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95 THESES: ART & MACHINE

Marc Awodey on Art & other things.

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biographical information: irrelevant, useless
(yes, i know)

dedicated to: dear alice

I.

Written response to advance questions put forth to a panel on art criticism at Vermont College/Norwich Univ. October 27, 1999

(i forgot the name of the questioner, but they are good questions)

question 1. (a) *George Bernard Shaw said, "Critics, like dentists, are much engaged in hurting sensitive people in sensitive places."* (b)*Is the object of criticism- to decide "how to hit him, where to hit him, when to hit him..." and have the nerve to do it, as he suggests?*

answer 1(a) **Dentists do not promote tooth decay.** When artists pull out their own teeth the pain is inevitably greater. Regardless of whether or not a critic is Doc Holiday, (a dentist who shot from the hip) or Dr. Mengele- the issue is the artist's sensitivity, not the dentist's. Artists who like too many sweets will inevitably have a rougher time than artists who eat only meat, potatoes, and turnips. Too much wine and cheese also leads to poor oral hygiene, and generally, the patients who are most in need of a good root canal have not been flossing hard enough to begin with.
-1(b) **The object of art criticism is to encourage critical thinking**. A critic afraid to be honest is no better than a dentist who is afraid to be bitten.

Q2. *In her 1960s book of essays, Against Interpretation, Susan Sontag says, "Interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art... real art has the capacity to make us nervous and intellect tries to tame it." She suggests that critics should attend to form rather than content, to "a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art." Do you agree?*

A2. So, was Sontag really calling for a criticism of keen and loving descriptions devoid of intellect? If so, **I do not agree**. This ideal would make me more nervous than any piece of art ever could, as it ultimately calls for a Home Shopping Channel kind of art criticism. **We should not try to ameliorate pseudo intellectual excesses by promoting mass lobotomies**. While there are many critics capable of making neither clear, informed interpretations nor “accurate, sharp, loving descriptions”- it doesn't mean that the whole premise of criticism, and the role of critique is flawed. It simply means that there are incompetent critics.

Q3. Aristotle said art was a useful way to arouse and purge dangerous emotions. Sontag says "art is a seduction, not a rape." Do either of these statements shed light on the controversial current exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum by British shock artists called "Sensation"?

A3. **No**.
Based on the framing of question #2, it seems clear that Sontag’s statements regarding visual art are at best reactionary, and at worst so subjective that they are not worth considering. As for Aristotle, most of the art of ancient Greece was produced by slaves. The Medieval version of his attributed statement would be “idle hands are the devil’s workshop”. It has nothing to do with art in the modern world.
Regarding the exhibition “Sensations”: There is an exhibit in the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry that presents a thinly sliced male transient, about 40 years old, preserved between slabs of glass for all to

see. The poor fellow had five o'clock shadow, and sores on his body. The museum also has a fine collection of fetuses in jars illustrating human prenatal development up to about eight and a half months after conception. The largest fetus is essentially a pickled baby. Both of these displays are at least 75 years old.

The British art students responsible for "Sensations" are cheeky neophytes compared to what many serious scientists have been up to in the Twentieth Century. The notion of "shocking" material being art, goes back at least as far as to Matthew Brady's 1864 exhibition "The Dead of Antietam", an assembly of corpse photographs that actually had relevance in the context of our Civil War. That exhibition was truly revolutionary, as it had a lasting impact on the art of photography and on the public's perception of war, violence, and society.

"Sensations" appears to be a sophomoric collection of "shocking" installations- that has somehow captured the attention of a few incestuous curators in Britain and America. **The Brooklyn Museum should have refused the show for purely artistic reasons, as it is artistically irrelevant at this point in history.** The movement that the show represents has been as dead as its decomposing cow head since at least the early 1970's. The curators at the Brooklyn Museum should have had the insight and fortitude to say so. The board of the Brooklyn Museum demonstrated its own critical insecurity by backing up the curator's flawed decision, and then the political leaders in New York City began grandstanding because the show is such an easy target for public outrage. Not however because the show is effective "shock" art- but because the whole process that put that particular show into that particular space has

been laid bare as corrupt to the core. If it had appeared in a privately funded space, or a commercial gallery the exhibition would not merit controversy.

The whole affair demonstrates why local, state, and federal government should not attempt to fund contemporary art. With funding comes an expectation of control- and artists should not submit to this public control. By scurrying toward the public trough artists are ever eager to accept the requirements of self-censorship that are inevitably imposed by community standards of moral decency, political correctness, and vague notions stylistic validity.

Be it public money, or private money- MONEY CORRUPTS ART. Artists must create and put their works before the public in as independent a way as possible by relying on their own resources, wits, and insight.

I do not believe that society has a responsibility to support the arts, because I do not believe that artists have a responsibility to uphold the values of their society. However, if artists DO accept public support they must expect to be accountable for the largess of their masters- and unfortunately, a semiliterate cultural elite is generally holding the purse strings. I see knee jerk support for the Brooklyn Museum position as arrogant, perhaps disingenuous, naive, and shortsighted.

Q4. (a) *How do you as a critic go about assessing a show? (b) What are the pitfalls and problems involved in the process, and (c) what do you do when you don't like the work?*

A4(a) I usually spend about an hour walking around with

my notebook, sketching interesting pieces, and trying to figure what the artist has done, and how the artist did it. I gather information from my own art library, and on the Internet to verify technical and art historical suspicions before presenting them as fact.

Also, **I usually disregard the artist's statements about why a piece was created**- unless they are presenting such an absurd premise that I feel like it should be questioned. Only rarely do I actually interview an artist. my job is to explain what is actually on the wall, rather than what the artist wants you to see. If the work is effective, it communicates exactly what it is supposed to.

(b) **My yardstick varies depending on the level of accomplishment of the artist**. I tend to expect more from M.F.A.s, professors, and other professional artists who put high price tags on their works than I do from artists just beginning to put their work into the world- and this may give the impression of capriciousness. However- bad remains bad, and good remains good regardless of intent and experience. The question is how diplomatic do I feel like I need to be.

(c) When I don't like the work I have three choices- I can ignore it, nullify it, or do a Sontag type of "really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work" without attesting to the validity of the piece. **My preference is to ignore work that I do not like,** and that's what I do most of the time when confronted with such work. Nullification is reserved for the best of the worst work.

5. *Is it okay to socialize with artists you write about?*

-5. **In Vermont it would be impossible to avoid the**

artists and curators most likely to be written about. Critics should recuse themselves from writing about artists with whom they have a very close relationship. It is ultimately up to the editor to decide what distance seems appropriate. As for myself, I rarely go to openings and am becoming more antisocial everyday.

6. *How can the quality of critical writing in Vermont be improved?*

-6 **I don't think it's all that bad right now in *Seven Days***. *Vox/Vt Times* is improving, *Art New England* is good but should devote more space to regional reviews, and *The Valley News* and *Time-Argus* have done some good things that I've read- and interesting stories pop up here and there occasionally. However, **a broader range of informed opinions would be nice.** It is sad that the *Burlington Free Press*, is completely worthless for visual art. The glossy Vermont magazines are not even contenders.

7. *A fascinating article in the New York Times Science section 9/7/99 suggested that the most original ideas do not come from utter freedom and a shifting of paradigms, but from "constraining options and focusing thought in a specific, rigorous and discerning direction "...To suspend criticism and think <u>any</u> idea is possible or good may ultimately be destructive to creativity," the researcher wrote. Do we need some historical parameters to accurately evaluate art?*

-7 **Absolutely.** Everything exists within boundaries and this is not a bad thing, as long as boundaries do not suffocate critical thinking. "Historical parameters" are

probably the most important boundaries in discussions about visual art and its criticism- because **everything that can be done stylistically, has already been done**, to a degree, somewhere at some previous point in time. What artists do- often without even realizing- is gather the threads left by earlier artists and try to weave something new. Critics and artists alike must appreciate what has gone before in order to understand what is unique about what could be happening today.

8. *"The innate gifts of the good critic are Awareness, Conscience, Justice and Courage" (E.J. West in the intro to Shaw on Theater). Thus the great dangers for the critic are, above all, Ignorance, Incompetence, Carelessness and Irresponsibility. Please expand upon one positive or negative attribute as it relates to your area of arts criticism.*

-8. I do not really understand what this statement is asking for, so I must hope that ignorance is a good thing. Let me just make a bit of a summation, and you can decide what it means:

A visual art critic must always remember that the aesthetic decisions were not his to make, and that he is not there to repaint the pictures. Also, I am not an ambassador for the public visiting a show, I feel like I am an ambassador for the arts visiting the public. When readers pick up my review on the bus, in the bathroom, at a cafe- they are reading a note from a foreign land, and my job is to explain what terms, concepts, or colorful rituals they can expect to see if they choose to visit this strange kingdom. What foods are nourishing, what foods are poison.

It is also important to realize that good visual art critics do not exist without knowledgeable editors. Visual art is too esoteric for the average newspaper writer to have any substantive insight or experience in- and what does a painter or poet know about the needs of newspaper? **It is as important for critics to realize what they don't know, as well as what they do.** Otherwise they are likely to be insufferable to editors, artists, curators, and public all at the same time. On the other hand... Cocteau's statement that "De Chirico need only paint a cross to crucify" is a brilliant critical observation despite its baseless, brash, subjectivity. Whatever attribute was manifested by such a turn of phrase- must be one of the most positive ones.

end.

II.

from the **Chiron Review**

verbatim interview with marc awodey by sean reagan- (c.2001)

"Marc Awodey, 2000 National Poetry Slam Haiku

champion, is the author of two chapbooks - "No This Ain't Haiku" *and* "Art and Machine: 95 Theses" - *and perfect-bound* "Telegrams From The Psych Ward *(WPC-Minimal Press, 101 pages, 1999 - available at Amazon.com and WPC-Minimal Press). Awodey, a founder of the Minimal Press and Writer's Publishing Cooperative, is best known for rehabilitating assorted and sundry vending machines - cigarettes, laundry soap, gum balls - so that they dispense poetry. We met at his home in Burlington, Vermont, then moved to the streets as the rain cleared. We visited machines at the Rhombus art gallery/ performance space and the local library where I purchased a copy of Cathy Resmer's "Ecole Champlain" and got a gum ball haiku. Awodey also showed me a 51 x 31 picture of himself in a whipped cream toga that hangs outside a local bar. We tied up the loose ends via e-mail. The face-to-face interview ended when Awodey- an elected justice of the peace - left to officiate a guerrilla wedding at an antique car show. Somebody was paying him $100.00 to "surprise" the bride-to-be."*

Sean Reagan: You're a painter as well as a poet. Have you always done both?

Marc Awodey: I think it was always both. I got an MFA at Cranbrook Academy of Art but I did a lot of writing at the same time. A few of my things got published when I was pretty young. But I never formally studied poetry. Of course, it was always hell to write poems before there were word processors because it was impossible to do any kind of little revisions without having to retype everything and I was just a horrible typist. So I guess it was with the advent of word processing that I really

started to get into poetry.

Sean: How does your painting inform your poetry and vice versa? Or are they entirely separate?

Marc: Well, that’s interesting. I never really thought about the poetry informing the painting as much as the painting informing the poetry. I find that the process of writing and building a poem is very similar to the process of building a painting. Basically, when you get to a certain point with a painting you realize that you can’t do anything wrong. Nothing is irreparable. You can always fix something you don't like. And that’s true in the revising process of poetry as well. Writing poems is like having a perfect blank canvas and a book is like having a perfect exhibition. You know, everything is under control, everything is where you want it to be. But as far as the poetry informing the painting is concerned . . . That’s an interesting thought. I do think that my visual art work has been sort of informed by poetry over the last couple of years in that there’s a little more room for spontaneity, which is probably introduced from the early stages of writing a poem.

Sean: You write about the name of Lake Champlain in "This Lake Has No Name" from Telegrams. There’s history in that poem, there's political theory, social criticism, ecological concerns. You've got a subject and a ton of information but by the same token, you've also got music. You've got words. Do the words take you beyond or around or away from your subject?

Marc: No. I always think of poetry in terms of images. It's always a "don't tell, show" type of situation. So I follow

the images but often as a result of that there are different things happening to the words and when I see that in the middle of a poem I will either foster it or leave it depending on what I think.

Sean: Telegrams is denser and more complicated than much of what I read in the small/alternative press. It's not the only book out there which is dense or complicated but there's an awful lot of beer fart and fish stick stuff which is derivative of Bukowski - I don't mean to impugn Bukowski...

Marc: Well, there are a lot of misreadings of Bukowski -

Sean: But in a reading culture that doesn't always cater to depth or complexity, I'm curious whether you feel that Telegrams has been fairly met.

Marc: I feel like people understand it as well as they can. I've gotten a number of nice, insightful reviews. I haven't gotten any real negative reviews from anybody. But I realize that the style of that book is pretty different than a lot of other things. One reviewer said this is not easy material to read. And I think that's perfectly fair, you know? So yes, I think it's been well-received. It's got it's own little place in the cultural continuum. But the response to your question about the reading and publishing culture is that we have to become our own publishers. There are all kinds of stigmas around self-publishing that we really have to ignore. I think there ought to be more stigmas around academic publishing because, in the case of academic publishing, manuscripts are looked at with almost no criticism. And they're published and marketed by big institutions that

just naturally create a certain amount of success or a certain number of sales regardless of whether or not the manuscript had any kind of a peer review whatsoever. Besides, when you think about self-publishing, Whitman comes up immediately. American literature started out self-published- from Huckleberry Finn to Whitman to - I guess you could say that City Lights started out as a self-publishing thing for Ferlinghetti.

Sean: What are the stigmas to self-publishing?

Marc: Well, there are a lot of people who publish stupid junk. Vanity press things that have no economic viability to them. And what I mean by that is that people will spend so much on putting together the book that their costs wind up being more than the book itself because they pulled out all the stops on the cover and the paper and all that crap. That's just a stupid thing to do and it hurts the notion of self-publishing. The bottom line is that you have to be your own critic and trust your own instincts about what is good, what isn't good. There's a lot of bad poetry published out there.

Sean: You're a publisher yourself. When did that come about?
Marc: Well the whole notion of publishing my own stuff started with the little books and that was just a little thing I did. I took 8 1/2 by 11 sheets of paper, folded them just so, with a cut in the crease and like that, very very cheaply, I had an 8 page book. And there were other writers in the area who were attracted to that format, and so we formed a little group to distribute each other's little books. We called it the Minimal Press. If someone was going to be going some place, we'd make sure they had

a stack of books to go with them. One of my little books wound up in Dostoeyvski's desk in Russia! There was a guy who was going off to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with one of his plays and so we published - and when I say published I could also say Xeroxed - we published his program in a little book format. Things like that. I think it was in ‘99 or ‘98 at the Austin Poetry festival there was someone who worked with Mouth Almighty records who had seen the little books. I sent him - he's called "Keystone" - a collapsed beer carton full and he set up a table with a pile of books. I think that wound up spreading the format even more. And then that naturally led into the idea of making chapbooks. It's funny. There are all these competitions out there for chapbooks. And it's just so . . . I mean, people should make their own chapbooks. What's the difference? So, we started with the chapbooks. And then from there, I was a panelist in a discussion about publishing because of my literary efforts and the machines and this other guy was on the panel whose name was Roy Morrison. Roy is a writer in New Hampshire and he had this idea for a literary cooperative that was controlled by writers. It would publish perfect-bound books and leave the writers in control of their own distribution. So I worked with Roy and we created the Writer's Publishing Co-op - www.essentialbooks.com. We have bylaws, an editorial board, we provide technical assistance et cetera, and publish perfect bound books for bookstore distribution. Once you realize that you're never going to have a market for your poetry, then you're free to do whatever the hell you want. You know you're never going to make a living publishing so you do a few books at a time, do them as cheaply as possible, maybe 100 using docutech, and just start getting them out there. Poetry

doesn't exist until somebody else sees it.

Sean: Who do you reach? Other poets? People who aren't reading poetry?

Marc: The little books go everywhere. They do. I mean they wind up in rest areas all around the country. I visited the national archives one time and in the same room where they have all the holy documents of the United States they also have an original manuscript of Whitman's and I had a little book with me and I tucked it in there. I tell people, when you go to a hotel, get the phone book, open it up to pizza and stick one of the books in. Grocery stores, people slide them in between boxes and things. So that's what guerrilla publishing is. It's based on putting art randomly out there in the world and seeing what happens to it. Passing them out to people. Giving them to bus drivers. Giving them to people you're sitting with in the subway. All this kind of handing out as well as just stacking them up in various places like coffee shops, coffee houses. So the little books go everywhere.
We also put the books into sawed off beer cartons, six titles to a carton and we had those in airports. You know 25 cents a book, whatever, because the books only cost 3 or 4 cents, even less if you know somebody at Kinko's that day. People would pick them up sometimes and we would get quarters here and there. But then I started in with the cigarette vending machines. And then the interesting thing about the machines is that people ended up buying the little books from them a great deal. I said to somebody, it's like putting your cat's medicine in a ball of hamburger.

Sean: Where did the idea to use the machines for distribution come from? I assume you didn't have a cigarette vending machine lying around.

Marc: The idea of readapted vending machines selling things that they were not designed to sell, including art, is not new but I wasn't influenced by any particular project. I didn't think "vending machine" and then decide what to sell. We had been distributing little folding books by various means, and the machines were another idea for distributing them. It was a natural evolution - one step better than putting the books into sawed off beer cartons. The project is about literary distribution, not vending machines.

Sean: What other machines have now been pressed into the service of poetry? Is it true there's a tampon dispenser dishing out poems?

Marc: The first two machines I converted were laundromat soap box vending machines. These were mistaken for tampon dispensers in a review of my work so no, I haven't used tampon vending machines. I got the laundry soap machines for free from a Laundromat that was going out of business. They worked pretty well but I wanted something that would vend several titles. I called around to vending companies, and cigarette machines seemed fairly easy to get - cigarette machine vending had been banned in Vermont. I gave the venders a tax write off of $300 per machine - through the Rhombus Gallery 501(c)(3) - and the machines were donated a few at a time. Eventually I had 9 of them. They vend up to 22 titles in each machine. The cigarette vending machines work fairly well but they require

upkeep and are difficult to move so I got into gum ball machines. These are easily bought if you keep an eye on the classifieds. I got 12 gum ball machines and a tabletop snack machine for $50 one time. On another occasion I got several double-headed machines for about the same price. These work well and are easy to move - portability is good. A couple of them do only haiku but others are mixed little books, by all sorts of people. The snack machines sell used paperbacks in addition to broadsides and folding books.

Sean: At first glance, the machines seem like gimmicks. But you say in 95 Theses that these machines are doing more than just being former cigarette vending machines that now dispense poetry books.

Marc: Right. Well, the thing that I like about the machines is that I like the notion of artists supporting each other and fostering each other's work. And one of the main functions of the machines is that they bring together work by a whole bunch of people who are working at different levels. You know, the New Hampshire machine had Maxine Kumin books in there. She gave us some poems and we made a book of it. And by the same token, in that same machine, there was work by teenagers who had just wandered into the Rhombus Gallery at some point. When I've given the machines to various groups - and it works better sometimes than at others - but what I like to do is give a machine to a group and let them manage and take care of it, put their own poetry into it. So for me, the main part of the machines is that they foster a bit of a community, even if it's just a community of people who are in the same machine. For me, the machines were just a matter of being a way to

distribute poetry. That's all.

Sean: 95 Theses also says that if your promote 10 poets before yourself...

Marc: Right. If you promote the work of 10 other artists, there should be ten artists promoting your work. I've found that that is true. The other side of that though is that you can't worry about whether or not it's going to happen. In an activity such as writing, where the act of creation is very solitary and the act of experiencing it is also very solitary, you can't expect too many people to be out there pushing everybody's work but a few people do and I think that matters. When you're a small press that's putting out chapbooks, it's really important that your writers promote the whole list, not just their own title

Sean: It's a very egalitarian approach.
Marc: Right. And that goes back to the whole self-publishing thing. A lot of people think that when they publish a book, that's the end of the process but it's not. A lot of self-publishers have their 1000 books and then what? What do I do now? I thought that publishers promote things. No. Nobody's going to promote your stuff except you and the other artists that you promote.
Sean: When you talk about guerrilla publishing, it's tempting to say, well, there must be an enemy and the enemy must be corporate America with its slick mega-bookstores, dwindling author lists, profit motives et cetera, but "the enemy" really doesn't enter your dialogue.

Marc: That's like talking about the weather, you know?

You can't worry about that kind of stuff. I mean, one example of this, is that Borders bookstore came to downtown Burlington and a locally owned bookstore closed up. And then that got a bunch of activists worried about this whole corporate thing. Well, the bookstore that closed down was owned by a jerk, you know? And he didn't even try to compete. He just rolled over and played dead and figured this is my opportunity to get out of town. And he didn't do anything for local work anyway. He was like a corporate bookstore himself. And Borders, on the other hand, wound up having this huge local authors section. One friend of mine, who was actually involved in protesting when Borders came to town, is also a Writer's Publishing Co-op writer. He's published a nice novel and after the dust settled he wanted to get into that Borders bookstore as much as anybody else. So, again, you have to come to your own terms with it. It's one of the things I like about guerrilla distribution. On the one hand you can try to get your perfect bound books into the big bookstores but while you're doing that, you can do the little folding books, too. Take those to the big stores. I think it's good to experience all those different levels.

Sean: Do you solicit poets?

Marc: Not for the little books, no. And for the chapbooks, it's similar. There have been a couple of poets whose books I've done that I've paid for. One of them was John Sinclair who hadn't published anything in a long time. He was an activist in the sixties who was arrested on a minor marijuana possession charge and there was a lot of support for him. John Lennon wrote
a song about it. "Free John Sinclair" was a big line of the

sixties. So anyway, I published a chapbook by him. I also published one by a fellow named Tom Bartlett who is a poet downtown, who's real obscure but also a great writer. So that happens every once in a while. But most of the time, people are responsible for paying for their own books.

Sean: And you don't - and they don't - do this with a profit motive in mind?

Marc: No, it's all about distribution. And creation.

Sean: Frank O'Hara said that if people didn't want to read poetry, then bully for them because only Hart Crane and Whitman were better than movies anyway. Do people really need poetry?

Marc: Well, I think so. You know there's a lot of . . . you see a lot of kitsch around and people like that. There's allot of kitsch poetry in this world. If you go into one of those stores that sells posters, there'll be some sort of an idiotic poster with a Jonathan Livingston Seagull thing on it. Well, that's just people finding their own level of appreciation of poetry. Pop music, rap, lyrics like that - I think a lot of it is just a matter of people finding their own level of understanding poetry. There is also a thing about literacy that's really important. Going back to visual arts for a moment, many visual artists talk about visual literacy. It's what tells you the difference between, say, Jackson Pollock and a unicorn painting on black velvet. Once people face art in a way that is a little more critical, then they gain new insights into whatever art they're considering. We could wish that everybody does that all the time for all media but people are busy. It's not a

matter of good or bad or stupid or smart, it's just that they're busy. Poetry is everywhere, all the time. Everybody notices it. Billboards are poetry. "Free 72 oz. steak if you can eat it all." That's poetry. I'm not going to take it and put it into one of my poems unless it's supposed to be there but it's an incredible phrase that works on all kinds of levels. It talks about the economy, it talks about consumerism, it talks about violence, it talks about all kinds of things. Whenever there's a debate like that, do people need poetry or not, I don't really get into it or worry about it. They do that with painting, too. People say oh painting is a dead medium, there's all this computer art happening now. Well, painting has been around for 25,000 years. It's not going away, folks. So those kinds of discussions are probably fun and interesting sometimes but I don't think anybody who's actually writing or painting is taking it seriously.

Sean: You say that only about 10% of all writing is any good to begin with. Doesn't publishing more of it just litter the world with more bad writing?

Marc: Hmmm . . . well, actually I think that 95% of everything is crap -poetry, music, painting et cetera. I have faith that only 90% of my own personal work is crap. I think if every artist burned 90% of their work then it would definitely reduce the overall crap figure. As far as publishing crap in the little books, well, either you believe writers should seize the means of production or you don't. I think they should. They should get their work into the cultural continuum by any means possible - guerrilla style, the internet, ezines and journals, books and chapbooks. Readings at coffeehouses or competing in poetry slams are not enough. If the work is not

preserved on the page it is as if it never existed. I think the poets who are the most motivated to publish are probably also the best. Anyone who thinks their work is worth distributing, and makes at least 100 little books, then we will distribute it for them. And we'll also give them copies of other people's work to distribute. We've made exceptions, like for Maxine Kumin, Wesley McNair and a few other more established people who wanted to participate. For them, I made the books.

Sean: So do we really need more slim volumes of American poetry?

Marc: Yes, and fat ones too. Thousands more. We should publish them and buy them. We should all be handing around the same wrinkled $10 bill. I mean, you need to ask if we need more slim volumes of American poetry? Certainly we do. More poetry and fewer cars. More poetry and fewer millionaire basketball players. More poetry and fewer suicide notes. More poetry and greater cultural literacy. More poetry, more humanity. Good, bad, mediocre, it doesn't make a difference. The only editor that really matters is history. The rest is guess work. As new technologies make self publishing easier and cheaper we should remember that if something deserves an audience then it will eventually find one. Jimmy Carter and Jewel will always sell more poetry than you or I - so let's think in terms of distribution rather than sales. Sales is not our business, but distribution has to be if you are an artist making art that you think can be useful. Yes, we should be critical thinkers but we shouldn't assume that we understand everything. What you consider to be valid need not be considered valid by everyone else - and that

notion cuts both ways. It's okay to be dismissive of something everyone else thinks is great - if you understand what the artist was trying to do and you determine that the artist failed. Or perhaps the artist accomplished the poem or painting perfectly but the idea is stupid. Even Nobel Prize winners have stupid ideas sometimes.

Sean: Okay, I get it. We really do need more slim volumes of American poetry.

Marc: As long as we use recycled paper, I don't see the harm in it.

END

III.

95 Theses; art and machine

(first published on ABOUT.COM c.2000)

Marc Awodey is a poet, underground undercover pt Barnum publisher of minimal press, one sheet of papyrus folded in unbelievableway to form 8 pp book(let), which are then (are you ready?) distributed through old pull lever cigarette machines that he (personally) rebuilds, stocks & stores, with the great gravy of literature: poetry books. For a list of sites to find these babies, write him at rawodey@together.net (rawodey@together.net). Also for instructions on How To pub yr own minimalist book. While yr doing that, please allow others to read Mr Awodey's most sacred screed:

(bob holman NYC)

95 THESES:
ART & MACHINE

DISPUTATION of Marc Awodey regarding the system of money, power and middlemen that has

caused abject corruption in the sacred Arts of literature, painting, and sculpture.

October 31, 1999

OUT OF A LOVE OF TRUTH and of the collective wisdom that only Artists AS A BODY can engender, Marc Awodey, a Master of Fine Arts in Burlington, Vermont has engineered POETRY VENDING MACHINES for the purpose of placing true Artwork into the World. Blessed are the Artists who bring their works into the streets, and any who disaffirm the veracity of DIRECT ACTION in the Arts are herein challenged to rebut these ninety-five theses BY THEIR OWN meaningful ACTS of sapient aesthetic inculcation:

1. Logic is not as linear as we have been led to believe. Artists must follow a HIGHER LOGIC based upon necessity, to enlighten the World with their purpose.

2. Artists enlighten the World by the MEAT of visionary vitality. Attempts to classify the Arts are attempts to narrow our vision.

3. We must use all available technologies: Vending Machines, computers, television, Xerox Machines, answering Machines, billboards, brick walls... All that humanity has invented must be pressed into the service of a HIGHER ART.

4. The creation and internalization of ART is an elementary function of the human spirit. AND IF we have souls- the paramount incarnation of a human soul must be ART.

5. While nefarious Elites herd the Artistically insecure into red and gilded slaughter pens, Artists must seek a new path into the eye of the CULTURAL CONTINUUM.

6. We only heed MACHINES when they do something capricious. Poets must wield the capricious power of MACHINES in order to enter the eye of the CULTURAL CONTINUUM.
7. All operating instructions are written in dead languages.

8. We must become our own publishers, curators, garbage men, and critics.

9. By promoting the works of ten Artists before your own, ten Artists are promoting your work before their own.

10. By promoting the works of one thousand Artists before your own, one thousand Artists are promoting your work before their own.

11. Judge skill fairly. Question Artistic intent at all times. Motivations test veracity. Veracity is the Artist's hypothalamus.

12. If skill is lacking in another Artist- teach. If your own skill is lacking- learn. If you can neither teach nor learn, you are a mosquito.

13. The Elites will sow the seeds of their own irrelevancy by making and promoting the FALSE ART of cronyism.

14. The streets are the highest judge of ART. Read your books aloud on the streets- grunt and squeal in bookstores.

15. Distribute free books to the workers of the World. Do not question the judgment of the masses. Study under the masses if they do not understand your work.
16. Cluster sculptures in industrial parks. Paint hand prints onto walls, interstate highways, and loading docks.

17. Nothing is criminal that does not injure others- by this definition certain "criminal" acts can have Artistic relevancy. Use all necessary means to place ART into the World.

18. By converting a MACHINE into something unanticipated, we demonstrate that ALL animated beings can be transformed, rehabilitated, transfigured.

19. The National Endowment of the Arts is a jewel of iniquitous elitism. All of the state and local Arts agencies are equally squalid. They are all well meaning Democrats. Artists must become Jacobins!

20. A readapted Artistic use- holy redemption for a MACHINE.

21. A readapted aesthetic paradigm- holy redemption for the Artist.

22. All ART is theater.

23. All theater is POETRY.

24. All painting is POETRY.

25. All POETRY is sculpture.

26. All sculpture is music.
27. No piece of ART created for the purpose of gaining money is as meaningful as a found object.

28. Museums are elegant mortuaries.

29. We have a higher purpose than quality control- do as you must then vanish into the crowd.

30. Set no standard fees for ART. Take as much as you can get from connoisseurs. They are all mad.

31. We attest to the veracity of our hallucinations with whatever tools are at hand, without seeking permission from the muse, the government, history, or the MACHINE its self.

32. Again: No piece of ART created for the purpose of gaining money is as meaningful as ART created only for Artistic purposes. Artists who are motivated solely by money may as well become counterfeiters.

33. A cigarette MACHINE that sells poems is very different than a poet selling poems, or a cigarette MACHINE selling cigarettes. Its obvious function is to trade coins for poems, but its hidden function is to raise questions about the nature of MACHINES, poets, commodities, and money.

34. MACHINES and Artists function best when their indigenous unpredictability is considered valuable. Once the nature of any MACHINE is questioned, everything is at risk!

35. ART resides in risk. We do not remember a peaceful commute as clearly as a fiery accident.

36. Critics motivated by money should only write in Lydian.

37. We will never be fully understood regardless of what we attempt to say- so we must simply say whatever we please.

38. And we will do whatever we do.

39. Every spectator must seek their own MACHINE. Ours are for sale, but the price is terribly high.

40. Every POETRY MACHINE is a totemic MACHINE image that has been carefully calibrated to remind the World that- ART imitates the original forces of creation. Providential randomness, chaos, chance. Such are the original forces of creation.

41. SLOT MACHINES are the highest order of ART.

42. ART Historians must take a broad minded approach to ART history. There would be no history without ART history. But then we could begin anew!

43. Intellectual property is a fallacy- "great Artists borrow, geniuses steal". The author of an idea is less important

than the idea its self. I say- steal all of my ideas. I publicly declare that any use of any idea is FAIR USE.

44. Vital ART will always see the light of day. We need not be coronated to claim our divine rights.

45. A POET is one who writes poems.

46. An Artist is one who makes ART.

47. A parasite is one who feeds off the blood, and sweat of another.

48. Again: As galleries and publishers have generally closed their doors to Vital ART we must become our own publisher by publishing the works of others. We must become our own gallery by presenting the works of others.

49. We must ordain ourselves, each other, and seek bibles in the streets. By spaghetti cans, lottery tickets, love notes, broadsides we actuate our epiphanies.

50. Fundraising professionals, development directors do not seek money for the Arts- they seek it for their bloated bellies. Arts administrators are fat mosquitoes.
51. The big book distributors have established monopolies. Our technologies will render them moot. Everything will work according to plan if the plans are written well enough.

52. Distribution monopolies are the last exhale of an old order. Guerrilla distribution is the first glint of jubilee.

53. We must repossess our prerogatives. Disseminate ART in subways, bars, grocery stores. Sneak books INTO libraries. Sneak books INTO chain book stores. Sneak books into prisons.

54. We cannot accept stylistic limitations. When the Anarchists captured Barcelona they did not form a government. When the Fascists recaptured the city, they where overwhelmed by chaos.

55. Censorship is evil. Government funding of the Arts is evil. Governments are in the business of control. We must work freely, without the largess of power Elites. We must remain beyond control.

56. Work with what you have. Find cheaper, more efficient methodologies for producing works of ART. Then let the exuberance of aesthetic controversy bloom and stink like an amaryllis.

57. Create from rubbish, rubble, refuse, debris if need be. Use hazardous waste for paint. Sculpt the spent fuel rods of nuclear reactors if need be. Wash the ink off old newspapers and rewrite history if you must.

58. VENDING MACHINES! VENDING MACHINES! VENDING MACHINES!

59. Set fire to Newberry Street nothing will change. Ignite yourself- and everything will change! Every Artist is a burning monk. Every burning monk was a great Artist.

60. The Dalai Lama is too wealthy to be holy.

61. "god bless henry
he lived like a rat."

62. Who is better remembered- Da Vinci or his swank, slack jawed French patron?

63. Who is better remembered- Diogenes or the faces that he startled by lamplight?

64. Polemics are useless, THE ACT is all that matters. Write with your whole body.

65. Dada was the Proto-Renaissance. This is the hour of Michelangelo.

66. Verbosity shields ignorance.

67. The Poets of the Minimal Press have distributed more books than any other publisher in the State of Vermont. We have produced more titles than 95% of the POETRY presses in the World. Not a single one of us has even seen all of the Minimal Press titles- but we all know they exist.

68. The time has come to organize a POETRY Internationale. We should convene in Atlantic City with all of the other gamblers.

69. We should put one, fifty dollar bill somewhere in each POETRY MACHINE to see if it sells more poems, and to ensure that we make no profit despite selling more poems.

70. If a curator asks to see your slides bring her a

trombone.

71. If an editor wants to see your first chapter send him x-rays of your mother.

72. Abraham Lincoln was a fine poet. Unfortunately, his POETRY neither killed nor freed anyone- and so he was assassinated.

73. When we ALL let delusions rule our lives, Nirvana will ensue.

74. Expect no rewards from your own times. Good works of TRUE ART will let you enter paradise- in the eye of the CULTURAL CONTINUUM.

75. The Academies and Universities have become circuses of mediocrity. Artists must educate themselves and each other in order to preserve the eye of the CULTURAL CONTINUUM. Let Academicians root out our truffles.

76. POETRY MACHINES will become the new Ark. We must lift our ART high into the wilderness. Let each MACHINE become a candle in the eye of the CULTURAL CONTINUUM.

77. Again: Museums are elegant mortuaries. True ART is MEAT not bones.

78. Again: And if we have souls- the highest incarnation of the human soul is an everlasting work of ART. And every work of ART is ultimately a MACHINE.

79. Every MACHINE should be transformed into a work of ART.

80. No ART without representation. No representation without ART.

81. Representational sculptures that do not question their own existence, are only fit to be smelted.

82. Doggerel doggerel the World dims with doggerel.

83. Watercolors should be hunted down and thrown into the Sea.

84. Poets with clean hands should be sentenced to write greeting cards.

85. Painters with clean hands should be thrown into the art galleries.

86. Artists who run art galleries are beyond rehabilitation.

87. Galleries, Publishers, Academies- lend me your necks. I have come here to praise your beautiful necks.

88. Rather than sell books, Amazon.com will someday simply sell Writers.

89. Cantaloupes are more expensive than Poets, pound for pound.
90. Fat writers are a better deal. None however, are as sweet as cantaloupes.

91. Again: Expect no rewards from your own times. Your neighbors have other concerns.

92. Again: Expect no rewards from your own times. Past generations are always more sagacious.

93. TRUE ART can only germinate in the wild.

94. POETRY MACHINES will remain mysterious until the World has been blanketed by them, or at least- by the idea of them.

95. Purgatory is the perfect place to create TRUE ART.

finis.

IV

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"Men have been taught that the highest virtue is not to

achieve, but to give. Yet one cannot give that which has not been created. Creation comes before distribution--or there will be nothing to distribute. The need of the creator comes before the need of any possible beneficiary.

Yet we are taught to admire the second-hander who dispenses gifts he has not produced above the man who made the gifts possible. We praise an act of charity. We shrug at an act of achievement."

-Howard Roark on trial from
The Fountainhead Ayn Rand

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My father William L. Awodey worked for the architectural office Minoru Yamasaki and Associates during the 1960's. "Yama" and eleven of his architects, including Dad, designed the World Trade Center. He is now semiretired in Florida. Below is an e-mail I sent him and his reply. As noted, I was writing to let him think about some questions for an article about 9/11. After reading and rereading our correspondence, I decided the story was written.

----- Original Message -----
To: William Awodey <mailto:wawodey@cfl.rr.com>
Sent: Monday, September 17, 2001 6:00 PM
Subject: stairs versus fire...

*

Dear Dad-
I am writing to let you know about an article I have been invited to submit to the paper I write art reviews for.

Especially here in the northeast, everyone knows someone who was directly affected by Tuesday. One friend of mine lost three people he knew- two in one of the planes from Boston, and one on the ground. When people ask if I and my family are ok I say- "we were affected in a unique way- my Dad is one of the architects who designed the World Trade Center. I remember seeing the models as a kid. I sort of grew up with the Trade Center."

Everyone who worked on the World Trade Center is probably having the same feelings right now- the pipe fitters, electricians, suppliers, engineers, and architects. Many thousands participated in the great achievement that was the World Trade Center. You were in an elite group, and though you must have been one of the junior architects (what age were you then- 35?) I am sure your professional investment was as great as any other.

On Tuesday you saw the building fail. I cannot imagine how that could have been for you. No one at Yama's office could have conceived of the inconceivable. But the failure happened. Survivors have said that the impacts of each jet were felt but the buildings just gently swayed. Even then failure seemed impossible. But as you said when I called on Tuesday night "at 1200 degrees steel starts to buckle", and "we didn't consider that amount of jet fuel." You also made an interesting comment that I world like to know more about- "thank god the stairs worked."

On the CBC, a Canadian survivor described how amazed he was that he could descend from an extreme upper floor, down the stairs beyond the burning floors because he was shielded in the stairwell. Horribly, he was the only one in his office to go down instead of up. Also on tv, a fireman sitting in rubble, hot and dirty said

"the architects who designed this building should be very proud. There is allot of void space in the plan. If any one could have survived we will find them." That was on Thursday.
So to write this article, I am going to interview you. I will call tonight, but maybe you can send me a few thoughts in advance. Tell me what went right with the buildings. What was the team like that designed the Trade Center? I'll also want to ask- why not the jet fuel? Was it hubris? The same question can be asked of all America. In 1969 we put two men on the moon. We had eradicated smallpox, completed the interstate highway system. We had earned the monumentality of the Trade Center. Has any building complex before or since used that much steel? How long did the architects think these towers would last?
Those are some of the questions I would like to ask.

much love

Marc

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Dear Marc,

Watching the North Tower in flames, followed by what seemed to be the two towers being pierced by a very large airplane- I clutched, I grabbed my face, I choked, I became very emotional. I was speechless in disbelief. I was embarrassed. I left the room.
I had been watching a large TV in the east conference room of our office with my colleagues. As if anyone was listening, I was quite vocally mumbling things like "they've hit it in the third zone above the 78th floor", "it

was designed for the impact of a large passenger plane", "it will not fall..." Although the room was filled with engineers and architects, nobody really heard me. No one really cared or understood what I was talking about.
Watching the explosion of the South Tower due to its floors collapsing was like getting a stake in my heart. Not since we lost your brother Scot in '92, did I have this feeling. The gasp in the room was very loud. I choked. I left. I called Pene and told her to come get me- I cannot stay here. I'll just walk home (we live about two miles from the office). She counseled me to calm down, stay there. I went back into the conference room. Left the room again, came back, and did the same for much of the day.
That day, that morning, a reflection, a memory image occurred that flashed me back to 1963 in what we at MYA called "the New York Room". Your mother had called to say Kennedy has been shot. I told Yama. Yama came into the room saying "the President has been shot, get a TV in here". Colleagues and I watched the aftermath of a horrible, history-altering event. We were in the presence of a 10' tall architectural model of the World Trade Center complex. It was in the process of being studied, as the tallest buildings in the world.
As designers we were very interested in how it would work, how it would macroscopically enhance NY and its skyline. How it would enhance life at work, at shopping, at relaxing, at play. We weren't terribly impressed with the fact that it would also be the largest construction project in history. We just wanted it to work, to work right, to last forever, and for it to be beautiful.
The "NY Team" including Yama, Aaron Schrier, Kip Serota, Dick Knight, Frank Arens, Jerry Karns, Violetta Dumlao, Gunnar Gruzdins, Sewa Barmi, and myself

watched Dallas in horror. Among others watching were Bill Ku, Yama's chief designer. He had hired me as a designer in September 1963. We were all somewhere under 40. I was 29 then. Mike Pudist and Henry Guthard were there as well, and still at MYA. I hope at least 6 to 8 of us are still around.

When we were designing the Project we were quite aware of the B-25 that had cracked into the Empire State Building during WWII. Of consequence, the towers were designed to accommodate the impact of a large jet passenger plane (this was pre-747, 67, etc.) however we had no knowledge of the types of fuels and planes that would be used in this day and age.

In those early days the towers were considered to be the tallest at 1350'. The clients wanted them to be 100' taller than Empire State building. Ultimately the Trade Center towers finished out at 1368' and 1362'. The difference was due to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (the clients) executive offices. Those were located around the 89th and 90th floors of the South Tower, and had to have 10' ceiling heights as opposed to the 8'8" ceiling height in the balance of the towers.

Seattle based structural engineers Worthington, Skilling, Helle, and Jackson designed the structural system of the Trade Center towers. Yama wanted the towers to be as tall, as slender, and as graceful as possible. His very close friend structural engineer John Skilling came up with a system that made the request possible.

Each tower was a tube within a tube. The outer "tube" was a square of 208' on each side. The inner "tube" was the tower's core. It contained elevators, exit stairs, toilets, and the building's mechanical and electrical services. These services were all shafts running through

the building core, rated to what we call a "4 hr fire rating". They were intended to withstand a raging fire for up to four hours. Apparently the shattering and exploding airplanes damaged cladding and fireproofing to the point where Tower 1 stood for one hour, and Tower 2 for 1 3/4 hours before failing. Fortunately and thankfully the fireproofed shafts, and the core located stairs (none were located within the open office areas), allowed many to exit past the flaming and failing office levels.

The core was a rectangle of approximately 90' by 150'. The truss supported floors spanned column free from the inner core to the exterior wall. The exterior wall was a bearing wall, with columns occurring every 3' 4" on center; approximately shoulder width. This allowed room for viewer hand support, to give a feeling of ease and security while looking at the world from hundreds of feet and many stories above the street.

The Tower's exterior 3'4" spaced columns become 10' between the seventh and ninth levels. This allowed for large glass areas through which the gleaming 90' high ceilinged lobby could be viewed from both plaza (larger than St. Peter's) and Concourse (shopping) levels. The lobbies were entered through neatly fitted, bright mirror finished stainless steel revolving doors.

At ground level each tower had approximately the same foot print dimension as the Sears Tower in Chicago. The Sears Tower was 100' taller when it was completed, and it contains 102 floors...8 less than the Trade Center. We didn't realize we were at the tip of a very large iceberg. Since 1963, thousands of persons went on to build the World Trade Center. Ten's of thousands worked there daily. Millions have visited.

When Pene called that morning to say that the top of one

of the Trade Center Towers was in flames I was struck dumbfounded.

love,

Dad.

(first appeared in *SEVEN DAYS)*

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there were once giants
but they were overwhelmed
by trivial concerns

thank you dear reader.