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Volume 12 | Number 2

suite, sequence

Guest Editor Emily Stewart

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Australian Poetry is based in Naarm, Melbourne, working in offices and remotely on both Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung lands. We acknowledge their Elders, past, present and emerging. As a national poetry body, we also acknowledge that we work across many lands and communities, and we extend our deep respects to all First Peoples, not just in Australia, but across the globe, including poets and audiences, and their enduring connection to Country.

ap Australian
Poetry

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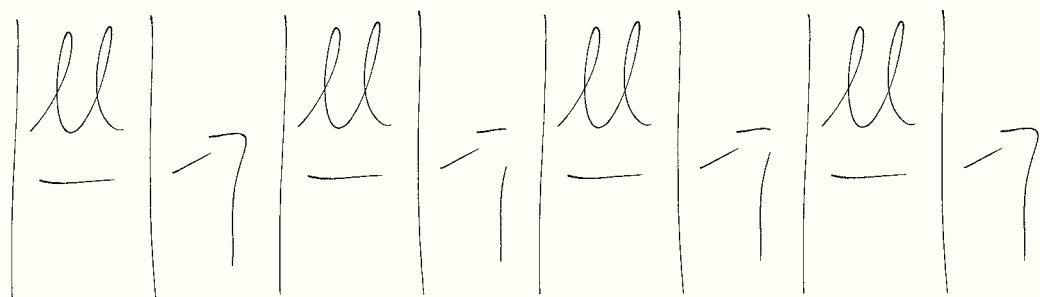
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Rachel Schenberg

like two pears

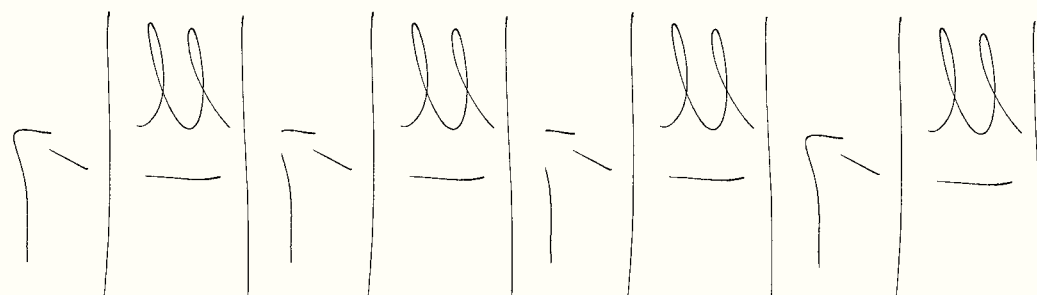


There is the outside of a person and the inside, almost that.ⁱ
— Bernadette Mayer

(I) Peers

On August 21st this year, i receive an e-mail from UC San Diego Library with some old correspondence between poets Lyn Hejinian and Bernadette Mayer. i'd come across mention of the letters a few months prior while searching for *Mutual Aid* as a 40th birthday gift for T—a stapled book Bernadette had published when she too was 40 y/o. It was the first book released in 1985, on January 1 at 12:01am(!) and had a print run of thirty-three. i was feeling sorry i didn't have the \$\$ to spend 1250USD on an auction-house copy at Barnebys, also sad wondering where those \$\$ would have gone anyway, though the search did bring me to San Diego scrolling lists of Bernadette's papers her manuscripts drafts poems the archives of her past world. And me not thinking much of it but here i was typing my contact in an empty e-box signing up for a library account where the ease of it left me sceptical of any means of access but i'm writing still asking if possible please, could i order some scans? Scans, a knock-knock on the library's door at high covid o'clock.

And no word for a slow three months, then suddenly there is word, there's words and words and waits for blab la bla, a few surprising back & forths and some choosings in the lists boxes folders numbers, receding because 50 cents a scan !too many! and i receive twelve letters from Lyn to Bernadette spanning the course of eight years. It's here i learnt about their mutual admiration for the other's sentences.



In her second letter to Bernadette in the file, Lyn thanks her for the review in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* where she writes about *My Life*, Lyn's then most recent book. This is February 2, 1981. i go ahead and find the review on eclipsearchive.org in Number 13 from December, 1980. Bernadette praises Lyn's sentences, or rather, her lines. She says:

My Life has so many good lines in it, it's like a trot, it makes you want to steal from it or perhaps annotate it & make the compliment (or complement) of imitating it.ⁱⁱ

And voila, talking to T on the phone about pistachio pesto we both check our shelves for *My Life* and *My Life in the Nineties*, the 2013 re-print, and it's there—on the book—in The Blurbs. Her quote! Thirty-three years after the fact, pertinent still.

In Lyn's headnote to "Happily", the final piece in her collection of essays and talks, *The Language of Inquiry*—she also praises Bernadette's lines, or rather her sentences. Lyn says:

I should, I think, acknowledge some creative indebtedness ... the sentences of three writers in particular have been central to my attempts to develop and amplify sentences of my own: Bernadette Mayer's radiating and run-on sentence, with its seemingly infinite capacity for digression...ⁱⁱⁱ

From a to z, from L to B. From 1981 to 1989. It's the sentences that move, each other's influences folding in. Reading these sentences letters numbers fills me with a joy from witnessing relations unfold in what seems to be real time. A date is a date, and what an anchor for the passing years.

Markers.

Anchors.

Ankles.

What is an anchor? An anchor is that which keeps one from drifting from the subject.^{iv}

The final correspondence in the file is from November 7, 1989, and i suddenly realise there're no responses from Bernadette. Will have to take a look at Lyn's archive.

(II) Pear Poems

First of August, the day after the last day of July this year reading Bernadette's *Memory* and they've settled, the days, but today feels like i've been on a big km swim splashy cute we wore the same socks and ate cherry cake or was it pie(?) the one with fake cherries they call them sour but they're sugared actually covered in glacé. Bernadette ate it too @the village restaurant with vanilla ice cream, and it went like this the celebration of a last day to *Memory*.

Second of July, Bernadette lists her meals, w/ pear:

(naive) cheese pear beer burnt bread (luna: bread water wine priests of nyu having a discussion & crazy people horrible sarcasm of veal...^v

Third of June, and i was crying not because you said no but because you said no like that, and all the other nos. Handwash, Moisturiser. Shampoo, Conditioner. 2-in-1. 2-in-1. Like rooms and space, the land of it. Not sure what i mean. Why was i finding it so hard to say that we're children? We're just children now all of us here falling over the most recent one being no practice for it. i don't know, i just was. And the extent of it.

In May, T gave *Memory* to me for my birthday. The text was compiled in 1971, where on each day in July Bernadette journalled, and exposed one roll of film to her 24hrs. The first edition of the book only included the writing and is long out of print, but it was re-published this year with the corresponding images. This is the book i had read from every day in July.

Seven years after Bernadette's first *Memory*, another New York poet, Ted Greenwald writes that the pears are the pears:

the pears are the pears
the table is the table
the house is the house
the windows are the windows
[...]
the eyes are the eyes
the mouth is the mouth^{vi}

The mouth... i read 42 years later about a pear growing inside a pear-shaped bottle, one that holds pear brandy. The William pear, or the Bartlett pear, or the other names for this special variety of pear, is used for poire eau-de-vie. It's made in Alsace "the garden of France" entirely from fruit—thirteen kilos of pears used to make one bottle of Poire Williams.^{vii}

The pear-in-glass-growing begins in May, when an empty pear-shaped bottle is tied around a young pear bud, straight onto the tree. Such pear-in-pear is also known as Poire Prisonnière.

i buy the Prisonnière, this bottle of eau-de-vie, G.E. Massenez, Liqueur Poire Williams—a treat to drink—with the coins i’d been saving from my teenage years. i had just refound them, they’d been sitting in an old metal cylinder previously used for an electric shaver, a container that used to be my dad’s. It was all stored for a decade in my family’s garage, i had used the cylinder to grow coins.

There was no pear in this bottle that i’d bought with the change. But as i sip i think: Whoa, we’re like these lil pears growing inside our houses rn. We’re the so-called Poire in our Rooms-de-Vie.

In one of Bernadette’s uncollected poems that i ordered during my online library visit, she typewrites on the back of a “PEARS’ transparent SOAP” packet, writing through the meaning of pears and its sounds. She writes:

We are like two pears
We are like a pear or two
We like two pears
We are two like pears
Like pears we are two
Like pears we are too
A pear and a pear
A pear and a pear are too
Like pears to swim in the sea
[...]^{viii}

There’s an interruption to meaning when reading pears with the suggestion of pairs, five and a half pairs to her pairs of pears. This interruption opens up space for meaning to shift, where these wordplays situate her thinking on the slippery plane of the bathroom sink, or the kitchen sink, or the swimming sink, showing how words can slide, how meanings can move, how we appear too and two. Bernadette prods the sounds in

pears pear pair
 two
 too

being transparent
with how she moves from word to word, from line to line, meaning
arriving from proximity in pears. With a soapy pair of hands we witness the

metamorphosis of her slippy thinking in real time. She guides our reading time with her writing time, sharing with us her pears unfold. We’re on the associative journey with her fruits.

There’s a letter titled “Pear Pie” in Bernadette’s book *The Desires of Mothers to Please Others in Letters*, a collection of letters written during a nine-month period when Bernadette was pregnant with her third child, Max. Her writing began in the summer of 1979 and finished in February 1980—nine years after *Memory*. These letters were addressed to individuals she had known, to “a constellation of friends”, though they were never sent.^{ix} Her correspondence stayed with her.

In “Pear Pie” Bernadette speaks about a pear tree, a lucky one that’s “striking” been struck by lightning whooosh cut in. Sorry to interrupt. Though the tree’s regrowth is budding from the split, sprouting pears, multiple loins. It’s an opening of space. Bernadette and her daughter Marie collect the pears from this cleft, a little underripe so that they can make a pear pie. Bernadette exclaimed her interest in the pears, saying she “wanted to get excited about something, even just these green pears ... if and when they do ripen...”^x

Bernadette also mentions, of the “something” in this zapped pear pie story, that there’s “no way of saying anything without implying something”. She sees thoughts in pairs, where there’s “something” behind this “anything”. There’s movement of thinking beyond what is said, where the meaning of one thing shifts by thought’s proximity. Or, by its distance—the space opened up by difference. One two, one, two. A pair of pears, like us, is two, too.

Lyn shares a similar thought:

But the emphasis ... is on the moving rather than on the places—poetry follows pathways of thinking and it is that that creates patterns of coherence. It is at points of linkage ... that one discovers the reality of being in time, *of taking one’s chance, of becoming another.*^{xi}

We’re living in pairs within us. Moving within in multiples. Is this seeing double?
Abodes within abodes.
Frames.
Brackets.
Numbers.

clink clink

(III) Poetic Feet

Magic was the roses they're there, there's all of them! bushes cut together house
by house and they're all re-growth now. Re-growth re-quote a second-hand
book in hand, it arrives to me *the*

descent
of
ALETTE

where Alice Notley writes an Author's Note about the use of her
"quotation marks". It's at the start of the 1996 Penguin edition and this
book her book a feminist epic follows Alette, the narrator, through a
journey of "continual transformation" where the quotation marks frame
rhythmic units throughout. They're at the edges of our words that is, the
edges of our mouths.

Alice explains that at times readers ask about the quotation marks when
beginning the book. Ask whom? Although the reader then becomes
accustomed to them, she says, no longer wondering why the floatation
marks are used. Alice still flags three reasons.

One reason is the quotation marks reiterate that it's a "voice" that is speaking,
the first poet writing through air. The mouHHHth. The softest place to
re-present prose. Alice says:

...they remind the reader that each phrase is a thing said by a voice: this is not a
thought, or a record of thought-process, this is a story, told.^{xii}

The second reason she lists as a clarification, almost, is to indicate the narrator is
no Alice:

They also distance the narrative from myself, the author: I am not Alette.^{xiii}

A formal decision for the assumption of connecting author to narrator.
The auto-fiction, the tiresome question of—would you say the character
is based on experiences from within the life of You, that is to say, is the
character ~more or less~ "You"? Though who wouldn't be You, as if there
is one of Us. Only one of Us, one of You. And one of You too.

A third reason mentioned for the use of quotation marks speaks of pace. The
pacing of the body in space, the way that pace is articulated on the page.

Alice says:

But they're there, mostly, to measure the poem. The phrases they enclose are poetic
feet.^{xiv}

Feet as in ft as in '. Pair of feet. Portable units of measurement, between things.

Units. Like a phrased walk. Alice continues that the quotation marks help
the reader to notice the phrasing, not pass over it mindlessly. They help the
reader "slow" "down" and:

...silently articulate—not slur over mentally—the phrases at the pace, and with the
stresses, I intend.^{xv}

The reader becomes accustomed to each phrase's context. Able to step
into Alette's shoes, and become one with Alette's feet. The marks exist
within the phrase. What's before what's after quotation? What's the outside
the inside, almost that.

ON ONE OF YOUR

STEPS

After zooming with your friends washing the dishes hearing the rain

on the windows and floors hearing it all above us
after hearing the nasturtiums catch the drips and
after i became a puddle, slowly, "with" "your" "finger"
moving around it just, and just
after the heat of it, your

three blankets

i went downstairs to pee i was thirsty needed to pee first, to drink
so i walked down your outdoor steps
and then i stepped on a snail

i first heard it through my teeth tasted the crunch of it under your
shoe i was wearing the snail who was heading upstairs to give its
company to your hellebore, to the little goblin you call it, likes the
wetness under the bridge, but i stepped on it on one of your steps i
stopped it on its tracks, its one foot on the base of your shoe

snail, on my foot.

(IV) Pause

BCE, pre- before, pre- all this happening, pre- the e-mails 40th pears and pear poems, i'd been thinking there's something in the idea of interruption & rooms i'd like to follow, to understand the space opened up by pause & doors. So i'm strict-one-hour-walking listening to a podcast i'd eyed a while ago—a lecture by Lyn at the University of Chicago from May 2006, titled “A Return of Interruption”. This lecture is 51'30” long and Lyn begins by saying she intends to not only speak of interruption but to make something of it, which happens precisely at 12'58” where mid-line, as i'm hearing the word “formation”, the audio-file of her lecture stops. Accidentally, and aptly so. At the end of the podcast description, a note encourages contact through the digicomm ether to report any listening difficulties. Dear uchicago tech-help team, is there an original file? The recording is fifteen yrs old, Eric replies, unfortunately the file cannot be sourced.

Online searching elsewhere for the interrupted interruption, it's nowhere until its original(?) is possibly(?) somewhere—an essay title in the tenth issue of *Aerial* (never heard of!) *Magazine*, “The Orders of Interruption”.^{xvi} Could it be? Rod Smith, one of its editors, receives my order for the issue. Apparently no postage atm no answers but then months later an e-mail with a pdf arrives.

Aerial 10: Lyn Hejinian, published in 2016 and edited by Rod, and Jen Hofer, is an issue dedicated to Lyn's work. Lyn and 24 contributors wrote around and through her practice, in any-which-way they chose. Rod Smith, Jen Hofer, Rae Armantrout, Carla Billitteri, Peter Nicholls, Laura Moriarty, Carla Harryman, Ron Silliman, Gerhard Schultz, Kit Robinson, Patrick Durgin, Kate Fagan, Barrett Watten, Jalal Toufic, Kevin Killian, Pamela Lu, Rosmarie Waldrop, Katy Lederer, Lisa Robertson, Jean Day, Anne Tardos and Lyn Hejinian, Leslie Scalapino, Lyn Hejinian and Jack Collom, Tim Wood, as well as ten letters from Lyn Hejinian to: Carolyn Andrews, Clark Coolidge, Rae Armantrout, Clark and Susan Coolidge, Alice Notley, Kit Robinson, Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe, Fanny Howe, and Jack Collom. It includes correspondence, interviews, poems, essays, as well as excerpts of previously published & unpublished works by Lyn. It all speaks to her works' “truly various, modes of thought” over the forty years she has been writing.^{xvii}

There's a community right there writing there around Lyn's practice. It's one i learnt about through the cause of interruption. Where the pause that followed thirteen minutes into the recording opened up space to access a network, “a portrait ... emerg[ing] from the community.”^{xviii}

And there's something in this! In who we choose to work alongside and with, or who we choose to steal quote requote annotate and imitate from that creates this network, this context. These relations define our work—our writing especially—by following sentences as they move. And, as Lyn writes, these relations can find room through interruption:

Interruptions bring contexts into view; they are foregroundings (and sometimes self-foregroundings) of what's being overlooked, by-passed.^{xix}

In Lyn's first letter to Bernadette, she says that she's read some of Bernadette's work and likes it “very, very much”.^{xx} Lyn then mentions Charles Bernstein is in town and will be bringing her copies of *United Artists*—Bernadette's magazine—issues no. 2, 3, 4, 5. Though not a copy of no. 1, which is the motivation for her to write that day, to ask for this by-passed issue. Lyn says she also wants to send Bernadette copies of her TUUMBA press books. Books for magazines, reading reading, a letter sent, the beginning of exchange.

When I read this I'm at yours, my shoes are off left right by the door, and your shoes are on. On my feet, as well as on yours—I'm wearing your shoes, again. As I pace, they create a dwelling around the feet of mine. I think of mine out front, “One foot in the other world / the other foot in the other world.”^{xxi} I remember Laynie Browne asking, “When does a letter become apparel ... how is a letter a shoe?”^{xxii} She answers (herself) that it's through movement: “Letters move locations, are all about locomotion. A letter creates a dwelling in the words of others.”^{xxiii}

Maybe a quote moves like this, too. A letter, a shoe. Moving between two worlds at once: the context you make and the context they made. A quote allows thinking in pairs—in the mouth of the speaker while hearing another's voice. Having two in one like a snail—a pair of feet in one foot.

Meaning is at these pairs of inside edges, these “points of linkage”, of “becoming another”, Lyn says.^{xxiv} It is in how we hold each other, like two pears. Or, meaning is where the edges of quotation—or interruption—have another edge, a doorhandle a window a rose by another name in another season.

Pause, like relation, can help us understand context. And interruptions can open up space for these contexts to grow—through language, and through pause
A pause, a rose, something on paper.^{xxv}

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

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- iii. Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 385.
- iv. Lyn Hejinian, *The Fatalist* (Richmond, CA: Omnidawn, 2003), 21.
- v. Bernadette Mayer, *Memory* (New York, NY: Siglio Press, 2020), 33-34.
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- xi. Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 3.
- xii. Alice Notley, *The Descent of Alette* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996), v.
- xiii. Ibid.
- xiv. Ibid.
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- xvi. Lyn Hejinian, "The Orders of Interruption (Alternative title: Rough Understanding) (First presented at the University of Michigan, March 31, 2005)," *Aerial 10: Lyn Hejinian* (2016): 63.
- xvii. Rod Smith, "Preface," *Aerial 10: Lyn Hejinian* (2016): 9.
- xviii. Ibid, 10.
- xix. Lyn Hejinian, "The Orders of Interruption," *Aerial 10: Lyn Hejinian* (2016): 77.
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