

February 17, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.  
Conrad Prebys Music Center  
Experimental Theater

# JACKSON MAC LOW

*"I myself think that if it is a connection and it does something, it's some kind of cause but it's different from the time-linear cause going from past to future. It's across any present, between any two things coexisting. ... And I think that one thing that systematic chance does allow... is for something to happen on that synchronous plane." - Jackson Mac Low*

Tree Movie (1961)

54th Light Poem: For Ian Tyson (1978)

The Five Young Turtle Asymmetries (1967)

Is That Wool Hat My Hat? (1980)

-- brief pause --

Numbered Asymmetries (1960)

## **Performed by Southland Ensemble**

CASEY ANDERSON :: JENNIFER BEWERSE :: ERIC KM CLARK  
ORIN SIE HILDESTAD :: JAMES KLOPFLEISCH :: JONATHAN STEHNEY  
CASSIA STREB :: CHRISTINE TAVOLACCI

[www.southlandensemble.com](http://www.southlandensemble.com)



**Jackson Mac Low** was born in Chicago on September 12, 1922. He was a poet and composer, and a writer of performance pieces, essays, plays, and radio works. He was also a painter and multimedia performance artist, and often worked in collaboration with his wife, Anne Tardos. Mac Low's books include *Two Plays: The Marrying Maiden and Verdurous Sanguinaria* (Green Integer Books, 1999), *20 Forties* (Zasterle Press, 1999), *Barnesbook* (1996), *42 Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters* (1994), *Pieces o' Six: Thirty-three Poems in Prose*

(1992), and *Twenties: 100 Poems* (1991), as well as the compact disc *Open Secrets* (1993), comprising eight works performed by Anne Tardos, Mac Low, and seven instrumentalists.

He was the recipient of fellowships and grants from the Creative Artists Public Service Program, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, PEN, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. He received the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets in 1999. Jackson Mac Low lived in New York City with his wife until his death on December 8, 2004.

Formed in 2013, **Southland Ensemble** is contemporary chamber ensemble dedicated to the interpretation and performance of experimental music. The ensemble consists of seven core members and often collaborates with guests as the music requires. Each member of the ensemble is proficient on a least one or more traditional Western instruments, as well as spoken word and found objects - stones, radios, sheet metal, and household items to name a few.

It is the mission of Southland Ensemble to present experimental music to a wide variety of audiences through the mediums of interactive concerts, lectures and workshops. The ensemble believes strongly in the power of creative programming to educate and enhance the audience's understanding of an historical or artistic period. Each concert is carefully programmed to reflect a specific creative period in a location or composer's career. Since its formation, the ensemble has presented works by Christian Wolff, Alvin Lucier, Pauline Oliveros, Robert Ashley, James Tenney, Alison Knowles and Laurence Crane, among others.



**Tree Movie:** Select a tree. Set up and focus a movie camera so that the tree fills most of the picture. Turn on the camera and leave it on without moving it for any number of hours...

**The 54th Light Poem: for Ian Tyson** combines features of several "genres" I've developed since 1961. First, it is a "Light Poem," a "genre" first developed in June 1962... & continued in various ways since then. All *Light Poems* mention light or names of kinds of light, but in composing most of them, I have drawn light names, mostly by chance operations, from a chart of 288 such names prepared in June 1962. In composing the *54th Light Poem*, I drew from the chart, using chance operations, a series of light names whose initial letters successively spell out "Ian Tyson"...

In addition, his name is spelled out "diastically" in red capital letters – the lines are so written that the letters of his name slant down through each two strophes, alternately of three lines ("IAN") & five lines ("TYSON")... I began using "diastic" (having letters of index words, such as names, appear in corresponding places in lines) as against "acrostic" (index words' letters appearing initially or finally in lines) as a chance-selection method in January 1963, after having previously used acrostic extensively... *The 54th Light Poem* is the first of my poems not generated primarily by chance operations in which index words ("IAN TYSON") are placed diastically.

Finally the poem is a Gatha, a "genre" developed first in 1961. In previous Gathas, letters of mantra, & after 1973 of nonmantric words, are placed, primarily thru chance operations, on quadrille graph paper, & the resulting configurations are used, as described, as "scores" for performance in which performers make spontaneous choices.

The Poem may be performed by one or more readers. It is first read from the beginning to the end by one reader thoroughly familiar with the poem, who uses the words' placement on the grid & an understanding derived from careful reading to group the words into complete utterances, despite the lack of punctuation. Pauses, stresses, & other elocutionary devices must be used to bring out the meaning of this very personal poem.

Then it is performed as a Gatha by that reader & the others, if any. Each reader starts at any square and "moves" to any square adjacent to its sides or corners. One may say names of letters, sounds of letters, syllables formed by letters adjacent in any direction, & words, phrases or other words strings, or whole sentences, either found in the poem

itself or formed by grouping letters in non-horizontal directions, as well as horizontally.

**Asymmetries** are nonstanzaic poems of which the printed formats are notations for solo or group performance. They are “asymmetrical” in that they have no regularly repeating stanzaic or other patterns. They are “notations” in that most aspects of their format can be translated into aspects of performance. Notably, the lengths of blank space before, between, & after single words or words strings, & between lines, stand for “temporal holes” – durations in which readers keep silent or produce single prolonged tones...

Asymmetries may be performed either by a single person or by a group including any number of people. Each performer follows either a Basic Method or one of nine other performance methods, while realizing successively each Asymmetry in a randomly selected or individually chosen series of the poems. The individual performers decide their own reading speeds and other performance parameters not specifically (or only partially) regulated by the methods followed. All individuals perform simultaneously.

*The Five Young Turtle Asymmetries* must be read by 5 readers. In an optimal performance all 5 readers will read all 5 *Young Turtle Asymmetries*, each in one of the following orders: 12345, 23451, 34512, 45123, & 51234. Thus all 5 will always be read together.

Performers must become acutely conscious of both the sounds they themselves are producing and those arising from other performers, the audience, and/or the environment. It is essential to the realization of Asymmetries that all performers choose as many aspects and details as possible of their individual realizations within the context of as clear an awareness of the total aural situation at each moment as performance circumstances allow... What is asked for is concentrated attention to all sounds perceptible to the individual and an attitude of receptivity and responsiveness such that “choices” are made spontaneously, often seeming to arise from the whole.

Schematically, this “whole” can be represented by concentric spheres: the inmost is that of the individual performer; next, that of the whole performance group; next, that of the larger social group including the audience as well as performers; next, that of the performance space,



including room acoustics, electronics, etc.; and finally, the larger spaces within which the performance space is situated: the rest of the building, the surrounding streets, neighborhood, city (or rural area), etc., all of which may affect significantly the aggregate of sounds heard by each individual at each moment. The spheres are best conceived as transparent and interpenetrating – not static shells but concentric ripples traveling simultaneously out from and in toward each other.

[The Basic Method] underlies the others and is the one to be followed when all or most of the others are ruled out by performance circumstances. *Blank spaces* before, after, and between words or parts of words, between lines of words, and before and after whole *Asymmetries* are rendered as *silences*. Each silence lasts as long as it would take the individual to read aloud any words or word fragments printed above or below the blank space. ...

*Emphasized words*, i.e., initially and solidly capitalized words and words printed in emphatic typography... are to be read *loudly* ... *Words printed within enclosing punctuation*, i.e., single or double quotation marks, parentheses, or brackets, are to be read *softly or whispered*. Other words are to be read *moderately loudly*. ... *Speed of reading and voice timbres* are free but should seldom give the impression of exaggeration or distortion.

### **Ten Methods for Reading**

1. Basic Method
2. Words Only
3. Silence Only
4. Words, Tones, and Silences
5. Tone Only
6. Tones and Silences
7. Words and Tones
8. Spoken and Whispered Words
9. Phonic Prolongations and Repetitions
10. Words and Indeterminate Silences

The pitch of each tone is determined by the performer's freely choosing any letter in the preceding words which is a German pitch name: A, C, D, E, F, and G are interpreted respectively as any chromatic tone or microtone in any register that can be designated respectively by one of these letters, e.g., A can be played as A<sup>b</sup>, A<sup>♮</sup>, A<sup>#</sup>, a quarter tone above or

below one of these, etc. However B always means B<sub>1</sub> or a microtone near it, while H always means H<sub>1</sub> or a microtone near it.

The poem as printed [below] is followed by a schematic version showing how it is to be performed with measured silences when following the Basic Method. In the latter version, words and word fragments measuring minimal silences (or whispered in Method 8) are printed [in grey]. The silences are "minimal" in that members of larger groups will sometimes find it desirable or even necessary to extend them to prevent the textures of performances from becoming so continually thick that a large number of words are unintelligible.

### Asymmetry 217

fact any, curve Time  
any not younger  
curve  
    "up"      "right"  
                    visit eyes  
Time international Mart--  
                            lick eyes

### Asymmetry 217

fact any, curve Time sit eyes eyes  
fact any, curve Time sit eyes eyes  
fact any, curve Time sit eyes eyes  
fact any, curve Time sit eyes eyes  
any not younger Time sit eyes eyes  
curve "up" "right" visit eyes eyes  
curve "up" "right" visit eyes eyes  
curve "up" "right" visit eyes eyes  
curve "up" "right" visit eyes eyes  
curve "up" "right" visit eyes eyes  
Time international Mart--lick eyes  
Time international Mart--lick eyes  
Time international Mart--lick eyes  
Time international Mart--lick eyes

(poem transcription and schematic by Jennifer Bewerse)

Other solutions are, of course, possible where words appear both above and below blank spaces.

**Is That Wool Hat My Hat?** This piece came about in the following way: During the 12th International Sound Poetry Festival, held at Washington Square Church in New York during April 1980, I came to the April 13th session wearing a navy blue wool hat ("watch cap"). Richard Kostelanetz had also walked over to the church for the performance, wearing a similar hat.

At the church door I met my friend the writer/clairvoyant Hannah Weiner and we chatted awhile. Then during intermission I talked with other people, but just before I took my seat, Hannah came over to me and handed me a wool hat similar to my own, which she'd found on the floor after the chairs in the church were shifted. Having seen me wearing such a hat before the program, she had assumed that I'd dropped mine and that this was it.

I'd gotten in just as someone began performing, so I had no opportunity to tell her it wasn't mine – Hannah had taken a seat not very near me – so I just held the hat in my hand, meaning to turn it in later to the "lost & found," and gave my attention to the performer.

Then, somewhat suddenly, Richard Kostelanetz, who was sitting behind me, leaned over and asked, "Is that wool hat my hat?" Having often seen Richard wearing such a hat, I assumed it was his, and handed it to him. But his rhythmical question stuck in my mind, so that night I composed this piece for four speakers.

As I wrote it, I decided to make four superimposed parts, each comprised of repetitions of the question and parts of it. I used a die to decide how many of the six words of the question were to be repeated each time. As a result, the four parts sometimes coincide exactly, but often the four speakers are saying four entirely different words at the same time.

Program notes written by Jackson Mac Low, excerpted from *The Fluxus Workbook*, *Doings: Assorted Performance Pieces 1955-2002*, and *Asymmetries 1-260*.

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