



NOTES TOWARD A POETICS OF THE LOCAL:  
SIX PART MEDITATION ON GUERILLA PRAXIS  
**RALPH LACHARITY**



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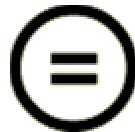
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Notes Toward a Poetics of the Local:  
Six Part Meditation on Guerilla Praxis  
by: Ralph LaCharity



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## a/ An Analytic Percussive's Perspective

Seeming to bounce & swagger from within, so nearly enough already know the stories that storytelling is manifestly not what we must now.

What can poets do is the query that renders narrative insufficient, making our test a new one: Place poets in dynamics notably post-predeterminate, wherein scores/scripts (poems) are made to be unmade in the light of an alertness as wary as it is sure, as unsure as it is rash, as unprepared as it is audible, as responsive as it is dissatisfied.

Bells get played with deliberate simultaneity, alike the drums & tambourines, so that one very obvious extension of the franchise becomes what poets will do when the rhythms that surround them, while clearly non-coordinate & musically unanchored, are yet alert, modulate, & wholly opportunistic, to degrees & in combinations that are as unpredictable as the poets are predictive; a simultaneity enriched by embodying itself as a provisional problematic, weird, wired, & vastly non-complacent.

Maybe the air is antsy with irrepressive reproductive vagueries, the inconclusive onward of virtue, volition, virtuality, & of volubility evermore.

And each of the above viscerally coterminous & accounting, grave & unspecified, the dancing at once self-appointed & self-abeyanced, fully as desirous as ever of clarity as of calamity, of breakthrough as of breakdown, yet also fully lingering, unsettling & unsettled, a mostly vulnerable volunteerism, mobile & transitory, & replete with many boths & furthers.

## b/ Unrestricting the Furthering Expedition

Marek laments the noisy chaos, complains he cannot read on his feet without his hands shaking so badly he cannot even read his own words. Lou finds no order in this room, wants most to simply leave it. Jean Ann leaves it, but is preceded by an hour by David & friend. We remain in a circle poised opposed to the poetry reading per usual: We are on a journey off the open poetry reading mainline. Of listening, of the fibrous agitation of quickened tympana, we make a parallel loudness co-equal to the poet's.

We are exploring an Elsewhere. Our compass is rhythmic. We wear leggings of actual flesh. Lung and heart comprise the terrible horizon.

One article of faith: That listening's noise will be reined by each participant's poet-praxis to a volume level that falls just shy of obliterating the reader's own volume. There is no question that this faith might come to nought. That the reader might have to force a deliberate tinkering. That few of us are unclumsy in this doing of Simultaneous Noisings. That one must needs learn as one goes. That repeated efforts will be the orders of these days.

Another article of faith: That each poet is capable of polyrhythmic More.

Another: Resonance is headbone stuff, likewise the simultaneity of perception/expressivity.

This poetics is local. Its lack of apologia is livid & aloud. Wee raisins of acute & alacritous Alert provision this expedition ...

## c/ To Frisk notions of ARBITRARY DELIBERATENESS & the PROCEDURAL TEMPLATE

Such riff-rife unsurety, on the ready ... an empty mute room cocks blue in the mind atop these East Tennessee Smokies, nigh upon that Other Newport. This'n, the mind's own Newport, three hundred miles of rolling photosynthetic humid heave twixt the imaginary Here & the imagined There. These yellow locust broken oilpan accompaniments. These sizzling oaken tambourine transmissions. These drums ghosting the forest's own cousin kissin' hollers. These bells boiling like the pepper's inner blisters ...

Poetry rooms are resonance chambers occupying evoked & embodied space bounded by the imaginary Here & the imagined There. Or is it the Other Way, & does the dilemma even matter so much as a hair more than the dyad maintained, as portal & pedal, an incitement subtle as seed? Come here bound for the Betweens ...

Prepare to be grown. Rogue swells of growl or groan, precise groundswell, taut echo-lave, fierce brevity lit & shaded, entered onto & all about. The template a posture. The Arbitrary, itself an actual contemplative dynamic.

Each reading a now. The circle & the swirl, sounded withal, heard without awhile, untimed rhythmic terror & beatitude. Then again, another now. Long as it lasts. Till the Time ...

## d/ Post-Predeterminate Technique:

### The Simultaneity of its Maintenance and Abandonment

To so internalize the poem that one can give it back orally with the sound of surprise, as if the poem were coming off the tongue with the same dyna-compaction that was present in the original solitary silent act of composition, it will be necessary to re-orient the act of memorization itself – what is “remembering” in this circumstance?

The circumstance of oral delivery of one's poetry in & of itself opens “new doors.” To remember what comes from the self, one coterminously remembers the self. Oral delivery is a double track, & is that in many senses — the greater one's awareness of this multi-trackedness, of what in other contexts is termed resonance, the more vivid is one's apprehension of those new doors. The memory central to poetic delivery is one of those new doors, at a dimensional & qualitative remove from previously acquired memory tools. How is it possible that we as poets would not be clumsy when first moving thru such doors?

One's very being In the Now. What we're honing in on is a very delicate & powerful difficulty: either you & your work are deeply reciprocal, or something is amiss. In this circumstance, death is defined as forgetting. Likewise on the livid contrary, to remember is to live.

So — how to do it? Poetic memory is one of the prime riddles, right up there with the sound of one hand clapping. You come to it as an integral no-shortcuts part of the Path. To “do it” requires that the poet utterly mean a most resonant yes down along the deepest filaments linking poem & self: The act of creation really is umbilical, & what poetic memory does is to honor that umbilical. Coming to such a realization changes both one's self and one's poetry.

That simple. That hairy. A re-oriented memory, double-tracked internally in the midst of giving the poem away, is one of the ancient radicals of the poets' office, a circuitry of Absolute Magic.

## e/ on the Peformative Possibilities of Poetry

Begin, then, with the subtle & unnerving fact that Poetry is not the poem nor is poetry the performance. Poetry itself refuses guarantees altogether & in every instance.

The very fact of Poetry's existence is indeterminate by any rational measure. Those who claim an existence for Poetry do so on their own authority exclusively. Those who practice Poetry actually are practicing attempts at Poetry, for the presence of Poetry in any given piece of writing or performance is absolutely provisional & never a matter of anything more than unverifiable personal perception. All strategies to impose specific guarantees in the matter of Poetry are deceits, perpetrated by the clever upon the dull. Poetry is brilliant, indigestible, & unproven. Those who attempt Poetry are blind, hungry, and gullible. They accept no substitute. Their destitution is total, their vulnerability is embarrassing, & their tolerance for failure is a pit without bottom. Poetry is the unrestrained laughter of the damned cavorting shamelessly with the Infinite Vulture soaring pitilessly in the very belly of the last ice cube poised atop the Scorpion's Neon Eviction Notice. Or at least that was what Poetry was a scant millisecond ago ... all of the terms of the shady agreement have been rewritten in the ages since that millisecond ago.

Let us admit that Poetry as attempt is its own journey, occurring for us within the confines of Wording, howsoever Wording might be made. We will insist upon Wording because the grunting of gifted athletes upon a football field bores us. We will insist on Wording because puffing into a tuba admits of little grace & less wit. We will insist upon Wording because plumb bob niceties exclude us and quantum mechanics swing with more gruesomely random perversities than the balance of our days bequeath. We will insist because all other modes of attempt are known to be clocked, metered, taxed, exploited, certified, censored, celebrated, vulgarized, corrupt, & simply do not require a silver tongue. We are & will remain inordinately proud of our tongues. Extravagant Wording is a coin of our realm. If Poetry will consent to dance anywhere, we are convinced that Poetry will dance where the tongue does. Our attempts accept no substitutes.

Poetry as practice is but a journey of Desire, come what may. Performance Poetry enacts that journey physically, so that Wording itself occupies actual space, quite as intimidating as sweat is, as effort is, as noise is. The difference is that our Wording has dimensions that leak into the deepest recesses of memory, that the resonances of our Wording will inspire a later restlessness. Performance Poetry makes of Wording a physical opportunist. The moving that Performance Poetry does occurs right before our very eyes & ears.

The Audience for Poetry is most frequently in a condition of prey, wherein Poetry stalks the Audience. In Performance, Poetry is haughty to the point of sadism. The Audience is Victim & must Defend itself howsoever it can. The only defense is comprehension, but no Audience comprehends fast enough. But Poetry knows comprehension eludes the Audience. It is this knowledge of its own elusiveness that powers Poetry's Performance. The Audience's inability to defend itself in Time is Performance Poetry's conquest over print.

Performance Poetry falls into a condition of Theater if the performance can be repeated. Repeat performances yield the upper hand to the Audience. Poetry never yields anything. To remain true to Poetry's attempt, the journey Performance enacts can be neither introduced nor concluded: Performance Poetry makes neither amends nor apologies.

We think we know what Poetry is & might do. We don't. The Journey of Desire is an unlawful journey, ungoverned & lacking accreditation. Each performative occasion is but its own recapitulation of the Journey to the limits of What Has Already Been Desired. Each occasion takes the performing Poet directly to a point where Further begins. That is the Poet's sole gift back to the Audience.

We are not looking for laws so much as for the quality of the Journey. Performance Poetry is not Theater because Audience is not its anchor. The anchor, paradoxically, is Manifest Movement.

Audiences are, typically, one-time Fields of Opportunity — each Audience is unique (& so the Poet, each time). A true performance will occur within the Poet's capacity to register an Audience as a unique opportunity to fuel the Journey of Manifest Movement that is Poetry's promise. A performance poet rides the Audience as surely as that very Audience resists every technique foisted upon them by the poet. It is in this that Poetry occasionally deigns to make its appearance, howsoever cloaked.

Performance Poetry will be the Journey thru physically indeterminate space. The links that hold this space together are dynamic, unstable, fluid, & typically monstrous. The Audience is an ideal sacred evocation of the monstrous for the performing poet, but whether the space entered into by the performance can transcend or transform those psychic monsters the Audience itself brings to the performance depends wholly upon that Audience's own psychic courage. In the best of all possible performative worlds, it is the performing poet's example, in performance, that will embolden the Audience to confront its demons. Performance Poetry enacts ritual circuitry when it works, but the poet's priestly pretensions sicken us when it doesn't work.

To fulfill Poetry's Promise in Performance means to escape the gravity field of any given poem. Because Poetry is Elsewhere, because Poetry indicates Elsewhere, & because Poetry's performance maps a process of seeking Elsewhere, the very indeterminates of this circuitry require that poems as resource be mulched. Performance Poetry is the mulching.

In Performance, nobody listens as intently or as comprehensively as the Performer. This acuity of the listening faculties causes in the Performance Poet apprehensions of Poetry, so that new work by that selfsame Poet will include characteristics of incomprehension commensurate with a literary outlawry the deceitful can only read as illitera ... said illitera will in turn achieve a condition of Poetry in direct proportion to the Performing Poet's willingness to continue in the arenas of Performance. What becomes increasingly apparent is that abandonment & uncertainty are principles of locomotion. That Poetry's long Journey grinds exceedingly fine, exceedingly outward. The ride is not endless so much as enduring, the results not conclusive so much as inclusive:

*Poetry gives permission: the whole of one's  
Desire, in all its needful articulation,  
is free to be & go forth, as Song*

*that Song & Desire are One  
is Poetry's sole Promise*

## f/ The Last Profession

The Poet, child of some other dimension's Immensity, will speak as the last living being, into a Void which will of its own accord thence immediately come fully to life, having totally & irretrievably forgotten itself. When the World awakens, all it will have to guide it as to its own identity & possible conduct will be what the Poet has just spoken, which is already fading on the instant. The World cocks in every leaf as the Poet stands there, silent. Having spoken, the Poet cocks to all that has simultaneously and spontaneously returned. There is a moment of August yearning as the World races with every ear to retrieve the Poet's every echo. Blank as the grave, the Poet waits this moment thru. If the Poet has spoken a single lie, the Poet is going to hear it again, very soon. It is at this moment that the silence ends. The pristine World talks back & the Poet is free to go mad again, waiting anew for the death of the World, when next the Poet will be permitted to speak.

The Poet has no name. Only poets with Names have names. The Poet only has words. At the beginning of the trick called Time, the order of the Poet's words is incontestably speedy & profound, making no sense at all. In the beginning, only the World makes sense, for the World is alive, & the Poet is mad. When madness grows livid, the Poet commences to unravel the Mystery of Order. The Mystery of Order is what the World will at that very moment call Form, the Center. That said center cannot hold will become increasingly apparent to the World, even as it becomes simultaneously apparent to the Poet that there is Order to Words. As the reversal works inevitably down, Time, that Trick, writhes like the Serpent. The Poet becomes the pre-eminent Snake Charmer of the Age & the World forgets the Poet's madness, then forgets the Poet is even there. The Snake sucks itself: that's its only job. For the first time, the laughter of the Poet is sane, & touched with malice. The Poet knows the Snake is turning into a maggot. The World is dying.

Just before the World sleeps again, the Poet goes walking. Wherever the Poet is when the World becomes Void again, it is from there the Poet will speak. The Last Place, & the Place of the Last Profession. All local poets will be gone, none will be about even to call the name Poet, & it is then that the Last Words will begin . . .



## About Ralph LaCharity:

A polyrhythmic adventurer and an intellectual provocateur, Ralph La Charity argues with and provokes the aesthetic possibilities of the contemporary poetic experience. His highly incantatory style of delivery is coupled with compositional ingredients that blend both earthy and sophisticated verbal elements.

A veteran performer at such festivals as Seattle's Bumbershoot and at Texas' Austin International Poetry Festival, he has incited poetry ferment over the years in communities as diverse as San Antonio, San Francisco, Honolulu, and Denver. His principal forté, since moving to Cincinnati in the early '90s, has been the blending of poetry within co-equally polyrhythmic musical contexts: La Charity simultaneously delivers his verbal stew while also playing percussion in eclectic, jazz-flavored productions featuring 3 to 5-man musical ensembles. La Charity has been public as a poet since 1970. He first began presenting his work in music settings as a result of the vivid physical quality of his delivery, working for two years as house poet at JAZZ PLUS Nightclub in Honolulu HI, with Bob Braye's Peace & Rhythm jazz ensemble in the early 80's. Working in collaboration with two Cincinnati-based musicians in 1996, guitarist Richard Williams & saxophonist Jack Walker, La Charity, as poet/percussionist, formed the musical trio, SáSemblé, dedicated to performing what the poet calls "village jazz & word." Also in the mid-90s, working with poets Ken Kawaji and Bill Polak, he created the eclectic Cincinnati jazz/poetry radio program, the Skaldric Cauldron, on WAIF-FM radio.

Among the poet's books currently in print are: *four-by-fars; on Som bo*; and *CINEMANUENSING*, all from *Aloud Allowed Impress of Cincinnati* in the late '90s, and *Seatticus Knight*, from *Black Heron Press of Seattle/San Francisco*, released in 1985. Two audio cassette anthologies include his work, *Poets Along the River*, from *Mesilla Press of San Antonio TX*, 1991, and *Road Word Live*, from *Burning Press of Cleveland OH*, 1994. The poet currently edits & publishes *W'ORCs/ALoud ALLOWED*, a poetry samizdat he originated in then-West Germany in 1986, based since 1992 in Cincinnati. An October 2003 taped 50-minute video of La Charity performing solo at the Jailhouse in Fred Fuller Park in Kent OH is available from RC Wilson Jr of that city.

Among appearances over the course of the preceding decade: Austin International Poetry Festival (Austin TX), Bumbershoot Festival (Seattle WA), the Southern Ohio Museum (Portsmouth OH), the Ensemble Theater of Cincinnati & the Carnegie Theater of Covington KY (in Aralee Strange's "Evening at the Sad Cafe"), the Davis Discovery Center (Columbus OH). In the Summer of the year 2000 he mounted *Sahara Date*, a single 90-minute performance piece, backed by a quintet version of his group, which was presented at Quill's in Philadelphia, at *BARDFEST 2000* in Reading PA., and on successive nights at three separate Cincinnati-area venues, Volk Gallery, Base Arts Gallery, and York Street Café. The June 2001 presentation of his hour-long *Acoustic Sun Song*, at the downtown Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, both distilled and advanced upon the achievement of *Sahara Date* . . . this performance marked the final public appearance of SáSemblé, which did not continue performing following the passing of Richard Williams, its guitarist and musical mainstay.

## Editor's Note:

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