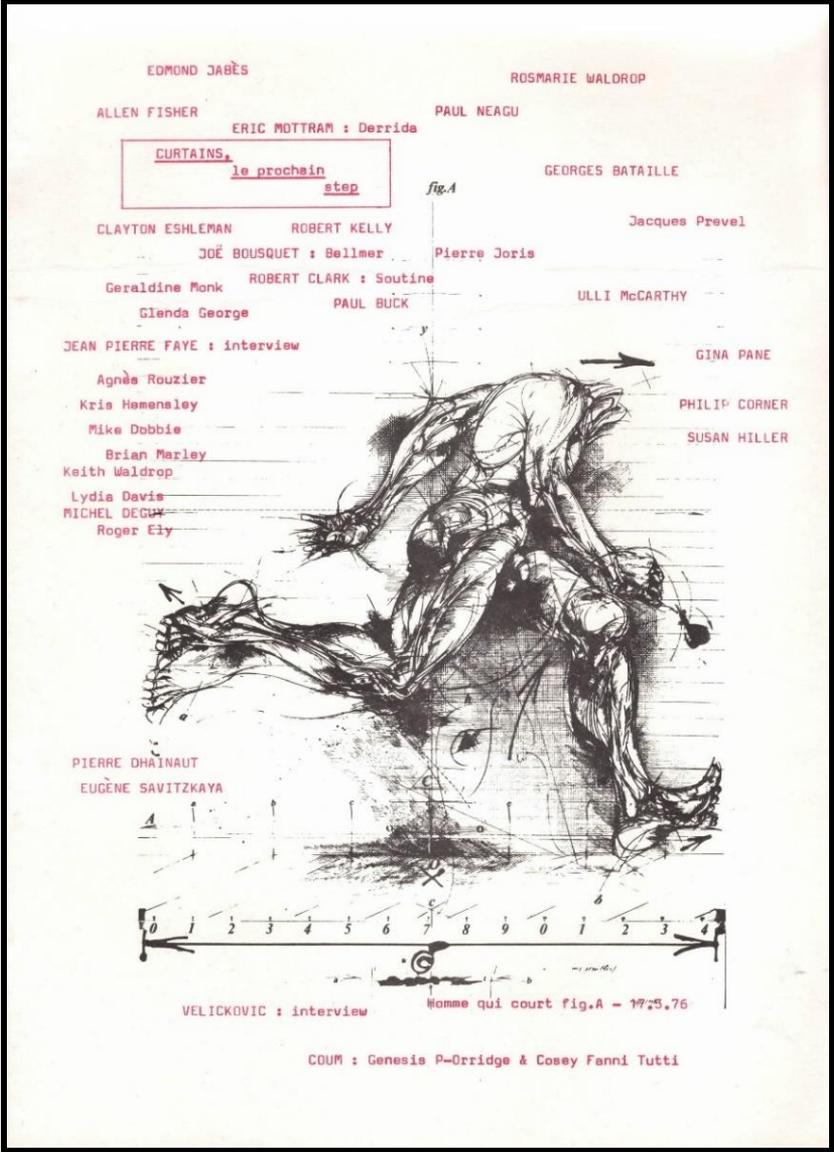


Paul
Buck

AMONG THE NEIGHBORS

Talking of
Curtains



Cover of *Curtains, le prochain step*, 1976
 [Image courtesy of Paul Buck]

Talking of
Curtains

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AMONG THE NEIGHBORS 16

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AMONG THE NEIGHBORS

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Today's pleasure is to waylay perspectives on *Curtains*, to draw together a number of depictions written for other occasions. This splicing approach will create some overlap, yet it should show, with its varying facets, points that a linear text would smooth away.

1

Invited to give a talk on 23rd November 2019 at King's College London in a two-day event of presentations, films, and readings entitled King's Underground: Eric Mottram and spheres of contexts, I suggested that my contribution could be a session on my work in relation to Curtains. Though I made comprehensive notes which I could use or refer to at the event, after the fact—as I was preparing to file them away—an idea from Will Shutes (for which thanks) that I could contribute a booklet to the Among the Neighbors series made it more of a challenging proposition to write it up, flesh it out. I include divertissements and footnotes that might complement not only that event, but wrap itself around all that follows, perhaps to oblige or disrupt thoughts and ideas that crop up.

**Notes and elaborations for a talk (with readings)
pertinent to my own writings in relation to *Curtains***

The idea is to use my magazine *Curtains*, that I produced through the 1970s, as the basis to draw out and juxtapose aspects of my own writings. Or better, to say I will scratch at it to some degree if I'm lucky.

A more blatant difference occurs because this text becomes fixed as I write it, whereas a talk is an improvisation, and whilst I have an idea of where I'm going in a talk, I also leave myself open to the option of taking/talking various directions, for—as is usual when I do a contextual presentation—displayed before me, or to one side, I have a table on which I have spread wide an array of books, magazines, manuscripts, plus photocopies in some cases of delicate documents or extracts from large and cumbersome volumes. (My weary body can only drag a medium-sized suitcase to the venue.) Enough material in any case so that I can feel my way through. I always need to feel the

atmosphere, the mood, and patience of the audience and make judgements accordingly. If you have thoughts of jazz performances, or aspects of David Antin's approach, you would be right, and I'll come back to that.

Curtains started out with the intention of exploring my interest in writings that straddled the world of prose and poetry. I had already been involved in theatre, but was disenchanted by certain events that blocked my thinking on ways to go forward. Traces of my interest lingered (witness the publishing of Jeff Nuttall's *People Show* scripts in the one-off magazine *Snow* in 1968, and also the writings of David Coxhead, some of which are playscripts in all but name). That said, they are not always easy to read aloud. David Coxhead's work has humour, playfulness, and inventiveness. Though I knew Ann Quin and others of that time who were regarded as innovative writers/novelists, many associated with the publishers John Calder and Marion Boyars (whom I too met in the late '60s because of their close proximity to Better Books), the matter of these writers' work was not what I was looking for. Issue one of *Curtains* (1971) had a section of short texts by David Coxhead.

[I read: a piece called "#," found in *Curtains* 1, from his book *Speed King*, also at hand.¹ On the table I had other options marked, including *Drop*, *Party Pieces*, *Stance of talking...*]

I should say that there's a Pierre Boulez quote upfront in *Curtains* 1. It says something I still hold to with my own writings and editings.

[I read: "If you present 20 new or recent works, you can't have 20 masterpieces. That never was the case, and it never will be. We have to try to get rid of the idea that when we listen to new music we are searching for the masterpieces of the future. The aim is to explore what is going on today, and if something valid or valuable turns up, then we can be pleased. Some of the works may be more important for indicating a direction than for themselves." (Pierre Boulez)]²

¹ Coxhead, David. *Speed King*. The Human Constitution, 1970, p. 34.

² "The Sound of Boulez," interview with Peter Heyworth, *The Observer*, 1971, no further date on my scrapbook cutting.

I'm not that interested in the poet/writer as hero or maker of masterpieces, not that I think most people that I associate with—or those contributing to the conference—actually see themselves as either; most of us see ourselves in some kind of community, handing on, via batons or rolled documents, our writings, our books, for others to absorb and take further as they see fit.

While early issues included poetry, there was an emphasis on prose, often by poets—as you are probably gathering. Larry Eigner, Roy Fisher...Allen Fisher. And others as it developed, like Nuttall, Martin Wright, Paul Selby, Doug Oliver, Kris Hemensley, John Riley, Mike Haslam. Though their poetry was featured as well as their prose, it was more than obvious I was interested in prose.

I was invited to work for Fulcrum Press after the core part of Better Books was eviscerated and we were thrown out onto the streets. At Fulcrum I read the prose manuscripts of Roy Fisher, and indeed a large bundle from Larry Eigner, and published from both of them.

[I read: N^o1 of *Metamorphoses* by Roy Fisher (with N^o5 vying for attention) that was published in *The Cut Pages*,³ rather than one from *Curtains*. I followed it with a comment by Fisher in his own words, lifted from the introduction.]

[I read: “The process in the *Metamorphoses* is a much slower one. They are exercises in changing, in full view, one thing into another whose nature was quite unforeseen at the outset, the change to be worked by playing over the starting idea until it began to loosen and dissolve, and yield place to another which looked as if it had a right to be there. The point of interest for me here was not so much the ideas as the slowed-down exploration of the kind of fields in which ideas exist, and the ways they have of succeeding one another.” (Roy Fisher)]⁴

³ Fisher, Roy. *The Cut Pages*. Fulcrum Press, 1971, pp. 11-12.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 7.

There were the poets too from early on like Mark Hyatt, Barry MacSweeney, Peter Riley, Pierre Joris...but I was moving towards the French in my search. I had met Claude Royet-Journoud and Anne-Marie Albiach in London in mid/late '60s. Claude was an early supporter of my work with *Curtains*. For years there was a regular flow of correspondence from Paris, little notes he popped into an envelope as he drank his morning coffee in a Blvd Saint-Germain café: suggesting or responding to requests for contacts, informing me of magazines and books winging their way across the Channel from writers and publishers, or enclosing cuttings from the literary pages of the press, often with cryptic comments added—an almost daily concern and involvement in my efforts to explore directly the contemporary French culture of the '70s, which Claude played a major part in as a poet, and more, as I'm suggesting.

[**Addition:** In 2012, I was offered an exhibition, *in the disappearing mist, the gift whispers*, at the Focal Point Gallery. I gave over the second of the three rooms to stage a kind of anthology, or magazine. That room brought together a further reflection on the ideas of generosity and the gift, as well as on views of disappearance. The contributors to this section had chosen themselves, in that each had been engaged with me and my work as writer, editor, and artist for some years. While the works had already been made or started, some had agreed to revisit and develop the pieces for this exhibition, thus giving some another life by being given further context, and—far from disappearing—generated another step forward. The artists, either exhibited on the walls or in vitrines, were: Liane Lang, John Cussans, Margarita Gluzberg, Tatjana Doll, Susan Hiller, Kathy Acker, Lucy McKenzie, Richard Prince, Sophie von Hellermann, Clunie Reid, David Barton, and Claude Royet-Journoud. Having kept all of Claude's correspondence, whether a post-it sized note, pages torn from notepads, or longer letters, all still maintained in their order of arrival, I made a pinboard on which many were displayed. Carefully overlapping personal information, these offered a wealth of reflections to a third

party to understand the nature of Claude's contribution to *Curtains* and indeed my own developments.]⁵

Claude led me into a world that included Edmond Jabès, Alain Veinstein, Roger Giroux, Pascal Quignard...while I discovered Marcelin Pleynet and Jacqueline Risset at *Tel Quel*. Letters were flying everywhere. Books, magazines, and manuscripts arriving from them and others. I wanted to read extracts from three poets who had made strong impressions early on in the 1970s. Jacqueline Risset's work I had found in a London bookshop (a *TLS* review copy, as noted within, that had been sold on). I translated from *Jeu*, only publishing a fragment. Marcelin Pleynet gave me work that was not available in book form. Sometimes the book versions differed from the manuscripts we had translated. (Or, in one case, with Bernard Noël, he had mislaid or lost his manuscripts for a work and came back seeking copies, though the final book became very different from all I have, all I translated, or indeed all I published.)⁶ The other poet was Anne-Marie Albiach, a continual presence in my thinking over the years.

[I read, consecutively: Jacqueline Risset, from the original translation manuscript of *Jeu*, the typewriter ribbon fairly worn, making the reading effort substantial. Then I read from Marcelin Pleynet's *A Shifting of Muscular Sense*, taking the section from the *Range of Curtains* envelope, with its various pencilled options to be determined as I read. I had done likewise with the Risset extract. With Anne-Marie Albiach, I faced the greatest difficulty to try to convey something from her work in a limited time. Moving away from any of my own translations, published or not, I read from Keith Waldrop's fine translation of *The Hermitage Road*.⁷ At hand, too, I had the *Mezza Voce* volume, and also her interviews with Jean Daive, *A Discursive, Space*, each blossoming with markers, too many

⁵ See *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, Slim volume, 2016, pp. 67-71. And also <https://www.fpg.org.uk/exhibition/in-the-disappearing-mist-the-gift-whispers/>

⁶ I am referring to Noël, Bernard, "extracts from The Book of the Forgotten," *Substance* 23/24, 1979, pp. 62-70 for the translation, and Noël, Bernard, *Le Livre de l'oubli*, P.O.L., 2012, for the final book.

⁷ Albiach, Anne-Marie. *Figured Image*. Translated by Keith Waldrop, The Post-Apollo Press, 2006.

probably to be able to quickly determine when pushed at the crucial moment.]

These texts are written for the page, but it's often hard to find work that can be read aloud of these poets. I was choosing these from among many to show that I was on the rim of the volcano of questions that was the game of writing and language. Thus, my own writing was veering that way on the one hand; and to demonstrate, I extracted from options on the table, a dialoguing table,⁸ the volume *No title*.⁹

[**I read:** from the final untitled section, *n*^o4 and *n*^o6.]¹⁰

The book was prefaced with quotes from two contemporary composers, Aldo Clementi and Gérard Grisey. I underscored the latter.

[**I read:** “In my music material in itself does not exist, but is absorbed in a continuous process of change. I don’t compose objects but the journey from one object to the other. The route one travels is more important than the vehicle one travels in.”] (Gérard Grisey)¹¹

Within my writings, I build into the text ideas about what I’m attempting to do. While I cannot determine when this procedure started, it was certainly becoming prevalent during the *Curtains* period. Nowadays it is a natural part of the process—laying bare the attempts, aiding the failure. Roger Laporte is one of those who guided me. It had to be noted that *Curtains*, and any related ventures, often required the inclusion of works of some length. Roger Laporte’s work was an example in point. *Split Curtains* included a major section taken from *Fugue*,¹² the beginning of his opus on the experience of writing. In recent times, Catherine Petit, my wife, with whom I work, has revised

⁸ A remark I will qualify later in terms of Robert Kelly.

⁹ Buck, Paul. *No Title*. Potes & Poets Press, 1991.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 60-61.

¹¹ Source untraceable on record sleeves, in scrapbooks, and on book and magazine shelves.

¹² Laporte, Roger. *Fugue*. Gallimard, 1970, pp. 7-41.

the translation to assist the renewed interest in Laporte's work, as well as helped with a further extension.¹³

[I read: an extract from *Fugue* by Roger Laporte, Catherine's version, working with the marked manuscript copy for convenience.]

I thought it would be good to read from this work too because Charles Bernstein, another contributor to the conference, was seated before me, and it was Charles and Bruce Andrews who asked to reprint an extract from *Fugue* in *Split Curtains* for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E.¹⁴ Despite all our efforts, and indeed Cid Corman's publishing of *Moriendo* in *Origin*,¹⁵ Laporte is still not given the credit and attention that many of us feel is due to him.¹⁶

What has not been noted as yet is as *Curtains* evolved, it included, at the back, long lists of publications either received or bought that did not appear listed elsewhere. People found that resource invaluable. One person wrote to me and asked what university I was attached to because of those lists, as well as all the further reading notes included after contributions. I replied that I doubted any university would have those books, mags, pamphlets, etc...or today, I could add, even now, decades later.¹⁷

I think we might have translated, along with a few others, around 35 to 40 poets/writers. I say we, in the sense that Glenda George, with whom I was living at the time, was translating daily too. Why so many? I wanted to cover ground, not just focus on a few. I wanted as wide

¹³ *A Circular* 2, 2012, pp. 57-64, and *A Circular* 3, 2015, pp. 33-37. Published in London. Edited by Pedro Cid Proença.

¹⁴ L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E #13, December 1980.

¹⁵ *Origin* (fifth series) #2, 1983.

¹⁶ After the conference many pointed out that the Laporte extract was a highlight and needed to be returned to.

¹⁷ When Martin McGeown edited a section, *Hotel Sub-Rosa* No.4, in *Frozen Tears* 1, 2003, pp. 100-227, predominantly from *Curtains*, he included book lists from three issues as they "have changed in my perception from concrete information to concrete image; a picture of the energies collecting at that time," pp. 126-160.

a span as possible. And I wanted unexplored territory, a fact others observed and were keen to point out to me in correspondence.

That said, I did one issue, *Velvet Curtains*, in 1974, that was focussed on Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Bernard Noël, weaving them together. All three appeared in other issues too, of course. I recall that the kernel for the issue came from a dedication that Blanchot wrote inside a book that he presented to Bernard Noël that I saw on his desk at his home in Mauregny, as well as from my own correspondence with Blanchot.

[I read: an extract from Blanchot's *Waiting*, as published in *Velvet Curtains*, explaining that its final form in his book *L'Attente, L'Oubli* (*Awaiting Oblivion*) was nothing like this extract, the text dispersed.]¹⁸

[I read: an extract from Bataille's *Le Petit* (*The Little One*), choosing the version done for Paul Auster's *Living Hand*.]¹⁹

Chance had made that selection, as I was pretty certain that I was actually going to read from other marked extracts of *The Orestia*, also from *Velvet Curtains*.

Paul Auster and Lydia Davis started to translate Bataille's *Le Bleu du Ciel* (as *The Blue of the Sky*), and I started serializing it. Lydia was also working on *L'Arrêt de mort* (its English title not determined as *Death Sentence* at that point) and we all pushed with the search for publishers for a book publication. All of part one appeared in *Living Hand* 4, 1975, and all of part two and the short part three appeared in *Splît Curtains*, 1975. It is always hard to translate blindly. One takes on texts that others have neglected because one feels passionate about them, not because of any commercial viability. With the Bataille, at some point we received word that Urizen in New York had commissioned Harry Mathews to translate the book as *Blue of Noon*. We halted the

¹⁸ Michael Holland's translation was from a Festschrift offered to Heidegger on his 70th birthday.

¹⁹ *Living Hand* 1, Fall 1973, p. 45.

serialization without completion. Sooner or later the Auster/Davis translation will find its way into book form. It is very different from the available version.

[**Addition:** Not that I think Blanchot’s work would have disappeared, but it is interesting to note the fragility of the way in which a writer gains attention. We tried to entice the publisher John Calder and others to consider taking on this text. Fortunately, it found its home with Station Hill.²⁰ This particular key work, *Death Sentence*, might arguably be cited as tipping the balance for Blanchot’s presence in the English-language culture. However, more than a decade and a half earlier, John Calder had already been asked if he would like to publish *L’Arrêt de mort* by the translator Austryn Wainhouse, who was to translate Pierre Klossowski for Calder, having already been an early translator not only of Bataille but also more specifically of Sade, initially for Olympia Press. Calder never explained that earlier approach when we spoke with him. A few years ago we discovered that Wainhouse had already translated Blanchot’s “*récit*” when we purchased, from a London rare book dealer, a copy of Wainhouse’s novella *A Chronicle of a Voyage*, published in Paris in 1958,²¹ that the author had sent to Calder as a gift in April 1960. In a handwritten letter from Wainhouse to Calder that was left inserted in his novella, Wainhouse said that he was sending the Blanchot manuscript separately after being encouraged to do so by Arthur Boyars (Marion Boyars’s husband): “The text is not long; so it could be joined (to) Thomas l’obscur—this was Blanchot’s own suggestion. Mr Boyars is looking at the french versions of both these novels, & you should soon be hearing his point of view & perhaps also a report on our conversations about Douassot, Caillois, Georges Bataille, Pierre Klossowski...”²² These Blanchot manuscripts do exist, copies of both—along with letters from Blanchot dating from 1952 to 1956—are to be found in Wainhouse’s archives at Syracuse University.]

²⁰ Blanchot, Maurice. *Death Sentence*. Translated by Lydia Davis, Station Hill, 1978.

²¹ Wainhouse, Austryn. *A Chronicle of a Voyage*. With a portrait of the author by Pierre Klossowski, La Librairie Anglaise, 1958.

²² Letter, dated 14.4.60, held in this author’s archives.

If Auster or Davis had known that Wainhouse had already translated *L'Arrêt de mort* almost two decades earlier, and that copies of the manuscript were languishing in one or more files somewhere, would they have undertaken the translation?

[I was going to read from that Austryn Wainhouse letter that I had on the table, but didn't. The details above are added to embellish here the environment in which we were working.]

An influence of Bataille, Blanchot, and the others on my own writing can be seen in a work like *Walking into myself*,²³ written in the '80s. I had marked a number of possible places, mainly from the early pages, as they appeared to be understandable, despite being out of context.

[I read: *Walking into myself*, starting at the "18th August" section.]

[I read: wanting suddenly to give context, and in order to refrain from rambling, the note on the back cover, to indicate my position of a writing that makes "language fight for its own survival." "Alone in a room, in a hospital perhaps, the writer writes to another, a woman it would appear. This is the point at which the book begins. From there everything shifts, from other to self, person to object, being to non-being. A writing for others while writing for the self, tugging against the reader's participation, drawing language as paint across expanses it might not wish to cross, always preventing something identifiable, and graspable, albeit with soaped hands." (Paul Buck)]²⁴

All of this showed only some aspects of what I had been exploring and researching daily for over fifty years. Nothing is neatly defined. I also became involved with another line through the magazine *Change*, with Jean-Pierre Faye, at one point sitting in on editorial meetings, then forming a splinter project, *Set International*.²⁵ This involvement with *Change* brought on new connections with Jean Paris, Jacques Roubaud, Danielle Collobert, Agnès Rouzier, and—particularly—

²³ Buck, Paul. *Walking into Myself*. Intimacy, 1995, pp. 8-10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, back cover.

²⁵ Jean-Pierre Faye talks about it in a book-length interview with Philippe Boyer, *Commencement d'une figure en mouvement*. Stock, 1980.

Mitsou Ronat. Each had aspects that interested me, both in language and “writing,” and often in questions of sexuality and the body, key concerns of mine.

[**Addition:** With Danielle Collobert, besides various extracts from her books, she also sent me the text for what turned out to be her last piece. She rarely corresponded with anyone, as I was told when Claude Royet-Journoud first introduced us. As I translated extracts of her work, we corresponded through necessity. In October 1977, out of the blue, Danielle sent me her longest letter, asking if I would translate *Survie* very quickly. She indicated that Orange Export Ltd would publish her text as a book, but didn’t make it clear whether it was to be bilingual or not. Another note soon arrived, concluding “j’aimerais bien que ce soit le plus violent possible.”²⁶ I worked quickly and sent my version. She responded, also offering me her work-in-progress to publish when it was completed. In April 1978, *Survie* arrived in book form. Accompanying it was my translation manuscript with rubbed and faint pencil strokes to indicate phrasings and rhythmic patterns, plus her expression of thanks. I wrote to enquire why she had needed the translation. No reply. She had departed for New York I was to discover years later. Days after she returned to Paris, in mid-July, Danielle chose to kill herself on her thirty-eighth birthday. She had written not long before in her notebook: “anche donnette l’hanno fatto,” a bolstering quote from one of Cesare Pavese’s final diary entries; “even weak women have done it,” referring to suicide; a quote that she had also written in her notebook five years earlier on her birthday, then crossed out, though still projecting herself towards that moment “to disappear,” in her words. Later I read that Danielle had told her long-time friend Uccio Esposito-Torrigiani that she had wanted an Italian and English version of *Survie*. As with me, he notes: “A curious and uncharacteristic sense of urgency.”²⁷ He translated *Survie* into Italian for her.]

²⁶ “I would like it to be the most violent possible.”

²⁷ Postface in Collobert, Danielle, *Cahiers 1956-1978*, Seghers/Laffont (Change), 1983. *Notebooks 1956-1978*, Litmus Press, 2003, p. 84, translated by Norma Cole.

[I read: Danielle's *Survival* in manuscript form, with rhythm slashes as she had marked them on the copy.]²⁸

Agnès Rouzier, also died young (35), like Collobert (38), and indeed Mitsou Ronat (38). All passed within a few short years of each other. Deleuze wrote Rouzier: "You don't write on sexuality, you write sexually."²⁹

[I read: from my translation extract of *Non, rien* in *Curtains, le prochain step.*]

These three remarkable women played a vital part in my development. Mitsou and I were also engaged in drawing up an anthology of writings in the late '70s, with Routledge in mind, after a request from one of its contributing editors for an adventurous book around current directions in French thought. Our proposition included texts written, or to be written, by Mitsou Ronat, Jean-Claude Milner, Jean Paris, Jeannine Verdès, Jacques Roubaud, Jean-Pierre Faye, Elisabeth Roudinesco, Gilles Deleuze, Bernard Noël, and half a dozen others. It was turned down, as the editor was unfamiliar with any of the names, thus unknown too for his potential readership.³⁰

Though I've read Bataille and Blanchot to you, Bernard Noël has been a common link as time has gone by to both and to many of those I've been drawn to. He has worked aside from groups or movements, drawing on many ideas that attract me, like memory and forgetting...or his interest in the body, that goes back to his early work like *Extracts of the Body*.³¹ I'll read a stand-alone short piece, first published in *Art Press* 10, in 1977, that offers a complementary vibration in these circumstances.

[I read: *ab...*, as published in *Disappearing Curtains*.]³²

²⁸ Finally published in *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, Slimvolume, 2016, pp. 71-73.

²⁹ Rouzier, Agnès. *Non, rien*. Seghers/Laffont (Change), 1974. Quoted on back cover.

³⁰ Given the editor's credentials, it was a somewhat remarkable admission with regard to at least a few of those listed, even at that time.

³¹ Noël, Bernard. *Extraits du corps*. Gallimard, 2006. The most recent edition.

³² *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, Slimvolume, 2016, p. 117.

Georges Bataille's unfinished novel, *Ma Mère*, was adapted by Pierre Bourgeade, staged in Paris in 1982, and further adapted and translated by myself for the Bataille Festival, *Violent Silence*, here in London in 1984. Twenty years later, another script drawn from the novel was filmed by Christophe Honoré, with Isabelle Huppert in the title role.

[I read: from the playscript of *My Mother*, the opening introduction by Pierre, as the ageing man looking back on his life, played by Neil Cunningham in our staging.]³³

This aspect of my research through the French vein manifests itself with two texts from the various on the table at my side.

[I read: *The diction of anti-*.]³⁴

[I read: a short extract from *Lust* (Vol 1), page 43.]³⁵

Editing is personal. In my method of research and exploration editing can only be done by an individual, not a committee. I wanted to explore where others failed to tread. Michel Camus who ran Obliques Bookshop in Paris introduced me to the work of Colette Thomas in the 1970s. He found the final copy of her book *Le Testament de la Fille morte* in Gallimard's cellars.³⁶ Colette Thomas, whom we know about principally through her connection with Artaud, had more or less disappeared. It seems permission was withdrawn to republish in Paris, though in recent years we've been allowed to make an English version.

[I read: from *The Testament of the dead Daughter*.]³⁷

³³ Unpublished, in author's archives, pp. 2-3.

³⁴ Buck, Paul. *Violations*. Pressed Curtains, 1979, p. 11.

³⁵ Buck, Paul. *Lust/lust to write/ to write out of lust*. Pressed Curtains, 1976, p. 43. Volume 2. and 3, though excerpted in publications, have never been published in book form.

³⁶ Thomas, Colette [René]. *Le Testament de la Fille morte*. Gallimard, 1954.

³⁷ Thomas, Colette [René]. *The Testament of the dead Daughter*. Translated by Catherine Petit & Paul Buck, Vauxhall&Company, 2014, pp. 12-14.

As *Curtains* itself was ending I met Kathy Acker in Amsterdam. I encouraged her to look on the shelves in the home of the writer she was staying with in Paris for work by Laure (Colette Peignot). She knew of Bataille but hadn't read him at that point. Her first Laure translation, which was more of a version, was sent to me a few weeks later on a Christian Bourgois-headed sheet of paper. It is taken from *Histoire d'une petite fille*.³⁸

[I read: the manuscript sheet of the Laure translation.]³⁹

It later appeared in Kathy's text, *Translations of the Diaries of Laure the Schoolgirl*, though transformed further, almost to be unrecognizable.⁴⁰

For the few years of our intense correspondence Kathy was relevant to my writing as she was on the same wavelength. I suggested she might also find books by Pierre Guyotat on the shelves of her host. Hence his initial appearance in the first chapter of *Great Expectations* which she wrote while we were corresponding, sending me sections as completed.⁴¹

I had been reading and collecting Guyotat's work since way back in the early '70s, but it was too much to translate and publish. Pierre Joris did an excellent and memorable extract in *Paris Exiles*.⁴² It must have been extremely time-consuming, and quite understandable why he couldn't continue with further sections.

After *Curtains*, in the early '80s, I was given Graham Fox's translation of *Eden, Eden, Eden*. I published three extracts,⁴³ but it was another decade before it appeared in book form.⁴⁴ Today there is a new re-

³⁸ In *Écrits de Laure*. Pauvert, 1971, pp. 75-76.

³⁹ In author's archives.

⁴⁰ In *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer. Semiotext(e), 1991, p. 105.

⁴¹ See Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker* (Allen Lane, 2017) for more on the subject.

⁴² *Tales of Samora Machel*, in *Paris Exiles* 2, 1985, pp. 28-30.

⁴³ *Violent Silence: Celebrating Georges Bataille* (The Georges Bataille Event, 1984), pp. 83-86, *Spectacular Diseases* 8, 1985, pp. 23-26, and *Temblor* 1, 1985, p. 122-123.

⁴⁴ Guyotat, Pierre. *Eden, Eden, Eden*. Translated by Graham Fox, Creation, 1995.

vised and reworked edition in our series with Vauxhall&Company.⁴⁵ Other works by Pierre Guyotat are available now in English.

[**I read:** from our edition of *Eden, Eden, Eden* by Pierre Guyotat.]

[**I read:** from my postface: “This work is a voyage through an African mindscape, through an endless chain of sexual acts and degradations, the endurance ploughing on page after page as one never-ending sentence. There are characters, but there is no characterization drawn, just as there is no narrative. Two fundamental literary supports have been removed. And any idea that an elegant prose style will exist has also been negated. Instead there is the unceasing thrust forward with the text, coming at us in short phrases, always phrases, punctuated, accentuated, as if breathed, or gasped, as if tripped over. If it is a dance, if there are rhythms, it is the dance of someone on the point of exhaustion, determined to reach the end, little realizing there is no end, only a textual and sexual treadmill. The reader feels the ecstatic thrill that an excess of boundless sexual imagery seeks to deliver, though rarely accomplishes once it mires in familiarity.”]⁴⁶

Pierre Guyotat’s writings impressed me, though not always in the most obvious manner. *Lust* is a consequence, at least in my eyes. To extract something succinct, written over the last decade or so, that reveals many of these traces in my work...:

[**I read:** from *That irreversible decision: a narrative of indiscretions*.]⁴⁷

There were a variety of sections from the forthcoming book placed around the table for my eye to fall upon. I have been noting this live editing approach here as it has a parallel with the editing technique of *Curtains*, in particular. I staged a flexibility by drawing from a pool of French texts in books and magazines or manuscripts sent to me, finding a structure with them, knowing that we would need to translate them afterwards, and then working in English and American

⁴⁵ Guyotat, Pierre. *Eden, Eden, Eden*. Translated by Graham Fox, Vauxhall&Company, 2017.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Buck, Paul. *Indiscretions* (≅ *Nakedness*). Vauxhall&Company, 2020.)

manuscripts that I had obtained. *Curtains* was an adventure that was pulled together with papers spread around the living room floor, and up the stairs to the bedroom, shuffling and pondering, seeking further texts to include, then translate. Ideas came as juxtapositions were found, as notions of an ongoing essay were sparked and provoked. I had felt a form of allegiance with a variety of French magazines. A number contributed to my attitude. I think of *Change, Exit, Erras* . . . particularly the latter because of its notebook-like feel. And a writer like Mathieu Bénézet with his own notebooks, fragments of poems, prose, theatre, that he developed into some form of fluidity. It was not quite as simple as that, as it has built up over time as my research developed. But the editing technique with the numerous French resources was unique it seems, with hindsight.

Here on this table this afternoon, besides the options I've indicated, there were texts either in manuscript or printed form in books and magazines by Mathieu Bénézet, Pascal Quignard, Laure, Joë Bousquet, Eugène Savitzkaya, many more from Bataille, and essays and extracts from Pierre Guyotat that we have translated in recent years. I cite Mathieu Bénézet, but Pascal Quignard's trajectory has also developed another way that relates to my path. Particularly his series *Petits traités*, or the more recent *Dernier royaume*, which he says consists "neither of philosophical argumentation, nor short learned essays, nor novelistic narration," a work where there is no concept of genre, or perhaps a genre that has toppled over rather than fallen away.⁴⁸

Curtains started when I was twenty-four and ran effectively for ten years. It was a turning point in my life, establishing relationships and avenues that I've explored ever since.

[I read: a section from *definitions for mendy* by David Antin.]⁴⁹

Though I was engaged with various American poets, notably Clayton Eshleman and Robert Kelly, David Antin—who went right back to

⁴⁸ Letter (undated) in author's archives.

⁴⁹ Antin, David. *definitions*. Caterpillar, 1967, p. 8.

my origins in Better Books in the '60s—was never in *Curtains*, though entwined in my thinking, particularly my oral developments. It was only in recent years, not long before his death, when David was in London for his first Talking piece at Cabinet Gallery⁵⁰ that we could talk fully for an evening over a meal. He regretted he had not had a work ready for *Curtains* when I'd asked, for preparing those pieces for publication took a long while. One matter we discussed revolved around jazz and the connection with the oral/formulaic techniques that Parry and Lord wrote about.⁵¹ That led to talking about how Charlie Parker had a substantial repertoire of lines and phrases to draw on productively and with inventiveness in his solos. As do others, whether Coltrane or Keith Jarrett, etc. A regular listener who's interested in improvisatory methods can discern them.

Which leads me to say that a couple of miles from here, tonight, Roscoe Mitchell is playing. And, like David Antin, Roscoe Mitchell was key to my oral work. In 1976 in Willisau, Switzerland, at a festival, he played a piece called *Nonaab*.⁵² The audience had been expecting Anthony Braxton. He was stepping into his place, asked to do a solo saxophone concert. He knew they would be disappointed. Instead of showing his virtuosity, he started with repetitions of the same phrase, occasionally varying, irritating the audience, which one can hear, for about five minutes, testing their patience until he felt he could release his alto, move through developments, and make a twenty-minute work—to great acclaim. Composition, performance, audience...three areas that Antin and Mitchell taught me about.

In much the same manner as I noted earlier with the Roger Laporte extract, when the reader is reading after the fact of the writing already having been written,⁵³ Mitchell's *Nonaab* is safe to hear on vinyl, you

⁵⁰ 12th November 2009.

⁵¹ Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Poetry*, Cambridge University Press, 1977. This book is very useful on this issue and other related matters.

⁵² Mitchell, Roscoe. *Nonaab*. Nessa Records, 1977.

⁵³ The extract of *Fugue* I read began with the notion: "I am so ignorant of the work to be written, so little confident in its possibility, that I am jealous of the eventual reader who, reassured by the thickness of the book, cannot believe in the author's feeling of uncertainty. How can I make the reader participate in the discontinuity of

know it is there. The “being there” at the live event, participating in the experience—that would have been the exciting phase. That is why I still like theatre as a possibility (but that’s for another time).

[I read: from an interview with the musician Steve Lacy: “I get myself into these situations where it’s on the edge and that’s a lifelong habit with me. That’s OK as long as I don’t fall over or the thing doesn’t die. As long as it’s alive and it’s on the edge like that I stay with it to see where it will go.”]⁵⁴

Curtains was a magazine that tried to engage its readership, either to follow threads and send me new work, or write pieces for it. Robert Kelly wrote anew, as did Jean-Pierre Faye. As did Allen Fisher. And, spectacularly, Eric Mottram, out of the blue, sent me a manuscript that when I retyped on plates became a twenty-pages tightly-packed A4 essay, taking as its starting point a piece by Jacques Derrida, and whilst drawing on British/American poetries, veered also into Blanchot, Bataille, Levi-Strauss, with the music references of Webern, Stockhausen, Boulez...

At this point, with music as a repeating concern, I turned the occasion around by asking Ulli Freer to join me. Ulli and I have known each other since the late '60s or early '70s, from the days he was living in Wales, and I was just moving onto the hillside outside Hebden Bridge, the early days of *Curtains*. Not long after we lived closer, across the other side of the valley from each other. We could almost have called across, or played our sound systems loud. Our links are numerous as friends; with work; with writing. Ulli’s poetry engages with voicing, breathing, rhythms, improvisations, free music, and more. He explores spaces, rooms, countrysides, urban territories, rush hours, pulsing, and blood flows. We both fight to survive against language flow, to try to make it work for us. In April 1977, we sat across the table from each other in my living room and wrote *The Table*, passing

the writing? How can I do it in such a way that the legato of the reading is broken by the spasms of writing? One should need to write in such a way that the reader expects an abrupt end or even suspects the volume to be artificially prolonged by numerous blank pages...” *Split Curtains*, p. 27.

⁵⁴ *Musics* 12, May 1977, p. 4.

the text back and forth. It was published within days as a book.⁵⁵ In December 2006, we tried again; the computer screen became the table, and we passed our text back and forth by email, though this time it has taken us thirteen years to publish.⁵⁶

Today, at this Mottram event, we read from the new book, both drawing together to read the final section as one. It was like—but not like—ensemble playing by the front players,⁵⁷ though more as reading together, listening to the other, and finding how to weave our voices and the notes, which for me brings back memories of listening to George Russell⁵⁸ in my teens, when the foundations for my life were taking shape.

2

In 2012, I was fortunate enough to be offered an exhibition at the Focal Point Gallery in Southend, directed at that time by Andrew Hunt. It was called In the disappearing mist, the gift whispers.⁵⁹ It comprised three rooms: the first reconnected with a textual work of mine, Disappearing⁶⁰ and reworked it directly on the gallery walls, rethinking and referring to what I exhibited/ created exactly twenty years earlier in 1992 in Cabinet Gallery. In a second room, I invited twelve artists that I had been involved with over a number of years. And a third room staged an interrelationship of further works from myself with a response from a young artist. After the fact, as planned from the start, I

⁵⁵ *Pressed Curtains*, 1977. The table references Robert Kelly in *The Loom* (Black Sparrow, 1975), pp. 23-29. We quoted the stanza beginning “A place to talk. / I’ve always loved tables, / a natural gamecourt / to lean & draw on - / to have something / between us / common to us both / & thus uniting. / When I’m working alone / I like to be at table / in dialogue with book, / or better with what comes / into my head to write / from the source of source, / ...”, and the section “Charles & me / in his kitchen, making that / rickety table dance / all over the floor...”

⁵⁶ *Towards infinity*, RD [Ulli Freer imprint], London, 2019.

⁵⁷ As Cannonball and Nat Adderley with Yusef Lateef playing *Gemini on The Cannonball Adderley Sextet in New York*, Riverside Records, 1962.

⁵⁸ As George Russell Sextet playing *Nardis* on *Essex-tbetics*, Riverside Records, 1961.

⁵⁹ <https://www.fpg.org.uk/exhibition/in-the-disappearing-mist-the-gift-whispers/> The link gives a summary and includes many images.

⁶⁰ Buck, Paul. *No Title*. Potes & Poets Press, 1991.

produced a book, *Disappearing Curtains* (a journal),⁶¹ which was intent on documenting the show, as well as building it further into a volume to elaborate on thoughts and link it across the decades to *Curtains*, drawing threads from those editions and subsequent developments—people met in the intervening years who would have been part of *Curtains*, I surmised, if it had extended its years. I wrote a lengthy introductory text (2,500 words) around the various contributors, though I opened the volume with a few paragraphs on editorial thoughts, as I felt it needed reiterating, or indeed stating to a younger generation, about “this business of editing,” to paraphrase Cesare Pavese’s journal, *This Business of Living*.⁶²

Notes in & out of the disappearing mist⁶³

A magazine serves more than one purpose. If I am to be the editor, it needs to be a personal document, an exploration of my interests. As I am a writer then being an editor revolves around the notion of editing as part of the research for my writing. However, I do see it as a wider project, that is, the magazine as a communal...a community work.

One could easily read and assimilate texts solely for oneself. One could translate and transform these texts into one’s ongoing writing. To make it public, to present it to others, is a way to share, to offer the magazine as a gift—to present others with work that one finds valuable and that one would like others to consider. It is not a mission, although some would like to interpret it as such, but an attempt to offer a dialogue so that others might participate and make your research venture into further areas, be it for one’s own benefit or for that of others.

All editors—for whatever reason they take on that role—have to gain some benefit from their work. Otherwise, why do it? Given the nature of a literary or cultural independent magazine, it is costly both in time and finance. As with all magazines, it can also attract all manner of odd and aggressive behaviour towards its editor from contributors,

⁶¹ *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, Slimvolume, 2016. A comprehensive index of all the *Curtains* issues is included on pp. 173-179.

⁶² Pavese, Cesare. *This Business of Living*. Peter Owen, 1961.

⁶³ *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, Slimvolume, 2016, p. 2.

potential contributors, not to omit those rejected—particularly those who have never seen the magazine or understood the nature of the project, many assuming that their contribution is primarily to place another tick on their list [...]

Another day. Another way to start.

Why does anyone decide to edit a magazine? There must be a few reasons, some good, some not so good, at least in my eyes, but one idea for me in those early days, way back in the '60s, was to produce a magazine in which I could place my own work in the company of those whose writings engrossed me. Looking back, that makes it a form of public notebook. Why should anyone do that? I could easily read those people for myself, privately, of course. But it doesn't quite work out that way. Over time, other shades and aspects come to the fore and start to develop the initial premise. What might have begun as asking for a fresh piece of work, hot off the typewriter, could develop into a sense of community, encouraging like-minded writers to explore areas that they might not have ventured into: a dialogue between contemporaries.

One of my key interests at the beginning focussed on prose writing, what might be termed experimental, alternative, avant-garde, radical ...the names vary and change over the years...but fundamentally I meant a prose writing that was aside from the mainstream thought processes. But it was more than that; the pursuit was on a field where the prose was mainly written by poets, or those associated with a poetry environment. No other restrictive markers or definitions. The work that drew my attention was written by David Coxhead, Doug Oliver, Martin Wright, Jeff Nuttall, Roy Fisher, John Riley, Larry Eigner, Kris Hemensley...Many had come to my attention because of my employment behind the counter in Better Books, or my work as a book rep for Fulcrum Press that followed. The shift towards the French was inevitable because of their heightened involvement in this area of writing which I discovered not only from the prestigious list of authors published by Calder & Boyars, but also from my own discoveries in this field; for example, Francis Ponge, René Char,

Henri Michaux, Bernard Noël, Joë Bousquet, Edmond Jabès...and so it went on. This was one of the passions that I embraced with *Curtains*.

Later on, towards the end of the decade run of *Curtains*, I added another project, *Twisted Wrist*, to offer other urgencies that didn't fit with the ongoing research of the main magazine. And later I carried on my editing enthusiasms by guest-editing sections in magazines like *Change*, *New Directions Annual Anthology*, *Temblor*, and *Frozen Tears*; or whole issues of magazines like *Odradek*, *Words Worth*, and *Spectacular Diseases*; or the bilingual anthologies produced for the French readership with *Voix-Off/Angleterre* and *Matières d'Angleterre*, the latter coedited with Pierre Joris. And not to forget the staging of a week-long festival of performances, readings, a play, films, and music, in a London theatre focussed around Georges Bataille called *Violent Silence*,⁶⁴ that also produced a book of the same title.⁶⁵

Would I do a magazine today? For me there is no need. The personal exploration is on a different plane, finer points within my years of research. I can encompass aspects within an editing such as this, but I am not seeking to keep pace with new strands from the younger generations. And yet, I am not exactly consolidating, because that would assume a form of moving towards an ending, a neat form of ending, when in fact it is more to do with the opposite—with an opening out to suggest there are plenty of ways to investigate and expand. And that—far from writing or cultural interests being restricted, being negated, being answered—there will always be ways forward because the world is forever changing and there are constant transformations and possibilities. “Everything has been done” is the remark that comes from someone who has only stood on the outside and has no real desire to understand what is at play [...]

Whilst *Disappearing Curtains* bore a resemblance to the final editions of the original *Curtains* (*Curtains*, *le prochain step* and *bal:le:d Curtains*—not only in A4 size and thickness but in the dispersal idea of the

⁶⁴ *Violent Silence*, 25th-29th September, 1984, The Bloomsbury Theatre, London.

⁶⁵ *Violent Silence: Celebrating George Bataille*, The Georges Bataille Event, 1984.

contributors' names along with an artist's presence on the cover), I had the opportunity to use modern computer technology to assist with the layout. It was a matter of mastering (almost as if a battle, certainly a challenge) an Adobe system that enabled me to enjoy various fonts and sizes, manoeuvre images, columns, margins...just about anything I felt was necessary to enhance the work.

Or, as I wrote in the introduction: "I think it was imperative that if I was to enter the after-flow of the earlier *Curtains* it was to align it with an ongoing editorial template. Given the developments in technology over the intervening years, it was also necessary to resist any attempt to hand the texts and images over to a designer to present in a false and slick manner."⁶⁶

3

In 2015, on a visit to our home, Will Shutes suggested that a tape collection be edited from the rows of tapes on display in the living room. As noted towards the end of the following text (now slightly edited) that was inserted in the box set, the whole process—from the initial idea to the reality of a box set of ten audio tapes—happened quickly and spontaneously.

Sleeve notes etc⁶⁷

Curtains was a magazine that I edited in the 1970s. It started life in Maidstone, Kent, before being transported to our new home at Foster Clough, just outside Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire. It was high on the side of this Pennine Hill in the Calder Valley that the main development of *Curtains* and what was to determine my future occurred.

Curtains was never seen as neatly fitting any category. It did not even bear that title, but took on variant titles such as *Drann Curtains*, *French*

⁶⁶ *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, Slimvolume, 2016, p. 9.

⁶⁷ *Paul Buck's Pressed Curtains Tape Project*. Test Centre, 2015.

Curtains, *Velvet Curtains*, *A Range of Curtains*, *Split Curtains*, and the more trying *Curtains*, *le prochain step* and *bal:le:d curtains*. *Curtains* was not a poetry magazine either, though it contained poetry and was viewed as part of the poetry world. Initially I was intent on researching an area of writing between poetry and prose, a writing that was more likely to be written by poets, though not exclusively. Indeed, looking back through the issues I notice that the inclusions by poets veer more towards prose contributions. But this aspect became obscured because the magazine took on other roles, not only with its contributions by artists, but its principal force as a presenter of French writings within its British and American settings. Rather than sprinkle a few French poets, it became a ground for exploring French writing in a way that had not been done before, or since. It gained ground with Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot in particular, two key writers not given much attention at that point. Indeed, *Curtains* probably contributed to their recognition within the English-language world. But it was also a major contributor across other areas of French writing, bringing in Bernard Noël, Roger Laporte, Edmond Jabès, Jean-Pierre Faye, and others from the *Change* group, or Marcelin Pleyne from the *Tel Quel* group, or those poets and writers gathered around Claude Royet-Journoud, a key correspondent and friend to the magazine.

Halfway through the 1970s, the notion of performing, whether relating to “performance art” or in terms of the oral tradition of poetry, was another factor that became part of the fabric. I was combining the two courses and exploring the oral in terms of poetry, music, art, and ethnic traditions. It seemed natural to extend the boundaries of *Curtains* into a cassette tape series, even if no sophisticated equipment was available, either at home or nearby. The house that Glenda George and I had lived in was difficult to access without a car. That was also one of its plus points, for our days were filled with translating for the magazine, or trying to do other writings to earn enough to eat and pay the bills.

I am writing here from memory, only checking a few points from the shelves, not consulting archives boxed in the attic, waiting for their

turn to relocate to a suitable archive library capable of housing them. I am not seeking precision and pedantry here, but offering an impression of the time and the venture at hand.

My memory suggests that the cassette tape project came into existence when I had the opportunity to stage a reading by Eric Mottram in our living room, effectively the ground floor of our small, terraced home. It was large enough to invite around fifteen people to attend. They arrived in shared cars, for there would be little room to park along the country road. I probably could name all in attendance if I concentrate, but it is certain that Ulli McCarthy (as he was known at the time) and Jeff Nuttall were there. As was Mike Haslam, our next-door neighbour. And only this year I discovered that Jeremy Hilton and Bill Sherman met there that evening. No one stayed over as far as I recall. The reason why Eric Mottram was in the area has gone from my head.

The reading was in two parts, with a break for refreshments. Glenda had baked a cake and prepared other foods. This conducive atmosphere is noted by Eric on the tape. There is no editing, nothing is missing from his reading. We issued it afterwards as the first in the cassette series, *Pressed Curtains: Tape 1*, making copies from the master as requested, handwriting all the information on the sleeve and tape itself. References to published sources are in parentheses.

Eric Mottram reading in public at Foster Clough 19.9.76

- Side A: 1) The Painters (*Homage to Braque*)
2) for Philip Whalen (*Homage to Braque*)
3) Underground: A Passage in Neruda (*Homage to Braque*)
4) Homage to Ferenc Juhász
5) A Revolution: Elegy 8 – For Belá Bartók
6) Elegy 10: Lorca
7) Elegy 7: David Jones
8) The Effort (*1922 Earth Raids*)

- Side B: 1) from Five Derivations (*the be expression*)
A) Sunday through Saturday
B) Satie
C) Crumb

- 2) Life Speed (*against tyranny*)
- 3) Turning Point (*Local Movement*)
- 4) Elegy 5 (*1922 Earth Raids*)
- 5) Elegy 9: Gramsci
- 6) The Art of Fugue: Spring

One of the central concerns for the series was to include poets or writers who had an interest in oral work of one form or another. Ulli Freer (as he is known today) lived on the other side of the valley, and though we saw each other regularly at various events, we didn't spend a lot of time at each other's homes, as—without a car—access was difficult, as noted. From time to time when Ulli was at our house, we set up the recorder and made tapes, sometimes both of us reading one after another, for each other. Thus it was natural that we should share the second tape in the series.

Side A was given over to a recording I had made of one work, xxxx 7. It had been recorded a number of times over a period, and this version satisfied me most. It was part of a series called xxxx 1–9 that I started in October 75 and ended in written form in April '77. Some sections were published in magazines, some in booklets on their own. The series as a whole is not collected, because the later numbers, including xxxx 7, spawned other variations. xxxx 7 had an oral and performance interpretation, as well as a work that can be called an “art object”—texts attached to a frame and hung on the wall.

Paul Buck reading at Foster Clough 1.12.77: xxxx 7

As far as the oral version was concerned, my research was taking me through diverse areas of oral tradition, from the aboriginal sounds and compositional methods of the Arnhem Land to the Pygmies of Africa or the Inuit of the Arctic regions. Or the paths pursued by Artaud and other theatre explorers. Or the sound poetry of Cobbing, Dufrêne, Wolman, and more. Or the paths of music, whether Beefheart or Berio, Berberian or La Barbara. Let alone the contemporary ways of McClure, Schwerner, and Antin. Give me a board and I'll draw an extensive mapping.

Ulli was on Side B of what was labelled *Tape 2/3*. We both had an interest in disrupting the general tide of events (still do) and we determined to try recording with a loop playing on another recorder in the room, in this case, one from Satie's *Gymnopédies*, as it seemed to go counter to Ulli's work. We were aware with our primitive equipment that the auto balance would distort each sudden start of the music, often to flood Ulli's voice. (Noted by Allen Fisher in his substantial essay on Ulli's work in *bal:le:d curtains*.) Other times we adjusted the volume higher or lower as we proceeded. As was often the case, readings were made with the flow, not stopping or pausing to reconsider. This is common throughout these tapes. Ulli's reading was recorded between "2 and 3 pm" it is noted on the master tape (for some reason now forgotten). It was released under his name at the time.

Ulli McCarthy reading at Foster Clough 27.7.77

- 1) Sewing Room
- 2) Changing Pastures
- 3) 9 from Cutting Room (inc. Train the cut up rooms & Grant)
- 4) Drima
- 5) link – from Train the cut up room
- 6) 1 from Cutting Room
- 7) Trophies – Book One
- 8) Immersion Binding Department – Book One
(accompanied by 3rd from Satie's *Gymnopédies* on a loop)

That was the end of the tapes that were released. Two others were recorded and could have been issued if other events hadn't disrupted the life and existence of *Curtains*—and indeed our own lives—necessitating that we move back to our earlier ground in Maidstone. Primarily, it concerned the censorship problems around the magazine's sexual content that had pushed its way through local media attention into whether it was still viable to live in the area, for our son to attend school without undue interference, along with the unnerving air around the Yorkshire Ripper, his presence too close to our home. Thus we welcomed the opportunity to move south.

Before that happened, Bill Griffiths informed me that he would be in the area, so we invited him to our home to record. He taped 45 minutes. There are pieces used as interference, which must have been played on another machine. It all happened at one session on that day, on one master cassette.

Bill Griffiths recorded at Foster Clough 8.3.78

- 1) Version of a Preliminary Account of Nordrhein-Westfalen etc.
- 2) The Twenty-fifth Anniversary: Six Sections on the Scheduled Visit of the Queen to Paderborn
(*Twenty-Five Pages*)
- 3) Sequence (*Twenty-Five Pages*)

All these poems are now found in the *Collected Earlier Poems (1966-80)*.⁶⁸

Pierre Joris had a different interest in the oral, with an upbringing in European culture and a later connection and life with a range of American poets informing his way of writing. Pierre and I were involved with various French writers, poets, and publishers, and when both of us were separately asked to edit an anthology of British poetry, circumstances determined that we channel our efforts and do a joint venture. It went through various changes until appearing as the bilingual *Matières d'Angleterre: Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Anglaise*,⁶⁹ published under the auspices of the magazine *In'bui*. Its scope and strength has never been equaled in the French field and it still reflects a very interesting moment in time for those willing to seek out a copy. In the course of its preparations, Pierre's visits to Foster Clough enabled us to make some recordings. I note the master has two dates. It is issued as recorded, no editing.

Pierre Joris reading at Foster Clough 23.7.78

- Side A: 1) Heathwork
2) A bundle of rods...

⁶⁸ Edited by Alan Halsey and Ken Edwards. Reality Street, 2010.

⁶⁹ *Matières d'Angleterre: Anthologie bilingue de la Nouvelle Poésie Anglaise*. Les Trois Cailloux, 1984.

- 3) Matrosen Lied
- 4) Writing/Reading: section 6
- 5) extracts from Breccia

Pierre Joris reading at Foster Clough 3.8.77

- Side B:
- 1) Tracing
 - 2) a whole life spent
 - 3) All past time is dream, & like a dream has no center
 - 4) The words of Yourougou
 - 5) A bundle of rods...
 - 6) Artaud & Schreber

I wrote on the final page of *bal:le:d curtains*, the last in the series of the magazine, that both Allen Fisher and Iain Sinclair would be future contributors to the cassette series. They are listed to appear before Griffiths and Joris, though Fisher and Sinclair were never recorded specifically for the series. Indeed, I have never received any tape from Iain Sinclair, only ever books or manuscripts, going right back to our early days. Allen Fisher, however, sent tapes from time to time, sometimes of recorded and released readings or performances, other times of private readings, often work in progress. One of these tapes is:

Allen Fisher reading The Apocalyptic Sonnets at his home 9.2.77

The recording is personal, low-key. Allen indicates at the start those who will receive copies of the tape. Some are referred to in different sections of the work. The 16 “scores” are dedicated to Cosi & Genesis P-Orridge, as noted in the edition published after by Pig Press. I had forgotten, until now, that #15 is titled *Lust* and relates not only to the title of my book of that name, but is “following the treatment given his work by the Yorkshire press and The Arts Council of Great Britain,” by which Allen means attacks by all on my own work plus the quality of the contributors to my magazine, particularly by the head of the literature panel of the latter organization. Allen adds such commentary throughout.

One of the contributors to and main supporters of *Curtains* across the Atlantic was Robert Kelly. It was part of his doing that various writers and poets around him either found their way towards me, or towards

Curtains. It is even more apparent today in retrospect how important a magazine like *Web Way*, that he directed my way, was to my education. Robert's own contribution to my venture also took the form of responding to a request for a tape. We were planning a *Curtains* benefit event in Hebden Bridge itself, on 9.12.76, and I wanted him to be more directly involved, to play him reading his work on tape alongside the work that Glenda and I would read live by Bataille, Hans Bellmer, Eshleman, and Diane Wakoski. Robert kindly sent me a tape.

***Robert Kelly reading Masada & from the Persephone series
at a public reading at Bard College 26.10.76***

Later, when *The Book of Persephone* was published by Treacle Press, Robert thanked me as editor of *Curtains* for arranging "the first public reading of this text in England, via Helen's electronics—and so gave the text the realest unity it can possess, happening to people."⁷⁰

Another poet who was part of the vibrant '70s scene, and whose work across the written, the oral, and performance came to my attention was Cris Cheek. He would send me little booklets, some barely larger than a postage stamp. He was published in *Curtains* and also in another series, *Twisted Wrist*, which grew as a subsidiary publication, that included writings that did not fall into the themes that *Curtains* was shaping up around, but which needed to be published urgently. Later, after *Curtains* stopped (or halted temporarily, as I initially thought), *Twisted Wrist* became a kind of bridge to the coming issue. And the live issue of the magazine, at the London Musicians Collective on 12.10.85—with David Barton drawing live, Hazel Smith playing a solo violin version of *Agglomeration* by Logothetis, and Roxanna Ziolkowska performing my play, *Isabelle, out the window*, along with readings of the work of Noël, Laporte, Guyotat, Collobert (with no trace but in the memories of those in attendance and the publicity sheet)—was another way to say the magazine days had not finished.

It was whilst listening again to this tape by Cris that I rediscovered that the main part was an oral rendition of an 11-page calligraphic text

⁷⁰ Kelly, Robert. *The Book of Persephone*, Treacle Press, 1978, not numbered.

that I published as *Twisted Wrist* 8, the vocalization of the words and signs woven with sounds of his voice and other instruments at hand.

Cris Cheek reading at his home on 25.1.77, the text written the previous day, followed by a final section Towards Rooms

This tape was recorded for me and sent without a case, as the box and its sleeve were my additions, for it is my handwriting that repeats—more cryptically than above—what is written on the tape label. It appears to have arrived by mail, slipped in with the text, as the original manuscript still bears indentations of the compression and restriction in an envelope. Cris says on the tape that the final section was an earlier work from March '76, and that it was written without the knowledge that Ulli was engaged in writing a series called *Rooms*. The way the vocalization is signed off suggests that it was a one-for-one recording, which I recently confirmed was the case. Other than a visitor or two to our home, perhaps this is the first time it has been heard by anyone else, including its original sender.

When Glenda and I moved back to Maidstone we were engaged in a correspondence with Kathy Acker, whom I had met in Amsterdam at a poetry festival in 1979, and then two weeks later in Paris at another poetry event. As stated in the letters—which were published in facsimile form in 2004 as *Spread Wide*, a work intended as a homage to her following her early death—she was writing *Great Expectations* at the time, sending us books and manuscripts, lining up to be part of *Curtains* when it restarted. In any event, the only publishing we did together was her contribution to an almost secret series called *fête*, her page never republished to my knowledge.

One tape she sent, but which I cannot trace in its original form, is of a reading of *The Persian Poems* for the West Coast radio station, KPFA-FM, in a series called *In the American Tree*, probably sometime in 1980. The text is censored and Kathy adds a statement before reading.

Kathy Acker reading The Persian Poems (censored) on KPFA-FM

This brief sample of those around me would have been more complete if David Antin was included. We had exchanged letters, but

there was no transcription of a “talk piece” available for *Curtains*. In 1980 I acquired a published cassette of one made at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Perhaps I would have asked for a tape if my series had developed. It was more than 40 years after I had first started acquiring and reading his work that we met, in London, after his “talk piece” at the Cabinet Gallery in 2009. Over a meal a few days later, he expressed regret that it had been the wrong time, for he wished he had been included in *Curtains* more than in any other British magazine at that time.

The last tape is another personal tape, coming not from Jean-Luc Parant himself, but from our joint friend, Michel Camus, who was an editor of *Obliques* magazine and manager of Obliques, the Paris bookshop near Hôtel de Ville, both of which I was involved with. Both were contributors to *Curtains*. Parant’s work, as artist and writer—pursuing a work of “balls” and “eyes” in his continual cycle of repetitions and transformations—was offered to me in oral form by Michel on the flipside of a recording of Artaud’s final radio work, which was impossible to obtain at the time. It was unusual to hear the French read their work aloud, besides a few “sound” poets like Henri Chopin, Bernard Heidsieck, François Dufrière, Gil J. Wolman...in vinyl editions slipped into a magazine such as *Ou*.

***Jean-Luc Parant reads from his work,
accompanied on the organ by Titi Parant***

Jean-Luc gave me permission, as indeed did all the others above, though in his case he is probably not aware of which text I have on the tape; nor are we able to pinpoint from which source, published or unpublished, it is drawn, as yet.

But this is how this present collection has come into being. As a total counter to the regular history of delays, everything has rolled quickly, following the enthusiasm of Test Centre’s two publishers, Will Shutes and Jess Chandler, on a visit to this house, suggesting that we bring out these tapes and make a boxed set. It is thanks to them that the private becomes public, an endorsement of these writers’ contributions to a sense of community that I have always felt we were part of

and that we have all always seen ourselves as part of; I think that on that point I can speak for everyone included. The nature of gift is at the heart of these writers. Many stories could be told of their generosity on practical levels, let alone in their available writings for us to read and, indeed, hear here.

4

In 2011 Geraldine Monk asked for my memories of Curtains as she was compiling a volume of recollections with an emphasis away from “those two strongholds of poetic power” London and Cambridge, that are often used to define the more adventurous or radical poetry developments of the period “between World War II and the advent of the World Wide Web.” The term she embraced was “elsewhere,” which I referenced in turn.

What lies behind *Curtains*? Or what is truth when recounting memories?⁷¹

That title arrived as soon as I sat to write a few reminiscences on my magazine *Curtains* that ran with sturdy thighs through the 1970s. A few years ago Iain Sinclair whipped into place an anthology, *London: City of Disappearances*, in which his introduction recounts a remark by Lee Harwood relating to our time in Better Books in the late 1960s.⁷² Unfortunately, Lee was confusing me with another employee, Paul Selby, though the Penguin paperback edition didn't make the correction, the vagaries of memories being left to run their course. And that is what we live with, waves and weaves of memories that narrate various realities so that myths can become legends. Or, as James Fox said in relation to the Cammell/Roeg film, *Performance*, when asked to clarify or refute any of the myths that had grown up around the film, “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend,” a quote lifted from John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*.

⁷¹ *Cusp, Recollections of Poetry in Transition*, edited by Geraldine Monk. Shearsman Books, 2012, pp. 160-168.

⁷² *London: City of Disappearances*, edited by Iain Sinclair. Hamish Hamilton, 2006, Penguin, 2007.

For convenience, let's begin in Better Books, in London, around 1967-68, because that is where I worked, and that is where chance and circumstance collided and developed into that strategic project that was *Curtains*. The bookshop, which was also a meeting place, proffered an extraordinary array of writers on a daily basis. Many left their wares for sale, snapped up eagerly by the staff, "sold out" no sooner had the depositor set off along Charing Cross Road. Some are mentioned in the Sinclair anthology noted above, the full version of that text online in *Visions of the City*, under the title *Street of Dreams*.⁷³ Though my interests at that point encompassed theatre, poetry, and prose, I was drawn specifically to that oddity often called prose-poetry, or if not that precisely, at least to forms of prose writing that veered away from conventional fiction. I soon realized that my textual research would require places to be published.

Dulan Barber at John Calder had called me in to discuss a manuscript I had submitted. On the horizon I saw that there was some exciting writing under way across the Channel. While others were pussy-footing with the *nouveau roman*, I wanted to jump into bed with other writings, many with leanings of a sexual nature. This wasn't too hard to understand as my mother was Italian, and I had been brought up a good Catholic, at least until reason gained the upper hand. And so, when I asked John Calder directly one day if he had plans for further English translations of Georges Bataille and Philippe Sollers he suggested that if I wanted to read those writers, or similar, I'd have to read them in French. And so I did. And *Curtains* was born in the process, a magazine that became a public research space where I could juxtapose my own writings alongside the work of writers I read, met, or corresponded with. As it sparked into life, after a spluttering start with a trial magazine, *Snow* (one edition), that had included Andrew Crozier, David Coxhead, Jeff Nuttall (early *People Show* scripts), Bob Cobbing, Stephen Vincent, Penelope Shuttle, Harold Norse, and Christine Bowler.⁷⁴ I moved from London to Maidstone

⁷³ See <http://www.visionsofthecity.com/streetofdreams01.htm> for a version with photographs added. Included in *Street of Dreams*, Ma Bibliothèque, 2020.

⁷⁴ *Snow*, X press, 1978.

in Kent. My trips back and forth to the metropolis were shaped around part-time work for Fulcrum Press, placing their books (as a “rep”) in various shops around London or on sorties to key cities around the country like Oxford, Cambridge, Liverpool, Manchester, Brighton, Birmingham, etc. Reading manuscripts at Fulcrum enabled me to pick up on the prose of Roy Fisher and Larry Eigner, I recall.

Like anything of real interest, there is no linear narrative to unravel and plot the course neatly—there is always a weave, a mosaic, a labyrinth. Names too can be strewn left and right. The formidable young English prose writers who intrigued me in those early days included David Coxhead, Doug Oliver, Martin Wright, Paul Selby, Kris Hemensley...names that prove the point today of how hard it is to carve one’s way with adventurous prose writing on this little island. And by naming names, I omit names, neglect names...Tomorrow night I might include others.

The French connections expanded rapidly, courtesy of my friendship with Claude Royet-Journoud (whom I met in Better Books), whose generosity knew no bounds: with daily letters and notes telling me about poets and writers, or sending me their texts, or instructing publishers, writers, and magazines to send me their work, feeding my voracious appetite through the 1970s. For no sooner had the decade started than we abandoned the sweet-smelling air of Maidstone, with its breweries and confectionary factories, for a millstone grit house on the Pennines, next door to Mike Haslam, who had found the property for Glenda and me and our child. I wasn’t to know that our move from the relative comfort of Southern England to a degree of isolation on the edge of the windy moorland in the North would give me most of a decade to dig in, produce a magazine, and set the groundwork for the 1980s and beyond, after we returned to the South.

What is key in my research—the term that I have always applied to *Curtains*, and indeed my own writings—is that there was never any attempt to edit in terms of gender, age, fame, nationality...or place of living, or indeed place of education. This was research that went wherever the needs required. And as the issues took shape, another

important development occurred when *Curtains* adopted the form of an essay. I was never interested in producing a magazine that just presented the latest writings of a particular person, or that encouraged unsolicited submissions (often from people who had never seen the magazine in the first place), with intent to market the whole caboodle as a representative product of “contemporary poetry.” It was always about juxtapositions of contributors and contributions. The possibility was there because I was selecting from a diversity of French-published sources, and then finding links to English and American poets/writers whose work I thought tied in on various levels. In that respect it became easier to produce a magazine that was almost an essay, a work that you could read from start to finish, allowing ideas and issues to evolve, the contributions having another context than their own specific interests. As the magazine progressed some of these writers, including the French, would respond to an edition and send me work that they thought would interest me.

I think of Eric Mottram’s essay on Derrida, or Allen Fisher’s piece on Ulli Freer, or Robert Kelly’s poems. Or again, Robert Clark on Soutine. Others too wrote works they said they would not have written otherwise. I’m sure I was also taking my lead from the French magazines I was reading—not only *Change*, Jean Pierre Faye’s magazine, that had developed such a strong bond with me that I ventured to Paris and sat in on “collectif” meetings, forging friendships and strong links with Faye, and indeed Mitsou Ronat, to name two of the group. There were other magazines too—*Chemin de Ronde*, *Dérive*, *Erres*, *Exit*, *Fragment*, *Gramma*, *Minuit*, *Obliques*, *Tel Quel*—that contributed to and influenced my editing, and indeed invited me into their pursuits.

The fact that many women were on board—Mitsou Ronat, Danielle Collobert, Agnès Rouzier, Michèle Richman, Rosmarie Waldrop, Lydia Davis, Geraldine Monk, Laure, Ulrike Meinhof, Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Wendy Mulford, Carlyle Reedy, Glenda George, artists like Susan Hiller, Gina Pane, Colette Deblé, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Elaine Shemilt, Alison Wilding (and these are the ones who spring to mind without checking the contents pages)—at a time when there

“appeared” to be few women writing in these fields, had more to do with my interest in the ideas they were pursuing and the sensibilities of their writings and approaches. (I note that Anne-Marie Albiach and Jacqueline Risset were also in my trajectory, and each appeared in work I did away from *Curtains*, and Kathy Acker bounded into my path just as the magazine ended, so became part of a satellite publication *fête*,⁷⁵ and later the book *Spread Wide*.)⁷⁶ The fact that I took on many more French writers than others was more to do with aspects of their work with language and “writing,” and their openness to explore with me and invite me into their research spaces. At that time, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Edmond Jabès were still gaining footholds in France. There was barely any interest here in the UK or in America. Instead, I received countless unsolicited translations of surrealist writers, which I turned back, as I viewed a slew of magazines that would be receptive to those writings. My interest was unexplored territory.

That said, I needed translators. I would regularly write to British poets and ask if they were interested in translating a poet or poem I had found, or a short prose text. Sometimes it worked, most times it didn't. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis however were interested in Bataille and Blanchot, as I was, so they became allies and helped to open up that avenue. And Rosmarie Waldrop was working in a major way through the work of Jabès. That was a real bonus. But in the main, those asked had other poets they wanted to translate, some of whom were amenable to my interests. So we had to take on the rest. I always thought it would be good to just focus on one or two writers/poets as those above had determined for themselves—good for oneself as a translator (and invariable for one's own writing), and also good for the one translated, putting them on the map in a better way. But that was not the job I had set myself. I wanted to give a breadth to the field I was exploring, to give context to the French as

⁷⁵ *fête* was an A4 sheet folded in two, that ran from 1979-81. Each contribution started with a Georges Bataille quote (from *Le Petit*). The seven were: myself, Glenda George, Paul Green, Ulli McCarthy, Kathy Acker, Kris Hemensley, and Sylvie Nève.

⁷⁶ *Spread Wide*, an encounter between Paul Buck and Kathy Acker (her letters), plus interventions from John Cussans and Rebecca Stephens. Dis Voir, 2004.

well as to the English-speaking contributors. To have translated more of Roger Laporte's work would have been valuable, to name one who interested, and still interests, me. And I never got to grips at that time with Mathieu Bénézet, which I regret tremendously. Or...oh dear, the floodgates could be opened. We had so much on our plate.

I say we, for Glenda George, my partner during that decade, was instrumental in taking on board text after text that I found. Her days became cliff-top adventures as I presented her with books and magazines with markers protruding, the results of working through the post, reading the publications sent or asked for. Or others that had journeyed back with us from our expeditions to Paris. One time we went for a six-week trip to Paris, then Mauregny-en-Haye to stay with Bernard Noël, then on to Lausanne to stay with the editor for whom I wrote crime essays (the only paying work I had at that time), to find on return that our neighbour had borrowed a mailbag from our postman to house the daily influx. That bag was full to the brim with letters and packets, and took me five months to work through.

And whilst the French exploits were afoot, I was also breaking the boundaries into art, particularly performance art. And the natural progression of those drawn in from a British poetry world continued to link with those often rounded up as Cambridge poets: John James, Peter Riley, Rod Mengham, and others who found themselves in another satellite publication, *Twisted Wrist*, like John Wilkinson and David Trotter. But nothing was simple. All these poets and writers were not members of cliques to me. My affiliations with Allen Fisher, Ulli Freer, and others were key to my research. Ulli lived within the echo of a shotgun blast across the valley, outside Sowerby Bridge, before eventually moving to Leeds. Ulli chose to move back to London at the end of the 1970s, at the same time as we moved back to Maidstone, because of various circumstances, but also to distance ourselves from the tensions around the Yorkshire Ripper. We felt vulnerable with a child who walked daily to school along a country road, and Glenda had also picked up the phone to an 'I'm Jack' phone call and decided to engage with the caller—which was

ultimately unnerving when it became known not long after that he was suspected of being the Ripper.

I always felt I was an outsider because I was not part of one group or another. And my involvements with those in America veered across their groups, taking in poets like Larry Eigner, Cid Corman, Robert Kelly, George Quasha, Jed Rasula, Jerome Rothenberg, and David Antin; or the younger L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, then others. It was a mosaic, not a jigsaw puzzle that fitted together neatly.

For the final few years, *Curtains* received a small regional grant to help with costs. It paid for the basic printing only. I typed the plates and we collated and staple-bound the volumes ourselves on the living room floor, which was backbreaking once it became a tightly-packed, 210-page, A4 issue. I was including such large extracts of Bataille, Blanchot, Faye, Jabès, Noël, Laporte, Marcelin Pleynet, Charles Juliet, and others, alongside the English-language contributions and artists' work from Gina Pane, Jean-Luc Parant, Vladimir Veličković, Ramon Alejandro, Robert Clark, Brian Catling, Paul Neagu, Susan Hiller, Henri Maccheroni, etc, etc. Few of them were known at the time. After the printing bill was paid, using the finance from a number of subscriptions enabled me to post further free copies into what I hoped would be good homes. (The time-consuming translation work by all of us was of course done for free.) Today, I have almost no copies left as so many were given away, but it seems to have had some influence. Selections from it have been re-edited and appeared in publications here in the UK and in America. And offers to do an anthology periodically appear. An anthology is feasible, but not in the way that most construe it. I would need to do an anthology in a far more radical way, reevaluating the whole notion. I couldn't just gather all the texts together and agree to play the historical acceptability card; and indeed, I'm not sure time is on my side as recent research into copyright and permissions makes the task somewhat daunting. Gone are the days when Blanchot would write to tell me not to bother with official permission from the Gallimard office and just to press on with publishing (on that occasion, almost two-thirds of his book *Death*

Sentence) and leave it to him to explain to M. Gallimard directly what I was doing. I know many friends who still have cupboards full of their publications because they were afraid to give them away. To me the point was—and still is—that if you believe in your publication, you should get it to those readers who seem interested.

And so, when *Curtains* blew up, mainly because I was drawing together questions around censorship on various fronts—reflected in my own writings—it ended sharply, and I moved my research on to other projects from my new base outside London. With Roger Ely I staged a week-long event around Georges Bataille, called *Violent Silence*,⁷⁷ that included nightly performances of *My Mother*, translated and adapted for the stage.⁷⁸ I also advanced into music worlds (producing a handful of albums in the process), film worlds (making long and short films), and also the art world, as a platform to pull the threads together. It's not that I moved away from the poetry world, but that I allowed the poetry to expand into other ventures. I have never seen that any art form or discipline should be closed within itself—not for my interests. Perhaps it would be easier to be a playwright and write plays for the Royal Court (I use that example because that is the first place I was attached to, prior to Better Books, around the time of Edward Bond's *Saved*). It would have made life so much easier. Or to be a painter and explore another language on a canvas. That is one type of “bliss” that I've imagined for myself that will never occur. Instead, I suspect that with hindsight, my work has been to focus on particular concerns and to find the disciplines and avenues to venture into for that limited time, with varying degrees of success.

⁷⁷ The only hard copy evidence remaining is a book, *Violent Silence: Celebrating George Bataille* (The Georges Bataille Event, 1984), an anthology of contributions from many of those participating, along with three substantial essays on Bataille and extensive bio and bibliographic details. A vinyl mini-album, *Violent Silence* (Some Bizzare, 1986), offers the set of five compositions written and performed by Marc Almond for the event. Extensive filming was undertaken for a documentary, but all the original tapes have disappeared, only copies of parts remain in the private hands of some of those involved.

⁷⁸ Playscript unpublished, in author's archives.

Then again, what is success? “I don’t compose objects but the journey from one object to the other. The route one travels is more important than the vehicle one travels in,” as Gérard Grisey, the French composer, wrote.⁷⁹ I am more interested in being part of a relay team than being the solo sprinter or distance runner. I always relished taking third leg in the house team at school, because I loved running and leaning into that final bend, handing to the anchor man, who was usually not in the lead, so it wasn’t a matter of winning, but participating. That seems to set me out of step with what one is supposed to be or do as a writer or artist. And yet I am still working, more than ever, harder than ever, and noticing that, besides the concerns that have always been there to explore, there seems to be a very marked way in which I work—something that started with *Curtains*, as I noted, and that involves the constant pulling out of threads from the mass of my notes and resources to weave them into another work. Or, as I said recently in terms of the book I published, *A Public Intimacy*,⁸⁰ based on a pile of scrapbooks that I’ve kept since 1964: I pull out and plant ideas as disturbances on the tracks so that the reader picks them up unconsciously, holding them until triggered later in the text. It is this process that is a feature of my work, and I know that angle took root during that period editing *Curtains*.

So, dear Geraldine, I can see where you are coming from with the notion of London, Cambridge...and “elsewhere”—a sense that those outside those two prime locations or “schools” are excluded, or are on the road to exclusion with the climate as perceived. I recall when we first connected in the 1970s, I was living outside Hebden Bridge, overlooking Mytholmroyd—the birthplace of one Ted Hughes, an irony given my interests which has not escaped me. From that lofty height at Foster Clough someone called my “ivory tower” (trying to be facetious when they actually wanted me to publish their poetry, and not the incomprehensible “stuff” they said I did publish), the *Curtains* caught the breeze, if not something more akin to gusts and gales. “Elsewhere” is indeed the place where I am best “categorized” when it comes to just about everything that I’m associated with. I

⁷⁹ See footnote 11.

⁸⁰ Buck, Paul. *A Public Intimacy (a life through scrapbooks)*. Book Works, 2011.

think that that is the plus side of what I've been about all these years. And whilst I could probably make a good case for neglect of my efforts, I could also say that if I hadn't been elsewhere—in every respect—I would not have done the various works. In fact, I've quite enjoyed the notion of being at a remove.

Some of the fascinations that evolved from *Curtains* and from involvements in Parisian circles, like *Change*, which itself allowed admittance to their circle for Peter Riley, Doug Oliver, Allen Fisher, Ulli Freer, Glenda, and myself,⁸¹ was to be in Paris and not to hang out around the English-language depot of Shakespeare & Co., but to attend meetings in backrooms in the Rue de Seine, or various restaurants, bars and apartments around St. Germain and the Left Bank. *Change* also generated an Anthology of English poetry,⁸² that shifted around a bit before finally shaping as a co-editing with Pierre Joris, an anthology that was chosen to suit the tastes and interests of the contemporary French poetry scene. It was immensely enjoyable to venture to Paris and read in Obliques Bookshop with Ulli and Jerry Rothenberg and to have an assortment of French poets, *Change* writers, Jabès, and others I didn't know jammed into the shop to listen. Or to do a reading at another venue and be approached by a warm and enthusiastic Henri Michaux.

Elsewhere has meant more to me than being tied to anything specific. Elsewhere was where it was happening and still is happening. Today, I'm trying to reduce the explorations of all those years where film and music have had their play; or the various transgressive behaviours around criminality and sexuality that have had their fill; or the more recent involvements in Portuguese culture. Since those heady days of *Curtains*, those days in the hills, I've lived whole lives in other fields. Some people I'm sure would have been pleased just to have ventured into one of those areas. But the real nub for me is the use of the term "career." That is an anathema and a misconception. I might well be asked to write songs for someone today, but I have to decline because there is nothing I need to actually explore in that field at this time. I

⁸¹ *Change 36, Set International*. Seghers/Laffont, 1978.

⁸² *Matières d'Angleterre*, edited by Paul Buck and Pierre Joris. Troix Cailloux, 1984.

do not wish to take on anything just because I have a track record in that activity. Unless there is a biting need for research, there is no need. I see ahead of me the possibility of some years with art and writing projects. I'm very lucky and privileged, I know, to be able to have enough health and energy to keep up the drive that is necessary to be always exploring, never resting back on possible laurels. And that again is part of the pleasure of being elsewhere. For me being elsewhere is being somewhere.

I think I've stopped teaching/tutoring in the art school system, bar one or two lectures, and I think I have almost come to the end of editing, as I do not keep up with "now" in the broadest sense. That need for dissemination of my passions is now bound into my work and seems to have taken the form of work/writings that offer possibilities for others to research and take further. The core today seems to be about exploring archives and resources to make something new. One challenge is not to slip into the trap of romanticism and nostalgia, but to find the edge, and to play in the margins. And I still have not properly tackled the idea that my mother was Italian, though I have drafted an essay for a possible book with a couple of others who have not explored their Italian-ness enough either. Perhaps the word "elsewhere" is better served by the word "margins." I live and work in the margins, but treat those margins as the centre, according them my time, energy...and passion. Perhaps if you live your life with passion you make it difficult to be excluded.

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*This consciousness within her
uncurled itself upon the rollers of objective experience
printing impressions
vaguely and variedly
upon Ova
in place of the more formulate education
coming naturally
to the units of a national instigation*

—Mina Loy
from "Ova, Among the Neighbors"

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HAZEL SMITH — POETRY (ask title)

(no) ROGER LAPORTE — PERIST

ME — RIPENING

(no) PIERRE GUYOTAT — EDEN HOW EDEN

HAZEL SMITH — VARIATIONS BY LYEL CRESSWELL

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HAZEL SMITH — POETRY (ask title)

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SUKOFKA

ROXANA ZIOL KOWSKA — ISABELLE, OUT THE WINDOW BY PAUL BUCK

“Live Curtains” set list, circa 1985
[Image courtesy of Paul Buck]