

TONE, DEPTH, AND PAIDEIA FROM AN UNSPLINTERED MIND

Guy Davenport, *The Death of Picasso: New and Selected Writing*, Shoemaker and Hoard, 2003. Erik Anderson Reece, *A Balance of Quinces: The Paintings and Drawings of Guy Davenport*. New Directions, 1996.

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Guy Davenport is this country's most singular literary stylist and painter to date. His passing at seventy-seven in January 2005 made *The Death of Picasso* his last trade book. It selects twenty pieces from nine earlier books and seven pieces from magazines ("The Owl of Minerva," "The Playing Field," "Ruskin," "Wide as the Waters Be" [review of a book on biblical translation], "Dinner at the Bank of England," "Horace and Walt in Camden" [another review essay], and "The Anthropology of Table Manners"). In the same year a limited edition of "Wo es war, soll Ich werden" in its longer, first version was still in production from David Eisenman's Finial Press in Champaign, Illinois. Erik Reece, a poet who studied with Davenport and recently the author of *Lost Mountain*, a report on Big Coal's obliteration of eastern Kentucky, writes very well indeed about his teacher's dovetailing masteries of the sister arts, in an amply illustrated volume.

The nature of their sisterhood changed in the past century, for reasons that Davenport has been among the keenest to sense. They strolled into the forest of forms and loped back lean and trim. *Architectonic style*, in his phrase, decisively altered rendering in both painting and writing; in writing, inventive narrative has been absorbed by that style, leaving the next step to the management of *tone* (I paraphrase his argument in the essay "On Narrative Tone and Form" in *Geography of the Imagination*). Davenport reproves critics in the prose "Circumspectus" to the Eisenman "Wo es war" for reading around his architectonics and "subverting my best efforts to transmute content into style. Style is not ornament; it is the *mind* of narrative structure." In a Beckett-esque dramatic sketch selected here—"We Often Think of Lenin at the Clothespin Factory"—the style is transparently mind in a grimly comic *reductio*; Notch and Polden, the first an old woman who claims she is Mandelstam's widow but does so only, like Polden, as a dissociated reflecting surface for bits of color, figure, and the culture swept off by the Revolution, remarks: "Events happen again / In memory, knowing, or narrative. / Time rolls it up as it goes along, bringing / The past with

it. Nothing is left behind.” It is architectonic style numbly communing with itself after catastrophe. It is affecting in inverse ratio to any show of feeling. This piece occurs far on in the selection, however. With three Danish schoolboy pieces at the outset—“The Owl of Minerva,” “The Playing Field,” and “Gunnar and Nikolai,” which extend the method of the van Hovendaal stories focused on Dutch teenagers in a Fourierist frame—a reader faces a long stretch of material cut chiefly to the gauge of style. These three wager tedium, over the chatter of pubes, against Whistleresque appreciations of pattern. Looking back at the book’s cover, one sees silver ruler markings up its black buckram shoulder and the contour lines on a maritime chart of the Dutch offshore islands: one is promised navigation and measure, yet odds are that many will shrug and pass. Our author has calibrated that likelihood.

Because he saw that Paul Metcalf’s 1965 *Genoa*, a major late architectonic narrative, preserved 20th-century tone, and since he admired Mandelstam’s prose as “a change in tone,” Davenport bet the store on advancing in that direction. *Prose ideogram*, *serial collage*—his own terms for the architectonics of his storytelling—leave us with questions, then, about how he articulated the units of his stories, what their caesuras midwife, and how he shifted the prevailing tone of architectonic style. As we know, *depth* in painting either was flattened or was achieved differently; in narrative depth’s traditional dimensions, often associated with conventions of feeling refined by late Realism and the *mot juste*, yielded to alternative ones or tended to disperse. As for painting versus writing, both engaged him equally. Davenport assesses all these matters vigorously in both the “Tone and Form” essay and his apologia, “Ernst Machs Max Ernst,” in ways that I leave my readers to find (they cannot be improved upon by summary). What I offer here are a few probes into his style after the reviewer’s customary debriefing report.

To my probes into tone and depth I add the Greek term for teaching, *paideia*, which comes closer to the German *Bildung* or formation from a cultural basis, or *paideuma* in Frobenius’s term. Davenport’s major form, a long train of serial collage narratives, is about *paideia* at the adolescent fulcrum phase, singly and communally. Utopian they are not, if I rightly take his hint that Fourier himself was not utopian. These stories feature his “puppets,” juicily unrepressed, mostly Dutch teenagers usually under the benevolent eye of a Sokratic, sometimes randy teacher, the sophisticated philosopher-and-painter Adriaan van Hovendaal (“gardener” in Dutch). They absorbed Davenport’s main efforts toward a new tone for architectonic style. They are his main role of the dice. Four are selected here: “The Death of Picasso” (a sequel to the novella *Apples and Pears*), “The Bicycle

Rider,” “Wo es war, soll Ich werden,” and “The Ringdove Sign.” He risked a great deal, not so much in investing them with his double in Hovendaal as in rehearsing to the point of tedium the sexual and relational doings of his Dutch ephebes. He must have calculated that effect, to some degree, to make us look less at content and more at shape, tonal rhymes, and ligature.

Item by way of interlude: Reece reproduces on facing pages two large acrylics that parallel the major prose forms. The 1990 “War is the Health of the State” lodges a grid or graph in the upper left quadrant which floats a Greek coin, a moth, and a ripe pear; the lower left quadrant shows the hunchbacked Randolph Bourne, while eight rectangles in two columns up the right side show an array of Fourieristic “essences:” a shamanic phallic figure and a young boy’s head atop, a Warhol-style Nietzsche and a Brancusi bust below, with the central four rectangles showing a naked boy with pear-like sex standing partly athwart a capital A (Zukofsky’s long architectonic poem?) and the hexagonal cells of a honeycomb with bee. Start with Bourne and rotate counter-clockwise, and you follow a progression not quite that of the Fibonacci sequence that ends with the Pythagorean grid that encodes generative cosmic order in several late Davenport paintings. The Brancusi essence-rectangle just next to Bourne startlingly resembles the shape of his head and body, and both evoke the ripe pear and phallus of the youth. Bourne, honeycomb, “A”, and grid converge at the geometric center; there, “A” may distill, 60 years after Bourne’s death, the essence of Bourne’s lonely resistance to American statism, an aspect of Nietzschean teaching, in another form. Opposite in Reece’s arrangement, “Orpheus Preaching to the Animals” spreads a blizzard of overlapping animal and human forms in bright monotones, “HOMMAGE À FOURIER” written through them along with Fourier’s key formulation of series, harmony, proportion, and destiny. The geometric center falls near the base of the throat of a large yellow Chanticleer. If you stretch a diagonal from the open lips of the large adolescent teacher Orpheus through the rooster’s open beak, it ends in the right foot of the single other human, again a naked male youth. Only one straight line enters the composition, a low horizon marker cutting across the base through that right foot at the juncture with our invisible diagonal. From 1979 to 1990, then, precision and the Pythagorean grid balance natural forms and arrays and frame several modes of rendering. The Dutch teenager/van Hovendaal stories span the same decade and write an analogous architectonic style. And that is for starters.

It is remarkable to turn sideways, in this collection, from these Dutch *paideia* tales to the narratives “about” Kafka and Stanley Spencer—“The Messengers” and “Christ Preaching at the Henley Regatta.” One sees much

the same style being developed around materials that appeal to feelings more sturdily ordinary (Kafka and Spencer, ordinary?!). Such appeals are muted by the advancing style. A number of Davenport's selections here, then, are really paintings slipping from Balthus over into abstraction, wrapped in a cover calculated to promise guidance by way of an internal Global Positioning System. And the patience with ourselves that Davenport recommends—with our desire for more conventional appeals to feeling—is actually modeled for us by Kafka in another wicked, earlier piece here, "The Chair," which studies the young Czech lawyer's "ox-like patience" in trailing after the movements of a self-importantly vacuous rabbi at Marienbad in 1916. Thus the architectonic intelligence can outwait, and outlast, the conventional "plump pace" of an outgrown, vacuous *paideia*. Teachers! they psych you out. A cautionary anecdote about Joseph Cornell, "Pergolesi's Dog," is also here to catalog insistent, hilarious errors of perception, even by Chaucer and Keats. So boredom with GD may turn out to be a joke that's on us.

In van Hovendaal he developed, within a pastoral Fourier frame (he actually questions the use of "utopian" for Fourier) an ample template of his own traits: erudite polymath, writer and painter, and attentive, precise, provocative teacher. It is no surprise that the lecture notes sketched while walking to class, in "Every Force Evolves a Form," unfold in the same architectonic style as his narratives. Pound, Olson, and Winters also taught ceaselessly; our windswept day, its air filled with chaff and the cries of shills and zealots, has brought out this educative function in force. Davenport shaped that role as performance, part of his style.

But one that also left him wondering. Herewith a scrap from the oral tradition: to John Matthias on the telephone during his last year Davenport said, "People will not read my work in the future, because they have forgotten how to walk, to talk, and to read." Neither irony or morbidity, that, but a settled conviction, for he had written in "Ernst Machs Max Ernst" circa 1980 that the writing and drawing he pursues (he reminds us that the Greek verb *graphein* means both to draw and to write), in a zone like Max Ernst's "which is always of verifiably real things that are not, however where they are supposed to be," instills "a skill of reading that has been abandoned for so long that we can't accept it."

In the rest of this notice let me swiftly scope the main drift of Davenport's style as I read it, then offer one response by way of that unavoidable sister-arts metaphor, *depth*.

If seeing means at root both writing and drawing, and walking and talking must be relearned (because things get displaced and one must move to get to them, and file a report with the mapping office), then matters of

the tribal archaic, of childhood and youth, and of species evolution indeed converge. Seeing anew, already Joseph Conrad's dictum in 1900, turns toward the grid of mapping because art must teach it to us, by voyage or on foot (in the same "Circumspectus:" "An author must keep making a map of the geography he's leading us across, making familiar and congenial the just seen"). Viktor Shklovsky's estrangement effect, like Ernst's removal effect in alienating the familiar, dictates the next step, a change of tone that would make the strange more familiar. The Fourier stories became Davenport's lab, floating a sequence of unrepression and peculiar lightness that sponsors three intuitions: (1) First, this thing is organized in ways I cannot perceive right off; it is meant to teach me as well as these spunky pubes. (2) Fourier's elaborate harmonics of desire and affinity, his schedules of relationship, work, and play, seem juvenile only at times; their stimulating-slash-tedious atmosphere, the replete vocabularies of sex and keen perception, bend things as water seems to bend a straw, across a boundary into total regeneration. But (3) if this learning is also *anamnesis*, the Platonic-Socratic recovery of functions inborn but silted over (as it is already by way of Thoreau, Menenius, and a note on "inborn nature" in the haunting "A Concord Sonata" collected here), then unfettered development is a jig danced by both Freud and Sokrates among the *phalanges* of proto-socialist Charles Fourier, and my own learning mixes anamnesis and developmental completion with constructivist freedom, as a compensation to the spirit of this time. Catch-up ball invigorated as discovery. Which changes the hard-work tone of a catch-up game to rebirth's second adolescence and even a higher innocence.

This new tone bids to lighten the burden pressed speculatively onto history by philosophy in our time, Marx's dialectic, which Frederic Jameson's *Singular Modernity* rephrases: "an ontology of the present demands not prophecies of the past but archaeologies of the future." Can this slight thing, an elfin game of shifted tonalities, really do that? Indeed it may not, yet that is its thrust in Davenport's hands. In fact, archaeology lies buried in plain sight throughout "Wo es war, soll Ich werden," as bardic nested form or Homeric ring composition (that story alludes to its own concentric "nested order," and in both versions of it a reader can dig up the symmetrical details of this subliminally organizing factor, one of them a blind folksinger who is up to no good). The same nested order can be dug up in some of the other stories. Jameson's own study of Fourier in *Archaeologies of the Future*, and Barthes's in *Sade Fourier Loyola*, do not encompass or explain what Davenport is up to with this arch, frank, provocative, second-innocence tone. His bardic insert of nested order, however, parallels Jameson's own category-flipping recourse to the Taoist *wu-wei* in *Brecht and Method*, where Marxist

praxis, stymied everywhere by neoliberal stasis, needs to revive “the older precapitalist sense of time itself, of the change or flowing of all things.” That is, Davenport rests and nests his architectonics for shifting our learning upon the latent powers and patterns that will actually support movement.

Fourier’s Harmony ideology inspired American experiments more than any other program (Rexroth’s book on communalism tallies with GD here), but only a handful of these experiments lasted more than a few weeks. Davenport’s long novella *Apples and Pears* of 1981, and its coda “The Death of Picasso” (its notebook entries spiked to Fourier’s calendar), draw the process out; it *has got to take time*. Even so, extension comes to mean morphing, not staying put. Van Hovendaal writes in his notebook: “Does Fourier’s uncluttered imagination belong to philosophy or art? I see him surviving in the verve and color of Roger de la Fresnaye, Delaunay, Lurçat. Was he a philosopher at all? Braque is the better epistemologist.” Surviving, that is, not in communal arrangements but in Cubist paintings that rework perception and teach energy transfer. Again, the lecture-notes in “Every Force Evolves a Form” track birds and the ancient winged *daimon* swooping through Darwin and English and American poetry as “modulations in a long tradition, a dance of forms to a perennial spiritual force.” *Tradition* alive cleans house and garden, vacating a philosophical system to inhabit painting. And Fourier survives in these Dutch stories of adolescent fledging as an energy transfer, social-visual-verbal, or not at all.

In Jung’s language, Davenport constantly skirts the archetype of transformation, his subject even in the sterling exegesis of Olson’s “The Kingfishers” in 1974. Let me review two of Fourier’s tenets which van Hovendaal adapts to his gardening, and then look briefly at the 1980 “Death of Picasso.”

First, children in Fourier are neuters who serve as “the principal source of links,” including saving affection across classes; and each father in the *phalange*, because he performs many kinds of work, takes keen interest in protégés, especially poor kids, who better his own son. Second, we are deluded in thinking that each of us has an integral soul. It takes 810 passional types to comprise the soul, their combinations going into the thousands, and the *phalanges* related them through a calendrical and festival gearing that fulfills human totality. No disastrous suburban isolation, no urban squalor, no anomie. The archetype of the anthropos, whether in Greek thought or the canonical gospels (“My house has many rooms”), in Fourier finds its social incarnation under Louis Napoleon in the decades of *Spleen idéale* and Wordsworth’s maturity. It speaks to GD in the decades of James Howard Kunstler’s books on sprawl and social entropy. “The phalanstery

is a whole village in a building as big as the Louvre: Corbusier's inspiration for his Marseilles apartment house" (*Apples and Pears*). Jung, whose work on collective psychology pivots on his analysis of the *anthropos* archetype, would say that Fourier projected that archetype of primal man onto a fantastically differentiated social screen. Davenport somewhat concurs, in *Apples and Pears*, having Adriaan van Hovendaal teach Jan that Fourier's harmonic series of attractions elaborate what Levi-Strauss studies in tribes. "Society as poetry rather than the newspaper prose of history. Practically all that's tacit in civilization is concerned discourse in the primitive." Jung replies: —But while going native is unavoidable, the modern person must get his return ticket as soon as the regression is no longer restorative. Davenport: —Machines both moral and cranked have killed off too much for too long for us to get through this in a hurry. "Science and poetry from the Renaissance forward have been trying to discover what is alive and what isn't. In science the discovery spanned three centuries, from Gassendi to Niels Bohr, and the answer is that everything is alive" (the essay on Olson's "Kingfishers"). Jung: —I know, Nobelist Pauli and I have met at a depth of 1,000 meters in the Alchemy/Quantum Café to work it out acausally: the depth aspect of so-called dead matter, we find, is life.

To make out what *depth* is in Davenport's Fourier-backed stories, experimentally I tallied themes and details from two weeks of journal entries, or prose ideograms, from 17 to 30 Germinal in van Hovendaal's sketchbook in "The Death of Picasso." Radio reports of the death reach the island where Adriaan has taken wild-child Sander from Amsterdam (and from rolling naked in the snow in Paris) to recover from trauma and abandonment, teaching him mapping, drawing, and natural sexual freedom, and recalling his work with another boy, Bruno, at Sounion in Greece. Philosopher-painter Adriaan writes lucidly on Picasso, while Sander, we come to see, is like the great Spaniard, "between urban sophistication and benign savagery." The Defoe and Rousseau precedents for what they are doing come up—Adriaan cites them to Sander to lend depth to his recuperation. *Depth* in these entries begins to percolate every which way: Picasso's sensing of deep time through still life and tableau rivals the best work in classics, prehistory, and anthropology; deep time and evolution play across the island-scape as transparencies, "gulls squawking Joyce" and wheeling as subatomic quanta. Painting, in Adriaan's notes, becomes European drama's guide-rail for several hundred years, and Fourier survives in Delaunay and Braque. Depth even reverses field in *paideia*, the teacher finding new depth for himself in his ward's innocence. Recollection, curative forgetting of trauma, and regenerative recovery all take on depth within the caesura of luminous death. The

final depth is civilization's filmy play, foraging yet idle, across the abyssal world. "Nature has no destiny for us.... We perish, however, the instant we take our eyes off nature." Erotic foraging among the bawdy latent integrals in our development takes that depth as its scrim. Thus this story caps *Apples and Pears*: it recasts Sokrates, Butler and Fourier, Freud's best followers, and our own experimental *Bildung* programs as patterns sophisticated and primal, so that depth arises from active *foraging*—a key term throughout Davenport—carried by a tone in which the strange (to civilization) grows gently familiar.

What does this tone accomplish? It presides over this very morphing of the whole enterprise of Fourier's social *paideia* into new art. That recursion twists the main key, for without it Davenport would stick with the elegiac "A Concord Sonata," an acme architectonic achievement about our "in-born nature" but one left suspended in the definitional longings of Thoreau and Mencius for a misplaced human quid. Mencius's philosophy was its recovery, but the "Sonata" can only proclaim it through juxtaposition with Thoreau. Whereas the Plato dialogue *dramatized* such recovery. Davenport shoots for a comparable form now, which includes the arts Plato chose to zone out, and the horseplay to which he barely alluded. In it, walking, talking, and reading/seeing make up one old-new, strange-*natural* business. Recursion miniaturizes an advance: the systematic projection of the *anthropos* archetype by Fourier gets taken back into Adriaan's form-thinking and a pocket social lab-therapy setting for the whole tribe.

So I ask myself: is this tone, with its deeply stimulating effect, its bounteously nourishing and authentic materials, a new step for architectonic narrative? And I reply, No, not quite, not yet.

Why not? Probably because we all still chew on the bone thrown out by Nietzsche in his *Zarathustra* mystery play of *paideia*, where Plato's dialogue inflects from the abortively social into daimonic rhapsody. In the Prologue his inflationary mouthpiece, haranguing a crowd as a teacher whose voice thins out because he gets past himself, out of his depth with what grips him, tumbles into a *paideia* he cannot master. What makes this text prophetic is its possessional quality; it remains representative, its process collective to this day. Zarathustra insists that the head is only the bowels of the heart, the heart causing us to go down in order to achieve a genuine progression or over-going—which the fatal rope-dancer episode seems to announce, but which autonomously brings up for Nietzsche, as it does for his mouthpiece, the consequences of symbol-death for one image of God—*symbol-death* as art historians talk it, but as Nietzsche the involuntary prophet came to know it. It is sobering to go into this text, read the best philosophical commentar-

ies on Nietzsche by Stanley Rosen and others, and discover, with Jung's help from his Nietzsche seminars of the mid to late 1930s, that philosophy still fails to read the psychological revelation in this teaching which both the imagined audience and imagined teacher—and the philosopher imagining both—witness helplessly, the heart of the greater unconscious indeed asking that we carefully keep our eyes on it in this open-air classroom or perish.

“We have invented happiness!” roars the crowd. Yet Nietzsche the writer has not invented everything in this episode. I tread delicate ground here, for both literary and philosophical folk are used to taking command of what the psyche brings it. The altered depth of architectonic writing and visual work, that entire achievement itself, has been moved into place by this heart, the unconscious psyche, which makes the brightest heads its digestive tract. The depth behind such depth is what spoke through, not only as, Nietzsche in the Prologue, already showing the consequence of transformation that comes to us over our heads, from our “inborn nature.” The dialogue between these two depths is what I miss in the subtly dramatized teaching tone of the van Hovendaal stories, where the invisible stream of spiritual force, pawky and invigorating in its Fourierist expansion, often a rounded joy, none the less smoothes out the intake from the bathysphere. Item: Davenport includes as ideograms in *Apples and Pears* his fine translations (as Adriaan's) of Rilke's First and Fifth *Duino Elegies* on the angels and the acrobats, where they lend deeper ground to both Fourier and the actively growing children of the novella. Yet their chief companion poems in the story are Shaker hymns, mighty things indeed but cleanly planed in the Light. And the interpretation offered to Rilke on “6 Fructidor”—the angels as “the quiring that Fourier saw as a destiny of attractions... messengers in that the composite knows how to appropriate the random” (memories of apples, longing in our eyes)—has no Rilkean terror in't. Item: the same sort of smoothing is administered to Herakleitos's crucial fragment on development, vis-à-vis Fourier, on pages 200 and 286. First, “The series distributes the harmonies. The attractions are proportionate to our destinies. Character is fate,” and then, with Fourier's Harmony meant not as utopia “but as human advantages being successful, after a history of confusion and defeat. The severity of the defeat keeps us from seeing what he meant. Character, for instance.” Analysis of class history and the Spenglerian diagnosis comes down to this: “Character is the ground of the harmony, as it was for Shakers, Mennonites, and other pioneer harmonian communities.... Duty and loyalties are structures inside affection.” Hooray, this acknowledges the spine which these overlooked communities in fact have. But it also steps around the response to our severe defeat which the heart, the greater unconscious

psyche in Nietzsche's Prologue, speaks over his head and past the mass audience blinking its eyes and roaring its preferences. O Rare Guy Davenport, either I have misread your lucid intricacies or you have laid them out on tables deliberately set apart from the sulphur-riven ground.

Depth indeed comes out onto the surface in architectonic narrative. A contemporary whose name I have lost has said that depth is that aspect of form which appears on the surface. Fourier's projection of the *anthropos* likewise socially exfoliates what civilization deforms, bringing human advantage into a spacious busy light, a Bucky Fuller dome for all of Gauguin's children. Depth is manageable there because it is visible. Its workings do not end history, capital enterprise, or class tensions, but reorganize them to serve our original advantage. Yet Nietzsche's *katabasis*, his program of down-going which is no invention of his own, at its pivotal moment of inwardness stands troubled and speechless before collective programs of fulfillment. Davenport's *paideia* and Nietzsche's talk past each other, as genuine complementarities, quantum and wave. The depth of architectonic transparency, moved to awareness by tragic losses, is not an alpine valley's hyper-clear depth overlaid by incoming cloud. Davenport's anthropology is not to be faulted in this perspective, but only seen accurately. Its fullest degree of consciousness remains unsplintered; Picasso goes with Balthus and Burchfield, the best of Freud with his antagonist Pound. In "A Field of Snow on a Slope of the Rosenberg" in *Da Vinci's Bicycle* of 1979, Robert Walser, in an asylum up one of those Swiss valleys, discourses to Doktors Hassenfuss and Vogel beneath their portraits of Freud and Jung: "It says in the pages of Mach that the mind is nothing but a continuity of consciousness. It is not itself a thing, it is its contents, like an eye and what it sees, a hand and what it holds. Mach's continuity, like Heraklit's river, defines itself by its flow.... It is so obvious..., once you have seen it. The mind is what it knows! It is nothing else at all, at all."