

TRANSCRIPT

Male voice says, “Our keynote speaker, then, Dr. Josephine Miles.” [clapping]

I am Josephine “Jo” Miles.

[Echo effect]: I am Trisha Campbell; I am a reprocessing; I am, I am.

And this is a *reprocessing* of Josephine Miles.

[Miles voice]: *“How did you come? How did I come here?”*

[Trisha Campbell’s voice]: I was born in 1911 and died just before the release of the Commodore Amiga in 1985. I was a compositionist, or at least, that’s what I want you to consider me and my work. I was a poet and critic, too, and most people remember me as a poet, but I had this special affinity for the word compose as an active variant in our lives [cue handwriting of the quote]. In my 1961 CCC’s article, What We Compose, I elaborated on its potential “THE WORD composition, with its relation to compose, component, composure, is the word of the active composing artist and of the poised, the composed philosopher” (146).

This idea of composing and composition, for me, had to do with our material and how we engaged that material. Our text material, the stuff of life, our archives. All of it was source material to the composing artist, but in the late 1930’s and throughout my life, I saw an inability to make with or really understand the material of our lives. This got me started on my own method. In 1939 I started writing my dissertation about Wordsworth, though wasn’t about Wordsworth so much as it was about this method I invented toward delaying my own human impulse of narrative. You see, at the time Wordsworth was all the rage, and I decided to write about him, too, but mostly because I didn’t understand him:

“I wasn’t trying to write about what I liked; I’m not all that interested in what I like. What I like I like so fast and completely that that’s just that I don’t want to bother about having to defend it or explain it to anybody. But I am really more interested in finding out what I don’t like and trying to understand that. My dissertation was done on that basis. I didn’t like the poetry of Wordsworth. I was complaining about that, and Ben Lehman said, “It sometimes-usually-often hard to write on somebody that you are crazy about because you stay crazy. But if you write about somebody you don’t understand and try to figure him out, this is

helpful” (From *Poetry, Teaching, and Scholarship*).

Of course, what Lehman wanted from me was more about Wordsworth himself. “When are you going to get around to writing about Wordsworth the man?” But “I didn’t want to write about Wordsworth the man. He s a dumb man! I wanted to write about Wordsworth’s language” and not just my own interpretation of his language, something else (From *Poetry, Teaching, and Scholarship*).

So I began counting words and word types. I started counting all the ways Wordsworth used the language of emotion. He said “bestowal” 439 times, for instance. This was as a way of understanding him differently than other critics at the time. I just counted and counted, classified, and organized. I didn’t want to see myself in Wordsworth work, as other critics did, I wanted to see something else, maybe it was Wordsworth, but maybe it was something else entirely. When I first starting counting, I wasn’t sure what I’d find, and no one was really doing it like I was. There was no method for how to look at the materials through their surfaces and relationships.

Even still, Wordsworth never became my favorite poet: “I like him now; I don t love him. I think the interesting thing is that value judgments are so instant that what they then need is documentation in terms of understanding of how they arose. Only after you really understand what you re looking at in terms of, say, text or paintings or whatever, do you want to come back to further evaluation or composition” (From *Poetry, Teaching, and Scholarship*).

In baldest form, I spent a long time counting, and I began to broaden my method in order to count works over centuries and continents. I thought of it as more of a “thick description” (From *Poetry, Teaching, and Scholarship*). I published several books from my counting inventories, which hung all over my house. I would count mostly in the summer on my porch with a typewriter and calculator. What I was interested in was how the work of counting or detailed observation of the world—that’s the artist’s work as I see it—could delay my own narrative and not usurp the world into something too tidy or too emblematic of the self, but could still capture without colonizing what it seeks to capture.

I thought about this in my poetry, too.

After over 30 years of counting, I began to see patterns and relations in the material. I saw ways that the past and future were folding into each other in a word or a collection of words. What did Donne

have to say that Wordsworth was equally ready to hear, or how I could use the phases of the world to imagine the next phase?

I began to see an inventory the relations between past and future. This caused me to be interested in how change happens over time, language, person, and material. What I saw and could quantify was how we could make futures out of our past materials, which began by being very careful not to hermeneutically map our present selves or my present self onto the materials of the past, but by allowing the material to speak through me. This is a kind of reprocessing. I counted so as to reprocess the material differently. In 1975 IBM had approached me to see if they could help me with my counting, but I couldn't really connect with them, mostly because I wanted to allow the material to render through me and my own human durations. What this gave me was an unfound intimacy with the materials of the past, and from that intimacy I thought about how those materials could be refreshed. ([quote on screen]: "how do we know our future? Like our past, it is all around us" *The Romanic Mode in Poetry* 66).

Towards the end of my life, I talked a lot about how, based upon my numbered inventories, we could actually think concretely about imagined futures. This is the need, I thought, we were not yet getting in the early 1980's. We need artists to profess the new meanings in our new lives. To think of the future through the intimacy of the past and not just as "so many presences," so the question is, [double-voiced with Trisha Campbell and Miles' voice]: "*how do you come, how did I come here? What is this that we come to? To converge as rare texts and components of clay. To converge as reader of magnetic messages and DNA. To converge as archivist. As scholar. Take this as another frame of space. We emerge out of old space into the universe. That we return to what we have abandoned and reshape not only what we are, where we are from, but what in the risk and moment of our day, we may become. It needs our lives to make it live.*" (1981 archival recording of Miles reading her poem "Coming to Terms").

([quote on screen]: "new forms for old materials" *Reading the Need* 245).

([quote on screen]: "Today, the voice you speak with may not be your own." *Rhythm Science*).