

PROJECT PAPERS

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NEW FORM

Opening remarks delivered at the "New Forms/New Functions" panel of the Poetry Project's 1988 Symposium, *Poetry of Everyday Life*

That particular conjunction of events which includes the history of your body, your experience, and your art vertically, and the time and circumstances you are in horizontally, seeks an expression, that is inevitably unique, or new.

A formal problem or limit represents a limit of what you can make or say or see, at a particular moment. You might make a new form by following a desire or an intuition into a further, more contemporary part of you, such as varying line length according to the horizon, embedding scientific terms into an equivocal or into a lyric context, using thought imagistically.

I find the idea of newness interesting, during a time when there is no recognized critical aesthetic. The criticism is at the edge of what it can discern or say, and so it's interesting to seek emerging form in fashion, in the margins of the arts, on the street, in experimental physics.

I have an intuition of a new form, as a new expertise in the topology of expression, emotion, and culture.

At first I characterized this new form by an idea of the horizontal, a horizontal cut across experience and culture, synchronistically and democratically, rather than the familiar vertical cut into tradition and essence.

But now I want to say it is a topological section or point of view, which could then include both verticals and horizontals along a complexity of a continuous surface, and with a new set of formal dynamics.

It's something which might take collage farther.

It's my intuition about an aesthetic, or perhaps an intuition about a poem, and would require a new craft or form, analogous to the invention of a mathematics of surfaces.

It's an aesthetic I've noticed in younger or "newer" writers that is just beyond my grasp. I have an urge to understand what they know that enables them to generate this ungraspable form, and it is an urge from the intuition which desires a way to express convolutions of experiences and meanings in me, which are somehow all rising into a present tense, or a tense of one time, or one surface.

It could be a way to write a poem across fragmented concentrations, for example, if you are raising children, instead of by traditionally pursuing a single line. It could be a way to write a poem that responds to the barrage of layered stimuli in the world.

A friend tells me, when she sees a deer next to a rock on a far hill, she learned as a child, by concentrating, to make the deer appear larger and closer, and the rock to diminish. When I ask a Yupik boy how he finds an animal on empty tundra, he tells me, you just look for the animal, until you see the animal.

The scientific notion of color as wavelengths of light — that we have in the light on our hands all possible colors — may not be true if you can call memory into being, using a color. We can imagine a person inventing a color, now, seeing it for the first time, and that that new color's entrance pertains to a new appropriateness in the environment for it to be seen, not a predisposition.

This could be how a new form takes place.