

**PETU  
LANCE  
+SLOTH**

EARLY  
POEMS

1980  
1994

**JOSEPH  
ALAN  
WACHS**

**PETU & LANCE  
SLOTH**

**JOSEPH  
ALAN  
WACHS**

Early Poems: 1980 to 1994

**PETULANCE & SLOTH**

TEXT  
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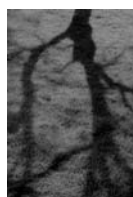
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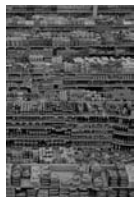
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**Sway**

Twenty-one years ago, I had the misfortune of contracting Salmonellosis from an Ethiopian restaurant in Portland, Oregon, where I lived during my undergraduate studies at Lewis & Clark College, a small liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest. Twenty-four hours after using spongy injera bread to mop up a plate of tender lamb, spicy lentils and a hard boiled egg, I sensed a strange and unusual percolation bubbling behind my chest cavity, just above my sternum. Sparing my reader the gory details, the rod-shaped Salmonella bacterium penetrates the intestines causing gastroenteritis, typhoid fever, and sometimes death. Three days later, I found myself in an emergency medical services vehicle en route to the nearest Portland hospital. For nine days, I remained in intensive care receiving healthy doses of Potassium and Demerol through an intravenous line.

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**Right Now**



v For the duration of my time at the hospital, the television dial in my room remained fixed upon Portland Public Broadcasting, which televised a staging of Sondheim's musical, *Sunday in the Park with George*, based on the painting, "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte" by Georges Pierre Seurat, as well as a documentary about the great American poet and pediatrician, William Carlos Williams. Both programs cycled in repetition numerous times over the course of my stay and I purposefully kept the channel tuned to PBS as an exercise in transcendental education. What I learned over the course of those nine days were critical lessons in detail and simplicity, which have stayed with me throughout my adult life.

Although I could have cared less about the Sondheim musical, hopped up on Demerol, I found Seurat's detailed technique spell-binding. Whenever the TV camera zoomed in on the cyclorama backdrop, an enlargement of Seurat's painting, I disappeared for hours into the otherworldly dimensions and distinct dots used to construct the neo-impressionist masterpiece. In doing so, I came to realize our entire techno-colored universe consists of a cosmic interplay between four colors: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black.

In contrast, the William Carlos Williams documentary offered a lesson in simplicity. At the time, I had been studying poetry with Professor Vern Rutsala, an established poet in the Pacific Northwest region, to fulfill the requirements of a double major in poetry and theatre (while theatre was my Potassium drip, poetry was my Demerol). In essence, the black and white documentary was a mouthpiece for W. C. Williams to encourage young poets to find their own voice and to be true to the simple word.

I remember the documentary highlighted an animated short Williams had produced in his younger years: Captured on Super 8 sometime in the early 1950's, a playful locomotive rolled down the tracks, powered by the text of a poem rising from the engine's smoke stack, with Williams' voiceover reciting the poem. Despite my Demerol-induced state, twenty-one years later, I remember the image vividly. More importantly, I remember the creative surge I received as I witnessed words rising like steam to create verse.

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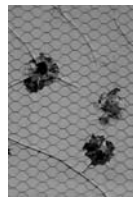
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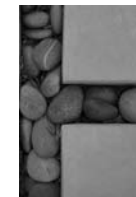
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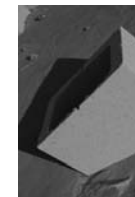
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What you hold in your hands represents my own black and white film, of sorts, capturing my own younger years: A detailed collection of simple poems, which have been waiting patiently for their turn at bat. Written in Larkspur, Portland, New York, Spoleto, Foligno, Perugia, Sydney, Melbourne, Wagga Wagga, and San Francisco over a span of fourteen years, the aim of this collection is to power a larger poetic vehicle; a poem-driven locomotive, if you will. My First Fifteen collaborator, Jason Franzen, is the man behind the movie camera, juxtaposing pixels and prose with a delicate balance of design and wit.

As I write these words, I know this volume is only one of an infinite number in a series of future First Fifteen projects and I look forward to the year 2020, when I am 52-years-old, glancing in the rearview mirror to see how far I've traveled since *Petulance & Sloth*.

Enjoy.

Joseph Alan Wachs  
First Fifteen  
2009

Dedicated

to the ghost of William Carlos Williams

# The Rise and Fall of an American Café

PETULANCE + SLOTH 2 JOSEPH ALAN WACHS

Housing the riff-raff,  
sandwiched between the walls of  
a smoky coffee dungeon,  
pretending to read,  
but not missing a beat,  
standing still,  
hanging out,  
playing chess,  
strumming guitar,  
flipping pages,  
staring at girls,  
studying boys,  
receiving unsolicited advice from strangers.

Killing, wasting, spending time  
with caffeine, sugar and lactose.  
Engaged in the small theatre  
of medium large.  
Low-fat, non-fat, double, single red-eye.  
For here or to go. How much for a refill.  
Here comes Starbucks.  
Well there goes the neighborhood —

And whence/forth a collection  
of petulance and sloth.  
Tales from beneath the counter,  
stories from the tip jar,  
and early tricks of the trade.

# Warning

Sealing wax may drip from the ceiling and seal the passage from the ceiling to the floor. No passage permitted by people protecting this passage.

Thank you,

The Management



# Can U Relate?

PETULANCE + SLOTH • JOSEPH ALAN WACHS

I'm trying to find the difference between  
old and new  
and wondering, too,

if watching the changing of the guards,  
and the avant-garde swans,  
as they sing their last song for Kalamazoo,  
or wherever swans fly these days,  
is instinctive wisdom or beauty in the eye of the beholder.

When you figure it out, let me know.  
Then I'll take another look at your résumé  
and give you a call,  
because I am eager to meet another who can relate.

# Can't Write

can't write  
can't think  
can't walk  
or breathe  
or move  
or spin  
can't see  
can't hear  
can't sink  
or swim  
can't play  
or fight or  
win  
can't drive  
or care  
or wonder where  
can't heal  
can't feel  
can't write



# Celestial Seasons

PETULANCE + SLOTH 10 JOSEPH ALAN WACHS

Anyone who has a why to live  
can deal with any how.

That's what Nietzsche said.  
I read it on the back of a tea-box.

Wachs says:  
The word how is wrong  
and should be woh,  
to go with what, where, when, which, who,  
and sometimes why.

But, woh means:  
Woah!  
Hold on!  
Look out!  
You're a horse and I want you to stop moving forward!

So, woh now is spelled how now, not woh.

I bet ol' Nietzsche never said that...

# THANK YOU

For your inspiration  
and support

To my lovely wife, Sussan Simin Corson, Jason + Laura Franzen, The Wachs Clan, The Corson Family, Shahla & Michael Jannetta, The Eggman/Almond House, QB7/Burkesworks, Jackson/Hybrid, Jason/FORMation, The Family Frisch, Sean Boling, Jonathan Haner, Richard Polsky, Henry Chinaski, Ecnirp, Absolam Fauts Hedges, Yashar Ozberkmen, Ellen Stewart/LaMaMa, Vern Rutsala, Russell Hill, The 30 Days Project, Glenn Verchick, Jun Shimizu, Paris LaFrance, my mother and father, step-mother, mother-in-law, father-in-law, two and a half sisters, older brother, two sisters-in-law, two brothers-in-law, two step-brothers, two nieces, two nephews (and a few more on their way), aunts, uncles, cousins, second-cousins, cousins once or twice removed, and all my close chums, bosom buddies, life-long pals, and their children. You know who you are.

A special thank you to Sam Chapin. Free Tibet.

Joseph Alan Wachs  
Hybrid/  
West Harlem, New York

# ABOUT

## The Author

Joe Wachs is a hybrid artist, writer, director, and performance coach living in New York City. He holds a BA in Theatre Arts and Poetry from Lewis & Clark College and an MA in Performance & Technology Studies from The Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University. Currently, he is the Director of Hybrid, an interdisciplinary company unifying art and business, and he is General Editor for First Fifteen, an independent publishing venture with Jason Franzen of FORMation. Joe lives with his wife, Sussan, in West Harlem, New York.

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