

## **After Such Knowledge**

In remembrance of Jackson Mac Low

Will you be able to though no one will know anything about it?

Will you be able to succeed in doing this by revisions?

Will you be able to reconcile yourself to death?

Will you be able to grasp shadows and solid realities to wrestle with?

Will you examine its private past?

Will you simply honor your parents?

Will you bring the haunting to an end?

Will you in a circle of friends and lovers belong to the past?

Will you be a manufactured one?

Will you be checked up on before you can help?

Will you be the mouse that hasn't moved?

Will you be persecuting and sometimes killing?

Will you be able to be pitied?

Will you be able to live remorseless and guilt-free?

Will you be able to understand, at best, half of the truth?

Will you be able to adore in silence?

Will you be able to pass under the armpit of the dead?

Will you be able to transgress all the theological sensory deprivation?

Will you be able to stand, to remain human?

Will you be able to develop the skills and intuition to see?

Jackson Mac Low's writing is generously instructive; it does not proscribe methods nor is it descriptively contained in quotes. Sharing information, Mac Low questions the selection of a single model as the exemplary template, encouraging languages the lungs unfold in, the skull (the globe of our actions, the meat and sphere of one's language) resonating with intervals, the gaps, 'the languages of cells'. Rather than seeing ideas as giving rise to forms, Mac Low recognizes that they color them, that they surround them without ever creating them. The imaginative qualities of impermanent things – 'mist through the skin of a fly'. It keeps changing. Since there is no meaning without the displacement of meaning, without metaphor, there is no form without change of form, without metamorphosis.

In the news media, as in the consumption of fashion, meaning *is* capitalist wit, its membrane stretched over the real in opal blobs along the walls and floors with one option—you're with it or agin' it or clever enough to be both. The dichotomization of the corporate individual from communal values is not a tenable position. Where people believe the ideal medium for bureaucratic action is the junk dressed up as thoughtful nuance, doing the right thing under "all the circumstances," skills and the intuitions needed to see have failed. That mania for locks and incarceration destroys anything that's living. Reading and writing knock them out in the distances – no aforementioned criteria and nothing win compensation.

Thinking is what writing is all about—that the mind might delight in what is rightly the body's province; or conversely, as if the body could feel the pleasure that the mind takes in thought. Mac Low has made it with what care he possessed. How many mistakes can it contain, even in its fragments?

Differences in form and perspective can be experienced as an uninterrupted whole—the duration of the present, perhaps 5 or 12 seconds—of affectionate relations constituted in perception as something inherently temporal that consists of different parts. Criticism, the most fetishistic of all arts, employs something stronger

in its shaping of information that leads continually to new and intimate territory or knowledge of moving particles, traditions, distinctions and assured reactions; which critics bottle and sell to an unstable public manipulated by appreciable losses in intelligence and reason. The Best Poetry of Blah-Blah Blah. Meritocracies or elaborate rituals? In the “debates of production” everything is washed out – the old stable stuff of the universe is no more. Jackson Mac Low wrote poetry that never secured his leisure and found full and satisfactory employment in doing so.

Why is the United States government cutting millions of dollars in AIDS research? Requesting massive cuts in funding for vocational education and after school programs in order to underwrite vouchers for private schools? Defunding struggling schools? Vehemently opposing important gay and lesbian rights issues? Why is it willing to use nuclear weapons? Why is it continuing to manufacture and stockpile nuclear, chemical and biological weapons? Subverting the Bill of Rights? Endorsing extrajudicial executions? Undermining the United Nations? Reversing dramatic improvements in air and water quality? Why is it pulling the plug on family planning organizations? I sense trillions enough to increase insecurity, instability, pollution and death. A Freedom to Harm Act Donning a Giant Halo (“halo” is a euphemism for “turning bullish en masse for no substantive reason”). Promoting disease as health. Why is the United States loaded with abscessed cities and eviscerated garage towns? Why can it so easily ignore these problems and numerous others? Why is it we are expected to choke on the daily slaughter of the brand-new? After such knowledge why have we resolved not to solve them?

Jackson Mac Low is dead. There will never be another one like him.

The best I am able to do is to describe what happens, and let those who disagree with me read somebody else’s errors. “Literature is politics, and the latter apart from the former, is demagogy ... Whatever justice there is in a people depends upon the purity of the diction employed by its seers” (Edward Dahlberg). The weight

holds that limits movement—more efficiency, more speed, more information or more power to particular interests—with no examination of the longer-term ends thus served. In front of a work hut talented in things musical and made of living words death reaches our ears in fragmentary form. A misdirected intensity of discovery the United States is closing the conditions of its reception. It does not itself offer the beginning of a dialogue or give at the point of a possible confusion – its interlocutors broadcast the preemptive fantasy and start acting out understanding its semblance of civility is sponged on the horizon merely to hold Manifest Destiny pure (the pathological urge to dominate an appropriated world a destroyed sentiment inflicts). “We’re going to the press club to make sure nothing happens.”

The world thinks all these things happen.  
They never happened.  
Everyone's so eager to get the story  
Before in fact the story's there  
That the world is constantly being fed  
Things that haven't happened.  
All I can tell you is,  
It hasn't happened.  
It's going to happen.

Feb. 28, 2003, Department of Defense briefing  
By Donald Rumsfeld

Expectations in a garbage press become insoluble—stars trip and squirm inside the community in dumbbell’s window. An unconscious catalogue of undefined sprawl – some post-Apocalyptic suburb of death (Freudian slips) trading the pursuit of happiness for temptation. It’s a place where dead folks collect and build up and never really evaporate—a site of ghastly, spectacular plunder.

Jackson Mac Low was and is a poet of the body and a poet of the soul. His body of work is a mosaic of multileveled interrelationships, each page pregnant with possibility, each word a cell, meridian, and wave. I look upon his verse in terms of

its honesty, clarity – a poetry diverting from preventing, of deepening the beds. The beginnings of mischief each lovely in its own way.

His verse is our cake, and this is our crown.

Now we have to act.

### **When I remember Jackson Mac Low**

I remember Jackson Mac Low as generous and wise. I remember that Jackson was at every reading by everyone and that he always sat close to the front, to the microphone, with notepad and pen in hand nodding his head, listening and writing. I remember seeing some of his notebook pages filled in every conceivable direction with his sentences, lines and improvisations. If he closed his notebook while you read, well, he was never indifferent. I came home on a Friday night to find the *Times* obit laid open on my desk. I couldn't read it for several hours. The man who for decades had climbed six flights of old wooden stairs to reach home, 3 flights of which would tire anyone half his age, had long seemed untouched by age or ill health. I remember some years back, maybe it was as long as ten, at a party at a poet / publisher's loft standing in a small circle with Jackson and several other friends passing a joint around laughing to Jackson's repartee, the one person who, higher than a kite, was absolutely lucid and brilliant.

He was one of the few people in the poetry and performance world who was always kind and who struck me with his gentleness, incisive intelligence, integrity, humor and utter lack of pretension. I valued the kinship I felt with Jackson, a fellow Midwesterner, who I'd identified as an independent, an 'outsider' to poetic fashion yet who attracted an international cadre of admirers and various 'schools' of poetry vying to claim him as their own. I was twenty when I first encountered Jackson's

work in the context of experimental / avant-garde poetry and performance in a course taught by Barry Alpert, editor of *VORT*. I remember the picture of Jackson in *VORT* with long hair and beard – a modern day Whitman.

I remember his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at St. Mark's Church and everyone agreeing we'd be there again for his 90<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup>. "Hell, he's going to outlive us all!" When I look around these United States I see few poets of his stature, ethically and artistically, still standing. He brought visible order to chance. He let poetry happen. He ushers us to the present.

– Andrew Levy