2015

Joanne Kyger & "The Rush"

Kelsey Ann Davis
Bard College

Joanne Kyger & “The Rush”

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Language & Literature
of Bard College

by
Kelsey A. Davis

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2015

Acknowledgements

Thanks to:

My advisors, Cole Heinowitz and Deirdre D'Albertis-- Cole, for introducing me to Kyger and for guiding me as I read these difficult poems and researched around them. Deirdre, for all her generosity (and patience) as I finally began to write about them.

Betsy Cawley & Jeremy Hall, who devoted hours to helping me with my research and helped me to order materials from UCSD.

And, of course, my family, for their continual love and support.

*

This project is dedicated to my library pals & fellow moths-before-light: Sorrel, Annie, and Cypress.

Table of Contents

Joanne Kyger & "The Rush"

"Joanne Kyger, March 1980, Venice, CA" Alastair Johnston [1]

"When I was trying to do a portrait of Joanne I was surprised to discover that Joanne isn't Really beautiful. But-- she is. Beautiful. Sexy. A poet (Three books out) Married twice. Lived four years in Japan, Thinks a lot about what it's all about. Is afraid she might turn in to an eccentric. Just bought a house. And__ vulnerable. Joanne seems very vulnerable to me. And not afraid of being so. Not That one necessarily has a choice. You find yourself where you are. But you can admit it, or not admit it. (where you are) and Joanne admits it. I always have the feeling that Joanne is on the verge of Asking me a very important question. Or trying to tell me something very important. I'm not sure which. Probably, both."

-- Joe Brainard, 1971 [2]

[1] Johnston, Alastair. *A Rogue's Gallery of Literary and Artistic Types*. 2004. http://www.poltroonpress.com/rogues.html.

[2] Brainard, Joe. *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*. Library of America. 2012, 316

Note to the Reader

In the spring of 1957, Joanne Kyger dropped out of UC Santa Barbara and moved to San Francisco. She was then just a fledgling writer. It was at an opportune moment for a poet to land there-- Jack Spicer's Magic Workshop has just ended, Black Mountain College has just closed, and the Howl Obscenity trial was ongoing. The Beat poets, Black Mountain poets, and the poets who gathered at "The Place" with Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan (from here on described as the "North Beach Scene"), were brought in to close quarters. The poets gathered at houses and in bars every night. The poems they worked on during these meetings were read at locations around the city, such as the Beer and Wine Mission. Published on Auerhahn, White Rabbit, Coytoe Press, Jack Spicer's *J* and the Open Space magazines. Although these poets were writing outside of an institution, these were very serious meetings. One writer said, "Your poem was on the line that week and that [the poem] was your life." [3] As intimidating as it was for young male poets, for women interested in poetry, there were even more challenges in place.

In the late 1950s, poet Harold Dull wrote a particularly lucid description of Kyger in his notebook while sitting at a Sunday afternoon poetry reading in San Francisco: "George [Stanely's] eyeglasses are tiny clear lakes... Ebbe [Borregaard's] great bushy eyebrows, tree-tops.... Joanne's fandango cape or shawl she twirls in a huff about her shoulders-- a wisp of a cloud."[4] What strikes me in this description is how Kyger's cape (and by extension, Kyger herself) is described as part of the view but not the landscape. Kyger is present, but unattached. Or, only so attached. What seems to be keeping her there is her performance of a certain feminine role-- how dramatic is Dulls' description of

---

[3] Ellingham, Lewis, and Kevin Killian. *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998, 116

[4] ibid., 110

the cape she "twirls about her shoulders." This paper will investigate how the social challenges of Kyger's early poet-hood impacted the poetics that she developed through out her life.

This thesis began as a study of poems of Kyger's in which, to borrow Alice Notley's term, we see "ordinary actual life finding itself." [5] (I will refer to them as "observational poems" from here out.) I began by working on poems published in *Places to Go* (1970), *The Wonderful Focus of You,* (1980) *Trip Out and Fall Back* (1974), *Desecheo Notebook* (1971)*, Phenomenological* (1989)*, Patzcuaro* (1999)*,* and others smattered through her greater body of work. But, it became clear quite quickly that I was not going to be able to understand these poems if I did not study her early life and work closely. The lessons, social and poetic, that Kyger learned with the Beats and in the North Beach poetry scene had a profound impact upon the way that she worked for the rest of her life.

In Kyger's other observational poems, I am drawn to the way that Kyger manages to exalt domestic scenes and objects without use of easy symbolism or metaphor. Monarchs, persimmons, narcissus, quail, waves, the moon-- these things become charged by a means that is still mysterious to me. It might be by their continual appearance-- they appear so frequently, and with such specificity, that one would think she kept them around for writing about. I found them difficult to speak about at first. And, still find them difficult.

Consider "October 29, Take it Easier,"

---

[5] Notley, Alice. "Joanne Kyger's Poetry." In *Coming After*. N.p.: University of Michigan Press, n.d.

I wonder what the ocean is like today?

Cold and flat, hot and flat?

Cold and whippy, tide out, in? The sand

will be warm, I'm sure

for the sun is out today, and although not warm

in the house

It is in the spot I am going to now.[6]

The humor, light, and gratitude she brings to any moment and to ordinary things is personally inspiring. Andrew Schelling might say that her poems prompt and instruct readers how to "live close to the bone." [7] But, though there is something irresistible-- and useful, invigorating-- about these poems, they are deceptively difficult to talk around.

It's true-- from without, the poems might seem just be lovely lists of happenings. Doodles. I am not the only one who thinks so-- the contemporary reception of the poems is similar to mine. The May, 1972 issue of the *Beauline* magazine (one of several magazines published in Bolinas in the 1970s) includes this poem by Kyger's friend Ellen Sanders:

I swear to god

Me and Angelica

w.Juliet

met a a diabetic monkey

in a tree on Hawthorne

in the sheriff's yard

---

[6] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever.* 79

[7] Andrew Shelling, *Voices from the American Land*

and if that is not as good as Tom or Bob or Lewis or Joanne or even Bill can do

You Can Kiss My Ass [8]

But, there is clearly something here. In "When I used to focus on the worries, everybody," a poem that Kyger wrote in the mid-seventies, she articulates the observational impulse she acts upon in "October 29."

We are in easy understanding.

Scarcely talking, thoughts pass between us.

It is memory. As I search to find

this day's sweet drifting. The fog out to sea, the wind. [9]

Ammiel Alcalay writes of poems, like "October 29," which "search to find the day's sweet drifting: "For Kyger there is a constant and ongoing recognition that relying on received perception and memory is never enough, that such ties must be loosened through observation, vigilance, and active thought." He celebrates her for "always bringing things and thought back in to a phenomenal world that defies definition." Alcalay's statement helps us to understand that part of the mystery of these poems is that, though they have been published, their purpose is not entirely for the reader. [10]

---

[8] Ospedal, Kevin. "A Literary History of the San Andreas Fault: Bolinas Section." http://www.jackmagazine.com/issue3/renhist.html., Chapter 5

[9] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever: Selected Poems*. Edited by Michael Rothenberg. New York: Penguin, 2002, 206

[10] Not all of her poems work on this logic. *Joanne,* (actually, my favorite of all her work), The Imaginary Apparitions, The Life of Naropa poems, The Life of Helena Blavatsky, the more political poems of her later years, in *God Never Dies.* Often those other poems seem to be working through a theoretical space which informs the movement or content of the observational poems. But, it seems, reviewing a timeline of her work, that at any given point she might have been working on poems like these. But, the observational poems are a constant in her

When one considers the spiritual practice which underlines Kyger's poetics, it becomes clear that these poems are not making a point, but attempting to *do something*--they work more like spells than statements.[11] On a panel, at Naropa University in 2000, Kyger said that "Paying attention to the details of daily life [in poetry] became a part of what I perceived as Zen. Paying attention to the details of daily life so they didn't become the mundane thing of the quote housewife. They become the things of what your daily life were made up of. "[12] The resulting poetics is about movement. For Kyger, poetry is a way of following experience so closely as to liberate it from being just an act of social performance. [13]

Understanding how deeply connected poetry and social performance are for Kyger is, I think, is the key to managing the difficulty of Kyger's observational poems. This connection, I believe, was established for Kyger in those days when she was reading in the homes of North Beach poets.

In my thesis, I will focus just on working through the poems in *The Tapestry and the Web* which anticipate Kyger's observational poems of the 1970s- 2000s. Kyger was writing these poems between 1958 and 1963. During that time, she was living in San Francisco, and then as an expat in Japan with other Beat writers. The poems that she wrote during this time are not quite observational, but they assert the presence of the

---

career, following *The Tapestry & The Web.* The first proper instance of that appears in *Places to Go,* in prose form.

[11] The spiritual practice might be a slightly fraught one, subject to many of the issues of 'Beat Zen.' For a further discussion of Zen in the late 50s see *Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen* by Alan Watts.

[12] "Women and the Beats Panel"

[13] For an interesting discussion of spells as they pertain to Kyger's work, see Nix, Jennifer. "Finding Poetry in Illness." The Poetry Foundation. Last modified May 9, 2012. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/243994.

body, and work toward and are impacted by social performance in a way which anticipates the liberating attention of her observational poetics. Although they have been neglected by scholarship, I would argue that these "proto-observational" poems are critical for understanding her later work.

Her early and late work operate, both, not only as objects on the page, but as objects intimately connected to their author's embodiment, though on different terms--the later poems pay attention to detail as a way of *preventing* Kyger's days from becoming those of the "quote housewife." But, while Kyger is living in San Francisco, she develops a poetics which *accommodates* and *facilitates* the conditions of her social performance. It seems to me that in order to understand the political and social import of her later poems, it is necessary to take in to consideration the difficulty of those early years.

Part I-- The Poet and The Muse

I. Groundwork

In her book, "I made you to find me." Jane Hedley writes that for the women she studied, **"**being female may have worked for them by working against them, in that it brought each of them inescapably to grips with the question of who she would be speaking *as* in her poems and where she would be speaking *from."* [14] This is certainty true for Joanne Kyger. Kyger was working in a community in which the pressures against women were particularly high. Women artists were forced to contend with obstacles both internal and internal to produce their work. When she is asked in an interview, "What was it like for you as a woman poet in this group?" She says,

> Most of them were gay, which sexuality was out of the way... We could just be friends. And, I don't think-- you know, that question is asked a lot, and I don't think there was the same kind of feminist identity in the middle fifties that people have now. I think it's something that has evolved. At that point, it wasn't yet of interest. Most women that I went to school with in Santa Barbara were not interested in what I was interested in... No, I didn't know any women who were contemporary writers. [15]

While there might have been plenty of models of women writers available to her in the larger American frame, there were none in her immediate sphere. "I understood that the brotherhood of the beat writers-- they had their voices-- I was never discouraged from writing, ever, but there was never a place for me, among them. I was essentially on my

---

[14] Hedley, Jane. "Making 'You' to find 'Me.'" Introduction to *I Made You to Find Me: The Coming of Age of the Woman Poet and the Politics of Poetic Address*, 1-25. Columbus, Oh: The Ohio State University Press, 2009.

[15] Grace, Nancy. "Places to Go: Joanne Kyger." Places to Go: Joanne Kyger to *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, edited by Nacy Grace. Jackson: University Press of Missisippi, 2004.

own."[16] In 1957, precisely when Kyger moves to San Francisco, there *were* some women writing-- Jan Kerouac, Carolyn Cassady, Joyce Johnson wrote alongside their husbands. [17] But, they were not poets, but diarists who wrote furtively.

Those women who were writing *poetry* at that time did so secretly. Frances Jaffer writes, "I told myself in advance that I didn't have to show any of my poems to men" [18] Hettie Jones said "I stuck my poems from that time in a drawer."[19] As far as I can tell, most did not aspire to writing and sharing verse alongside the men, or even consider it an option.

Kyger attributes women's' exclusion from the "brotherhood" of poets to a nonsense construction of inspiration which was trending at the time. In a 1983 interview, Kyger recalls, "Gary Snyder told me that a woman couldn't be a poet because she really couldn't have a muse." [20] Beat women like Kyger, Jones, Cassady, etc. faced internal constraints. Space was made for them in the community as "muses," not speakers. So, they did not speak publicly. A challenge for Kyger was to work inside the social persona of "the muse" that allowed her to be engaged with these writers, but do so without internalizing too deeply this idea that she might not speak or write publicly for herself.

In discussions of the relationship of the poet to (presumably) his voice in the 1950s and 60s, the muse-poet construction became a way for poets to discuss-- or mask-- their inheritance of Romantic ideas about inspiration and gender. (One which the Romantic poets had, in turn, inherited it from generations of writers before them.) In

---

16 "Women and the Beats Panel" Audio File. Naropa Poetics Audio Archive. June 2000. *archive.org/details/Women_And_The_Beats_Panel_June_2000_00P013*

17 An exception to this is Diane Di Prima, but Kyger did not know of her at this time.

18 Jaffer, Frances. "For Women Poets, For Poetry: A Journal Entry." In *The Poetry Reading: A Contemporary Compendium on Language & Performance,* ed. Stephen Vincent and Ellen Zweig. San Francisco: Momo's Press 1981, 61

19 "Women and the Beats Panel"

20 Kyger, Joanne. "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed." By Diane Middleton-McQuaid and John Thorpe. *Convivio* 1, no. 1 (1983), 113

Women Writers and Poetic Identity, Margaret Homans makes an appraisal of the experience of women poets in the Romantic era which I think could apply to the writing of the San Francisco Renaissance as well. She writes, "Where the masculine self dominates and internalizes otherness, that other is frequently identified as feminine, whether she is nature, the representation of a human woman, or some phantom of desire." [21] Woman's reduction to mysterious *other* results in what Homans describes as "her exclusion from a traditional identification of the speaking subject as male." [22]

In a panel discussion held by Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Allen Ginsberg in 1963, we see the men of the San Francisco Renaissance working through these same issues. The discussion is called is called "Duende, Muse, and Angel," and in it the participants think through the nature of poetic inspiration, and work to reconcile these terms. It becomes clear in the course of their discussion that while these figures are thinking about nature in the same terms that Wordsworth was, they are nonetheless still inheritors of this tradition of thought which frames the speaking subject as male.

At some point, Olson, who always dominates the discussion, says, "For Wordsworth, nature had become a substitute for this thing that we're now talking about. Like, literally nature, You go out and look." [23] Olson says, *a substitute.* As if the conception of a (feminine) figure of inspiration were so necessary that it was justifiable to say that Wordsworth had gotten it wrong.

---

[21] Homans, Margaret. *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980., 12

[22] ibid.

[23] Olson, Charles. *Muthologos: Lectures and Interviews*. Edited by Raph Maud. 2nd ed. N.p.: Talonbooks, 2010, 68.

Kyger understands that how deeply engrained this construction of the speaking subject is in the culture. In 1963, she writes a vexed journal entry expressing her frustration:

> My ground self
> has got humor too
> The rock bottom
> exactly the same
> I'm the country
> You are the voice
> I can't be without you
> At rock bottom is a hollow soul,
> lady is the land, small like a seed
> and the big voice the man
>
> (what woman ever writes a poem "America I Love You") [24]

Kyger sees lady framed as the land, but not granted its bigness, only its mystery (hollowness), and possibility (as of seeds). Its potential can not be actualized without nourishment of voice. She says, "I can't be without you," mocking the assertion that woman, or land, is dependent on man, or masculine voice, to come in to meaningful being.

In the Romantic era, the women whose writing remains for us imagined new ways of speaking, which could be compatible with their identification with the "hollow" subject and un-actualized potential. In the 50s and 60s, the pressure on women to disavow their own artistic ambitions was obviously not as high as it was in the Romantic era. Still, they allow themselves to assume subordinate or secretive writing roles, as Dorothy Wordsworth did. (I see her as being involved in poetic production from the sidelines, writing *journals,* participating in William Wordsworth's poetic process as an

---

[24] Kyger, Joanne. *The Japan & India Journals 1960-1964*. Bolinas, CA: Tombouctou Press, 1981, 234. The last line of this poem is ostensibly referring to "Next to God of course America," by E.E. Cummings.

observer and commentator, and leaving the public voice entirely to him.) So too, women's poetry was seen as "missing something." It was less marketable.

Women in "the scene" were viewed as more suited for the role of the muse than the *poetess.* In *Making You to Find me, The coming of age of the Woman Poet and the Politics of Poetic Address,* Jane Hedley finds evidence for this in her study of the way that women's poetry was marketed at mid-century, often apologizing for the femininity of their authors. (Even popular authors, like Sylvia Plath.) [25]

Kyger intuits this cultural stigma. While, in her later years, Kyger has no trouble assuming the identity of a poet. She says in an interview in 1974, "Well once you're in to poetry and it gets in to your life you can't turn back from it." [26] But, as a young woman, Kyger hesitated to describe or present herself as a poet at all. She reports that she never wanted to be a "*poetess."* She wanted to be "bigger than that"-- a *writer.* [27] Kyger chooses the genderless *writer* over *poetess,* an identity that could more easily satisfy her ambitions as a thinker and a maker.

And yet-- Kyger, as a young woman, was quite shy about her writing. Kyger says that she wrote first in her twenties. In college, she wrote largely in prose. "At first it was a somewhat anguished look at the world, seeking catharsis," she says. [28] Writing was, from the start, about personal engagement rather than ambition. Although she had started a writing group with Mark di Suervo and his brother, and even started a literary magazine

---

[25] Hedley, Jane. *Making 'You' to find 'Me.'* 2

[26] Lawrence, Nahem. "A Conversation with Joanne Kyger."
Note: "dedicated" is one of the words most frequently used to describe the 2000 Jacket magazine feature on her, in which poets and poetics scholars write about her.

[27] Grace, Nancy. "Places to Go: Joanne Kyger." Places to Go: Joanne Kyger to *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, edited by Nacy Grace. Jackson: University Press of Missisippi, 2004, 144

[28] Kyger, Joanne. "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed." 111

with them, and later wrote a "silly column" in the college newspaper called "Easy Come," she never read her own work out loud. [29]

Likewise, when Kyger moved to San Francisco, it was without an explicit desire to become *a poet.* In 1957, Kyger dropped out of UC Santa Barbara and went running to San Francisco with her friend Nemi Frost, from whom she had heard stories about Robert Creeley and John Altoon. She describes that moment in time this way:

> The howl obscenity trial is happening, spring 1957. I visit City Lights Book store and fall I love with the tone, the truth... A friend from my job at The City of Paris, a young painter named Jerome Mallmann take me to The Place, a famous writer and poets' bar run by Leo Krikorian, formerly a student at Black Mountain College. This is where it's really happening... [30]

What was important to Kyger was fame or dissemination of her work, but being engaged "where it was really happening." So, when she encountered what Linda Russo calls "the masculinist concept of the poet as maker," (the poet whose female counterpart was not poetess, but *muse*) and playing "the muse" seemed to offer her access to this community, she did not fight it. She says, "I decided to become the muse, in that case." [31]

It would be easy to read this as an act of self-subordination. But, I argue that "the muse" an inactive role, nor a waste of time for Kyger. Playing "the muse" was a strategic social maneuver. Has she not given in to this social performance, she might not have had access to the group. By playing "the muse," she was able to build a space for herself among the writers that she admired, and gain access to their teachings, support, and work.

---

[29] ibid.
[30] CUNY, 2
[31] Kyger, Joanne. "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed.", 113

II. Playing the Muse

When asked in an interview, "How does it feel to be a Muse?" Kyger said,

> You live your life in relationship to poets and become the source of their material.You become the instiller who keeps things moving and amusing and keeps putting music on. I thought I could warm people up and pat them on the back and bring them messages, as some way of using my wits and questioning them. [32]

It was expected that, as a woman, she would contribute to poetic production obliquely (as Dorothy Wordsworth did.) And, she does for a while. This is indeed how people describe her in that time-- the other members of the North Beach poetry scene remember her particularly 'standing out' by her unconventional, 'impolite' and indulgent behaviors and dress. Nemi Frost recalls Joanne doing cartwheels in the park one evening. [33] Tom Field remembers Joanne drinking from a saucepan with Nemi at the Dunn's. [34] She participated enthusiastically as the 'muse,' putting the music on for others. Even in her own descriptions of herself, Kyger emphasizes her muse-playing and her social performance: "I visit [North Beach] every night in my red Capezio slippers with silver buckles. I have them re-heeled every two weeks. I drink devastating martinis and hear Kenneth Rexroth and Lawrence Ferlinghetti read poetry with jazz at The Cellar..." [35]

The problem arises when Kyger *does* start writing and sharing poetry. (At some point, the form calls to her, and she begins writing simple pieces, childhood memories in her spare time, or while she working at Bretano's bookstore.) Things come to a head in the Fall of 1957, when Kyger is confronted by George Stanley, of all people. (A recent

---

[32] ibid.

[33] Ellingham, Lewis, and Kevin Killian. *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998, 100

[34] ibid., 108

[35] Kyger, Joanne. "from Joanne Kyger." The Electronic Poetry Center. http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/kyger/autobiography.html. Originally Published in ContemporaryAuthors Autobiography Series, Volume 16

review of Stanley's work begins, "George Stanley's poems often take place in bars.") [36] He said to her, "Some people are treating these meetings just like a party." It is as if he was entreating her-- well, Joanne, do you want to be a *woman* or a *poet?* [37]

III. Writing as the Muse

In Doctor Williams' Heiresses, Alice Notley, poet and personal friend of Kyger's, writes,

> I'm not all that interested in being a woman, it's just a practical problem that you deal with when you write poems. You have to deal with the problem of who you are so that you can be a person talking.[38]

This was certainly true for Kyger. Following George Stanley's confrontation, Kyger was forced to consider the use and limits of her social persona. It seems that abandoning her social performance was not an option. But, she was also being entreated to share her writing. The challenge was to construct a poetics that would allow her to speak without jeopardizing the social rapport that she had accumulated by playing to the muse/ poet construction.

Being part of "the scene" is important to Kyger's development as an artist. A resource available to her was the discussion surrounding Charles Olson's Projective Verse happening at that time. The way that poets were thinking about sound and the body in poems-- about the significance of *form*-- offered an alternative to (masculine, inspired)

---

[36] "GEORGE STANLEY." Poetry Society of America. https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/awards/frost_and_shelley/shelley_winners/2006/

[37] In *Fiery Forms,* scholar Suzanne Juhasz, writes of women who are interested in writing verse, "Usually she is pressured or pressures herself to make a choice: woman or poet" [37] This was certainly the dilemma that Kyger found herself up against. (Juhasz, Suzanne. *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition*. New York: Octagon Books, 1978, 2)

[38] Notley, Alice. "Doctor Williams' Heiresses: a Lecture." Tuumba Press, 1980.

voice by which “hollow forms” and “seeds” could become actualized, and suffused with meaning or beauty.

When Kyger begins to read her work, it is on these terms that it is praised. The impression I have of her reception to the community is quiet-- a smattering of comments on this, form. She says, the first reading was at Ebbe Borregaard’s. Spicer said, “What are your plans for poetry?” and Harold Dull said, “Ssh, leave her alone.” [39] She recalls that Robert Duncan’s response was, tellingly, “There are a few things I could teach you about the line.” Forming such relationships empowers Kyger to be adventurous in her writing, to read in public, to publish her work.

[39] Alcalay, Ammiel, ed. "Communication is Essential: Letters to & From Joanne Kyger." *The CUNY Poetics Documents Initiative*, 3rd ser., 7 (Fall 2012), 2

Part II-- A "voice"

I. Lessons on Consonants

It is not a coincidence that Kyger's reading of "The Maze" in particular coincides with a sudden burst of positive critical reception from Duncan. The poem runs on principles he taught her about Projective Verse. It moves, despite discontinuity in places, on the power of the syllable, the tight musical weave of alliterations and assonances. Kyger was not new to *Projective Verse* at the time she was writing "The Maze." She says, Joe Dunn gave her a copy in 1957), but its principles are exceedingly apparent in her work once Duncan begins to advise her closely.[40]

Kyger's 1958 workshop notebook begins with four pages on the syllable. In it she writes pages upon pages about the syllable. Despite her own disdain for detail-work-- she writes in *The Dharma Committee,* on October 9, 1958, "Duncan's class met last night and more talk about vowels and consonants-- the boredom of it to me relieved only by the fact that Robert arrived quite high on martinis."[41] But, she writes down an assignment for herself: "Find out all you can about double consonant-clusters. Consonants begin a word. More than one consonant together

Black Bird
Clutches at our finger
The black bird rises..." [42]

---

[40] Kyger, Joanne. "The Community of THE CURRICULUM OF THE SOUL." *Harriet (Poetry Foundation Blog)*. Entry posted August 28, 2012. http://The Community of THE CURRICULUM OF THE SOUL.

[41] Kyger, Joanne *About Now: Collected Poems*. N.p.: National Poetry Foundation, 2007., 381

[42] Kyger, Joanne. "Notebook: Duncan Poetry Workshop 1958-1959." 1958. Box 19: Folder 6. Joanne Kyger Papers, 1950 - 2009. University of California: San Diego, San Diego, CA.

The principles that she learned in that workshop are so pronounced in "The Maze" that it seems almost to be an announcement of her allegiance to Robert Duncan's teachings. Look just at this stanza:

> Behind the
> tall thick muslin of the curtain
> we could see his shadow
> knocking
> and we waiting
> not stirring

The whole poem runs more or less at this tenor. The tenets of Projective Verse are even more apparent in Kyger's writing than in Duncan's. Kyger does not work closely with Projective Verse through her whole career. By the time that she is writing *Going On,* she has, in fact, returned to prose poetry. [43] But, making this connection was a strong diplomatic move for her. By engaging with his ideas about form, attention, and time in "The Maze," Kyger makes her work available to Duncan's conversation.

Duncan writes briefly about "The Maze" in *As Testimony,* an essay that began as a candid letter to George Stanley, arguing about what was going on in North Beach. What he says of her work is this:

> Joanne Kyger's poem began "I saw"; the sound lingered as a base tone (where the world awe never merges) thru the diminished o of walk, all, fall, water, for the sound of water was that sound rushing,) on to the close with the word *walls.* "And so I walkd" she writes, "wanting to fall. [44]

---

[43] She says of *Tapestry,* "I oversaw the lines very carefully to be sure hat the flow was moving across the page and that it accurately represent the passage of writing. Spicer would refer to this period as "completing my maze." The second book, Places to Go, got more adventuresome. I felt that language would move of it's own accord." (see "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed," 117)

[44] Duncan, Robert. *As Testimony: The Poet and the Scene*. San Francisco, CA: White Rabbit Press, 1964, 18

Duncan calls attention to the *small* parts of Kyger's form, her lines, and within them, her syllables. But, it's worth noting that even as Duncan celebrates her use of Projective Verse, this only comes *alongside* a description of her physical presence.

Duncan ostensibly places her front & center in his essay, *As Testimony: The Poets and the Scene*. But, while the essay claims, in its opening note to be "beginning as a letter from Robert Duncan to George Stanley and referring to a poem by Harold Dull and later to one by Joanne Kyger," and includes copies of both "The Maze" and "The Door," Duncan really writes only about "The Door." Kyger's poem itself receives maybe a paragraph or two of analysis. It is merely counterpoint to Dull's. What she gets credit for is her body language and her conversation: "As in the scene Sunday I see Joanne Kyger kneeling. There had been a chair, but she sits always on the floor, not crouching Sunday, but on her knees when the poem was read." Later, he writes "At tea, Tuesday, Joanne told me this part of the legend..." and he goes on to recount her story, without mentioning her again. [45]

The liminal zone between muse and poet that she here occupies will only be a useful space for her for so long. In spite of Duncan's mentorship, Kyger clearly had to pursue her own poetic project in order to progress as an artist.

II. The Body in Projective Verse

In her early career, Kyger does not dismantle the poet/muse binary, but recognizes its ridiculousness for herself, and then uses it to carve a space for herself in the scene. She said, on a panel, "I labored under these conceptual restraints for a while until I realized it was nonsense." When pressed on this issue, she uses gendered metaphors to scramble the

[45] ibid., 13

sense of the poet-muse binary: she said that as a young woman, she would "do things like dressing and cooking and being the midwife for any great writing that might come along (the men's writing)." [46]

But, the time that Kyger spent playing the muse is not totally lost on her-- her experiences then go on to inform and to develop a poetry that is completely her own. Duncan's writing on Kyger in *As Testimony* demonstrates that, for Kyger, social performance and poetry go hand in hand. Kyger is welcomed as much on the merit of her embodied social performance as on the quality of her poetry. It is not a leap, then, to think that the poetry itself might be shaped by these social performances. In Kyger's case, I believe this lead to an insistence on asserting the presence of her body in the poetry.

Later in life, Kyger describes Gary's imperative that she play the muse a "warning that any writing I might do might not be inspirational."[47] Her engagement with Projective Verse, then seems to be an acknowledgement, or an avoidance of, that problem. Her poems run on technical precision, resonating not at the level of *idea* or *inspiration,* but in the way that *sound* brings *feeling* to *the body.*

A great deal of the emotional thrust of "The Maze' lies in Kyger's deft manipulation of sound. This is especially apparent at the end of the poem. The last stanza begins:

She
tortures
the curtains of the window[48]

This is such an animated piece of text, a break from the beginning of the poem, which is melancholy and unhurried, but precise. The effect has something to do with the sudden

[46] "Women and the Beats Panel"
[47] ibid.
[48] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever,* 3

shift in the placement of the lines on the page. (Before this point in the poem, few lines deviate from the margin.) At the moment Penelope begins to shred the curtains of the windows, the suddenly fluid placement of the line on the page gives the reader, or listener, a jolt. The shape of the line does not let the reader breathe in a steady, comfortable pattern as in the first half. The breath pattern is suddenly capricious, erratic. Listening to Kyger read the poem, we hear her lurch at several spots. It is jarring. Kyger seems to be drawing attention to the fact that her poem originates from a physical being and has a physicality of its own.

She adapts some of the lessons she learned from Duncan about syllables to this end as well. The most obvious example of this is the connection between "I saw" in the first line of the poem, and "walls" at the end. A more extended pattern is her manipulation of the soft 'e' sound. Kyger builds up and wears down the affect on this letter throughout the poem. Lines will go by in which the only soft 'e's that appear are in words like "begged," "never," and "dead," which carry a sense of hopelessness. And, then suddenly, she will break this pattern by throwing in something softer with an 'e'--"delighted," "caressed," or "melodies." Consider,

> Held captive in a cave
> Ulysses
> sobbed for his wife
> who was singing high
>
> melodies
> from the center of a ...

In the second of these two stanzas, "melodies," isolated on its own line, breaks the hard affect building on that 'e' sound. But, in the last stanza (the one in which Penelope tears the curtains), the type of affect associated with the soft 'e' sound ceases to fluctuate. Though the sound is equally important here, it only appears only in words with a violent

feeling-- “shreds,” “insect,” “demented,” “web,” and “possessed.” This only enhances the physical jolt that her lines give one listening to the poem.

In her exploration of *The Tapestry & the Web*, *To Deal with Parts and Particulars* (2002), critic Linda Russo makes the smart suggestion that I hear echo. It is by manipulating formal aspects of the poem (like line placement and sound repetition) that Kyger finds release from some of the expectations of a masculinist poetic. Russo puts it nicely-- because Projective Verse situates poetry in the body rather than in the mind or field of inspiration, it offers “new mode of poetic authority that diverges from masculine conceptions of the role of the poet as maker.” [49]

It’s true that Olson had advocated for the inspiration model of poetic authority. He had been present at the panel discussion I cited earlier in this paper about modes of inspiration. Indeed, it was he who said: “For Wordsworth, nature had become a substitute for this thing that we’re now talking about.”[50] But, in Projective Verse, he calls the poem the “Boss of all, the ‘Single Intelligence.’” Within the scope of Projective Verse, there is no authority outside of what is on the page. The poem is viewed as separate and superior (in intelligence) to the poet. The materials of the poem-- the syllable, the line, words-- are to be dealt with carefully as materials of any other art form. [51] So, Projective Verse situates the origin of poetry in (genderless) bodily attention. It is poetry by way of “The ear, the eye, the breath.” He writes, “And the line comes (I swear it) from the breath,

---

[49] Russo, Linda. "To Deal with Parts and Particulars: Joanne Kyger’s Early Epic Poetics." In *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, edited by Ronna Johnson and Nancy Grace. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002, 179

[50] Olson, Charles. *Muthologos,* 68

[51] Another passage from Projective Verse that might be of interest:“[words] must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality; and that these elements are to be seen as creating the tensions of a poem just as totally as do those other objects create what we know as the world.”

from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes, and thus is, it is here that, the daily work, the WORK, gets in." Not inspiration, but *work.* Labor, such as any body is capable of doing.

Kyger says, that in this poem she had found a "voice," precisely the quality that she felt had been socially unavailable to her when she first moved to San Francisco because of the emphasis that her peers placed on the muse-poet construction. [52] But, I would argue that she never feigns to find a "voice" which comes from inspiration and abstract feeling. Only the one which comes literally from the body. Playing "the muse" is a social strategy that remains useful to Kyger for years. Joe Brainard writes of her on his visit to Bolinas in 1971, "Everyone seems to have a high school crush on Joanne Kyger. (Me too.) "[53]And, the influence of this social performance, which I have sketched in this chapter, continues to show itself in her poetry.

It makes sense that if Kyger felt that her acceptance and authority in the scene were dependent on her ability to perform socially with her body that she would write from her body, and to other bodies as well. Kyger's demonstration of the tenets of Projective Verse operates as a girder or a mast in the poem, asserting the integrity of her labor and her intention in writing.

Part III-- The Rush

I. Reading Otis Consciousness

Let me offer my transcription of a poem that Kyger reads in 1978 for Public Access Poetry. In it she describes the way that her social performance informs her writing practice. It is of interest to me because in 1978, Kyger is writing primarily the

---

[52] Alcalay, Ammiel, ed. "Communication is Essential: Letters to & From Joanne Kyger," 2

[53] Brainard, Joe. *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*. Library of America. 2012, 296,

observational poetry I discussed in the introduction to this project. As my paper progresses, I will continue to argue that the emphasis she places on physical attention in those poems is something that I see as having roots in Kyger's performance of the muse. This poem, *Otis Consciousness* give me a useful language for talking about the way that Kyger understands the connection between direct attention, the body, and social performance. The poem runs,

> ... Enough to have all of this happening or none of this happening I tell you sometimes I wish my body I mean I hate it when I get tired, like *I'd like to see* the whole world and the universe and heaven and all human beings from before now and forever more and everything all at once, every single instance that never stopped or even began. Did I say it all? ... That's why I want to go down town tonight, just in case, but first I'm going to take a shower and wash my hair. And I'll see what happens. [54]

Kyger finishes reading. Then she says, "that's called *a rush."* It is unclear whether Kyger is referring to the state of expanded, altered perception that she imagines in the first half of this poem, or to what's "going on downtown tonight." This makes me think that she considers them one in the same, at some level.

What I'm interested in here is the way that Kyger frames her hair-washing in light of both of these "rushes." First, Kyger is reconciling the difficulty of her desire for an expanded perception of "every single instance that never stopped or even began" and the constraints of her body.[55] Her particular bounded perception, its lock in time is crucial to any perception, but it is also a limitation for her. If Kyger wants to "*see what happens",* she has to go do so with her body. Second, Kyger is reconciling the necessity of her

---

[54] "Memory Stick." mp3 audio file, 1:14. Penn Sound. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Kyger.php
(Note: I do not know if the original poem was in verse or prose)

[55] What she describes, I imagine, is something like what D.T. Suzuki would describe as a moment of Satori. Kyger begins reading Suzuki when she is in college and when she first moves to San Francisco.

social performance to the potential unfolding of this. To "see what happens," she has to play a certain social game: she has to wash her hair.

Bathing, and specifically hair-washing are concerns that Kyger takes up frequently in her writings, often to this same conclusion. [56] An instance in *Joanne (1973),* Kyger's "novel inside-out," speaks directly to *Otis Consciousness:*

I am walking up the path
I come home and wash my hair
I am bereft
I dissolve quickly

I am everybody [57]

In both of these poems, we see hair-washing operating as a necessary opening space to experience. To me, it speaks to Kyger's understanding of the relationship between her social performance and her spiritual/ poetic projects. Washing is a task of daily maintenance & sanitation, but it is also an act of vanity, part of a social performance. For Kyger, the body-- and by extension, her social performance-- is always present as an anchor to experience. It follows that social performance would anchor her poetic practice as well. Seeing as Kyger's presence in the community was so long dependent upon her physical presentation, it makes sense that she develops a poetry that does not take for granted physicality as a resource or as a limitation.

---

[56] Other hair-washing poems which operate on similar grounds include *Morning Mess* and *Tuesday, October 28, 1969 Bolinas*

[57] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever: Selected Poems*. Edited by Michael Rothenberg. New York: Penguin, 2002, 101

see appendix for context, correct spacing and line placement

In the first two parts of this project, I argued that Kyger's poetics responds to the particular conditions of her female embodiment by insisting on physicality in poetry. We might think of that as an attempt on my part to articulate the way that Kyger's poetry reflects how she, as a woman, navigated a literal search for the social "rush" of belonging to the major artistic movements of her time.

In what follows, I will observe how, as Kyger makes a shift toward writing more observational poetry, the poems themselves become about finding a "rush," social and spiritual, in quieter moments. In the observational poems in *Going On, Trip Out and Fall Back, Phenomenological,* etc. (as well as in the poems in *Tapestry* which anticipate them, like "Waiting" and "The persimmons are falling,") Kyger develops a poetics which helps her work towards meeting her experiences, finding "the rush" in anything.

II. Cultural and Critical Context

We can read Kyger's poetics of the "rush" as a push against the cultural pressures in the 1950's and 60's that discouraged women from engaging and voicing their interiority. The pressures arise from what Elaine Tyler May calls the "domestic confinement culture" of the 1950's, an "internal reverberation" of foreign policy initiatives by the same name. [5859] It has its roots in the rising popularity of therapy, one tool which promised to make the home a safe oasis for the family--

> Professionals became the experts of the age, providing scientific and psychological means to achieve personal well-being. The therapeutic approach that gained momentum during these years was geared to helping

[58] May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. N.p.: Basic Books, 2008, 16

[59] George F. Kennan first used the term in regards to the American strategy for preventing influence of the Soviet Union from spreading around the world. The term was also used to refer to strategies for coping with the reality of the atom bomb.

> people feel better about their place in the world, rather than change it. It offered private and personal solutions to social problems. The family was the arena in which that adaption was expected to occur... [60]

May argues that the popularization of therapy and its encouragement of "adaptation" impacted women especially. When May reviews surveys she finds story of woman after woman who, through pressure to suppress 'unacceptable' urges, become estranged from the truth of their own experience.

One, named Norma, writes of her dissatisfying marriage "Inadequate as it seems in some respects it will last us 'till death do us part' and we'll live on an even keel." [61] Though therapy promises to *surface* one's emotions, thereby offering "private and personal solutions", it encourages a culture in this era, of *shutting off* one's attention to ones' needs and experiences in favor of "the even keel." It serves to rationalize and suppress feelings, estranging individuals from their "inadequate" lives-- essentially, remaining comfortable as they wait.

Kyger expresses disdain for the confinement culture in her early poetry and early life. She understood that the pressures of the "domestic confinement culture," extended through beat counter culture as well. At least, for women. Kyger herself writes,

> There were very few women that set out to be independent thinkers. There was the beat chicks-- yeah they were really emancipated-- they stayed in the kitchen all the time... Women *thought* about being intellectually independent. That was a goal or an aim. [62]

Kyger sets out, as a young woman, to avoid becoming economically dependent on a lover or a husband. And she works at a dry good store called the City of Paris.

---

[60] May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound,* 17
[61] ibid., 189
[62] Russo, Linda "Introduction: a context for reading Joanne Kyger." *Jacket #11*, 2000. 7-8

> I loved being part of the North Beach phenomena but then I had to go to work every morning, and got very stretched out, with late nights and taking dexedrine which was the drug of choice then if you could get it. So it got very stretched out for me during that time. But I needed to earn a living. [63]

Kyger, like the other beat women writers, arrived in a community of poets because she was looking for a community of intellectuals. Unlike most of the *beat chicks* her principal, initial entry in the poetry community in San Francisco was not a lover, but her friend Jerome Mallman, a young painter friend happened to be a co-worker. (Bobbie Lousie Hawkins, who was married to Robert Creeley for a time said, "I registered that if you fucked somebody, you had somebody to talk to. An easy solution!") [64]

III. Poetics of the Rush

After Kyger moves to Japan, especially, her poetry practice itself becomes a way of maintaining her independence. As I noted in the introduction to this project, she said on a panel in 2000 that in Japan, she spent a lot of time "paying attention to the details of daily life so they didn't become the mundane thing of the quote housewife." [65] This manifests itself in the formal quality of the poems as well--

Stephen Vincent is one the poets who works on Kyger in what I have termed the 'second wave' of Kyger scholarship. [66] In an essay titled *Testing the Sublime,* Vincent explores the syntactical difficulty of Kyger's poetry as it relates to this concept of "the rush."

> What makes these poems contemporary, rather than histrionic: they are nervous, publicly anxious, not always sure, and yet committed in a way that proposes a generosity of humor and spirit, a mischievousness...

---

[63] ibid., 10
[64] "Women and the Beats Panel"
[65] "Women and the Beats Panel"
[66] For a more detailed discussion of this, see appendix I

> Kyger's work (clearly various in its directions) delivers a formality constantly disrupted by a variety of scrims that move/ slide into and off stage. The incomplete sentence that splices then unsplices from the overlap of one scrim and then another. "[67]

I spend some time with this because I want to borrow Vincent's terminology as I go forward. I appreciate Vincent's description of some of Kyger's favorite syntactical maneuvers-- "formality constantly disrupted," the "spicing" and "unsplicing" of sentences. He says that Kyger "keeps turning the tables-- the unveiling-- providing the poem as a "rush," a surprise, indeed an alchemy." Kyger's observational poetry is so faithful to perception (of the outer world, as well as her own thought) that often more than a study of sight, these poems become studies of its limits and its lapses.

Consider *About Now,* a poem written in 2004--

About now
tiny iridescent
pieces of abalone

So intimate these overcast days

Home is the moment
the quail arrive.

The sentences are fragmented, interrupting, constantly subverting our expectations. As detail follows detail, perception and thought, Kyger's syntax becomes mobile and multi-valenced. It's a *rush*-- maybe the same "rush," that Kyger describes in *Otis Consciousness.*

These poetics are anticipated by some of her work in *The Tapestry and the Web.* Like Kyger's observational poems, poems in that book they often avoid syntactical closure just as much as Kyger herself avoids closure of her sight. Take, for instance, "Fragmented, ie several valleys, which opens

---

[67] Vincent, Stephen. "Testing the Sublime-- The Work of Joanne Kyger." *Jacket #11*, 2000, 3

Unfortunately unable to give you the plain *D.* can present of

wheat, corn etc. only bravado on my part

to hope to be blessed with complete vision. [68]

My project in the second half of this thesis is to trace the development of Kyger's poetics of "the rush" from early poems in *The Tapestry and the Web* (such as "Waiting" and "Fragmented") through her later observational poems. I hope that, through doing this, what will emerge is a strong sense of the way that Kyger's poetics are shaped by, and shape, her social performances throughout her life. And, ultimately, move toward a social and political reading of her work as a critique of or, antidote to, 1950s "confinement culture."

Part IV-- Reading The Tapestry and the Web and Kyger's Observational Poetics

I. "The Rush" in Kyger's Epic Poetics

It is by imagining through the story of Homer's Penelope that Kyger first explores issues of domestic confinement in her poetry. As she continues writing, using epic motifs to articulate this project of articulating her own seeings seems to become a crutch.

December 31, 1963

> ... Resolutions: In order to rise as a poet, the craft of poetry must be studied and known. Painful as it may be, hours each day should be spent scanning poetry sheets and volumes of the past. New conscious ground expansion for poems and ordinary proficiency both executed daily. The craft should fit like a glove. Exactly: from my *own* life, not sources from myth. [69]

[68] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever,* 22

[69] Kyger, Joanne.*The Japan & India Journals,* 269

Although she ultimately moves away from the epic poetics, they are crucial, I would argue, to the development of her later work.

Penelope appears in her poetry first in *The Maze.* Her engagement with her begins as an intervention in to literature, likely by the influence of Robert Duncan.[70] In a letter, Kyger recalls that the ending of The Maze poem was inspired by a dream she had about the character Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* by Dickens.[71] The finished poem, however doesn't bear that mark. Considering earlier mentions of "Ulysses" in this poem, the "She" here appears, from without to be Penelope, a figure who Kyger later establishes as a classical analogue to herself as a 'Beat Woman.' "The Maze" ends,

> She
> tortures
> the curtains of the window
> shreds them

---

[70] We might even read it as a participation in the project Duncan takes on in *The H.D. Book.* *The H.D. Book* is a quest to explore the shadows of the culture he lived in. He sees himself as an inheritor of the project of Freud, James, Sapir, Whorf, and others, in reclaiming as "common sense" and as "meaningful and significant" the thought of "primitives, dreamers, children, or the mad." Duncan's quest to extend the types of human experiences thought of as human must have spoken particularly to Kyger, as a woman. Duncan's interest extended the project of Freud, James, et al. toward reversing the dismissal of women and the feminine. Michael Boughn, who introduces the *The H.D. Book,* calls it a project to recover what has been "occulted beneath layers of patriarchal authority."

Duncan, Robert *The H.D. Book*. Edited by Michael Boughn and Victor Coleman. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011.

[71] Kyger sees the two women as having been subject to the same plight of repression. She writes-- "I had a dream Monday night: I was looking a the white muslim curtain in my bedroom and I fell asleep. When I awoke Sheila had gone mad-- like Pip's 'friend' in Great Expectations, Mrs. Haversham-- and had done awful things to the curtains. They were shredded in the most terrifying way-- like loose spider webs and fastened with points of open safety pins to the ceiling and walls around the window."

Kyger, Joanne "Letters from Lost & Found." *Harriet (Poetry Foundation Blog)*. Entry posted August 31, 2012. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/08/letters-from-lost-found/

like some
insane insect
creates a
demented web
from the thin folds
her possessed fingers
clawing she
thrusts them away with
sharp jabs of long pins to the walls. [72]

Some scholarship has been done on Kyger's re-imagining of Penelope.[73] In *Parts and Particulars,* Linda Russo advocates for the political power of Kyger's aim to uncover or imagine an inner life on to Penelope through scenes like this one, which force us to realize that the narrator of *The Odyssey* did not ask, of Penelope, "But what's on her mind?" as Kyger does. [74]

This is all good. But, what I find most interesting about Kyger's early epic poetics is the way that, through her exploration of *The Odyssey,* Kyger begins to develop a distinct way of thinking about the relationship of poetry to *seeing.* Recording her seeings in poetry is a practice that keeps her engaged in the movement of her own life. In "The Maze*,"* the "She' who shreds the curtains of the windows is clearly distinct from the "I" who walked through the maze in the dead governor's garden. But the scenes speak to each other. Both describe women who struggle with obstructions of their vision. In these poems, seeing and composition often emerge together-- in "The Maze" Penelope/ Miss Havisham opens the curtains not just by *tearing,* but *weaving.*

II. Waiting and Detail

---

[72] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever*, 45
[73] I say imaging because Kyger makes it clear that this is her own reading, playfully using language such as "Refresh my thoughts..." and "as I recall" and "*I choose to think of her..." see* Kyger, Joanne. *About Now,* 67
[74] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever*, 35

When Kyger is writing "The Maze," she does not have much direct experience as being a "beat chick"-- pushing against the culture was as simple as *getting out,* opening the windows, embracing possibility. But, as Kyger became more attached to Gary Snyder, moving in to the East-West house in 1959 and to Japan the following year, her living situation began to look more like Penelope's. Snyder would often go on trips and to sesshins without her. And she would be waiting at home for long periods of time. Confronting this situation as a cheeky financially independent young woman, she wrote things like,

> I am no longer Gary Snyder's sweet north beach chick because I said Gary Snyder you must not be insanely in love with me if you are always running off to the mountains and sitting cross legged zenly and paying no attention to me for hours.... and telling me to read more books instead of admiring my precious unspoiled mind. [75]

She writes of Gary in this quippy way more than once in those early letters, calling him, "wretchedly independent." She writes, "I can see he is going to cause me a lot of misery/ or vice -versa." [76] And, he does.

When Kyger and Gary move to Japan, Gary's constant leaving finds her alone in the house, knowing nearly no one. These intermittent isolations launch her into a dialogue with *The Odyssey* which takes as its subject the nature of knowing. Can one know what one has not seen? How much can we trust? We see her beginning to explore that in The first of the *Odyssey Poems*--

Oh he is a liar
from the bottom of his heart
But he puts facts together
and has little rival, and lets no one know.

---

[75] Alcalay, Ammiel, ed. "Communication is Essential: Letters to & From Joanne Kyger." 24

[76] ibid., 22

The real earth
moves and falls away in to pieces in the north
He comes back, he was lead astray, the land has abundance
corn and wine, rain
springs, the forest

wild fields of flowers take him out
with your own eyes you make sure. [77]

"With your own eyes." There is no other authority. Any *account* of what happens beyond her is uncertain. Her own eyes are all she trusts. Engaging them is way of remaining present to herself; a way of asserting the value of experiences (her own) which the "domestic confinement" culture threatens to estrange her from.

This is where we begin to see these poetics anticipating Kyger's observational poetry. In interviews, after 1970 or so, Kyger writes that she sees poetry as a tool for living an engaged life.[78] By "congratulating" any living being in her poetry, she "congratulates her own living." [79] In an interview in 1974, she said of her writing practice: "for me it gets into... I was going to say, adventure of the self, but maybe that's too particular, For me it's always a process of just trying to keep pushing out the horizon..."[80] Kyger is talking about the way that poetry helps her feel that she is expanding as person, and making spiritual and artistic progress. (Ultimately, freeing the observations of her daily life from their dailiness-- but I will discuss this in more detail later.) What's important is that this "pushing out the horizon" always comes from a place

---

[77] Kyger, Joanne. *As Ever,* 31
[78] Lawrence, Nahem. "A Conversation with Joanne Kyger." *Occident* 8 (spring 1974): 142-57.
[79] Kyger, Joanne. "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed."
[80] (Occident interview page 154. That was 1974)

of phenomenal attention, as going downtown at night always began with washing her hair. [81]

In the hours that Kyger spends alone in the house waiting for Gary to return from sesshins, it becomes necessary for Kyger to put in to practice what she theorized in "The Maze." Composition, such as weaving or writing, is a key to engaging, seeing, a push *away* from a confined existence. Writing through the details of ones' days changes it from a confined, mundane experience to something other.

In Kyger's observational poems, she clearly puts that in to practice. But, some of the poems in *The Tapestry and the Web* anticipate that as well. "Waiting" is particularly tender early example of this.

> over the lilacs won't he come home
>
> to at least rest tonightI want to see
>
> the round car safe in the driveway, cinders
>
> and the moon over head [82]

---

[81] Attention works as anecdote to futile over-intellectualizing and explains the movement she makes away from the fading North Beach Scene at this time. [81] In 1959, she wrote in a letter to Michael Rumaker,

> I am glad that Ebbe can meet other poets and not have to suffer the continuous smart talk that goes on between Spicer, George Stanley & Duncan when he is around. *That can be quite headachy and leads you out onto the plains of a quite unreal world, as removed from feeling (ie. Jack Spicer's) as possible.* However that is no longer a problem with me, my meetings with the old While Rabbit crowd are infrequent and therefore always pleasantries are exchanged.

Kyger has her own headiness/intellectuality, but she tends to stay away from the *plains of a quite unreal world.*
Alcalay, Ammiel, ed. "Communication is Essential: Letters to & From Joanne Kyger."

[82] Kyger, Joanne. *As ever,* 30

Writing here is not the subject, as it was in "The Maze." But, in this poem we see the writing and recording detail being used as an anchor to uncertainty. The careful attention to visual detail in this poem works as a relief to the unknown of waiting. The massiveness of what might lie "over the lilacs" is grounded by the specificity of the flower, the driveway, and the cinders. There is security in recording detail. [83]

III. "Those things we see are images of the past"

The development of "Waiting" is that, unlike in The first Odyssey poem in which she writes from a "zoomed out" perspective, in "Waiting" she refrains from speaking about things that she would not have directly experienced. (There is no way Kyger or Penelope would have direct knowledge of "the real earth" of the north, or the abundance of that land described in the first Odyssey poem. But she clearly would have been able to see the lilacs of "Waiting," and likely did.) In the later poems which follow from "Waiting" Kyger is even less likely to occupy the "zoomed out" perspective she takes in the first Odyssey poem.

Her admission of her own unknowing is tirelessly realistic. And is only increasingly so as she grows as a poet. (In "The persimmons are falling," she writes, "I don't know a thing, about what's around the corner.') [84] The position of her speaking "I" never strays from herself, or "zooms out." For that reason, "Waiting" predicts the close

---

[83] The waiting space that she occupies could be much more volatile than it is. The power of this poem lies in the contrast that we feel between the unknown of her lover's whereabouts and the specificity of the lilacs, the cinders, the moon.

[84] ibid., 28

This is perhaps the opposite of the experience she had on her peyote trip of 1959, of which she writes in *visions of hell,* another poem in *Tapestry,* "heaven explodes the walls.")

focus of Kyger's observational poetry. With the exception of her occasional philosophizing or references to myth, those poems refuse to reveal information Kyger did not directly experience. Or, often, that Kyger is not *directly experiencing.*

By the time that Kyger is working on her observational poems, she takes very seriously the practice of writing through detail, within the moment, *only* from her own direct perceptions.

She says later in in an interview,

> You pitch your tones environmentally to what's around you... really, amigo, ideas are a dime a dozen. Ideas are something our European structure of mind which sucks in the world, which our education has given us very generously. I don't want that. I want to see how you live *in* your environment or in your compassion for place. [85]

What is so important here is her assertion that there can be no consciousness with out context. When "you pitch your tones," physicality comes in to it, necessarily. Engaging *that,* your *context*, she writes, is more valuable than making an argument in a poem. It is only by attention this close (and descriptions of it this true to her embodiment) that she is able to liberate her daily seeings from those of the "quote housewife."

IV. Poem as Statement for Now

The question remains, however, why does this allegiance to detail so often manifest in the poems as *a rush?* Do the breaks in logic, the revelation of unknowing, these the "splicing" and "unsplicing" of incomplete sentences which poem that feeling of "the rush" contribute to this project? [86]

---

[85] Kyger, Joanne. "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed." 117-8
[86] Vincent, Stephen "Testing the Sublime-- The Work of Joanne Kyger." 3

I'd argue they do-- I want to turn to "Those Things we See are Images Of the Past," another poem published in *The Tapestry and the Web.* Kyger ostensibly begins writing "Those Things We See are Images of the Past*"* in San Francisco in 1958-- we see seeds of her interest in these topics in her 1958 Duncan Workshop notebook (such as the mention of the head turning in "As if To Meet.")[87] And, I have reason to believe that she completes in Japan, sometime after 1960. In it, the indispensability of phenomenal perception, the insistence that one, or you, "*with your own eyes make sure"*-- is articulated more precisely. At the same time, in it, she also begins to explore formal principles that give her poems the feeling of "the rush."

In "Those things we see are images of the past," Kyger expresses that her anxiety about "what's around the corner" is more complicated than it seems. Kyger draws a parallel between literal blockages of her sight, such as "walls," and more abstract blockages-- like her confinement to the present. [88] In "those things," she writes, we are "From now, always, on the turning point, viewing back." And, the past we look back on

---

[87] See Appendix IV

[88] We might read this as an extension of the project Duncan articulates in *Rites of Participation,* a chapter in the H.D. Book, Duncan writes,

> "Time in the composition comes now," Gertrude Stein puts it, "and this is what is troubling everyone the time in the composition is now a part of distribution and equilibration"-- "past the danger point"-- throughout history of Man. History itself, no longer kept within the boundaries of periods or nations, *appears a mobile structure in which events may move in time in ever-changing constellations*." ... The whole is seen as a mobile is passionate impermanence in which Time and Eternity are revealed as one.

For Kyger, the past is a mobile structure like the one Duncan derives from his reading of Stein. But, these "ever changing constellations" are not just limited to the past encountered through the composition. The composition does not even come in to it. (I think about the dead bird of *The Maze,* uncovered and *prehistoric.)*

is "An entirely new thing each time" each time we turn. [89] Not only is the past a mystery, but the future, too-- When Kyger writes,

> Right to the water's edge
> That's a wall

She is talking about the onset of event. In Kyger's poetry, the waves often appear as a metaphor for "rushes of arrivals."[90] They are described in this poem as "full of things to happen."

What we see is Kyger describing for herself what she calls "the gasp of reality" in an earlier poem, and in a later one, the "lucid suspension" of the present. [91] The moment in which she might know her own life is *so fleeting.* I would argue that the formal principles Stephen Vincent articulates as central in Kyger's poems-- the overlapping of "scrims" of attention; the "splicing" and "unsplicing" of incomplete sentences-- are all strategies that she takes for keeping the poem within that space of "the gasp of the present." [92]

Joanne Kyger is described by Alicia Ostriker as "a genius, but a strange one... a porcupine travelling at the speed of light." That is not a bad measure. Though she struggles with the passage of time, her strategy is not to dwell in detail in order to draw out the depth of a moment. Kyger's poetry is interested in detail in so far as it is true to the nature of human perception. She notates sight after sight, and allows us to move with her as she follows the ever-receding "gasp of the present. She writes in her journals,

---

[89] In her Duncan poetry workshop notebook, she writes in big red block letters she writes, "WE NEVER START AGAIN / ONLY / REMEMBER AGAIN." (see appendix.)
[90] Kyger, Joanne. *About Now,* 195
[91] Kyger, Joanne. "Notebook: Duncan Poetry Workshop 1958-1959."
[92] Vincent, Stephen, *Testing the Sublime*, 3

> Suggest and suggest and keep turning... The surprise is innocence & revelation of the mind...
>
> Poem as statement for now.
> Pound is so much better than I
> to indulge in
> emotion [93]

In *Tapestry,* Kyger is writing "Poem as statement for now," at the same time that she finds herself often chasing the *now*. "HOW CLEVER," she says, sarcastically, to indulge in memory or invention. "Those things we see" begins,

> From now on, always, on the turning point, viewing back
> and that delicious interpretation
> is the world, HOW CLEVER OF US

A more clear, but perhaps less delicious iteration of the thought expressed at the beginning of "Those things we see" is recorded in her journals:

> 5.18.60
>
> All the world's a stage & we are
>
> actors in it: a real existentialist
> statement, i.e. we have MADE UP *the world*
> & I will not deny that I am sick with
> the realization of it.

Any attempt to *faithfully render a* moment by *dwelling* in it would involve a set of theatrics that she is not interested in. Kyger makes fun of *facts.* They are inventions; not something she has time for. Kyger's project, as we recall, is not to lose sight of the present, but reclaim her consciousness-- gnarly or incomplete as it might be-- for herself in a culture which seeks to render "adaptable" that kind of deep feeling. Toward this end, it is more useful for her to keep *turning*-- to keep chasing the present in a "rush" even if

[93] Kyger, Joanne. *Japan and India Journals,* 229

that is happening too quickly to follow well. The solution is simply to abandon hope of being "clever." Gaps in argument or continuity *will be.* The important thing is to stay true to the movement. Kyger writes in a notebook,

> I want to write a poem for birds
>
> their movement
> in to the poem [94]

She treats her thoughts with the same kind of energy. Argument and indulgence of emotion facilitate the false extension of a present. They get one stuck. In the spirit of writing poems for birds, more than half of the utterances in "Those things we see" are fragments. Thoughts and perceptions follow without opaquely. Her syntax avoids closure. She desires openness at the level of syntax as much as at the level of sight. All of those sentences that invite sense-making according to traditional syntactical logic the describe unknowing, distance, lack of clarity, or things slipping away. These sentences are "oh where does it go," "she's fleet footed," "That's a wall," "do you talk to each other well?" and "I miss each time."

By avoiding argument, or indulgence in emotion, Kyger brings herself back in to this principle that there can be no consciousness without context-- a principle that harkens back to her days playing "the muse." (As I discussed in parts one and two, when Kyger was living in San Francisco, attention to physicality-- to things like hair-washing and dress-- became an important "opening" to the artistic/intellectual community.)

Rooting on to context, attempting to stay close to the drifting present, is a project that that Kyger continues all the way through to the end of her career. I'd like to return to "About Now*,"* one of Kyger's late observational poems. She wrote it in 2004. It ends,

---

[94] Kyger, Joanne. "Notebook: Duncan Poetry Workshop 1958-1959." See appendix.

About now
tiny iridescent
pieces of abalone

So intimate these overcast days

Home is the moment
the quail arrive.

Even here, in a poem written long after rhetoric of confinement has dissipated from the culture, we see her working in this project to push against it. The poem is part of an embodied search for "the rush." The syntactical ambiguity and distractibility, the "splicing" and "unsplicing" of fragments gives us a realistic map of her attentions. The valence of her description "So intimate" at the center is unclear. The adjective works as a pivot. It might refer to the iridescent shell of a mollusk, or describe the feeling of an overcast day. In the end, that doesn't matter. "It is memory." And she's off to the next perception.

This calls to mind a poem I studied earlier in this project, "When I used to focus on the worries, everybody"--

It is memory. As I search to find
this day's sweet drifting. The fog out to sea, the wind. [95]

At the end of *About Now* and *When I used to focus,* both, we are left with sense that the individual finds home through speaking, in place and in time. Home is not a place but a moment followed and, ultimately, lost. But there is another. "Confinement," to a home is an illusion and impossibility for Kyger when she is able to recognize the passing moment. Tracing it, she finds a freedom from inertia, brief clarity in waiting. In another poem, she writes,

[95] Kyger, Joanne. *As ever,* 206

Could be anywhere

on Earth and Time focused completely

focused

on chopping

the tomatoes, chilies, and onions.[96]

[96] Kyger, Joanne. *About Now,* 698

Conclusion

In this project, I've attempted to make a social and political reading of Kyger's observational poems more available by establishing how deeply social performance impacted her poetic practice.

In the first half, I demonstrated how Kyger's time playing the "muse" wasn't wasted, but prompted her to think about the role of the body in "The Maze," and in other early poems. In the second half, I attempted to illustrate how Kyger continued to explore the relationship of poetry to social performance through the poems she wrote in Japan, and how that exploration lead to a powerful repudiation of 1950s "confinement culture" in her observational poems.

It is my hope that this project might serve as an intervention in to the body of criticism on *The Tapestry and The Web* in particular. Kyger's early writing is often arbitrarily divided by in to two parts by critics: one which explores epic motifs, and a second which is interested in a "poetics of presence." (The "poetics of presence" correlates roughly to her observational and proto-observational poems.) I attribute this trend in the scholarship to very first piece of literary scholarship which discussed Kyger, Michael Davidson's influential *San Francisco Renaissance* book. This is an important book, really *the* book on this period of literary history. It is cited in nearly every print article on Kyger. The criticisms made there have dramatically shaped the discourse which emerged around her work.

Davidson himself divides her body of work, preferring those poems in which, "underlying [her] poetics of immediacy are mythopoeic and theological concerns that serve to ground the present in a larger narrative." [97] According to Davidson, poems like

[97] ibid.

"It is lonely," or "The persimmons are falling," -- poems which, as I have argued, anticipate the observational poems of her later years-- too often "indulge distractedness for its own sake, becoming lists of unrelated observations, *valued for their sheer presence* rather than for any relation to a conceptual or critical frame." [98]

It's true that Kyger's feminist "revisions" of the Odyssey *are,* by virtue of their opaque engagement to Homer, more accessible to intellectual discourse. And, it is also true that some of Kyger's poems indulge distractedness for its own sake. But, I think I have made steps in this project toward demonstrating that these two projects hold together. (And are, in fact, bolstered by one another.)

I believe that this division might be part of the reason why no statement has yet been made on the political import of Kyger's "observational poems." While Kyger's "epic poetry" of *The Tapestry and the Web,* and the equally opaque *Descartes and the Splendor of,* a long prose poem in *Places to Go,* have been given thorough treatment by literary scholars, the observational poems have yet to see that honor. This is not to say that they have not been written about-- the observational poems, and the poems in *Tapestry* which anticipate them, have been read principally by poets. Many articles by poets have been dedicated to their study. (Notley, Alcalay, and Schelling, cited in the introduction, as well as Stephen Vincent, all belong to this movement.) I have nothing against the work of these poet-critics, but I do wish very much that a space could be made, in some venue, for a rigorous historical study of Kyger's later work and the poems in *Tapestry* which anticipate it. I hope my work here might provide grounds for that.

---

[98] Davidson, Michael. "The San Francisco Renaissance." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945*, edited by Jennifer Ashton. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012,188

Note: I have written extensively on this matter in Appendix I.

APPENDIX I: NOTES ON KYGER SCHOLARSHIP

This project responds to what I perceive as a division in the scholarship which corresponds to a (false) division of Kyger's first book of poetry, *The Tapestry and the Web* established by Michael Davidson in his *San Francisco Renaissance Poetry* book.

The division is more or less chronological-- there are two waves, roughly divided by Kyger's feature in *Jacket Magazine,* which ostensibly opened up the critical discourse on her work to those aspects of *Tapestry* (and her later poems) which were not praised by Davidson. This is a short overview of those two 'waves' of scholarship. All of the books mentioned here are listed in my bibliography.

1990- 2000

The first movement in the scholarship, which spans from 1990 to 2000 or so, is interested in studying the parts of Kyger's work that Davidson celebrated-- her ideas about her gender and her poems which reach out explicitly toward a critical framework. (*The Odyssey Poems* in *Tapestry.)*

In the 1990's, several anthologies dedicated to the purpose of 'recovering' the work of women writers from the Beat generation such as Jan Kerouac, Carolyn Cassady, Elise Cowen, etc. were published. In the early 2000's, a book of interviews with women writers from that generation, *Breaking the Rule of Cool* by Nancy Grace, was published, as well as one book of criticism titled *Girls Who Wore Black,* also edited by Nancy Grace. Kyger is featured in many of these anthologies of women's writing.

In these early anthologies, "Tapestry" and "Pan as the Son of Penelope" are the poems of Kyger's which receive the most attention. "Tapestry," which was surprisingly Kyger's first published poem, was anthologized in *The Beat Book* edited by Ann

Waldman, *Beat Down To Your Soul* edited by Ann Charters, and *A Different Beat* edited by Richard Peabody. That is, it appears in four of the seven anthologies I find that include her work.

"Tapestry" and "Pan as the Son of Penelope" are studied in depth by Linda Russo in *Girls Who Wore Black (*2002*),* and more cursorily both in the introduction to *Places to Go,* the chapter on Kyger in *Beat Down to Your Soul* edited by Nancy Grace *(*2001), and in Michael Davison's *The San Francisco Renaissance.*

2000- 2015

I argue that a feature in the online poetics magazine, Jacket opened up Kyger scholarship to a whole new areas of study-- the journal, her relationship to the east, her interest in phenomenology, and her poetics of presence. (The Jacket feature was published in April, 2000). It might have even prompted the publication of *As Ever,* her selected poems. (2002)

Following the Jacket Magazine feature, and especially since the publication of her collected works in 2007, Kyger's later works are beginning to be studied in academic, book-form scholarship. In *Philosophy of the Beats* (2012) Jane Falk sreads Kyger's experimental TV show/poem 'Descartes and the Splendor Of,' published in *Going On,* as a philosophical and feminist statement.

Likewise, as the field of Beat studies grows and the voices of other marginalized figures emerge and the Beat period is less often read as a monotextural "male revolt," Kyger's own story comes out clearer. [99]

[99] "The male revolt" is a term that I borrow from Barbara Ehenrich's *The Hearts of Men.*

Particularly influential has been the recent rise in interest in Phillip Whalen, who Kyger describes as "the best of the beat poets" in at letter to Michael Rumaker. [100] *Two takes on Japan* (2012) reads Kyger's *Japan and India Journals* alongside Philip Whalen's travel poems, opening up a new reading of her time there. And, particularly brilliant, Linda Russo's *How You Want to Be Styled* (2013), reads Kyger's correspondence Phillip Whalen (who Alice Notley describe as a "male-female poet") in the in order to complicate our understanding of gender and social performance in the Beat era, as well as re-write the story of Kyger's own emergence as a woman poet that Russo herself told in To Deal with Parts and Particulars: Joanne Kyger's Early Epic Poetics" (2002).

Kyger's work has also gained traction in poetics circles-- her work was celebrated at length in *Coming After* by Alice Notley (2005), and in the blogosphere. My personal favorite is Jennifer Nix's "Finding Poetry in Illness," published through The Poetry Foundation in 2012.

What is more-- since the publication of *About Now,* these circles have begun to call upon Kyger's own voice more frequently to comment upon the work of her predecessors and contemporaries. Kyger wrote for the *Jacket* Magazine feature on Ann Waldman (April 2005), and a book on the life of Richard Brautigan. She was also commissioned to write three pieces for the Poetry foundation website in 2012. Especially interesting is her take on *The Curriculum of the Soul* series, the set of books Olson commissioned. Some of her correspondence has been published by the CUNY *Lost & Found* series, and even as Kyger ceases to publish new work at the rate she once did,

[100] Alcalay, Ammiel, ed. "Communication is Essential: Letters to & From Joanne Kyger."

interviews with her have increased. These concern themselves with her life in Bolinas and her later poetry.

Conclusion

All of this is *good news* for Kyger scholarship. Progress is being made toward a more holistic vision of Kyger's contribution to American poetry. Scholars have begun to look at her from fresh angles, draw attention to, and make available her work which does not opaquely engage a critical framework (i.e., Homer). But, I think that the effect of Davidson's criticism still lingers in the work. With the exception, perhaps, of the very most recent study of her work, "Communication is Essential: Letters to & From Joanne Kyger," Kyger's "poetics of presence" remain untouched in studies of her early work. A holistic vision of the *Tapestry and the Web* ha*s* yet to emerge. The goal of this project is to make steps toward that.

APPENDIX II: PARTIAL TIMELINE OF KYGER'S LIFE, THROUGH 1970

1934: Kyger is Born **in** Vallejo, California. Kyger's father is a Navy Officer. The family lived in China, Washington, Florida, Pennsylvania and Illinois.

1949: Kyger family settles in Santa Barbara, CA.

1952-1956: Kyger attends UC Santa Barbara, where she studied Heidegger and Wittgenstein, got a D in Hugh Kenner's freshman English class, and wrote articles for the school paper. [101]

1957: Kyger moves to San Francisco with her friend Nemi Frost. [102]

In her biography of Robert Duncan, Lisa Jarnot describes this time in Kyger's life this way, "Joanne Kyger, who had fled college in Santa Barbara hoping to encounter like-minded young people in SF remembered that her first education in poetry came through those magazines, copies of which disappeared from her apartment when friends visited." [103]

1958: Kyger is living with John Wieners and attending Duncan's poetry workshop.

In the fall, Kyger presented her first "important poem" to the Spicer-Duncan circe. It is called "The Maze"

In February, Kyger tries peyote with Gary Snyder while recuperating from a broken ankle. She says, "It ripped the Christianity right off my back. I saw this wild boar that I took as my totem animal and I followed it through India and in to the Eleusinian mysteries." She later writes about this experience in a poem *visions of heaven & hell.* The Wild Boar also appears in some of *The Odyssey Poems.* [104]

1959: Kyger called this "a year which was the equivalent of a nervous breakdown." [105]

---

[101] Kyger, Joanne, "JOANNE KYGER interviewed 9/29/95 in her Bolinas Home." By David Chadwick. Crooked Cucumber: the Life and Zen Teaching of Shunruyu Suzuki. Last modified September 29, 1995. http://www.cuke.com/Cucumber%20Project/interviews/kyger.html. 6

[102] Grace, Nancy. "Places to Go: Joanne Kyger." Places to Go: Joanne Kyger to *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, edited by Nacy Grace. Jackson: University Press of Missisippi, 2004.

[103] Jarnot, Lisa. *Robert Duncan The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*. London: University of California Press, 2012, 29

[104] Berkson, Bill. "Joanne Kyger." In *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America*, edited by Ann Charters, 324-28. Vol. 1. N.p.: Gale Research Company, 1983, 326

There are also very vivid Description of this in "congratulatory poetics", and in the CUNY Lost and Found recovered letters.

[105] Kyger, Joanne "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed." 114

In March, Kyger gives her first public reading at the Beer & Wine Mission. (It was arranged by Spicer.) Around the same time, she publishes Tapestry in the 4th issue of Jack Spicer's *J* Magazine. It is her first published poem. She said, "the world changed. I thought people on the street looked at me differently." [106]

Kyger moves in to the East-West house, where she develops relationships with Bill McNeill, Phillip Whalen, and Gary Synder. Shunruyu Suzuki teaches her how to sit. She describes it this way:

"I was living at the east west house and was getting ready to go to Japan so I thought I had to learn how to sit... There was a real focus on the Zen of enlightenment, koan all that stuff that was going on in the late fifties. Some kind of open door to whatever it was supposed to be-- realization. We were reading all those silly books of DT suzuki and here was a guy who really showed us how to sit." [107]

1960: Kyger marries Gary Snyder and travels with him to Japan. She met Ginsberg & Orlovsky on the trip.[108]

There, she teaches English and does some acting. [109] There she writes her *Japan and India Journals.* She says that she models her Journal writing after Gary's practice. (he kept a "daily book") .[110]

Her Zen practice does not quite take off there, as she expected it to. "Of course he [Gary] was very strict in his Zen study and it seemed inaccessible to me. I didn't speak Japanese, I was a woman, there was such formality inside the sodo you couldn't just drop in and out and it was a very strict kind of sitting." [111]

1964: Kyger returns from Japan. She divorces Snyder. "It took me until I was about 30 before poetry became an identity I was within. Before that it was my own longings for it." [112]

She does not resume sitting, though she regrets it.

This was the *Open Space* year. Stan Persky (a bartender at Anxious Asp) turned on Don Allen and put together a parody of *new American Poetry,* an anthology which had

---

[106] Russo, Linda "To Deal with Parts and Particulars: Joanne Kyger's Early Epic Poetics." 187
[107] Kyger, Joanne, "JOANNE KYGER interviewed 9/29/95 in her Bolinas Home." 2
[108] Grace, Nancy. "Places to Go: Joanne Kyger." 145
[109] Kyger, Joanne "Anne Waldman: The Early Years... 1965-1970."
[110] Grace, Nancy. "Places to Go: Joanne Kyger." 145
[111] Kyger, Joanne, "JOANNE KYGER interviewed 9/29/95 in her Bolinas Home." 4
[112] Berkson, Bill. "Joanne Kyger." 327

excluded Kyger. Kyger says, there were these "wars" that were going on between the poets in San Francisco at that time. [113]

1965: Don Allen Publishes The Tapestry & The Web

Kyger reads at the Berkeley Poetry Conference.

1966: Kyger marries the painter Jack Boyce on valentines day. [114] They travel in Spain, France, Italy and England for nine months. The trip nourishes her interests in art and philosophy. [115]

Kyger teaches English in New York. [116] She meets Anne Waldman, who she describes as being the first woman she "really meets" in her generation who is devoted to writing. (She only *knew of* DiPrima, Levertrov, Ruth Weiss.) [117] Kyger spends a lot of time at St. Mark's place.

1967: Kyger moves from New York to San Francisco and begins to work at KQED for the artists in television series. [118]

1969: Kyger and Boyce move to Bolinas. [119]
Kyger describes Bolinas :

"Bolinas offered an alterative lifestyle, one that was sought at that time in the late 60 and early 70s. A small coastal town of about 500 inhabitants at the time, it offered rural living, the hippies versus the surfers for softball teams, ad in large letters painted on the sea wall NEW YORK REFUGEES GO HOME... the picture of those years have everyone sitting on the ground, shoulder high long grass and long hair. On Indian print bedspreads. We could sit all afternoon with bottles of wine and smokes, and conversation and poetry, moving along with the path of the sun. Nobody sits on the ground anymore. Bolinas was a destination point."

---

113 Russo, Linda "Introduction: a context for reading Joanne Kyger."
114 Berkson, Bill. "Joanne Kyger." 327
115 ibid.
116 Kyger, Joanne "Anne Waldman: The Early Years... 1965-1970."
117 Grace, Nancy. "Places to Go: Joanne Kyger."
118 Opstedal, Kevin. *Dreaming as One: Poetry, Poets and Community in Bolinas, California 1967-1980.*. chapter 2
119 ibid.

APPENDIX III: A SELECTION OF POEMS READ IN THIS PROJECT

When I used to focus on the worries, everybody

When I used to focus n the worries, everybody
was ahead of me, I was the bottom
of the totem pole
a largely spread squat animal

How about a quick massage now, he said to me.
I don't think it's cool, I replied.
Oh, said he, after a pause, I should have waited
for *you* to ask *me.*

The waves came in closer and closer.

When I fall into the gap of suspicion I am no longer here.

In this world that has got closed over by houses
and networks, I fly out
from under the belly. Life's dizzy crown
of whirling lights, circles this head. Pure
with wonder, hot
with wonder. The streets become golden. All
size increases, the colors glow, we are in myth.

We are in easy understanding.
Scarcely talking, thoughts pass between us.
It is memory. As I search to find
this days' sweet drifting. The fog out to sea, the wind. [120]

[120] About Now, 296

The Maze

I saw the
dead bird on the sidewalk
his neck uncovered
and prehistoric

At seven in the morning
my hair was bound
against the fish in the air
who begged for the ocean
I longed for their place

Behind the
tall thin muslin of the curtain
we could see his shadow
knocking
and we waited
not stirring
crouched by the fireplace
where the ashes blew out

later we checked the harbor
to see if it was safe
rather hoping
one had gone astray
and flung itself upon the shore
for all to watch

If I should weep
they would never know

and so I walked
silently
shrugging off hands
in treacherous places
wanting to fall

In Williamsburg, Virginia

my uncle
pointed out the Maze
which grew
in the dead
governor's garden

delighted

I went to it

and stood
poised
inside the
precise
entrance
like a long hallway
the tightly trimmed
bushes
held themselves
pointing each
leaf

and twig
in an unquestioning manner

white gravel
caressed my feet

the sky disappeared
and I
could hear
the sounds of water
rushing

I knew each corner
without pausing

Held captive in a cave
Ulysses
sobbed for his wife
who was signing high

melodies
from the center of a
cobweb shawl
of their design

three feathers
I picked
from a stone
in my path

and turning last
I saw
the speckled bench

and halting fountain
which marked
the end.

She
tortures
the curtains of the window
shreds them
like some
insane insect
creates a
demented web
from the thin folds
her possessed fingers
clawing she
thrusts them away with
sharp jabs of long pins
to the walls. [121]

[121] As ever, 45

Those things we see are images of the Past

From now on, always, on the turning point, viewing back
and that delicious interpretation
is the world, HOW CLEVER OF US

An entirely new thing each time
blind or not about it, always inventive-- seeing
stones
persimmons,
moving a stone in dirt, oh where does it go
she's fleet footed
to be a tree, to be Jack Spicer in a dream
to carry this around all day. and every night
the waves chuck full of things to happen

As clear as you can See
it's done, isn't it, isn't that a *fact.*

Right to the water's edge.
That's a wall.
Do you talk to each other well?

I miss each time. up she went her arms went into willow
And do *you* feel
what you put down is fine, precious.

Tuesday, October 28, 1969

It was a beautiful golden day
Now a black split shape
scuttles under
de foot. So long, Sayonara.
The fact cat lies down
dozing. I could use a little rest too
I only slept 11 hours last night,
wrote some letters, swept the floor,
planted 2 rows of onions, snow peas
And now I am looking forward
to washing my hair. [122]

[122] About Now, 186

from *Joanne*

he makes love to her
he talks about
afterwards
when some years
ago
he worked
for the welfare
department
in New York City

She starts up
a hue
and cry
oh the money, the electricity
give me
some clothes, some jewels
some food, some love

In the corner
don't you worry
The tunes, familiar
weeping & laughing
I leave my love behind

what I wanted to say
was in the broad
sweeping
form of being there

I am walking up the path
I come home and wash my hair
I am bereft
I dissolve quickly

I am everybody [123]

[123] About Now, 211

APPENDIX IV: FIGURES

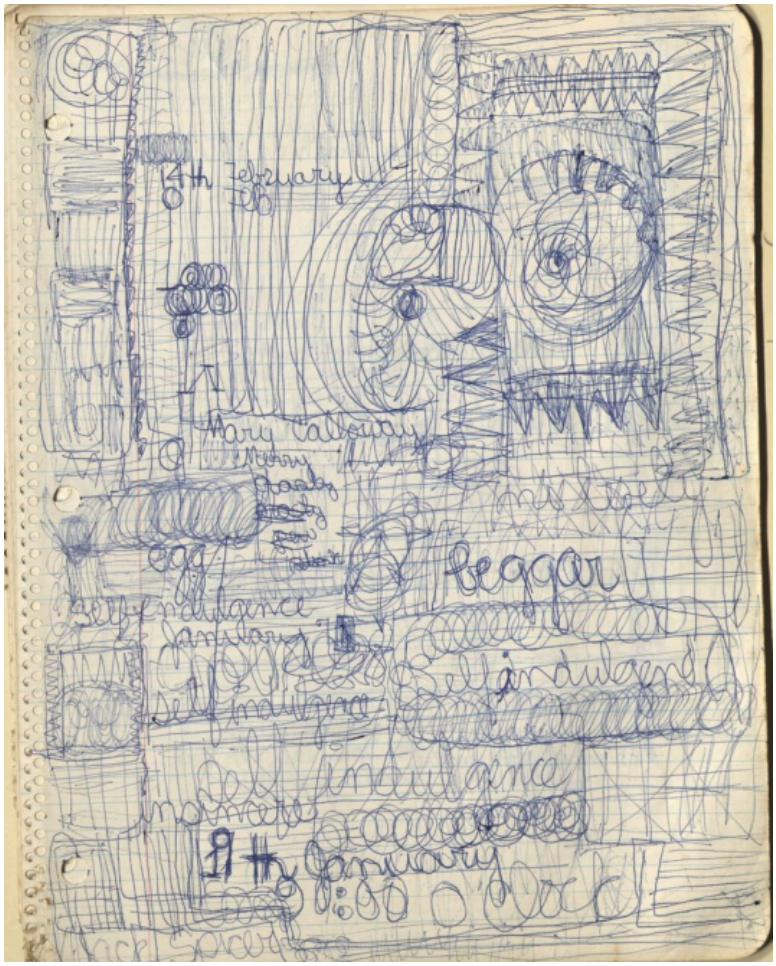


Fig. 1, page from Kyger's notebook dated February 14, 1959, when Kyger was suffering from a broken ankle

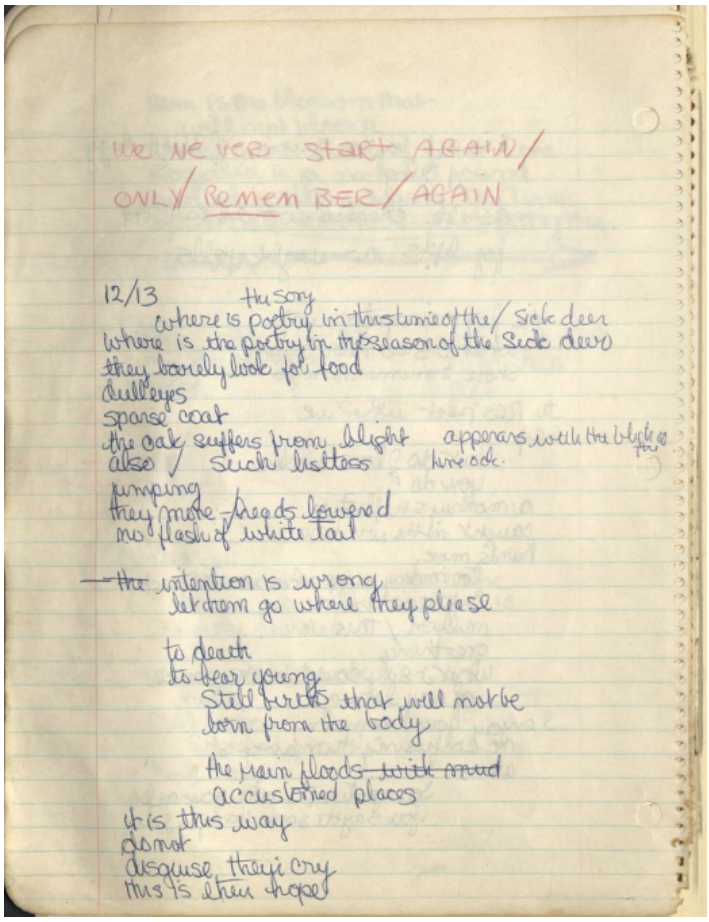
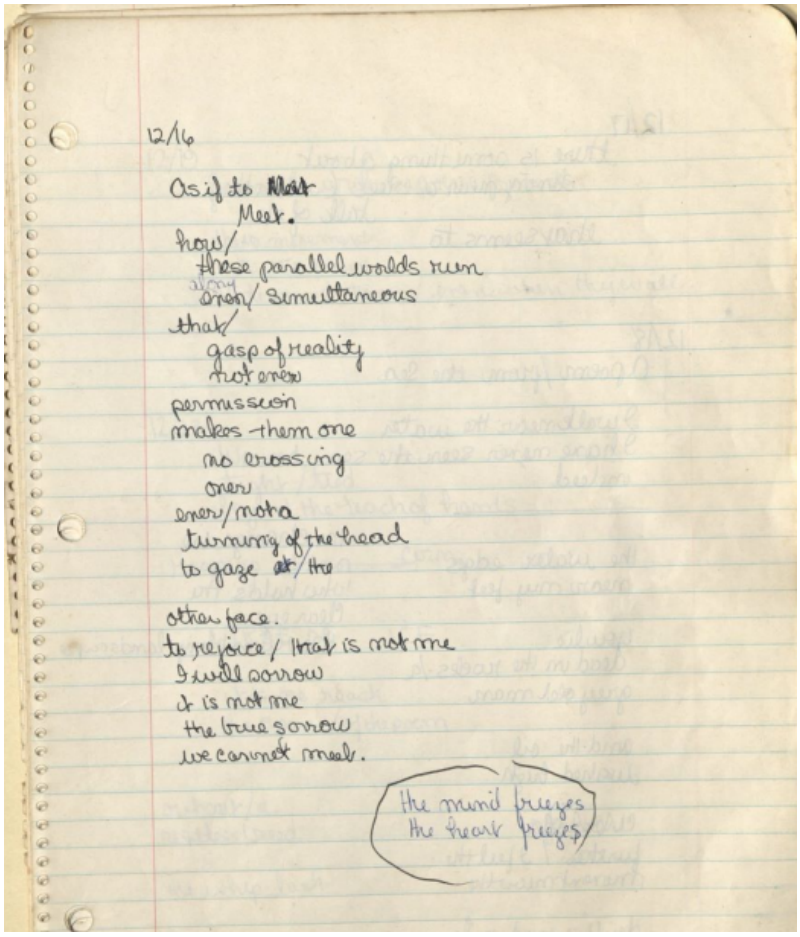


Fig. 2, Page from Notebook dated 12/13/1958


12/16

As if to ~~Meet~~
Meet.
how/
these parallel worlds run
~~along~~
even/ simultaneous
that/
gasp of reality
not even
permission
makes them one
no crossing
over
even/ nota
turning of the head
to gaze ~~at~~/the
other face.
to rejoice / that is not me
I will sorrow
it is not me
the true sorrow
we cannot meet.

the mind freezes
the heart freezes

Fig. 3, Poem from Notebook dated 12/16/58

Bibliography

Alcalay, Ammiel, ed. "Communication is Essential: Letters to & From Joanne Kyger." *The CUNY Poetics Documents Initiative*, 3rd ser., 7 (Fall 2012).

Alexander, W. "Timeline: A Spicer Chronology." Jacket Magazine. Last modified 1999. http://jacketmagazine.com/07/spicer-chron.html.

Allen, Donald, ed. *The New American Poetry*. New York: Evergreen Books, 1960.

Allen, Donald, and Warren Tallman, eds. *Poetics of the New American Poetry*. New York: Grove Press, 1973.

Aram, Saroyan. *Bolinas Book*. N.p.: Other Publications, 1974.

Berkson, Bill. "Joanne Kyger." In *The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America*, edited by Ann Charters, 324-28. Vol. 1. N.p.: Gale Research Company, 1983.

Berrigan, Ted. "Words for Joanne Kyger." *Iowa Review* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1972).

Brainard, Joe. *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*. Library of America. 2012.

Charters, Ann, ed. *Beat down to your soul: what was the Beat Generation?* New York: Penguin, 2001.

Coffrey, Dan. "My phenomenology waits: Death and Rebirth in Joanne Kyger's Phenomenological." *Jacket Magazine*, no. 11 (April 2000).

Damon, Maria. "Beat Poetry: HeavenHell USA, 1946-1965." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry*, edited by Walter Kalaidjian, 167-79. N.p.: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Davidson, Michael. "The San Francisco Renaissance." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945*, edited by Jennifer Ashton. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

———. *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Duncan, Robert. *As Testimony: The Poet and the Scene*. San Francisco, CA: White Rabbit Press, 1964.

———. *The H.D. Book*. Edited by Michael Boughn and Victor Coleman. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011.

———. *The Opening of the Field*. N.p.: New Directions, 1960.

Ellingham, Lewis, and Kevin Killian. *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

Falk, Jane. "Joanne Kyger 'Descartes and the Splendor Of': Bridging Dualisms through Collaboration and Experimentation." In *The Philosophy of the Beats*, edited by Sharin N. Elkholy. N.p.: University Press of Kentucky, 2012.

———. "Journal as Genre and Published Text: Beat Avant-Garde Writing Practices." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2004).

———. "Two Takes on Japan: Joanne Kyger's The Japan and India Journals and Philip Whalen's Scenes of Life at the Capital." In *The Transnational Beat Generation*, edited by Nancy M. Grace and Jennie Skerl. NY, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Frazer, Vernon, and Kirpal Gordon. "Who We Are Now: A Retrospective of Michael Rothenberg." *Jacket Magazine* 33 (July 2007).

Friedman, Amy. "Joanne Kyger, Beat Generation poet: 'a porcupine travelling at the speed of light.'" In *Reconstructing the Beats*, edited by Jennie Skerl, 73-88. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.

"GEORGE STANLEY." Poetry Society of America. https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/awards/frost_and_shelley/shelley_winners/2006/

Gizzi, Peter, and Kevin Killian, eds. *My Vocabulary Did This To Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*. Wesleyan: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

Gonzales, Matilde Martin. "Gender Politics and the Making of Anthologies: Towards a Theory of Women's Poetry." *American Poetry*, 2006.

Grace, Nancy. "Places to Go: Joanne Kyger." Places to Go: Joanne Kyger to *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, edited by Nacy Grace. Jackson: University Press of Missisippi, 2004.

———. "Snapshots, Sand Paintings and Celluloid: Formal Considerations in the Life Writing of Women Writers from the Beat Generation." In *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, edited by Nancy Grace and Ronna Johnson. Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Hedley, Jane. "Making 'You' to find 'Me.'" Introduction to *I Made You to Find Me: The Coming of Age of the Woman Poet and the Politics of Poetic Address*, 1-25. Columbus, Oh: The Ohio State University Press, 2009.

Higdon, Hailey, ed. Joanne Kyger. EPC Buffalo. Last modified June 2011. http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/kyger/.

Homans, Margaret. *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Jaffer, Frances. “For Women Poets, For Poetry: A Journal Entry.” In *The Poetry Reading: A Contemporary Compendium on Language & Performance,* ed. Stephen Vincent and Ellen Zweig. San Francisco: Momo’s Press 1981.

Jarnot, Lisa. *Robert Duncan The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*. London: University of California Press, 2012.

Johnson, Ronna. "Three Generations of Beat Poetics." In *The Cambridge companion to American poetry since 1945.*, by Jennifer Ashton. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Johnston, Alastair. *A Rogue's Gallery of Literary and Artistic Types*. 2004. http://www.poltroonpress.com/rogues.html.

Juhasz, Suzanne. *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition*. New York: Octagon Books, 1978.

Kane, Daniel. "Angel Hair Magazine, the Second-Generation New York School, and the Poetics of Sociability." *Contemporary Literature* 45, no. 2 (2004).

Killian, Kevin. "The Carola Letters of Joanne Kyger and George Stanley." *Jacket #11*, 2000.

Knight, Brenda, ed. *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution*. California: Conari Press, 1996.

Kyger, Joanne. "Notebook: Duncan Poetry Workshop 1958-1959." 1958. Box 19: Folder 6. Joanne Kyger Papers, 1950 - 2009. University of California: San Diego, San Diego, CA.

--------. *About Now: Collected Poems*. N.p.: National Poetry Foundation, 2007.

———. "ANDREW SCHELLING WITH JOANNE KYGER." Interview by Andrew Schelling. The Conversant. Last modified September 2011. http://theconversant.org/?p=6975.

———. "Anne Waldman: The Early Years... 1965-1970." *Jacket Magazine* 27 (April 2005).

———. *As Ever: Selected Poems*. Edited by Michael Rothenberg. New York: Penguin, 2002.

———. "The Community of THE CURRICULUM OF THE SOUL." *Harriet (Poetry Foundation Blog)*. Entry posted August 28, 2012. http://The Community of THE CURRICULUM OF THE SOUL.

———. "Congratulatory Poetics: Joanne Kyger Interviewed." By Diane Middleton-McQuaid and John Thorpe. *Convivio* 1, no. 1 (1983).

———. "Exciting and Simple: Lew Welch, William Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein." *Harriet (Poetry Foundation Blog)*. Entry posted August 6, 2012. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/08/exciting-and-simple-lew-welch-william-carlos-williams-and-gertrude-stein/.

———. "from Joanne Kyger." The Electronic Poetry Center. http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/kyger/autobiography.html. Originally Published in ContemporaryAuthors Autobiography Series, Volume 16

———. *The Japan & India Journals 1960-1964*. Bolinas, CA: Tombouctou Press, 1981.

———. "Joanne Kyger and Simon Pettet in Conversation." Interview by Simon Pettet. The Argotist Online. http://www.argotistonline.co.uk/Kyger%20interview.htm.

———. "JOANNE KYGER interviewed 9/29/95 in her Bolinas Home." By David Chadwick. Crooked Cucumber: the Life and Zen Teaching of Shunruyu Suzuki. Last modified September 29, 1995. http://www.cuke.com/Cucumber%20Project/interviews/kyger.html.

———. "Letters from Lost & Found." *Harriet (Poetry Foundation Blog)*. Entry posted August 31, 2012. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/08/letters-from-lost-found/.

———. "Richard Brautigan." *Harriet (Poetry Foundation Blog)*. Entry posted August 9, 2012. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2012/08/richard-brautigan/.

Kyger, Joanne, and Michael Rothenberg. *Man-Women*. N.p.: Big Bridge Press, 1988.

Lawrence, Nahem. "A Conversation with Joanne Kyger." *Occident* 8 (spring 1974): 142-57.

Martz, Louis L., ed. *H.D. Collected Poems 1912-1944*. New York: New Directions, 1983.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. N.p.: Basic Books, 2008.

"Memory Stick." mp3 audio file, 1:14. Penn Sound. Accessed April 27, 2015. http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Kyger.php.

Nix, Jennifer. "Finding Poetry in Illness." The Poetry Foundation. Last modified May 9, 2012. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/243994.

Notley, Alice. "American Poetic Music at the Moment." In *Coming After*, 131-46. N.p.: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Notley, Alice. “Doctor Williams’ Heiresses: a Lecture.” Tuumba Press, 1980.
———. "Joanne Kyger's Poetry." In *Coming After*. N.p.: University of Michigan Press, n.d.

———. "Voice." In *Coming After*, 147-57. N.p.: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Olson, Charles. *Muthologos: Lectures and Interviews*. Edited by Raph Maud. 2nd ed. N.p.: Talonbooks, 2010.

Oppenheimer, Joel, Ed Dorn, and Joanne Kyger. "Three Versions of the Poetic Line." *Credences* 2, no. 1 (March 1997).

Opstedal, Kevin. *Dreaming as One: Poetry, Poets and Community in Bolinas, California 1967-1980*. N.p.: Big Bridge, n.d.
Available Online http://www.bigbridge.org/bol-int.htm

———. "A Literary History of the San Andreas Fault: Bolinas Section."
http://www.jackmagazine.com/issue3/renhist.html.

Ostriker, Alicia. "Of Being Numerous." *Partisan Review* 29 (1972).

Peabody, Richard, ed. *A different beat: writings by women of the beat generation*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1997.

Rothenberg, Michael. "FRENZIED SWEETNESS: AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL ROTHENBERG AND DAVID MELTZER." By Christopher Luna. Rain Taxi Online Edition. Last modified 2010. http://www.raintaxi.com/frenzied-sweetness-an-interview-with-michael-rothenberg-and-david-meltzer/.

Russo, Linda. "How You Want to Be Styled: Philip Whalen in Correspondence with Joanne Kyger, 1959-1964." In *Among Friends: Engendering the Social Site of Poetry*, edited by Annie Dewey and Libbie Rifkin. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2013.

———. "Introduction: a context for reading Joanne Kyger." *Jacket #11*, 2000.

———. "Particularizing People's Lives: Joanne Kyger in conversation with Linda Russo." *Jacket Magazine #11*, 2000.

———. "Strange Big Moon: The Japan and India Journals: 1960-1964." Big Bridge: A Webzine of of Poetry and everything else.
http://www.bigbridge.org/issue7/fictlrusso.htm.

———. "'to be Jack Spicer in a dream': Joanne Kyger and the San Francisco Renaissance, 1957-65." *Jacket Magazine*, 1999.

———. "To Deal with Parts and Particulars: Joanne Kyger's Early Epic Poetics." In *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation*, edited by Ronna Johnson and Nancy Grace. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Schelling, Andrew. "Joanne Kyger's Portable Poetics." *Jacket #11*, 2000.

Silliman, Ron. "e-mail to Linda Russo from Ron Silliman." Electronic Poetry Center. http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/kyger/silliman.html.

———. "Monday, July 09, 2007." *Silliman's Blog*. Entry posted July 2007. http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/search?q=joanne+kyger.

Skinner, Jonathan. "Generosity and Discipline: The Travel Poems." *Jacket #11*, 2000.

Smith, Dale. "As Ever by Joanne Kyger." Bookslut. http://www.bookslut.com/poetry/2003_07_000126.php.

———. "AS EVER BY JOANNE KYGER." Book Slut. Last modified July 2003. http://www.bookslut.com/poetry/2003_07_000126.php.

———. "Energy on The Page-- Joanne Kyger in Coversation with Dale Smith." *Jacket #11*, 2000.

Spicer, Jack. *my vocabulary did this to me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*. Edited by Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

Theado, Matt. "Beat Generation Literary Criticism." *Contemporary Literature* 45, no. 4 (2004).

Vermont, Charlie. "Vertical Portrait of Joanne Kyger-- a poem and a letter." *Jacket #11*, 2000.

Vincent, Stephen. "About Now: Collected Poems By Joanne Kyger." bigbridge.org. Last modified January 2008. http://www.bigbridge.org/REV-JKSV.HTM.

———. "Testing the Sublime-- The Work of Joanne Kyger." *Jacket #11*, 2000.

Waldman, Anne, comp. *The Beat Book: Poems and Fiction from the Beat Generation*. Boston: Shambhala, 1996.

———. "Introduction to Strange Big Moon." *Jacket 11*, 2000.

Wieners, John. *The Journal of John Wieners is to be called 707 Scott Street for Billie Holiday*. Edited by Lewis Warsh and Fanny Howe. Los Angeles, CA: Sun & Moon Classics, 1996.

"Women and the Beats Panel" Audio File. Naropa Poetics Audio Archive. June 2000. *archive.org/details/Women_And_The_Beats_Panel_June_2000_00P013*