

Review: Robin Blaser / **The Metaphysics of Light** (Capilano Rev. No. 6)
Image-Nations 1-12 (Ferry Press)
Image-Nations 13 & 14 (Cobblestone Press)
The Stadium and the Mirror (Ferry Press)
 "The Practice of Outside" (Black Sparrow)

All of which have appeared in a sudden breeze, a real West wind. Outside my window the Sorority girls are singing in the night. How long since human voices graced this Northern air the way they do now, open again, and free? It didn't feel like a rhetorical question. These texts which Blaser has supplied mark an emergence of yet a further poet.

And it must be because his experience is so divinely chosen, that he would bring together his intimacy with Jack Spicer, his respect for and devotion to Charles Olson, encountered under the rigorously inspecting Scholastic eye of Robert Duncan. I don't know many of the details, but it appears now that the Flare Up over Nerval and the removal of Blaser into Canada has provided enough distance that things are clicking. One can see it in the photos which both Capilano and Sparrow produce; and it is some Apollonian apparition! Look! Look! at this poet. Not that I am, finally satisfied with visage, but it sure promises what the words project. I noticed this about Blaser, the first time I ever saw him, come to read for us at the Student Union in Buffalo. Not in the least frivolous, neither was he "serious" in some pompous fashion. Rather, he was an adept. It was quite another posture than the beatniks I'd been so keen on as a High School student. And this impression held, when I visited his house in Vancouver, had a few drinks with him, fell victim to an attack of violent paranoia and sought aid from him standing near the refrigerator in his kitchen. Always, the same nobleness and clarity.

So now the books are here, unlike the earlier small volumes though still retaining a fine cleanliness of appearance. There is a kind of ambition in the Cobblestone edition, but to my eye the mid-sixties San Francisco designs still have the edge. Or one would say, the small press has grown larger. That's welcome. Black Sparrow, in fact, has really crossed the chasm. *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (which contains "The Practice of Outside") is freed, in format, from associations other than happy ones. It is a truly commercial venture and stands as a landmark for John Martin. The *Capilano Review* tempts one into moving yet further North, with its display of how Government monies can be put to use. Production of that order would have to sell for at least \$4 in U.S., as against the \$1.50 Canada asks.

II

But what of the writing itself? I don't have the Ferry Press (and I see now why it is not mentioned above — though from Memory I could do it) because it's so good Jack Clarke took it home and won't send it back. *Image Nations* is a polysemous title for a long poem constructed in numbered sections much like Robert Duncan's *Passages*. One can climb up on it, like the jungle gymn we had on the playground, you can hang by your toes from this title. I'm not going to give you, reader, much that way, but take this stanza near the end of 14:

the mirror in the garden doubles
 the garden
 there and not there
 we had stolen the mirror from
 the wrecked house next door
 over the fence near the willow,
 across the heather, the talisman
 rose, and the wild-flowers under
 the blue back steps

One figures, since Pound, that the reader does not need an explanation. And that if he or she or it is perplexed upon hearing a new song (what kind of bird is that?) they will proceed with books and field-glasses. I present it here as specimen speech of the man or god who's image occupies page 60 of *CR*.

Mostly, however, the new work is prose. Blaser, as he readily professes, works slowly in poetry. It is one of his virtues, especially at a time when poets so-called are cranking them out as if there were no tomorrow. Apocalypse! and as if creation were a matter of scoring points: Sis! Boom! Bah! They even creep in here, because I forget myself and what I know. But discourse is another matter, and it feels like Robin has discovered that arena or table where he is allowed to voice his Mind. *The Metaphysics of Light* essay, in fact, is transcribed tape recording from lecture to and conversation with associates. It gets one off the page and into the mouth, as it occurs, quicker than any false face may have gotten hold our attentions.*

Why not? When the talk is of the quality which Blaser generates (dig the long introductory adverb clause) then the technology which ruled us is put to use. Because it is informed talk, and in turn it informs us as to continued care among the living for that cherished light.

"The Practice of Outside" (a 75 page essay which articulates Blaser's long care with the workings of Jack Spicer) equally discloses a new eagerness for speech.

"At first this essay was short and simple — about Jack. But that became a reduction which every twist and turn of the work denied — a biography without the world the poet earned or a split between the man and the work which drank him up and left him behind."

Or, later, he writes:

"I am here entering that combat for language which was Jack's. And I'm having a hell of a time with the description of the process which he performed. I feel my language thicken and become more abstract. I lean on the linguistic necessity of invisibility to give meaning to visibility or vice-versa, entangled in the oppositions which are natural in our words. Jack knew we were inside a performance of language."

III

I am already reluctant to put down Spicer and finish this review, so compelling is the Sparrow representation, as ordered by Blaser. And here, really, is the final note. Just as he has debuted in tape-transcribed speech and in exegetical prose, here Blaser makes his first appearance as the editor of a book. And, as in all other procedures, his performance is impeccable. The "Poems and Documents" section which follow his own commentary exemplified above is an interesting and useful innovation. The tone is never "academic" or pedantic. The texts are presented readably and with no waste of space. When certain variances are necessary (such as the printing of Spicer's "Explanatory Notes" for *The Heads of the Town / Up to the Aether* in grey ink) they are accomplished directly. There is nothing hurried or ambitious about it, which fact alone marks it off from most of today's commercial productions. The work is finished.

So, if we can believe the prospectus provided in *Capilano, Bach's Belief* (#10 of *IFS A Curriculum of the Soul*) is next. May we all be ready to conduct that light.

Al Glover
 Richardson Hall
 SLU - 30 Oct 75

*Kerouac, really, invented it. See his transcriptions of conversation with Neal finally revealed in *Visions of Cody*, done early but held back, while others went into print. And, of course, big money maker was U.S. Govt. *Watergate Tapes* which helped alleviate serious cash shortages.



— Brian Slopey

instead invisible

lines of connection run everywhere to
 everything, knitting the mental fabric
 completely as one no matter how changing
 the forms be

A variety of images come to mind without
 much effort, yet that sought after
 unity is elusive. So it goes with
 cooler mornings, frost etching here and there,
 the small clustereing of aspen colorings
 along the river, preparing for the conflagration
 of yellows and oranges soon to arrive with
 whole valley sides ablaze, massive
 sized beauty in combination with the
 intricate underbrush and scrub
 paintings.

Meanwhile back in July I spied
 a hound dog neck deep in irrigation
 ditch waters nosing past reeds and
 summer time's heat waves to observe
 nearby steers a'grazing

— James Karkut
 Steamboat Springs, Colorado