



**Charles Augustus Blaisdell II**

*September 21st 1935, San Diego*

*September 17th 2003, Albuquerque*



Art. 445.11

work a way  
a while  
in words

LA ALAMEDA PRESS • ALBUQUERQUE

Semi-Festschrift for  
**GUS**  
*A Celebration of Gus Blaisdell*  
FEBRUARY 24, 2005  
OUTPOST PERFORMANCE SPACE  
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

The Sixth Patriarch (Hui Neng) Tearing up a Sutra  
Liang Kai, early thirteenth century  
*hanging scroll, ink on paper, 73 x 31.7 cm.*  
*Collection of Mitsui Takamaru, Tokyo*

Photograph by Nicole Blaisdell  
“Gus in front of the Living Batch Bookstore”

Frontispiece” Veiled Woman (Femme à la voilette)  
Henri Matisse, Nice 1942  
pen and ink, from *Thèmes et variations*

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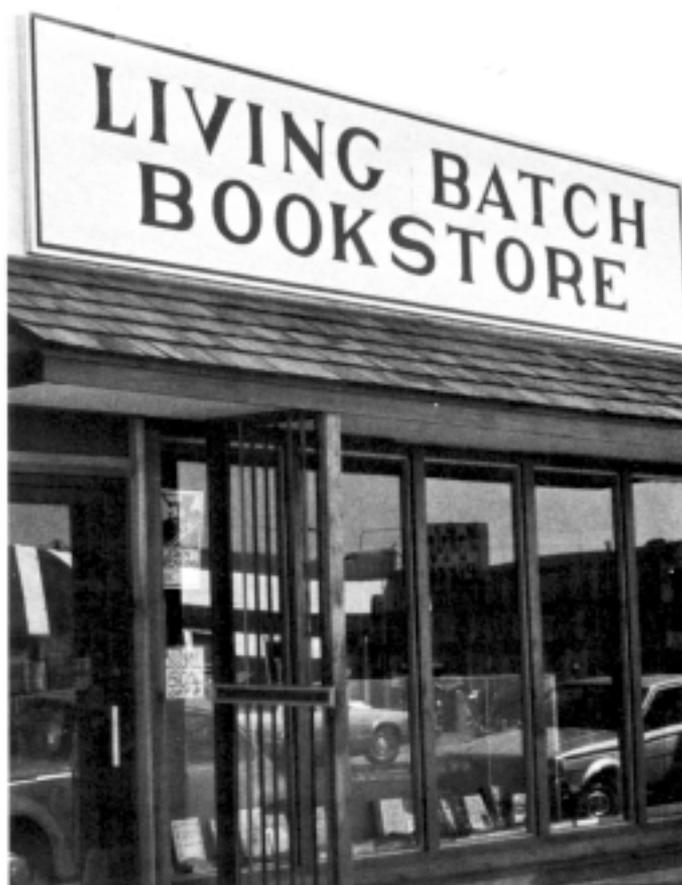
*Captain Pissgums & His Pervert Pirates* / S. CLAY WILSON  
ZAP COMIX #3, 1968

### Virgo Horoscope September 11-18, 2003

During my recent visit to the Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert, I drank in an abundant array of confounding sights and enriching adventures that I'll remember forever. The last surprise I saw before heading home was among the most modest, but it's a perfect choice to serve as your ruling symbol for the coming week: a sign that read "The Very Tidy Pirates" above an image of a bad-ass dude wearing an eye patch and apron and wielding a vacuum cleaner and feather duster. I hope this vignette inspires you to be wildly disciplined, neatly rowdy, and boisterously organized. — ROB BREZNEY

PUBLISHED IN *The Alibi*

(PICKED UP IN THE FRONTIER RESTUARANT & DISCUSSED AT LUNCH  
"TOO GOOD!"—SEPTEMBER 17TH, 2003)



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## Excerpts from an Elegy

I'm honored to speak about Gus Blaisdell, whom I knew for 30 years. Writer, editor, educator, raconteur, friend, husband and father, Gus died in Albuquerque on September 17, still brimming with enthusiasm.

Gus created popular courses in cinema for almost 25 years at UNM, where his work helped establish a Department in Media Arts. He also taught art history and instructed philosophy and math at New Mexico Tech. His publications addressed photography, film, painting, literature and philosophy; he lectured widely in Europe and the United States. His book with photographer Lewis Baltz, *Park City*, was followed by his monograph on painter Guy Williams.

A former student of Stanford literary critic Yvor Winters, Gus composed books of poetry and fiction, including *Fractionally Awake*, *Monad*, *Prose Ocean* and *Dented Fenders*. For years as proprietor of the Living Batch Bookstore, where Allen Ginsberg and other poets read, he also ran Living Batch Press.

Gus relished witty conversation, often conducted within the public sphere. He'd meet friends, colleagues and students in popular restaurants on Central to take up topics of the day. He seemed to value the theatrical space of the boulevard as much as he did the classroom. Born in San Diego, he became a vibrant presence in Albuquerque, the city he adopted in 1964.

Life for many people today is distinctly less pleasant without the option of lunching or studying or opining with Gus. He could be gruff, which made his warmth all the more restorative. Plus, he was more than funny. Victims and witnesses will testify that his wit and impersonations could shatter the equilibrium of perfectly fit adults. Audiences



eager for Gus' accounts of, say, the Beat Generation, would fare no better than individuals who joined him for tea. It's unlikely he would have been so funny, or so sympathetic, were it not for his complex seriousness. In *Park City* he observes that having the pleasure of company had relieved philosopher David Hume of the despair that attended Hume's reflections about philosophical skepticism, about whether we can be sure of the existence of other minds. Ruminating on Baltz's photos of wastelands, of dead mining ventures, he fastens on what people mean by value: "Waste, trash, litter, rubbish, tailings, scraps: that there is such stuff implies an antecedent process of value, intention and purpose. Waste is an end-product, the consequence of value."

Gus' concern with value accounted for his seriousness. If "at any moment thinking may reel, tip over, and fall into that bottomless pit of nonsense," such thinking partly concerned the question of value. "Anything that is," he wrote, "is a fit subject for philosophizing, and nothing can be excluded as... unfit or unseemly; and especially not what the conventional wisdom... regards as beneath contempt... The freedom of inquiry must lie in the refusal to consent to the ways in which the world has been prepared for us, to the way opinion words the world for us."

Gus insisted here on something like "the universal eligibility to be thought about;" and we might read his words to apply to people as well as things, suggesting his aspiration for equality and community. In these lights, nothing and no one is valueless. Gus' expansive statement helps explain his surprising bouts of patience and love, as well as his abstentions from conventional opinion. Courageous and incorrigible, he was determined in an age of cyber-speed to preserve time for reflection and face-to-face dialogue. Fortunately, lunch or tea with a number of us became such a time. We were all fit, thanks to him.

IRA JAFFE

# What is Dead?

1

The heart stops BOOM like my Dad's, cardiac arrest, and he slumps down with a thud in the middle of a parking lot only six feet from his car, and two hours later the doctor says to the family that he was probably dead when he hit the ground. That's a medical doctor's version of dead.

Well, the heart stops, yes, but the ideas, feelings, relationships and connections to a person suddenly spring to life. The news of my father, Gus Blaisdell's death sailed across oceans and continents seemingly within moments. Grown scholarly men in seven different states and three countries broke into sobs on the phone when his wife called with the news. Over three hundred students, colleagues, family and friends packed the small adobe chapel to pay tribute to him. Those are the reactions and relationships I know about, so far. And some of them accept the doctor's version of dead, but not all.

My husband Mark, who loved and related to my father through intellect, was amazed at how quickly people from so far away found out about his death. Mark wanted to work on a mathematical algorithm, map out a network or web with Dad in the center and through people's connections, find out how many degrees of separation there is from any one person to Gus. What time and day did they receive the information and from how many different sources? Gus would be intrigued, Mark said. New connections in the Gus web would need to take place in order to get the information, and Gus would like that. Mark's brain is filled with Gus. So Dead, according to Mark, is to leave no legacy: to fade from memory.

In memory Gus is very alive. So is he perhaps alive in a new sense and flying free? No longer encased in that body, weighed down by the great gravitational pull. We're made up of energy and, according to the laws of physics, energy dissipates but never totally disappears. It just changes form.

So is Dad just changing form? Moving entirely out of the physical realm and into a more nebulous mental/emotional realm. Photographers, philosophers, publishers and poets in places like Paris, Berlin, San Francisco and Cambridge are discussing his ideas, studying portraits of him, contemplating his essays and reading his poems out loud. If that's not alive in a new form, what is?

Dad is alive because so many people are analyzing his entire life and legacy, because tears are streaming down, anger flaring up and questions flying around about him like fireworks. When the collective brainpower and emotional energy of hundreds of people is focused on the life and death of one person, some form of that energy that makes up that life (ideas, words, relationships, connections) must exist.

Over in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he taught film at the University for twenty-five years, his colleagues are working on a tribute to him. One of the Media Arts instructors asked me about the video I'd started on Dad called *A Great Subject*. He's very alive in the video. As I pace in my empty living room, watching the footage of him in his book stuffed and cluttered study, I feel unhinged, like I'm floating in some surreal non-linear space and time. I know that he no longer can do the things I'm seeing: talk to me, answer questions, move about his study, pet his cats. But somehow it feels as if some small part of him is still there, trapped in the ions of the magnetic tape, trying to impart new ideas and information to me.

On the TV screen Dad's sitting in his straight backed wood chair, brown eyes bright, talking to me in his deep, gravelly voice. As he explains the contents of his Mojo Pig (a furry brown and white pig-shaped coin purse he's carried in his pocket every day for the last five years) he looks good, comfortable in his body, in his study, in his life. I'm listening very carefully this time to everything he tells me. This is now history he's talking about. Because he's "Dead" he can't communicate through typical channels anymore.

"Dead", according to *Webster's Dictionary* is 1. no longer living 2. without life 3. deathlike 4. lacking warmth, interest, brightness 5. without feeling, motion or power 6. extinguished; extinct.

So he's dead but he's not, because I'm staring right at him on my TV screen, watching him talk to me. Of course it's a one sided conversation but that's not really so different than before. Except that now, looking at the video, without those father/daughter pressures, I can think of all these great questions that I didn't ask while he was alive and able to communicate directly. Like how did you, a poet at the age of thirteen, survive being sent away to military school? Why didn't you ever get your teeth fixed? Did your father beat you? Were both your parents alcoholics? What happened at Stanford to end your dissertation? Did your dad die of a heart attack, too? What form are you in now?

All but one of these questions can be answered by digging through boxes and boxes of papers crammed in his study, but with the information, I can no longer get that intonation and those subtle insinuations that come with his good direct intellectual communication.

Now I can only gather so much from the video footage I've recorded. So I have to rewind and read between the lines. Read the body language, the shifts in position, his ever-changing gazes, each grunt, deep inhale, sigh and laugh. His smile. There are entire books in these.

And because I can listen to my video dad, look at his portraits, read his essays, poems and letters; talk to his friends, students, colleagues and my family, I realize that he won't be dead for years, certainly not during my lifetime. For twenty-five years he filled students' minds with ideas, information and questions and sent them out into the world. Knowledge, ideas, relationships, art and music meant everything to Dad.

Material things, possessions meant nothing. So was his body just another possession, a material thing? If so, then without it, can't he live on through his passions and his words? Through his students, the authors he helped make famous, the photographers he wrote essays for, the friends he counseled and pushed to excel, the wives he loved. His children?

So, what is Dead? Dead is just another spoke on the big evolutionary wheel. It's something that each of us, eventually, will have to deal with and come to understand on our own. We can't truly know what Dead is until we've experienced it for ourselves. So far nobody's been able to pass on that information, at least not to my satisfaction. Ideas, thoughts, relationships and dreams are alive to me. And Dad is flying all through these.

NICOLE BLAISDELL IVEY

NOVEMBER 11, 2003

## Heartfelt

you said, Flowers mouthed. His mouth full of pills and the glass of water in the other room where it was left when sky fell. Sky fell. You can see where the river goes the people live on either side and once you're there you never want to leave. You stayed. You made enemies and the friends you had, Gus, said Flowers to him, you Shakespeared clasping them to you like hoops of steel. You went out everyday at the same time in the afternoon as Albuquerque

were Koningsberg. Set your clock, you said. Your father was in the navy, your mother taught you to read. Men did and women were done to. You like I, Flowers said, married too many times. You had to. The world was inside you. Find a love in there to keep you happy. Stoke the furnace. This will be brief, I think, but heartfelt, you said beginning on the First of July to write for the last time this moldering soul so far north you didn't know anyone there but a man

who wrote about Hemingway—you read his study in manuscript and published it at the press—and his wife, Dickinson. Hemingway's last wife grew up here. Emily's namesake owned the town, but no relation. You loved Creeley. He left town too. But he had resources, he came back. Flowers went up the hill to his house and talked to him about Olson. You said, Of course. You talked about Neal Cassady and Ken Kesey, whom you loved like a big brother panda bear.

Cassady, you didn't know. When I wanted to write about him you said, Don't do that, write something that'll make you think. Kubrick, then. The wild days went off the calendar. You burn calendars after the days go by. Wild youth. How long can you on believing you're young and will never die? We did it quite a while. I had a very good sleep last night, I told Irish, Flowers said, mouthing the words in his mind, but what does a tongue have to do with brains?

Flowers said I like to imagine. What Gus was like when he was truly young. The boy on the San Francisco navy yard pier, what's it called? Treasure Island. Ho ho o and a bottle of rum, by gum! Young Jim and the peg-legged Cap'n Long John Silver. The treasure was everywhere. The father was stern and loving. He did what you wanted, helped you go to Stanford and study with Yvor Winters. There you met the best minds of your generation, or was it imagination

they had and you the mind? Thank you, dear friend, for keeping me company over thirty years. Even when you're not here, I remembered most of what you said and how the world could feel when fully aware. You read Heidegger the year we both broke up with wives. The holes in our heart were plugged with Nietzsche. Heidegger on Nietzsche: I don't know why I'm reading it but I am and I feel better, you did not say, about going my own way one more time.

We loved movies, Flowers said. What would Gus say if I said he was *The Dancer Upstairs* or "William Blake" in his ceremonial canoe floating out to sea at the end of *Dead Man*? The sky is blue and the land goes out as far as it can be seen. The people on shore are shooting at each other, like the people outside the walls of the dance studio in Peru. We knew all the symbols came from the real. We read Emerson. I loved you like a brother who loved all his brothers

not long, but well. The older you get the more you know was for naught. I thought of writing you when Kesey died. I didn't. Know him. Nor did you say that much about your annual visits to the farm in Oregon. You went to Germany and toured Dachau on you own. No fol-de-rol for you, mon frere. Like Howard and Gordon Curtis, and Lafe's son Geoff you were fathered by Lafayette Young of whom Henry Miller wrote: I will miss his great pal, the painter gone to his eyrie. The eagle's up there, Flowers points and Irish follows the finger up. Here is the northern wilderness we live it up by staying in the house and living like everyone else

says they do though we wonder how you can live if you don't talk all night and sleep half the day. Today I woke, Flowers says to Irish, missing Gus. His is the first funeral I've been tempted to go to, ever. He thinks again, I couldn't do that, Gus didn't believe in priests but he did in wakes

though that was long ago. Still he wouldn't stop his friends from whooping and hollering as his corpse was delivered to the promised land. But nobody drinks now. Good, he would say. Put me in the furnace and cast all my ashes away, and bones if there are any should not touch the ground. ha! the woman from Laguna makes sound, and the mourners feel words are all he had to give them, or I add, Flowers said he would say—Gus thought words were meant to think.

FLOYCE ALEXANDER

19 SEPTEMBER 2003

*"Last summer I sent him a copy of my most recent book, AMERICAN FIRES, and he wrote back via e-mail, July 1, a very characteristically gracious note, ending, "This is brief, old friend, but heartfelt."*

## from The Logician

For his thirty-sixth birthday the logician received from his wife, a silver and turquoise clasp for the long hair she so detested, papers of divorce, and his first case of crabs.

He itched; found it as difficult to concentrate on work as he did to get fucked. He probed and learned restraint. Nor did he know which took precedence, which he would really prefer. He scratched a lot on paper, on blackboards, and in his groin, between his buttocks, and on his perineum.

The three blackboards swarmed with formulas. The logician dejectedly grunted spawning in the moonlight. His eyes were gritty with chalk; the blackboards abounded with symbols. Notes, sketches of proofs, and proofs recovered spread across the whole surface of his desk. He looked from his jottings to the formal progressions on the boards. There they were, in both places— upper and lower case roman letters, characters from Greek, German, English, and Hebrew alphabets; algebraic symbols for operations; a single Japanese character in *kana*, MA—all held in their places and their orderly dispositions by brackets, braces, dots, and parentheses, the syntactical marks of punctuation that gave to the world its structure and not just a hermetic structure to the world of symbolic logic.

The logician rubbed his gritty eyes, recalled taking barium sulphate when he was young so the doctors could illumine his interior, and looked again at the bloodless scab of symbols covering his boards. Clearly, certainly, and with small awe, he realized that the parens, braces, and brackets, like staples, held the symbols on the pages and the boards. Other wise they would skitter sideways off the edges or else explode upwards in grit and ink into the faces of logicians. The imagined blindness, whether permanent or temporary, made the

logician realized for the first time the deep dangers inherent in his otherwise empty and skeletal investigations. For logic makes up the world and therefore never touches it.

There is nothing protean about logic even though its symbols resemble hieroglyphics, epitaphs relieved in stone, and figures incised on cylinders of clay. It is timeless and unchanging; it merely grows and progresses, enveloping the world like a casing does the sausage, a skin its bubble. It progresses and is terminal.

A word is used when it is used to mean what it stands for; it is mentioned when other words are used to state what the word means. We mention a word by putting it between single quotes; it is then a sample, a type. With this simple convention logicians adequately characterize the truth. Prepare and behold:

‘Snow is white’ *if* snow is white.

As always truth admits neither of dispute nor interest. We are where we began, and the lightning remains, as usual, unforked.

Because logicians are commonly found in departments of philosophy, this means nothing. Their sole interest is in forms, not contents, in what underlies and is a foundation for everything there is, in what encloses, holds, and limits. Without such interest, there would be no substance to the world. Nothing would be content.

Travel light, they always told the logician. Snarling, he would ask how in hell he could do that. He always had to take his head along. Like the logician himself, his field was rather massive than subtle.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Stooge 7, 1972*

16 September 1974  
201½ Princeton SE  
Albuquerque, N.M. 87106

Lard LARDY O Speckled Hole of Doughnut!

Last week was a week of Youngs. I am delirious with their varied but unanimous responses to *le curvre de Gus* (pron., Prog., Goo-se). First, and I quote in full, the best letter I have ever received, read Thursday evening after coming up from Socorro on the bus--- (I actually felt that the bus was gaining altitude, an illusion increased since I was sitting behind the driver, watching the highway create an undisappearing vanishing point between the intersecting white lines (broken) of the highway))--the letter, from Lufe:

Dear Dear Gus: I've had a bad spell but even whskey I gotta tell you your work in Messure is exciting & great. God bless you! Lufe.

I was left responseless, my knees gone semen-sticgl, smash. I'll write as soon as I push my few working words into the right shape. Then a card of disturbing Lichtenstein from the Weeney Hock O Woke Youngs saying that Lufe & Bethel like items in Messure; so I wrote you; and you got that letter; and then today, Be's item, which sent me shivering into my chair, grinning from ear to ear. The Youngs gotta be the best readers in the world! Da kinda readers a man outta have, as George Louis Bore-ass wd say. Yes in deed.

Thus inspired, I abandoned pro tem my work in porn & asst to zero in on my STOOGE item. I gotta have something new so that the least I can do this time is to fail to please--parce that preceding, ironical one slowly, O Mons.

This weekend, while contemplating the globose beauty of remembered loquats; while reading an article in the San Diego Historical Society Bulletin on Madame Tingley's fuck palace on point Loma--really just a place we want to bump; while working assiduously on set theory, on an item for STOOGE; while clinking out of the inexplicable doldrums and despondencies of pre-birthday sunswing; while doing all this, it was revealed to me that I was the reincarnation of Kawabata Yasunari & Henry James! So, as in PROSE OCEAN, I gotta thin the Jamesian densities & rhythms adverbially generated with a little of that Kawabata silence and glistening space--a single trail of sting & snails in the garden.

Read Ippekire's CAPE JASMINE & POMEGRANATES, free-meter haiku, and he writes about loquats, pomegranates, and free-style swiming, and lepped of the cosmic loaf this little item for Ippy, as we who knew him called him:

A plate of pomegranates  
and chilled loquats  
after you finish your laps.

Nice, but not fini. It doesn't clamp shut like a giant razor-clan, but it will.

Read Evan Connell's CONNOISSEUR, and it is wonderful, about lust and the desire to ppsess creating an unquenchable appetite.

So, in the midst of all this, I was working on my piece, saying to myself, "How nice if you'd have at least a draft by the time Geoff & Laura get here," and so other things laid aside, not too far aside, within wrists reach (nice sound).

And this little letter is written still grinning about Youngs in general, feeling like a kid, and bouyed wonderfully by Bo's inspiration.

That woman in UKIYOE has recurred, and I think the redo for Chuck book will exclude the octopus—she just gets had by too many items; the Hokusai print exists, brilliantly; and what I really want is the sexual fear of depth, of diving into a foreign element; but it is a powerful enough drawing as it stands; and PROCE OCEAN has been tucked, perking, away since June; Chuck starts drawing soon, after his vacation and house-renewal, and then I'll redo the goods for their final appear, due credit to my gorgeous editors at STOCCE, "the only artists who truly understand the gilet-holedx sense of the Hlaidalleian visions (sic)." Fl? Sure, who wants singularities. Queers!

Seen California Split twice. Loved it.

Things are well; you're all getting closer, as I swing sunwards. 39! How exciting and frightening, I guess.

Love,

Yas! Yas!

Yasunari Dingy-bata



GUS & GEOFF YOUNG / 1971

PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM STAFFORD

from O Bateau

Afternoon goes out curses light comes in curses darkness no focus  
soul all turned wrong way round light no direction dark none known.  
Outside: imagine: a hotelroom to die in, in torn oilcloth windowshades,  
sweat sunlight through broken windowpanes, stripe mattress stained  
steelwool smell piss trickle sperm spot blood ooze soul all turned wrong  
way round stumbles in dark out of light cursing, broken both all turned  
wrong way round. Outside, elsewhere another mattress on curb in gutter  
smouldering between peckertracks menstrual stain urine spots  
trickle soggy hole spreads black burning center out old liver spotted  
speckled hand drops dozing cigar all wrong turned way round through  
water bring blood and being between piss and shit, birth, curve of space  
to slope of time, death all turned wrong way round.

Adrift in a skiff, cockleshell, looking up rolling in seas of alcohol, at the  
constellations, smoke like cosmic dust obscuring great swatches of the  
ceiling universe of O Bateau. False North Star, false Pleiades, Betelgeuse,  
Aldebarran, Only the Dog Star and lodestars of despair.

Air pulses throbs stopped ears beat rush with outside blood voice and  
boom air slams drunk heads down tabletops up tympanum volume up  
aural alley hammer and anvil stirrup foot on side of drunk head memory  
gone brain gone membrane gone throat songs choke swole tongue back  
teeth hiss wet songs out throat lips and jerk songs choke tongue back  
no song no voice just chest hum phlegm snot song blood up noise choke.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Fractionally Away Monad*

SAND DOLLAR / 14, 1974

## VIII

A young boy who, thought the restlessness of the sea was because the ocean was unhappy, once threw a book of poems as far out beyond the breakers as he could. See it sail above the waves, fluffing out its pages before it dives! Believing the rhythms of the poets would soothe the churning sea, forever rebegun. Spine-broken, the binding washed clean by salt, the waves disgorged the book, its stanzas awash upon each page as terrifying now as the thrash and surge of weed beneath the waves of the whaleroad.

Inland, the boy buried what remained of the seatorn poems, then returned across the grassy dunes to the reefs, the tidepools, and the blowholes full of sky-ascending ferns of seafoam. there was within him the pelagic cycle of his own blood, and he felt uneasy.

He makes his way among the rocks and reefs until he comes to a tidepool starred with sea-anemones, the bottom glowing with smoothwashed chips of abalone. Slipping off his trunks, stung by the salt spray, the boy fearfully extends his finger into the waiting, waving sepals of an open, pink anemone. He expects to be stung but is released instead, pleased in the tautening pressure enclosing his finger. After a while he stands, erect and opalescent.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Prose Ocean*

BEAR HUG BOOKS, 1975

# Test(e)ings

work a while  
away  
in words

to the mind the brain is cloisonne

sleep dark as sashweights  
hanging in casements

facts cast	syllables of light
shadows falling	encrust on bone
things cling	each wordspun sum
one, to an other	
to each other	

bodiless thoughts  
come in, yes, in here  
in this body in which  
I inhere  
neither inside nor out  
thoughtless bodies  
no words no way new words not one, none

work a way  
a while  
in words

GUS BLAISDELL  
*Dented Fenders*  
TRIBAL PRESS, 1976

## Two Deaths

Junichiro Tanizaki (1886–1965)

Yvor Winters (1900–1968)

*O yaumi nasai*, old man.

*O yasumi nasai*.

Your heart has  
killed you  
at last;

Gone, the bulldog face  
of wisdom, old man.

Somewhere, on some street in Hell,  
I see you smile at summer lightning.  
*O yasumi nasai*, old man.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Dented Fenders*

TRIBAL PRESS, 1976



ONO NO KOMACHI (834–880) is the legendary beauty of Japan, and one of Japan's greatest poets. Her poems often explored the intricacies of love's longing, heat, and loss. Numerous artists created numerous woodblock prints depicting her life, though often using various courtesans of their day as models. This print is by Utagawa Toyokuni (1769-1825).

## On a Japanese Print

Komachi with a poem clenched in her teeth,  
Calligraphy pouring from her mouth like blood,  
And the complex heat of her passions  
Articulate and expressive as steel.  
Bright eyes rimmed in black above her fan  
And the long upraised sleeve, and black hair  
With strands of silver and green flashing  
Lights and highlights on her small body  
White rice washed in a mountain stream.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Dented Fenders*

TRIBAL PRESS, 1976

## from Skeptical Landscapes

The mood that has pervaded my descriptions of this sequence has been that in which Hume finds himself at the end of his skeptical deliberations. It is that famous section at the end of his first book of *A Treatise of Human Nature* in which, almost shipwrecked by the melancholia that attends his profound thoughts, the great philosopher is near despair. Reason, in a shambles, is unable to heal the wounds it detects; all the faculties of his mind are in disrepair. In short, he is near to madness, the everpresent double of skeptical doubt. He finds himself an uncouth monster. But society is even more deformed. His isolation is absolute and his mind seems near a point of no return. He has discovered that two fundamental determinations of the mind, reasoning from causality and continued existence of matter, stand in contradiction. This undermines sense, and what we say either false or without meaning.

Because the mind cannot heal itself nature steps in, and on removing from his room and rejoining society, the philosopher finds himself restored once again to integral sense. Yet, knowing that society is a slumbering beast that dreams, he cannot long remain in so somnolent a condition. But, remembering the pain of his intensive thinking, he wonders what it is that pulls him against the current of indolent nature and seems to predispose him to the pains of philosophizing.

The situation I have been describing throughout is one in which nature can no longer restore us to our senses. She appears fixed, with a hideous clarity and an unwanted constancy, and my experience of being in this world is one of incarcerated isolation, a room of my own mind which I cannot leave. This world will not change; it will not go away; it will answer to only one of my moods. Obstinate it persists; obdurately it fixes me. The countenance of crucifixion is surcharged. Inside or out this is a world that insists on my acknowledging what has been done to it. The unlooked-for result turns skepticism over, making it a permanent feature of nature in its exhaustion, things-in-their-farewell. But

these last now refuse to recede any farther. My distance is fixed by them. I have no place to which I can remove, none to which I may repair. Assaulted from without, deformed from within, I cower, having no place to go. That means I am here, nowhere else, and that I cannot exempt myself. Like Hume, “I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance,”; “I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ’d with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty.” This is a black world where I would not dwell. Yet Cavell, meditating with Thoreau, advises me that if I have pursued a downward and darkening way then I have no alternative, and that “the place you will come to may be black, something you would disown; but if you find yourself there, that is so far home; you will either domesticate that, naturalize yourself there, or you will recover nothing.”

We speak to each other, and to ourselves, in one another’s voices, some of which must be our own. This is at least a precondition for philosophical conversation, the sound of an internal dialogue, since the soul that converses with itself through acknowledgment gains, as always, self-knowledge of the other. When that other is so totally different as to horrify us, as in some of these pictures, then we are awakened to a fact like crucifixion—the sequence spreads out and deepens as it exhibits all of the terms of its criticism—indignation and outrage and disgust, steps far beyond any misanthropy, defensive aestheticizing, or contempt. The world depicted here is indeed as Cavell wrote of another, one in which instinct is estranged, birds droop at noon, and strange gods are readied.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Park City: Photographs by Lewis Baltz*

ARTSPACE PRESS / CASTELLI GRAPHICS / APERTURE, 1980

## from *On in: Outside*

The pigmentary primaries are present in each painting, no matter how muted, tertiary or off-minor. Even the tertiary colors are so deeply saturated that they diminish with an internal luminosity—toward brightness or darkness, depending on the overall tone or key chosen for the painting. If there is any feeling of optical undulation in these paintings it is deeper by far than any experience of the surface, coming as it does from the painting's own acceptance of an invitation to voyage, like the one Matisse accepted from Baudelaire . . . Matisse also compared a painting to a book, to be leafed through slowly, its contents soaked up by the reader in search of, and now intent upon, what each page holds, turning over in his mind, savoring it there, what he leafs through by hand or scans with his eye; intent upon the successions, each and every one of them, as he enters more deeply whatever surface happens to be before him.

Illusionism is emergent, insinuated almost furtively, and present as the depth of the space. And this is done with every appearance to the contrary, with the appearance of avowedly avoiding illusionism. After all, these are undeniably abstract paintings. Yet illusionism is brought to the fore, shown to be equally reflected in surface and depths. Abstraction is being used abstractly, concentrated upon, as if it were mapping itself into itself, enfolding the manifold of one of its many-fold aspects. Abstraction brings illusionism into being. (I am tempted to say that what we have forgotten is that illusionism is not originally about realism but painting's first mastery of abstraction.) Is seeing believing? Seeing a painting is knowing it. The problem is, if any, and as always—getting said what is you see and know.

The feeling of these paintings is for me very close to my experience of Japanese prints. The color, rather than being attached to a surface, seems to permeate it. It is soaked up into it and gives the white surround it an equal weight and reciprocal shape. Color is made something we can

handle. When I remember leafing through stacks of Japanese prints the touch I recall is that of suede or chamois, and I sometimes see and feel the sweet heavy brown of a wilted magnolia blossom when I evoke those prints in my imagination. So fully saturated are the colors that the single sense of sight is so intensified that vision is taken into feeling, sight awakens touch, and the two senses discreetly combine with the others until consciousness is alert.

Colors though reciprocated by white, are gravidly charged. They burgeon into continuous transformations of themselves, mixing and comingling, primary and modulated until they unfold completely, extending themselves to whatever limits happen to be internal to them at this juncture, the they rest at now. They compose themselves with others. Ultimately they compose the composure of a complete painting—outstretched luxuriantly in the silence they have shaped.

Lyric and musical in being simultaneous, silent in the intervals, these paintings, as I essay them, reverberate color toward a meaning all its own. They call our attention to the possibility of color making shape and give us the resounding silences we usually associate with poetry—meaning rising with the unstressed syllables' freedom from inflection—and with music—the dying notes fading fall, bringing darkened feeling resoundingly to light.

A pause: inside, then moving on in—outside. Since tenor absorbs vehicle throughout, their shapes are tenorious. Harmonies and concords as plain and complimentary as timbres, am I saying that this body of work is melodious? Better than that. I think I am saying something more. It is *thelonious*.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Guy Williams: Selected Works 1976-1982*

THE FIGURES, 1982

## from *Paris, Texas*: Passion Misfits Us All

... There is in that room all the room in the world, a mother's love for her son and a child's response. Travis has no need to see what he already knows. He drives off, action replacing the undertow of passion. They are together. Now he has himself to work on, beginning all over again. Hunter and Jane, and *Paris, Texas* itself overcome screening at this point. The ordinary, seldom documented, transcends the eroticized hotel-room set in the Keyhole Club by becoming an ordinary hotel room in the Meridian Hotel. Precarious is the alternating balance between the erotic, the ordinary, and the ordinary under the exploitation of the erotic. Jane and Hunter are, far away from the impacted visions of love that preceded this last scene. The thought seems to be that passion suffers itself not to be transformed. In its struggle to maintain itself, something it knows it will fail to do, passion represents the ordinary as boring and tedious. For in a mother's love for her son passion (no smarter than any other human being) seems its own demise. It resists change, conservative as such suffering always is. It encloses the self enchants the senses, and collapses utterly when faced with transformation.

... If reality is what we aim at documenting, then drama or fiction might be our ways of achieving it, things outside and beyond ourselves that are ideals, not just ideas, and which if need be we can reach. Once reached we may have to disabuse ourselves once again. Can passionate love be housed and domesticated? Passion is always there to knock us over. As *Paris, Texas* shows it can happen to anyone. Passion is as desired as it is dreaded, and we could sort this all out could we strike the proper balance between passion, love, and jealousy. Who lives that deeply in the present of the world? My guess is that Travis represents a beginning, one that acknowledges the outlaw nature of passion. He drives toward it in the night.

GUS BLAISDELL

ARTSPACE MAGAZINE, SUMMER 1985



*f/t/s: Gun Club Road/So. Wall Variant 1978 (Gus Blaisdell Study)*

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS BARROW

## from Absorbing Inventories

My relations to my materials, my connections between words and subject matter proved as remarkably mysterious and intriguing as those between the photographs perched tantalizingly atop their originals. I started and frowned, took notes and drafted them into compositions. Nothing. I swivelled round and round. I made promises. Deadlines arrived and passed. Mountains of pages, volumes of notes but none of the words were mine. However many years passed was irrelevant to progress. Each time I began I began for the first time, hopelessly ignorant, anxious and at a loss.

. . . Made of paper and ink, cloth, linen, starch, pasteboard and glue, the ingredients of books and the operation of their making showed me clearly the domain was domestic privacy. Binding and its sewing reminded me of upholstery; shelving, of cupboards and cabinets. Libraries like

houses are built, housed in the dwellings that protect us and provide our comforts. Libraries have more in common with linen and china cabinets, pantries, cupboards, furniture and furnishings than they do with the public and monumental. Matisse, a master of the life of interiors, wanted his paintings to be like favorite armchairs after a long day's work. Wittgenstein once likened aesthetic theory, if there was to be use and pleasure in such undertaking, to a beloved old shirt, one you slip on without thinking but are constantly aware of its comforts, of the way your body wears it. Real books are rational beings in a form other than human. They are between us and the angels. When Mallarmé said the world existed to be put into a book he saw the book as one of the most remarkable of our artifacts, the form of man's argument with God's non-existence. Every book has its own seasons, its own weathers. Books are worlds and doors of transport to themselves.

Readers are lovers. Have you ever watched a collector weight a book in his hand, run his hands over the binding and spine, appraise with a sensuous eye the general qualities of the book's making, and then raise it to his nose as if it were a bouquet? For lovers every book is an anthology of the materials and content that book expresses. Books are fragrant and redolent of privacy. Such an aesthetic of comfort and acute awareness is not within the aggressive, confrontational reach of Minimalism.

. . . Ours is a devastated privacy. The road not taken is the one of self-knowledge. It is an abyss, an ugly one. It is vertiginous. All of that requires a quiet heroism, still as madness, stiller than even the still small voice and a silence of composure and repair that will silence even the idiot questioner.

GUS BLAISDELL

*"Thomas Barrow's Library Series"*

ARTSPACE MAGAZINE, FALL 1988

## from Space begins because we look away from where we are

The camera creates a tree where none is. An angle does it, the photographers position toward what is present.

Starting from the top, the photograph (51) shows leaves and branches of a eucalyptus. The central bough crowns a smooth, exfoliated trunk that turns out to be an abandoned electrical pole. A dangling wire trails sketchily down its right side, unattached to an iron electrical ground. Rubble strews the foreground. A chain-link skirt, protecting it from what?, encircles the base of the pole.

Trees break the level of this prostrate place where elevations and depressions alike still leave you in the dumps. There are very few trees in this place, stadia breaking the horizontal or odd dustball shapes at the end of an otherwise horizonless plain. A small stand of trees cluster around a spalled concrete pad; they are deteriorating, sickly, dying, dead.

The angle crowns with leaves not even a dead tree. The camera memorializes a vast absence of trees in their own former materials. This tree is not a tree, not even the memory of a tree, or its trace. The photograph creates a tree where none is, out of the materials of a tree, the photographic equivalent of a field-stripped, exploded-view drawing of? a weapon? a tree? The photograph constructs itself and its content as an artificial ruin (a folly) and thinks about consequences, about futures: by showing us another cap of madness on a visionary face— the expression of affliction memorialized by the always open face of the world.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Lewis Baltz: Candlestick Point*

APERTURE, 1989

## from Afterworld

The corpulent, voluptuary, concupiscent subject matter arouses as it repulses. I am uninterested in the artistic and religious trappings that cover much of the material. What fascinates me is the narrow defile of feeling between pleasure and pain, where prurience is a useful figure: the attempt to relive by pleasurable scratching an itch that becomes a painful wound. The site studied is one where pain and pleasure confuse without amalgamating and yet, in the one who looks, they must begin to coalesce a mottled, piebald range of feeling. I call this seemingly narrow range a defile to distinguish it from an abyss, especially from an abyss that deepens as it narrows. Am I saying that these pictures are superficial, only skin deep? Flesh is where it all tarts and skin is hardly protective enough. How deep, how shallow is incarnation? Human embodiment is where I begin to essay this narrow elusive, continuous, uneasy and sometimes defiled range of feeling.

GUS BLAISDELL

*Gods of Earth and Heaven*

*Photographs by Joel-Peter Witkin*

TWELVETREES PRESS, 1989

## from King of Hearts

He looks out of the narrow rectangular window of his welder's mask. Is the red smudge a reflection of her sexy, piratical bandana or an after-image of the flames in his painting of the *noir* couple she has turned him away from finishing? At least both. Painting, bringing images into existence, is an annealing and tempering and humoring of images, seeking an unbrittle and toughened picture in the heating and slow coolings of the passions of composition. Here painting is a weldment. The humor resides in the fact that a passion greater than that of his *noir* couple—he buttoned down and uptight, she naked, falling or stopping her fall in their unendingly brutal transaction—was building behind him. Wedded bliss is coming unglued and requires a new understanding. The totemic balancing act of his hats does no good. Regardless of the status in the world each may signal, all are doffed before her feeling as before flags, at gravesides, and in churches; even a welder's mask, here the helmet of an image-diver, is unprotective. His masked face is as expressive as her turned back. Acknowledgment will not allow them to cover who they are, neither by turning away nor by covering over. No matter what they may do they stand exposed to each other and to us, privileged to look on, and on—but on and only into ourselves; for like other people they are opaque, as opaque as we discover we are when we introspect, scumbled and confused in the fruitful emptiness within. Understanding of a painting has no outside. Not that it is all inside. Rather, once it starts to unfold what it has to tell, it continues enfolding anyone who willingly keeps looking on. (An old song drifts in from memory, coming into apposition with the title of the painting, a song first heard in 1963 in the White Horse Bar in Craig, Colorado: “From a jack to a king / I played an ace and won a queen / And now I’m king of her heart.”)

GUS BLAISDELL

*“Brian O’ Connor: King of Hats”*

ARTSPACE MAGAZINE, JANUARY/FEBRUARY, 1990

## Moon 2

### **Before your mother and father born, what was your original face?**

Original Face permits us to think about *Moon 2* by entirely removing the visual. Likeness, similarity, imitation, representation (based on likeness), copying and family resemblance—all are erased as the sword of the koan's sense cuts through the Gordian grammars of the self. Taking to heart the sense of Original Face forcefully reminds us that most of the time, especially when awake, we are dark to ourselves. Once Original Face returns us to the dark of ourselves it demands of us that we express ourselves originally.

I must begin blindly, feeling rather than seeing (thinking's epistemological figure). The sense of sight is shut down and looking for help is useless. Original Face is my ordinary, primordial one. Thinking the koan excavates a face behind it like a mask, one more ancient than parents or self. If we try to see in the dark of Original Face we are quickly lost. Emotions populate the dark. With our eyes closed and trying to see in the dark we push against the sense of Original Face.

The dark that is behind us, accompanying us, a companion as constant as forgetfulness; as utter as the dark beside a perception—this is the dark of absolute, utter otherness. I cannot turn upon it and I can never completely dispel it. . . . The other and I delve what surrounds or is behind or is beside or within, and here we are more abandoned (committed) in the dark than we are to it.

GUS BLAISDELL

excerpt from *As REAL as thinking :: Allan Graham/TH*

SITE SANTA FE, 2000

first published in *Artspace*, SUMMER 1986

life and death  
form,  
a

space

reason  
demands  
version  
sacrifice

form  
follows  
limitation

be a front  
for a back

you must be  
nothing  
to survive  
death

the  
flower

such  
a  
life

TOADHOUSE (TH)

## from Inzorbital

### 13

The Gaboon Viper, looking like a secret agent out of Kurosawa samurai film, stood in the doorway of the small adobe house, chugging away on a container full of thirty hits of Sunshine which dissolved when Katsun's wife pour iced tea into my hiding place. . . . Hey, I yelled, wait for me, that's my only useful tranquilizer! I grabbed the residue of residues and said a charged hello to the oncoming surge—Inzorbital and the Gaboon, noisy California emanations of combustible post-nuclear madness, in the ebullient—April 1967 sunlight—fifteen hits to trouncing all divisions, staring the mountains down into accessible focus. . . .

“You're ultimately vague.”

“I'll tell you right now Searsucker, you've got several bright minutes to get your ass in gear and get back to hypothetical grounds for continuance, you rotund glob of slime. . . .”

Others came and went all day, mostly went, unable to handle the energy of this pharmed out act which threatened the entire world with a madness so contagious no one who came near could afford to stay for long. . . .

Laughing, laughing uproariously long into another day, drinking and smoking, pitching boulders, unloosening the throwout bearings of Unlimited Energy, the wind blowing the spring dust all over our faces jabbering riotous connections in the unearthly light of Fervent Valley

BILL PEARLMAN

# Thanks for Lunch

YET IN THE DESERT  
YOU'D BE HAPPY TO EAT THE SCHEDULE ITSELF  
THE SLINGER FINISHED  
ED DORN / *Gunslinger*

symbol adhesion, pervasive seepage  
industrial obedience & tedious amnesia  
    “odious data” / conjured errata  
an overwhelming realm of total assholes  
    squalid where the integrity has come apart  
    everybody & their quaint fears  
    “fuck that shit” he sd

birds & poets fight back  
voice to voice & straight no chaser  
    yet even song distracts  
for how cold the river goes  
    “tis a mug's game, my darling”  
    fortunately it's a gas  
    writing things down in a notebook

sorrow arrives again  
    the old old story  
    no instructions no guarantee  
maybe a last glimpse before the light  
    on Vulture Peak  
    all you need is a rock  
    & the ability to be ready

JB BRYAN

## Shmooz

Of the various pleasures I thought to provide in my title and subtitle, I mention one that may not readily dig out, the sense of *causeries* in causes, the idea of conversational topics or topical conversations. I do not mean by this that I am looking for the sound of chat; I am glad to sacrifice that (supposing it were mine to sacrifice) in favor of a chat's sense of the provisional, the sense of passing, not away, and not exactly over, but by: words and their thoughts on their ways. I think of this as a manner of letting these causes affirm their origins, those contacts one might otherwise like to deny, those to which others might otherwise like to reduce ones efforts. So I am reminded that where I grew up the word for what I mean by a chat was *shmooz*.

Noting even this little, concerning the limited bearing on what I do of a standing mode of exchange, calls for a further word of warning. The Yiddish *shmooz* is taken up in German as *Schmus*. My German dictionary, after giving the derivation of *Schmus* from the Hebrew word for things heard, adduces the word *Gerede*. Now *Gerede* is the word Heidegger uses in *Being and Time* to name Dasein's everyday (hence, for Heidegger, our average, inauthentic) modes of Being and understanding, and first our everyday possession of speech; it is translated as "idle talk." (From here a path leads to one of Wittgenstein's diagnoses, or terms of criticism, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, of a certain failure of philosophy, namely that in it language is idling, something he also seems to identify, most prejudicially, with language's going on holiday. Idlers do not idle. Can engines loaf? Something Wittgenstein means by philosophical failure I find better express in saying that language is racing.) I gather *shmooz* relates to *Shema*, meaning "hear," the first word and the name of a Hebrew daily prayer. This suggest to me why a *shmooz*, taken unprejudicially, is as far from a debased public language (say from what we are generally handed as political discourse, or as talk on talk shows) as philosophical dialogue would be, and roughly as therapeutic. I am not

unaware of the existence of misleading cognates, the sort grammar books used to call false friends. These cost, but perhaps no more than failing to train oneself to spot false enemies.

One of the sayings that would lace my father's conversation was "You can learn from anyone." I did not, in the years he was saying it to me, take him to be singling out my capacities on this score, but to be rebuking me for some common, desperate effort at snobbery. I have since come to take the saying as naming a tremendous aspiration. Between the snobbery and the aspiration there is the daily field on which we do learn from anyone and everyone—sometimes, maybe most often, circulating the discreditable things we already know, but sometimes circling the better thing, possibly achieving Henry James's hopes for us not to lose what there is for us to profit from, in turn something I relate to Thoreau's hopes for reading "out of what wisdom and valor and generosity we have." I am taking it that there is such a listening as well. I do not conceive that anyone has had occasion to learn the better thing from his or her students more than I—from those I have known, so far, in no more than a stand-up exchange after a lecture, which maybe I took as encouragement, maybe as correction for some lazy try; sometimes, so far, from the lucky continuing of a conversation, it may be quite intermittent, into the present, when the earlier offices have been outworn.

Why really, come to think of it (I mean of the subject of learning from the casual or a discontinuous exchange), I ought—as Clark Gable forever puts it in *It Happened One Night*, concerning, among other matters, doughnut-dunking—I ought to write a book about it. To which Claudette Colbert, forever replies—after the man has delivered himself of a lecture on the subject— Thanks, Professor.

STANLEY CAVELL

from the Preface to *Themes Out of School*

NORTH POINT PRESS, 1984

# Fruit of the Loquat Tree

\*WRITTEN FOR GUS' SIXTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY

Gus has a shelf in his study filled with found objects.  
They glow in the south window,  
they resonate in memory.  
Gus has a grandson named  
Jack Augustus.  
He twirls a phrase like other children swing  
tin pails at the beach.  
Jack says  
bop de bop de bop de bop.  
This beat is coded in his genes.

Loquat, loquat.  
How many varieties can there be  
of fruit from this one loquat tree?

Marshal Will Kane turns back  
from retirement  
each semester. Gus asks his students  
Can you hear it? Do you GET it?  
There's courage in this art,  
no art without courage.  
It's always nearly noon,  
ask Wen Ho Lee.  
Loquat, loquat.  
Bop de bop de bop de bop.

A friend from Socorro days asks me  
are you related to Gus  
by marriage?

Let's skip a survey of the intervening decades  
and turn to objects that glow in memory.

Gus taught a class there.

Are you related to Gus by  
learning?

Loquat, loquat.

Bob de bop de bop de bop.

How many varieties can there be  
of fruit from this one loquat tree?

Translate loquat from Mandarin: Rush Orange.

Pronounce its taxonomic name:

*Eriobotrya japonica*.

Follow it hanging in the western sky,  
round burnt orange disk.

Follow it to the first tree  
rooted in oriental earth, rooted in Adam's memory.

Seeds from this one tree blew across oceans,  
flowered in strange, distant worlds.

Can you hear the rhythm that carried these seeds?

Do you GET it?

Loquat, loquat.

Bop de bop de bop de bop

MARK IVEY

16 SEPT 2000



THE WINDOW LEDGE IN GUS' STUDY      PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE BLAISDELL

## A Trollop's Altar

Found & sanctified gutter treasure, anonymous tumbled junk, prized debris, spectrums of patina, metallic residuals, rust, toys, bits of toys, something that might once have been a toy, unknown remnant, rubble, geegaws, ongoing arrangement years in the making, deliberately shuffled, room made for next object, black rock perhaps, emptied from a pocket, jumbled clutter, ordered gnarl, dregs, startled rummage mind, rabid slut for remarkable swine pearls, some letters once cognate gone neologic, rumplestiltskin's ratnest, basic crap for aesthetic gaze, a bum's true gem, reclaimed debased devalued industrial wabi-sabi woe scrap, salon of refuse, exalted realm of "the shunted aside," *Beggar's Banquet*, dense worship of useless trinkets, nasty flotsam, the usual transience of Such.

HILDEGARD MCGILICUDDY

## Phone Calls

“Dudley”

The deep voice would come over the phone at odd hours.

“Yeah Gus...what’s up?”

“Nothing really...just calling”

“Yeah...I’m still here too.”

These calls increased from three or four a year to every few weeks as we both aged. Both of us travel averse, we saw each other infrequently over a period stretching from the 1940-50’s when he was a precocious Navy brat in San Diego, to what turned out to be his farewell tour on his return from Italy shortly before his death. What can I write now of this absence? Who will call now to check?

He was the Best Man at my wedding.

DON DUDLEY



*“i last saw gus, in  
may of 03, at don dudley’s  
loft in nyc, as gus and  
elizabeth were returning  
from venice. had a great  
(last live) yack, lovefest.  
they’d had a great trip.”*

GEOFF YOUNG

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE BLAISDELL / 1990 / TRIBECA

## Moments

It doesn't surprise me that Gus Blaisdell's heart led him out of this world. Or that he left so quickly. He had no patience with fogginess of heart or thinking. He wasn't one to linger needlessly in any matter. And those who knew him saw his heart as a shining road, and it linked exactly with his keen mind. Simon and I stopped by the Living Batch once on our way home, a few weeks after Rainy was born. Simon, the proud father presented the covered baby to Gus. "Isn't she beautiful?" Gus warned with something like: "every parent thinks their kid is beautiful, but I've yet to see one at this age, when they look more like naked mice." Then he uncovered her, and gave his blessing, "You're right," he said. "She is beautiful." Those aren't the most profound words, nor is it the most profound memory. We come to know people more through their spirit than their words, though words are conveyed by the spirit. And small moments with each other are what build the world. And then, as now, I look forward to our next meeting of the heart.

JOY HARJO

*Dear Joy,*

Thank you for getting in touch with me about Gus Blaisdell. Oh my! Not long after James Welch too. You know, Gus was the person who told me first about Jim Welch back in 1967, maybe even 1966. Did I ever tell you? I was gathering poetry for that Native poetry anthology I was doing then which would have been a real first if it'd gotten published. Gus and I were talking like usual, probably at Okie Joe's along with the usual others, and I was telling him about the anthology I was putting together. He said I ought to include James Welch. Who's

he? I asked Gus, and he told me Jim was a poet from Montana who Richard Hugo had taken under his wing as a student. He gave me Jim's address in fact and I got in touch with him. And Jim sent me *Riding the Earthboy 40* in typed manuscript. Beautiful, beautiful poetry, heartwrenching and heartwarming at the same time. Yeah, Gus was something else alright, a good friend and brother mostly; he was always a fan and supporter of my work which goes back to when he was the editor of *UNM Quarterly* back when. Gosh, when was that? Mid-60's until 1968 I think. He was the one who got me in touch with Fran McCullough (Gus had been in the Wallace Stegner Writing Workshop at Stanford with her, Scott Momaday, Larry McMurtry, Ken Kesey, Thomas McGuane, Ernest Gaines, and others) an editor at Harper and Row that resulted in Harper taking a look at my gigantic poetry manuscript which became *Going for the Rain*. I'll always remember Gus Blaisdell as "my Cajun buddy from Louisiana." Yeah, I'll even remember the countless beer drinking days/times at Okies when I was supposed to be in class! Thanks for letting me know about the passing on of a friend and brother.

SIMON ORTIZ

My New Mexico  
for Gus Blaisdell

Edge of door's window  
sun against  
flat side adobe,  
yellowed brown—

A blue lifting morning,  
miles of spaced echo,  
time here plunged  
backward, backward—

I see shadowed leaf  
on window frame green,  
close plant's growth,  
weathered fence slats—

All passage explicit,  
the veins, hands,  
lined faces crease,  
determined—

Oh sun! Three years,  
when I came first,  
it had shone unblinking,  
sky vast aching blue—

The sharpness of each  
shift the pleasure,  
pain, of particulars—  
All inside gone out.

Sing me a song  
makes beat specific,  
takes the sharp air,  
echoes this silence.

ROBERT CREELEY

*Just in Time: Poems 1984-1994*

NEW DIRECTIONS, 2001



ROBERT CREELEY & GUS

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICOLE BLAISDELL

## For the Gentleman Caller

Gus died.

The eligible cowboy caught a clam  
vent out that vest while you're able  
I'd hate to have anything else cancelled  
hey that changes the landscape  
nevermore to catch my drift  
closed: the home of the bicycle pen  
two tips to the blast and this huge key  
unbar the agility studio  
him and his things reattached  
name your own poison  
it all comes out somehow practical  
in front of this vast class but now  
no one to show me me from that exact angle  
high abode of the never  
to be finished

But the nation's puzzling Gus is doodling  
the price of minding never falling  
now wouldn't that be something an Equalling Prize  
they'd have to move north for management etc  
is it okay anymore to forget?  
that bicycle went with my youth  
but Shelly stayed on Oh my Gus  
a voice never to stop down my phone

Otherwise time's inexorable transformations  
you don't usually even notice  
anything you want to do in town?  
another copy of Johnny Smears?  
Citizen Sutcliffe settling for another Sagittarian  
the recompense something else something tied

to the tail of a passing storm you can't quite catch  
actually it was a runaway vulva  
I was perched I thought then it all let go  
sirens wailing a few bars of that woodshed Indiana  
preternatural infection quite stunning  
Jack's new label but we'll see  
comes an average you can never meet  
swell let's wait

The airplane left the garage just  
at the main man's passing  
flat out quartered in oak pins  
and left puzzled with the sailors  
no one has quite opened a pen  
guess I'll be sorry later  
an owl just pissed his pants  
raised and lengthened the song  
heard the belting of the pliers  
won't bet on the next thrush

But don't concern your next  
take it at river tempo  
nothing to stall the desk ever  
not to be clever or at all meted out  
only as sore as the self can get  
match or leave the sound hive alone  
that wall of books it has to be there  
Gus and Phil together in the tomato soup thunderstorm  
the table of my troubles turned over still  
there's food to eat lines to be cast  
Morrison solos in the pewter backyard  
when it comes at last to the cost  
we'll all be gone

CLARK COOLIDGE



PHOTOGRAPH BY JANET MAHER

## The Destination

Luc asks the Frontier staff to find the one who saw his father fall.

The man takes Luc to the spot in the alley—the spot between places the exact spot. Luc gets the story. The whole story. Luc brings family and friends to the exact spot where his father fell. He tells the story. Again and again.

Luc's sister Casey goes to the alley to the exact spot behind the Frontier where her father fell. Casey cries in the alley. The place between places. And she covers the exact spot where her father fell, with sand and fronds and tears of love.

NICOLE BLAISDELL

JANUARY 21, 2005



