

Steven Meinking interviews Peter Ganick

Peter Ganick
Interview

Peter Ganick is not a venerated poet in the traditional sense, but it is not due to a lack of effort. *Around A Corner: An Epidermis* (1-28) is his most recent effort, and it joins his broad catalog of other works such as *Agoraphobia*, *No Soap Radio*, and <a 'satty>, to name a few. Each text is theoretically inspired and dense with Peter's dauntless fervor for discursive experimentation. What follows is an interview with Peter that was compiled from a correspondence of e-mails that stretched over several days. Excerpts from some of his texts are interspersed throughout.

then sought as a face in the wilderness
sounding something suffering too benign for
improvisation himself the prasada offering
where nothing else works,"
— *Around A Corner: An Epidermis* (1-28)

Steven Meinking: Before we delve more deeply into your experience as a poet, I am interested in your thoughts on the convergence of the Internet and poetry. I've noticed a widespread emergence of poetry all over the Net, from e-mail lists and e-zines to bulletin boards and personal web sites. What do you think of this cyber-poetic emergence?

Peter Ganick: I think, for the most part, that any proliferation of poetry is a favorable trend. The fact that poets of all persuasions can post their poetry on the Internet is a democratization of the art form. Every democratization of an art form is attendant with certain difficulties, however; the main being the quality issue. If any poet can have his/her poetry displayed, there is not the usual filtering that occurs when an editor weeds out what he/she feels is not suitable for publication.

A very favorable trend established by the Internet, and one that I have taken advantage of many times already, is the possibility for e-mail collaborative texts. Until the Internet, snailmail had to suffice. With its necessary slowness, a critical momentum could never be established. That is why there were few collaborative poems written up to the advent of e-mail.

In an e-mail collaboration, the participants can exchange portions as often as they wish or are able. This speeds up the process, and the same momentum that an individual poet establishes in a single work, is augmented when two or more poets work on a poem together.

SM: Your POTEPOETZINE and POTEPOETTEXT both do an admirable job of showcasing this type of poetry and work. You are the editor of both projects. Both the text and zine are distributed via e-mail, with the zine exhibiting a collaboration of

multiple contributors and the text featuring one particular poet/writer. What are your thoughts and motivations behind those projects?

PG: The motivation behind the POTEPOETZINE and POTEPETTEXT projects is the same as that behind my hard-copy projects: to distribute experimental poetry to as large an audience as possible. In the print media, it has been to publish readable editions that are affordable while being sufficiently elegant. I consider the print media activities of more importance for me, at least at this time. A print book is somehow more "permanent" than an online project. The online zines were never more than a side activity to complement and further the print work of the Press.

The relations set up between an artform (writing) and another artform as "foil" are similar to keeping oneself free, mentally and spiritually. In the Heideggerean sense, it is a "free-for" that one obtains in this manner — free-for-writing.

— "A Poetics Statement" from POTEPOETTEXTTHIRTEEN

SM: You mention print work, and I don't think I'm being charitable when I say that the amount of work you have produced is impressive. The poetry that you write is also very unique and innovative. You refer to it as "experimental poetry." What does this notion of "experimental" mean to you and the breadth of your work?

PG: I have produced a lot of work, both in the publishing medium and in my own writing. The way I write is to not filter the writing at all, then when it's on the page, go back and revise it, however minimally. The forward motion of the writing is what keeps me going from project to project. The difference between projects, or not having two projects be alike, is what I call "experimental." I have always felt that to write the same type of poem twice is not worth the doing. For this writer, to be at the edge of his endurance at all times, helps me go onto newer projects.

I have always had a fondness for the long poem. "Remove A Concept," written in the late 80s to early 90s is almost 4000 pages. "SPLINTERED," some of which can be seen on my author's page at the Buffalo Electronic Poetry Center, written around 1996-7, is around 2000 pages. "Around A Corner: an epidermis," written in 1998 and to be published by Potes & Poets Press is over 600 pages. The long form gives one a chance to develop motifs and energies, even if only subconsciously. The type of poetry I do could also be called "abstract," because of its de-referentialized nature. It is different from, although similar to the classical LANGUAGE poets' work in that it has always been motivated primarily by philosophy, not poetry. In the last fifteen years, I have read around 10 books of poetry, no more. Philosophy, whether Eastern or Western, is the prime source. Poetry, in the manner of which it alters language, is the urtext of philosophy. I write such urtexts.

SM: "Urtext" reminds me of the "Urstaat" in Deleuze & Guattari. For them the Urstaat is the ideal model of the despotic state, but the direct reference to Ur is more

primary, the first city of the civilized world, an originary form. In its altering of language, do you think the urtext is similar?

PG: This is a controversial issue. Certain theorists like Chomsky believe that language capability is innate, something we have at or before birth. If I understand correctly, this capability is common to all homo sapiens. What I wonder is if a writer, through intense practice, can change his/her own, and therefore possibly a reader's, ur-text for language. This is akin to Rimbaud's idea of sensory derangement, but in a more planned manner than he had in mind. Or in a phrase now part of the common jargon that originated in the 1960s, to bend one's mind.

However that 1960s phrase is not what I have in mind. Those of us who participated in that period of history are different from it, although many of my peers seem to have forgotten the ideals that motivated us then. Rimbaud, as an individual, seems to have accomplished more in that he left poetry finally. Meaning that he DID alter his ur-text significantly. An inner change DID happen. Something was accomplished. WIRED magazine tells us that "Change is good."

When I speak of urtext in language, it is not an actual first language. Rather an ideal language. A language that doesn't exist, except in the minds of poets.

The poetry I write is abstract, not non-referential. The Language poets, from who early on I took my model, write non-referential language. This is language that has a relationship to some reference to reality. Namely that of negation.

The writing I do is, on the other hand, abstract. Meaning, without relationship to reality. This is its insularity and its vulnerability at the same time. I like to see that the language is a structure that is pure and of-itself. Sort of like the abstractness of mathematics. And hopefully its universality.

perhaps it begins in four echoes
the closest of which is
word-mind before
demanded straits,
the cipher has gone awash
its tone to replace now & then
every caller-frequency
— Agoraphobia

SM: How have you been altered through your poetic efforts, if at all?

PG: A fair enough answer would be to say: Read the books I have written. But to elaborate a bit because that's the nature of the responses expected in an interview like this, writing has led me to a spiritual pursuit. Writing is a spiritual pursuit, with the word "spiritual" being used in its fullest sense. As a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, a Hindu saint

who lived in the nineteenth century, and having a guru and meditating daily, the spiritual pursuit is a large part of writing for me.

Another answer would be to say: Life has changed me, as life changes everyone, and the writing is nothing more than life writing life.

SM: You stated earlier that philosophy is a form of inspiration. Who are some of your favorite thinkers? And what about philosophy as a practice gives it this prominent place in your work?

PG: The philosophical tradition I am writing from is twofold. First, the Derridean and Deleuzean tradition of what I'll call "errant" texts. Texts that become intentional only when activated. Their resonance is through the Derridean "trace" and extended in the Deleuzean "rhizome." I like the fact that these two concepts claim to be more than concepts.

The other tradition is more vital to the writing I do. It is the Vedantic tradition in the sense of being aware of the consciousness I am writing from more than the words I am writing. What distinguishes this from a "trance" or "channeling"? Perhaps nothing. Perhaps something. Perhaps the fact that the consciousness claims to be nothing more than a consciousness-producing-words/text. The creative consciousness, in this manifestation.

Vedanta is a version of Hinduism for those who do not know this. I am a Hindu.

SM: I find the style of your poetry very liberating, but it isn't easy to read, at least initially. When I engage one of your texts it takes time to work through the material. Then, after a short period, a flow is generated and I seem to drift with the work. What are some of your thoughts concerning how a reader might approach your poetry?

PG: I think you have hit on it. In a sense, a writer merely writes the text and leaves each reader to find his or her way into it. However, the writing has a relationship to a "stream of consciousness" type of production, therefore some sort of mindful suspension of thought in the reading process would be helpful.

The writing is meditative in nature, therefore should be read in a concentrated manner. It is difficult, as you say; but, I think, if one "keeps on moving" through the texts, doesn't get stuck anywhere, one will find what is there in each text.

As we all know, there is a "normative" grammar in language. And it seems to me that the task of the poet is to extend that grammar. This can make for difficult going in one of the texts I've written, however, each text, especially the recent ones does a certain "twist" with form and grammar, maybe more than one. Once that is realized, there should be no problem with reading.

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on dry shape RELUCTANT however din
— News On Skis

SM: With elements of your style, approach and influences touched upon only two questions remain: Is there anything you would like to do creatively that is not already represented in your lifework? And what direction, if any, do you plan to take your poetry?

PG: Regarding what I'd like to do in the future: that'd be basically "more of the same." I find value in writing texts. I hope to be able to write many more. Multimedia or Internet work only interests me as it can be applied to texts I can write. I would like to learn how to type faster.

The poetry has developed over the period I've been writing on its own. I think I'll just sort of sit back and let it happen. One cannot direct the stream of one's creative activity. One can only be grateful one has it.

Resources:

<http://www.spdbooks.org> Site where you can purchase Peter's books, titles from Potes & Poets press, as well as texts from other independent publishers.

<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/ganick> Peter's work at the Buffalo Electronic Poetry Center.

<http://www.burningpress.org/va/poteindex.html> POTEPOETZINE and POTEPOETTEXT electronic index of issues.

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