

I'd like to begin with an Emily Dickinson poem:

By homely gift and hindered Words
The human heart is told
Of Nothing—
'Nothing' is the force
That renovates the World—

I think this poem (#1563 in the Johnson edition) speaks to your work in several ways. First, there's the appeal to 'hindered words' to lay bare the (doggerel) verities of the 'human heart'. But there's also a socially-minded torqueing of the 'Nothing' that emerges from this practice. You've spoken elsewhere of the 'negative economy' of poetry, and your work often features broken and 'bad' poetic language. In your latest book, *Recalculating*, you write: 'Poetry should be silent, unread, invisible, inconceivable. The true poem can never be written or heard.' I wonder if you might have anything to say about 'Nothing'?

I love this poem, which seems so much like a Celan poem. According to Johnson, it's from around 1883, very near the end of Dickinson's life, when she was 53. Read as an *ars poetica* it feels so close to me it's hard for me to consider on its own terms. Forty years ago, in 1973, I poured over that three-volume Johnson edition in the only class I took after college—a seminar on Dickinson taught by Robin Blaser at Simon Fraser University near Vancouver; but Dickinson's first impact on me was as a junior in high school, when I studied her work with Richard Feingold (who later went on to teach at Berkeley). Dickinson gave me a fundamental sense of what a poem could be (*be* not *do* as I would usually say). And just this Fall I returned again to Dickinson for my Poetics of Identity seminar, with Marta Werner speaking to us on the late manuscripts, letters, and fragments—the way Dickinson would write on the back of envelopes, transforming scrap to talisman. Werner and Jen Bervin call their recent Dickinson book *The Gorgeous Nothings* referring to this same poem and also what Werner calls, marvelously, Dickinson's "'Sudden" collage made of two, possibly three, sections of envelope': 'the gorgeous / nothings / which / compose / the / sunset / keep'.

The first thing to say about this poem is that it is a gift: first to Susan Dickinson, to whom it was sent in a letter, and then to us, readers from a beyond Dickinson could address with more freedom and ferocity than perhaps any of her contemporaries because unconstrained by the demands of publication, or, perhaps, better to say, constrained by the demands of nonpublication, what she called eternity. The possibility of any one of us receiving this gift is absolutely precarious (if you can accept the oxymoron—I have a feeling you are up for it), given the precarious state of her manuscripts

or even the recognition of her poems *as* poems (rather than as sweet nothings, notings). The poem is a (hindered or delayed) gift both into and—that supreme fiction—for the unknown ('eternity's vast pocket').

Poetry makes *nothing* happen (DON'T EVEN THINK OF NOTHING HERE!), manifest in the cracks (delays, blanks) between words and the frictions of gift. A gift (this gift) is a present made present; as for reciprocity: nothing is given in return.

Mine is a homely poetics, both odd-looking (unattractive, disagreeable, low) and intimate (even private). The doggerel and generally deformed (as you rightly say, hindered, averse, thwarted, delayed, backwardly) rhythms and rimes, bathos, peculiarity and solecisms, have a double function of being *unheimlich* while also being—homesickness even at home and at home with homesickness. I know this sends mixed signals. But I don't think I am alone in feeling that the unknown is most familiar or that the normal doesn't feel right. I am not talking about alienation, quite the opposite: an alien nation, making a ground where you find yourself. Recently a reviewer dismissively assumed a hindered lyric of mine was mocking—because, for him, awkwardness signaled parody or more simply *badness*.

But awkwardness is home ground.

My motto has long been Dickinson's 'Don't you know that "No" is the wildest word we consign to Language?'

That's different, if related, to zen. I agree with your sense of 'socially-minded' but also because it suggests socially unminded. Mind the gap. Unmind in the gap too.

I have nothing to say and I am not saying it. I have nothing to not say and I am saying it. I have nothing to not say and I am not saying it.

I read Dickinson's poem as close to negative dialectics. Nothing in the sense of not one thing: variants around a blank center.

To be told about nothing is to come face to face with loss, despair, grief; the irreparable.

Nothing repairs the world.

Renovates is something else again: making new again, making new now.

The revolution of the word is the force of nothing.

As a follow up to the first question: Agamben says all his books are prologues to the one he can't write. Is there a work you can't write? What prevents you?

My poems are mired in inability and disorientation as much as enthusiasm, sarcasm, exuberance, the ridiculous and the ecstatic (often the same): I think this is what puts me at odds with so much other poetry and also what so many people seem to want from a poem. I don't know what I am saying until I say it and I don't know how to say it until I do. A poem for me is finding a way after losing my way, where myopia is a manifestation of grace, thinking of Reznikoff's poem about walking in the fog: 'the solid path invisible / a rod away – / and only the narrow present is alive.'

Then there is also pragmatics: writing what I am able to, what I have a knack for. I take advantage of my disadvantage (which is the same as to say I work from the vantages given). And rather than try to move up and out, I have just drilled down.

My poems are a prologue to nothing.

Nothing without youse.

Your work has meant a lot to me and other Jewish-American friends of mine (including a young relative of Charles Reznikoff) who were brought up hearing about 'heroes' like Sandy Koufax and Steven Spielberg but had to discover Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Stein, Oppen, Rakosi, Rukeyser, Rich, Rothenberg, and many other poets on our own. Being a Jewish poet, experimentalist or not, seems to entail the awkward position of speaking for a marginalized group from a marginal position within that group. In this sense, it's no different than being any other kind of poet, I suppose. But of course, there's also something very Jewish about that tragicomic awkwardness; as you write in *Recalculating*, 'I am a Jewish man trapped / in the body of a Jewish man.' How do you feel about American-Jewish culture's relationship to its great poets and artists?

And, to follow on from that: you use the phrase 'Midrashic Antinomianism' in several essays from *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, including your 'Recantorium' in which you hilariously denounce its 'false doctrines'. Often, your poems sound like 'midrashim', or Jewish parables, gone awry. In this sense, it seems possible to read them in a long fabulist tradition extending from Reb Nachman of Breslov to Franz Kafka and Edmond Jabès. Do you consider yourself to be in dialogue with these figures? What does it mean to be a Jewish poet in their wake?

Jewish jokes riddle my writing. While I sometimes link that to a specific set of Jewish comedians I think the context you propose is accurate: my work is in dialogue with the writers you mention and their ‘bent’ methodologies—and we can fill out the list with many other names. Kafka, after all, is my father’s milk (‘The Penal Colony’ is a source for ‘Recantorium’).

A number of people seeing me canting ‘Recantorium’ say it looks like a Cantor devanning. ‘Oshamnu’ (‘Ashamnu’), the Yom Kippur prayer of atonement for wrongdoing, is hardwired into the piece.

As far as Jewishness goes, I am chosen more than choosing. And that goes pretty far, just not all the way. That is, I am interested in Jewishness as a specific response to the condition of being Jewish (the circular reasoning is liberating)—and as an argument with that condition. Like other identities, Jewishness is a product of Jewish culture, it’s imbibed, a contact high, a mass hallucination, as real as a belly flop from the 12-foot diving board at the Fontainebleau Hotel, Miami, circa 1962. Nothing more real than that; that is no other form for being a Jew is any more real or authentic or legitimate, *if I say so*. I am the happy genius of my own identity (to echo Williams, lonely, dancing naked in ‘Dance Russe’, proclaiming, ‘I am the the happy genius of my household’).

I fear a reaction formation in which Jews adopt the racial definitions used by our exterminators in determining who is Jew and who Mischling. But I won’t reject such external tattooing; I can’t. If you don’t want to be a Jew then don’t be—and good luck to you. But there is no such thing as a lapsed Jew. Nor do I accept that Jewishness is exclusively defined by religious belief or Zionist affiliation. I see Jewishness mutating and reconstituting, a trace as much as a set of beliefs, in aversion to its history as much as a shadow of it. Haunted because hunted but not giving up the marker of difference no matter how infrathin it might be, just out of sheer, exhilarating (or paranoid or debilitating) stubbornness. The path of unmarked assimilation, having been tried for centuries and fatally failing during the war, doesn’t seem viable, much less desirable. That’s the dilemma. Jabès says all poets are Jews, but mostly not the ones I read about. And all Jews are surely not poets; for most the practice of poetry, as I imagine it, is irreconcilable with Judaism (putting aside the commentaries we could produce to argue the opposite).

Those of us who don’t link our Jewishness to (or *only* to) religious observance might say so from time to time.

Anyway, it’s a thought.

***Recalculating* includes a number of translations from Portuguese, French, Russian, and Latin, and acoustic transliterations from German and Finnish, in the spirit of Zukofsky's Catullus translations. Your version of Apollinaire's 'Le Pont Mirabeau' is notably—and uncharacteristically—beautiful. Does beauty matter to you?**

I don't know much about beauty but I know what I like. Is there a difference?

Over the years I have struggled with the enormous differences between what I value in poetry and what others seem to. I often feel about much prize-winning poetry—who could possibly like that? I was at a memorial service for a friend last weekend and the widow, an artist herself, read a poem that must have affected her deeply but seemed to me disturbing, flat, and unbeautiful as a tribute to a person whose own art seemed so opposed to the aesthetic of this poem (fortunately he was not there to hear it!). I tell this story not just to expose my crankiness but rather to acknowledge how powerful aesthetic judgment is, for me and my mourning friend. In *Attack of the Difficult Poems* I write about Henry Petroski's theory of invention: 'form follows failure'. The translations in this book are often provoked by my sense that other translations don't get at some beauty in the poem being translated (as I expect others will feel about mine).

You started with a question about the homely and now we are on to beauty. I have an affection for homely beauty, or anyway homemade beauty, hindered or damaged or fragile or fleeting, a queer or peculiar beauty. The beauty in the recognition of loss, where elegy acknowledges that which is gorgeous as it becomes anything but nothing.

And nothing all the same.

I think of Baudelaire's 'maigre nudité', in 'À une Mendiante Rousse', a Baudelaire translation in the book—

Go then, without any other ornament—
Perfume, pearls, diamond—
Than your scrawny nudity,

Oh my beauty!

I like how, as you note, our conversation has gone from homeliness to beauty, propelled by nothing. This raises the topic of transitions, an important concept in your work. One of my favorite essays of yours is the piece on *Rivers and Mountains* (1966) for the *Conjunctions* special issue on

John Ashbery. As you ‘meander down the Yangtze’, you observe that in Ashbery’s third collection he ‘introduces a nonlinear associative logic that averts both exposition and disjunction.’ Elsewhere, you appropriate the medical term ‘dysraphism’ (‘a congenital mis-seaming of embryonic parts’) to characterize this method of ‘contingent consecutiveness that registers transition but not continuity.’ Your poem, ‘Dysraphism’, embodies this practice, too, as do many others. Would it be fair to say one of your primary units of composition is the ‘transition’, rather than, say, the line or the sentence? How has your thinking about poetic transitions evolved?

It would also be fair to say that *transition* is a metaphor I lean on perhaps too much, as implicitly quoting Emerson in ‘The American Scholar’: ‘The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived. Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not.’ But I also think of Langston Hughes’s epigraph for *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, quoted in *Recalculating*, about being a people in transition, which evokes for me the life on the streets of New York, where dramatic shifts in neighborhood occur sometimes block for block; or the subway station: the palpitation of these races in the crowd / clashing colors on a whirligig’s brow.

There’s a short poem in *Recalculating*, ‘Two Stones with One Bird’, dedicated to my friend and Penn colleague, the Pound/Joyce/Lacan scholar Jean-Michel Rabaté, which could be recast ‘Exposition / comes / and / exposition / goes / but / transition / is / here / forever’ (substituting *exposition* for *redemption* and *transition* for *transience*—yet how unoriginal as I seem to have just paraphrased Emerson in ‘Circles’: ‘Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit.’).

Another version of this could be ‘transmission is mine, sayeth the Lord’. (So the guy in the garage tells me, you need a new transition. I just dropped in to see what transition my transition is in.)

Or: I don’t know what I like, but I know a lot about change.

One obsession of mine (one obsession MUST LEAD instanter to the next) is assimilation and its malcontents, maladaptation to assimilation being, for me, as you’ve suggested, a rocky road to song. Assimilation is a form of transition from one set of cultural markers to another, which can go marked or unmarked. People talk about transition in the queer sense and also as a euphemism for dying. And there’s the transition we make in the face of death, the grief that necessitates recalculating. For every bait and switch there is the counter-measure of *derive*. (Situationist drift rescues art from rote

détournement, and vice versa). The patterning in my poetry—the rocky bent beat—comes from the degree to which, and the quality of, the transitions: hard or soft, invisible or obtrusive, abrupt or seamless, jerky or cool, wild or logical, plausible or inscrutable, contiguous or brute, mirrored or echoic, happy or unfortunate...Parataxis is such a blunt term for an infinite field of exquisite and extravagant nuance and metamorphosis. Transitions occur not just image to image or sentence to sentence but sometimes word to word or phrase to phrase or phoneme to morpheme (this is the contrast I make between serially disjunctive sentences and imploded syntax poems, even if both are ‘prose’—the emergence of prose-format poetry in the 1970s was itself a way to mark and organize transitions). (I won’t stoop so low as to make a play on ‘morpheme’ and ‘morphine’.)

In a poem, I want to feel the transitions viscerally—that’s why all that talk of the cerebral and theoretical strikes me as an inability or unwillingness to take the ride the poem offers (just as calls for affect are often prophylactics against sensation).

Wittgenstein uses the term ‘queer’ when a transition, which would normally go unnoticed, obtrudes. The pataque(e)rical would be a way of fomenting such moments. But the end is not an awareness of misfit—as if the poem was a one-note-Johnny-come-lately. Here’s the rub: the foregrounding of disjunction is an obstacle to the kind of poetry I want. This is what Ashbery realized (as I discuss in the essay you mention) and explains his aversion to ‘hot’ rather than ‘cool’ transitions (to adapt McLuhan’s famous terms).

Me, I never met a transition I didn’t like.

But you have to go against the flow and with the tide or keep stepping twice into the same river on all sides of the current, or else, like Zeno, you’ll get nowhere faster than Coyote gets to Lyric Corners. Transgression is boring and pretentious and so useful if that is what you want as a tone, which I sometimes do; but to hear bumps as beats—that’s different. David Antin says the difference between plot and narrative is that in a narrative there is a transformation (something like the difference between story and allegory). Transitions do things, not just mark changes. But, then again, marking time, is that not a noble office of poesy? Kind of like turning brick bats into gold bars of malady.

Emerson again—and to return to a theme broached in this conversation: ‘Beauty is the moment of transition, as if the form were just ready to flow into other forms. Any fixedness, heaping, or concentration on one feature—a long nose, a sharp chin, a hump-back—is the reverse of the flowing, and therefore deformed.’

But, as I was saying, my long nose, sharp chin, and humpback anchor me to earth, as the spaceship is tethered to the graven image of the spaceship. Adorno was wrong (just as Emerson is): reification is as inevitable as high TV ratings for disaster coverage.

And if thine eye offend thee, get used to it: it is better for thee to enter into life with three eyes, rather than casting away any part of your psyche or any part of the world.

I hate transition and want it to stop.

Just not *here*, nor *here*, or *here*.

Not now, anyhow.

This might be a tokenistic question (if so, please accept this parenthetical aside as a token of apology), but I wonder how you feel about the legacy of Language poetry in 2013? As I ask this question, I'm not even sure which rubric to use: 'Language poetry', 'Language-oriented', or 'L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E'.

In 'The Expanded Field of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E', an essay I wrote a couple of years ago for the *Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, I do my best to provide an account of the sources, approaches, and trajectory of this work; it is filled with lists of names, ideas, and contexts. I have often been asked this question and while I am well placed to answer, I have a preference for being evasive or indefinite. I don't want to repeat what I have said before and that presents me with a curious challenge of trying to say something else (and not fall back on the fact that repeating does not produce sameness).

I don't answer questions in interviews; I take the form as an opportunity to create a series of short dialogic works. But then I create a problem: explanations are needed for my explanations.

Language Poetry does not exist and that may be its greatest virtue. Not that virtue is necessarily a virtue and in this case it may be a deficit or maybe the problem is my saying this and it's not true. I am not eliding collectivity or positionality but trying to adapt both to a poetics of transition that resists characterization and fixed principles. That is the position and the principle, though also subject to internal dissent. In contrast, the expanded field of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E certainly does exist and is made of related, even if contradictory, poetics and what I see, maybe through prose-colored flashes, as phantasmagoric cornucopias of possible poetics.

To see the warp and weft of the field you have to find a way to accommodate such different poets as Mei-mei Berssenbrugge and Steve McCaffery as constitutive, as keynotes. I have had a hard time coming to terms with the minor outbreaks of nostalgic regionalist autobiographical revisionism. (Everybody talks about memoir but nobody does anything about it.)

But then again all I am is revision.

Literary movements that succumb to insularity risk stagnation (in the way that Quaaludes may inhibit sociality). Anyway for me the movement of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E is centripetal, outwardly non-national in its affinity-seeking trajectory.

At a bilingual reading in Brazil several years ago, Régis Bonvicino (who read translations of my work) got us matching black t-shirts, with 'traidor do movimento' inscribed in white Helvetica lettering, and black facemasks (such as those worn by prison gangs in Sao Paolo) on which were written *translator* and *translated*. Faithfulness is a fickle business. And diffidence is the price of fidelity. As a theological matter, I prefer low-fi to high-fi.

That's been my view all along but I recognize it as contestable and contested. Which is my point.

Legacy is what you call outmoded computer code that has been replaced by new and better code that won't run on older applications. As you get older you are confronted by the specter of being outmoded or redundant—and that is an almost biological anxiety, irrespective of the actual poetic environment, which just adds injury to the underlying insult. If you lived by creating a space for yourself (yourselves) by undermining what came before you, then you die by that. I don't think I quite did that but it goes with the territory no matter how much I may protest. It's interesting to see some in the younger generation so comfortable embracing group monikers. I was always too hung-up for that.

I wouldn't join a group that has members.

But then I have done many things I wouldn't do.

I saw the field around L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E as a temporary constellation aimed at opening up different reading and writing practices. In many ways, the most powerful dynamic was revisionist, pushing for a history of poetry that went against the then dominant one.

People come together for a moment then go different ways (even if they don't

realize they are). Resentment builds because the social economy of poetry is riddled with neglect. Some people become disaffected because things didn't work out the way they planned. 'Et tu, Brute' is practically a byword in my household, along with 'have another mezcal'.

From those old days new days dawn, darker, but new in spite of themselves. It's sad to look out and see so much of the company, to use Robert Creeley's apt phrase, long gone. Bob too. Any way you see it, the company reforms and we keep putting on more shows, which, after all, are as good as ever.

As for my own work: I love the ploy where you respond, coyly, that is for others to say.

It's a coy ploy.

I'm much too coy for that.

Since I compose by book, I'd look at the transitions from book to book and see what pattern that makes, a network of stoppages in Duchamp's sense. My work has been peripatetic and I haven't repeated the same poetic form over and again, though perhaps I have repeated a set of them. Continuity persists through the variation. Now I am thinking about what I can do next that will be as alive to me as anything I have done. I am in the present of poetry, despite my pesky pasts. I love that some people like my last book as much, maybe more than, any; but I don't see it that way. I am guided not by what I would like to do but by the limits of what I can do, or, more bluntly, what I cannot not do.

In Maggie O'Sullivan's piece in the recent *Salt* companion to my work (for which I am grateful to William Allegrezza, the editor, and Chris Emery, the publisher), she takes lines from one of my first poems, 'Asylum', with which I open *All the Whiskey in Heaven*. "'Pulled" failure' (akin to pulled pork I suppose) is a syncretic phrase Maggie 'marks' from the vocabulary of the poem; it might just as well refer to motifs in *Recalculating* and—here is what I am getting at—it would have worked perfectly well to start *Recalculating* with 'Asylum'. Maggie takes as her title the Emersonian last line of 'Asylum': 'circles from which'. Or pata-Emersonian...because the circles are vicious.

Which contemporary art do you feel closest to? Which do you feel farthest from?

I've lived a good part of my life with Susan Bee, who is a painter, and have spent lots of time in the company of visual artists and done collaborations with

Amy Sillman, Richard Tuttle, Mimi Gross, Jill Moser, and Susan, among others. So painting is a second skin for me. One of the most elaborate collaborations I've done is the most recent, with Sillman. For 'Duplexities' we did around 100 image/poem works in which we bounced off each other, so that after a while we couldn't say which came first, image or poem. Mostly we did 'Duplexities' in sets, Amy sending me a series of images, my making poems for each and returning one by one, then her responding to that by sending me more images. All Amy's images were done with her pinky on her iPhone—and at first I would look at the image on my Droid and immediately type something back, though after a while I returned to my MacBook Pro laptop (I am hoping *The Wolf* can collect on the product placements, which I think is a key to small press funding in the coming digital present). So while in most cases I had the image in hand when I was writing the poem, the image is itself a response to previous poems. It's all echo. We even coined a word *iconophrastic* to go with ekphrastic, for those cases in which Amy was making an image in response to a poem. Out of this grew *Pinky's Rule*, an animated drawing (on PennSound) with my poem, read by Amy, as soundtrack to her animation, which is made up of thousands more drawings. In that case I based parts of the poem on 'stills' from Amy's ongoing animation but in the end she set the animation to the completed poem (which was in turn inspired by her images). It's all very Mobius.

As for the second part of your question: there are many genres of writing and media of art that I don't pay much mind to, but as I try to be more explicit, I feel it reflects poorly on me and I want to put my best foot forward in this interview. I shouldn't like your readers to think of me as the curmudgeon I sometimes am. I once told a friend of mine I didn't much like dance and she looked at me incredulously, as if to say how can you be such a philistine as not like something as multifaceted as dance. So let me pass on this one.

Has a poem ever persuaded you of something?

Poems have persuaded me of nothing, but we've been there and possibly even back, no? And then there are the poems that persuaded me while I was reading them but I didn't respect them in the morning. Pound did not persuade me about usury nor Eliot about Christianity. Creeley certainly persuaded me of the absolute necessity of his writing his poems in the way he did, that conviction makes poetic matter. And by that token I could say a number of poems have convinced me of the necessity of their forms; maybe that is a criteria of value for me. A lot of poems, most poems I read, persuade me of their lack of merit (not necessarily a bad thing, but often enough), their utter conventionality, their lack of care for the art of poetry. But then who I am to be so Goddamn judgmental!? I assume you are asking not about being persuaded about the truth in the experience of the poem but being persuaded

of some didactic proposition. Would that mean the poem would have to be framed as wanting to persuade or else we'd open up a Pandora's box of persuasive byproducts, a.k.a. the real.

Sonia Sanchez has a poem called 'Rape' and it makes an argument for vigilantism, for revenge, that does persuade me, even if I keep a measure of my ambivalence.

Blake remains for me the greatest didactic poet. And he persuades me, over and over, of the danger rationality poses for Reason, though perhaps I came to the poem already thinking that. More than likely for me, poems confirm rather than persuade. Yet I do think of my own poems as rhetorical.

Is there such a thing as poetic virtue? Can it have a connection to ethical virtue, if such a thing is possible?

Yes. No.

Yes: I think of the virtue in a poem as being the truth in its materials, something like what Zukofsky meant by 'sincerity'. No: Not virtuous sentiment but poetic truthfulness. So I would not connect that to moral sentiment: it's not the job of the poem, the kind of poem I want anyway, to be moral. Poems at their best are mired in compromise, desperation, cowardice, loss, ambivalence, aesthetic turpitude. The worst that has been thought or said: I don't mean to just be flippantly anti-Arnoldian; I mean to place the poem in the care, and the recklessness, of the imaginary. Poems, the kinds of poems I want, are not better than 'us'. They are us.

What are you working on now?

Bits and pieces. I am trying to go day to day and see what I come up with, what comes up. I have in mind another essay book, to be called *The Pitch of Poetry*.

Did Jon Lovitz really write the *Yellow Pages*? And, more importantly, how did you land a role as 'The Critic' on those amazing *Yellow Pages* commercials from the late 1990s? I also note that you play a school principal in *Finding Forrester*—how did that come about?

It all ties together. I got the role of Jack Simon in Gus van Sant's *Finding Forrester* through someone who was involved with the *Yellow Pages* ads. Originally van Sant auditioned me for the role of the sadistic prep school teacher, played by F. Murray Abraham in the film. So the part of the principal was a cameo van Sant offered. I'd like to say it was like the William

Burroughs cameo in *Drugstore Cowboy*, but in *Finding Forrester*, the other cameo was by Joey Buttafuoco (for those who don't recognize the name, I am afraid the sleaze factor is too great for the tone I want for this interview and I will not, under any circumstance, mention Amy Fisher, no relation to Eddy.) For the role of Jack Simon, I could sort of just play myself, after all; they even let me wear my own clothes.

As for the *Yellow Pages*—the film maker Jeff Preiss, a long-time friend, and son-in-law of Susan Howe, had the idea when he heard me read 'Log Rhythms'—which has a bit about all the stores named 'Bob's' in the phone book. In those ads, I did play myself. But if anyone wrote the book on this, it's Jeff. It was a fascinating moment for pitching the phone book as the web was basically making obsolete this paradigmatic exemplar of print culture. And my enthusiasm for the *Yellow Pages* was genuine. From time to time, I am scolded for selling out by doing those ads. I only wish I could sell out more.

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'Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit.'

Questions by Stephen Ross