of a prophetic monotheism, as for example in the current Islamic terrorist ideolo-

1. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

2. Wikipedia, s.v. “Diaspora,” last modified January 29, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaspora>.

gies. (There's much talk about the disasters of all three monotheisms in my and Adonis's *Conversations in the Pyrenees* [Adonis and Joris 2018]). But given that the idea of nomadism doesn't ab initio include a return to a promised land (or just nostalgia for last year's camping ground as in the *atlal* of the Mualla'qat) while implying continuous movement, my thinking and writing is more attuned to the notion of nomadism, defining the whole space/time continuum as having no beginning or end, i.e., of always being an in-between. Though obviously this may come from the fact that unlike either Jabès's or Celan's, my "exile" was not forced but willed, and I could return to the country of origin if I wanted. This allows me a sunnier, maybe more Jabèsian vision.

In my current project—a longish multistrain poem presently called *A Riparian Commons*—I try to investigate and reflect on some of the reasons for the diasporic behavior of not one "people" or "tribe" but of this late white incarnation of the *Homo sapiens* species, as it posits itself ab initio as separate and superior to all the other realms of this earth, and uses this claim as a justification of its ruthless colonization of that "other" world, the animal, mineral, and water realms, the results of which are leading us to an ecological cataclysm. Earth—and the Celanian structures of geology—will survive and may reinvent new life-forms in time, maybe even more "intelligent"—i.e., less self-destructive—ones. Not that Celan's vision, despite the vaunted bleakness, is politically negative. It is he who since the 1950s and until the end of his life pointed out the survival and recrudescence of Fascist tendencies in post-World War II Europe. His core lifelong adherence to a strong, positive, and democratic political vision was acquired as a very young man—namely, the "anarchistic" position of mutual aid, as proposed by Peter Kropotkin in his 1902 book *Mutual Aid*. A book I have pulled back off my "historical" shelves and that now sits at arm's length on the closest shelf in the company of the books on climate change and next to the book I am finishing reading right now, David Graeber and David Wengrow's [2021] *The Dawn of Everything*.

Jabèsian hospitality and multivoiced discussion without Romantic-lyrical frills (as readable in the nonlyrical, prose / dialogue, structured by the play of black print blocks and white spatial forms he found for the *Book of Questions*) may help point us toward the possibility of implementing enough change to avert the worst. Though that seems a nearly Romantic position today—i.e., two weeks into Putin's active attempt at the eradication of the Ukraine and its people. I have been keeping an eye on one specific spot in the Ukraine—namely, Celan's birthplace, Czernowitz, which, after having

been part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until 1918, then part of Romania, and since the end of World War II under the spelling Chernivtsi, part of the Soviet Union (Ukrainian SSR) from 1944 to 1991, was integrated into the Ukraine since then. So far, no destruction. I dislike the word *hope*—which Nicole Peyrafitte has deconstructed so well in her work as a nonactive, passive stance and thus not positive or useful for creating (necessary) change—and writing in that sense is an activity against hope, is, as all writing and art is or should be, a political act. And, to go back to your question, I would agree with the Jabès line you cite: “Maybe the desert is the pulverized beyond of the question.” Not sure yet if it will prove humiliation or triumph.

CB: *I love Celan’s “we never were,” as you note: a commentary on a passage of Jabès. This is a poetics of becoming, perhaps also echoed in “The Negative Community,” the opening section of The Unavowable Community [Blanchot 1988], the title of your translation of a work by Maurice Blanchot, La communauté inavouable (1983), which itself is a response to Jean-Luc Nancy’s [1991] The Inoperative Community (La communauté désoeuvrée) which, as you say in your preface, could also be “idled,” a term I associate with aesthetic possibility and, at the same time, aesthetic impossibility. Negative dialectics is a practice: the aversion of origin in pursuit of potential or perhaps unobtainable. In Microliths [Celan 2020b] you connect this phrase of Celan’s to his relationship to Ingeborg Bachmann, so as much a matter of love as history and identity—“Where it never was, there it will forever be. / We never were, so we will be with it.” Diaspora but with a crucial twist: no “original”: nostos, the turn (not return) to a homeless home, verse’s turn, if we let it. “Truth is diasporic, the Holy Land is exile,” as I have it in a poem I wrote for our boundary 2 editor, Paul Bové.*

Thinking of these turns of phrase as a way to imagine literary communities/uncommunities with special focus on national languages and nonnational affinities, indeed your connection with a number of discrepant schools, styles, movements, generations, places, countries—wait for it, a question is coming: I know you resisted becoming a US citizen for a long time, until it became too impractical, or perhaps counterfactual, while all the while working as, well, an American poet, a poet who writes in “the American.” What is America to you? How do you read, or figure yourself within, the layers and configurations of American poetry, of our generation, and the two generations before us, but also the nineteenth century (thinking of my echo just now of Emerson). And how do you figure/disfigure that with frames outside “the American”?

PJ: Actually, the reason why I functioned so long with a green card and my Luxembourg passport wasn't a matter of resisting becoming American, but was based on my preference for a "both and" against a "one only:" until about 2015 I would have had to give up my Luxembourg passport in order to become American, and I would thus have been stuck with only one identity after thirty-plus years of a doubleheader: green card and country of origin passport. Then suddenly Luxembourg changed its law and allowed for double nationality, an event coinciding roughly with Trump running and winning—and so I immediately applied for US citizenship in order to be able to finally vote here where I live and work.

Now, a quick way of starting to answer your question would be to use that old saw according to which Europe is Time and America Space. And European time is history—here is how I put this matter in the talk-essay I wrote as acceptance speech for the Luxembourg Batty Weber Award: coming to America allowed "this European to feel liberated from the weight of history, that swamp in which one is afraid to sink, hip-deep, unable to lift a leg out to move forward, forever hobbled by the weight of the past or condemned to move in deep ruts along a road traced long ago." The idea of America as Space, as wide-open space, was there from childhood on—via the Westerns I saw in vast quantities in my grandmother's movie house—and then via the books I read, from Karl May to James Fenimore Cooper, a sense of the US confirmed in teenagedom when I found Kerouac's *On the Road* discarded on a beach in Andalusia. Coming to the US in 1967, landing in New York to go upstate to Bard College, obviously brought a different sense of the country—though even the verticality of a tightly packed Manhattan, being aboveground and reaching into the air and sky, felt like a confirmation of the primacy of open space here. And even if upstate wasn't the Great Plains, there was an odd and immediate liking for those riverine and lake hillscares, a liking I would later ascribe to an instant if unconscious recognition of that psychotopography as experienced and loved in my childhood readings of *The Leatherstocking Tales*. Even if my first cross-country drive (with poet friend Stephen Kessler) from Bard to Los Angeles over much of Route 66 in December 1967 confirmed my romantic Kerouacian vision, the real apprenticeship of the deep cultural importance of this space came only a bit later with the discovery of Charles Olson's [1947: 11] *Call Me Ishmael*, which starts, "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large and without mercy."

That primacy of space translates to poetry, both in terms of its

basic *support* (if we can use that painterly way of speaking of what we write on, mainly), the space of the (white?) page, and its possible contents, as wide-open fields. Not in that European/Mallarméan *Coup de dés* sense where empty space and print are set up to play a sort of Freudian *fort/da* with absence and presence. Although of course at first reading those formal innovations were interesting to the curious young poet (even if finally not half as interesting as the truly breathtaking discovery of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* had been, not to speak of the earlier meeting with the "Todesfuge" and the slightly later meeting with Ginsie's *Howl*)—but there was something sterile, something *fin de siècle* or even *fin d'un monde* about this. And I realized, or became conscious of what was absent in that Mallarméan space: the human body. My body, your body, in the space of the actual world as we live the one in the other and both in our writing. This has become ever more important and much of it visible/audible in the collaborative performance (and learning/thinking/writing) work I have done these last two decades with Nicole Peyrafitte under the title of "Domopoetics."

Now, I have always wanted to call a book *The Book of the European Dead*, though have never had the time or desire to write either the poems or prose texts that would make up such a book—essentially because it would mean to look back, and I'm not really interested in coming up with such an autopsy report. I did quit medical school and its dissection room, and even then didn't want to become a coroner of any description. It may also have been my liking for Pennebaker's film *Don't Look Back*, in Pennebaker's original spelling without the apostrophe. A film that came out in 1967, the year I came to the US. The filmmaker claims that the title came from a Satchel Paige quote, "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you," and that Dylan shared this view—as do I. And looking back seems to be a core Euro trait. Was thinking about this a few days ago when rereading some texts by Kenneth White, the Scottish-born poet who elected to live in France half a century ago and writes in both languages. As founder of an International Geopoetics Institute, it is interesting to note that his "looking back" goes to Greek philosophers with or via Heidegger, or ancient Chinese poets and artists (though he does also speak of the nomadic in Deleuze and Guattari, etc.), but without addressing what I think of as the necessary advance in that area offered by recent and contemporary American poetry and poetics—he is thus very suspicious of Olson, whom he finds "too obscure" (well, he did write an intro the French edition of *Mayan Letters*, which I have to confess, I haven't read) and only Whitman's work, especially the *Notes and Fragments*, seems to find a place in his geopoetics. He calls himself an

“intellectual nomad” but looks more to me like someone involved in trans-humance between his two Euro sites while also writing travel books. Among the European poets of my generation, it seems to me, possibly only Allen Fisher has a real sense—and practice!—of space and place with an actual body as a non-Euclidian area of investigation in his poetics. But I’m getting too far away from your question.

Well, Whitman, indeed, was also a major American poet for me back when I started, and I guess it was some familiarity with *Leaves of Grass* that made a little later for easy access to Ginsberg’s *Howl* and thus to the Beats in both poetry and prose. But maybe if not more important than American Lit (I was also an unabashed reader of a range of US novelists and essayists, as I mentioned earlier) was jazz, from first hearing Nat King Cole, Armstrong, and Ella Fitzgerald as a preteen and young teen when my parents took me to concerts in the Kursaal in Oostende, Belgium. And then the more avant-garde jazz during my student years in Paris 1965 to 1967. I sometimes date my arrival in New York City as happening “three months after John Coltrane passed.”

All of this makes for slightly odd, if not skewed, relationships with a range of US poetry. Thus, although I enjoyed them easily enough, the New York school of poets around O’Hara and Ashbery didn’t interest me a lot for a long time, as I immediately spotted the familiar links and moves they got from French modernist poetry. I was, a bit naively you may say, looking for pure, genuine Americanness and found that to some extent, beyond the Beats—though Bob Kaufman has always remained core to my interest in the Beats—when in my first year at Bard College, Robert Kelly pointed me to the Black Mountain poets, especially Olson and Creeley—with Duncan coming in later. Then Ed Dorn and Gary Snyder, but also, connecting me back—and forward—to my love of jazz, Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka. I was also lucky in that Kelly and his small press, Matter Books, gave me first access to Ken Irby and Gerrit Lansing. Robert suggested I drive up to Gloucester to meet Olson who, he said, was rather lonely and would no doubt enjoy meeting a young European poet who could also bring him news of Paul Celan’s work, which I was starting to translate then. Problem was, I had neither car nor driving license, and didn’t feel up to busing it to Gloucester on spec—and thus didn’t go and never got to meet the big O. But, bolstered with even scanty readings along those lines in US poetics (I had also bought the Allen anthology, *New American Poetry, 1945–1960*, and was reading around in it before finding books by those poets) I had no trouble either not liking another line of US poets—such as Theodore Weiss, who

was at Bard when I arrived and whom I met just as he was packing to leave, or Robert Bly, who came to read in early 1968, if I remember correctly. The next major discovery came when I moved to the city after graduating in 1969—and Kelly gave me two phone numbers, those of Paul Blackburn and Jerry Rothenberg, which allowed me to meet up with the poets who I came to think of as the “real” New York poets: Blackburn, Rothenberg, Antin, Schwerner . . . Then, later in the seventies when I was living in Algeria, Allen Fisher in London sent me news about a new American “school,” namely the so-called Language poets. In Africa it was easier by now for me to come to terms or make my peace with certain European thinkers, and thus also with some of the directions the L-poetas were coming from and going into, even though the more vocally based work of the New York L-poetas (yes, that means you, Charles, and Bruce), was and remains close to me.

So I do see myself as firmly linked to that branch, I mean that tree with its manifold branches, of US poetry. And if indeed the basic attraction for the young man I was in 1966 was the American space, by now history has also caught up with me—i.e., there is no running away, on or off the road(s), from the fact that one lives inside a historical construct called a society anchored in a state structure with its various historical and ideological roots. Which right now, fifty-five years after I first came to the US, has me very edgy: what I have come to call the Fascist Taliban GOP and the global climate crisis indicate to me that the weight of *Homo sapiens* history may crush the life out of not only the geographical space these states represent, but out of the whole of the little space-ball we call Terra or Gaia.

Next question!

CB: *Your take on Mallarmé is, for me—and it’s a compliment!—quite French, at least it’s similar to the view of Emmanuel Hocquard and Dominique Fourcade that Mallarmé is an end, while I take him to be an opening of the field (!), probably because I am not brought down by the chains of the old prosody in Coup de dés, the metrical echos. I don’t feel weighed down by them: they are not my chains. Maybe this is the reverse of the way in which some French artists and writers embrace unappreciated American artists. That is, we may appreciate what we lack in each other’s culture, or, to be more precise, appreciate what we can’t do as artists in our own culture or language, but which we can see being done in the other culture or language. Which brings me to the question of England, or more broadly, the United Kingdom. For many American poets, within the tradition with which you are most closely affiliated, UK poetry can seem*

stiff, indeed the end of the line, with the exception, among the second-wave modernists anyway, of Hugh MacDiarmid, Basil Bunting, and David Jones (as Eric Mottram might say). You mention Allen Fisher, a poet too little acknowledged in the UK or the US, so I am following up on that. You lived in England for some years, and were deeply involved with British poetry. I'd almost want to say Britain is, for you, a liminal space between European and US poetry. What's the UK got to do with it?

PJ: In the early 1970s, New York was drowning in downers and heroin—trying to come down from the overdose of late 1960s psychedelics, to a good extent. When not sofa-surfing—i.e., when I had some money—I would get a room in the Chelsea Hotel, where (everybody was repeating the line) you couldn't find a spoon to stir your coffee that wasn't bent and blackened. *Corpus*, the underground newspaper I had edited for two issues on the floor above the Free Theater (closed because their one great play "Che" by Trinidadian writer Lennox Raphael had been shut down and dragged into court for obscenity) in the building that had previously briefly housed the Free Store at the corner of East Fourth and Cooper Square, had folded and thus my measly income from that job vanished. I kept looking for possible income via translation work—having just, in an acid-vision-induced fit of moral or literary ethics, burned the three completed chapters of an erotic (or rather porn) novel I had contracted for. In the Chelsea my close friends were Claude Pélieu and Mary Beach, who were working on translations of Ginsberg's poems and William Burroughs's novel trilogy into French. They suggested I get translation contracts from their publisher, Christian Bourgois Éditeur, in Paris, and do those Beats they didn't have time for. I would have preferred to translate into English, but as I had never heard back from the New York publishers to whom I had sent translated excerpts from Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* and Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, I resigned myself to turn back toward Europe, or at least a Euro lingo. Bourgois indeed offered a contract for translating the two small books (Mary Beach had published) by Carl Solomon—he to whom *Howl* is dedicated—*Mishaps Perhaps* and *More Mishaps*, to be gathered into one book, *Contretemps à temps* (that excellent title had been Claude's idea). Broke, I had left the Chelsea and the Big Shitty to move back up to the Bard College area. My friend William Prescott had rented a small cottage on the Sawkill in Annandale, where the previous October we had interviewed Allen Ginsberg upon his return from Kerouac's funeral. That October—1970—as I drove in my then girlfriend's Mustang over the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge, the radio

suddenly brought the news that Janis Joplin, whom I had befriended in the Chelsea, had died. Too many deaths, too many blackened spoons, too much too much I thought and decided on the spot that it was time to go check out other places to live. A month or so later a check arrived from Bourgois, and I figured I'd try Paris again, probably still vibrant from 1968 revolutionary activities (or so I thought). And so towards the end of that year I fly to Paris—which I instantly detest as it makes me paranoid: there's a cop with an Uzi machine gun on the corner of every street. I hightail it out of *gay Paris* after a week or two, having decided to return to the US, maybe San Francisco this time. A few friends, Mary Beach and Claude Pélieu included, had that fall also left New York and moved to London, so I figured I'll go say hello to them and fly to the US from there. The first evening in that city, in a flat on Sloane Terrace, just off the Kings Road, two old Bard friends introduce me to a new ritual: after dinner they carefully roll a few potent joints, then settle down in front of the TV sucking in the smoke. At the top of the hour all talk stops as they ritually turn on the TV—and here comes my first viewing of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. It blew me away and was probably one potent reason why I suddenly thought that London could be a good place to live for a while.

I was able to rent a room in that same building and a couple months later, Claude and Mary joined me there, renting the third floor flat I had found for them. So this was in fact a very Americanized UK I moved into or around in: Mary soon set up Thursday night dinners where we would be joined by William Burroughs, who lived not too far away on Duke Street, and a few times by Miles—Barry Miles, that is, who would write William's biography and other books on the Beats. At least once a week I would go up to Camden Town to Compendium Books and suss out their amazing poetry section curated by Nick Kimberley: it was the best and widest contemporary US poetry section anywhere, ever—i.e., way better than the Eighth Street bookstore in New York City or any other store in the US I knew of. I had sent some poems to a magazine called *Strange Faeces*, and they were accepted, and I met the editor, Opal L. Nations, who, a year later would publish my first book, *The Fifth Season*. No doubt informed by Opal, one day Allen Fisher and Dick Miller, in those days an inseparable duo, rang my doorbell. That's how the connection with the New British Poetry scene began. I can't remember if it was one of them or Burroughs himself who brought up the name of Eric Mottram, whose book *The Algebra of Need*—the first major, and still one of the very best, books on Burroughs's work—had just come out. At any rate, I soon made contact with Eric and

visited him at his Vicerage Gate digs (not far from that other interesting bookshop and poetry reading place, Bernard Stone's Turret Bookshop, on Kensington Church Walk). It was at Turret Books that Eric would soon introduce me to Jeff Nuttall, Roy Fisher, Lee Harwood, and other British poets. I was hooked—and it seemed to me that the take on US poetry that Mottram or Fisher offered was far more open and investigative than the more cliquish, proprietary approach I had experienced in New York.

I decided to start a little magazine with my live-in girlfriend of those years, Victoria Smitter, an exiled New Yorker herself. I called it *Sixpack*—a Poundian or maybe just Jorissian pun, i.e., the translation into an Anglo-based word of *hexagram*, the I Ching concept/ideogram that also served as colophon for the mag. *Sixpack* started as a mimeographed sheet and the table of contents of the first issues will give you an overview of what I was up to, including as they do, in the first issue, Ginsberg and Mary Beach, Carl Weissner and Michel Bulteau (the young avant-garde French poet), Bukowski and Celan, Bob Kaufman and Claude Pélieu, joined in the second by Burroughs, Jeff Nuttall, Mottram, Carl Solomon, Allen Fisher, Dick Miller, Felipe Ehrenberg, Kerouac, Paul Blackburn, and others. Issue 3 again included a number of those but adds the Brits Bill Griffiths, Doug Lang, and Peter Finch, and the Americans Robert Kelly, Richard Grossinger, John Giorno, and Andrei Codrescu—well, he was Romanian American. So a US/UK mixture with a (very) few Euro Continentals thrown in.

In '73 I would do a Morden Tower Reading with Clayton Eshleman, and Yorkshire became a great place to spend some time away from Low-down Town, as I came to call it. Again UK/US connections, such as weekends at Jonathan Williams's and Thomas Meyer's Corn Close place in the Yorkshire Dales, where after a bottle of good single malt whiskey, Basil Bunting would explain not only the importance for him of Persian poetry but also how he won World War II single-handedly. That same year I decided to do an MA at the University of London's American studies extension, with Eric Mottram. That's probably when I read the most nineteenth-century US lit, Poe to Melville, Thoreau and Emerson, et cetera, but also books like Henry Adams's autobiography, et cetera, as background to the US twentieth century. A true cultural studies seminar, before that term became familiar. Still have the tapes of those sessions, probably the most essential university teachings I got. Decided not to sit the exams (went there, but ancient room with hundreds of adults cramped into small school desks to write all day, made me turn around and leave—too Dickensian for my post-1968 sensibility). Eric called me "daft" for doing this, as he had hoped I'd start work on a

PhD with him later. The following year I did finish that MA—at Essex University, translating a French surrealist poet, Jean-Pierre Duprey, overseen by Ted Berrigan and Gordon Brotherston. I would stay for a night or two a week at Ted and Alice's place in Wivenhoe, and while Ted would unsuccessfully try to get me to like Auden's work ("cocktail chatter," I'd murmur), I'd try to get him interested in reading David Jones, whom I had just discovered (can't remember Ted's response).

Allen Fisher and I would also drive out to Cambridge from time to time to meet up with J. H. Prynne, whom we two thought of as a major figure even if the London avant-garde or "new" poetry scene felt rather antagonistic toward much of Jeremy's work. Meanwhile in London, the young poets around Eric and Bob Cobbing managed by democratic means (we showed up to vote while the old country-gentlemen guard didn't bother) to take over the London Poetry Society (a "scandal" according to the London *Evening Standard*), enabling us to set up great readings—Basil Bunting doing a major presentation of *Briggflats*, Ed Dorn reading *Slinger*, Roy Fisher his *the ship's orchestra*, Lee Harwood "Cable Street" and from *The Long Black Veil*, et cetera—and under Eric Mottram's editorship a lively and interesting (for the first time in decades and for some several years) *Poetry Review* magazine. I'd moved down to Tooting Broadway by then—i.e., halfway between Mottram and Allen Fisher—and now on Thursdays, Allen and I would go over to Eric's, who would feed us and then play either records from his great collection of American comics (first heard Bruce and Carlin there) or would treat us to a thorough investigation of twentieth-century classical and avant-garde music—he had all the records we two could never have found or afforded.

Allen Fisher's Spanner Editions would publish my next book *Antlers* in 1975, to be followed by *Net / Work* in 1982, while *Fire Work* (published by Hatch Books in 1977) presents Allen's *Fire-Place* and my *Hearth Work* in a gorgeous book designed by Paige Mitchell. For a moment it looked like London could become a sort of permanent base for me, as what you called a "liminal space between European and US poetry." But it was difficult to make a living. I couldn't get serious teaching jobs (except for badly paid English as a Foreign Language gigs in those small private Oxford Street "schools" for foreigners), and translations didn't bring in enough. I had applied to over a hundred teaching positions at US universities—proof I wanted back!—but didn't get even a single interview. Then Clayton Eshleman told me that he had just turned down a job teaching creative writing at the University of Constantine in Algeria and maybe I should apply. I did,

got the job, and off I went in late summer of 1976—some six weeks after my thirtieth birthday bash. Looking back, I'd think of that occasion as a prescient and exemplary affair, with, for the many guests, a whole roast lamb—foreshadowing my love for Maghrebi *meshoui*?—and many large bottles of bourbon (I had taught for one short semester at the University of Maryland's overseas extension in East Anglia on a US Air Force base, which gave me access to the cheap food and liquor of the PX). That good-bye party to my twenties and to the UK (or so I thought) ended semi- or tragicomically, namely in 4 a.m. fisticuffs between American and English poets: Ed Dorn swung at (and didn't miss) Tom Pickard for having said something derogatory about Tom Raworth.

CB: *And then, to bring this conversation to an end: from Algeria to France and then back to the US?*

PJ: And so this nomadic meander has us back to where this conversation started and I can jump those three years in the Maghreb and its desert, so now we are in late 1979, back in London with my Algerian compañera, the scholar Zahia Matougui who was finishing her PhD at the University of Wales in Cardiff. The UK had since May of that year fallen under the disastrous premiership of Margaret Thatcher and her Tory party. Things were getting tougher and tougher, economically, culturally, at every level—it felt like that wide-open space I had enjoyed so much during the first years of that decade had vanished. The young people, and many of the poets, were leaving London in droves, too expensive. I got a job as editor and writer for *Al-Zahaf al-Akhdar*, the English language edition of the Libyan Revolutionary committees biweekly newspaper, run by the Egyptian-born journalist Zainab Abbas. Our aim was to turn this into a radical magazine for Third World journalism and writing by, we hoped, mainly writers and journalists from the South. One of my jobs was to write a column commenting on the “Green Book”—i.e., the “Third Way,” the noncommunist and noncapitalist ideology Muammar Gaddafi had tried to lay out in his book. Fascinating to see what this young idealistic nomad who had come to power through the army had imagined possible: a pan-Arab ideology based neither on Western-style pseudo-“representative” democracy, nor on the fake “people’s democracy” of Russian or Chinese style party dictatorship, but on direct democracy bypassing all representation and exercised via local village- and town-based revolutionary committees. A grand if impossible idea, when applied to a big country with a large population at the end of the twentieth century. It was bound to fail, and did so, but not only because of its own

flaws but also because the US government—especially under Reagan—did everything to isolate and diminish and destroy this attempt and its leader (remember the 1986 Gulf of Sirte US military aggressions?).

That job, however, gave me the occasion to write my one journalistic-historico-political treatise, *Global Interference: The Consistent Pattern of American Foreign Policy*, published in 1981 by Liberation Press, with a foreword by Labour MP Stan Newens, and which we presented in a committee room at the House of Commons (and which, I recently discovered, was translated into Arabic a few years ago and is being taught today in some places of the Mashreq, Iraq among them, it seems). On my return to the US in the fall of 1987, invited by the Iowa International Writing Program, I was in a for a surprise. The librarian showing off the new library computer network of US universities to us furrin' writers typed my name into her machine and out came a list of all my books held by US libraries: it consisted of a rather measly number of poetry books, at that time nearly all published in England, but there were several hundred copies of *Global Interference* dispersed across the whole country! This would somewhat scare me later on, when applying for my green card, as I wondered if the FBI investigation into my status would dig up this “dangerous” association with Gaddafi’s and other radical Third World politics.

But I am still in England, where my closing act would be to edit, with Paul Buck, the first anthology of this new UK poetry—which no publisher in that country (or the US) would touch with a ten-foot pole, so we published it in 1984 in France in a bilingual edition, under the title *Matières d’Angleterre*. (It is a book I could still see reissued today in this country!) You can read the preface—which I wrote in French—in an English translation by Peter Cockelbergh on *Jacket2* and get details on the making of the book on my blog; no need to repeat all this here [Joris 2009, 2010].

Not only, as already said, did this anthology have to come out in France (reassuring no doubt the old Brit schools of poets for whom “barbarism starts in Calais”) but by now I had to travel to Paris to make a living working for France Culture, the great French cultural radio station. Though that wasn’t easy either: when I arrived with tapes of readings and interviews with UK poets, including Mottram, Fisher, Cobbing, and others, the first question the program director asked me was which “comédiens”—actors—I wanted to hire to “dire les poèmes,” to “say” (i.e., read) the poems. I explained that I would play the poets themselves performing their texts, adding the translators as readers of the French versions. No actor/comedians need apply. There was at that time no—or very little—tradition of poets

reading their own work, and of poetry readings in general (still, I'd suggest, a hangover from the Mallarméan "absence"—that of the body, as suggested above—and elaborated in those decades in France as the "death of the author" who thus has to be replaced, reincarnated by an actor's body/voice). A telling anecdote: Paul Buck and I gave a reading in the hip and *osé* Oblique art gallery, at that moment exhibiting hundreds of close-up color photos of vulvas. The art didn't phase the people who came in for the reading, though the absence of chairs made them mull around uneasily until Michel Deguy entered, moved swiftly to the front, took off his trench coat, laid it out on the floor, and sat down on it. We could see light bulbs going on above the heads of the mulling audience, who now all followed Deguy's example and settled down on the floor.

Paris in the 1980s was again open and interesting and exciting. Two quick postcards set the scene: first, picture a small, continuously talking and laughing group of people walking down boulevard St. Germain after an editorial meeting that included the poet and editor of *Change* magazine, Jean-Pierre Faye, the linguist Mitsou Ronat (who would sadly die in a car crash in 1984), the writer translator Didier Pernerle, the Celan translator Martine Broda (who a few years earlier had introduced me to Gisèle Celan-Lestrange), Jerry Rothenberg, and myself. Now picture a Chinese restaurant where I am sitting for hours with my Nagra tape recorder interviewing American filmmaker Samuel Fuller for an oral autobiography that would turn into five two-hour episodes for the late evening *Nuits magnétiques* France Culture radio program. Meanwhile, I would assist my friend and flatmate Michel Maire, who was translating (superbly!) my longish poem *The Book of Luap Nalec* (written in England in the mid-1970s as both an homage to and a way out of or an attempt to move beyond Paul Celan's work and influence—you can read his name reversed in the title) and that would be published by Le Castor Astral (or, as Claude Pélieu used to call it, Le Castor Anal) in 1986. In some way this book, which, beyond Celan, draws on and questions Gottfried Benn and the Occitan poet Guiraut de Bornelh, while quoting Mallarmé and Antonin Artaud in the "hinge collage" separating the two halves of the book, *is* my "Book of the European Dead": the dedication reads "para mis Europeos / para mis Muertos" (can't remember why I wrote those lines in Spanish) followed by a quote from Ed Dorn: "We will never look very good / We are too far gone on thought, and its rejections / The two actions of a Noos" [Joris 1986].

Despite all this useful and pleasurable busyness of Paris, I kept looking for a way back to the US. Jerry Rothenberg and I had been talking

for a while about working on translations and about a possible anthology. When his and George Quasha's *America a Prophecy* had come out I had, despite loving the book's content and form, some trouble with the title, or rather with the word "prophecy"—too religiously overdetermined for me, despite its Blakean source—and immediately thought of a parallel antho to be called *Europe a Vision*, in which the Rimbaldian visionary would, how to put this, "de-sacralize" maybe, the prophetic. Some such reflections are, at least on my side of the collaboration, at the source of what would eventually become the *Poems for the Millennium* anthologies.

One day Jerome mentioned that he was moving to SUNY Binghamton where he had been offered tenure. There were no teaching jobs for me there, but I applied for a doctorate in the comparative literature department—which at that time included William Spanos, founding editor of this magazine, and with whom I would take a course on, of course, Martin Heidegger. I was accepted—which gave me a five-year visa—and would over those years complete a dissertation that continued (and supposedly concluded—until Jonathan Galassi pushed me further) my work of translating the remaining volumes of Paul Celan's late poetry. Just then—Paris, early 1987—I met the founding director of the Iowa International Writing Program, Paul Engle—who invited me to Iowa City for the fall of 1987, which is where I first landed on my return to the US.

The year of my return was accompanied by another bridge-work: *Breccia*—a wide selection of my poetry from 1972 to 1986—came out not in the UK but in the country of origin, Luxembourg (published by Editions PHI) and simultaneously in the US (copublished by Station Hill Press). If the nomadic on-the-road life went on for a few years (Iowa to Binghamton to Encinitas), the return to the East Coast in 1992 to teach at SUNY Albany allowed for all those energies to take shape in new work, both in poetry (see for example the 2001 *Poasis* and the 2015 *Barzakh*, both "Selected" volumes) and in what I came to call a "nomad poetics" (see the 2003 book of essays with that title). This has obviously continued since settling in Brooklyn in 2013. The two Farrar, Straus and Giroux Celan volumes (and a few others such as variorum edition/translation *The Meridian* from Stanford University Press in 2011) paid back my "infinite debt" (to use Blanchot's term) to the poet who brought me to poetry sixty years ago, and allowed—maybe—for a return to a more Jabèsian sense of an open "sunny" community.

It also allowed me to take stock of past work, so for example, looking back at the *Matières d'Angleterre* anthology, I was appalled at the gender imbalance: only five women as against forty-seven male poets... If

the nomadic stopped being the early quasi-frantic beat literal on-the-roadness, it moved toward more poetry-, performance-, and thought-based nomadic investigations, as visible in the worldwide gatherings of the three *Poems for the Millennium* volumes, in my essayistic work (see, for example, *Arabia (Not So) Deserta*, Spuyten Duyvil, 2019) or in the reflections of the poems gathered in *Barzakh* in relation to the practice and theory of “inbetween-ness” (one of the possible translations of that title). Essential for this “inbetween-ness” have been the last twenty years of collaborative work with Nicole Peyrafitte. Work we have named “Domopoetics,” that involves complex investigations (I’m tempted to write “inter-vestigations”) via poems, theoretical texts, live performance, video and sound montages of the interconnectedness of our daily lives, and the changing ecologies of the surrounding worlds, social and natural. To quote and slightly inflect Nicole’s own words for what she and I also name “karstic works,” these are explorations of “proprioception (sense of body position) and kinesthesia (sense of body movement), as meeting points between painting, poetry, voice and improvised music.” Important here has also been the thinking and writing of several women who all explore non- or post-anthropocentric possibilities, among them, Suzanne Simard’s *Finding the Mother Tree*, Donna Haraway’s *Where Species Meet*, Vinciane Despret’s *Living as a Bird* or her *Autobiographie d’un poulpe, et autres récits d’anticipation*, and Isabelle Stengers’s *Cosmopolitics*.

So the work for the next few years goes under the title *A Riparian Commons* and extends these investigations of between-nesses (*riparian* = banks + river; *commons*: the cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society, including natural materials such as air, water, and a habitable earth.) Let me conclude on a note from my diary on these matters:

your riparian vision
 —an elemental nomadism

dbl move also anadromous / catadromous

from mud / stay in the mud = waterandearth = you

nobody shaped us from, we are, were, came out of, go back to, only time
 will divide

the earth from the water

the elements of us, the mud, the must

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