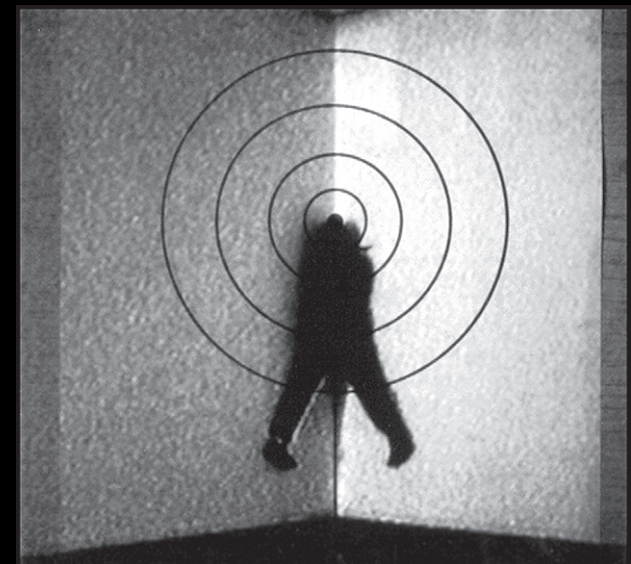


# Corner Jump

*Jimmy Raskin*



*Bijou Theater, Cal Arts*



Birth of The Documentarian;  
Mispronouncing 'Polyphony'

circa 1991

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Birth of The Documentarian;  
Mispronouncing 'Polyphony'

A 20th Anniversary Commemoration.

*Dr. Lauren Silvers*

*Matthew Monahan*

*David Colosi*

*Josefina Ayerza*

*Jean-Philippe Antoine*

Witnesses:

*Boaz Barkan*

*Brian Baltin*

Featuring the original notes and diagrams of

*Jimmy Raskin*

### Corner Jump

1.

In 1991 I wrote critical notes on the nature of The Poet:  
“I have a fixation with a Poem’s disgrace.”

2.

I recorded myself reading from these notes.

3.

Soon after, while the audio track played, I had myself video-taped leaping into a corner.

4.

I was to present the video to an audience at the Bijou Theater at CalArts.

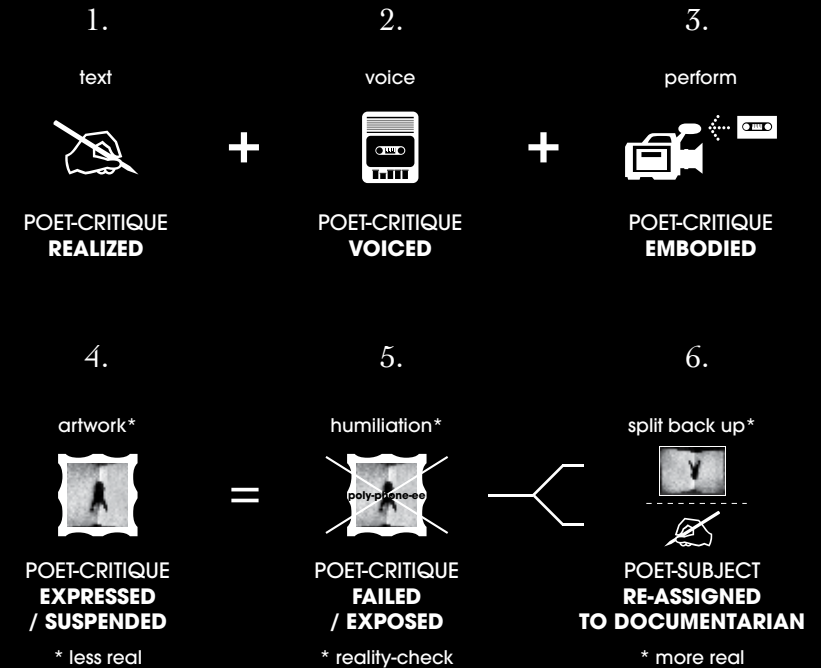
5.

Just prior to the screening, I previewed the video to a friend who told me, rather severely, that I mispronounced a key term: Polyphony. I uttered “*poly-phone-ee*.” The correct pronunciation is *pə-l-f’ə-nee*.

6.

Panic-stricken, I immediately told the projectionist to mute the audio. I then acquired a podium, which I could re-read the text *live* behind, and in front of the projection, thereby saving myself the embarrassment the mispronunciation would have caused. In front of an audience reading critical notes *on the nature of The Poet* with a supporting video demonstrating *the body of The Poet* in the moment of critique, I inadvertently embodied the role of “The Documentarian.”

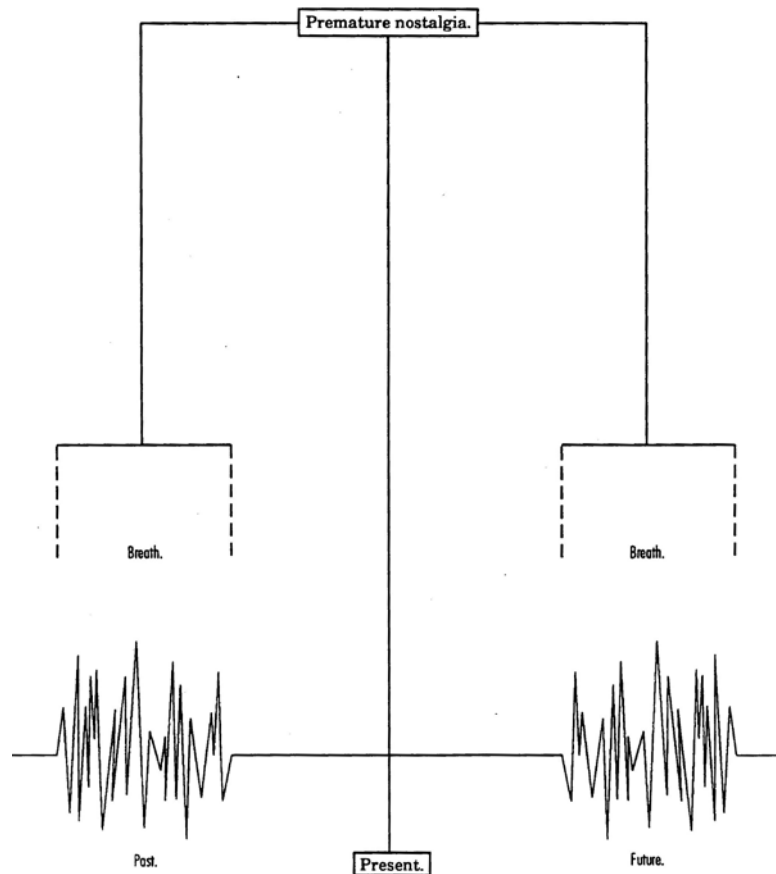
A few days after the event, I rendered the initial diagrams.



## INTRODUCTION

### *Premature Nostalgia*

n. Reminiscence of the present  
through an imagined future.



Initial diagram, *Premature Nostalgia*, circa 1991

My rendering of diagrams, as a form of artistic practice, coincided with the appearance of “The Documentarian” and became the synonymous by-product of his agency. The Documentarian was born from the circumstances of the *Corner Jump* event and through his inauguration The Poet was simultaneously made manifest as his subject. (Later I would also define him as The Poet Pure; The Poetic-Impulse; The Poet Within ...)

Since 1991 the roles of the Documentarian and Poet have remained intact. Their bond is markedly peculiar for each is defined by a set of primary differences: *The Documentarian displays and objectifies* while *The Poet eludes and subjectifies*. The Poet proceeds obliviously with his back to The Documentarian while The Documentarian relentlessly tracks him. They remain *essentially* split.

In fact, these two halves once constituted a whole and confident Artist—where the external responsibility to “display” fluidly mingled with the internally charged instinct to “express.” This is true with the original intent of *Corner Jump* where such an Artist was present and confident with a good work of Art. And yet, with the misfire surrounding a key mispronunciation, this Artist was *struck*—split into the primordial roles of Documentarian and Poet.

Looking back now (perhaps participating in an act of *mature nostalgia*), it seems completely fitting that the first diagram The Documentarian rendered was on *Premature Nostalgia*, being a particularly good description of The Poet. What made this documentation *particularly* peculiar was how The Poet remained a viable subject for years since even though no “poetry” had been written.

As for *my* story, *Premature Nostalgia* allowed me to nurture the role I had assigned to The Poet in the years prior to 1991. When I wrote poetry, I imagined that “The Moment!” was

important: the moment of expressing (not through the eyes of others, but from time itself) a path destined, etched here and now, foretold and fate planted, like a memorial realized simultaneously as the event transpires, sensationalized in the fullness of a breath heard only from within. It was the *feeling*, the emotion of the importance that gave weight to whatever I was musing. And then from this gravitational weight the words came out. More than working through an idea, more than inspiration from a muse or an exercise in word play, it was the *manufacturing of weight* that I eternally returned to, letter-to-letter, word-to-word, page-to-page.

When we pause with something past and longed for, the climax of nostalgia suspends us, whirling into a self-sustaining strength like a vortex from the perfect storm mixing warm and cold. It is a paradox of presence: we are in the present yet aloof and not conscious of the present passing but only of the past as it passes! This constitutes a *parody paradox* especially if one fervently expresses this between-state, mistaking one's emotion for undeniable worth. For me, this was to testify to the essence of The Poet as a figure of self-contradiction. The Poet embodies that which is both indispensable (to language's potential) and easily reprehensible (a source of critique when meaning is *too much*). This Poet is caught in a *between* of his own making. Nostalgia helps to qualify this status while a unique case of *Premature Nostalgia* will qualify something even more special: The apex that is The Poet Pure.

So what can break The Poet out of such a trance of preternatural authorship—out of an ambassadorship of dreams? *Critical Distance*. This state of action—the insertion of criticality between subjectification and objectification—re-resolves the two in order to create a more conscientious expressivity. Critical Distance brings Difference itself to the foreground, ultimately forcing, with practice, a more intelligent movement through meaning-making. The Poet's singular pursuit of hidden truths is now replaced by the ever-

churning, indeterministic and primary nature of language itself! From this new dynamic platform, The Poet's moment of expression does not privilege pure interiority—"Voice"—but rather, by way of pre-existing signs and the unity of cultural conditions and contexts of expression .... What I mean to say here is that Critical Distance—at its core—*separates The Poet from The Poem*.

From the beginning, I thought that in the grand scheme of expression, Critical Distance originated most acutely in the critique of *The Poet Within*. From the point of view of this *out-of-Body introspection* (poets disembodiment themselves) all artists could then fully investigate the more pluralistic, culturally conscious exercises of contemporary poetics and execute projects—display art, perform, curate, and so on. The "trick" of Critical Distance hinges on keeping hold of *the tools* of The Poet (assemblage; metaphor; playful description) while letting go of *the myth* of The Poet's spirit (blessed vanity; faith in meaning; preordained path-maker...). An originary critique of The Poet *Within*, as a means to establish Critical Distance from *Without*, propels one forward and severs nostalgia (that one emotional longing that prevents Critical Distance from being realized at all!). Nostalgia for the loss of The Poet Within is the self-subverting tool that blocks the noble activity of Critical Distance.

It is evident that nostalgia is an attribute of The Poet we distance ourselves from. The expressive mourning of a past poetic persona is an almost comical state reserved for cliché. And even more so, to be nostalgic for the death of The Poet himself is an even more wicked trap. And Premature Nostalgia is no exception: manufacturing a feeling of added weight is especially *especially* dubious! To reminisce about the present passing, as if it has already passed from an imaginary future cuts the subject off from knowing that *this moment* also must pass, that in fact it has *always-already* passed! Believing otherwise puts one in a precarious

position, in a false state of presence—his back turned to us and his front facing the corner.

I am reminded of a transitional concept: “*The present is always-already passing.*” This law of perpetual motion, through time and space, qualifies that there is no “awaiting fixed truth to uncover”...“no secrets of the universe for the Poet to give to us.” There is no “preordained path;” there is only the path that moves. This is the fate of fate: the *paradox* returns. A Self cannot be “genuinely expressed,” for one’s Self is perpetually changing within the infinite layers of meaning and the immutable dynamic conditions of life itself. But this liberating understanding is meant to propel not paralyze! Rather than perceiving or presenting the ‘...*always-already* ...’ as a paralytic force or condition, one could rather interpret it as the fountain from which one drinks to become The *New* Poet and continue to “Express!”...by way of the insertion of a perpetually active and mutually acknowledged Critical Distance.

And yet! There is that possibility of *misinterpreting* the perpetual passing of time. Instead of moving forward as a more dynamic being (or as The *New* Poet), one pauses to reminisce. One mistakenly suspends that this very moment of realization (that all things must pass) ***must be mourned too!*** Only a Poet Pure is capable of such a ridiculous challenge: to attempt to *halt with and feel* the inevitable ‘...*always-already*...’.

Yes, the subject of *Premature Nostalgia* is especially stuck. We will hold him there as a reminder of what to avoid even as it slips away. Such is **the task of The Documentarian: to hold The Poet in this peculiarly potent state.** In his grasp, The Poet is held in this auxiliary space. He is always available.

It is from this particularly precarious position of nostalgia that I present to you a 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary book on the *Corner Jump*. Looking back on this work and my initial diagram

on *Premature Nostalgia*, it is evident to me now how my early experience with Critical Distance, wherein The Documentarian of The Poet was realized and The Poet Within was preserved, cemented itself in my art practice.

*As for the Corner?... It remains an apt space for critique: The Vertical Line differentiates one plane from the other, while constituting our Limit: One plane is for it is not the other. The corner is a physical doctrine of Difference Itself. And yet, the longer one stands and stares into this primordial space, the more one may appear to suffer from self-humiliation (punishment). Therefore, it is the intention of this outward-facing critical dimension to bypass The Self and turn around to face the new world and the ever-expanding culture of Critical Distance.*

*Such is the struggle of The Documentarian—his subject still faces the corner.*

Jimmy Raskin  
December 2011  
Brooklyn



## On The False Appearance Of The Present

*Dr. Lauren Silvers*

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates recounts the myth of the origin of writing: the god Theuth presents the Egyptian king Thamus with his invention of writing, which purports to aid in the wisdom and knowledge of his subjects. Thamus calmly listens to Theuth's case for bringing writing to the kingdom. Then, he decides against it, arguing that instead of *aiding* in wisdom and knowledge, writing would actually *corrupt* his subjects' memories and render them lazy thinkers. It is with the retelling of this (spurious) myth that Socrates condemns the "dead" letter in favor of extolling "living" speech. When speech is written down, Socrates warns, it can be interpreted by others in ways unintended by the original writer. It becomes defenseless and illegitimate as long as the original speech maker is not there to explain it. Speech, on the other hand, is much more likely to bear truth, wisdom, and knowledge as long as it is conveyed to its audience by the breath and the voice, the primordial human medium of rhetoric and communication.

It is fitting that the figure of the poet conserves this distinction, historically speaking. Every kind of poetry establishes a relationship to the lyric tradition—in which love poems are recited by singing bards and "overheard" by others. When we write about poems, we identify a "speaker" of the poem. We are the poem's "audience"; it is as if the writing we are reading is infused with the breath and the voice of the poet, although the poem itself, an indication of a timeless "present," pretends to ignore us.

The *Phaedrus*' privileging of speech over writing may seem outmoded to contemporary ears, but there's nothing like the dramatic rescue of writing by its maker to reinvigorate its relevance. For "Corner Jump," Jimmy Raskin had recorded his own voice reading his notes to play alongside his performance, but discovered at the last moment that he had mispronounced the word "polyphony" in the recording. As a last resort Raskin ditched the audio-recording (in this





instance a kind of writing), and performed his poem about poetry in the present. And according to Raskin, everything went off without a hitch; the poet's presence vouchsafed the legitimacy of the written word.

Or so it seemed; with this publication of the documents surrounding the "Corner Jump," questions ensue. Why the need to document poetic failure, or, as Raskin puts it himself in an earlier formulation, why the fixation "with a poem's disgrace" ("Annunciation"). Why, for instance, include the photocopy of the original manuscript, replete with spelling errors and idiosyncratic use of majuscule? Why the obsession with returning to the event of potential misfire? How does the *avoidance* of an innocent mispronunciation constitute an event—an event around which, evidently, an entire life's work is reconfigured, re-analyzed, reorganized?

The very notion of the "misfire" dismantles the myth of the present-as-presence. The present is the horizon of expectation, that frontier where everything we know about the world from our past experience appears to collude with our assumptions about the future. The present is almost non-existent when you think about it; it is mere presence, passing away, mere connective tissue between the past and the future. When a misfire occurs, the present intervenes and dominates like a temporal albatross. No poem can bend the fourth dimension like a misfire can.

In retrospect, "Corner Jump" concerns itself with dismantling the myth of presence. A more recognizably modernist version of this myth, courtesy of Robert Duncan, goes something like this: "The presence in which we shiver is the entity of the poem itself in which the poet shivers, the immanence of the design of the tapestry in the weaver's held breath as he works" (Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 1964). This immanence of the poetic present, the immanence at the source of the *text* (for the Greek word for "weaving" is

*textere*, from which we derive our modern word for text), is the poet-weaver's held breath, that emancipatory moment reaped through concentration, inspiration, and genius.

Raskin's diagram of "premature nostalgia" re-pictures this myth, divesting it of shivers and tapestries, reducing it to its minimal features, in which the breath is displaced from the present onto both past and future. The present here is unoccupiable by the poet or by any other figure for that matter; it yokes, yet it eludes.

In many ways Raskin's poet-turned-documentarian is akin to Stéphane Mallarmé's *Mime* (cf. "Mimique" in *Crayonné authentâtre*): both reveal the present to be tantalizingly untenable, a kind of Apollonian dream-state of pure presence, seemingly friendly yet ultimately treacherous to the poet. The Mime-as-poet "operates" according to the following logic: "between desire and accomplishment, perpetration and its memory; here outrunning, there reminding, in the future, in the past, under a false appearance of the present." The *Mime appears* to embody the present, especially if one is watching him, but really, he is only ever alluding to a multitude of presents, possible and actual: that of the act to be mimed, that of his reading, that of his performance, the continuity of his gestures and expressions—all anticipated as they are already falling away. It is the false appearance of a present, too, because the *Mime* retains the whiteness of the page: nothing is written, but the present yokes past and future in pure virtuality, but the presence of the present—it eludes.

The distilled, rarefied role of the Poet, for Mallarmé as for Raskin, is to capture and then denature that non-moment between breaths, a sort of diastolic nothingness that does the work of spacing yet leaves no textual trace. The presence of their present never vouchsafes voice, utterance, self-expression, but only alludes to its potential failure. Here the feud between speech and writing becomes fully antiquated;



there is no speech but only writing; everything has always already been written and waits only to be performed under the false appearance of the present.

Indeed, Raskin is not the first to have had the *idée-fixe* of the poem's disgrace. If Mallarmé's Mime writes while remaining unwritten (in white on white), then Raskin uses the more traditional—and hence more risqué—palette of black on white (or is it white on black?). As it is documented, the performance of "Corner Jump" yields something unanticipated by Raskin. A simple series of attempts to document jumping into a corner produces a remarkable work of contemporary poetics. Raskin hurls black against white, alluding to the false immanence of expressivity that secures the generic distinction of "poetry"; he flails expressively, hurling black against white in a dramatic monologue of poetic desperation, attempting again and again to make his non-inky body form a word somewhere recto or verso of the spine of the book he calls a corner. Raskin's vertical page, unlike the horizontal one, refuses to absorb the signs of his poetic desire; the material support ignores him resolutely; it becomes only a canvas for staged desperation.

These failed attempts at writing are voiceless, *bodily* misfires. But in summoning the false appearance of the present, and in marshaling the physical energy of the body for performance, they also feel so voluble. They are speech acts that speak volumes—volumes that pass ineluctably into the possession of the Documentarian, who records and assembles them for an unknown posterity.





## If Brass Wakes As A Bugle

*Matthew Monahan*

Phony: perhaps an alteration of *fawney* “gilt brass ring used by swindlers.” The noun meaning “phony person or thing” is attested from 1902.

— Dictionary of Etymology

If brass wakes as a bugle, it is not its fault at all.

— A. Rimbaud

A number of witnesses have been called upon to recount a certain event in the life of the young poet, Jimmy Raskin. Considering the degree of formality and documentation surrounding the event, the poet would have us weigh its historical importance alongside Verlaine’s pistol assault on Rimbaud, a squalid legal affair that drove Verlaine to Catholicism and Rimbaud to renounce poetry all together. Rimbaud’s renunciation has haunted poetry ever since and glitters darkly throughout Raskin’s oeuvre, sometimes in the guise of a donkey. Though no blood was shed at Raskin’s Corner Jump of 1991, it was to be his last stand as a “poet pure.” “The Poet has been sustained as a potent subject yet no ‘poetry’ has been written since.” It is a fall from grace and a coming of age story: a renunciation brought on by pronunciation.

Once upon a time, the adolescent brass awoke to find itself a bugle, and from it came an outpouring of music: marching songs, ballads and commemorative tunes for every occasion. “More than working through an idea, more than a muse or exercise in word play, *it was the manufacturing of weight* that I eternally returned to, letter to letter, word to word, page to page.” It was not always so easy to find the sense in these sounds, but the important thing was the sound itself, the lyrical flow, the rise and fall of the breath, the pacing around and the pausing, all of which transformed the cul-de-sac [Raskin was raised in the California suburbs] into a stage for the young man to say “I am a poet.” Poems were written



“not through the eyes of others, but from time itself, a path destined, etched here and now, foretold and fate planted — *indispensible*.”

In the Notes of Corner Jump (see Appendix I) it is this relationship to the audience that is going to be questioned. Not only is the poet going to read his poems, the audience will be called for jury duty. This jury/audience “can at any given moment deem (the poet) all or entirely meaningful or NOT?” It is not enough to listen, or even to interpret the poem, the audience will be called upon to “KNOW IT” and hand down a verdict of “ALL or NOTHING.” The audience is expected to validate the whole existence of the poem and the poet. In this “ride of a trial” the poet hopes to realize that he is capable of “ALL or NOTHING.” Naively and passionately the poet sees himself and his work in these absolute terms and expects the audience to do the same. But what if the audience cannot be reached, what if they don’t get it? Or don’t care? and we suffer “a traveling stagnancy that obviously trips the audiences power of understanding?” How will we even know? In the performance of the poem “we cannot undertake the parody of a conversation.” His brinksmanship with the ALL or NOTHING is a sickness, but “(t)he poet does not know that he is sick” until the space between the podium and the front row opens up a critical distance, a diagnostic light that will reveal his sickness.

Will he have to retreat into isolation? Quarantine the poet?

If the audience cannot measure his “manufacturing of weight,” can he learn to endure the lightness of being? He may have to settle for “a pleurably lamer dance, if the poem desires isolation of private meaning.” But the poet pure is not pure enough to endure the private meaning! The poem is “hateful to the very ordinances that keep it.” In desperation he starts to shout exclamations!:

Undeniably unforeseen-  
Dogmatically irresponsible...compromisingly weary-  
Saturated and unwieldy  
Metallically stutter-esque  
Capsizing intoxication-  
Feisty friendly quaint-  
Quaint...

He exclaims that the cacophony must be heard! The whole brass section is for hire! A new career is born:

**A career with a poly-phony!** (*poly-phone-ee*)

The word held aloft for a moment and then from the audience, precise and short: “It’s pronounced *pə-l-f’ə-nee* you fucking idiot!”

The gavel drops. The bailiff restrains the poet.

There must have been panic, shaded by a grin.

How to go on? The audience is a chorus of hecklers! And the poet can no longer trust his tongue! The words lead the thought in the wrong direction! The phoneme has betrayed his secret signified! He is exposed as a phony! And many times over!

Even worse than not being understood, he is phony?  
No choice but to approach the bench.

The defense would like to enter a plea of insanity.

“The exclamation is more flavorful in its private madness.” Private meaning has lead into private madness. “There is confusion as to when a poet is or is not in control of his parody paradox... The schizophrenic may be the individual who possesses the unknown through an inevitable route



of being CLUELESS.” He takes the Rimbaud defense, pleading a temporary “derangement of the senses.”

Objection: *Ignorantia juris non excusat*, ignorance of the law is no excuse.

The poet pleads not to be negated, the poem “begging for its identity, it is muffled by the placidity of the poets inscape.”

But what if he could be treated, institutionalized, where “there is a process of familiarizing oneself with an overlapping of potentially stagnant signs” and where he “could become thoroughly aware of his image as we are asked not to negate him...”?

It is the audience itself that is both the witness and the jury and the whole arrangement criminalizes poetry. The audience is invited to interpret, but ultimately the poet, in seeking the absolute validation of this being, demands to be sentenced even if the jury is hung. As it seeks meaning and is confounded by the poets drunken mis-fires, and mis-pronunciations: multiple mis-deamenors! The “perp” is no longer a minor, he will be sentenced as an adult, responsible for his meanings.

Too late for an escape, he turns his back to the audience and jumps, like a suicidal dunce, into an empty corner.

It was an event created by the poet himself to try to define what a poet could be in relation to very skeptical audience and due to a certain “mishap” that took place at an art institution the reading itself became the scene of a crime. The crime puts into question the limited uses and liabilities of artistic license.

I myself knew Raskin in his youth, he was a minor then and wrote poetry “freely” as only young passionate adolescents

can. Like many young men, the ardent ways of heart lead down many dangerous paths. His days in the institution forced him to place critical distance between himself and his creations, driving a wedge between the sign and the signifier, between his body and his soul. Just as the glass can be seen as half full so too, by a trick of optimistic phenomenology, can the concave corner be perceived as convex. In this the way the poet once trapped in the corner now appears to be floating outside it, contemplating the pure edifice of a cube.

Postscript:

“Lawyers are all right, I guess—but it doesn’t appeal to me”, I said. “I mean they’re all right if they go around saving innocent guys’ lives all the time, and like that, but you don’t do that kind of stuff if you’re a lawyer. All you do is make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot. How would you know you weren’t being a phony? The trouble is, you wouldn’t.”

- *The Catcher in the Rye*





## A Fixation With A Poem's Disgrace

*David Colosi*

To be honest, I missed the Corner Jump performance. I don't know where I was. One thing I do remember, though, is that Jimmy had a particular way of pronouncing "unknown." It sounded something akin to Anknown or Onknown. For years I had no idea what he was saying. So when he told me he once mispronounced polyphony, I thought nothing of it. I thought, as a poet he was merely coining phrases and manipulating language to his own benefit. I thought nothing of it at the time, but he has since made me think everything about it.

I start with context.

Leading up to the event we commemorate here, Jimmy Raskin embodied the poet. He participated frequently in poetry readings, seducing not only the women in the crowd but all of his listeners. His poet persona grew out of his admiration for the young Arthur Rimbaud—like Raskin, also a twenty-year-old poet in his prime. He published flyers and invented a community of poets called *The Bastard Poets International*. Many of the poems were published anonymously and often by a community of poets rather than by an individual, though pseudonyms made many of us readers wonder whether Jimmy had written all the poems himself or none of them. He paid tribute to his hero on the cover of these pamphlets with a graphic logo of an enlargement of Rimbaud's left eye from the cover of the 1957 New Directions edition of *Illuminations*. The eye of the seer, the author of both prose poems and *Les lettres du voyant*, was the lens through which Raskin saw his poetic persona.

He romanticized the stirrings of Rimbaud's heart and the poet's translation of those stirrings to the page until he read a book by Vincent Descombes called *Modern French Philosophy* in a course at CalArts. A particular passage in the chapter on Semiology made a deep impression. In a series of early notes, Jimmy paraphrases and discusses Descombes' analysis of a



stanza from Rimbaud's "Fêtes de la Patience" and its affect on him. DesCombes' words read as follows:

"The poet [Rimbaud] listens not so much to the stirrings of his heart as to the prescriptions of the French language, whose resources and limitations engender a poetics which governs the poem. Indeed, the closer that poetic expression claims to be to some spontaneous lyricism of lived immediacy, the more it is codified. The more the poem strives for emotional effect, the nearer it draws to popular forms of expression, whose regularity tends to the stereotype (ditties, refrains, nursery rhymes)."<sup>1</sup>

This revelation that Rimbaud may have recorded less his tormented "natural self" and more the limitations of the French language created a sense of trauma in Raskin's identity as a poet and forced him to readjust the stance of his persona. He was buying into a traditionally held mythology which joined the person of the poet to the poem, while DesCombes' Post-Structuralist reading, which attributed the poetic voice less to the stirrings of the young savant but more to the limits of the French language, cleaved the author from the text and reassigned the credit for the poetics to the limits of language. For Raskin, his favorite author had been killed, and, in turn, so had his own persona. From this experience, he found himself stammering (a conscious reference to Roland Barthes, both essays "The Rustle of Language" and "The Death of the Author"). As he rethought his identity as a poet and his ability to generate poetic technique, in journal entries he entertained questions like "From where did I begin to understand that I was a poet?" And further, "Is asking from, 'what is the nature of my duty?' an undesirable tactic? Should I just start writing poetry?" As a poet having an out-of-body experience, he wondered how he could survive—in his words—"the ravaging dislocations of post-structuralism."<sup>2</sup> In other words, could the poet ever use language, or would

language always use the poet? If language always precedes the poet, what then is the poet's duty?

But Jimmy was not alone in the questioning of the duty of the poet or his ability to generate poetic technique, nor did he have to look far for a mentor. In what are called *Les lettres du voyant* (The Letters of the Seer), Arthur Rimbaud briefly paused from writing poetry to discuss his duty as a poet. Regarding technique, he told George Izambard that the point is "to arrive at the unknown through the disordering of *all the senses*..."<sup>3</sup> And concerning his identity as a poet he said, "I is some one else [Je est un autre]. So much the worse for the wood that discovers it's a violin..."<sup>4</sup> Two days later in a letter to Paul Demeny, he reiterated, "If brass wakes up a trumpet, it isn't to blame"<sup>5</sup> and "The poet makes himself a seer through a long, a prodigious and rational disordering of *all the senses*."<sup>6</sup> Not only is this a diagnosis of the poet, but it is also Rimbaud's prognosis of the poet's duty. Raskin concludes from this that the poet is schizophrenic (a term he introduces metaphorically without clinical disambiguation that likely came from an introduction to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, particularly, *Anti-Oedipus*, probably from the same course that had assigned DesCombes). He witnesses Rimbaud's achievement of critical distance: the poet documents of his own process, becomes the philosopher of his poems, and like brass, wakes to discover he is a trumpet. The poet and the philosopher of the poet are inseparable, of the same body, yet they display a different consciousness. The poet who sees himself as a poet from outside of his poem, for Raskin, jeopardizes his claim to that identity. Finally, separation anxiety finally presses the poet to stammer, to explain and to apologize for naming himself as such. With this realization Jimmy witnesses the poet's initial misfire in the utterance: "I am a poet."

Another quote from Rimbaud in *Les lettres du voyant* also made a lasting impression on him:



"Ineffable torture in which he will need all his faith and superhuman strength, the great criminal, the great sickman, the utterly damned, and the supreme Savant! For he arrives at the unknown! Since he has cultivated his soul—richer to begin with than any other! He arrives at the unknown: and even if, half crazed, in the end, he loses the understanding of his visions, he has seen them! Let him croak in his leap into those unutterable and innumerable things: there will come other horrible workers: they will begin at the horizons where he has succumbed."<sup>7</sup>

One can compare many of the conclusions that Raskin drew to Rimbaud's characterization of the future poet. In the first place, his poet, too, is defined as sick. The great sickman suffers from ineffable torture. In the second, he has a reserve of superhuman strength and becomes the supreme savant when he arrives at the unknown. He is half-crazed and, one presumes, half-brilliant, or at least rich-in-soul. Raskin's diagnosis of schizophrenia matches Rimbaud's caricature. Ultimately Rimbaud's poet will leap himself to death. His repeated leaps into the unutterable and innumerable things, into the unknown, will cause him to lose his bearings and croak, leaving other poets to pick up from the horizon—from the line—that he lost contact with. Compare this to Raskin's later portrayal in a series of notes written during this time, cited here from a piece titled Quarantine.

"The poet has been pushed face first into the dirt of language and all its minerals, then expected to hurl supernaturally into the clouds to capture some sort of divine quintessence to bring back to the earth from his downfall of tangibility, the weight of communication value. We demand this process, and he accepts it. It then becomes understandable that he cannot eventually handle the pressures of the betweenness."<sup>8</sup>

After working through his ontological and poetic drama/trauma from Descombes in his journal, Jimmy began to resituate and resuscitate himself as a new being—the New Poet/Philosopher. Fallen in the dirt, face down, badly maimed and disfigured (a caricature Raskin will return to later), the poet exerts his super human strength and rises.

During this period, Jimmy methodically rendered his Anknown differently from Rimbaud's Unknown and from the abyss that Martin Heidegger referred to as 'destitute time,' and from the broader abyss of Existentialism. Reference books he aligned his new position with and against included—besides Rimbaud's *Illuminations* and DesCombes' *Modern French Philosophy*—Dwight Bolinger's *Aspects of Language*, David E. Cooper's *Metaphor*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Zettel*, Martin Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Roland Barthes' *The Rustle of Language* and Douglas Messerli's *"Language" Poetries: An Anthology*. (There are also references to Derrida in his notes, and insinuations to Deleuze and Guattari, but these are non-specific. At this point he has yet to encounter Frederick Nietzsche, Stephen Hawking, and Pinocchio, who have assigned roles in his later cosmos). Armed with research from these books and journal entries defining his new position, he formulated his Anknown.

In his first attempt, he videotaped himself jumping into a corner. He referred to the corner as the space where the borders bounce, where the wall of the poet bumps into that of the philosopher. The thin line where they meet is the entrance to his abyss, but it is, by design, unenterable—a physical paradox. His New Being—the Poet/Philosopher, the Poet who documents his identity as such from a critical distance—embodies this paradox. From the corner, if we separate the two walls and take each in isolation, the border evaporates. The philosopher is on one side and the poet is on the other. The Anknown, and its door, only exist by way of an attempt to unify the two. Jimmy interprets the corner as





the space where the performer, rather than entering, bounces *off* of the border. His studied reading and writing leads him to conclude that the corner is the dwelling place of the New Poet/Philosopher. He thrusts his new being into the corner in an attempt to “become one with the line.”

If we consider Rimbaud's earlier assessment of the act and duty of the poet, and now consider Raskin's interpretation of his Anknown as a corner—the vertical horizon that joins two planes, the binding of a book, perhaps—one can easily see how he physically interpreted Rimbaud's proposal for leaping “into those unutterable and innumerable things.” We might push the connection further and see how Raskin has inscribed his performing subject as one of those “horrible workers” who begins “at the horizons where [Rimbaud] has succumbed.”

And so we find ourselves at the event commemorated as the Corner Jump and the Polyphony misfire. Upon discovering this new dwelling place, he was then ready to reemerge and present his thesis to an audience. So he pared down several pages of his notes to a few essential paragraphs and titled it, “When a Poet is a Poet and Not a Poet.” He recorded himself reading these essential lines and dubbed them with the video of himself repeatedly leaping into a corner, performing repeatedly what he calls “a lame dance, a catapult.”

A portion of his notes read this way:

“...There is a different kind, or perhaps, a pleurably lamer dance in the catapult of the poem. It desires isolation, a sensation of private meaning—the exclamations suggest a conversation we cannot undertake: a parody of conversing; an embedded utterance we cannot strive [for]; undeniably unforeseen; compromisingly weary; saturated and unwieldy; feisty-friendly; quaint; a career with a polyphony...”<sup>9</sup>

But on the night before he was to present the corner-jump video with this audio recording, he confided in a friend who pointed out that he mispronounced “polyphony”: ‘*poly-phone-ee*’ vs. ‘*pa-l-f’ə-nee*’.

His friend's exact words were, “It's pronounced ‘*pa-l-f’ə-nee*’ you fucking idiot!”

The criticism had devastating results (at first only, as it would become inspirational for all of his subsequent work). Raskin felt his minor mispronunciation destroyed the whole of his credibility. His reemergence as the New Poet/Philosopher was to be both the presentation of a poem and a scholarly analysis of his enactment of “poeming,” a document of his new philosophy. The poet poised himself to declare that he was no longer driven by the stirrings of his heart or his spontaneous lyricism, but from a new vantage point of critical distance, the poet could perform a studied separation of the poet from his poems. But standing on the foundation of his scholarship, when he opened his mouth, he instead released a fart, vocalized as two words, poly and phony. Rather than demonstrating the plurality of voices he intended, his error multiplied his phoniness. The academic posture he meant to display was undercut by that of the goofy poet who succeeded only in entertaining, in performing as a buffoon, a jester, getting the laugh that the pathetic entertainer desires. Prior to this, Raskin gave little importance to grammatical correctness. In his earlier writings he relished his mistakes and trusted that the interpreter would give him the benefit of the doubt as a poet merely using the tools of the philosopher. He never tried to cover up his misfires. But in this instance, he was not satisfied to leave it to the viewer to know that while he may have mistakenly pronounced “polyphony” he was not, also, ignorant of its meaning. He was well aware of his announcement of the *vocal plurality* embodied in the unified schizophrenic voice of the New Poet/Philosopher. But the mispronunciation had the adverse effect of reinforcing the



perceived *vocal polarity* between the spontaneous intuition of the poet and the rigorous scholarship of the philosopher. Behind the podium, he became an ass. In his hyper-desire to suppress the aesthetic whimsy of the poet and become the self-conscious and ironic New Poet, he failed and fell from an even greater height.

So, stammering to cover his mistake, he came up with a plan to prevent the repetition of this embarrassment in front of a larger audience. He decided to show the video without the audio and read the text live. But he realized that by standing between the video of himself as a performer and the audience he would again confuse his audience (and again throw his credibility into doubt) by allowing them to see both personalities and physical representations of the schizophrenic simultaneously. The layers are these: in the original video, the disembodied voice of the philosopher was to deliver ruminations *on* the poet while the video image of the body *of* the poet repeatedly jumped into a corner enacting the philosopher's words. In the performance event, the disembodied voice of the philosopher was muted and the physical body of the poet (visually identical to that in the video) appeared and uttered the words of the philosopher. The philosopher/documentarian at the podium thus took on the role of the performer/entertainer/poet, and the viewer didn't know which was which. The paradox was visible for the audience to see, and the credibility of the New Poet/Philosopher was again in jeopardy. The audience didn't know whether to take the entertainer seriously or to laugh at the philosopher. They choose the latter.

In trying to cover up one superficial misfire, he exposed himself to a larger one. In his attempt to correct his 'polyphony' mistake, he witnessed again the poet's inevitable flaws, his failure, and his fall by introducing the two personalities of the schizophrenic simultaneously. Up until this point, he had only theorized that the poet must

proceed clueless of his own misfiring, but in this instance his theory turned into action. Just as the corner rejects his leap every time, and he lands, badly maimed, in a ditch, so too did his mispronunciation of 'polyphony' throw him to the ground. But when he jumped again to try to correct the error, he hit the ground again even harder. This attempt, at once, betrayed his cluelessness while it reinforced his very premise—the inability to unify the borders of the poet and the philosopher. But despite and through this misfire, Jimmy gained the inspiration that would sustain his creative practice over the next twenty years.

While Jimmy has always posited the corner as the line that sucks the poet in, that seduces him, he locates its strength in the structure that violently rejects him. Here I would like to suggest another way to view the Corner Jump video. Played forward, it looks as though Jimmy is repeatedly trying and failing to enter the corner. But if we play it in reverse, we see what is actually happening. The corner will not let him go. From Jimmy's first strike, the corner retaliates. What we see repeated, again and again, is his impossible attempt to escape. The corner grabs him, sucks him in and spits him out, and beats the little puppet with vengeful repetition. The corner will not let him exit. How do I know this? Why is my interpretation better than the one Jimmy provides himself? Well, it's twenty years later, and where are we? A poltergeist, indeed.

While Jimmy wants us to assume that the corner is passive and his jumping is active, it may be the other way around. Was the misfire passive or is this document commemorating the event a lengthy missive to pacify the corner, a prayer to let him go? Since the Corner Jump, and as a result of the polyphony misfire, Jimmy has since found himself trapped by the acts of his past. He cannot escape the corner, he cannot live down the fall from grace of the polyphony misfire, and, for those of us who know his later work, he is trapped in the



prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. His past haunts him, and the ghosts of the metaphors he has accumulated follow him making up the cosmos that animates all of his work.

Rimbaud knew better than to make his metaphors physical.

## NOTES

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This essay is adapted from a larger forthcoming work titled, *On Becoming An Ass: Jimmy Raskin's Poetics of the Misfire*.





Transcript:  
Josefina Ayerza With Jimmy  
Raskin On The Couch

July 2012

JR: So do I just start talking?

JA: What do you think? What else could you do?

JR: I could breathe. I could sleep, but I'm not tired. So ... we are here ... to maybe ... talk about "poly-phony-ee."

JA: "Poly-phony-ee." So you still don't know if "poly" is phony or if "phony" is "poly?"

JR: I know that "phony" is important. What I like about "poly-phony-ee" versus "polyphony" [pronounced pe-liph-a-ne] ... the mispronunciation of "poly-phony-ee" means that I am failing at plurality, or better yet bucking the *pleasure* of multiplicity if you will. Polyphony has been stopped ... "poly-phony-ee" ... the humorous accident ...

JA: Polyphony has been stopped. Did I hear right?

JR: Yes, Polyphony ... the plurality of many sounds and utterances, the phonetic plurality, the potential musicality of Being and of Experience ... has been stopped accidentally by a mispronunciation in 1991!

JA: [laughter]

JR: So I stopped. I believe that I stopped. If I pronounced Polyphony correctly I believe I would have had a strongly different path ... in my work and confidence. But I had to deal with stopping the musicality of The New Being and embrace The Misfire.

JA: The accent is something. Because if you say Polyphony correctly the accent is on the "i". But if you say "poly-phony-ee" the accent is on the O ... and it is very noticeable if you say it.



JR: “poooooly-phony-eeeeee”

JA: But when you say Polyphony the accent is so early...

JR: Yes.

JA: But then you let go and say “poly-phony-ee.”

JR: There is something very liberating with “poly-phony-ee” ... rather than Polyphony. The correct pronunciation of Polyphony is forced and structured. The irony is that “poly-phony-ee” opens me up as a vocal experience. It sounds funner.

JA: Farther?

JR: No funner. More fun.

JA: Fun. Ohhh. It sounds fun. More fun.

JR: Funnneeer ... I don’t think funner’s a word.

JA: Thunder?

JR: No, I didn’t say thunder.

JA: Thunder you said no?

JR: No funner. F-u-n-n-e-r.

JA: What is this?

JR: To have more fun.

JA: Oh.

JR: But it’s not really a word. People have a common mistake when they say funner. So it’s often...

JA: This is why I understood “farther...”

JR: Funner is a word that does not exist. So it’s another sign of my inability ... maybe ... to know what is correct in grammar.

JA: Oh.

JR: “poly-phony-ee” ... it exposes my lack of scholarship.

JA: But look at this. You say “poly-phony-ee” ... “Funner.” It’s like a poem or something. But they do go together.

JR: It might be amazing to do a poem of only mispronunciations.

JA: Yeah, well...

JR: I’ve always been a bit paranoid before I give a reading. So sometimes in my presentations or lectures I would spell out a word ... of how it sounds to say ... next to the word to make sure I pronounced it correctly. Lessons learned over time.

JA: But why? Do you speak other languages?

JR: No.

JA: But if you don’t speak other languages why would you be afraid ... of pronouncing it wrong.

JR: Precisely because I don’t speak other languages ... you would think I would at least know my own!



JA: You are afraid of the mishaps ... of making the slip...

JR: I might in the end like the slips but ... now, 20 years later from this first art work ... I don't know if it's time to either let go ... or embrace "poly-phony-ee." For example, in real life ... whenever there is a word that I know I will mispronounce ... because I feel it coming a few words before ... a word is coming ... I know it's a word I am about to say wrong ... what I do now is I purposely, blatantly mispronounce it as a comical element.

JA: Give me an example.

JR: ... "Anonymity."

JA: Yes that is a difficult word.

JR: So I will say, "Anamoninabateee."

JA: Oh, you purposefully do that...

JR: Now, I exaggerate the mispronunciation ... so that one, I get away with it, and two, I am embracing my own flaw. But what it comes down to ... is that I just didn't study enough. [laughter]

JA: Why?

JR: ... Such words were taken and appropriated often in my writing and my work. I knew their meanings ... but they just weren't practiced and applied ... in a way where the correct pronunciation would have been learned. So "Poly-Phony-eee" is an example of me lifting that word ... out of Roland Barthes ... from *The Rustle of Language* ... because I knew as a Poet something was relevant to me in that essay he wrote ... and when I wrote my original notes on The Poet, which became the text of the corner video, I loved

that word Polyphony ... but I never talked about it. I never used it in an essay. I never discussed it ... but it was a word ... even though I fully knew the meaning ... it was an object to me. It was a thing ... a referent of identity ... a new sign to post...

JA: So that's what you took. ... You took it.

JR: I took it to deal with it ... it's like temporarily stealing ... like when you are at somebody's house and one of their objects means something to you ... and you gently steal it ... so you can sit with it ... because you know it has something to do with you ... and you will eventually return it ... but you don't really understand it ... you do not ask other people about it really ... you just bring it into...

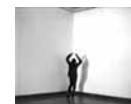
JA: But this is you stealing yourself. You stole "poly-phone-ee" from Jimmy.

JR: I stole it maybe...

JA: From your body. Well, because let's say The Other is made of words that belong to everybody ... words are not yours. They are just out there in the world. But if you make something like not Polyphony but "poly-phone-ee." This is yours. It is in your body. And you steal it from your body. Where are you stealing it from? From your body and words. You are stealing it much less than you are stealing the regular words ... because the regular words you steal all the time. Nobody processes them. But maybe that is the question ... of possession ... because you are stealing something that belongs to you. Nobody says "Poly-Phone-eee."

JR: No...

JA: Or nobody knows about it...



JR: When I took the word, and read it on paper, and read it aloud, and jumped into the corner with the word in the video ... I never thought that it was *particularly* special. It was one of many words on my paper. But when my friend pointed out that I mispronounced it, I then realized the kind of *premature appropriation* that I was doing .... Yet I was confident as an artist to do such things. And yet by mispronouncing this word I was exposing too much when I wanted more mystery in the artwork ... of the video and the words...

JA: What got exposed?

JR: Now let's remember, when I finally showed the video I showed it without the audio. I went on stage with a podium to re-read the full script live ... so that I could pronounce the word correctly. Now what I meant is that if I showed the video ... and I never knew that Polyphony was mispronounced ... then people would have laughed at me. When they heard "poly-phone-ee" they would suddenly go, "Oh, this is a very young artist. He didn't even know he pronounced the word incorrectly ...." If the word was pronounced correctly to begin with, we would have had a particularly good work of Art. But we didn't. We had a flawed work of art. But I saved it by pronouncing the word correctly *live*. However something happened that I did not expect. I became *present* ... with the video behind me. I was no longer with the audience. I was now in front of them. And that is when I realized this is my project. This is ... the function of the artist. In the moment of being on stage with the corner video behind me ... and my words. It shifted unexpectedly my perception...

JA: "My corner video. My word." And now comes the shift. Where did it shift you to? Because here comes the artist you said. So the artist with the relation ... if it's art, it is Truth. What is the truth behind all of this? Behind the

corner video. Behind the word. And now the shift. These three stages...

JR: The shift I assume is...

JA: What is it? Where did you go to? Where did it take you?

JR: Well I believe ... yet I still do not know for sure ... but I believe that I became a Documentarian of my own art making process. Or, what I realized was that if I pronounced the word correctly I would be sitting with the audience as a mutual observer of the phenomenon of an artwork. And in that is a freedom of responsibility to an extent. But the shift by me going up there and taking responsibility for my own words and being in front of the audience ... I became less assuming of the process...

JA: You said less assuming of a profit?

JR: No, "process."

JA: What would be your "profit" here?

JR: You are saying "profit" now...

JA: Yes...

JR: Oh! P-r-o-p-h-e-t?

JA: No I am saying p-r-o-f-i-t. What did you say?

JR: I said process...

JA: Oh...

JR: But I like prophet.



JA: [laughter]

JR: Prophet ... like a Seer or a Visionary. So let's say this:  
**When I mispronounced Polyphony I became a Prophet.**

JA: Oh! You know that this would be where we STOP!







## The Artist Within, Without

*Josefina Ayerza*

JR pulls out the stops as he divides between the Outsider —**being** as such, being qua being embraced in “a **Documentarian**” —and **existence**; an other category which is not reducible to that of being. Here The **Poet** will be the heart of the matter: the one he wants, here in the world ... but what world?

**Existence** is a name (state) for a human being, for a destiny of thinking... A crucial and creative experience of the actual becoming, being-here is nevertheless without any reference to something like a Subject, experience, or human being.

The **Poet that does not exist** shall construct before you a pure relational concept of the slight distance between a multiplicity and the same multiplicity being-here. He is not only saying that it is something in a world here and now, but that something happens. Like a cut in the continuum of the world something is new, and it disappears. Because happening is when appearing is the same thing as disappearing.

The **Artist** was suddenly struck by a glaring mishap that undercut the otherwise exceptional agglomeration: poly-phone-ee...

*Corner Jump is the story of this unexpected **stop** — a thrust back into the auxiliary space of that which precedes Art and Artist:*



*the primordial roles of Documentarian and Poet.*

*Nostalgia helps to qualify this state-of-status, while a unique case of Premature Nostalgia will qualify something even more special: The apex is The Poet Pure.*

The **Poet's** intimacy had a singular structure, and a history... thus that intimacy hadn't always existed, nor need it exist forever.

I finally circumscribed it as a **place** whose essence is **both architectural and scopic**: the space where the Poet can hold himself and experience himself outside the **Documentarian's** gaze.

A space in internal **exclusion**, an island, what is known as "at home," where the **Poet Pure** escapes the very supposition of being **gazed at**. It's his **hiddenness**.

The birth of the Poet Pure's intimacy took place in an unexpected domain — not in the domain of the corner where the idea of "privacy" was partly created, nor in exceeding its boundaries, but in **Art** — when he defined **Art** as "an open window."

Did he break the wall open?

The Poet Pure's intimacy was established when he defined **Art** as "an open window."

The **Poet-Within** had henceforth the right to gaze on the world, together with **God**, and define his **intimacy** as the place in the world where the **Poet-Impulse** — Artist, can stand separately from the world, from which he can secretly contemplate through the window, and where, out of every sight, he can look at himself.

*The Documentarian that came from the Voice — the subject leaping into a corner — It embodied the Voice*

At the other side of the Wall....

The Artist's hiddenness is not a gain or a conquest in terms of more or less: it is an absolute condition of the **Poet Subject**. I would say that there is no subject if he cannot be unseen — which amounts to saying that the Subject that is looked at does not think. Thus, in Poetical terms, intimacy, the secret territory of shadow and opacity, is the very place of the Subject.

Talking about intimacy in terms of a territory poses a question about frontiers. Here frontiers are walls. We want to reflect on it, along the line established by J. Lacan — who invented an antonym for intimacy that doesn't exist: ex-timacy. It is due to the urgency of a **jump**, which is a threat: If it weighs upon intimacy it currently weighs upon the Subject.



There is a politics of intimacy. Intimacy may be under threat. It must be defended.

Invoking a right to hiddenness leads to an intimacy that goes beyond the architectural and scopic limits. Here **intimacy takes on a political dimension**, based on **force**. For **a place free of all gaze** implies a Jump which is a **separation — from power**.

The point is to keep a territory outside the always **totalitarian power** of the **Documentarian Other**. This constitutes the real condition of intimacy, which can be related to **the right to secrecy**.

Intimacy is silhouetted against the background of a Documentarian Other, under an importune, intrusive or invasive gaze — which wants to see **all and know all, all the time**. Thus the point is to establish what might place **a limit on this limitless desire**.

The **law** can be invoked.

But the law preserves privacy; or rather, privacy is the part that can be protected by the law. **Intimacy exceeds this**, as it **cannot arise from the law**, it only arises from the real possibility that a subject has of hiding and remaining silent.

His guarantee is material, that is to say that the right to secrecy is only supported

by the **subject himself**, only by his force, and **not by the Documentarian Other**, by the law.

It is an act by the **subject** that keeps the **subject free**. This political dimension is the notion of **intimacy**, which names only what is **most interior** as it comprises the idea of **secrecy** in its very definition.

**Intimacy, secrecy and freedom** are tied together. Real freedom is material freedom.

Again, how it can be possible for the weakest to be effectively free with respect to the strongest? Like intimacy, the doctrine of **freedom is not based on the law**, but on **force**.

There is only one guarantee for **real freedom** and this is the **right to secrecy** — the only material **limit** to the power of a **Documentarian Other** — be it the state, institutions or society.





## Bachelard (Machine) Cornered

*Jean-Philippe Antoine*

In 1991 Jimmy Raskin jumped into a corner, threw himself into a corner, he hurled himself at a corner. It was sudden it was swift, 'twas repeated. Each time it took less than reading this sentence—the physics of the jump that is—the brunt the shock registering and the fall which took the registering with it, and took it down down down, down to the floor.

What did he think he was doing, pouncing on a corner ? With this jump, and that other one, and that one too, etc., THE POET PURE ATTEMPTED TO VANQUISH IMMOBILITY. Yes, Immobility, no less : built, once, from two sides, by two walls at an angle. Joined.

The corner, says Bachelard, « is a haven that ensures us of one of the things we prize most highly : immobility ». But perpendicularity is intractable, and is no human *trait*.

*Bénie soit la poétique de l'espace*

Oh Jimmy Jimmy, Jimmy Poet, repeatedly, violently, one jump at a time, you built the germ of a house, a fortress of solitude, « a negation of the Universe » (Bachelard again), the Highest Prize, a Tower of Fortitude, a House of Refuge for the Disconsolate, all in less than a second, too fast really too fast to last, body taken down down down, and down again. And again.

Floored.

You tried (says the Documentarian).

It hurt (says who ?).

*de Gaston Bachelard*

*qui a jeté un pont entre*

The corner, « that most sordid of all havens » (writes Bachelard) - for it misses the *e* in heaven ? sure did lack of polyphony—the corner—what's a corner to be, but to be cut ?—repeat : the corner « is a sort of half-box, part walls, part door. » Thrusting himself into that corner, looking for the part that is or should be a door the small interstitial door joining the walls the proverbial camel going through the eye of the needle - resisting the corner into a door, wishful thinking camel entering the kingdom of Haven-without-the-second-*e* ; repeat : *half-box* (I see) ; *wall* (I see two) ;



*door* (door ? what door ? It hurts). Reality—again—is the denied door in the corner which resists my assault and is not a negation of the Universe, as much as I try try try and try; the brunt the shock registering and the fall registering. NOW registering too. Floored.

Try again.

It hurts.

*l'art et la science au-delà*

Follow the diagram.

Breathe. Jump. Breathe.

Execute.

Breathe. Jump. Breathe. Where am I, diagram ?

*I am the space where I am.* Close your eyes.

Open eyes. Again.

Jump. *ALL or NOTHING.*

*de tous les espoirs de*

*C. P. Snow,*

*Says Marshall McLuhan*

*This Poet is caught in a between of his own making* : I jump therefore I am. Therefore *IS* a jump. Therefore the jump. Twenty years after it still hurts (says the Documentarian). Two walls and a door denied, before, during, and after the polyjumps—the chamber of being but a half-box stripped bare. Life in corners impossible : a jump into immobility (this last point made into a public statement).

*Breathe. Jump. Breathe.*

Execute.

No playing house in corners. Please, make space withdraw before your advance. Put space, all space, outside, in front, and corner it. Yes. Jump. Yes—admirable, no less. Again. Put space in front, make space withdraw. Now pounce on corner. Execute jump ; no space left behind please, all space outside in front (and about to withdraw). Now.

Yes.

Admirable.

But the brunt the shock registering and the fall registering too, eyes closed. No freedom to think, the space open behind resisting closure resisting the jump, the half-box open—no door front or back but a cut of circumstances. No freedom. To think. Pure. Critical Distance acquired by the body falling, stripped bare of ascending power. Back to one's feet back on the floor. Try again. Ascension. Floored. Ascent is no assent (says who ?).

Assess—do not ascend—the Critical Distance between the House you built while jumping, the Instant Dwelling shattered by your fall, the failing memory of the House You Built the memory of your fall Access the House of Polyjumps the Castle of Fortitude the Fortress the shattered Tower the temporary denial of the Universe. Do the Bachelard Machine (You do the Bachelard Machine)

Assess—do not assent to—the want of a Door the resistance to Denial the egregious Life in corners

Impossible

Take a fall

Take the door Jump into a corner Try to square the Half-box

Assess do not ascend the corner (says the Documentarian)

Do the Bachelard Machine. Breathe. Jump (short Apnea).

Breathe.

Execute.

Assess. Apnea.

Execute. Jump. Ascend.

Breathe.

Assess jump. Jump. Ascend.

Dissent.

Breathe again

again





## *Witness Account: The Videographer*

*Boaz Barkan*

I remember walking through the maze of art studios on my way to Jimmy's space, which had birthday-cake candy letters pasted on the door. An army of ants marched in and out, day and night, slowly removing the letters and disappearing down the cracks in the concrete building.

Inside Jimmy's studio there were piles of art and party supplies "taken" from his part-time job at an art supply shop. His studio had a recliner chair where Jimmy unofficially spent the nights. The floor was covered with sunflower seed shells. Time with Jimmy was spent watching him make art, talking about everything and breakout laughing—all amid the cracking of his sunflower seeds.

Jimmy began to frequent poetry events in the LA cafe scene. He amassed fellow readers, including the exceptional LA architect David Davis and his fellow-poet in arms, artist and writer David Colosi. I joined him, as he became a regular reader. He became fascinated with the events and the process of generating his own "role" in such appearances. It was a refreshing contrast from the art scene of CalArts. Each event was like an enactment of a "becoming" a poet. There was an element of conquering, of erupting, and of lecturing the other poets. Jimmy would produce piles of papers at an increasing speed, dense writing typed and photocopied, piles of papers with glitter-pen underlines, of which he knew mostly by heart and would sometimes edit on site while reading, scratching out lines as the audience was made to wait.

Many nights we drove around for endless miles looking for the right coffee shop to locate and discuss ourselves, art and the unutterable (and the occasional flirtation with a potential muse). And during longer breaks, we drove down to Mexico in Jimmy's sun-drenched Datsun (also covered in sunflower seed shells) to visit Matt Monahan at his father's house in Baja, Mexico, set on a cliff overlooking the setting sun. Many poems were written there, each of us



contributing phrases to an inspired opening line. Upon our return we made it a point to read what we captured at the various venues on the way back to Cal Arts.

Back at CalArts Jimmy was speeding up his production of text and identity, partially in relation to the circles of art school friends in which he was roaming. Tension was building; the art community was not easy or kind. There was an intensity of emerging young artists searching for the lead and the grace.

And one memorable evening, I borrowed a video recorder to produce some “movement documentation” featuring my girlfriend at the time. Jimmy became aware of my videotaping and suggested we go shoot some dance videos of his own. I was surprised. I had no idea he wanted to “move,” although I did know of his background as a gymnast. We shot in a dance studio where Jimmy performed large leaps and bounds across the floor, to which I responded with surprise!

I believe it was the following evening, after Jimmy’s initial movement, that he came to me with purpose: “I need to be shot in the corner!” We waited until late at night, so as not to have anyone walk between the perfect corner and us. (This area was referred to as “The L-Shape Gallery,” a common space at CalArts that held art shows while also being the main link between the cafeteria and the rest of the school.)

Jimmy brought a boom box, so he could play a tape of himself reading off various circumstances concerning “the poet” while he leapt. And Jimmy began, at first trotting *to* the corner, and, eventually, with a big run, he thrust himself *into* the corner. We captured something and we knew it.

We watched the video on the spot and I realized this became a whole new aspect of the poetic becoming in Jimmy’s adventures.

He transferred the audio of his poet-recordings on to the video, to finalize the piece as a work of art, and scheduled a presentation. I believe Jimmy changed the format of the presentation, because he mispronounced some words, mainly “Polyphony.”

And that’s where the Poet met the Documentarian. Out of a stumble and an embarrassment, came this creative act.

Boaz Barkan  
August 2012  
Copenhagen





## *Witness Account: The Misfire*

*Brian Baltin*

Let me start by being bluntly honest—when Jimmy contacted me I did not remember this piece. That has nothing to do with the quality of the piece, but more to the number of years that have since lapsed, and even more to the fact that I sustained a brain injury from an incident in 2000 that has affected my memory of many things. That said, I find it delightfully astonishing—and an honor—that my correcting a simple pronunciation error could have so drastically reshaped the piece, and apparently some aspects of Jimmy's later work. I'll be more blunt to say that I'm sure my intent wasn't deliberately philanthropic, or forethought at all (and I'd suspect I most likely said it in rather a bitchy tone), just a reflex that happened to pertain to a word I've always loved—polyphony.

One thing that does not surprise me on reading these texts is that Jimmy decided to repeatedly jump into a corner wall. He was such a surreally hyperkinetic bundle of energy circa 1991 that he was virtually ricocheting off the walls on most days anyway. That it became the basis of such an intricately analytic piece speaks to his talent and intellect. It does also perhaps speak to the tone of CalArts at that time—how we were being propelled toward dissecting every piece to the point where the original intent or aesthetics were frequently obfuscated to the point of comical abstraction (heightened here by analyzing such a ludicrous act). I will say what many people won't—that some of the work produced by some of my peers was simply not strong enough to stand up to such minute over-analysis. Conversely, other pieces were made much stronger, more charming and endearing by the process. The Corner emphatically belongs to that latter group.

As for the genesis of Jimmy's role as documentarian, whatever the cause had been, it is abundantly clear that it was essential to the successful performative nature of the piece. If it had been rendered strictly as a video documentation





of a performance with a prerecorded voiceover narration, it could very easily have gotten lost in the shuffle of any number of similar videos that were already bombarding us, arriving newly by the day (if not the hour on many days). While Jimmy's recollections of his "panic" at being unmasked as somehow fraudulent or, worse still, inept by virtue of the mispronunciation of one word (which could likely have gone unnoticed, or at the very least been quickly forgiven by the choice of such a beautiful word from the start) are, frankly, adorable (sorry, Jimmy, I had to say it), inserting himself as a lecturer presenting the piece live could only have straight away given it a far more vibrant scope and depth—even more so given his mannerisms and unmistakable way of speaking.

So if I were the catalyst for that epiphany, I can only be proud.

Brian Baltin  
August 2012  
Seattle



*Appendix 1*  
*The Notes On The Poet*

We come to understand  
the presence of a poem  
by interpreting it -  
but we finally KNOW IT  
when we realize  
that it is capable  
of ALL or NOTHING

The ride of a trial  
is the poet's ATTEMPTS  
resulting from the poet  
realizing he is capable  
of ALL or NOTHING

The casualty  
is a result in itself  
for the poet  
does not know  
that he is sick...  
for the sake of THE RIDE

The poet assumes  
he is infinitely meaningful  
when the poem  
is no longer an attempt

How can the poet  
make ANY decision  
by an audience that can  
at any given moment  
deem him all or entirely  
meaningful or NOT?

There is a different kind...  
or perhaps  
a pleasurable lower dance  
in the catapult of  
The Poem

It deserves isolation...  
A sensation  
of Private meaning.

The exclamation suggests  
a conversation  
we cannot undertake -  
The parody of conversing -  
an embedded utterance  
we cannot strive -  
a traveling stagnancy  
that obviously  
tests the audience's power  
of understanding:

UNDENIABLY UNFORESEEN -  
DOGMATICALLY IRRESPONSIBLE -  
COMPROMISINGLY WEARY -  
SATURATED AND UNWIELDLY  
METALICALLY STUTTER-ESQUE -  
CAPSIZING INTOXICATION -  
FEISTY FRIENDLY -  
QUAINT....

A CAREER with a POLYPHONY

Here,  
Condensation is not  
favoring a small poem  
to a large one.

The exclamation  
is the character.  
The character here  
is more flavorful  
in its private madness.

Is this lame?  
Is this what seeps  
into the core  
of the poet's  
responsibility?

The poem  
is carried through  
with a desire to isolate  
according to the  
physical definition.

A paradox emerges  
with understanding that  
'isolation' is contradictory  
to the borders  
that keep it  
so independent.

If a poem  
desires private meaning  
is it then hateful  
to the very boundaries  
that keep it  
so mysterious—  
so distanced.

Is ambiguity mistaken  
for a mere blur  
of its use?

What technicalities  
prevent clarity?

When is confusion a mistake?

There is a confusion  
as to just when  
a poet is or is not  
in control  
of his PARODY PARADOX

The schizophrenic  
may be THE INDIVIDUAL  
who possesses the unknown  
through an inevitable route  
of being CLUELESS.

If eventually  
the poet's contradictions  
become virtually invisible  
to or through him  
then perhaps  
Melodrama will persist  
in complete fury,  
begging for its identity  
as it is muffled  
by the placidity  
of the poet's inscape.

Here, the poet involuntarily  
sets fire to the brim.  
He is unmistakably  
under rapture.  
Captivated.

We become  
thoroughly aware  
of his image  
as we are asked not  
to negate him  
but chose whether  
or not to engage.

He is ALWAYS available.

Is this an exercise  
of justification?  
How do we come  
to understand  
Poetic License?

We inevitably attempt  
to make sense,  
to make sense  
of the encounter.

There is a process  
of familiarizing oneself  
with an overlapping  
of potentially stagnant signs...



The desire is movement  
the desire is speed -  
an attempt to discourage  
the space as a realm  
for differences

And so, I am attempting  
to make sense  
while still enjoying THE RIDE  
Lovers make sense of THE RIDE  
They manufacture  
a sensible sense  
for the exercise...

A tolerable sensation  
of making sense.

I have a fixation  
with a poem's disgrace.

*Appendix 2*  
*The Video*



[www.miguelabreugallery.com/Polyphony](http://www.miguelabreugallery.com/Polyphony)





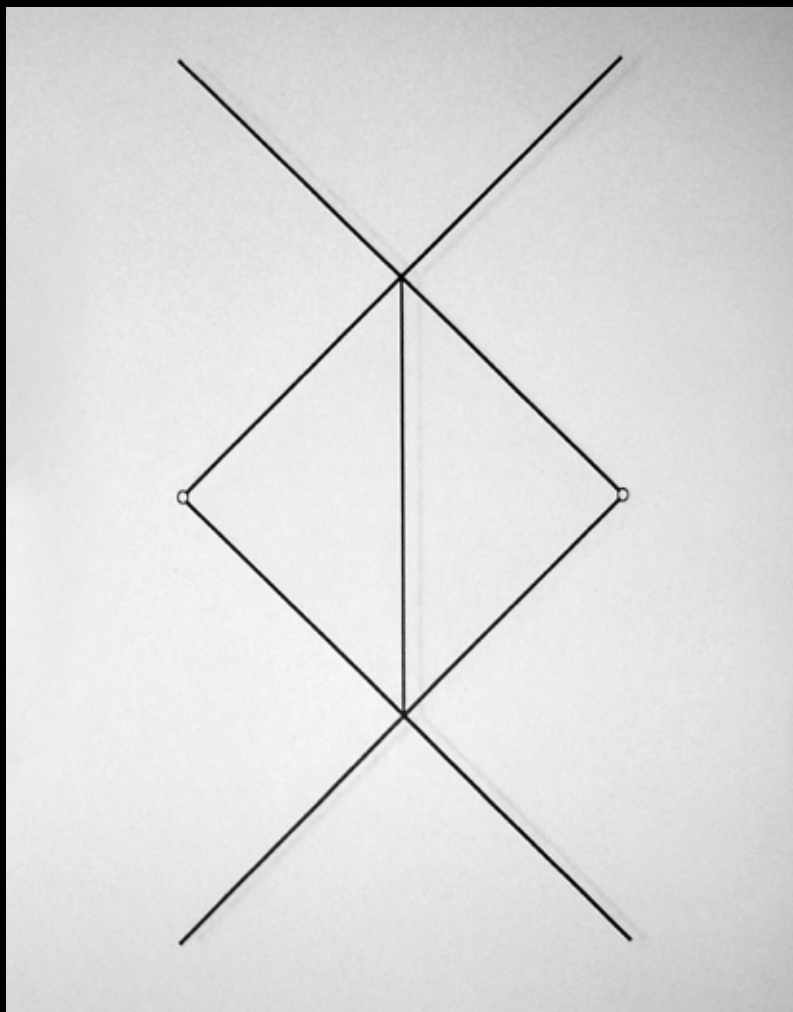




*Appendix 3a*  
*The Corner Diagrams*

THE ORIGINAL CORNER DIAGRAMS

*The Documentarian's Initial Assignment, Part 1*

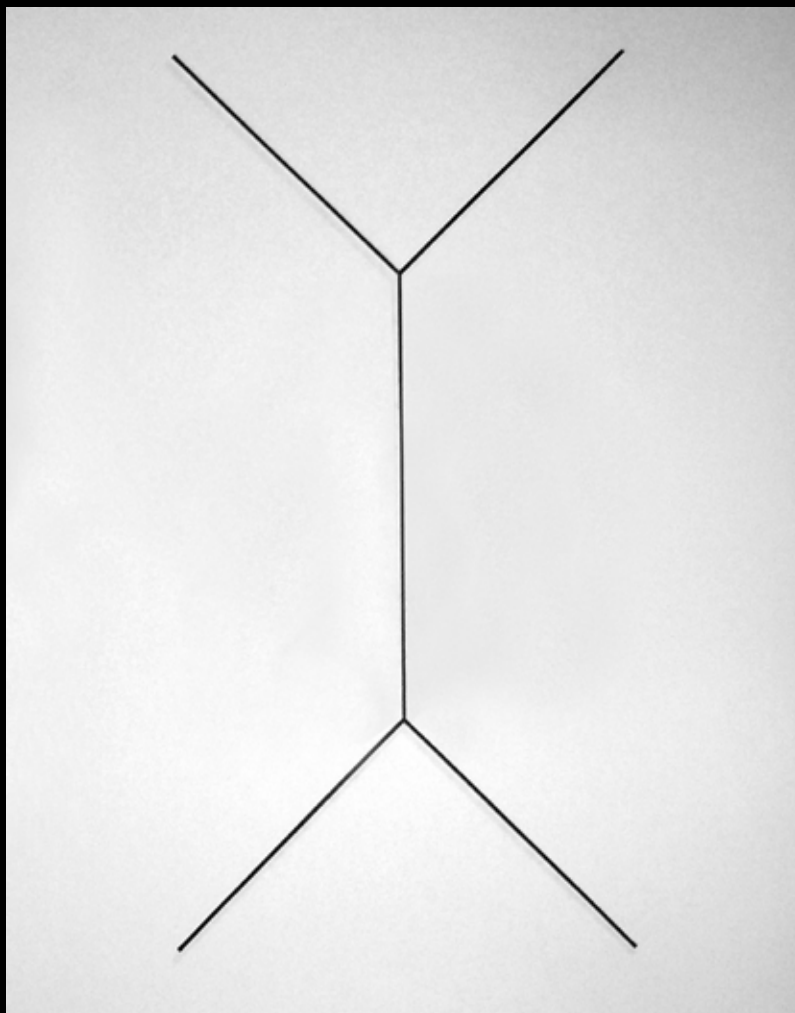


1.  
POINTS AND PLANES

*Vanishing points and their projected planes,  
forcing a vertical line as their medium.*

DOCTRINAL VALUE:

Two points of possibility expressing an horizon  
of meaning, simultaneously manifesting  
a mediation in the form of a vertical line.

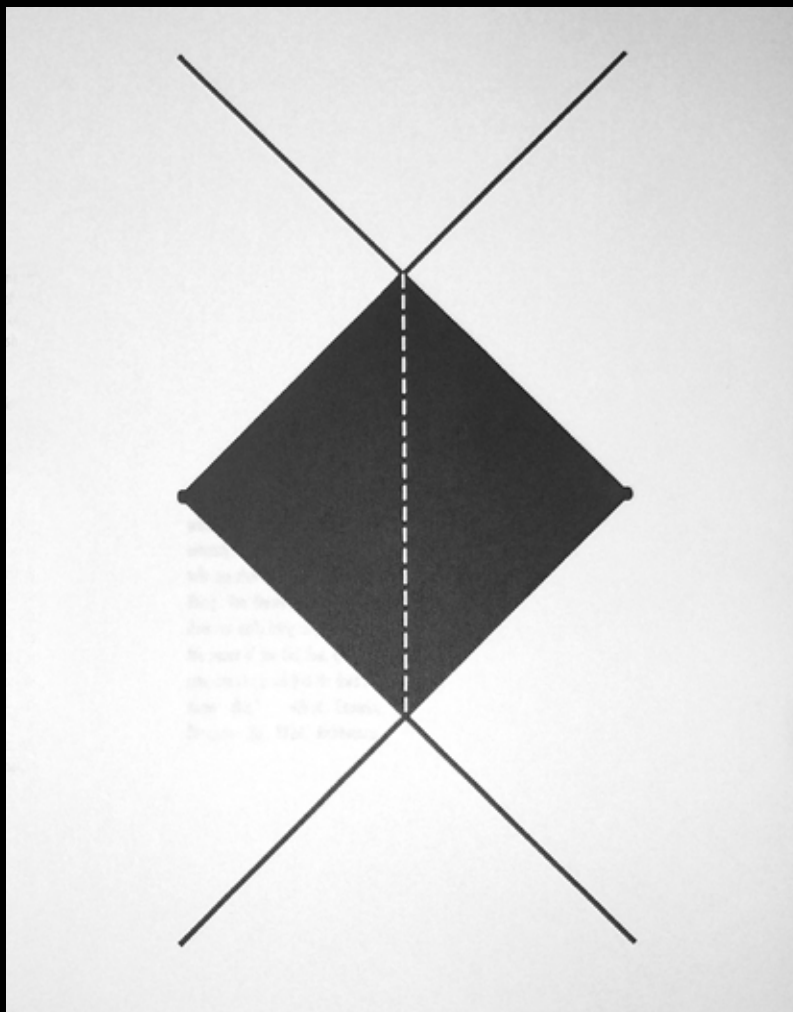


## 2. THE CORNER

*Two standing planes coexist  
serving the vertical line of difference.*

DOCTRINAL VALUE:

The Vertical Line of Difference severs  
the original vanishing points, preserving  
the planes as they exist on the side of the other.



3.

### DOOR OF DIAMOND

*The original vanishing points return  
forcing the vertical line to open up.*

DOCTRINAL VALUE:

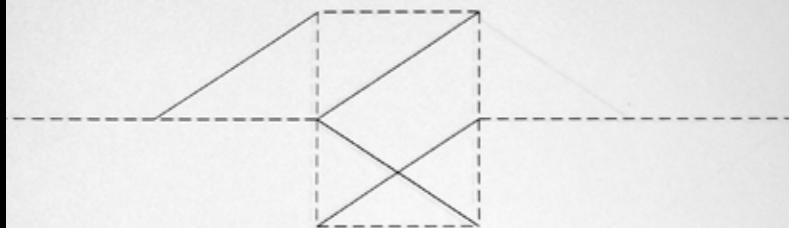
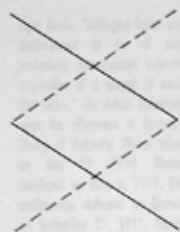
A possible vision of revenge, where the  
passive vanishing points reawaken  
and tear open the vertical line.

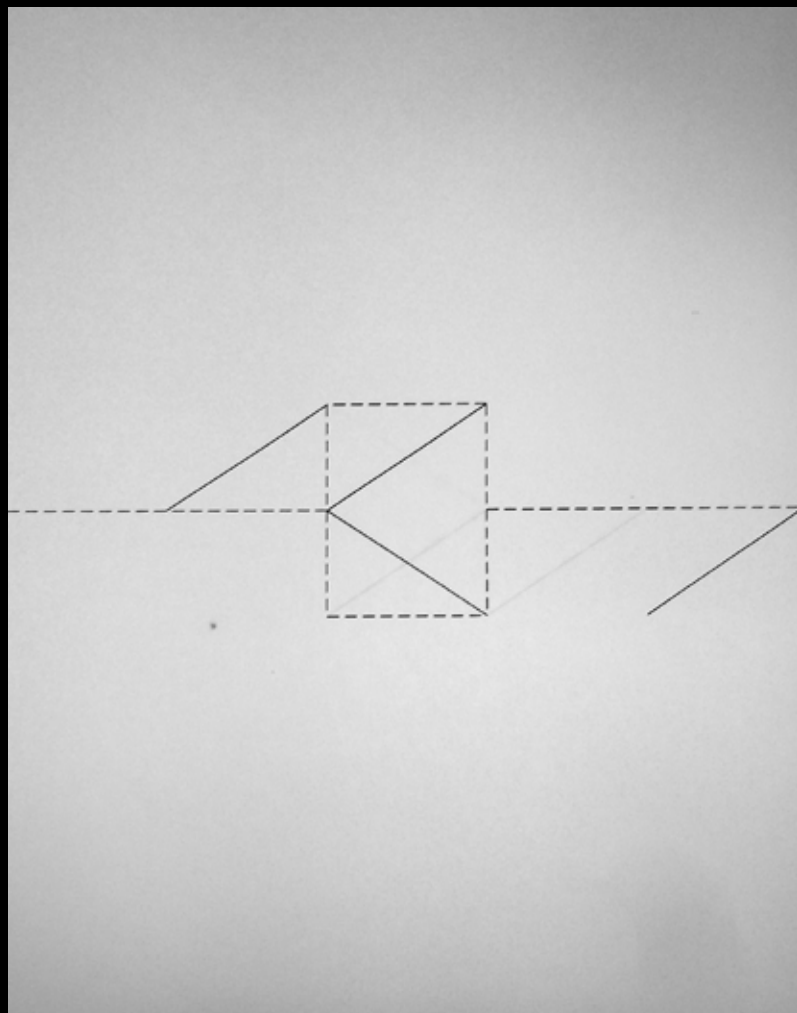
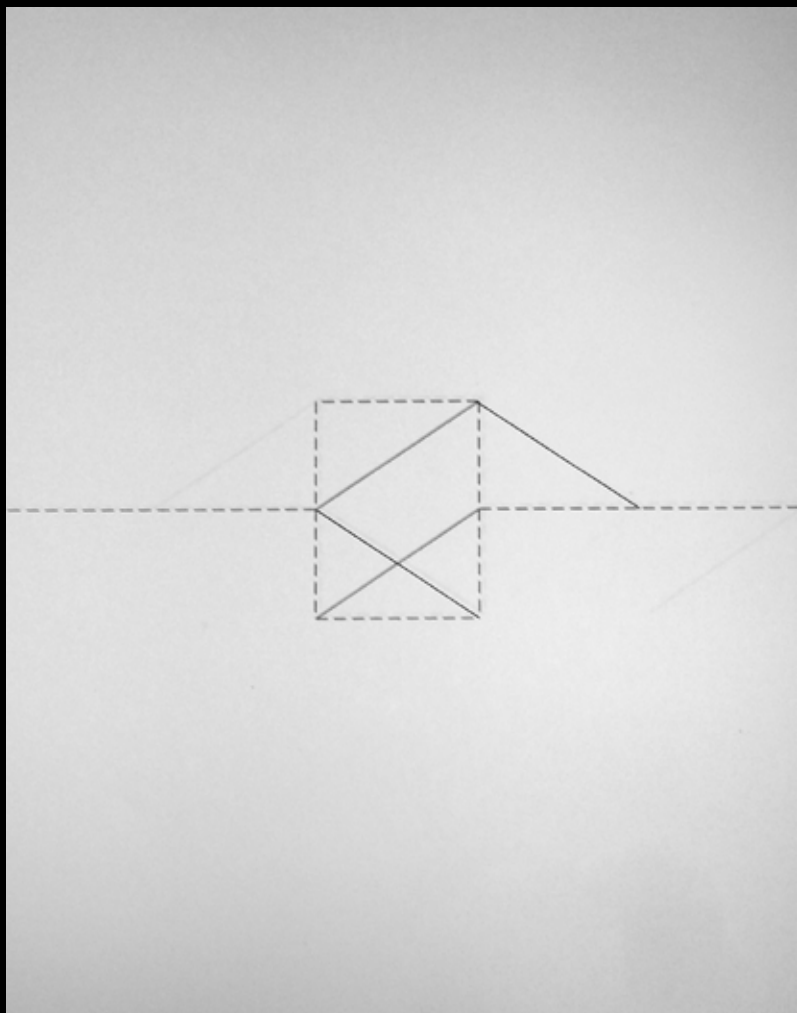
*Appendix 3b*  
*The Hut Diagrams*

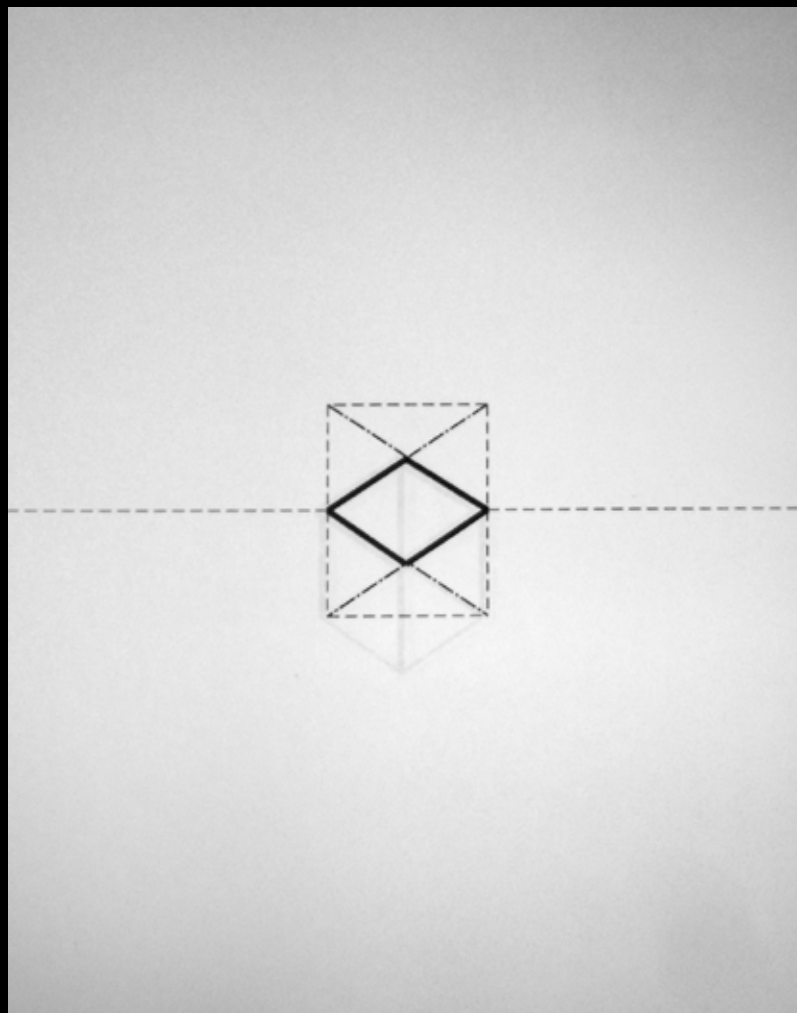
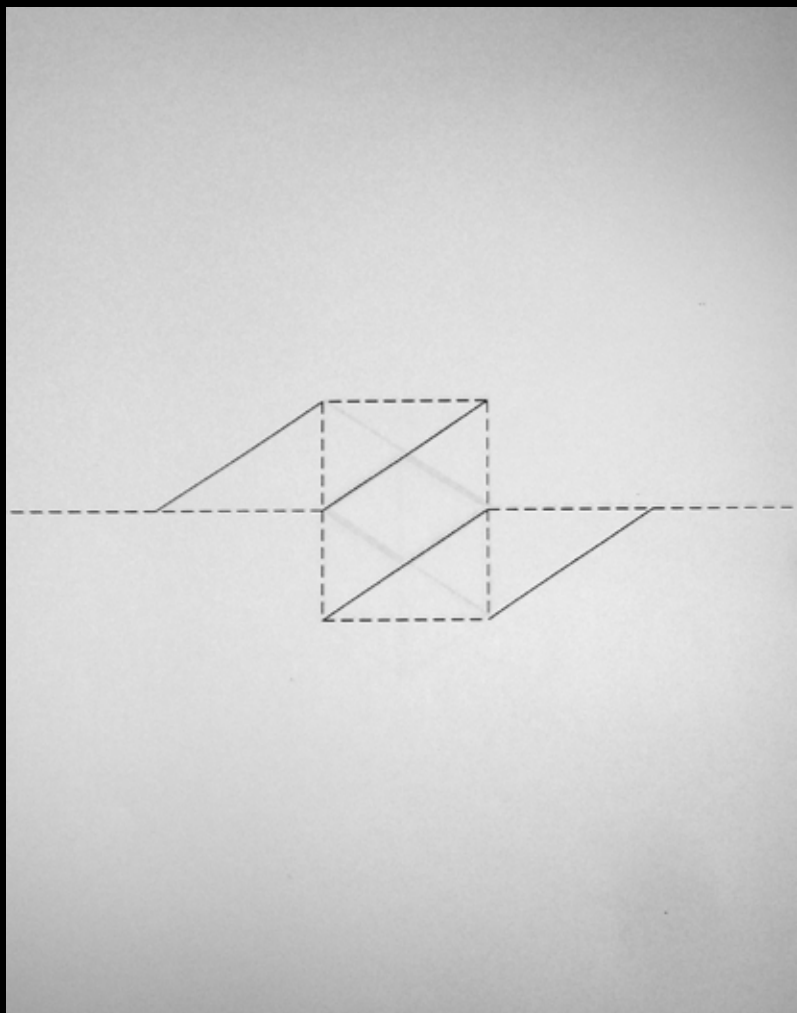
A POSSIBILITY FOR HOME OR PORTAL  
JUST PRIOR TO THE VERTICAL LINE

*The Documentarian's Initial Assignment, Part 2*

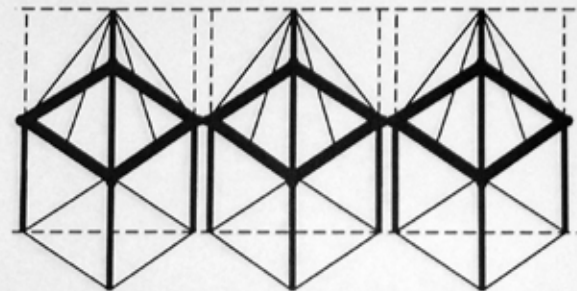
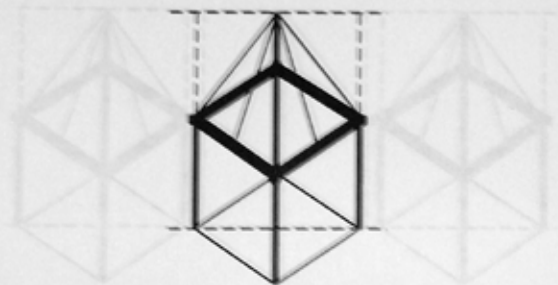


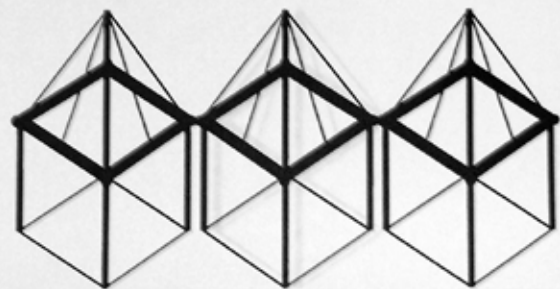


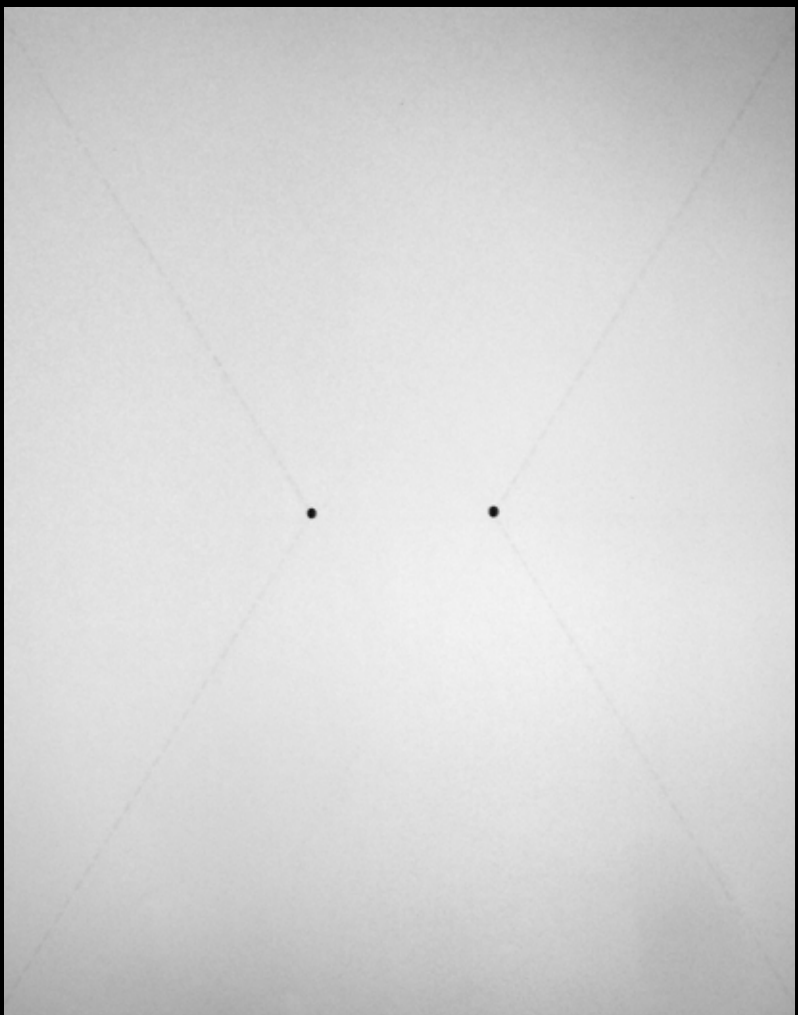
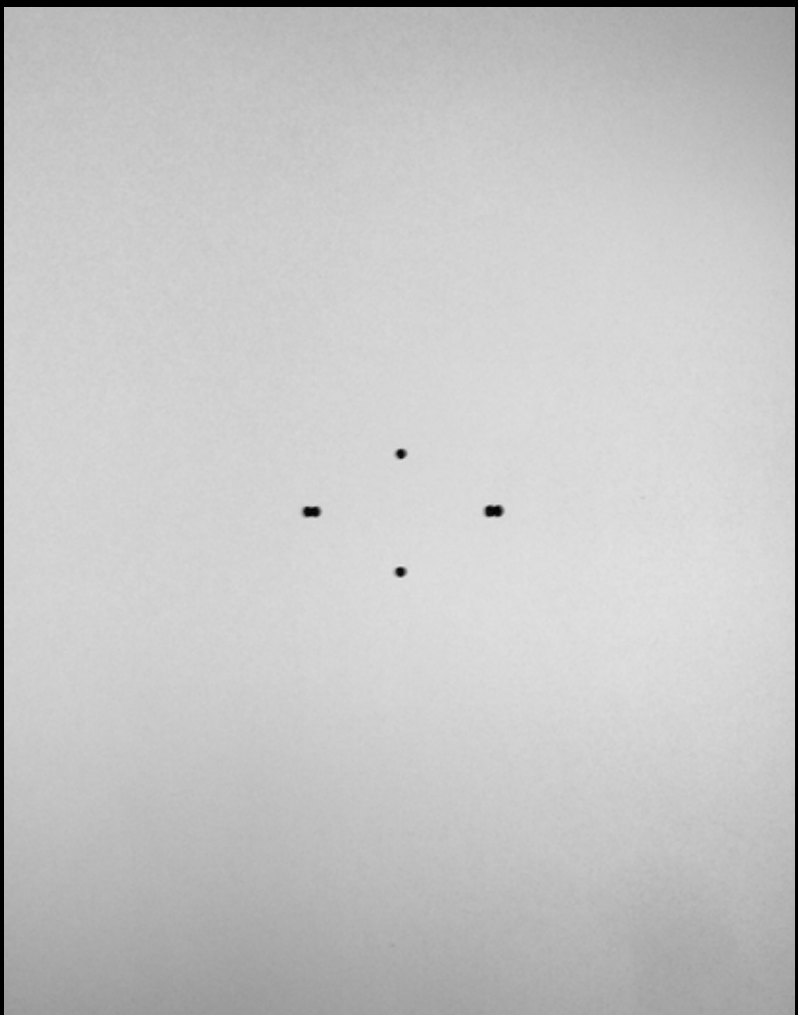


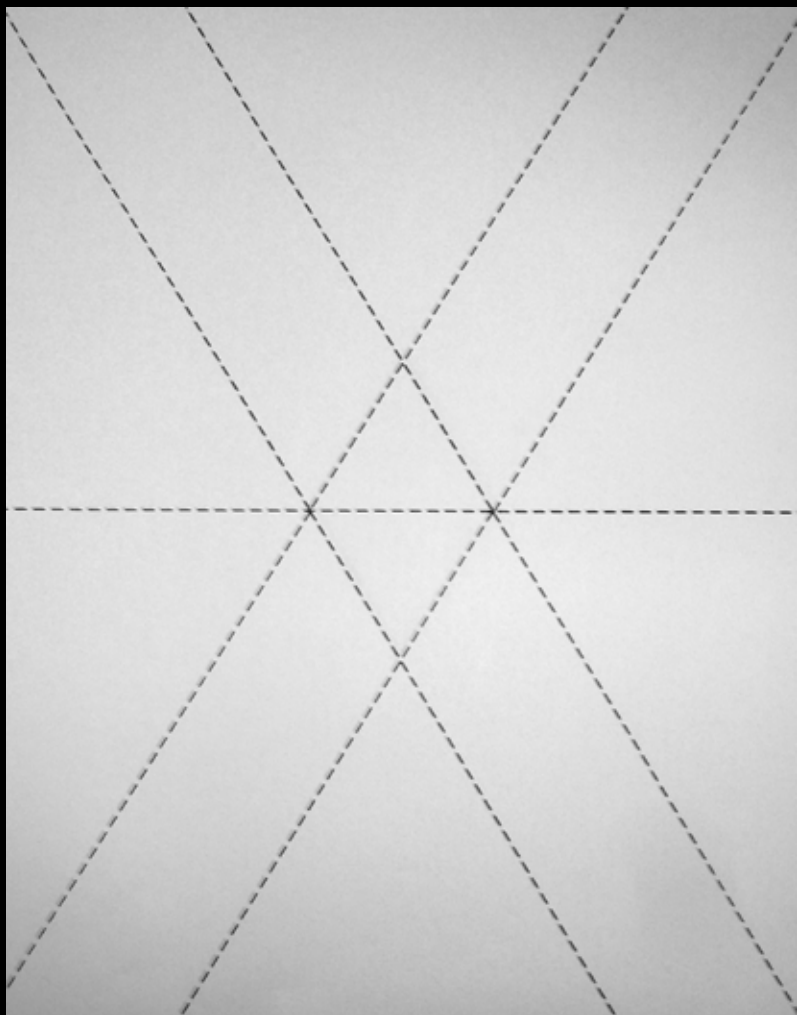
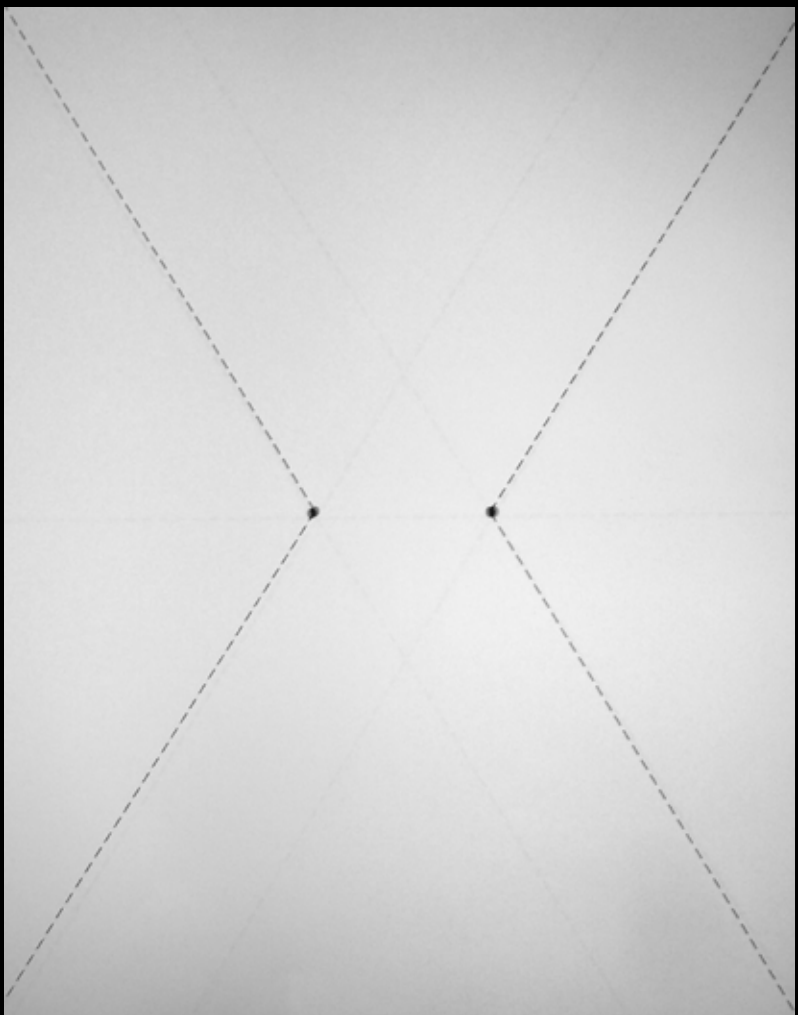
















# Corner Jump

*Jimmy Raskin*

First edition limited to 250 numbered copies  
In addition to this book a limited edition multiple  
by the artist is also available from onestar press.

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