



TEN FOUR

◊ POEMS ◊
◊ TRANSLATIONS ◊
◊ VARIATIONS ◊

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MIKHL LIKHT

an operating system print://document





THE OPERATING SYSTEM PRINT//DOCUMENT

TEN FOUR : POEMS, TRANSLATIONS, VARIATIONS

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was designed and produced by Lynne DeSilva-Johnson in conjunction with Rothenberg and Resnikoff's October 4th "Fantasy Reading" at Bowery Poetry. The title, "Ten Four" is a temporal marker, an anagram of "fortune," and a nod to the radio ten-code for understanding another's transmission, an apt metaphor for a volume with a lineage in translations and variations.

The Likht Variations were first published on Wave Composition & will appear again in Rothenberg's forthcoming, *A Field on Mars: Poems 2000-2015*, to be published in simultaneous English and French editions by Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre.

"The Hotel Monopol" will also appear in *A Field on Mars*.

The poets would like to extend big thanks to the Bowery Poetry Club, & to Elizabeth Peters & Ariel Yelen, specifically, for the invitation to read, and to Roslyn Wood, for permission and encouragement in the publication of the Likht translations.

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LIKHT

**PROCESSION : V
(EXCERPT)**







THE LIKHT VARIATIONS, WITH SNAKES AND STONES

*Wandering in the wasteland
I saw the snakes smile
their dusty skins
in convulsions
of laughter.*

(Mikhl Likht, "Legend")

1/
the weak reproach
of someone's membranes
painted yellow

dust kicked up
by snakes
whose pale eyes
match your own

what schemes
we live with
face to face

the mould
of years
the blood
of tyrants

& the fire
cleansing them
of doubts

/// ROTHENBERG | 5 ///





Pan plays for them
brutes that the sun
rains down on
that the time allows

they slide
& slither
from the bottom up

2 /
snake
skins

that the dust
entombs

the wasteland
covers

legends
grow apace

convulsions
rise

& laughter
matters

3/
atop a mountain
stones
are hammered down
stone after stone

the sun
ignites the air
a carnival
atop a mountain





in a show
with wagging
tongues
stones touching stones

& casting shadows
stones in heaps
the luck of brothers
binding brothers

fire in the sky
a heap of stones
& how a hammer
raised aloft

can signal
joy

4/
are sorrows
carmine colored
like a kiss
squeezed tight
with tongs
a kiss or something
hot inside
our mouths
a ritual of blood
driving all creatures
mad
even you

5/
her breast
comes open
spilling dust
& rust
around her





skinny virgin
whom a genie
fills with love
the gods
with hate

their salutations
stiffen her
leaving her prey
to what they aim at her
down to the basest
offal

6/
delight
in blueness
or in scum
that flows
from hollows

there is magic
in the place
where blades glint
hopes still live
deep in the vortex

the long stretches
air so thick within
it loses
any rhythm
in the season's calm

a yellowness
of air
we cut through
with a pair
of hatchets





somnambulism
guides us
lethargy returns
a zephyr floating
overhead

something to envy
skulls that time
has left behind
chameleons with diamonds
on their bellies

yiddish symphonies
up from the depths
its waters
bursting
from a stone

they practice
immobility
grass covers earth
like scales
or wings

one thought
a thousand
movements
forced vibrations
in the sea

a hatchet
clatters down
dispersing points
of dust
& sand

a plane
above us
diving
down
& out





7/

a hatchet like a dream in yiddish strikes them flanks & bellies tremble
timber swells a cryptic compromise sucks up the fragrance from the floor
before a fire cracks the silence springing up along the path the little nothings
seen are both a promise & a violation

like a dream in yiddish stones drop down & houses bring forth fountains
sight forsakes your eyes & over on your left rugs cover windowpanes
with eyelids shut somebody twice a nobody cries slander creativity an
archipelago with houses set aflame a measure of how matter drags us down
of how our hands hide glass utensils how on your right the windows of
an attic form a mouth a stone frame near the house's peak

how like a dream in yiddish I am near you how a scarecrow's heart
starts swelling in an eerie earthlight seen from far away we sit on facing
chairs the walls are like a morgue's a damp anarchic void surrounds us
steel & stone a mountain house a buddhist forest shadows of our feet
beneath an oaken table from our ears bejeweled rings are dangling pipes
connect us to our roots a yiddish cry for judgment where a creature lurks
& nobody replies

8/

eyes in his head like crystal scorpions god's crooked loins vibrating until it
shakes the street makes bridges fall & scatter like a line of snakes responding
to the way his breath blows & the streets grow foggy parapets shoot through
the air & drop straightdown in the abyss through which we make our way
by impulse drifting past the intersection of two streets at left & right an
airborne chase a trip that takes us to the middle of a further street a snake
at one side testing our courage shaken by its fateful noise refracted through
bright prisms sparks of energy a dance that cracks our ribs the rhythms
of a world reduced to chaos yesterday erased with scarce a care

[Written in the process of reading Mikhl Likht's Protseseyes/Processions along with the translation from Yiddish by Ariel Resnikoff & Stephen Ross, while following the procedures set earlier in my Lorca Variations. A tribute both to Likht & to his language.]





AT THE HOTEL MONOPOL IN BRESLAU

PROEM. [Summer 1988] *It was raining when we got to Wroclaw, the miles from Auschwitz bringing back the memories of what had happened there. Traveling with our son we had made reservations for a single suite at the Hotel Monopol, but when we pulled in, the hotel could only come up with two separate rooms. After a while, though, the desk clerk said that they had found a suite for us that was free. An elderly bellhop carried our bags up the central flight of stairs, threw the big doors open, put our bags down on the floor, & asked me with a little smile, "And do you know who slept here?" Then he answered his own question: "Hitler!—And he made a speech from that balcony." After which he turned & closed the doors behind him, leaving us to think again about our fate & theirs.*

in the room
where Hitler slept
dreams didn't come
but sounds
broke from the walls

& cracked
then crackled
made us stare down
past our feet
the dance beginning

/// ROTHENBERG | 11 ///





while over our heads
the lights would flicker
one-two-three-four
brought to life
we stepped out

on his balcony
& hailed the crowds
hard faces
four-two-three-one
theirs like ours

our fingers flat
above our lips
looking like hairs [two fingers held above his lip]
bunched up
touched by his tongue

the rain falls
upside-down
from iron boxes
the dead outside the ring
surround us

cousins fallen
bird-eyed
where the rain
like tiny knives
opens their wounds

children & rain
the redfaced killers
reach up to the man
the victims without faces
broken underfoot





four-one-three-two
I hadn't been there
where the lines of gymnasts
march to the sounds
of open flesh

for them his face
is golden
old as time & echoing
the cry of what can never
be reborn



YINGLOSSIA

*to escape the perpetual torments inflicted upon it
the dybbuk-tongue seeks refuge in a garbled mouth...*

(A)

My chronic itch
may it bring health upon our navel
for small favors
w/ minor fortunes
& big doings --
THE REAL DEAL:
a-thenticity
I don't give a hang about.
To all those happy-go-lucky people
they should live!
What a few chews wldn't do
after midnight
when the hostess serves
peanut hors-d'oeuvres.
As long as a lung
or liver hangs
on the nose
another disease made
easier to stomach
rash on my ass
made less to bare.





Maw to the ear might
serve me right
for a year & a Wednesday
a slice of gan eden.
Healthful as a body
can be (under the
circumstances.
Tho it shldn't happen
to the worst of us
(cld be said about
any of us. Too smart to do it
ourselves
in spite of everything that
churns out wrong.
Culturally impudent finicky bagatelle.
Getting senile?
Find some absented-mind
ed peace already.
An alphabet for
alphabet
's first language
jitters. & to all those
cobblers
walking barefoot
thru the streets
give them shoes!
Not the one & just
-born excuse
in over-dressed wandering.
Majority rules. Minority's
a joke.
Really? That's
how it goes?
That's what they said.





(B)

Concealed in
bobby-yarns
inventing lift-off
praise
for rolls w/ holes. Burying
our names
fared no easy feat.
“Teamsters!”
they screamed
(the respectable
 chews, “waggoneers,
“coachmen! dis-honorable
“faith-healer
“gossips
“drummed-up
“a barren taboo
“fornicated
“for the fun of it!”

“So don’t screw
“me around,” slashing out
the show-pup rebbe
spoke:

“You there, in a hurry
“standing on one leg
“what are you, nuts?
“While white-cheese pancakes
“puff hot pride
“over bobby-yarns!”





(Small things, peanut holdovers,
the price of hotelroom
in the Catskills.

Still fond of
borsht botshvine
brunches
chronic stomach
ache made brave.





TEACHINGS OF THE MAGIC KOHLE RABİ : IV

[WISDOM CHANGE]

in or that
concealment of
un-concealment

mind-numbing slides
we abided
by

total
mudness.

...

*Go thee then
as far as thee can
go, shall find
a thing as close
as can be:*

*(even Viennese schnitzel
in Kanyakumari ...*





*Only when you go
you find
you cannot know
if you
are less-than
or more
-than
one.*

...

So what?! If the shit's human
shit

it's not enough
to say

it you've gotta
prove it.

The clock-safe ticks
only after

inserting the coin
you can wind.





NOT FROM MEMORY

Wasps & bees banned together
(meanwhile
without permission
of the birds

to state the obvious:

at the Borsalino Hat Store in Bnai Brak
the man at the counter asks

after my accent:

nu, vus bistu, chabad?

Not me.
At least

not from
memory
tho
before
around
over
after
again.

Not from any where but
 body knuckle bone

non-mind

idiom of
sound





PROCESSION : V (EXCERPT)

[AB OVO]

From the dark ways

From bare fidgetings

From the schematic tarantella-motifs
From sufficient machinations intoxicated by bright shimmershine
From the silent smoking modifications
From the cool blue hazes veiled in early morning light
From the rumbling motor cavalcades
From the elongated unimpeded zeppelins

From neutral genres in nature painting
From sunken water-secrets swaying U-boats
From dumb hearing and pupil billy goat glances
From wilted tulips and sister-flowers in Long Island hothouses
From A-G minor concert piece
From entangled concept over godlessness, Chinese braid and pale financier
From pearly summer-storm onset

From hasty wagers over accidental yes's and relative no's
From spiritual germinations and material finishes (and vice versa)
From trolley-clanging violated through radio's manifold hoo-ha
From the weariness of pedestrian city-street step
From the inertia and forced vivacity of the staff of clothing-and-other stores
From bells angelus-chatter in church-spires
From nightwatchman's burdened eye
From mother's and wet-nurse's mechanical chasings after childrens' paths
in squares, streets, parks
From seething howls of productive and destructive machinery
From blind cellars' miasmic atmosphere
From forced bending from full height under flat, subterranean ceilings
From obscene creatures wheezing in little houses
From birds' metatarsal altitudes

/// LIKAT | 21 ///





From complete aircraft signals
From patient waiting for *something new*

Life shall live itself out

Generated itself elderly energy:

death

I.

[A STORY WITH A MOUSE]

Alone. Solitary, without anyone, without myself
am I
(to me). Someone should, who knows,
even thru a crack, a little gap the dimensions
try to turn a creature into a point, a little nail
from a threatening hand, -- throw a thinking cushion
to the shut in head like the majority
among bubbly girl friends the morning after sleep.
I Spring myself covertly
the between-summerwinter-autumn. Hint:
My wife
is to me (what the world ought to be) the old Jewish catchall;
My mother --
the baker's bread, farmer's butter;
My palatial spacious house --
The museum of every bubble and squeak
that ostentationalizes the senses; pomposifies the brains. --

A shudder in a mouse's cornerroom:
the full power of a god's prompting.

[THE SAME: MORE TO THE POINT]

Dovebosoms. Mine, yours, everyone's --
no one's.
God forbid!, I don't begin to be alone
and sweeter than a worm in horseradish
is the duality (ours) to me: mouse's
and mine. Oh people of lonely! Oh those





famous *nikhbodim*¹ who spin themselves
out from, into, events as if from-into flax a coarse fabric:
Sleep robs a hair from you
then comes to poetry-lore;
You take a little nap
You tear life (a supplement to prose) into itty-bitty pieces --
with dovebosoms one lives life out like oneself the *zhmenke* years,
But this year the yarmulke diaspora-tree shall suffice:
in the coming year -- in Soviet Russia, in Mexico, in Galveston:
if necessary -- in Jerusalem.

[THE DOVES DO NOT WANT TO PART FROM THEIR BOSOMS]

The mouse will somewhere finally find rest with us
even if it costs us a thousand-and-one dumplings!
We will lead ourselves with a cow
a bull, with a nanny goat and ram.

For ourselves we will erect a house (a home²),
the livestock -- a stable. And for the sickly little mousey?
With holes we must devote ourselves to God
for our service in shul and shtibl.

We will as it suits us crawl from the skin
through all cracks to redemption: either as guards
of our own renewal -- sowing cabbage
with onion, becoming bakers, farmers;

or giving up corrupt “liberal” professions --
with that, draw in “The Internationale”; the handyman
becomes our beloved anew -- industrious and new,
it will completely carry itself out song to God.

And the enemies of Israel will become the young Zionists,
and Allenby and Balfour -- Moses and Aaron,
and we will then, who knows, arrive where --
we’re off already -- we’re coming -- make way!

Translated from the Yiddish by Ariel Resnikoff & Stephen Ross

[1: respectable people]





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NOTES AND COMMENTARY





Jerome Rothenberg is an internationally celebrated poet with over ninety books of poetry and twelve assemblages of traditional and avant-garde poetry such as *Technicians of the Sacred* and *Poems for the Millennium*, volumes 1-3. Recent books of poems include *Concealments & Caprichos*, *A Cruel Nirvana*, *A Poem of Miracles*, and *Retrievals: Uncollected & New Poems 1955-2010*. His most recent big book is *Eye of Witness: A Jerome Rothenberg Reader*, and *Barbaric Vast & Wild: An Assemblage of Outside & Subterranean Poetry from Origins to Present* has just been published as volume 5 of *Poems for the Millennium*. Scheduled for 2016 is *A Field on Mars: Poems 2000-2015*, to be published in simultaneous English and French editions by Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre.



Ariel Resnikoff is a poet, translator & editor. His chapbook, *Between Shades*, came out in 2014 from the Materialist Press. He is currently at work on a translation into English of Mikhl Likht's Yiddish modernist long poem, *Protsesiyes* (Processions), in collaboration with Stephen Ross. Ariel is a Commissioning Editor at Wave Composition & coordinates the "Multilingual Poetics" reading and talk series at Kelly Writers House. He was awarded a 2013/14 Dorot Fellowship & is currently a doctoral student in the department of Comparative Literature & Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania.



Mikhl Likht (1893-1953) was a Yiddish American poet, critic & translator, whose radical masterwork, *Protsesiyes* (*Processions*), accompanies & may even prefigure the long-poem experiments of English language masters like Pound, Williams, Loy & Zukofsky, with all of whom he was in contact. The excerpt from "*Procession: V*," published here, is part of an ongoing effort by Merle Bachman, Stephen Ross, Jerome Rothenberg & Ariel Resnikoff to bring Likht's Yiddish modernist long poem into English. A complete translation of *Processions* by Resnikoff & Ross is currently in the works.





////THE OPERATING SYSTEM IS A QUESTION, NOT AN ANSWER.

THIS is not a fixed entity:

The name “The Operating System” was chosen to speak to an understanding of the self as a constantly evolving organism, which just like any other system needs to learn to adapt if it is to survive. Just like your computer, you need to be “updating your software” frequently, as your patterns and habits no longer serve you.

What is The Operating System? An ongoing experiment in resilient creative practice which morphs as its conditions and collaborators change. It is not a magazine, a website, or a press, but rather an ongoing dialogue ABOUT the act of publishing on and offline: it is an exercise in the use and design of both of these things and their role in our shifting cultural landscape, explored THROUGH these things.

Whether on- or off-line, all publishing produced by the The OS can be most accurately described as documentation: an archive of creative production and process. We publish to exemplify a belief that people everywhere can train themselves to use self or community documentation as the lifeblood of a resilient, independent, successful creative practice.

We currently publish a spring chapbook series of 4 volumes each year, read rolling submissions for full length volumes continuously; and print conceptual edited collections of text, art, and less easily defined work in “magazine” form. Via a recent alliance with Brooklyn Arts Press, all future volumes will now be distributed through SPD.

Our ongoing, online original series, Field Notes and [Re:con]versations, seek to create an online home for process dialogue, increasing the value of the work we as creative practitioners are already engaged in, as well as encouraging an open-source peer learning environment amongst creators from all mediums. A publication like the one in your hands is a perfect example of the type of extended-value-artifact we seek to nurture into existence around performance, exhibit, or other ephemeral creative output via collaboration with a diverse range of persons and organizations.

On our platform you’ll also find partnerships with cultural organizations modelling the value of archival process documentation -- American Composers Forum, CulturePush, The Mycelium School, and 10,000 Poets for Change, to name a few. 120 living poets have written tributes to their peers, heroes, and mentors via our three annual Poetry Month 30-posts-in-30-days “Inspiration, Community, Tradition” series, and 30 more will join us in 2015.

We welcome unsolicited contributions and are actively seeking ongoing partnerships for online content that fits THE OS’s mission. ...And funding! We are proudly lean and agile, but not too proud to turn away help.





DOC U MENT

/dəkyəmənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

noun - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record
verb - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form
synonyms - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, example, proof, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse, we also believe that now more than ever we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means, fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country
 we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,
 in the place where intention meets resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.
 When we document we assert. We print to make real, to reify our being there.

When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,
 to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space, to respect and acknowledge
 the strength of the page we now hold physical, a thing in our hand...
 we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy: *we had the power all along, my dears.*

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