

GETTING READY TO STAY DEAD

WITH “WHERE WE ARE IS IN A SENTENCE”: JACK SPICER AND CATHERINE
WAGNER’S POETICS OF CORRESPONDENCE

by

JULIA RUTH MAHER

(Under the Direction of EDWARD PAVLIĆ)

ABSTRACT

Getting Ready to Stay Dead examines the uncanny texture of address between impossible—but necessary—interlocutors. Chapter I: “Where we are is in a sentence,” explores the ways in which Jack Spicer and Catherine Wagner’s correspondence poetics attempts to collocate author and reader, flattening out the supposed hierarchies that exists within acts of cultural creation. Drawing on theories of address within both the epistolary and lyric genres, I argue that in figuring acts of reading and writing as simultaneous and ongoing a correspondence poetics revitalizes not just traditional understandings of how readers encounter the lyric, but the aesthetically and politically transformative qualities of the genre. Chapter II: “Getting Ready to Stay Dead,” presents a selection of prose and lyric poems composed largely via a self-sent and self-received chain of epistolary emails. The collection intentionally confounds and conflates generic boundaries, as well as

questions of who is talking to whom. Asking readers to both occupy and deny the space of the *you* within them the poems foreground the phenomenologically uncanny experience of *you* within poetry, or what William Waters' refers to as poetics' "wild spot" that makes "an accidental reader into the destined and unique recipient of everything the poem contains or is."

INDEX WORDS: Poetry, Poetics, Necropoetics, Lyric, Epistolary, Prose Poem, Address, Apostrophe, Women's Studies

GETTING READY TO STAY DEAD
WITH “WHERE WE ARE IS IN A SENTENCE”: JACK SPICER AND CATHERINE
WAGNER’S POETICS OF CORRESPONDENCE

By

JULIA RUTH MAHER

B.A., Union College, 2003

M.A., New York University, 2006

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2015

© 2015

Julia Ruth Maher

All rights reserved

GETTING READY TO STAY DEAD
WITH “WHERE WE ARE IS IN A SENTENCE”: JACK SPICER AND CATHERINE
WAGNER’S POETICS OF CORRESPONDENCE

By

JULIA RUTH MAHER

Major Professor: Edward Pavlić

Committee: Jed Rasula
Aidan Wasley

Electronic version approved:

Julie Coffield
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for their support during comprehensive exams and the dissertation, for their careful reading of this and my other work, and the lively discussions that ensued before and after. I would also like to thank my classmates at UGA for helping move both me and these poems. And my mother, father, and family: thank you for being who you are. Much, much love to Clovis Vladimir Patrice Anjard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
1 “WHERE WE ARE IS IN A SENTENCE”: JACK SPICER AND CATHERINE WAGNER’S POETICS OF CORRESPONDENCE	1
I. “I Am Darling You”: <i>Letter Metes Lyric</i>	3
II. <i>Dictation versus Volition</i> : “Keep it Loose”	8
III. <i>Poetry, Politics, and the Youth</i>	15
IV. <i>Cognitive Dis-sentence: The Future Perfect Reader</i>	20
2 GETTING READY TO STAY DEAD	31
WORKS CITED	45

CHAPTER 1

“WHERE WE ARE IS IN A SENTENCE”: JACK SPICER AND CATHERINE WAGNER’S
POETICS OF CORRESPONDENCE

The poetries of Jack Spicer and Cathy Wagner “do not connect; they correspond” (*my vocabulary* 133). Both poets turn the idea of correspondence—that between ideas and objects, as well as between people—into not a process of poetic composition. Like the relationship Spicer established with the then-dead Federico Garcia Lorca in his book *After Lorca*, Wagner’s extension of Spicer’s final collection, *Book of Magazine Verse* (1966), in her serial “Magazine Poems,” (2001) creates an intertextual space of poetic correspondence between her and her predecessor. Here, lyric intimacy burns down its supposedly solipsistic walls of self-introspection and isolation. In both sets of Magazine Poems, the active engagement between individuals radiates outwards towards a larger audience, calling for an ever greater response. Spicer and Wagner’s poems show readers how a poetics of correspondence can become a politically effective and responsible way of being an artist in the world.

Spicer and Wagner’s Magazine Poems are informed by two interrelated concerns: the experience of authority in the joint processes of composition and reception, and the peculiar ways in which the second person figures our experience (as both readers and writers) of such an authority. While distinct, Wagner and Spicer’s poetics of correspondence and their processes of composition and reception manifest a union between reader and writer. Moreover, this poetics of correspondence figures the joint acts of reading and writing themselves as not just aesthetically

but also politically transformative. In short, I believe that these poets and their poems give us a revitalized way of both reading and writing lyric poetry.

The second person and address could hardly be more pervasive or paramount in our everyday experience—just think of status updates, tweets, or even the way in which your web-based email, in purloining your own correspondence, attempts to cater to your hobbies, interests, and shopping habits. Address is foundational not just to our every, everyday utterance—we are almost always attempting to communicate something to someone—but increasingly faceless and inescapable—all these new kinds of missives zooming at us from all sorts of social media seem more concerned with transmission than actual, returned correspondence. Spicer and Wagner’s insistence on the intentionality and directionality of their work shows us how to push back against language’s otherwise seemingly abstract and potentially impersonal flow, and their attention to address reminds us how we constantly mediate and are mediated by our own and others’ vocabularies. On his deathbed Jack Spicer explained to Robin Blaser: “my vocabulary did this to me” (*my vocabulary* xviii). In a heart-wrenching inversion of the old adage, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” While Wagner, working against the same silly line, warns us that to think words can’t touch us is to risk disappearing: “Their mean vibrations had nothing / through which to reverb / I was so OK” (*Miss America* 9, “A Poem for *Social Text*”).

A comparative study of the poetries of two interrelated poets, this essay is also, fundamentally, an inquiry into the role and function that address holds within these as well as other poetries. I begin by discussing the scholarship on the function and feel of address within verse as well as epistolary writing, then consider the evolution of Spicer’s rather singular conception of composition via dictation, and close with discussion of how Wagner builds on and

off of this process in her own notions of the use of so-called “trance state work” and being with others during the process of writing. (“On Writing with Catherine Wagner”).

Scholarship on Spicer is limited though becoming increasingly good, while scholarship on Cathy Wagner’s work has yet to really catch up with the poet herself. For my analysis of Spicer’s radically democratic understanding of artistic creation and audience reception, I build on the work of Peter Gizzi and Robin Blaser, as well as contemporary critic Kelly Holt, who notes the epistolarity of Spicer’s writing and its connection to desire for a poetic community at once material as well as metaphysical. For Wagner, I work largely through interviews wherein she discusses the performative aspect of her poetry, and the correspondence with readers and audience she desires to include, somehow pre-performance, within their poems themselves.

I. “I Am Darling You”¹: *Letter Metes Lyric*

Traditional studies of lyric address make much of the *I* speaker, and not so much of the actual *you* recipient. Often such studies read the *you* as a mere stand-in for the speaker’s own divided consciousness. Early 20th-century studies of lyric apostrophe and address, most notably those by Northrop Frye and Jonathan Culler, tended to follow J.S. Mill’s description of 19th-century lyric as the genre “overheard.” In so doing, these critical analyses of address focus on the narrator’s “pretension” of position and voice, assuming the *you* of lyric to be, if not a stand-in for the speaker’s own fragmented consciousness, simply chimera: a *you* unknown or unknowable (Waters 3). More recently, theories of address built around Helen Vendler’s assertion that poetry, as a performative art of the voice, causes the reader to identify herself with the speaker, whether her recitation of the lyric be silent or uttered, have sought new methods of aligning the *I* of lyric

¹ This is the title of one of the poems in Wagner’s *Miss America*, her first collection and the one under study in this essay. I hesitate to call it a relationship poem, but it is.

with its reader's *I* (Vendler xi).² These readings of lyric isolation—the poet writing alone in her room, the reader likewise lonely in her reading—present strikingly similar images of the isolated, fragmented consciousness sealed tightly within the study of her own mind. In fact, while Mill's famous definition of lyric was itself built on his study of 19th-century Romantic specimens of the genre, later critics have found its emphasis on the divided self resonant alongside the trenchant fragmentation of Modernism. However, the past ten years of critical inquiry into modern and contemporary American uses of lyric address and apostrophe have challenged this image considerably.³

In *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address*, William Waters argues that readers can just as easily find themselves identifying with lyric's frequent *you* as they can its *I*. In fact, he argues, the second-person pronoun is far more persistent in its desire to be embodied than others, and that the question of how a reader engages phenomenologically with poetry—though both mind and emotion—via the second person is central to “the reasons why we read poetry at all” (Waters 15). Waters believes that the lyric's second-person *you* creates a reader who is both “accidental” and “destined”:

The *you* that (perhaps) calls to the reader is a wild spot in poetics, a dynamically moving gap in whatever secure knowledge about poetry we think we might have; and “live” as it is, this *you* makes palpable poetry's claim on being read, which is to say, its claim to make an accidental reader into the destined and unique recipient of everything the poem contains or is. (Waters 15)

² In her own book on address, Ann Keniston reminds her readers that Vendler's assertion of the reader's identification with the poetic “I” of lyric, so often cited in subsequent studies of address (see Bahti, *Ends of Lyric*, in particular) is actually a revision of her earlier “implication that lyric equates addressee with reader,” in the essay “A Quarter of Poetry” (Keniston 134).

³ See especially Barbara Johnson.

For Waters, the *you*'s siren call is insistent enough for any (all) of us to answer, and that the wild spot it creates (who is this *you* within the poem?) forms a potentially open moment within the supposedly closed system of lyric isolation.

Michael Macovski examines just such break-downs, or what we might think of as extensions of generic space and influence, through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* in his multi-genre study of Romantic lyrics and novels. He claims, for example, that William Wordsworth's dialogic structure in some of his lyric poems makes them "communicative" in the sense that the utterance within them is "linguistically encompassing—connecting not only diverse readers but manifold characters and distant voices as well" (Macovski 47). Interestingly Macovski's description stands in stark contrast to Bakhtin's definition of lyric as a world of a single, "unitary and indisputable discourse" (Bakhtin 286).

Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, studies of epistolary fiction are also centered on the function of the second-person and the role it plays within the intimacy often inscribed within a letter, just as within a lyric poem. Similar to these more recent efforts to expand our notions of the relationship between lyric poet, poem, and addressee, these studies tend to read the letter as a physical mediator between speaker and addressee as well as a figure for the reader herself. They see the letter as something that moves through public space (the streets, fields, and waters of the republic) into intimate space (the entryway, living room, home office, and even bedroom). In her book *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, Janet Gurkin Altman claims that the letter becomes, by turns, both a "figure for the lover" as well as a "'medium' in the spiritualistic sense" (19, 37). The physicality of the letter becomes a site inscribed with desire of all sorts. Likewise, as a portable body, the letter "can provide space in which to practice conversing privately or to bridge the gap between private and public," Anne

Bower reminds us in *Epistolary Responses* (8). As a physical body, as well as the container of address, the letter can act as a bridge between both the writer and recipient, whoever that recipient—intended or mediated— might turn out to be. Moreover, “epistolary discourse” becomes a sort of sliding scale of agency and power: “we read any given letter from at least three points of view—that of the intended or actual recipient as well as that of the writer and our own. Even when only implied, the interpretation that the addressee would give to a letter enters into our own reading . . .” (Altman 111). The letter as body of exchange creates a multiple—whether joyous or not—out of both authority and meaning. Such a reading of “epistolary discourse” holds true to our phenomenological experience of reading across genres—we read verse epistles, many of which are addressed to known persons or writers, in a similar way, the hinge, of course, being that tricky *you*.⁴

This description of the three-part point of view inspired by literary epistles, seems the most viable way in which to describe the phenomenological experience of reading both Jack Spicer’s *Book of Magazine Verse* and Cathy Wagner’s subsequent “Magazine Poems.” Unlike Spicer’s earlier dedicated lyrics or published epistles, each of which is addressed to a single individual (whether alive or dead), the poems of *Book of Magazine Verse* and Wagner’s “Magazine Poems” are each dedicated (read: addressed) to a particular magazine. Yet published as they are, in single-volume poetry collections, their actual readers are both accidental as well as destined. While these poems never appear in the magazines for which they are ostensibly written, they are also always intended to reach some audience of readers. Moreover, each set of Magazine Poems has shifted its attention and use of address away from the concerns of Spicer’s

⁴ Bill Overton makes use of Altman’s concept of ‘addressee-consciousness’ in his exhaustive study, *The Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle*.

earlier lyrics and epistles: these poems aren't simply meant to be read over the shoulder, as it were, of their named intended, as one feels in parts of *After Lorca*, and all of *Admonitions*, they are meant to be read by a larger audience. Direct address in both poets' sets of Magazine Poems seeks to disclose and correspond with a different, larger community: a community of readers.

While the poems remain intimately charged along their speaker-addressee axis, their dedications to magazines rather than people has changed the rules of the game. This interplay between public and private at the center of the epistolary genre gets an interesting showing here. Are Spicer and Wagner addressing the magazine as an entity— a collective of writers, editors, selectors and fact checkers? Are they addressing folks who identify with these particular magazines, readers with subscriptions? Are they addressing non-readers, those who remain critical of the cultural purchase of the titular magazines? Tonally, these poems are highly critical of their titular correspondent. Over and over, the poems emphatically question a magazine's rights to power as arbiter of art and culture.

As purloining (purloined?) readers of these poems we are aligned—against the magazines—with this critical stance itself. Moreover, the critical stance that these poems model (they are almost always attempting to disclose the faulty logic, vapidness, or simply bad choices of their titular addressees) attempts to collocate the acts of composition and reception. In this, it resembles epistolary writing itself:

The epistolary form is unique among first person forms in its aptitude for portraying the experience of reading. . . . If pure autobiography can be born of the mere desire to express oneself, without regard for the eventual reader, the letter is by definition never the product of such an 'immaculate conception,' but is rather the result of a union of writer and reader. (Altman 88)

If letters come into being only through this union between reader and writer, Spicer and Wagner's poems point to the uses of these sorts of unions. Their Magazine Poems offer alternative ways in which to "read" each magazine's position, power, and content in order to model how we as readers are always implicated in the creation of position, power, and culture—figured in this instance as a magazine. By highlighting this slippery but powerful—and potentially active—texture of address they ask readers to question their own addressers—people, poets, politicians, and magazines.

II. *Dictation versus Volition*: "Keep it Loose"

The largest collision of lyric and letter for Spicer happens in his seminal "first" book, *After Lorca*, published in 1957. Composed of a combination of transformed/translated Garcia Lorca lyrics and letters written from Spicer to the late Lorca, the book also contains poems that Spicer "disclosed" himself (i.e. lyrics that look and sound like Lorca, but aren't quite) and an "Introduction" to the reader penned by Spicer-as-Lorca. In a book such as this one, hybridity becomes a question not just of genre but of subjective identity itself. Who is the poet here, anyways? Spicer's anxiety of influence is subsumed—or at least quite fetchingly parodied by this masque.

In *After Lorca*, Spicer first outlines the concepts that will become essential to his poetic process: seriality (or composition by book), dictation (an involuntary process whereby the poet receives the poem as messages transmitted from a radical "Outside,") and correspondence. In the book's combination of prose letters and verse lyrics, authorship of the former is fixed by the greeting and closing of each, while authorship of the latter is far less specified. Spicer's notion of correspondence is two-fold: first, there is his correspondence with the dead Lorca via both the

book's letters; second, there is the method of dictation by which the non-Spanish speaking Spicer is able to "translate" Lorca's Spanish lyrics not just into English, but effectively into Spicer. During his three-day lecture series in Vancouver in 1965 (given while he was in the midst of receiving the dictation for *Book of Magazine Verse*) he claims that his correspondence with Lorca was singular and direct: "[with Lorca it] was just a direct connection like on the telephone (*House* 138). These phone conversations with a dead poet mark the beginning of his correspondence via dictation with an even more radical "Outside," as we shall see in *Book of Magazine Verse*.

Spicer's "dictation" desecrates the poetic ego from its position of primacy by reconfiguring authorial composition as reception: dictated poems arrive as "messages" sent to the poet from some source who is simultaneously outside as well as immanent. Spicer thinks of writing and reading in precisely the same—or some might say, opposite—terms, thereby flattening the supposed hierarchy that exists between them. Generally, we think of the position of artist and audience thus wise: writing is the act of creating art, reading is the act of consuming art. The writer writes, and the audience reads. Spicer sees it quite the other way around. For Spicer, reading is a way to locate one's own voice and ideas, whereas writing is about dislocating the self from a position of power. In *After Lorca*, Spicer discusses how translation, for him, has little to do with fidelity to language and more to do with a fidelity to his own "correspondence" with Lorca's work. Spicer believes that all "poets" are always "patiently telling the same story," that they are always "disclosing" something inherent rather than inventing something new (*vocabulary* 110-111). The work of translating this same story becomes an act of locating "correspondences" between Lorca's world and Spicer's:

That tree you saw in Spain is a tree I could never have seen in California, that lemon has a different smell and a different taste, BUT the answer is this—every place and every time has a real object to correspond with your real object—that lemon may become this lemon, or it may even become this piece of seaweed, or this particular color of gray in this ocean. One does not need to imagine that lemon; one needs to discover it.

(*vocabulary* 134)

For Spicer, the poet should devote himself to becoming a medium for the discovery of such correspondences between his place and time and the place and time of others. Spicer's anxiety of influence is either non-existent or odd indeed.

While in the context of the conversation of *After Lorca*, the poet of translation still maintains volition (one needs to “discover” his lemon, after all), for the later Spicer of *Book of Magazine Verse*, poetic practice has become increasingly involuntary. During the Vancouver Lecture Series, again, delivered while he was in the process of composing *Book of Magazine Verse*, Spicer repeatedly refers to the place of poetry as an “Outside” source, or as “Martians.” He describes how these Martians create the poem by rearranging the furniture in the rooms of the poet's mind:

It's impossible for the source of energy to come to you in Martian or North Korean or Tamil or any language you don't know. It's impossible for the source of energy to use images you don't have, or at least don't have something of. It's as if a Martian comes into a room with children's blocks with A, B, C, D, E which are in English and he tries to convey a message. This is the way the source of the energy goes. But the blocks, on the other hand, are always resisting it. (*House* 8)

For Spicer, composition via dictation isn't so much a visionary as involuntary—it is the “Martians” who attempt to locate a corresponding object within the mind of the poet, and it is the poet's mind-objects (his language) that resists these messages. Spicer's notion of the discovery of correspondence between peoples' times has dropped into something quite a bit more menacing and mechanical here. Now the poet isn't so much “disclosing” these corresponding objects, as he is allowing the outside to do so within him.⁵ Spicer is highly critical of the prose letters he authors in *After Lorca*, repeatedly explaining within them that the weakness prose results from its tendency to “invent,” while poetry remains strong only so long as it “discloses” (*vocabulary* 111).⁶ However, the letters remain within the text nonetheless, material reminders of the poet at work, a placeholder of his presence as artist and writer. But by the time Spicer gets to writing his last book, this image dissipates almost entirely into his process of dictation.

While the source in *After Lorca* is a lyrically intimate⁷ one—another gay, male poet—the sources of *Book of Magazine Verse* are a bit less so—these are largely magazines which, as others have pointed out, were unfriendly to Spicer's work or even openly hostile to his sexuality. And while Lorca and Spicer are estranged as much as they are aligned—both by language (Spanish to English) as well as metaphysical barriers (the living and the dead), the barriers

⁵ Spicer links this understanding of involuntary poetic composition to Yeats, Eliot, Duncan and Olson (*House* 4-5), and later in his seminal essay “The Practice of Outside” Robin Blaser will link Spicer's method into the tradition of “Poe, Mallarmé, Artaud and Duchamp in their emphasis upon loss of meaning turning into necessity of meaning” (Blaser 175). However, it seems to me that this involuntary composition has an even earlier American predecessor: Emerson. In “Self-Reliance” Emerson marks a strict distinction between the “voluntary acts of [the] mind” and “involuntary perceptions,” saying that of the latter a “perfect faith is due.” He goes to suggest that such involuntary perceptions simply allow us to view something already present but not yet discerned: “when we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams” (39).

⁶ Part of what Spicer is railing against within this as well as other letters in *After Lorca* is a sense of novelty or even the avant garde in poetry. He believed that poetry was really just the business of “patiently telling the same story, writing the same poem, gaining and losing something with each transformation—but, of course, never really losing anything. . . . Invention is merely the enemy of poetry” (*vocabulary* 110-11). Correspondence within the book then, holds dual meanings—it is the correspondence between Jack Spicer's story/poetry with Garcia Lorca's story/poetry, as well as the epistolary correspondence between the two poets.

⁷ Even if you don't quite buy the romance between Spicer and Lorca that the former spins, the two poets are most certainly demographically proximate to one another.

between them are precisely the source of *After Lorca*'s intimate alchemy. One can't help but realize that Lorca, is, in some ways, Spicer's perfect paramour—lyrically imminent but physically as absent as the body in his grave. Amusingly, Spicer tells Lorca that he is perfect for Spicer's poetry because "the dead are very patient," whereas Spicer-as-Lorca remarks in his preface that "The dead are notoriously hard to satisfy" (*vocabulary* 108). While his sources for *Book of Magazine Verse* are both a bit less estranged (English to English, or so one would assume) and a bit less intimate ("Ten Poems for *Down Beat*"), desire still burns blueely at the heart of the text. While the reader is consistently teased by the address to interlocutors in *After Lorca*, *Admonitions*, and *Letters to James Alexander*, in *Book of Magazine Verse* the *you* starts to feel distinctly more direct. For what really is at stake here is displayed in the title. Spicer is attempting to address the human behind the magazine-machine—the poets at work as its editors, the readers of its submissions.

In "Spicer's Poetic Correspondence: 'A Pun the Letter Reflects,'" Kelly Holt examines Spicer's "transformations of lyric and epistolary genres," arguing that Spicer's "poetics of direct address" with the then-dead Garcia Lorca performs a sort of triangulation between Spicer's poems, their position within "an immortal textual tradition," and the process of building a poetic community (Holt 37). Holt believes that the epistles and dedications of *After Lorca* and Spicer's subsequent book, *Admonitions*, spring out of Spicer's isolation from his two close contemporary poets and friends, Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser during the time of the books' composition:

Throughout their various relocations, the trio exchanged handwritten and typed letters that transformed the immediate, collective energy of their magic circle into a textual correspondence. Their letters contain poems, tensions of love and loss . . .

homoeroticism, impatience, balking, inside jokes, pleas, admonitions, and, most importantly, a poetics materialized into letters that navigate between both physical and metaphysical worlds through their missions and receptions. The dedicated poems of *After Lorca* and *Admonitions* sought to maintain the immediacy of this poetic connection and community. (Holt 63)

Holt argues that this experience of epistolary correspondence became the model for Spicer's notion of serial composition, wherein he eschews singular, one-off lyrics in favor of composition by book. Just like a letter and its chain of response, serial poems communicate and respond to one another. In a serial poem, Spicer writes in a letter to Blaser that became part of *Admonitions*, "Two inconsequential things can combine together to become a consequence. . . A poem is never to be judged by itself alone" (*my vocabulary* 164). While seriality provides the poems with a community of others (other poems, that is), the direct address to Lorca and to his other contemporaries also offers Spicer something the isolated, non-personalized or addressed lyric cannot: direct correspondence (via the body of the poem) with a fully realized audience, an intimate *you*.

Holt reads and links the direct address of the letters of *After Lorca* to Spicer's letters to "his personal correspondences with contemporaries," to demonstrate how direct address to a particular person—living or dead—becomes Spicer's bridge between his art and his world:

Spanning across generic or formal boundaries, Spicer's poetics of direct address performs a correspondence between phantasmic matter and material reality. . . The letters to Lorca, as a direct address across formal and temporal boundaries, incorporate the 'inconsequential' epistolary and lyric traditions to become a consequence of

correspondence between the material, temporal world of private matters and the immaterial, eternal, and collective serial poem. (Holt 64-5)

Holt's description of the ways in which address bridges a gap between the immaterial linguistic world of the poem and the living, breathing world in which we all find ourselves, resonates with contemporary analyses of the experience of the second-person address in the both the lyric poem as well as the epistle that we saw above, as well as with Spicer's own desires to create (and sustain) a poetic community throughout his lifetime and career.

In his final lecture, "Poetry and Politics," delivered in the summer of 1965, at the Berkeley Poetry Conference, "where one of the largest student anti-war activities in America was about to take place," (*House* 149) and while he was writing *Book of Magazine Verse* and just a little more than a month before his death, Jack Spicer extols his audience of young poets to "stay loose" (*House* 154). He means to avoid becoming too closely affiliated with any one magazine. He explains that "a magazine is a society," and as such it attempts to disseminate, through its inclusion and exclusion of certain works of art and information, a particular kind of culture (*House* 157). Ever wary of how power can inform as well as deform art, Spicer is nervous about this kind of social, cultural power and control. Alternatively, he proposes that young poets come together to form their own "communit[ies]," (*House* 167) through which they themselves can support, reject and arbitrate their own art, and things. To Spicer, there is not (and should not) be any division between life and art; a community, unlike a society, "[is] a place where you live" (*House* 167). A society is built from the top down, while a community surges up, over, and around.

III. *Poetry, Politics, and the Youth*

While Spicer's experience and description of dictation has changed between 1957 and 1965, the idea of the work as a correspondence with, and consequence of, others remains prominent. Remembering Altman's comments about the ways in which the epistolary form highlights the very process of reading itself, Spicer's poems in *Book of Magazine Verse* do just the same: the book consists primarily of words, images, and ideas recycled from the poet's own reading. In his essay, "Jack Spicer and the Practice of Reading," Peter Gizzi refers to this process, calling Spicer as an "assemblage artist" (225). Yet another iteration of the "Outside" at work in his involuntary practice of dictation, these readerly influences on dictation are also visible in his immediately preceding book, *Language*. While Ron Siliman and Graham Foust agree that both books "share a format (both books mimic the covers of specific magazines, *Language* and *Poetry*, respectively)," Siliman sees less assemblage in the former (Foust par. 1). However, Foust makes a compelling argument that Spicer's *Language* is quite actively engaged with a re-reading of *Poetry*—signaling an important overlap between the two books. Another concordance between the two texts is the "Sporting Life" section that appears as the second piece in *Language*. However, by the time Spicer writes/reads himself into *Book of Magazine Verse*, this conceit has evolved into the process of writing particular poems "For" specific publications, and has become a guiding trope of both form and content within the text.

However, this artistic assemblage, this bricolage reminiscent of Eliot's fragments shored up against the ruins, is only one aspect of the outside at work in Spicer's poetry. The other aspect of Spicer's communal composition is his turn towards his audience and readers for a fuller understanding of his own work. Merely the medium between Martians and his readers, the writer of a dictated poem experiences an interesting and useful estrangement from his work. Spicer

explains this phenomenon during his three-day lecture series given in Vancouver, also during the summer of 1965: “I try to figure them out because I figure the poem is giving a message to me as well as to other people, and so I naturally read them to myself. I read them out loud and try to get what bothers people about them” (*House* 77). As Geoffery Hlibchuk notes, “there is a Möbius-like quality to Spicer’s work, given the ways it twists exterior and interior until they are indistinguishable” (311), which lends it an exciting sense of mystery and discovery.

Largely mysterious both in their “messages” as well as their effects on others, Spicer’s dictated poems become both opportunity and occasion for collective engagement. In fact, large parts of the Vancouver Lecture Series revolve around a collaborative reading or decoding of the poems themselves, with Spicer frequently looking to his audience for affirmation, dissent, and discovery. Gizzi links these comments to the importance of reception in Spicer’s sense of composition:

Given Spicer’s view of the communal aspects of composition on every level—of poems, magazines, cities, and finally some larger community of the dead—it would be almost impossible to overestimate the importance of reception within his practice, especially since for Spicer the traditional roles are reversed: the poet is essentially a passive receiver of messages from beyond, which he copies and translates. The reader, on the other hand, is engaged intellectually and physically—even erotically—in the creative act, and is the necessary supplement allowing for the occult circuitry of the poem to perform.

(*House* 174)

In the act of writing, the Spicerian poet is a “passive receptor,” as Gizzi notes, however, when the work of writing has ended, the writer crosses over into another role: reader. The agency Spicer is willing to claim over his work is, in some ways, a posthumous one—occurring after the

fact of composition but not after the fact of understanding. Moreover, it is an agency he shares quite happily with fellow readers and even listeners:

Any questions from people who haven't got the text with them? In a way, it's more interesting. Although I enjoy answering questions on the text, it's even more enjoyable to see what questions come up just from hearing the thing go by once like a big rapid express train. (*House* 62)

Refusing to vest authority in either the author or in the more studious or experienced reader, Spicer's practice of readerly discovery is radically open, indeed, and one which aligns him with his readers. In his essay "Spicer's Orpheus and the Emancipation of Pronouns," Jed Rasula describes the relationship affected between Spicer and the readers (or listeners) of his poems:

The genuine *project* of reading Spicer, however, is not restorative, does not seek to respond to the absence of any Spicerian authority in the poem/receptacles by filling them with definitive correspondences. The project is rather to witness *with* a Spicer who is standing back to back with you, both of you viewing something going on around the entire circumference. And this ascent to the real reveals a different visibility to each witness. Indeed, what Spicer's work not only allows but calls forth is the individual imagination. (*boundary* 86)

This description fits quite perfectly the image of Spicer above, quite happily soliciting imaginative responses from his audience. Clearly one reason and benefit behind Spicer's increasingly involuntary approach and characterization of his dictation is the way in which distancing himself from his agency as author, he thereby moves closer to those whose agency also resides in their reception of the work—his audience of readers and listeners.

Spicer's dictated poems reveal artistic creation and reception as conjoined, communal acts. Moreover, his *Book of Magazine Verse* models how reading (or listening) can become a kind of critical engagement—one which implicates the audiences to whom it is comported. These magazine poems, and the assemblage of their meanings through joint acts of reading, suggest that reading itself is a fundamental and formative act integral not just to poetic creation, but any kind of cultural creation or transformation. As such, it carries great power. As Gizzi reminds us, “an assemblage violates the boundary between life and art; it exists in both worlds” (*House* 225). *Book of Magazine Verse* is Spicer's attempt to show young poets and writers how they might build alternative communities out of their critical correspondence with the arbiters of their culture at large.

While Spicer doubted deeply the political efficacy of poetry as a tool for revolutionary change, his insistence on engagement with young poets in both the third Vancouver lecture and the subsequent “Poetry and Politics” talk in Berkeley belie an emphasis not only on community-building but on the artistic, social and political relevance of so doing. For Spicer, acts of artistic creation become moments of shared experience wherein the power structures binding author and audience in their respective places become permeable. While there is fun to be had here, for sure, don't mistake Spicer's metaphors of gaming—if poetry is a game it is a serious one indeed. One poem, “Four Poems for *The St. Louis Sporting News*,” in particular, describes the intensity of what is at stake in this game of poetry. In the poem a veteran baseball player starkly warns a “rookie”:

Now: the tigers treat the pigs real fine before they eat them . . .

And later:

Like kid, don't enter here or you'll become like a pop fly I lost in
the sun but went back in the stands anyway. Foul. (*my vocabulary*414)

Throughout *Book of Magazine Verse*, Spicer risks a certain kind of intimate didacticism. He viewed these poems as messages both to himself and to the young poets and writers in attendance at his two final lectures. Spicer believes that while he can't show these writers what to do, he can show them what *not* to do. This didactic approach is similar but different from the epistolary sections of *After Lorca*, not only in its direct address, but also in its intimacy. While before the reader experienced the thrill of most epistolary fiction, in reading over the shoulder of the author, of imagining herself the recipient of the letter at hand, now the reader recognizes, perhaps with trepidation, that she herself is being drawn into the poet's systems of address.

While it might not be Spicer writing these love poems, intimacy and its attendant desire for connection bleeds through the book's many, many "yous":

It was not desire but your shivering moved me. (409)

I would like to beat my hands around your heart. (414)

You, in either case, have a pair of hot hands. (415)

On a basic level we could read this book as merely inverting the hierarchical structure of Spicer's earlier text: rather than writing deferentially to a forefather poet, Spicer now assumes that role. However, unlike *After Lorca*, the speaker's desire to correspond with his audience is not rooted merely in physical or psychological need, but also political in nature. Spicer doesn't just want to warn young poets about the very real dangers of poetry, he wants to goad them into action against the forces which he believes threaten to curtail, corrupt, and commercialize their

language. On another level this reading becomes impossible. For if we believe in Spicer's assertions about his involuntary poetic practice of dictation, we must also accept that there is something else speaking to us readers, at the same time it is speaking through and to Spicer. However, what doesn't become impossible to map onto Spicer here are the intense feelings and tone of desire. What after all could Spicer have meant by his own vocabulary, than this very language of need itself.⁸

IV. *Cognitive Dis-sentence: The Future Perfect Reader*

Catherine Wagner's work revitalizes Spicer's process, returning to it a vehemence and indignation, a sense of staying alive. While Wagner's joint processes of composition and reception mimic quite closely Spicer's discovery of correspondence within his own work through his correspondence—through it—with others, she is notably more critical of the process itself. Interestingly, it seems that one important role of the audience, as well as audience awareness with Wagner's poems, is to provide this critical lens: "My books are rooted in experience as a lens, and playing with language is a way to exteriorize that lens, to feel its constructedness and artifice and look at it and mess with it" (Wagner qtd. in *Art Animal*).

For Wagner, poem provide a place and body wherein agencies of the author, audience, and sources known and unknown get inscribed. Many of her poems pinch phrases, images, and rhythms from just about anything they can, hence Gizzi's designation of Spicer as "assemblage artist" could be equally well applied to her. Also similar to Spicer's poetics is the way Wagner describes her poems as simultaneously concrete and ephemeral objects— things that hang between being and non-being, presence and absence, poet and audience. Describing the

⁸ Robin Blaser claims that Spicer's final words are "My vocabulary did this to me," seeming to suggest that if he'd simply had a different set of raw material, he might not have ended up dying so close to alone in a hospital bed at the age of 40 from complications due to alcoholism.

experience of reading a poem aloud, she says, “The poem hovers between us and neither of us are there. But our presences charge the poem. I want the poem to notate that” (Wagner qtd. in *Art Animal*). For Wagner, intentionality in the address of the poem is paramount. The seismic exchange of energy between audience and author that the poem will encounter in the moment of its performance somehow informs and shapes the poem itself during its moment of composition. Like Spicer, Wagner always has the audience, quite literally, on her mind. Moreover, like Spicer, Wagner writes and speaks poems with similarly human terms. Speaking of the title of her most recent book, *Nervous Device*, Wagner says, “I wrote to my editor [that] the nervous device is body, handheld connection, poem. It wants you to hold it, it wants to be noticed, it wants you to see how it works to bind and separate” (Wagner qtd. in *Art Animal*).

Wagner’s poetic process doesn’t attempt to remove the poet entirely from the moment of creation in the way Spicer’s dictation does, because she remains critical of what the “outside” or “Martians” have to tell her. While Wagner invests in what she calls a “trance state” in order to tap into a place of poetry that is once personal as well as social, she keeps the authority of this trance in check:

I like to tap into that, to go into trance state to work, and I regularly do it. I absolutely love it and I want it to happen, and try to use it. But I also want to be aware, there, when I’m sort of floating in that place, that lots of it is complete bullshit, and coming from various social constructs that I would like to interrogate. So I just want to call bullshit on it all the time, even when I’m in the trance state! (Wagner qtd. in “On Writing with Catherine Wagner”)

For Wagner, as for Spicer, this trance state is less about the veracity of some sort of poet-as-seer fantasy, than it is about the potentiality for discovery of the unexpected in letting go of both

poetic ego and poetic control. However, for her, it is only useful as a process in so far as the poet remains aware of how the “outside” informing the poetry is often just a regurgitation of social constructs damaging to any sense of responsible, communal individuality. Critique throbs at the heart and center of such a process, even self-critique: “I see myself walk west in the windows / You are Clinton or Nixon / And get your hair cut often / A tribe indulging” (“Two Poems for *Entertainment Weekly*” 34). Even the notion of understanding comes under fire in her work, as Wagner questions the use of simple, one-to-one meaning, something that lots of poets tend to forget and forgo. “I hate not understanding / I like understanding so much I want it to happen over and over” (“A Poem for *Poets and Writers*” 6). Understanding itself, for Wagner, can function as a limiting, social construct, one that threatens to close far too many circuits, and cut out far too many potentialities and differences. Wagner knows how one person’s understanding can threaten to rip another apart.

While the gaze, reception, and interpretation are all constants in Wagner’s Magazine Poems, “A Poem for *Time*,” turns on the very figure of address and its dynamism, recreating the spectacle of being in the public eye, something *Time* is most concerned with. The poem raises questions agency and power in the world of our popular culture, critiquing the roles of both addressee and addressor (performer and audience/politician and voter) within such forums. This brief poem has not only epigraph but also *Preface*, *Introduction*, and *Ancilla*. In fact, the only thing missing from the poem seems to be its body—its middle, its message. But for a poem about the widespread fakery of address in the pop culture journalism machine perhaps this missing message isn’t so strange after all.

A Poem for *Time*

Deem this well, deem me into a great
poof of light

Preface

I love you very much

Introduction

Oh jeez riding inside it
Under the eye of me gaping a room
O hi riding inside it
Outside the belly a larger balloon
Dear friend

Ancilla

That is damage talk
I don't know it
All but there isn't
Anything else
Want to watch me
Make it (7)

Foregrounding the power of audience, the address of the first two lines radiates towards an exalted reader, one who will judge (“deem”) and transform (“deem me into”) the speaker. The speaker appeals to us—the “you” assumed opposite to the “me” of the first line—to approve of “this.” “This” what? The poem? The performance? The method address? Whatever we read into the vague context of the adjective/pronoun “this” in the first line, it is closely aligned with, if not synonymous with, the “me” who is also to be deemed. Immediately then, as readers we are thrown into an interesting and complex relationship with the speaker/poem, being told we are those who “deem” both how we so choose. Ratify me, this speaker begs, if not because you find this poem “well” then perhaps because “I love you very much.” Address here is multiple and quicksilver, the opening couplet seeks confirmation from a “you” who its *Preface* turns into a

beloved. This longed for ratification from the “you” would exalt the speaker straight out of earthly existence, as he or she would exchange corporeal reality for “a great / poof of light.” The audience—and our emotive reception of the speaker/poem—holds all the power here. Or so it seems—be careful not to let the speaker/poem seduce you with its astounding (read: insincere) deference.

Immediately following the *Preface*, the *Introduction* section of the poem ups the ante on this power held by us, the audience. We are no longer only in the realm of the written address, but now inside the public performance of address. The somewhat tortured (sublimely Dickinsonian or easily Plathian) syntax of the line: “Under the eye of me gaping a room,” suggests that not only is the speaker being gawked at by onlookers, but that the astonished and rude attention is both mutual and self-reflective. In other words, the oddity of the construction, “Under the eye of me,” shows us that the speaker is distanced from herself, refusing to identify with or claim contiguous possession of her own faculties and body parts. This is a reified self—a person who objectifies herself in her quest to become some sort of cultural commodity. This reified speaker experiences the ambivalence of the “room” from both within as well as without. The twisted syntax here mimics this out-of-body, or more-than-body, feeling where the speaker seems to identify more with the watchers than with herself. This awkward feeling cues the nervous recalibration of address in the next line: “O hi.” The opening confidence of the first phrase “Deem this well,” has neatly been deflated by each subsequent line, so that now the speaker has become nothing larger than the small “I” hidden within the equally diminutive “hi.” Attempting to regain composure through yet another stab at rhetorical address, the *Introduction* ends with the phrase: “Dear friends.” Whew, that’s four different modes of address in just ten lines—ten lines counting subtitles, that is. The seemingly absent narrative content or focus of the

poem makes its intention that much more clear—this poem is about address itself as both form and performative function.

We can easily read the final section of the poem, subtitled *Ancilla*, as a direct confrontation not only of the vulnerability and need for attention that tempts individuals under the white hot spot light of public scrutiny for their fifteen minutes of fame, but also as a confrontation of just the kind of posturing—required on both sides—that doesn’t fool us so much as keep us looking. Invoking this by now familiar spectacle, Wagner gives it new direction with her tight focus within the poem on the figures and gestures of address itself—this poem reminds us that address and its rhetorical deployment—“damage talk”—is front and center in our hyper self-aware contemporary society as well as within contemporary poetry itself.

However, the speaker in the poem vacillates between being assured of herself—the insincere bravado of the opening couplet where she places us in charge—and being rooted in the wildly raucous and uncontrollable physical experience of frenzied media attention (“O jeez riding inside it”; “O hi riding inside it”). Where do we—she—end up? Is this speaker a keen rhetorician of address who knows how to play on our emotions and foibles, or an ingénue dazed by the spotlight and genuinely confused? Both. Wagner isn’t content to let us have a villain or a hero here, unless the villain is the machine (of our own making) that sets such moments into motion. In a world like this—the world of *Time* magazine, perhaps, but also the world of countless other places and spaces in our contemporary American landscape, neither author nor reader has any real agency or ability to indelibly shape their own worlds or communities—precisely because neither seems to be showing up in anything more than a series of costumes. (Makes me think of Axel Rose during a *Guns n’ Roses* concert in Japan where he keeps running backstage and stripping off a pair of skintight bicycle shorts to reveal yet another pair of

skintight bicycle shorts in some other primary color.) Is the poetry reading the place where our collective refusal to unmask stops? Maybe and maybe not, suggests Wagner by reading this poem aloud during her performances, wherein we might just be tempted to read her as the “me” and us as the duped (or not) audience from the first two sections of the poem.

In the final section, our speaker tries on one last rhetorical mode of address. Distanced from the spectacle of herself she describes her various addresses: “That is damage talk / I don’t know it / All but there isn’t / Anything else / Want to watch me / Make it.” Again, syntax comes into play in interesting ways here, telling us one story while line breaks visual signal another. The first narrative tells us that these gestures towards false intimacy, false understanding between performer and audience are hollow but necessary, because there isn’t any alternative with when everyone in the room fails to show up as anything but a performer. We can only speak damage talk—the balancing act our assumed selves perform between ultimate confidence and hyper-performed humility—so, says the speaker, she might as well “Make it.” However, the radical enjambment resists this seemingly deterministic argument. First, our speaker is fallible: “I don’t know it / All.” Furthermore the enjambment between lines 14 and 15, which leaves “Anything else” on its own seems to suggest that we try for precisely that—anything other than this kind of posturing. Finally, in the break between the last two lines, “Make it” mirrors “Anything else,” thereby aligning the two. This parallel enjambment suggests that if we opt for “Anything else” we just might “Make it.” Of course, “Anything else” here would be an active rather than passive sense of agency: we have to *do* something rather than watch something else get done (“Want to watch me”).

This poem shows how we, to varying degrees within our everyday lives, are all keen rhetoricians of address, capable of deploying it in guises that range from laudatory to self-

deprecating, from the emotional to the skeptical. Plato's fears about poets in his ideal city, this poem seems to suggest, have come true in a radical way—now everyone has become masters of the art of apostrophizing the self into positions of at least temporary recognition if not power. Again, if this is a game, it is one with serious consequences. We are all capable of getting ourselves watched, and yet, how does this watching affect both individual and community in the end? Wagner's enjambment provides us with an escape hatch: the poem's formal structure, the visible appearance of the line breaks on the page, ultimately have more agency than the speaker's syntax. In a sense, here anti-grammar trumps grammar. It is the breaks within the poem, its dissonance, that resonate. The final subtitle itself is a joke—what is truly an *ancilla* here is not, as the final section would suggest, the damage talk of address, but rather the deconstruction of that damage talk at play during the entirety of the poem. In other words, this poem suggests that we must become masters of a new kind of address. This new kind of address offers us a critical approach, via writing, towards those disingenuous addresses which offer only a hollow sense of solidarity and community. Like Spicer's attempt to build a community of writers through his critical correspondence and rejection from the print magazines of his historical moment, Wagner's "Poem for *Time*," suggests we take a critical stance in the face of a similar social spectacle of power and identity in our own.

V. "And where did your poems find people?": *Conclusion*

Correspondence for Spicer moves from direct epistolary correspondence with his contemporaries and Lorca, to a correspondence with "Martians"—who use the vocabulary within him to create a poetry of which he becomes a reader. For Wagner, composition happens in a similar trance-like state, but she is free to cut out the "bullshit social-cultural" static that invades

this state and threatens to corrupt her poetry. The latter believes in craft, while the former eschews editorial control, preferring instead to search for interesting correspondences between the “Martian” poems with his reading/listening audiences themselves. Wagner also wants to make space for audience response within the body of the poem itself. Correspondence for her occurs both in the trance moment of the poem’s composition, and in the moment of the poem’s performance in front of an audience, where the audience interacts with and changes the poem itself. Spicer thought he was getting messages from some radical outside, and Wagner knows she can’t know herself without considering her relationship to others.⁹ Furthermore, they both also think of poems as sentient beings. Spicer didn’t want his poems to be one-offs, “one nights stands,” but to correspond and communicate with one another via his composition by book. Wagner desires for the poem to notate an audience’s emotive and charged reception of it, to provide a space wherein this is not just allowed but invited to happen.

To think of poems in this way—as apart from but also part of the writer, as living and transformative beings in and of themselves, and as creations sprung out of the alchemy between a personal and public vocabulary—envision a vital emotive and political life for poetry. While Spicer’s process of writing keyed him into the outside and to the “Martians” seeking to communicate through him, it also led to him becoming increasingly isolated in the moment writing. Emerging from this isolation he could experience community connection only through reading his work with others, but these others became increasingly difficult for him to find. In

⁹ In a similar move to Spicer’s penning of Lorca’s introduction to Spicer’s own book, *After Lorca*, Wagner published a “Fake Interview with Alice Notley,” wherein she writes the calls and responses for both she and her predecessor poet. (A key difference here being, I guess, that Notley could probably have been reached for comment, since she is still alive.) During this interview, Wagner questions Notley’s defensiveness against otherness, writing: “I’m a little nervous to get poststructuralist on you, but here goes: I don’t know what I am without others. I mean, because language is what it is, it’s impossible to describe difference except via sameness: words that are our shared currency. Does that drive you nuts? To have to use the words that the assholes use?” To which she responds, as Notley: “You don’t have to be all stupid & everything like that” (*Interim* 93).

relaxing Spicer's rules, Wagner allows the poet herself to step into the world her poems create with others. For just as she wants the poems to notate the energy of audience reception, so too is she free from an anxiety that we would see her, Cathy Wagner, at work within the poems. As her poetics continues to progress, she develops new strategies of putting others into her work. In her third book, she writes the serial poem "Everyone in the Room is a Representative of the Room at Large," while always accompanied by another individual, most often her son. While writing in the presence of another, Wagner became acutely aware of the "invisible energies strung between us, power inequalities, desire, all sorts of things, and the poems tended to be more directly social and political than my other poems as a result" (Wagner qtd. in *Book Slut*). Wagner's builds on Spicer's notions, rather than simply picking up where he left off. Wagner's work, without declaring death to the author, or automatization of the author, still opens a key, critical space within socio-cultural discourse for what happens everyday between one person and another.

While at first glance it seems Spicer and Wagner's magazine poems are dedicated to the magazines themselves, they are really dedicated to others, to readers-at-large. Spicer and Wagner's poems showcase the correspondence of sender and intended, sender and unintended, and sender and over-intended. In other words, there are always at least three parties intended in their magazine poems' systems of address: the titular magazine, the reader, and the writer-as-reader. Altman's definition of epistolary writing as a joint act resonates with the ways in which Spicer and Wagner seek a sort of collocation in the acts of composition and reception—one must inform the other. This pushes at the linguistic and other boundaries that seek to divide the writer from reading, the author from audience, and poetry from the world around it. Busting both lyric space and moment wide open, writing and reading become a collaborative community practice in their poetics of correspondence. Traversing the boundary between life and art, Spicer and

Wagner attempt not only to reimagine and re-*write* the experience of both, but call us to respond in kind. To read a culture, and to either dissent or embrace it, is the way in which cultures continue to be made anew. Spicer and Wagner's poems show us how poetry does do just this.

CHAPTER 2
GETTING READY TO STAY DEAD

Get those words out of your mouth and into your heart.

Jack Spicer, *Book of Magazine Verse*

This book is for my mother.

January 1, 2014

I'm breathing the dead. Thinking's a necro-erotic activity. Willing or un. In sleep and dreams the self gets slippery. Amoeba-like it leeches out for and subsumes. Multitudes. It is the waking mind that splits and self-divides. Banishing banshee parts out of their Edenic collusion. I say I am breathing the dead and I am. I'm hearing them and voicing them and writing them too. And now you.

January 18, 2015

Locked it in. Last night the cove grew skin. The seals stopped singing. Bumped up on the ice.
Wriggled free of it. The wind. There were ashes sweeping the clouds like sea hawks. When the
thaw comes what will be to bury. Snow done in by mud.

January 30, 2014

To begin now.

What is the wind. What is it.

I tremble for small examples.

Tremble for small examples.

Against a gun-metal sky

I saw an albino giraffe.

The unconscious of the unconscious.

A mind's arrangement

is even more important than its

regard for arrangement

it is not easy.

A third part is added to the top and bottom and the middle part is

added

(walking sticks paper weights water marks)

inbetween.

If the mind has a face the nettings are legion

like the glaze on an enchanted thing

a katydid-wing.

The mind is hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, hair that can rise,

if it must.

January 6, 2015

Anonymity can be both lead and breath. Anonymity can be breath. Anonymity can be.
Breathless. Let lead be led to the breath. The breath led to it. Let be be breath. Nameless. Leded
to the breath, anonymous. Down by the. Breaching. Left less.

April 1, 2014

I said I would write you but I don't. Not even now. This isn't for you. You will never read it. I have made a habit of writing. But can't begin with you. You are not waiting for correspondence. You will recognize my message by name only. *What is there to say* you address the envelope. What I write would try to be an invitation. You would not accept it. It would be my failure and yours. We would be together in this. I tell myself *we are together* in this.

December, 31 2013

They come and take it. Half your breath. Ripped out like a rib. Flat and jelly with too many dark bits. They say in two days you won't even know it. Breathing at 98%. Like a machine, whinnying up to God. How many of these hours can you log? Track them like medicine, an already dead deer. Smelling blood means it's your own. If there's a freshness here it's the cold. Snapped like so many telephone polls.

November 13, 2014

Made material of it. The bits. They did. They did it. And again, gulfs. Gulls in the gullet. The seven sins. A Wyeth and Reed. To be made of something and then hallowed out. Like an office. What part of labor cradles art? I used to stuff myself full of it. Couldn't get enough of the bodiless. Now: a giant hole in your chest. Your right lung moved over and spread. Out. But the disease is tricky. The place for that is in the rib. We sprang from it, right. We did. We gull-flapped right up on out of it. I'll drink my fill of it. The fluid as it rises. As every spring in your riddled body comes sprung.

November 13, 2014

It strikes me as Spicer. Spicerian. The seriality of it. No more nameless one-nights. These pieces are all going down river together. Debris or not. Rotted out like the bottom of that busted canoe. How many nights can you fish the same pond for it? Delving. Divining. There's definitely a body down there. Somewhere. The water of it. The hitch in the line. These are the _____ that were your eyes.

December 3, 2014

This here's a winter's worth of it. Cold you feel in your teeth. If you could break air, this air would be broken. Clumped up ice bearding a ghost trap washed up in a nor'easter. This year November came and went with them. November naughty with nor'easters. Gnawed by nor'easters. When will we ever get to go west. November, knifed by nor'easters. Numb with nor'easters. When will we get to stop waiting for your death.

December 3, 2014

This one's full. Bareknuckled, barnacle-gilt and snapping to the brim of it. They were. The salties. The line snapped and everything cracked back down to the bottom of it. Winter-water and the haze. It was weeks before they started. To eat one another. But they started. I can't stop staring. These were the pearls. We never were. Closer. I can't stop bolting. Try as you might to tie everything down, to hatch-latch every sliding thing, it will all come free. Wet. Tumbling. Snapping back to the brim of it. They were. They were.

WORKS CITED

- Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1982. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. M., and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas, 1981. Print.
- Blaser, Robin. "The Practice of the Outside." *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*. Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Books. 1975.271-326. Print.
- Bower, Anne. *Epistolary Responses: The Letter in 20th-Century American Fiction and Criticism*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." *Emerson, Essays: First and Second Series*. Ed. Douglas Crane. New York: Vintage Books, 1983. 29-52. Print.
- Foust, Graham. "Listening to Poetry: Jack Spicer and the fiftieth-anniversary issue of Poetry (Chicago)." *Jacket7* (1999): Web 17 October 2013.
- Gizzi, Peter. "Jack Spicer and the Practice of Reading." *The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*. Hanover, NH: University of New England, 1998. 173-225. Print.
- Hlibchuk, Geoffrey. "From Typology To Topology: On Jack Spicer." *Contemporary Literature* 51.2 (2010): 310-340. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 20 May 2013.
- Holt, Kelly. "Spicer's Poetic Correspondence: 'A Pun the Letter Reflects.'" *After Spicer*. Ed. John Emil Vincent. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2011. 36-68. Print.

- Johnson, Barbara. *A World of Difference*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987. Print.
- Keniston, Ann. *Overheard Voices: Address and Subjectivity in Postmodern American Poetry*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Macovski, Michael Steven. *Dialogue and Literature: Apostrophe, Auditors, and the Collapse of Romantic Discourse*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.
- Overton, Bill. *The Eighteenth-century British Verse Epistle*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Rasula, Jed. "Spicer's Orpheus and the Emancipation of Pronouns." *boundary 2*. 1977. Vol. 6 Issue 1. 51-102. Print.
- Silliman, Ron. "Spicer's Language." *Writing/Talks*. Ed. Bob Perelman. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1985. 166-191. Print.
- Spicer, Jack. *my vocabulary did this to me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*. Eds. Peter Gizzi, and Kevin Killian. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2008. Print.
- . *The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*. Ed. Peter Gizzi. Hanover, N.H.: University of New England, 1998. Print.
- Vendler, Helen. *The Given and the Made: Strategies of Poetic Redefinition*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995. Print.
- Wagner, Catherine. Interview by Elizabeth Coleman. *Art Animal Mag*. *Art Animal: A Women's Art Magazine*, 2012. Web. 5 Sept. 2013.
- . Interview by Zoe Ward. *Book Slut*, July 2007. Web. Sept. 2013.
- . "A Fake Interview with Alice Notley." *Interim*. 2005. Vol. 23. Issue 1. 87-93. Print.
- . *Miss America*. New York: Fence, 2001. Print.
- . Interview by Tom Orange. "On Writing with Catherine Wagner." *Vanderbilt University*

News Service Podcasts, 2008. Web. 1 Jan. 2015.

Waters, William. *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003. Print.