Brown University Around 1960

by Richard Kostelanetz (June 2016)

When two book-length memoirs of Yale University around 1960 arrived, I naturally recalled my experience around that time at another Ivy League university situated between Harvard to its northeast and Yale to its west—Brown University. At that time, while the eight schools composing the Ivy League played on level athletic playing fields, culturally they could be divided into two groups—the upper crust of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia, and then the minor Ivys of Dartmouth, Cornell, Penn, and my Brown. For one simple measure, the alumni of the first four included far more distinguished artists and writers than came from the second-level schools. For a second measure, consider that the first four could steal successful professors from the latter four, while those failing to get tenure at the top four found employment at the lower four.

As Daniel (not David) Horowitz entered Yale in 1956, he titles his memoir *On the Cusp* (University of Massachusetts) with the subtitle of "The Yale College Class of 1960 and a World on the Verge of Change." As the second Yalie, Howard Gillette, Jr., entered in the same year that Horowitz graduated, his book's full title is *Class Divide: Yale '64 and the Conflicted Legacy of he Sixties* (Cornell University). Having entered Brown in 1958, I straddle them.

Reading their two books together, I find that their social experiences were very different, simply because the first was Jewish and the other not. Certainly at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton around that time, Jewish students inhabited a different campus world to a degree that would be inconceivable today. As Jerome Karabel documents in *The Chosen* (2006), his great book about admissions practices at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, the elaborate admissions procedures (in contrast to the European custom of simply scoring high enough on a test) were designed to limit the number of Jewish students entering those schools. So, once there, while the Jewish students didn't experience much anti-Semitism as such, they tended not only to congregate in their own social enclaves, but also to dominate the level playing fields apart from athletics, such as the more

difficult courses or, say, the student publications. They knew they had to work to succeed; to no benefits were they entitled by, say, heredity. Though Horowitz is a second generation Yalie (of a father who apparently did not change his surname), he knows this last truth.

In this last respect, Brown was no different, as the student Jews tended to band together; but the more ambitious students at Brown were faced with another problem. Unlike the Ivys of first tier, their institution lacked respect for itself. As many of its professors thought they belonged in the upper crust, where some had taken their degrees and a few had taught before failing to get tenure, they simply lacked respect for each other and for their students, whom they regarded as likewise "rejects" from Harvard and Yale, as indeed many of us were.

Brown's lack of respect for itself created a disadvantageous atmosphere that discouraged student ambition to do anything unexpected, not just at Brown but later in life. Even if a sometime student realized that he or she could overcome such disadvantage, perhaps successfully breaking through the glass ceiling, to recall a concept from critical feminism, the folks back at his university would have trouble acknowledging that he or she had done something special. So sometimes would his fellow Brown alumni.

Brown's lack of respect for itself became apparent to me back in the 1990s, when its chief sponsored "presidential lectures" supposedly by distinguished visitors, I noticed that none were Brown alumni. I wondered why not. At a school with greater respect for itself, say Princeton or Harvard, even Williams or Stanford, any chief so gauche would have been sent packing. Once the significance of this blatant fact became clear to me, other incongruities about Brown had explanations.

This bias accounts for why of the hundreds of people supporting my work in one way or another over the past four decades, say with invitations to lecture or by publishing me, only five were Brown alumni. Of those five, only three of them paid me, and of those three, only one more than once. Alumni professionally supporting alumni in the arts, especially distinguished alumni, is "not a Brown sort of thing to do," as I heard more than once, reflecting Brown's implicit sense that it wasn't Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, though its publicists might glibly claim otherwise. When I've asked the question of how many other alumni

professionals in the arts there were, I customarily get the response of Zero.

Remember that Brown is not really an urban university, like Columbia or Harvard. It sits isolated and insulated atop a steep hill at the beginnings of a suburb apart from a reality corrective that city culture can offer. When you understand how people can be persuaded, if not intimidated, to be less than they can possibly be, especially if residing in a geographically isolated situation, you begin to understand how peaceful slavery succeeded, as indeed it did, until some slaves escaped from captivity to look back upon it critically, or some outside agitator exposed inequities.

From well outside Brown University, where the study of American slavery has reportedly been a favorite topic, I wonder how much of this last truth is understood; for if it failed to penetrate, then learning about slavery has been limited, which is usually a measure of educational deficiency. Remember that one mark of an educated person is learning how to think—how to apply intelligence gained from one domain to other domains. If recent alumni have failed in this respect, may I judge that a Brown education might be less than what it used to be.

Both these books about Yale in the early 1960s, as well as other college memoirs read by me, fail for failing to get beneath surface generalizations into deeper truths.

II

Whatever career I've had as first a critic, then as a poet and fictioner, and finally as a media artist was certainly a surprise to me (and no doubt to my sometime teachers and colleagues at Brown). I realize now that, while they had not "prepared" me, I had prepared myself, so to speak, mostly through fortunate contact with certain strong professors and the more ambitious students, some of whom should be praised.

My principal teacher at Brown was S. Foster Damon, who was remembered then and perhaps now for publishing in 1924 the first major book unraveling William Blake. Even today, his *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* makes impressive sense, given Damon's. powers in clarifying literature that previously seemed inscrutable. Nearly sixty-seven when I first met him early in 1960, he was officially emeritus, thus teaching only one course each semester—in the

spring “verse writing” workshop and in the fall a seminar on either William Blake or Herman Melville. On both those historic authors he began publishing pioneering criticism over thirty years before.

As an undergraduate at Harvard before World War I, Damon had co-founded with other students the *Harvard Musical Review* (1912-1916), which was meant to appreciate contemporary music ignored by their teachers. One partner in this *Review* was a yet younger man who went on to a more distinguished musical career, the composer Roger Sessions, whose daughter Elizabeth was my Most Significant Other for many years. Foster’s brother-in-law was the eccentric Boston poet John Wheelwright, who died too young, whose poems are treasured to this day by John Ashbery, among others. Do a Google search of Foster Damon’s name now, and you’ll find a healthy number of references, thousands I think, which measures that his presence persists, even though he died decades ago.

Additionally, he established at the Brown University Library the Harris Collection not only of poetry but more significantly the unique collection of American songs, some of which he gathered into a box published in 1936. His sometime student, the composer Virgil Thomson, acknowledged taking from this collection for his own compositions; so did other American composers. Foster also knew avant-garde literature after WWI, telling E. E. Cummings and Malcolm Cowley what they didn’t know.

Since Foster was officially retired, the younger bucks in the English department didn’t tell us students about him. Always part of a larger world beyond the campus, he incidentally befriended Providence writers who, since they didn’t teach at Brown, the faculty ignored—among them the horror fictioner H. P. Lovecraft [1890-1937] and, in my time, the poet David Cornell DeJong (1901-1967), even though the latter’s poetry collections appeared from prominent trade publishers and the former’s collected writings are now available in the Library of America, where no other Providence writer is honored—not even Winfield Townley Scott (1910-1966), an alumnus who was a stronger writer than Brown remembers him to be.

Though I took only the verse writing course with Damon, I saw more of him off-campus, so to speak. For some two years, from my second semester in 1960 to my departure at the end of the first semester in 1962, I had dinner at his house perhaps once a week, often cooking his recipies, sometimes joined by my wife-to-

be, who later wrote her doctorate on William Blake before publishing a book on him. Active in the art and musical avant-gardes dating back to the 1920s, Foster imparted to me an awful lot of useful intelligence, especially about how to be a professional, which is not quite the same thing as “how to write.”

From Foster above all others I probably developed the intellectual ambition for always aiming to take my work to a higher level, to go where no one else has gone or would go, in my case not only in criticism but later in creative work and now even in this memoir I hope, much as he and his classmate E. E. Cummings did in their own writings. Foster would tell that when he was a graduate student in English lit at Harvard in the early 1920s, supplicants were asked what they thought of William Blake. It was enough for the student to say, “Oh Blake, he’s crazy,” for the examiner to move onto another subject. Simply, Foster’s Blake wasn’t crazy, and he’s not been crazy since..

From him, along with other intellectual heroes, such as George Orwell, whom I also discovered in college, also comes the ambition to tell the truth, even an unfamiliar truth, much as I hope to do here.

III

Another faculty member important to me at that time was the dean of the college, Charlie Watts, who was very considerate to me. A young dean, he must have been in his early thirties when we entered. Charlie made sure I got through Brown in part because I was seeing Foster Damon, whom Charlie had admired since he was an undergraduate at Brown after World War II. Though Charlie did his doctorate with Foster, he was then too busy with Brown biz to visit as often as before. Perhaps Charlie also saw the need to support my creative deviance that to some degree resembled Foster’s as I was influenced by it.

Thanks to Charlie’s excusing me from a few requirements and my already having some advanced standing credits that could be applied to my major, as well as a few “independent studies,” as we called them then, or personal tutorials, I improvised for myself a semblance of the New Curriculum that hit the Brown campus several years later. Since I often read differently from what the teacher thought should be understood or perhaps what the author intended, I was then and probably still am someone who routinely misunderstands, sometimes creatively. As a result my academic scorecard had a D or two along with the As and Bs,

especially in my first two years. My election to Phi Beta Kappa came posthumously, to so speak—not while I was a student but a decade after graduation.

Incidentally, because Charlie Watts looked so WASPy straight, most of us tended to forget how hip he was. When the undergraduate literary magazine invited Norman Mailer to read his work at Brown late in 1960, when the author was around thirty-seven years old, I got some flack from my co-editors because of Mailer's notoriety at the time. To defuse such criticism, I asked Charlie to introduce Mailer, which he graciously did, concluding with the advice that coffee would be served at the end of the reading. Mailer, perhaps annoyed that the college dean should be younger than he was at the time, asked if we'd be serving any "tea." Recalling that this epithet also meant at the time marijuana, Charlie replied, "No, neither kind," stealing Mailer's provocation. This further upset Mailer, who turned surly for the rest of the evening, even walking down the college hill after his reading, disappointing those waiting for him at the coffee reception, until I physically fetched him to return for the promised reception. A few days later, Mailer made news by stabbing his wife Adele. I always wondered if Charlie's swift and witty response might have been a contributed to unhinging Mailer.

Incidentally, I don't remember any other literary faculty attending the Mailer reading, perhaps because us students invited him and our professors didn't much respect the students. Most of the writers they invited to Brown were literary powermen they were trying to impress, such as Saul Bellow, who later published both John Hawkes and Edwin Honig, two Harvard rejects, in the final issue of his magazine *The Noble Savage*.

Watts should have become president of Brown, where he had taken all of his degrees and taught before becoming a young dean. Instead, he soon afterwards became at 37 the president of Bucknell University and later, I think, the Wolftrap Music Center in Virginia, while all of the Brown University presidents during my lifetime have been carpetbaggers who came from somewhere else before moving onto yet another place. In my considered judgment, had Brown chosen an alumnus to be its chief, the notorious lack of respect for itself would have become less egregious.

IV

The most important courses for me were the IC seminars and then the honors program that likewise had seminars usually in the afternoon, rather than the big lecture classes given in the morning. For freshmen and sophomores the IC program had been introduced only a few years before, the acronym standing for the Identification and Criticism of Ideas. Instead of surveys, they required intensive reading on a single subject or single theme. As those IC courses were tough, no one could hide in them; some people dropped out, taking the standard lecture courses instead. I took at least three of them for the entire year—one with Dennis Wrong on several classics of sociology, a second on William Faulkner and T. S. Eliot with Hyatt Waggoner, and a third on European literature in translation with Juan Lopez-Morillas.

The honors seminars for our last two years likewise met around a table. If nothing else, we learned how to talk smart, very smart. Then there were the non-departmental "university courses" that were likewise challenging as seminars usually in the afternoons. So you could get a lot of good intellectual exercise if you sought these courses out.

Since these classes customarily met in the afternoons, we just didn't know the morning people, as I now think of them, though they surrounded us at refectory, where tables sat eight. The girlfriend who later became my wife was in a similar socially segregated track a year behind me. This streaming structure, so familiar to students who graduated from urban high schools, would have been unacceptable at Brown if actually identified as such. Nonetheless, it separated us both intellectually and socially from the hoi polloi, who at Brown included more drunks than I'd ever seen before or since, even when I lived a decade later in the East Village, around the corner from the notorious Bowery. Those of us selectively streamed felt less elitist than challenged, because we had so much reading and writing to do, though elitist we probably were. As most classmates probably didn't even know about the honors programs, they didn't miss us. Since getting up in the morning was already difficult for me, afternoon classes were more agreeable.

When my high school class has a reunion I know almost everybody, but when I get a booklet announcing my college class's reunions, I don't know who most of my classmates were—I have no idea—even though I have a voluminous memory for individual names. For that reason I've never felt compelled to go to any Brown reunion.

V

Overcoming the disadvantage of Brown's lack of respect for Brown, some classmates who went on to have distinguished innovative careers, some of them recognized in my *A Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes* (1993, 2000). Walter Carlos was probably the first among us to get great recognition, in his case as the composer of *Switched-on Bach*, a long-playing record that certainly epitomized innovative music when it first appeared around 1968. Avant-garde socially as well, Walter became Wendy Carlos in the early seventies and did around 1980 a long extraordinary interview about his sex-reassignment in *Playboy* magazine. Though he has reportedly disavowed it, this text is a classic of its special kind that I'm gratified to have in my library.

Though Wendy has continued producing records, his music isn't so avant-garde anymore. Occasionally, I run into Wendy and her companion Anne-Marie just above NoHo, where they live, just north of SoHo, where I lived for more than three decades. I didn't know Walter Carlos in college, as he was a "townie," as we used to say, commuting to College Hill from his family home elsewhere in Providence. I wish I did, for when he told me about an electronic music club that he founded at Brown in 1962, I didn't remember it.

Shortly after Walter became prominent—the late 1960s—I appreciated the work of four contemporaries who had meteoric visual art careers: Boyd Mefferd, whose kinetic light sculptures were featured in an important exhibition at the Whitney Museum; Bill Bollinger, who did some abstract sculpture of industrial materials that was noticed before he died young, reportedly of alcoholism; Ira Schneider who co-produced around 1968 one of the great pioneering works of live video-art that looked just as strong when I saw it again in Berlin in 1989; and Willoughby Sharp, who published in the early 1970s an avant-garde art magazine named *Avalanche* whose copies I still treasure, which must have remained important, because all its issues were reprinted in 2010 as a single book of more than 1000 pages in an expensive box. Careers in visual art, don't forget, tend to be meteoric, as theirs were, or slowly accretive, culminating with optimal recognition after decades of unfashionable work, in contrast, say, to careers in literature or classical music, which tend to be more continuously incremental or level.

The greatest visual artist among us, exemplifying the principle of a

successfully accretive career, was Paul Laffoley (d. 2016), who told the world he graduated from Brown in 1962 though he had actually finished four years before. Painting mostly words representing complex concepts, he was also among the champs at talking about his own art. During an exhibition of his work he could speak for an hour about an individual picture of his. I suspect that Paul like myself got at Brown a good education not in the making of visual art, which both he and I had to learn on our own, but in handling cultural materials, in Paul's case now including his own paintings. He once told me that the IC classes forced him to be articulate, because, as he put it, "You could not hide."

To no surprise perhaps, art galleries at Brown have never mounted an exhibition of alumni artists or sponsored a one-person show by any alumnus. That's zip. When I had a modest traveling retrospective in 1978, some folks from Brown came to my SoHo loft to talk about it; but nothing happened. Beginning at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and fitting into a single box that I still have in my studio, *Wordsand*, as the exhibition was called, subsequently went to university galleries at Vassar, Alberta, North Dakota, Miami-Dade, Cornell-Iowa, and Cal State-Bakersfield, among other places. It contained large prints, book-art books, drawings, audios, videos, and a hologram, mostly using language, as its title suggests. Words have always been the principal content of my art, now in more media than those mentioned already, by that fact alone distinguishing me from almost everybody else exhibiting visual art around the world.

However, *Wordsand* never landed at Brown. When more recently a gallery in Holland mounted an exhibition of my book-art, I proposed that the principal art gallery at Brown might like to redo it to coincide with the 50th reunion of my class in 2012. Somewhere they replied that their program was full, even though the schedule publicly available on the gallery's website suggested otherwise, and it has never contacted me since. It's hard to make winners of losers.

I recall hearing of a visual poetry exhibition at Brown in which Laffoley and myself were only barely included, would you believe, and certainly were not invited to do presentations, even though both of us have long been identified as major practitioners on the website of the principal collectors of visual poetry—Ruth and Marvin Sackner. How is that possible? Back we return to that awful theme of a lack of respect for itself that has forever been a recurring problem at Brown—a predicament verging a self-hate, a problem that only strong,

insistent leadership can overcome but, alas, never has.

VI

Alvin Curran became a noted avant-garde composer; Joel Cohen, a smarter guy then as now, the director of an early music ensemble called the Boston Camerata; he still ranks as the greatest classical musician ever to graduate from Brown. Literate, Joel also wrote a good book about early music. The playwright Richard Foreman, who has been central to avant-garde theater in America for the past decades, was at Brown, remembered nearly fifty years later for his extraordinary performance as Willy Loman a few years before I arrived. Don't forget that all three of these guys, each avant-garde in his own way, have spent considerable time in Europe earning support that was not available here. (The sole recent alumnus to head a university, Rick Trainor, several years behind me at Brown, had succeeded wholly in Scotland and England, which is doubly remarkable, because I can't recall any American holding a comparable position in the British Isles during my time there fifty years ago.)

Another classmate, Dickran Tashjian, became a prominent scholar of American avant-garde art and literature. When I met the San Francisco cameraman Philip Makanna at a New York screening of his video work with the composer Robert Ashley, I recalled him as big guy, I think in my class, who rowed crew at Brown. Phil also produced photography books. There was a prematurely scruffy-haired fellow a few years ahead of me named Peter Goldman, whom I mentioned before, who did two experimental films forty years ago that are still remembered, *Echoes of Silence* (1966) and *Wheel of Ashes* (1968), and another scruffy-haired guy a few years behind me named Alan Sondheim, who he has done a huge amount of work in both writing and music that is certainly advanced and eccentric. Both Peter and Alan, I think, participated in Saturday night folksinging, perhaps with Mark Kapner a few years behind me. I recognized Mark in the late 1960s as the keyboardist in a prominent rock group called Country Joe and the Fish.

Also ahead of me was a fellow named Edward Pincus (1938-2013), then known as a superior logician, who later made personal documentary films and even wrote a guide to their production as a professor at MIT. I don't recall seeing any of his films (and doubt if he has seen any of mine), though he reportedly influenced another documentarian, Ross McElwee, several years behind us at Brown, who produced personal documentaries that I've seen and admired. (Ed

married Jane Kates, a Pembroker who was among the initial authors of the classic feminist manual, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which was socially avant-garde when it first appeared.) As far as I can tell, the only noncommercial filmmakers/video artists among our classmates still screening his or her work are Ira Schneider and myself.

Of the sometime student Pembrokers, who were then perceived to be in another school, I still see the playwright Elizabeth Diggs, whom I met the first day of classes in September 1958, and her partner Emily Arnold McCully who's done some rather extraordinary children's books, as Liz has written plays. They graduated in spring 61, a semester ahead of me. Certainly close friends then, perhaps roommates, they married Brown campus stars and had children only to become thirty years ago lifepartners who have been together ever since. From time to time we meet at the NYU gymnasium, where they play squash and I swim. As there wasn't any visible homosexuality at Brown when I was there, I suppose Liz and Emily represent something socially unexpected. Indeed, when I was in college I saw both feminism and the demand for racial justice emerging; but if you had told me that respectable people would want to be recognized as lesbian or gay, I would at the time have replied, "highly unlikely." The subsequent acceptance of homosexuality still surprises me.

Among the Brown-Pembroke women later significantly contributing to feminist literary scholarship (which didn't exist during our undergraduate years) the most visible was Lillian S. Robinson (1941-2006), who has published collections of her critical essays with university presses, in addition to editing a prodigious four-volume anthology titled *Modern Women Writers* (1996) which collects in a few thousand pages published criticism of more than five hundred fifty twentieth-century authors, Lillian doing what no one else has done or will probably do again. It must be held in one's hands to be believed. My ex-wife who accompanied to Foster's dinners, once Anne Louise Tidaback, later Anne K. Mellor, who taught at both Stanford and UCLA, is credited with feminist reinterpretations of feminism in English literature.

About his wife (and my classmate) Jennifer Brown, my favorite roomie Wilson B. Brown writes me: "I think she is Canada's foremost ethnohistorian. Her two early books, *Strangers in Blood*, and the *New Peoples* (co-authored), both published over thirty years ago, are still in print, and *Strangers* has been reprinted numerous times. A new scholar can't start to write about racially mixed groups,

particularly Canadian ones, without reading these books, so they are in continual demand. Many of her books are co-authored, partly because she is generous about sharing, and often because she is publishing material partly written by the long-dead: one on Chief William Berens of Berens River, who told his story to A.I. Hallowell (J's favorite anthropologist on whom she is the expert) in the 1930s, and another upcoming on Adam Bigmouth, who, Hallowell interviewed and left notes on, but never published. They are marvelous stories, and she handles them in a way that validates their viewpoints without demeaning the storytellers." Knowing nothing about these subjects, the best man at their wedding can't. dispute him.

As far as I can tell, Emily, Clark Coolidge, Richard Foreman, Susan Cheever, and I are the only literary authors of our years who are still publishing books. Susan once wrote that she remembered me as a BMOC (a Big Man on Campus) when she entered three years behind me, which surprised me, because I didn't feel particularly visible to more than a few and now doubt if I'm now remembered by more than a few, in spite of having done what I've done for decades now. [Around 2005, I had a personal reason for writing the New York City Corporation Counsel, who was a class behind me at Brown. He incidentally replied that he'd had not heard of me before.]

A brainy classmate who went to Hollywood is Hal Barwood, who has worked with George Lucas and directed at least one feature film before concentrating on the development of video games, all on the West Coast. My classmate Alan Rosenus has published several books, including a collection of *Devil Stories* (1979) that he inscribed to me. Sometime during the 1990s he won some Western States prize for his biography of some Mexican general. I thank Alan for introducing me to the idea of California as a literary category.

The actor Ray Barry, officially Raymond J. Barry, who was the Brown football fullback during my years there, became involved in avant-garde theatre in the sixties and seventies with the legendary Living Theatre and then The Open Theatre. I remember a memorable performance he did with the Open Theatre around 1969 in which other actors, all smaller than he, beat up on him. Ray went out to Hollywood twenty-five years ago, where he has had a good career, though his occasional New York performances demonstrates that he certainly still knows what avant-garde acting is all about. I met also at Ray's impressive performance here perhaps a decade ago Dick Nurse, who told me that he was running an historic

black theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Another playwright a few years behind me is John Ford Noonan, who began his performance career dressed as the Brown Bear during football games. Since we didn't win any games during our senior year, I recall that he spent the last half time hanging from the goal posts until other people took him down. In addition to plays, John has since also done some screenwriting and film acting. I also recall him moving the stage furniture at the legendary Fillmore East rock palace around 1970. As we look somewhat alike, though John is yet larger in all dimensions, strangers perhaps once a year used to ask me if I were John?

You must respect the truth that any Brown alumnus surviving in the arts must have overcome a lot of obstacles. That's why I recognized several with individual entries in my *Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes* (second edition, 2000). Some have acquired unfortunate personality distortions common among individuals who have overcome great disadvantage, though, in this case, sometimes less acceptable to outsiders who fail to recognize the truth of Brown.

On the other hand, did Richard Foreman, say, and myself succeed as we have because of Brown or in spite of it? My hunch is the latter, because we had a greater determination, if not skill, at overcoming serious disadvantages that we recognized soon after college. Recall that around 1970 Foreman established his own theater, producing only his own work, instead of submitting texts to other producers. This is the equivalent of self-publishing books, which, while more common now, was dismissed as career-killing only decades ago. In understanding negative institutions, here and elsewhere, especially in my own experience, I'm rarely if ever wrong, mostly because, living life as I have, I couldn't afford to be wrong.

Incidentally, one rule I learned about Ivy League schools that pretty much holds true for Brown—the alumni who went on to careers in the arts did not major in any of the arts. I majored in American Civilization, as did Susan Cheever. I remember that Ira Schneider majored in psychology, Paul Laffoley in classics, and Walter Carlos in physics. The painter Frank Stella did history at Princeton. At Brown and perhaps other Ivy League schools, the writing programs especially, and perhaps the arts programs as well, were designed to teach its majors to be high school teachers—to spread the gospel of what their professors did to the next generation at an earlier level.

That perhaps accounts for why I didn't start writing publishable poetry until my mid-twenties and publishable fiction until my late-twenties. In both genres I initially did work radically different from anything taught at Brown—poems and fictions that to my surprise and gratitude have since appeared widely and recognized in the critical compendia of both those genres. And I didn't produce visual and audio art until my mid-thirties, after I moved to Artists' SoHo, which was, as I've written, an informal educational institution.

VII

May I judge, nonetheless, that I've been intellectually shaped by my experience of Brown more than any other institution, certainly more than two graduate schools and more than my high school. Indeed, Brown was a very good school—better than it thought it was and perhaps even better than it became.

What we were taught at Brown was how to handle large amounts of cultural information efficiently. William G. McLoughlin in his American intellectual history course required several hundred pages a week of reading. When he assigned us *The Titan*, a six-hundred-page novel by Theodore Dreiser, to understand Social Darwinism, some student asked, "Do we have to read this for the exam?" He replied, "Yeah it shouldn't take you more than two hours." I felt like slinking off. What's wrong with me? Am I incompetent if I can't figure out how to read 600 pages in two hours? I mean these teachers were tough, especially if you did the honors program. They made you learn how to learn at a level you didn't need to do in high school or at most colleges at that time.

If Foster Damon turned me on to the avant-garde in the American arts. Bill McLoughlin introduced me to intellectual history, which is what I did in graduate school. If education teaches one to think in a certain way—like an engineer or a lawyer, say—then to this day I still think like a historian, rather than, say, a literary person. Am I not in this interview functioning like an intellectual historian, connecting intelligent people and events over time and space?

Juan Lopez-Morillas was my fourth major teacher. He was also very important to Richard Foreman—indeed, Richard cited L-M, as we called him, among his great teachers in his own memoir that appeared in the *New York Times* Sunday theater section some years ago. As a refugee from the Spanish Civil War, Juan

represented continental culture to a degree that no one else at Brown did and certainly introduced us to a lot of memorable European literature. Oddly, I never took a course in English lit per se, which I still don't know much about, even though it was one of the two majors of the Pembroker whom I married.

One key difference between Brown and other Ivies at that time, perhaps now too, is that the best teachers were available to us if we sought them out, perhaps because serious students were so scarce. A swimming pool buddy who went to Harvard told me of how a certain celebrity professor there, by contrast, scheduled his required office hours to overlap with lunchtime so that students wanting to see him would know in advance they would probably miss their free lunch.

I kept in touch with Damon, Wrong, McLoughlin, and Lopez-Morillas after I graduated, even staying for a night or two at the last one's house during the 1960s, so supportive were they at that time. Not too long ago I got a nice letter from Juan's widow, Frances, who has returned to Providence after his death; but when I sent her something more recently, there was, sadly, no reply. I recall reading in their house around 1963 a Spanish book she had wanted to translate into English—Guillermo de Torre's thick history of modern avant-garde literature—that looked so good I always wanted to have my own copy, even in Spanish. I recall in 1987 swapping some audiotapes of mine with a professor in Argentina who promised to send me a copy but didn't deliver. Not until the arrival of the Internet around the year 2000 and that used book heaven called Abebooks.com did I finally purchase a copy, which indeed I'm pleased now to have.

My first book, which appeared within a few years of my leaving Brown, was appropriately dedicated to these four teachers. My first collection of poems, which appeared in 1970, was dedicated to Damon alone. I personally gave it to him in the nursing home where he lived just before he died. My anthologies of the E. E. Cummings and Virgil Thomson, both Harvard buddies of Foster, were likewise dedicated to him, while my history of post-World War II American thought was dedicated to McLoughlin.

VIII

Remember, I tell young people, that the three things you want to do in art are

take a step ahead of what others have done, produce major work admired not just by your benefactors and friends but strangers—the addition of strangers is crucial—and survive professionally. Every other success is nice, but it's never more than everything else. Education and internships, as well as how you live your life, should prepare you for these three long-term goals. In both respects, don't forget that art and writing are highly competitive worlds. Avoid smug expectations and self-defeating traps. Even short-term successes can be a distraction.

May I mention that some alumni readers of an earlier draft of this conversation found its exposure of Brown's lack of respect for itself to be sad, even if the theme were true, especially if they failed to realize early enough how disadvantageous Brown was. Need I remind them that critical autobiographical memoirs always sound peculiar, especially if they contain uncommon truths. Remember that George Orwell's classic about his prep school could not be published in England during his lifetime. Like Orwell before me, I've tried to dig deeper and see further.

When a recent intern who received his degree magna cum laude in English at Yale read these recollections, he judged that I received at Brown a richer education than he had four decades later at Yale, as indeed I probably had, paradoxically accounting for why I became as a writer and an artist more than I expected to be and certainly more, alas, than my teachers expected and, more strangely, that my university has acknowledged.

[Some of this draws upon *Autobiographies @ 70*, available from Amazon Createspace later this year.]

Individual entries on **Richard Kostelanetz's** work in several fields appear in various editions of *Readers Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers, Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature, Contemporary Poets, Contemporary Novelists, Postmodern Fiction, Webster's Dictionary of American Writers, The HarperCollins Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature, Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, Directory of American Scholars, Who's Who in America, Who's Who in*

the World, Who's Who in American Art, NNDB.com, Wikipedia.com, and Britannica.com, among other distinguished directories. Otherwise, he survives in New York, where he was born, unemployed and thus overworked.

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