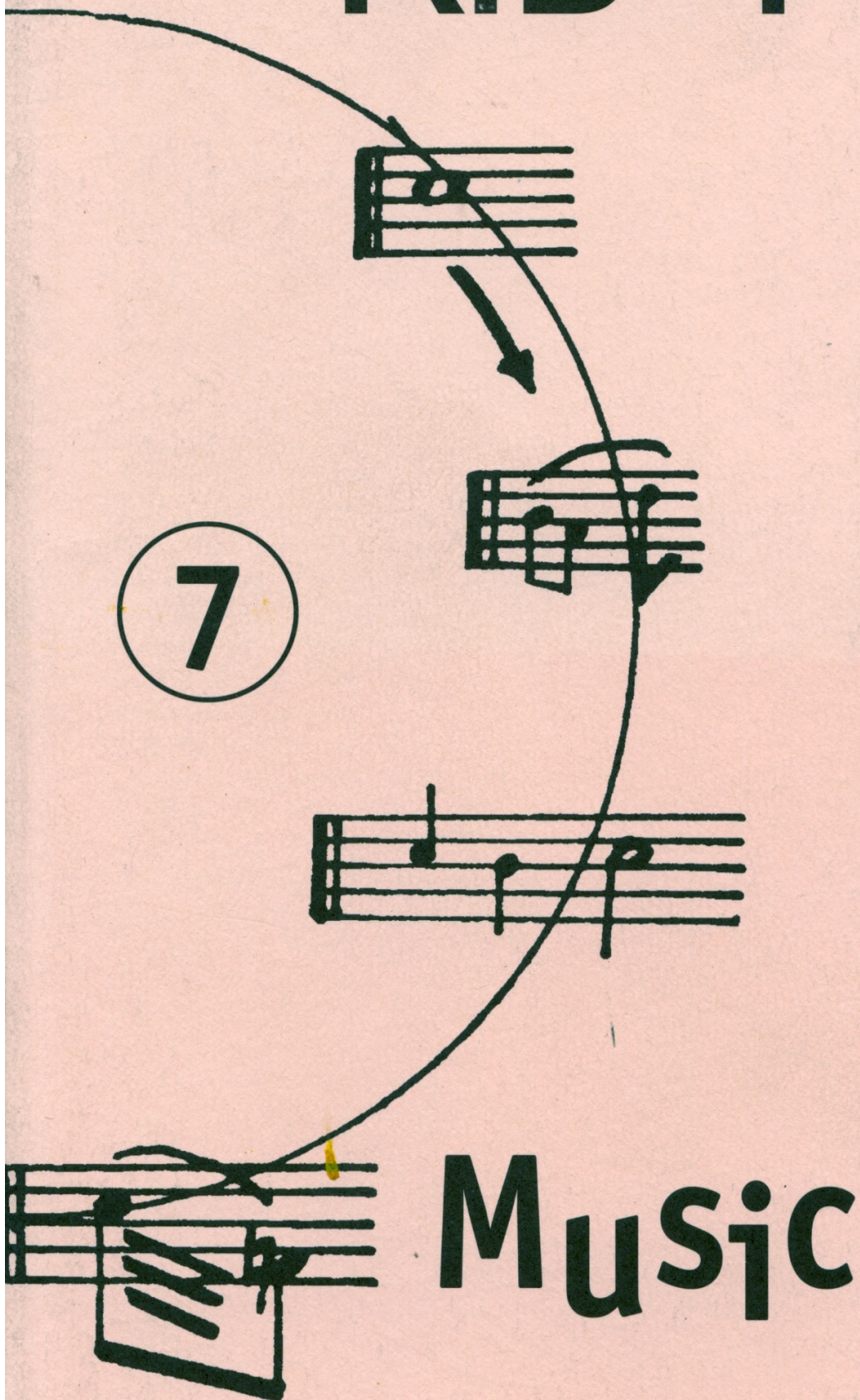


RIBOT

7



Ribot

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With this our seventh number of Ribot, and the College of Neglected Science's eighth year of virtual existence, we come to the end of the twentieth century. The significance of which the editors, as well as the custodians and staff of the College, do not have the least interest in or idea thereof. One thing, though, seems clear enough: the end of this 'low, dishonest decade' cannot come soon enough.

Far from any sort of millennial angst, the College recognizes that much of our cultural life is bankrupt, or perhaps worse, suffering the dim fate of calling itself disruptive, oppositional, experimental or avant-garde, when it remains hopelessly careerist and the stuff of museums. We welcome the new century not so much from a trust or belief in the future but with some hope that it will expose the pervasive corruption of what can only derisively be called 'intellectual life.' Whether mainstream or avant-garde, culture in our society seeks desperately to become institutionalized in a manner disingenuously known as "popular," i.e. commercially youthful, revisionist and laissez-faire.

The College has tried, sometimes unsuccessfully, to keep its distance from this schizophrenic social and political vision, and now, on the threshold of the millennium, takes the opportunity to go out neither with a bang nor a whimper, but a reassessment of the ground gained by the last several generations of writers and artists who lived and worked in this century. To this end we have chosen music, one of the most fundamental urges of poetry, to be the focus of Ribot 7.

When, in the early and mid-seventies, in the poetry tabloid Invisible City, we questioned the conformity of both the confessional and mythopoetic or Black Mountain school (the "dreamers vs. the breathers," as one Los Angeles poet called them), we did so to underline what we thought was naive and self-indulgent in the writing. In short, this conformity embodied and consecrated the all too Anglo-American, internalized and Puritanical response to experience. For all its quirkiness and sometimes curious charm, this notion of writing is essentially opposed to the musicality of poetry, treating it as little more than a signature of individual consciousness— what, most bluntly put, is going on inside the head. Or as Gertrude Stein defines it, "They [poetry and prose] should consist of an exact reproduction of either an outer or inner reality."

Interesting as an anodyne to Victorian prose, such an adamantly reductive view of poetic language has fostered a versification ultimately confused with the most superficial considerations of typography, punctuation and syntax, where a sentence is mistaken for a verse, the lexicon for metaphor, a mental state for imagination or studied irrelevance for ideology.

Whether in the hands of a confessional poet, inditing the melodrama of loss and personal disintegration, or the purportedly innovative compositions of the "language poets," with their mechanical representations of and seemingly endless variations upon critical and vaguely non-experiential paradigms, these institutionalized models of poetic language almost entirely ignore what might be sung— what precedes subjective, self-referential thought— in favor of an entirely internalized speech.

After the last number of Ribot, the College tried a different form of publication, Lowghost 1-12: a monthly, cooperative assembling of one or two page texts from works-in-progress, compiled by some 21 poets invited to participate. These included: George Albion, Guy Bennett, Franklin Bruno, Avery Burns, Jeff Clark, Norma Cole, Robert Crosson, Jacques Debrot, Ray DiPalma, Barbara Guest, John Lowther, Douglas Messerli, Dennis Phillips, Christopher Reiner, Martha Ronk, Leslie Scalapino, Standard Schaefer, Aaron Shurin, myself, Catherine Wagner and Diane Ward. Around the first of each month, texts were sent, in multiples, to the College, to which we added a cover, collated and bound 23 or so copies, and returned the finished magazine to the poets.

Lowghost 1-12 (May 1998-May 1999) was a communal, non-commercial publication, distributed exclusively among the poets engaged in the process. The magazine's title comes from the poetry of Jack Spicer, as well as the epigraph on the title page: "What I mean is words/ Turn mysteriously against those who use them." (If anyone, by the way, is interested in seeing Lowghost, you may contact the College or, perhaps better, one of the above mentioned poets.) From this year-long activity, involving three generations of poets, we made a brief selection of work possessing an essential musicality, what makes poetry enduring and one of the most remarkable and resilient qualities of language.

The other unusual feature of Ribot 7 is the addition of Standard Schaefer as co-editor, and his essay, "Music in Poetry" which follows. In two previous essays, "Preliminary Notes on Literary Poetics," (Rhizome 3, 1999) and "Impossible City" (Talisman 18), Schaefer underlined his distrust of the essential academicism of a kind of poetry which substitutes the writing process, along with aesthetic dogma and posturing, for the prime physical qualities of poetic language. Here he emphasizes that he demands from poetry something prior to meaning or critical theory— "a sensation that produces sense beyond the realm of representations and beyond a conception of language."

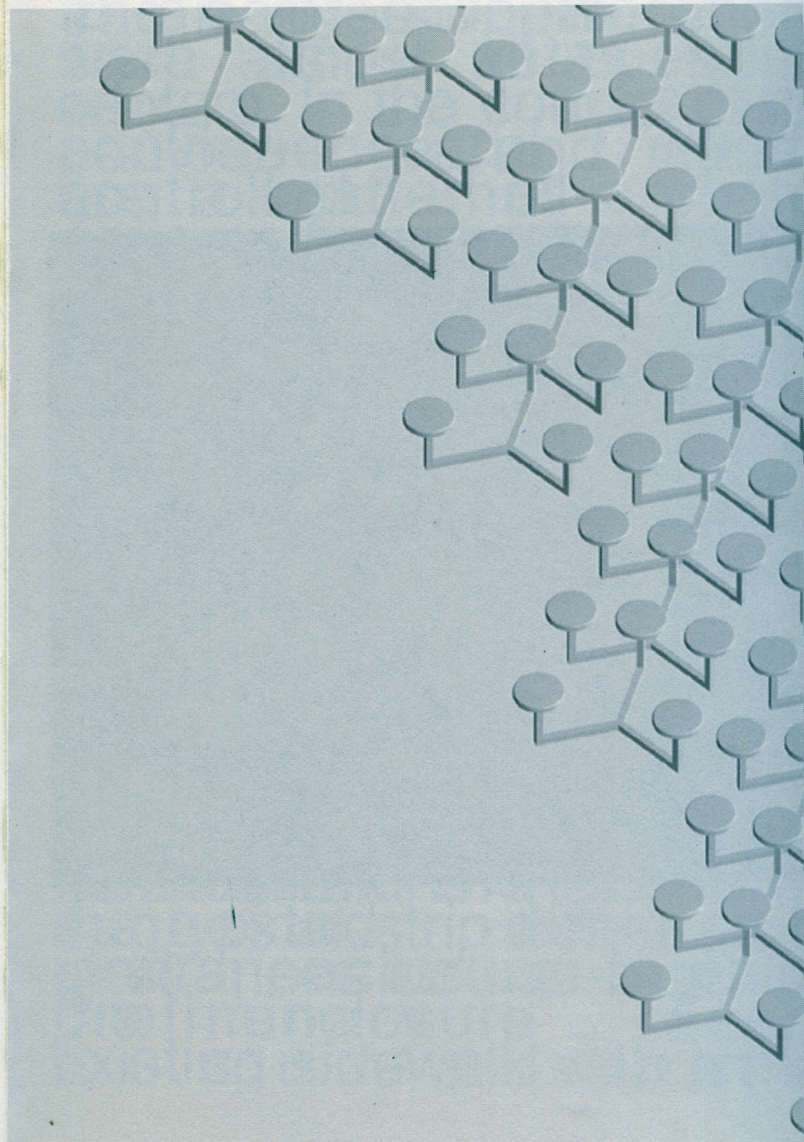
The music of poetry is, for Schaefer, always specific and singular: the "experiential element" of language.

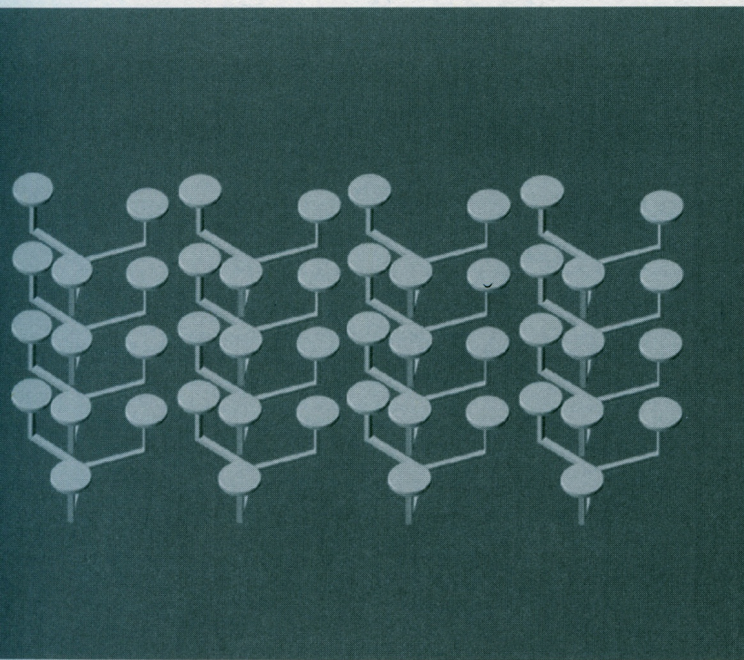
Also, we must mention the group of visual artists and Ribot contributors who generously donated their work to a raffle accounting for a major part of the issue's funding. They are: Kevin Appel, John Baldessari, Ginny Bishton, Karen Carson, Enzo Cucchi, Roy Dowell, Chris Finley, Llyn Foulkes, Charles Garabedian, Scott Grieger, Jill Giegerich, George Herms, Michael C. McMillen, Margaret Nielsen, Alexis Smith, Don Suggs and Tom Wudl. As always, the College's generalist, Don Suggs, was invaluable in organizing the event, "Art Raffle 99," July 17, at the Patricia Faure Gallery in Los Angeles. Special thanks to Brandon LaBelle for his curatorial contribution to the issue.

Finally, we note the passing of the College's librarian, Robert Y. Zachary (March 27, 1921-September 30, 1999). We will never forget his laughter and his most restless and generous of intellects. One of the gentlemen, *con gli occhi onesti e tardi*. We dedicate Ribot 7 to his memory.

P.V.

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