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Selected Excerpts from Volume 26
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Friedrich Hölderlin

Translated by Maxine Chernoff and Paul Hoover

Bonaparte (*Buonaparte*)

Poets are holy glass

In which life's wine,

The spirit of heroes, is kept.

But the spirit of the young

And eager overflows any glass

That seeks to contain it.

Poets should leave the young as untouched as nature.

Such stuff makes crafty men into awkward boys.

One can't live for long in a poem.

One lives and endures in the world.

Palinode (*Palinodie*)

What shines around me, Earth, your pleasant greenness?
Why do you breathe on me once again, little wind?
There's a rustling in all the tree-tops,

Why do you awaken my soul, you good ones,
And stir up the past in me? Better yet,
Let the ashes of my joys rest in peace!
You're only teasing me! Go away,

You fateless gods, pass on by and blossom
On high, in your youth, over this old man;
And if you want the company of mortals,
Young women also blossom

For you, as well as young heroes, and morning plays
More beautifully on the cheeks of good fortune
Than on a gloomy eye, and the songs
Of the carefree sound pleasant on the ear.

The source of song once flowed lightly
From my breast, when the pure joy
Of the gods still shone from my eyes

A little mercy, please. Relent for once,
You unchanging gods, hold back a little, if only
Because you love the purest of sources . . .
To the Germans (An die Deutschen)

Never make fun of the child, when the silly one
Feels proud and masterful upon his rocking-horse.

My friends, we are also
Poor in deeds and full of high thoughts!

Or perhaps come leaping out, like lightning from clouds,
As deeds do from the mind, fully formed and ripe?
Does the fruit grow, like the orchard's
Dark leaves, from quiet books?

And the silence of the crowd, is it the celebration
Before its cause? The feeling of awe before
God brings his word? Then take me, my dear ones,
Make me repent my blasphemy.

For too long, I've gone astray like a novice
In the workshop where spirits are formed.
I can only know what I see growing—
What he's thinking, I have no idea.

It's sweet to surmise but also painful,
And I've already spent enough years
Doubting and misapprehending, as mortals do,
Always moved by him whose constant work

Brings me closer to his loving soul,
Smiling down at us mortals—
Whereas I hesitate—bringing life's
Pure depth to its ripeness.

When, Creator, genius of the people,
When will you fully appear, soul of our country,
That I might bow more deeply,
That my accomplished strings

Grow silent, that ashamed
As a flower of night, I'll bow down to you,

Heavenly day. In joy, I'd close myself
Up from you, when everyone with whom

I've once mourned, when our towns now brighten
And open and awaken, full of a purer fire,
And the mountains of Germany
Are the mountains of the muses,

Like those masterful men of old, Pindos and Helicon
And Parnassus, and all around,
Under the country's golden sky,
Free and clear, gleams intellectual joy.

True, our lifetimes are narrowly
Circumscribed. See how the tally grows.
But the years of the people
Are all that they can know.

When the soul soars with yearning
Over its time, you wait there sadly
On the cold shoreline,
Among your own kind a stranger,

And the future generations also, those promised to us,
Where, where are they? To be warmed
Again by a friendly hand,
To be perceived by a living soul?

Silent now, the hall has long
Been empty, poor visionary; yearning dims your eye,
And nameless you slumber,
With no one to weep or remember.

The Course of Life (*Lebenslauf*)

You too wanted more, but love
Forces all of us under.
Pain's necessary curve
Returns us to our beginnings.

Whether up or down, in the holiness of night,
Speechless nature determines all the days to come;
Yet in the labyrinths of death
You can find a straight path.

I know this—not once, like mortal instructors
Did you heavenly, all-knowing gods
Have the foresight to lead me
Along a level path.

Everything's a test, say the gods.
Having found his strength, a man gives thanks
For everything he knows, and, knowing
His freedom, goes where he wants to go.
Sung Beneath the Alps (*Unter den Alpen gesungen*)

Holy innocence, that men and gods
Love the most! Either inside the house
Or out of doors, to sit at the feet
Of the ancients,

Always full of contented wisdom; for man knows
Much that's good; but astonished as the animals
He looks toward heaven. But how pure everything is
To you, Pure One!

Look! The rough beast of the field gladly

Serves and trusts you, the voiceless forest
Speaks to you of the ancients, the mountains
Teach you

Holy laws, and even now the Great Father
Often wants to name for us the complexity
Of experience; only your words are luminous
And clear.

To be alone with the gods, and when
The light passes over, and wind and flood, and
When time hurries to its place, you have a steady
Eye for them;

Nothing is holier that I know and want,
As long as the flood doesn't take me, like
The willows, well cared for, sleeping as I must
On the waves;

He who holds divine things in his heart
Will gladly stay home, however, and I'll be free,
As long as needed, to translate and sing
In the tongues of heaven.

Memory (*Andenken*)

The north-east wind blows,
Dear to me because of its strong spirit
And the good voyage it promises sailors.
But go now and greet
The beautiful Garonne
And the gardens of Bordeaux,
Where on the steep bank
The path runs unevenly and the stream falls
Deeply into the river, while above
A pair of noble oaks
And white poplars face the water.

I remember this so well, and how
The broad elm with its leafy tip
Leans over the mill, and a fig-tree
Grows in the courtyard.
On holidays the brown women
Walk on silken ground
In the month of March,
When night and day are the same,
And over slow paths
A light breeze blows
Heavy with dreams of gold.

Won't someone pass
A cup full of dark light
So I can rest sweetly
And sleep among shadows?
It's not good
To have mortal thoughts
And also lack a soul.
But a little conversation is good

To express the heart's meaning,
To hear about the days of love
And everything that's happened.

But where are our friends? Bellarmine
And his companions? Many
Are afraid of going to the source;
for wealth begins
In the sea. And like painters
They bring together
The beautiful things of the world
And don't disdain war's outspread wings,
Nor years of solitude beneath the
Leafless mast, where the city's holidays
Don't gleam through the night
Nor the sound of violins or local dancers.

But now the men have gone
To exotic, distant places,
There on the windblown peak
And the vine-covered hills, where
The Dordogne flows from its source,
And together with the brilliant
Garonne, broad as the sea,
Its current flows out. It's the sea
That offers memory and takes it back.
And love too has attentive eyes. But that
Which endures comes from poetry's well.

Home (*Heimath*)

And no one knows

But meanwhile let me walk
Along your paths, O Earth,
Picking wild berries
To satisfy my desire for you.

Here where . . .
And the thorns of roses
And sweet linden is fragrant
Beside the beech trees at noon, when in the harvested cornfield
There's the rustle of something growing on the stalk,
And the ear bends its neck to one side
Like autumn. But now beneath the high dome of oaks,
Where my thoughts and questions go upward,
The familiar sound of the bell
Rings a golden note in the distance
At the hour that birds awaken. And all is well.
On Yellow Leaves (Auf falbem Laube)

The grape rests
On dying leaves, a promise of wine, as the shadow
Of a gold earring rests on a young woman's cheek.

And I must remain alone
Like the little calf
Entangled in the chain
From which it's freed itself.

So busy . . .

But the sower
Loves to see a woman
Asleep at mid-day
Over a stocking half-knitted.

The German tongue
Is not easy on the ear
But lovingly
Plants its kisses
From a prickly beard.
What is God? . . . (Was ist Gott. . .)

What is God? Who knows? Yet
His face has the texture of heaven.
Of course, anger and lightning flashes
Are among God's possessions. The more
Invisible something is, the stranger
It becomes. Yet the thunder
Of fame is God's. Love of eternal life,
Property too, like our own,
Is a God's.
Questions for the Muse (Einst hab ich de Muse gefragt . . .)

Once I asked the muse, and she
Replied:
In the end you'll find it.
Those born to die can't grasp it.
About the highest mysteries, I'm speechless.
One's true home, like the laurel,
Is forbidden fruit, the last thing
We all taste,

The beginning and ending
Deceive us far too much.
The last thing, however,
Is heaven's sign that sweeps
and men
Away. Even Hercules
Feared it. But since we are
Born listless, a falcon is required
And a horseman to follow its flight.

In the when
And the Prince
and fire and smoke flower
On dry grass
Still unmingled with all this
The voice of the Prince, the battle's refreshment,
Is drawn from a good well.

An artist makes containers
And they are purchased

but when
The day of judgment comes
And the lip of a demigod
Touches it like a virgin

He will never
Give away the thing he loves
To the unproductive, from that point on
The useful is the sacred.
Tinian (Tinian)

It's sweet to get lost

In the holy wilderness,
— — — —

And drink at the wolf teats
Of the waters that wander
Through the countryside
To me,
 ,wilder once,
But now, like orphans, accustomed to the taste;
In spring, when unfamiliar wings
Return to the warmth of the woods

resting in solitude.
Among the willow trees
Full of fragrance
Where butterflies
Mingle with bees
And your Alps

Divided from God

The divided world,

indeed they stand
Armed,

And wander as they wish, timelessly

for they
Hazard us a falcon's glance or,
Like gladiators, the gods decree
These outward signs to be birthmarks
Of whose child the West must be;

Some flowers
Don't grow from the earth, but sprout
In loose soil of their own will,
Counter-light of our days, nor should
One pick them,
For they stand golden,
Prepared only for what they are,
Leafless even
As thoughts,

Ann Lauterbach

Pursuit

(23 April 2007)

With the eruption yet once more of murderous violence perpetrated by a single person last week, this time at Virginia Tech, I have been pondering some quandaries that have nagged me much of my life. These include questions about the possible correlatives between choices, decisions and judgments in life and those in art; questions about destiny or fate (DNA if you want) as the limit space of all living creatures; questions about chance and luck; questions about the relation of the one to the many; questions about the relation between art and the public imagination; questions about whether it is possible to help young persons who want to become artists to think broadly about that desire and its consequences. These questions often fret at the periphery of the art object and sometimes erupt, theorized into the sublimity of academic discourse, to lend weight if not measure to their ongoing restless provocation of yet more questions.

I remarked last fall during Jessica Stockholder's panel on Power that I thought all powerful art is at some level a critique of power. What I was trying to suggest was an idea of power as a place of received, tacit, or unexamined truth that attaches itself to organisms or institutions that, in turn, influence and shape our habits of mind and behavior. The job of artists, I wanted to suggest, is to bring these points of attachment to our attention, to bring us closer to consciousness of how power might curtail our capacity to make choices, decisions and judgments outside of its often unquestioned assumptions and directives.

I think of most human institutions as organisms. Yale is an organism, for example. It has a narrative, a self-portrait, even a life span; it has vested interests in keeping that narrative, portrait and life span active and powerful in perpetuity.

So what about this mostly silent young Korean who killed 33 persons --- thirty two victims plus himself? He majored in English, wrote poems and plays, and so we might imagine that he had some, however inchoate, desire to be an artist, a creative person. Perhaps he intuited that the only way out of his apparently life-long mute alienation was to write; if he did, he

certainly is not the first person beset with dementia to intuit this possibility. But it wasn't going to be and perhaps, as he approached his graduation from a school that appears to be overt in its celebration of institutional identity, its competitive bon-homie, its rituals of smiling togetherness, perhaps he felt he had no chance at all of becoming --- that he was destined to return to the habitat of dry cleaners that many Koreans in Virginia, according to The New York Times, have chosen because they can go to church on Sunday and because they need only a minimal amount of English to do their job. Nothing I have heard or read has adequately analyzed the hopelessness of Mr. Cho in the context of the American present. This grim tragedy has produced the usual disheartening and self-serving rhetoric of cultural abasement, sanctimoniousness, and pieties of improvement. Better gun control. Better care for the mentally disabled. Grief as commodity. Way easier to grieve over the victims of this mass murder than over the 3300 dead Americans in Iraq. What is the connection between the lone "Korean shooter" and the President of the United States?

I am thinking about happiness, and am wondering in what it consists. It is a value I deeply mistrust, because, for one, it cannot ever be anything but contingent, fleeting; in a temporal sense, partial. Happiness is a certain kind of human weather. But we have all been given the right to pursue it. It is written into our Constitution. If we are to pursue happiness, then choices, decisions and judgments clearly must come into play along the way. Here are two things I can opt to do, I have a choice. I will decide to do this, not that. And once I have made this decision, sooner or later there will be a judgment, if a judgment is a kind of consequence. I will be judged or I will judge myself. My life in retrospect will be in a sense a sum of these choices and decisions and judgments. In art, perhaps a teacher or a critic or a curator will come along and judge my choices and decisions. I might forego my own sense of judgment for that of another, perhaps of a powerful other. What did Mr. Cho's teachers tell him about his violent, abject writings?

Here suddenly I am recalling a poem by one of my most revered poets, George Oppen. I recommend him to you; his book, comprised of a single long sequential poem called *Of Being Numerous*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968. Here is the poem I am remembering:

Leviathan

Truth also is the pursuit of it:
Like happiness, and it will not stand.

Even the verse begins to eat away
In the acid. Pursuit, pursuit;

A wind moves a little,
Moving in a circle, very cold.

How shall we say?
In ordinary discourse---

We must talk now. I am no longer sure of the words,
The clockwork of the world. What is inexplicable

Is the 'preponderance of objects.' The sky lights
Daily with that predominance

And we have become the present.

We must talk now. Fear
Is fear. But we abandon one another.

I have argued elsewhere that art is necessary because it demonstrates the human capacity to make choices; it is an allegory of choice: this material, this connection, this length, this hole here, this light there, this color; for poets, this word, this punctuation, this cadence, and so forth.

Art reminds us that we can resist certain things and agree to other things. It presents us with the predicament and the process of constructing a narrative of relation. Life is also a construction of a narrative of relation. The predicament of artists is how to keep this idea of choice free from its debasement in commerce. This is the most difficult of tasks.

But it is too late to question the fact of the Art World as an organism of power; it is foolish to protest the now complete adaptation of the organism of art to the organism of capital-

ism. It is a futile resistance, and a thread-worn discourse. Progressive thinking has to come from another space; it has to imagine new paradigms, in which artists can maintain their clarity, distance; their obligation to simultaneously question, enlighten and engage. Engage with what or whom? The most urgent answer, for me, is simply the present. Art that does not engage the present as an acute pressure on the future is of no consequence to me. In this respect, art and the academy are natural adversaries

In my view, one way to do this is to imagine that art-making and life-making are in a continuum of the most profound order. I do not mind if artists are successful, famous, wealthy. I mind it the life they choose to live as a result of these effects is as predictable as a fashion shoot. I mind if they see no reason to convert “success” into the social imagination beyond our perfunctory, received notions of the good life. Once a life-style icon, always a life-style icon. If artists cannot extend their habit of choice in the service of art to contexts beyond art, then the habits of imaginative production they have pursued are too readily absorbed and curtailed into the dictates of commerce and its ruthless judgments.

Mr. Cho lost whatever belief he might have had in this life-art continuum. He came to invent persons, lovers, and even his own origins; he went into the vast negative space, the black hole, of the extra-terrestrial to find succor for his earthly existence. The internet and its extensions provided him with false intimations of intimacy. He used the photo capacity on his cell phone to take crotch-shots of girls under the desk. All of American culture came at him with its same message: fame, celebrity, winning and winning, these are the only real goals even for an outsider like you. And so he chose to be a celebrity, and to live forever in our minds and hearts. What does it matter that this is negative celebrity, all dark and no light?

I learned that the police jargon for dead is “black tag.” When I was in college, Lee Harvey Oswald shot John F. Kennedy. Black tag.

POWERFUL ART & POWER

(11 September 2006)

I want to begin by noting the obvious irony of being invited to partake in a discussion of power in relation to art. As a female American poet, I come to this subject with a lifelong commitment to a practice that accepts and even promulgates the positive value of powerlessness.

That this identification might be both self-deceptive and defensively prideful is certainly possible.

Who would be the opposite figure from me? Well, take, for example, the sculptor Richard Serra. It so happens that Richard Serra lives across the street from me; we have been neighbors for almost thirty years; we nod to each other. He owns his building; I rent my loft. This is all I want to say for the moment about the economic inequities of art and power. Serra's most famous piece, *The Tilted Arc*, was reviled, contested and finally removed from its place in City Hall Park, because it was deemed too violently threatening for the pedestrians. This was not long before, and only a few blocks away from, what we now call Ground Zero. When Serra put his sculpture in a public place, the public did not want to feel threatened. Now the public always feels threatened. Would the public now feel more or less tolerant of the difficult vision of Serra's *Tilted Arc*?

On this day five years ago, I was awakened by an immense roar whose proximity to my bed could result only in annihilation. I crouched on the floor and covered my head; within moments, there was a sound for which I have not found the words, since it was simultaneously enormous and mute; I had no references, no likenesses with which to compare it. A great swallowing, perhaps. It was the announcement of Power at its most primal, erupting from exactly the pre-linguistic ground of our most profound imaginings. Within minutes, it was clear that an event was underway that would occupy the world stage for years to come, shifting the ground of history and of our, America's, place in it. But one could not have anticipated the degree to which it would also elicit years of destructive abuses: of language, of persons, places, things, and that these abuses would place cultures, our own and others, at risk.

They would, in turn, put immense pressure on artists to find ways to be in conversation with this risk.

For some weeks, I have been rereading certain passages from some of my favorite thinkers, writers who have, however obliquely, addressed the issue or theme of power: Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Edward Said, Giorgio Agamben, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler. I read the Fragments of Heraclitus, the novel *Plowing the Dark* by Richard Powers, and an unpublished talk by my friend the poet Michael Palmer called “On the Sustaining of Culture in Dark Times.” Palmer calls this time, our moment, “fraught and contentious and corrupted.”

None of these thinkers focuses on art, although each writes in such a way that an artist might feel, one way or another, implicated.

I think I want to believe that powerful art is a critique of power.

From Said, I have the idea of the amateur, and of the necessity to find reconciliation between intractable opposition.

From Agamben, the notion of the gesture, that ideas and objects find meaning through mobile constellations that rupture boundaries.

From Emerson, the idea of the present as the practice of active thought.

From Heraclitus, the idea of mindfulness within change.

From Butler, the idea of precariousness in relation to violence and mourning.

From Foucault, the denial of universality and the consciousness of structures.

From Arendt, the scruple of fearless skepticism.

From Deleuze: opposition to vertical hierarchies.

Heraclitus Fragment 91

Since mindfulness, of all things,
Is the ground of being,
To speak one's true mind,
And to keep things known
In common, serves all being,
Just as laws made clear
Uphold the city,
Yet with greater strength.
Of all pronouncements of the law
The one source is the Word
Whereby we choose what helps
True mindfulness prevail.

I spent some time this last June in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Like all great cities, Saint Petersburg has many disparate layers; unlike most cities I have been in, these layers seem to be rubbing against each other, causing an almost palpable friction. Nothing seems to be quite in alignment with the present, which courses through the streets like a reckless toxic current. In any case, I visited the Hermitage, the vast pale green museum that was once an Imperial Palace. It would take days, maybe weeks, to even begin to know what is there, in the immense rooms and corridors with their gilt trim and poor lighting. I knew that some of my favorite Matisse paintings were there, including *The Conversation*, and *Music*, and *The Dance*. I did not, however, know that there were several Rembrandts. Rembrandt has never particularly captured my attention. But I was, that day, arrested by his painting of the *Deposition*, of Jesus being lifted down from the Cross. It was poorly lit, and needs cleaning. The figure of Jesus is deeply, impossibly human; it has weight, dead weight; you can see the arms of those who are lifting the body down strain; you feel the lifeless burden. There are fleshy folds around the figure's mid-section. I do not recall if there is blood, or any signs of the stigmata. But the painting registered inside me, and I have tried to think

about its power. I am not a religious person. Was it powerful for me that day because I was in the difficult flux of a difficult city, whose complex relation to faith was everywhere apparent? Was it because there are so many images of the newly dead in my mind these days, and somehow this portrayal spoke from a space of such profound humanity that it seemed to redeem or to remind me of the parts of Western culture that seem all but erased in our excruciating exercise of raw power. If I visited the painting again, would it again elicit such a strong response?

I have been trying to think of what to say without stating the obvious while wondering what the obvious might be; I have been wondering if the obvious is what needs in fact to be stated. I have been thinking for a while about the difference between knowledge in relation to power and knowledge in relation to art. I have been wondering about the necessary forms of knowing.

This wondering has taken the form of some questions:

Are knowledge and power inevitably reciprocal?

What kinds of knowledge do artists need, and is it more important to think of how we know than what we know? The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead comments that, "in the real world, it is more important for a thing to be interesting than for it be true." Duchamp is said to have commented that he never did anything unless it amused him.

Is art, to invoke Wittgenstein's great phrase, a form of life? If it is, what does this imply about the form of an artist's life?

Is there still any meaning to be found in the etymological connection between experience and experiment?

Is powerful art necessarily art that embraces technology?

The word "power" comes from the Latin *potere*: to be able. What abilities does an artist need to make powerful art?

Is powerful art art that shifts our perceptions of reality or art that confirms them; art that causes consternation or consolation? Are these exclusive registers?

Here is Richard Powers writing about his heroine Adie's response to being inside the machinery that will make a totally virtual world, which she has been hired to help realize through her capacity to make perfectly mimetic drawings:

“Shame and amazement did a two-step inside her. This room was this present's widest accomplishment, its printing press, its carrack and caravel, its haywain, hanging gardens, and basilica. These demure, humming boxes contained the densest working out, the highest tide of everything that collective ingenuity had yet learned how to pull off. It housed the race's deepest taboo dream, the thing humanity was trying to turn itself into. Yet for all that Adie had seen, art had fled headlong from it, in full retreat, toward some safe aesthetic den of denial, where it could suck its wounds in defeat.” *Plowing the Dark* p.30

A safe aesthetic den of denial, sucking its wounds in defeat. An image of abject animal powerlessness.

Art of course does not have volition, only artists do.

Powers implies here a post-human world, in which our investment in the humanity of the human, evidenced or symbolized in the act of art making, is about to be surpassed. He implies that art cannot compete, as it were, with the ravishing technologies of the post-Enlightenment, and can only retreat into, be absorbed by, the exhausted afflictions of bourgeois individuality.

If artists are not to slink off into an aesthetic den of denial, what are we to do instead?

Heracitus Fragment 101

What use are these people's wits,
Who let themselves be led
By speechmakers, in crowds,
Without considering
How many fools and thieves
They are among, and how few
Choose the good?
The best choose progress
Toward one thing, a name
Forever honored by the gods,
While others eat their way
Toward sleep like nameless oxen.