

## THE TYPEWRITER PORTRAIT

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I invented the typewriter portrait one day while I was getting ready to take part in Ugly Duckling Presse/Loudmouth Collective's ANTI-READING at Tonic. The Anti-Reading was created by James Hoff, a kind of carnival in a room involving alternative ways of presenting writing, through performance, emphasizing process and collaboration as opposed to ego and spotlight and boredom of many poetry readings.

The idea was to give away the writing of the other, completely and immediately to the other, to practice writing as non-attachment to results, to make it sacrifice again, an offering, a thank you to existence.

I placed a small desk on the stage at Tonic with my typewriter on it, a black manual "STREAMLINER", the red curtain of the tonic stage in back of me giving everything that "TWIN PEAKS" glow. Whoever would come up to me and ask what I was doing I would say "Would you like to have your typewriter portrait taken?" "Yes" the answer came every time.

Why a typewriter? Vinyl beats CD every time. Analog sound makes me dance, digital makes me numb. The obsolete instruments are inspiring to use--the letter press. In a society where mass production and waste and excess are the rule, the resistance offered by obsolete instruments is key in making art that questions the status-quo in every step of its process. Also, using the typewriter is funny and percussive and encourages spontaneity, you can't go back and erase, you have to launch out and COMMIT and all this makes the other more relaxed when sitting for the portrait.

The other sits before me. I ask questions and in the carnival atmosphere the answers are jovial. "What's your favorite island?" is usually the first question. It gets them thinking about paradise, and what else is art to do but to demand and make paradise now? (perhaps make dystopia as a measure of how far from paradise we are?) I usually follow this with "What's the first image you remember?" As they talk, I type, sometimes what they are saying, sometimes what I am saying to what they are saying, sometimes what somebody across the room is saying. It is a transcribed multi-conversation/language(s)-track and the train is the breath of all of us, PRANA, life-force, moving through, breaking down barriers of ego between us, celebration overtaking us. What remains? A trace of the experience. A record on paper, typewritten page, I give immediately to the other as a GIFT.

My friend, learning of my idea, did the same thing, but typed on carbons, so he could keep the results. At the time I was so orthodox about the idea of giving away, not being attached to the results so you could be as free as possible in inter-other-composition, that I felt quite righteous about not keeping copies. Later I wished that I could see some of the portraits, but was ultimately okay with their absence because of the enormous space opened up by the experiment in my writings of that summer, when I went to visit my family in Belgrade, Serbia.

I stayed with my paternal grandparents and wrote up a storm, revelling in the ghost-presence of the Serbian other-tongue inside the

New York English I was writing in. I would ask people about the war, not out of spectacle-fiending, but curiosity, how do people survive such a thing, a bombing, twelve years and more of constant upheaval, bloodbath, assassination, food shortage, gas shortage, a draft, refugees, THE HORRORS OF WAR. I felt equally curious to find out what was going on in the aftermath, the rebuilding of Belgrade.

But this time I decided I would keep the results. One afternoon when I was feeling blocked, I sat down at the kitchen table with my grandfather and asked him if he would like me to take his typewriter portrait. He loved the idea and we began.

It was much more difficult one on one, without the carnival in the background as accompaniment. Was it ethical what I was doing, going into his memories and extracting fragments and pounding them into the paper with the rattling keys? I decided, yes, this is a celebration of the other and the other in my self and language as other in both of us, and the gaps in the languages, the words standing-in for desire, understudying the desire star, and becoming stars in their own night.

What remains in a typewriter portrait is a record of time spent between two people questioning history, in Charles Olson's sense of the term--History="Check it out for yourself"; "what I found out". It is not an interview because what is emphasized is not so much the other's answers, or mental process, but rather, the "third mind" created by both parties present in the room, as they surrender to the act of recording time, stopping time, making a moment of ecstasy where each is outside of themselves listening to the live mix of each others' minds.

What follows is the typewriter portrait constructed from notes I typed while listening to my grandfather speak in Serbian one afternoon two summers ago of his adventures in love, war, family, travel, all the epic themes reeling through the Balkan oral epic tradition I inherit and complicate and question (so heroically!) in the chaos of the now-- or as Benjamin called it JESTZEIT, the nowtime, the time that must be recovered in a flash in a moment of danger, or be lost forever to the brainwashing of the ruling classes.

### TYPEWRITER FORTRESS--A TYPEWRITER PORTRAIT OF GRAMPA MERCY

1. WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE ISLAND?

--Mljet is my favorite island  
    an island near Dubrovnik  
completely covered with forest  
    in the center a lake of sea water  
    flows through a very slim  
                                    a narrow canal.

My favorite color is Adriatic blue--  
    nothing better than flying over the blue Adriatic--  
like a flying free bird--  
without any control--  
totally alone--.

--Tell me all the memories you have of Mljet.

--In the center of the lake there is an island and on it a hotel  
but I was not in it  
but I lived in a tent  
and I enjoyed the island there was sand on it--  
and I enjoyed a well-prepared fish  
the natives of Mljet caught in the lake--  
a saltwater lake in the middle of Mljet Island--

anyway Mljet is known  
famous--for it is full of mongooses--  
who multiplied since the government brought them in from Indonesia  
a non-indigenous life form  
imported to destroy the snakes  
various snakes--

When the snakes disappeared the mongooses started to feed on  
chicks and chickens and other farmlife  
of the natives.

They--in this way they changed from do-gooders to damagers--

## 2. WHO WAS YOUR FIRST LOVE?

--I was watching in the theater a production from Hunterville  
and I spied through a glass keyhole.  
When the production finished  
one of my acquaintances  
brought her friend  
to meet me. I never knew such  
one girl  
who liked me instantly  
that is how my first love began

(GRAMMA NADA ENTERS)

--Where is my mother?

--She's dead.

--Don't say things like that, Tata.

Where is mother?

In the pantaloons pocket is stuck green powder detergent  
to clean our teeth.

It is four thirty time for Sister Milena to come over.

--Sister Milena's not coming, Nada.

--Why? Oh yes. She has to teach a class today.

--The love affair lasted short  
everything lasted only one spring and one summer.

--Don't talk like that Tata  
don't dirty your pants or lose your glasses

later you will suck the blood from our veins for it.  
Does my Tata want coffee--

--One spring and summer lasted, right?  
Because in the city arrived a foreigner a stranac a stranger who  
yanked away my first love--

...

I was fifteen--it was to me fifteen years--

I had fifteen years--

...

a slightly older stranger

...

took her away from me--my first love--Ana--

...

3. WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE U.S.?

--First of all--when we arrived in Miami Beach--comma--  
I was splashed by the richness of the hotels and  
the beauty of the nature--  
but very quickly I learned two things  
that Americans are individually good people--BUT  
that for them--now open the parenthesis--I mean the quotes

"That the dollar is your master  
and you may not have other gods  
besides him"--

(Nada comes in to hang her wet freshly washed dress on the balcony  
laundry line)

--Milena, why did you run away?  
See how yr Deka gives you company  
remember that when we die --

\*\*\*

--At once I eyed  
the ugly--in Miami beach--  
ugly appearance--apparition--  
segregation and exploitation of position of blacks--  
as they were then called by progressives--  
including the violence over them--



--Did you ever try to learn the BOOGIE WOOGIE?

(He taps his thick reading glasses  
against the white and brown kitchen  
table  
with its tablecloth of brown and white flowers)

--There was a balance  
I was preparing for war  
for Air Force--and along with that  
I used my free time to acquaint myself with people and land  
and I created many friends.

You can add this: Then we Serbs were very popular--  
as Chetniks (the King's guerilla army) were very popular  
u Americi--

--Was socialism ever in view?

--By my thinking New Deal was a road out of Great Depression--  
and in that way to save the existing order--

which allowed America to employ its capacities  
and squiggle around the crisis--

period.

After Pearl Harbor  
the state was taking total control over the economy--  
which always brought out a quicker exit from crisis and  
a more prosperous support of the front--of wartime idealisms--  
at the same time protecting ekonomija in balance.

--If you were holding a talk to the soldiers in Baghdad what would you  
say?

--That that which they are doing is not good for themselves, for  
America  
and for the world (period).  
instead of helping the world poor  
and in that way creating friends for  
themselves.

America is--America started out  
on the road  
of an imperial power--and is coming upon  
the resistance of the subjugated--

who have no other exit than terrorism  
and it is the only vehichle with which the downtrodden  
worker  
can resist the powerful.

--What would you tell the young in America's cities about resistance?

--To fight for one better America--less militant--and more good-creating

good-acting--and in this way create a better life for themselves

and for the rest of the world--instead of a hundred millions for arming--to ask that big means be used for the good and not the destruction of people--the destruction of life.

Dosta? [Enough?]

--Yes--

(He shrugs his shoulders and looks at me.)

--I don't know what else I'd say, enough it is that which I said

maybe I could say

something: (taps glasses on table)

To battle against the Cocacolazation and Hollywoodization of the culture comma and for the real culture's value.

5. WHAT WAS THE FIRST IMAGE YOU REMEMBER?

The first image I saw in my life was the First World War, at the end of the First World War when the soldiers who escaped from the front and came returned home

burned the Austro-Hungarian empire flag-

--Do you know that it is the anniversary of the start of the first World War?

--Yes soon it will be the Second World War wars always begin in autumn, or in the spring--

--Why do they begin in spring?

--In spring so they're finished by fall--

and in the fall because the harvest is gathered to get through the war winter for the leading of an as-short-as-possible war.

Instead of "in the autumn" you should say "end of summer"--you know-

that change-

...

In modern times the history shows not one war was short.  
In modern times.  
Not the First not the Second not Iraq--

even the one against Yugoslavia  
lasted longer than they hoped  
which was begun illegally  
without the okay of the United Nations  
against Yugoslavia.

The moment the European Union took the role of  
mediator in the internal conflicts in Yugoslavia--  
that was the biggest mistake  
Yugoslavia made--that it allowed  
the mixing of outsiders into its internal  
workings  
(period). because mediators didn't serve Yugo  
slavia but their own interests:  
"Germany before everything" so as to liquidate  
the results of the First and Second war of the  
Balkans--

before everything say: Germany  
in the continuation of imperial doctrine Drang Nach Osten  
"penetration into the East"--  
and with this they tried to nullify the results of  
the First and Second World Wars on the Balkans.

My first memory is--the soldiers returning from the first World War  
to Bugojno, Bosna lit the flag of the AustroHungarian empire on fire  
in front of my home. I had then four years.

--What just fell on my smartness  
on my mind?  
In the global cell no one is sure...  
in the global village no one can be sure or secure--  
or independent--

but you should add:

as long as force is  
the way of solving world  
problems  
no one can be sure in the global cell  
no one can be secure in the global cell  
as long as power is the way of solving the world's problems  
from one side or another  
no one can be secure in the global cell.

## EXTENDED FAMILY VOICES

### 1. THE NURSE OVERHEARS

GRAMMA NADA AND GRAMPA MERCY SITTING AT THE  
KITCHEN TABLE AS NADA, COMING OUT OF A TRANCE,  
BEGINS TO CRY:

--Mercy...what is this that's happening to us?

PAUSE

--Darling, you...are sometimes forgetting things.

PAUSE

--Aha...why are we not with our children in America?

SILENCE

--Because nobody wants us there.

GRAMPA MERCY BEGINS TO WEEP.

### 2. TELEPHONE YELL

Grampa Chaki called me today while I was eating lunch at Grampa  
Mercy's apartment:

--DID YOU TAKE DOWN MY TWO PICTURES OF MILOSHEVIC?

--YES.

--WHERE DID YOU PUT THEM?

--INTO THE DRAWER UNDER YOUR BOWL OF PIPES. I DIDN'T WANT HIM LOOKING  
AT ME WHILE I SLEPT, ESPECIALLY TWO OF HIM.

--LISTEN DON'T YOU MESS WITH ME!!! I AM A SICK MAN! ! ! YOU PUT THEM  
BACK, YOU HEAR ME? I'M GOING TO CALL THE POLICE AND HAVE THEM TALK TO  
YOU! I LIKE VERY MUCH TO BE A GOOD GRAMPA AND YOU A GOOD GRANDSON BUT  
THIS IS TOO MUCH, THIS CANNOT BE!

--GOOD. OKAY.

And he hung up. Goodbye  
Chaki, I'm moving on.

### 3. BELGRADE DETAIL

From the basement of Plato's internet cafe  
I write you, Dear Alien Mantaray,



Travel makes you a robe of  
feathers of cemetery geese  
of Brooklyn where you walked  
past graves with Julien and Kailey  
last June before you came to  
Belgrade Ecstasy."

## 5. MARRIAGE ADVICE

"A man has to get married, otherwise  
in four walls alone he dies dies dies..."

Mercy echoes in my basement moment tobacco head.

The videogame boys keep talking but  
new material is not forthcoming.

When you listen for the overheard note  
it never comes. Stop listening and into  
the typing it comes. Typing is TRACTION  
when you slide on wet night road mind.

## 6. AUNT IVANA AND NURSE MIRA:

The NATO planes came for three months. Spring of '99. Left trauma  
traces on many people.

BLACK NIGHT NOT A LIGHT ON--  
Then--FLASH--

sometimes they just circle  
all night for three hours and  
don't drop a single bomb  
and you're like HIT ME ALREADY!

...

A schoolteacher was catching  
empty air on streetcorner.  
When they asked her  
"What are you doing, Misses?"  
she said

"CATCHING AIRPLANES!"

...

In Vojvodina they bombed they hit it they spanked it  
hard the cornfields they hit every day and in Belgrade  
the AJAXES passed over filming everything low filming  
the hospitals schools and Generalshstab headquarters to  
hit and the television building to hit most of the

targets were civillian targets PREMEDITATED  
COLLATERALDAMAGE.

(Basement boys play video  
games in tobacco smoke.  
"The grip is ours, Fool! Throw  
something! Why did you stop?")

The Serbs made tanks out of wood and the Americans  
bombed the hell out of the wooden tanks but the uranium went  
into the ground it will leave in 7,000 years don't worry  
nobody reports about that but history and statistics will show  
what happened. The planes bombed funerals in progress,  
hospitals full of civillians, cornfields in Vojvodina  
where farmers had to go in groups to pick the harvest  
or starve--the bombs took them all.

The cancer rates in the sanitariums for consumptive  
people in the mountains are rising fast. Once  
ecological paradises, now birthing places for  
two-headed children. An experiment in radioactive  
warfare. Belgrade was hit too, not as hard, but they  
rocked it, with depleted uranium bombs, usually used  
only against tanks, but with all that surplus, what's  
to lose.

(SURPL-U.S.-AURUS, EXTINCT EMPIRE,

alive at your own wake,  
Zombiehood

\*\*\*\*\*

Wolfman  
Are you making her cucumber  
finger sandwiches? Always  
be making the Muse  
cucumber finger sandwiches  
or she will make cucumber finger sandwiches  
of you!)

\*\*\*\*\*

The bombings changed the weather.  
I've never seen it this humid till after.

felt this humidity is New York.           The only time I've  
after the bombing, the summers changed    when I came back here

us up good. And we've always been best at knockin'  
'em down. Coffee?                           They set

## 7. DEAD STUDENT INTERLUDE II

"Despite the uranium  
in our food and water  
we are happier here  
in Belgrade  
than all of you in America  
with all your conveniences--  
dying a death by surplus--  
A HEAP OF  
SURPLUS GOODS  
BURYING YOU  
and your senses--"

### ELEGY DIARY

No one dead yet today  
that I know. If they died  
would I have the where-  
withal to write them an elegy  
immediately, are my chops--  
Let's see. Pretend somebody died! I can'  
T. No pretending. Back to work, what are  
you doing here do you know how many emails you have to answer--  
emails of the dead! Writing you from their text pads  
on the coffin lid while they're out for a death smoothie  
with lots of wheatgrass in it which decreases concentration.  
Meanwhile in Troy I breaking Hektor, breaker of horses  
I Achilles with this sharp tooth stuck in my heel beg your mercy  
O Gods, for all the poems I Accept are for you and therefore  
to you I return them, written in wet crayon on my bleeding heel--  
take them and me away from all this breath because I never  
learned breathing properly otherwise I would have stayed home and  
pretended to be a husband or gone in drag to wash laundry  
so the Gods wouldn't come draft me. Oh Gods,  
that's you again, no escaping what's closer to you than the  
veins in your neck. Heck, I'  
d like to call you all for dinner, Gods, and read you my hymns of  
praise  
to you which you dictated to me in my waking stages between adolescence  
and puberty, when I was only 9 years old in the mushroom cult steambath  
composing the threnody to last, and we ought to linger long enough  
at the supermarket shelf to see ourselves in bags of poisonous  
spinach. I'm spinning from something, must be the placebo God I just  
swallowed, must be the mountain I climbed down slow so  
my bloodcells would settle down and the blood must be the blood

bubbles not forming in my blood because I'm surfacing slow enough  
from the depressiocean depths to speak to you, Dr. Phillips  
of the traumas endured and the traums still traum'd and  
the trams taken through Belgrade during the war when tramrides were  
free  
and on bombing days Republic Square was full for rock concerts  
and no school and everybody went to the theater free and everything  
was free because of the threat of imminent NATO bombdeath and  
Zorana stayed up doing her math homework anyway by tomahawk green light  
flashes  
in her window and learned algebra in dust swinging up from  
Belgrade concrete, which is a curious furious mixture of blood, bombs,  
and human feet.