

INTERVIEW / VICTOR COLEMAN

This interview was held at Pierre Coupey's house on the afternoon of January 29, 1974, immediately after Victor read at Capilano College. Those present (indicated by initials in the transcript) were Victor Coleman, Judy Holms, Pierre Coupey, Dwight Gardiner, and Daphne Marlatt.

The actual stops and starts of each person's speech have been left in as much as possible to indicate the character of individual speakers. Commas have been used to indicate pauses, rather than in any conventional grammatical way.

VC At what age did I first get into writing?

PC Yeah right.

VC I was in Grade Nine and I was, charged like everybody else in my high school class to write a piece and, I wrote a satire on school, and, handed it in — gotta, I don't know, a B+ or something like that, was asked to read it out loud, to the class. I read it out loud to the class and the hero's name was Cedric, and, I created a persona for myself through that satire which, really flipped me out, you know, I said, Wow. And ever since then, I mean subsequent to that, people in the class were calling me Cedric, and I was able to carry over the fantasy that was in the satire to, just the day to day life, classroom life. And I think that's how I picked up on the possibility of writing, and reading and all that. As far as getting into, so-called serious writing, it was much later.

PC Much later. How much later?

VC Well, I meant when I was sixteen I met Milton Acorn. He was the first poet that I ever met.

PC Ah, Milton shows up again.

VC And, he was living on the Island with Gwendolyn McEwan who he was married to then, and they were just on the bald edge of estrangement and so I saw him a fair amount for a summer and, you know, went various places with him and saw him in action, and one day I was talking to him about, you know, about poetry, and I was trying my hand a little bit, and he said, have you ever read Robert Creeley? And I said no and he said oh you should read Robert Creeley. So I picked up *The New American Poetry* which was the only thing available for Robert Creeley and I don't think I got off on Creeley as much as I got off on some other people. The person that I guess affected me most initially at that point, and I don't say this is particularly earth shattering, was Ebbe Borregaard, his Wapiti poems and I was just amazed by them. So at that point I, my aunt, my old aunt Alice gave me a typewriter and that was really the start. Then I really got into it and started to write poems and plays and stories.

PC Yes. Did you share any of Milton's political sense at that time, or did he talk about politics? Because I'm sort of surprised myself that Milton would get off on Creeley rather than anybody else.

VC I think it's a very surprising thing and simultaneously I was reading Kenneth Patchen and Michael McClure and I was into them more than anybody else, and I don't know why but I think because their books were available, basically, and until I discovered how to use a library that was about all I had. No, we never talked about politics. And we haven't since. I've seen him half a dozen times in the last few years. I don't think he recognizes me. I never talk to him.

PC Really?

VC Well, I would think that Milton would see me as the enemy these days.

PC You think so?

VC Oh yeah. Well, there's a magazine comes out of Vancouver called *Blackfish* which did a review of *America* and, sort of, I mean it wasn't a review of *America* at all it was, it was this big time publisher from the east it was,

DM I was going to ask you, when you were going from *New American Poetry* in which you didn't appear, when did you first start reading, getting into Zukofsky?

* VC I made mail contact with Ron Caplan who was in Pittsburgh, who, he's the publisher of a little book *After Eyes* and, he was the one who turned me on to Zukofsky and I was very slow getting into Zukofsky because I couldn't understand a word of it. I mean I was thinking in terms of not being able to understand when I was at that age. I met Olson and Creeley and Robert Kelly and Leroi Jones, Ed Dorn in Buffalo. I was close enough, being in Toronto, to Buffalo so that I could just go down there. *Then* there was that incredible scene happening there.

DM What year would this be now?

VC Ah, sixty four. That's when I met all those people.

DM It really surprises me to hear you talk about not understanding Zukofsky when, what I think of immediately is, like, the music, the tightness of the music is similar.

VC That is all I could understand on sight. I mean, I could hear that and that is why I kept at it. I've read *A* at least fifteen times and each time I read it I've come to it with trepidation, am I in fact going to be able to comprehend what this man is trying to say? And each time I would go through it I'd comprehend it in a new way, I guess, and I read *A* before I read any of the shorter works and then when I got into the shorter works I began to understand how the music was carrying the content.

DM Which is very similar to what you do.

VC Yes. It is.

PC I don't understand Zukofsky either. I was going to ask you what is your understanding of Zukofsky now in terms of content. What is he dealing with?

VC I guess one equals eye equals love is my definition of Zukofsky. He's talking about sight being more than a recognition, like real sight is like an acceptance, and if you get caught up in recognition then you're lost. I mean if you have to recognize what's in the poem, then you get lost. In Zukofsky you get lost in the sound, in the enjambment of sounds. I've read stories of Zukofsky where they said that he was simple minded — you know that's somebody who is coming at it from a surrealist point of view, and not understanding how Zukofsky can use surrealism, he was *there*, then, when surrealism was happening, something like Jack Gilbert writes about Zukofsky and says oh, this is awful stuff. And I can sort of understand that point of view but, it's a blocked-off point of view.

PC So the difference is between recognition and acceptance.

VC Well, it's not a difference, I mean it's just another degree of recognition. I mean, to me, once you have the acceptance, if you've got it through the sound, then the recognition just comes en route.

DM It's almost a verb, it's an action, it's an act of seeing.

PC I was going to ask whether that relates to one of the lines that you read today: "the marginalia speaks more relevant than rhetoric," and how that relates to your whole sense of Zukofsky and what you're doing, because it seems to me that also links up

to a great extent with what Gerry Gilbert does, with what Dwight does, and with the serial form where you accept what occurs immediately and let it enter into the poem without a sense of direction, and, I guess in balder terms, the sense of open form rather than closed.

VC Although I'm obsessed with closed forms,

DM Sonnets,

VC Sonnets, *America* is a very closed form.

PC Based on the Tarot.

VC That's one of the things that is confusing about *America*, is that it's based on the Tarot; to me it's just the double acrostic thing that's important, that's the formal thing that is happening, the fact that there are Tarot images that I was writing off of, is, it's like looking at the landscape, and I'm looking at the Tarot card, and then defining the form of the poem by using those letters, that's all, I mean that was as closed a form as I could manage, I, you know, I tried sestinas and sonnets, etc. etc., and I didn't find them satisfying. I guess that's the word, satisfying, I couldn't get no satisfaction. But by the way at Berkeley, that was the song, the Berkeley Poetry Conference, the Rolling Stones "I can't get no Satisfaction," was the song that everybody was hearing, constantly, no matter where you went, that was the song that you heard. And, to me that's like the introduction to Olson's so-called reading at Berkeley, is the Rolling Stones singing "I can't get no Satisfaction," because you know that's what he was trying to say to everybody there.

PC I was just going to ask another thing, though. Your sense of the closed form, you just said you were obsessed with closed form, but it strikes me, that it's not so much closed form as a kind of a baseline of structure, which gives a kind of a movement for intent where it doesn't formulate what's going to be said but gives you somewhere to move from. Is that more, close to your sense of it or not?

VC Aaah, ideally, yeah, but *America* doesn't work that way. *America* is a, maintains a closed form in being that obscure, simply because I wanted to, I mean it's too consciously, avant garde or something, you know, so it doesn't really work as anything but a cataloguing of responses to whatever was going on.

DM There's another way it works though,

VC It works on the subliminal too, and I mean, to me that's the way it works for me now.

DM What's the subliminal?

VC The space between the lines, the space between the words.

DM Are you talking about a language subliminal?

VC Yeah.

DM Yeah, because that's what I felt, that on a funny level, sort of, *construct*, in the sense of construct, they were, well, you could sort of subsume them under the heading "readings of Tarot," ok, but what you were really doing were making readings in the language. And that's with that *form*, the readings become even more intense, because you're moving syllable by syllable.

VC Uhuh, and you end up having to end a line with a certain letter, in *America*, and that's a dictation on the words, *total* dictation.

PC I didn't understand the sense of the double acrostic, I thought you were talking in terms of paired poems but it is the *first* letter of each line, and the last letter of each line that forms the acrostic.

VC So there's the Eight of Swords, E.I.G.H.T.O.F.S.W.O.R.D.S.

PC Oh I see, but then, when you were reading out these poems, you were reading out zodiacal signs as well, right? Gemini,

VC That's in the heavens, I don't know where it is.

PC Aha, this tape is going to be punctuated with "aha!" ok Capricorn. Capricorn. So it really is closed then in that sense.

VC I'm not sure why I decided to write something like this. I mean there wasn't anything in my sense of prosody that made me want to write something like this, and it certainly wasn't anything that I learned from Zukofsky, to do a double acrostic, but I used his language, well "used his language" I mean well, I heard the sound of his language, in these poems, very much, and not so much *A* and not so much any of his other work, but in the Catullus translations. So I see these almost like translations.

DM There's a formal pacing to them that's unusual for you, your line is, often so tight, and the breaks come so naturally, like they coincide with breath breaks, and they're for emphasis, that's when I first saw those poems I *couldn't* understand what you were doing, the way you were breaking words, and this was before I understood the, acrostic thing.

VC Well, what happened was that I had to eschew the whole idea of projective verse, to write these poems, and it was extremely healthy, for me to have done it, because I felt really trapped in projective verse, from outside pressures, from other people on the literary scene back east, who were, you know, saying, "Oh, another projectionist," or whatever word they wanted to use, and it's still being done and it's really absurd, it just comes from ignorance of anyone's intention. The poems don't look like poems that these people have seen before, so it's projective verse, so anything that doesn't fit into the closed-form aspect, is projective verse. It's a very slowing down process.

DM How did you feel about the length of the lines in there? Was there any sense of wanting to write a longer line?

VC That's why I stuck these babies in, I put periods in with spaces on either side which is, a William Carlos Williams, Paul Blackburn punctuation thing which I, still use, and I think is very useful because you get a real sense of there being something between the words besides just that dot and the spaces, and you do that typographically by putting a space on either side of the dot, so the dot appears not only at the end of the line but at the beginning of the next line, there's equidistance happening, so there's a structural thing happening in that, which I like to use. I like to think that this is not a full stop at all, it's a point at which you almost circumambulate. You have to circumambulate that point before you can go on. So it's more than a pause, it's like a spin-around, and you get to the end of a line, it's not a line, it's half a line or a third of a line, whatever, and then you spin around and you're into something else and then you spin around, so it's a very dizzying effect, which is why people have difficulty with this work.

DM When you were reading, I didn't have a copy in front of me, so I couldn't see it but,

VC No. No stops at the end of a line.

DM OK that's what I wondered, like "serious," "ser-" ends with a hyphen and then begins a new line "ious."

VC It's only that way because I have to end that. So what I had to do was find a word that could be broken that way, and more often than not I tried to stay within the strictures of grammar, and not break a word too strangely, but there were some times when I had to, and you know, if you really want to, hone in on the critical aspect of it maybe that's, maybe it falls apart there. But I, had a hard time *reading* these poems, for a long time, because of that, because I was still caught up in, you know, the breath unit and all that, and wasn't sure that, this was all right, is this the real thing? I thought to myself.

PC When you were reading I didn't have any sense at all of line breaks, in fact. I was trying to hear the acrostic at the beginning anyway. I didn't really realize the acrostic at the end of the lines, but I didn't get the sense of line breaks, I just felt, you know, breath units coming through.

VC Oh, orally the acrostic isn't visible.

DM You slowed down on certain words. You'd take a longer time to, pronounce certain words, and I didn't know whether that coincided with whether they were breaking on the line or not.

VC I think that's where, because of where I was, I mean I'll slow down on different words when I read them somewhere else. In some cases I *have* to slow down. Oh, in one of these poems, Eldon Garnet did a review for *Saturday Night on America* and there's a line, the line, quote "line" "Song is not thought/ Unlikely in a world of dirges," and he got off a whole polemical argument on the line "song is not thought." And, I thought, oh yeah, OK, it can be read that way. But then I immediately snapped back, and this is one of the reasons I'm not totally confident about this book, snapped back to Spicer's whole condemnation of poets who are milking the words of their, all their different connotations.

DM But you're a marvellous *punster*! How can you make that statement?

VC I can make that statement because I still feel new in the art. I don't feel I've gotten that far, I think that technically I've still got a lot of things to work out.

DM In *Light Verse* there were, there's a different use of rhyme, which you sometimes move back to, but I don't hear it nearly so often now, and that's a kind of, almost deliberate flat-footed rhyme with two very obvious words. And now that the music has become so much denser, that it's even unusual to *hear* that kind of, that particular kind of rhyme any more,

VC I think it's still happening, it's just happening in a, I mean, I'm getting more hold on the technique of that, so that I don't fall into it that easily. In *Light Verse* it happens all the time. I think I can find,

DM "You" and "true" was one of them

DG The "liar", the "lyre"

DM "Night" and "write" is another one in one of them,

PC Well, what you were just talking about is what Duncan calls "floating language," where it has several simultaneous syntactical meanings where it can be read, and often that occurs when you have a line break between two syntactical components of a unit. And that was the thing that I was picking up on last night in your reading as well, is that it could be read in so many different ways. So it is surprising to me too to hear you say that you're not sure,

DG Yet it goes on, the break, you know, is *intended* to have this spin around, to go on, in the poem, you get trapped in how many words this "liar" means, you can just hear it, and then go on with the poem, that *informs* the poem.

VC I think it's in here, this poem for Zukofsky, it's like a relatively early poem, and a relatively early reading, of Zukofsky which is called "After reading *Spring and All*," which is Williams, *All in All* which is Zukofsky, and *All*, no *All in All* is Corman, and *All* is Zukofsky, so it's posing something about those three writers. And it's one line broken up into syllables, almost, making syllables lines. And it's

Zuke
of
skies
liars
no liar
no Lear
no lair
I say
one
air.

PC I never had the patience to get into that sense before. I never had a sense of the kind of necessity for the play. It just seemed to me to be a very superficial game on words and

VC Well that's why I wrote this, I wrote this so that,

PC Which one's that?

VC *Some Plays On Words*. I wanted to say something directly to people who had come at me with that criticism, where, you know, you're just fucking around with the language, you don't really have anything to say, etc., etc.

DM But I really hear you *listening* very closely to the language, and letting *it*, well, the word Dwight used, "inform," inform you as you are moving along.

PC That's still part of the projective verse sense, though, isn't it?

VC No, I'm getting that from Spicer. I mean my sense of "inform" is, comes from Spicer not from Olson. What I got from Olson was, you have to be where you are and look around, and understand what you can reach. That's what I understood by locus. And Spicer wasn't even talking in those terms. He was into something else altogether, he was, you can misunderstand Spicer to be about metaphysics, when in fact, Spicer's work is like a chronicle of decay. You know he's talking about decay all the time, without actually even mentioning it. Certainly in his letters, to people, constantly there's this cynicism about the decay that's going on. That was all happening inside of him, his stomach was rotting away and that's what he was writing about.

DM In Spicer, always I have very clearly that image from Cocteau's film about the poet in *Orphée* tuned in to the wireless, catching what's coming down the wire which is so very far away from that sense of locus that you mentioned in Olson.

DG Spicer is also a linguist,

PC And what's coming through the wires is Cégeste, the joke.

VC Spicer is another person, I mean, to me the people that I'm writing off are not projective verse people at all, it's Spicer and Zukofsky, and that's a weird combination for sure, trying to put those two together. I can't imagine Zukofsky reading Spicer somehow; I can imagine Spicer reading Zukofsky, but, I mean, there's things that always, that throw me on those people are little anecdotes that I hear about them. Well Spicer's alcoholism has always confused me, I can't understand how he got into that, and Zukofsky's psychosomatic reality has always bothered me, like Zukofsky's the kind of person that sounds like Glenn Gould, he'll have to put a glove on before he'll shake your hand.

DM Oh really?

VC Oh yeah. Like in the correspondence I've had with Zukofsky there's always a little note in it about how he is ill; maybe he's old, but there's a certain obsession that he has, also, with decay, or potential decay.

PC Would you elevate that to a sense of entropy, or is that what entropy means, anyway?

VC I talked about poetry as being "entropic airplanes of sense" which was just a flash phrase that I got, where, the suspension of a space between the words, like the active enjambment is what makes *my* poetry, and that's baldly what I think I'm doing. It's just taking a couple of words and putting them together, and in *Light Verse* it's words that almost rhyme. It's like rhyming "lit" with "ditch," like, I am consciously doing stuff like that. But it's not a working after rhyming, it's not coming to the word "lit" and searching for the word "ditch" at all. It's

(End of first side of cassette.)

PC One of the things, this may not lead into finishing what you were saying but I was going to go back to it anyway, sorry, is the other thing that I had sensed in what you were doing before hearing you read, was that there was a tremendously hermetic sense to what you were doing, very private, at first it seemed to me really very coldly intellectual, not an emotional thing at all.

VC The Hermit in the Tarot, is a hooded figure holding a lamp, and there's another poem somewhere, which posits myself as the hermit which is in fact the card which is identified with my sign. And it is just, I talk about myself as being "with light," almost the same way that you talk about being "with child," so that the crux is the visual.

DM OK, that leads me into something I wanted to ask you, it relates more to content, and that was a very strong sense of physical environment in all your work on the west coast, Gibsons, Roberts Creek, and so on, and very often that sense of light and water. Your poems that are located back east don't have any of that physical sense of place that I can remember, I might be wrong. What does the west coast, like, what does it mean to you?

VC Well, coming out here was coming, like coming into a cleaner light, a light that was visible, whereas I had been living in that strange gray town all that time, where winter light was, was very important, but I mean any other seasonal light seemed vague and undefinable, so incidentally a key book for me when I was younger was Margaret Avison's *Winter Sun* in which that whole thing is gotten down. She's done that in that book, she's talked about that environment and the light in that environment and it's, and you can see that in *her* work too, where, bingo, in the winter there's a definition of the light through snow, and just through clean air and the cold, that's the ideal definition, I mean that's my idea of definition, is just a clear light, and I'm not talking metaphysically at all, I'm just talking about plain ordinary clear light, one that isn't fogged.

DM And yet you have a sense that this light out here is also clear.

VC No, I'm saying that the light out here *is* clear and the light back there isn't.

DM Except in winter.

- VC Except in winter, yeah. But that's the experience that I have about back east, is a real attachment to that experience, to that winter thing.
- PC Does that tie in with the hermetic sense of yourself back east? Cause it seems to me to be a kind of
- VC Because that's when you're active. You're cloistered in a situation where you can't really get out. But that *outside* is where the light is, so in fact you *do* get out, but it's a hermetic thing to get out because you're
- PC Bundled up
- VC Yeah, you're like the hermit, you know. And it's five o'clock at night and it's dark, so you need that lamp, and, I'd substitute what? conceptualising, for the lamp.
- DM Right, right. Whereas a lot of the west coast stuff details the kind of
- VC Oh, I had clear light in the afternoon in the summer, you know and I was amazed by it and it just opened me up completely so that I mean, what? everything was written, I mean not everything, but two thirds of it was written out here. Like I just, it opens me up.
- DG What about the book *Back East*, does that sort of detail that, trip back
- VC Well, I mean it's an ironic title because most of it was written out here. And it just posits the whole thing of *back, back* east, you know the elasticity of one's roots almost, one's *pulled* to that, sense of roots, and yet, one discovers release outside of one's roots.
- DM Almost a flowering, and I keep getting this image of light seen through needles, fir needles, and you mention cones a lot
- VC Cones and needles, fingers and hair.
- PC I just wanted to bring this in, that great painting by Paul-Emile Borduas, "Jardin Sous La Neige," garden beneath the snow, which is very close to what you were saying, and to that sense of hermeticism in the east with the winter, yet it does force you in a way inside of yourself, which becomes that kind of open space there.

VC I wonder about "hermeticism" though. I mean, I can see what I'm doing as being oblique, and I can see it as being obscure, and I can accept that, but I don't know whether I can accept "hermetic" because, in fact, most people *can* relate, if they're listening, to what I'm saying, and I'm not worried about it, the obscurities, and the obliqueness.

DM Well, it's all in the language, you know, it's, I mean, it's not hermetic in the sense that H.D. is hermetic.

PC It's hermetic in the sense that Norman O. Brown has, of Hermes Trismagistus, the medium, and that closeness to the language itself where it does become, the transmitter of things, you're not forcing a message, you're letting what words *do* arrive speak, that's the sense of Hermes that I have.

VC One thing that came up last night, I don't know, I think it was Dwight and I that were talking about it, was how it was very difficult for people to come up to me afterwards and say, well I really liked that one poem, like you were the only person that actually did that, but then you've seen a lot of it before, so you have it available. But people who hadn't were hard-pressed to say, well, I liked this. And what people did say, was they liked *parts* of things, and I've heard you say that before. Most people that I've read to, say that, you know, I like *parts* of that.

DM Well that's how I could identify the poem I liked, was by a particular image.

VC And, like when I read in Ottawa, and I got feedback from Cid Corman and George Johnson whom I had dinner with, just before the reading, they both sort of said *that*, you know, they didn't qualify it by saying they *only* liked parts, and I can see how a particular focus in the direction of anyone's hearing is going to leave out a lot of what I do.

DM When you walk, like, to use your own image of road poetry, that you mentioned and you threw out in the reading today, each poem does take you on that walk down a particular, a particular road, you have an impetus going and then you have, say, a creek on one side and something else on the other, but you happen to, anyone *listening* happens to localize on the creek because it presents a nice cluster on the *way*.

DG You're still going down the road.

DM Yeah, right.

PC Are you aware of all the patterns of those tangents that you go on?

VC Sure. Sure. Well, that's about the only way that I rework a poem, is if I see a tangent happening which is unclear, I remove it. That's very simple. It doesn't matter whether the language is working or not, if it clutters the poem I remove it.

DG That's what I like about revision is just taking out, you know, the stuff that's gone bad.

DM Deadends.

VC Although I get very upset with my children, when they're picky about taking the brown spot out of an apple, because, to me, the ideal apple in their minds is one of these big, waxed, polished babies, that's got most of the nutrition taken out of it. And my sense of the apple is that the one that's lying on the ground, that's got a brown spot where it hit, is the real apple. And that's the one that I'm after. I'm not after the big shiny waxed apple that's sitting in the Safeway store. The bruises are very important.

DM Well, that leads me into another question that's sort of difficult for me to ask you because I don't know how to word it. The bruises, the brown spots. Why is it that so much of your work sort of focusses in on the bruises, on the, I don't know what other word to use for it, the bruised part of sex, the,

VC Cause that's the part I can't handle.

DM That's so, it's in a sense, it's like an inoculation?

VC Yeah, well, no, I don't want to be immune, I mean, I want to be able to feel, first of all, and the bruises happen. I mean I have no control over that, really, if I have control over that, then there's that aspect, I've got my thumb on the situation, and can control it. But if I take it off, and it becomes an equal element thing, then the bruises are going to happen, because you don't confront things directly without getting bruised. You can't. There's no way. You know, I'm a firm believer in tenderness, but at the same time, I keep getting the picture of the apple.

- DM Yeah, yeah. And that's much more present than the tenderness. It's rare to find the tenderness in terms of sexuality.
- PC I don't feel that at all. I felt an extraordinary amount of tenderness in the poems that dealt with sex today. I felt an extraordinary sense of, that pain, actually.
- VC Well, a lot of the collaborations last night, though, I mean there's this whole thing happening in the collaborations,
- DM Yeah! right!
- VC But that's once again me suspending, something, to write with somebody else.
- DM That's really *hard* for me as a woman to listen to, to a lot of that collaboration stuff.
- VC Well, our whole discussion which has been going on for a couple of years now, has been extremely important to me, because I'm just understanding more, but I wasn't able to understand that before because nobody would *say* those things to me. I wasn't *hearing* those things. I wanted to understand what was going on, I wanted to understand how deeply I could touch somebody without bruising them. It had to be, tenderness was not tenderness at all. Tenderness was a holding back, tenderness was an almost touch or, you know, there's the tease aspect to tenderness which I'm never sure of. To me, you know, if you really need to hold on to something you hold on tight. You don't need to crush it, at all, but in fact the apple falls from the tree, and it gets bruised, and there's no way around it. You can't surround the orchard with styrofoam.
- DM But there's, like you're still *talking* from that other point of view because it comes across as, as, going back to, you can't get enough satisfaction, it comes across in a kind of very unsatisfied manner.
- VC Well. That's just honest expression of my feeling, you know, like I haven't really, in fact, gotten to the point where I feel that I've reached a plane with somebody, sexually. I want to be there, desperately, and that's where the desperation comes in.
- DM And that's, so it's the wanting.

- VC Sure. The wanting demands that I deal with all those things, and that I say all those things, and I'm saying them to myself, first of all, and because I understand my, the possibilities of my technique, I think it carries out to other people, now. I wasn't sure before.
- DG I think there's something important about what Spicer said, about, that true poetry scared you, and what we were talking about, being tender and holding back, it comes, it gets said in the poem, can I say this? I think Victor leaves it *in*.
- PC It comes back to that sense of first of all acceptance, and afterwards recognition again.
- VC Like to me that's what happens, I mean the recognition comes *first*, there are too many pre-suppositions about a relationship, whether it's with a bunch of words on a page or whether it's with a bunch of people. If you presuppose that there is a way to relate, "you can't get no satisfaction." But if you, if you *accept*, whatever, whatever words are down on the page or whatever people are in the room, then through that, you can recognize, or not recognize. It's much easier, for me now, to see people right away. I really have a sense that I can see people right away, and the same for words. I can see words right away. When I write words down I can see them right away, and I know whether or not they're, they're saying something or not.
- DM But do you ever have a sense that there are words that are knocking on the door but haven't opened it yet?
- VC ●h yeah. Sure. Well, look, my whole reading of Zukofsky was that. Just coming back at it over and over again. Knocking on that door. Let me in!
- DM And I guess, even the words, even those words that are knocking on the door, if you think back to the sense of touch as being informative for anyone who is blind, is a way of getting there, because you tap it all out and you finally find the crack
- VC To go back to your question again, which was badly phrased
- DM I know, I know, I thought of that, and I couldn't come up with a good phrase

- VC The desire to touch is something that you have to really work up, like we discussed it so many times in letters, but we've never done it, and to me that's really important, to be able to get it down and consciously come out and say it, and blubber it out, however embarrassing it might sound, when you do get it out, to be able to do it with somebody who is going to respond, in a like manner, allows you almost, to, conceive of that touch. Because that's what's important. Like the touch itself is just so easy and, it's not the big problem, what's really important is the recognition after the acceptance, of it. And it's the same with a poem.
- DM But like, I'm still stuck somewhere back *previous* to that, that's like with a kind of certain savage insistence, which comes across to me as savage because it's so *insistent*.
- VC Well, that's me, I mean that's *my* savage insistence. Sure. I can see that. But it's somehow necessary for me to understand, how that works, before I can experience the tenderness that's necessary to get on to the plane. Because until I can, then I'm just, you know, three quarters of a person, as far as anybody else is concerned. I'm too wrapped up in something else, and not with what's there.
- DM Oh yeah, that's so easy to do. And that's a constant risk. Like, I really identify with the kind of way you proceed in the writing, because I do the same, a similar kind of thing. And that's a constant risk. It's like being stuck back there, being side-tracked by all the manifestations of it, without just kind of going through, you know, through that open door.
- PC That comes back to your sense of the spaces between the lines again, and that period with equidistant spaces between two phrases.
- DM Janus the door that faced two ways.
- PC Two ways, exactly. You're asking for something, though.
- DM It has to do with savagery and I'm not sure, I can't get beyond that.

- VC That's a contentious thing. I mean, like the savagery that's in the *content* of the work is difficult to handle, because, a.) one doesn't like to admit that about oneself, and yet, the intensity with which the writing approaches that savagery almost forces people, to admit it, to themselves, so that people have a difficult time, listening. I mean Warren, his parting shot to me last night was, you're a very disturbing man, and I understood exactly what he meant, you know. Like, somehow, I'd expressed a, just a universal disturbance that everybody's into now. It's not something that we can just sort of say, Oh yeah, and then next day we're gonna be different because that's not the way it works. You know, we're still fighting this thing.
- DM Yeah, well, it becomes so huge as you're taking on that whole question of what is male and what is female, the definition of the sexes.
- VC Well, that's been my concern, like in *Light Verse* it was naive as hell, that whole concern. But it's still there. And I see myself now, just coming out of that naivety, just barely coming out of it. I'm beginning to feel somehow mature, just as a man, as a sexual being, and as a social being.
- DG I liked that idea about touch, that, you know, anybody can touch but unless you go further than that, the meaning of that, some larger, larger meaning.
- DM Well, without, yeah, without a certain amount of consciousness, the touch is meaningless anyway.
- DG The *recognition* of that.
- VC And that's been a thing that I've dealt with since puberty, just wanting somehow to, for it to be important, for me to touch something. It has to be important to me, and if it isn't important to me then it's going to cheapen the touch when it becomes important.
- PC And that's where the bruise comes in. Because that's the first visible sign.
- VC But it is visible, and the fact that ninety nine percent of the people that we know still see it as invisible is maddening to me. That is why I'm writing what I'm writing. I feel it's a responsibility to keep writing what I'm writing.

DM You mean the collaborations?

VC No no. I mean *Stranger*.

DM Oh. Because I see the collaborations as *embodying* all that sense of meaningless touch. And that's why I really find it hard to listen to them.

VC Yeah, yeah.

PC Well that's writing out a lot of that shit that does come off the top of the head; and it has to.

VC Well, it's also the people that I'm writing with, too, the trouble with the collaborations is that it's not me, it's this other being that's been created by these people and all the stuff with David Young is working out his sexual problems, and it's very important for me, he's just another person, but he's in fact working out his sexual problem, and I mean a lot of the violence that comes in there is his, not mine.

PC I appreciated those poems very much, or those prose pieces, because it expressed so much of my own violence in ways that I haven't been able to get through, I mean there are doors and there are doors and there's a door to expressing the violence, and there's a door for getting *through* that violence.

VC There's a prelude to orgasm in a man which is frightening, really frightening, because you get to the point where it's easy to call upon just any old image that you want to call upon, and as soon as you do that, there's a bruise, inherent, in the orgasm, and no wonder people are, fucked up, because they've gotten to the point where they're aiming at an ideal, and they can't get there, and they're constantly frustrated by it.

DM Do you think that's particularly true of North American, male youth?

VC Oh, I don't know, I don't know European male youth.

DM Or is that like Marilyn Monroe and all that kind of stuff. All that stuff you were talking about in the fifties, I mean it was so strong for us when we grew up in the fifties.

PC But Daphne, you were talking about *male* youth, what about *female* youth, too. I mean when women say, hold me tight, you know, they're asking for that, you know, real pressure, against the skin, that does equvalate that whole sense.

DM Now that's a whole other bag. That gets into the whole protective,

VC Yeah, I wouldn't hear a bruise in that. I would hear, you know.

PC *Really?* I hear a bruise in that.

VC "Come around," that's what a woman is saying. That's not just protection either, it's, I mean a woman who wants to have content in that, and so often all she can do is *provide* content, she doesn't really encompass content, and so there has been a formal situation for women for a long time, just because it's been set up that way.

DM That's really interesting. The psychological reversal of the physiological. Yeah, very interesting. I think it's true. *That* provides a sense of definition.

VC Uhuh. It provides a base, for me. I mean I can, I feel much more confident about my own sexuality, simply because I can, say those things about myself, I can say, Okay, I've had these fantasies, and I've even tried to work them out, on the real plane, and it seems to me quite obvious from the work, that it didn't work out, you know, group sex and all that. And the reason that it didn't work out, was, you know, the whole mathematical thing that happens in, *Stranger*. Did I bring it? Where is it

We are three
 in the bed
our selves until one
 moves away making two
sets of particulars
 verging on division
or union

 The Third makes all
indivisible by anything but one
 or itself

This one insists
 she is one and a half

& the Third

halved by the other's design
slinks off leaving two
to divide & fall
into the arms of a difficult splendour

And it was just, its prime numbers, it's all about prime numbers, and Judy's educated me on prime numbers, she was obsessed with, prime numbers, and like one and three, are the first prime numbers, the self, and the others, and, once you realize that two, is, something else, two is just *the* most difficult thing to maintain. Like three, and you can go through life in threes, and you can go through life in ones, but the ultimate risk is to go through life in twos because it's constantly divisible. And one is available in two, but all it creates is two ones, and so, like any relationship that you have has to *deal* with that: how you're going to, to me it's just two words, enjambling again, that's what's happening in my language, is that, in fact, you're going one word at a time, and you might make phrases out of three words, but in fact, you have got to put the first word up against the second word, and the second word against the third word, and the three words are separated by that word in the middle, etc., etc. So it's happening in the language all the time.

DM But you know, that careful one-to-one-walking, that kind of action you've just described for the seeing. I hear you moving in your, in that last, in "A Proposal," away from that care, I mean the care is still there, it's not *care-less*, but it's not the primary thing, I *hear* a large sense, like if I'm going to use musical terms, a phrase building up, instead of the note, plus note, plus note. You have a larger sense of the phrase which I really liked to hear, very much a moving kind of emotional line, which I don't think I've heard very often, except perhaps, in some of the poems in *Stranger*.

VC Well, the poem to you that's in *Stranger* does that. I mean, I very seldom actually get on to that, and I don't know why. Maybe because I break it up too much. I mean, I'm not confident with, in stringing that melody out.

DM I think you get so fascinated by the units that you're dealing with that you get into those,

VC You know, I'm very waylaid by my own intelligence.

DM Yeah, yeah,

DG I think that has something to do with why you are working in collaboration, so that you can accelerate that intelligence, that you are interested in.

DM I want to hear more about this accelerating.

DG Well we were talking about going down the highway before, and sort of looking to the right, there's a pond, and *if* it works, there it is, but you know, the writer keeps going: he sees something else. And I think what I see in collaboration is the ability to move faster, down that highway, or something.

DM Yeah, to do a kind of instantaneous seeing at the same time.

VC Yeah, collaboration isn't walking, it's driving.

(End of cassette)