

BOOKS

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SBOOK

VOICE, VERSE &

DEEP CULTURE

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

LETTERS AND SCIENCE EXTENSION

BERKELEY POETRY CONFERENCE, 1965
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 ng, Alon, Alchemy, Psy. Types
 bster, From Mycenae to Homer
 ight, The Worship of Priapus
 ng & Kerenyi, Essays on a Science
 of Mythology
 ompson, The Art of Logos
 nas, The Gnostics
 aves, The Greek Myths
 amer, Mythologies of the Ancient
 World
 ith, The Origin of the Semites
 len, N.A.P.
 Voto, The Year of Decision
 nk, Art and Artist
 Sitter, Kosmos
 wrence, Fantasia of the Unconsc.
 -Mornings in Mexico
 -Studies in Classic Am. Lit.
 itchard, Ancient Near East. Texts
 rdon, Before the Bible
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 .lliams, Desert Music; & Stories
 -Paterson, et all al.
 und.
 ithews, Dakota (Wakontah)
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 Combustion, Four Winds, Coyote's Journal,
 Matter, Sum, Poetry (Chi.)

(If this doesn't work, try the Tarot)

This note & The Bibliography- The work of J. Clarke, Buffalo

STATEMENT ON FEMINIST PUBLISHING ETHICS
FROM THE 1985 WOMEN IN PRINT CONFERENCE

Every story told by a woman about her life is a breaking of silence -- the silence imposed on us because we are women. In opposing patriarchy and joining together as feminists we commit ourselves -- the heart and souls of our lives -- to the liberation of women. This commitment is a spiritual and moral contract by which we as feminists freely and joyously bind ourselves to work for the freedom of all women. This feminist contract can not be contained and defined merely by legal clauses, no matter how elegant and explicit. This is a contract whose unwritten clauses are inexpressible because they speak of the dimensions of the heart.

How can we define women's spirit, trust and caring? In our women gatherings we experience the energy, love and caring of women together in strength. Most often, in our day-to-day survival we experience the opposite -- where the feminist commitment is absent. And certainly these are not found on the pages of "Forum" magazine. What is in "Forum" magazine is woman hating -- commercial exploitation of women as sex objects for the gratification of men and to the benefit of the pornographic industry.

Whatever one's opinion of the content of "Forum", one of the primary issues remaining from the sale of excerpts from Lesbian Nuns to "Forum" magazine is one of consent. Contributors to anthologies should always have the right to approve and consent to all uses of their work outside the original edition for which the work was intended. This includes reproduction in media other than print.

At the very least, we should aspire to three common practices of mainstream publishers: inform authors well in advance of planned or unplanned publicity; offer those affected the choice of refusal, anonymity, use of a pen name or use of their own name; and require authors' consent for serial rights sales.

Editors and publishers have a further obligation to fairly distribute proceeds from the sale of contributors' work. In the situation with Lesbian Nuns, where publishers' revenues will far exceed \$100,000, there is a direct obligation to fairly share the proceeds with contributors, legal contracts notwithstanding.

While in future situations contractual agreements may avoid some of these problems, such agreements can never wholly replace trust, good communication and ethical behavior on a business and personal level.

We share in the grief of betrayal, sorrow and suffering expressed by the contributors to Lesbian Nuns, those who have spoken publicly and those unable to speak. We commit ourselves to never sell the rights of any woman's work

Interview: Lisa Robertson

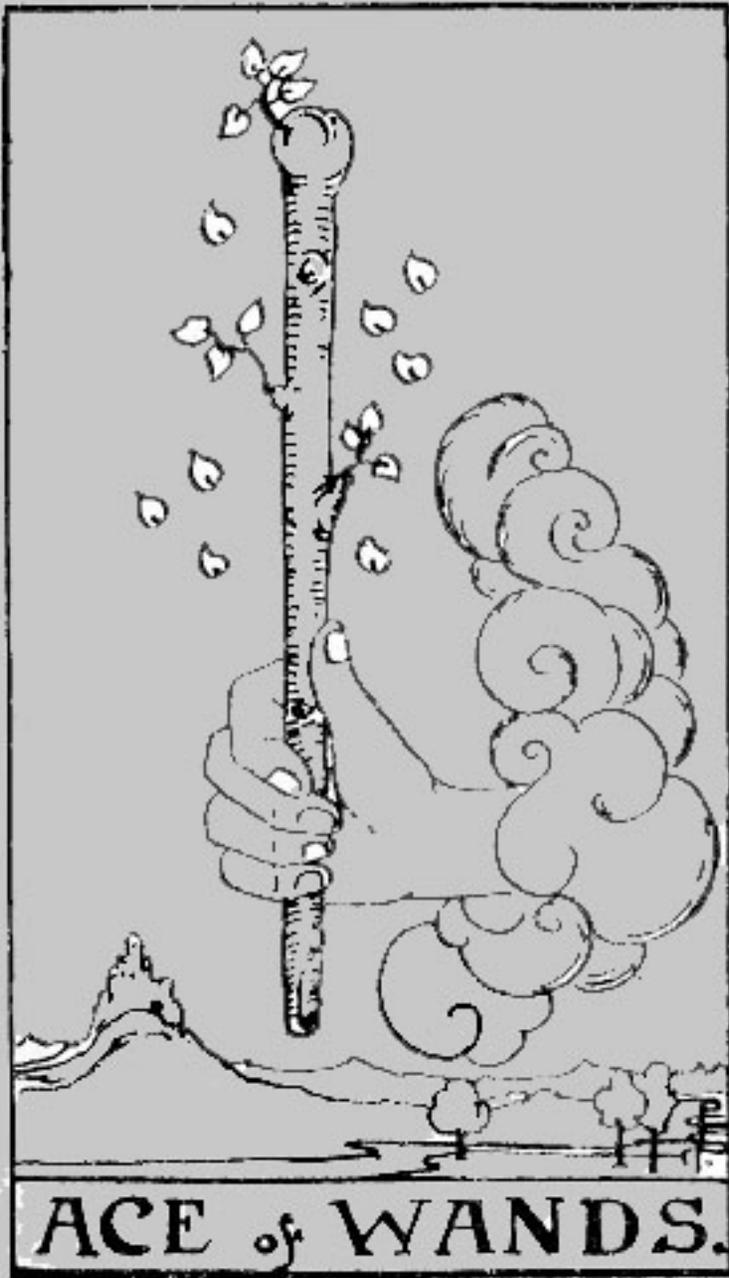
Rachel: How did Proprioception books start, why did it start?

Lisa: I'm gonna take off my bracelets because they clatter. Uhm, I didn't start it, I took on a bookstore that was already functioning. And I kept the name of the previous version of the bookstore. The bookstore was started by a Charles Olson scholar who was a teacher at SFU in the English department; his name was Ralph Maud. He worked on Olson, Dylan Thomas. That's the main stuff I know he worked on. But he was— Do you know Charles Olson?

R: No, I'm not familiar with his work.

L: Ok, Charles Olson was a mid-century, postmodern American poet who was known for his relationship to Black Mountain College. He was a dean at Black Mountain for a while in the 40/50's, in the last period of Black Mountain. He was a poet who made use of local history in a collaged and extended form. He really influenced west coast poetry here in the 60/70's. Charles Olson was an encyclopedic big mouth guy [faint giggling in the background]. He aspired to make these huge cosmological histories that go back into prehistory, connecting poetry to everything.

Ralph Maud started a bookstore that centered on the concept of duplicating Charles Olson's personal library. Olson had written an essay that was really important called Proprioceptive Verse. The name of the bookstore referred to Olson's essay. And the word "proprioception" means, roughly speaking, your body's unconscious ability to situate itself in space, to perform unconscious motions and actions: so breathing; remaining upright. It's really a word that you'll only come across, outside of postmodern literature, in physical rehabilitation. There it's a bodily skill that is highly sought after—after you've had an injury for example, proprioceptive ability must be reestablished. In his work, Olson connected the body and voice and verse and deep culture.



So my old professor, Ralph Maud, started this bookshop based on Olson's personal library, and he used to get his students to volunteer there. The bookstore was in an alleyway in Kits off Broadway, I think near Vine St actually. Near Broadway and Vine. The building's gone now, it's been replaced. It used to be some wooden rambling thing. You went in through the alleyway, and there were lefty lawyers in their shitty little offices and then this funky little bookstore. It was really charming. I had taken a course with Ralph and found out about the bookstore through the grapevine. And so I used to go there because it wasn't far from where I lived, and it felt really amazing to know about this place. It was pretty wild there— it was the only place in town that stocked contemporary poetry.

For contemporary poetry and theory, you know, there weren't that many places. So I used to go there a lot, and then I ended up volunteering. I had always had a fantasy about having a bookstore because I had worked at a bookstore in Paris. I was really kind of a fangirl of Sylvia Beach, who had started the bookstore Shakespeare and Company. She first published Joyce, and she was part of the Paris expatriate scene in the '20s and '30s. She was a total hero of mine. So I confessed this to Ralph, who was my professor and boss, an older guy, and he said to me why don't you just take mine, meaning his bookstore. I'm like what? So we made a transaction legally. I quit school, used my student loan to make a down payment, took it over, became the owner, and moved it downtown into the Dominion Building. When I moved it downtown I got rid of some of his stock— though not the Olson. Ralph was really Jungian, and I was not into Jung. I used to go to Jungian events to set up book tables, and that convinced me that I never wanted to be around those people. So I sold off that stock. Then I went much further into contemporary poetry, theory and philosophy, and art criticism. It was mostly new books with a few used books just to keep it juicy. I ran it out of Dominion Building for four years, first on the seventh floor, a tiny office space, and then on the second floor. But the Dominion Building's front doors locked at certain times so I couldn't determine my own hours.

For evening events — readings and book launches— it was awkward because someone had to stay at the front door and let people in.

So after four years, I guess, I found a storefront on Homer St. It had been a funky local designer clothing store. It was a pretty cool space, had beautiful pine plank floors that were new and bright, and it had a deep blue ceiling. It was a long deep space. My friends helped me move all the Ikea bookshelves from the Dominion building, and then we set up there. But I think I was only there for two years. I only did it for six years in all. Which at that time—at that age— felt like a long time. I mean, I had it from the age of twenty-eight to thirty-four. But I basically had to close it down. I lost control of my overhead; the building flipped; my rent tripled, and there had been all kinds of other cutbacks. And it was the time when independent bookstores started closing. Six independent bookstores closed that year.

The internet was hardly a thing— it existed, but there was no such thing as Amazon. So you couldn't sell on line. Vancouver was going through real state transformation and gentrification, so I just couldn't afford a space. In bookselling, the profit margin is low, so you have to have low overhead. Either that or sell mass market— just sell books like potato chips or something.

I had no other livelihood, and my family doesn't have any money or anything like that, so I needed to at least scrape by. I was paying my bills to publishers by doing art writing for catalogs, and after a couple of years of this, I realized I could write and support myself and not be going further and further into debt. I was going deeply into debt, keeping the store open, with no means of ever paying that debt back. So I closed the store. When I took it on, I had expected to be a bookseller for the rest of my life. I was deeply committed to this as a calling in an old fashioned romantic sense. So it was deeply disappointing to me when I closed it.

Uhm...

It was also a wonderfully rich, fabulous time in the cultural history of the city. The whole time I was running the bookstore, I was part of the KSW collective; I was a board member at Artspeak, and I was a poetry editor of Front Magazine over at the Western Front. And I ran a poetry reading series at the Vancouver Art Gallery. I was super active, doing stuff everywhere. And the bookstore made a place for people to come to. Anyways that's an overview of the whole thing.

R: It was a calling for you— a space for people to go. It would be nice if you could lean into that a bit more because of my interest in the bookstores in Vancouver, specifically the feminist bookstores...

L: Oh, yeah, great. I used to go to Ariel Books.

R: Actually, Ariel Books is also one of my interests. I found one of their old bookmarks in a book at Paperhound Books. It was from the 1980's Dark and Light Festival.

L: I don't recall that festival, but yeah, Paperhound keeps ephemera, stuff like that. They found a stack of bookmarks from Proprioception and sent them to me in France.

R: Really, that's great! Well, I find those things interesting, and what has drawn me to these places such as Ariel books is their mandates. How these bookstores are very much about a space; a community...

L: Yeah, yeah. When I first took on Proprioception books, I was just beginning to attend events at KSW and get to know those people. I'd been a full-time student at SFU, and I worked nights as an office janitor, so I didn't have much spare time to hang out. I was part of a women's poetry reading and writing group, and some of those women were going to classes at KSW, and so I had some trickle-down information. I had first gone to KSW when Lyn Hejinian was teaching there.

Which was around the same time I was taking over the bookstore, so it would have been 88.'

What I'm saying is when I first took over the bookstore, my sense of community was kind of rudimentary. It really was the tradition of bookselling that I loved, and the experience I had had of working in a bookstore in Paris, sitting there and talking about books with people—that's what fired me up. I thought this was a thing I could do for the rest of my life. As I was making the transition to taking on the bookstore, I was getting more and more deeply involved with KSW. Then I got to know the other artist-run centres. You know there were three of us that were on the same block for a while, almost four. The Or gallery, Artspeak, and I were on Hastings and Cambie, and then the CAG was just a block up. And Lorna Brown was the assistant at the CAG, Cate Rimmer was running Artspeak, and at the Or, Nancy Shaw I believe was the director. We all got to know each other. I knew Kathy through classes at SFU, and Kathy was very close to Cate and started working at Artspeak too.

So I very quickly got to know a whole community. At first, my store was so tiny— it was a little bit bigger than this kitchen— there was no question of doing any events there. When I could afford to move downstairs into a slightly bigger space, we would do more events, things like book signings. In the last years of the bookstore, when we were at the storefront, I did all kinds of stuff, readings, launches . . .

But what I used to do was take my books around to events. I had a hand truck that three boxes could fit on. I didn't have a driver's license back then. So I would go to academic conferences and to readings, and I would set up a book table. I would do special ordering for all the events. After that, I was pretty in demand for academic book tables because, strangely enough, the university bookstores didn't pick up on it. And I was enthusiastic about it. I loved to participate in the conferences. I would have friends helping, and we would take turns at the table and attend the lectures.

I'm talking about conferences in the literature; the humanities; the arts. Probably one of the first ones I went to, the keynote speaker was Gayatri Spivak, another one would have been Homi Bhabha. Sort of early 90's postmodern, post-colonial crit and literary history. I was really mobile with the bookstore which helped bring people in.

People knew that I could tell them who was reading what. Certain customers had cultural clout. So, I knew if they were enthusiastic about a particular book, I could order ten and easily sell them. There was a kind of bibliophilic networking. And people would meet each other in the store— a lot of good conversations. It was also a place where people would come and sit down and talk to me for a while before starting to browse. I was hand-selling books; I knew all my customers. I would bring the books to them that I thought pertained to their research: it was that kind of place. It was very personal and very connected with the artist-run scene and with academics in the humanities at both schools (SFU and UBC).

R: Did the bookstore ever influence your own writing practice?

L: Oh, God, yes! My first published work happened when I was a bookseller. Everything was so interconnected it was impossible to say that everything didn't influence everything. It's about the books you're reading; the conversations you're having. The bookstore was not always really busy, so I spent a lot of time reading there, carefully reading, trying to not crack covers. It was like having the most totally amazing library that happened to be a community resource and a conversation base. It definitely influenced my writing. The bookstore deeply connected me with a bigger community which became the world my writing went into. I was publishing art writing and poetry at the same time.

R: Has the art and poetry ever intermingled?

L: A lot of my books of poetry are partly comprised of texts that were commissioned for gallery publications, or by artists.

My milieu was equivalently writing and contemporary art practice. The approach I took towards writing was very shaped by my understanding of conceptual feminist art practice. Kathy and I started doing our work in tandem. I believe one of my earliest pieces was a voice-over for a video she did. Now, Mary Kelly, the British feminist artist, did a work called *The Postpartum Document*, which was a key feminist piece. She is profoundly a Lacanian thinker. She was teaching seminars at SFU on Lacanian conceptual art, and all the fabulous feminist artists in the city were attending. I was their bookseller. I didn't take the class because I was running the store, but they all came to my store. We were all reading the same material. Those kinds of conversations became the work that I did. The main difference between poetry and the art world was that you got paid to write for art publications because the artist runs had budgets, and poetry was simply given away. I started writing catalog essays in 1990-92. I think the first one I wrote was for Mina Totino. The work had to do in part with the witch trials. And at the time, there were not a lot of feminist art writers— for years, I only wrote about women's work. That became my identity and the form of my commitment to the community. That is what I did then, and it has remained part of what I do now.

R: You started teaching at KSW during your time at Proprioception Books?

L: I started at KSW during my time at Proprioception Books. A lot of us taught seminars at KSW— it was just one of the things that were possible to do and it seemed interesting. It was also a way to make a little bit of money and another way to have interesting conversations. I started teaching there while I had the bookstore, but it really intensified after I closed the bookstore. They weren't general poetry workshops— there would be proposed topics and reading lists around theoretical issues that were of interest to me. The courses I taught ended up being a bit connected to my writing practice. I taught there a lot— it was obvious teaching was something I was going to have to learn how to do well, for my future.

It was one of the things that writers could do. Yet I wasn't an academic, I had left my BA. I never finished because I thought I was going to be a bookseller for the rest of my life. I was a little bit naive, really, about how I planned things, you might say. But luckily, loosely speaking, it has worked out.

R: KSW was a lot different from most institutions

L: Oh yeah, KSW was strongly focused on feminism; it was queer-friendly, at a time when this was barely part of a more general vocabulary. KSW was involved in all kinds of exciting discourse. There were a lot of panel discussions and lectures from visiting people, visiting artists. It was very exciting discursively and creatively. Deciding to teach there was about wanting to be part of that. I was at KSW quite regularly till I left Vancouver, which was 2003. For about ten years I taught there. Once or twice a year, I would have a class that lasted for about eight to twelve weeks. The workshops were a way to meet people. The students weren't strictly poets; it was a real cross-over. Multi or inter-generational and with all different kinds of practices and life experiences, which was very stimulating. There were also no administrative protocols, so you could just sort of invent what teaching was.

R: In 2003, what made you move from Vancouver to France?

L: There are several ways to answer the question. Because obviously, it was a big move. Well, what happened is when I turned 40 which was in 2001, I asked myself, did I want to make any changes in my life?— or what have I neglected? And I realized I had become a monolingual person. When I was young, I had been, loosely speaking, bilingual, from my time in Quebec when I was 17, to the year-and-a-half I had spent in France when I was in my early twenties. But by the time I was forty, I was totally monolingual. It seemed, to me a sad loss, but a loss I could do something about. And at the time, I was making quite good money as a freelancer because I worked at a design magazine in New York: Nest Magazine.

I wrote a horoscope under a pseudonym, and this was at a time when the Canadian dollar was quite low against the American dollar. I was being paid well by a glitzy magazine while leading my then relatively inexpensive Vancouver life, so I actually had money to do things. I could go to Paris for a month, which seems shocking now. Now I could never make a decision like that in my life. But, I decided to get my French back. An old friend, an American friend who had lived in Paris, Stacy Doris, helped me find an apartment to sublet. My editor from Nest set me up with a sweet gig to write about some posh interior decorating when I was there. So I took a fabulous trip to Paris for a month when I was forty-one. That turned into a move a couple years later. It was quite a momentous thing for me. Most of my work in the past five years, I would say, or even longer, has really focused on topics in French literary and cultural tradition. I've increasingly been absorbed by my second home.

R: In 2020, you will be publishing new work, is this work related to your time in Paris?

L: Yes, it will be a novel, my first novel in fact, and it is related to the time I spent in Paris in the early to mid-late eighties when I was a young girl. There is a lot of discussion about 19th-century painting—the painters who Baudelaire wrote about. All those paintings are still there, and so I have a quotidian access to looking at them. I made very good use of that. Most of the research for the book meant merely going to the Louvre or the Orsay, standing in front of paintings and writing.

R: Oh, that must have been horrible.

L: Oh yeah, it was just awful! I hated to mention it, I didn't want to upset you.

laughing

L: So it's set in a different Paris, but it makes use of certain material I have access to in my current life.

R: Is the novel just set in the 19th-century, or is it just creating parallels between a later time and the paintings themselves?

L: Well, it moves between the 1980s and the 1840s and '50s. My youth and Baudelaire's youth. Using these paintings as conduits between the timeframes.

R: I know I sort of asked this, but does your poetry find connections with art, specifically painting?

L: My relationship to art can't be separated from my approach to writing poetry. They are in no way two separate things. I've been a part of these two worlds since I was 28, which is 30 years now. My approaches to writing come out of my research which has been influenced by many media. I've been interested in sound studies—artists such as Pauline Oliveros or John Cage. I've been very influenced by the way many Vancouver artists approach research as a basis for their practices, and that has influenced my poetry since I began to publish in my late 20s and early 30s. Before I became a party to those conversations around what we could call conceptual practice, my idea about poetry was normative and romantic. It had to do with self-expression. And if one's experience is limited, ha, well, poetry also becomes limited. I lacked the access to a critical agency that my later exposure to feminist art practice and feminist theory gave me. So, although I would consider that I have been a feminist since I was a teenager, I didn't have a theoretical purchase on what that might mean in terms of a thinking/making process. My early feminism had more to do with equitable access/opportunities and non-sexist treatment, non-violent treatment of women. But once I became exposed to feminist discourse in the art community, it opened up my critical capacity, which transformed the way I wrote. And writing suddenly became more happy and exciting. Full of new kinds of unimaginable potential.

R: It seems to me that all these connections from the book store to the artist-run centers and KSW really filled your capacity of experiences.

L: Well, that became my experience, that was the life I was living. There was nothing outside that. We partied together; we slept together; we fought together; we lived together. It was a really intense scene. I could honestly say I had no experience at a certain point outside that network. It's been more recently in my life that I have been apart from the kind of intensity that I'm privy to when I return here to Vancouver.

R: More so, now that you are not situated here, do you feel limited or not to these experiences and the communities you have built?

L: Now I primarily live in a tiny village that's isolated. I moved to a rural area because I am freelance and I need to live really cheaply. I couldn't afford to live in Paris. Anyway, I reside in the country, but my income-generating activity is teaching and lecturing in art schools, mostly in masters programs. I travel a lot to work. So my life in Europe is very connected with young artists. It does feel like a kind of continuity with what I experienced here, except I'm not involved much in a literary community; I'm involved in the art community. Although I have had a couple of books come out in French I don't have a profile in the literary world. No one really knows my work or what I do. In art schools I do have a role. So that's become both my income-generating milieu and a real point of simulation. Young artists are very interested in poetry as a possible component of a studio practice. Because of my background in these two fields, I am one of the people who can discuss poetry in the context of contemporary art practice. I can help young artists with their writing or help situate them in some way in a broader field of literature. I would say my time in Vancouver was like a training for what I currently do. Which I wouldn't have anticipated either. And some of the people I got to know here cross over, so local communities become broader, international communities. People move and travel more and more. If you really make yourself available in a curious, committed, and energetic way, people want to continue talking together. You can join into these conversations in other places. So that is how my practice has become international, through networks of friends and collegial discussion.

R: How do forms of poetry emerge in contemporary art?

L: Well, there's a tradition within avant-garde art and poetry that goes back to the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé and his study of the space of the book, the space of language. Many visual artists have been influenced by Mallarmé's poetry and writing. It's a tradition still— artists who work in language and the form of the book. Kathy Slade is part of that tradition. You really can't create work without thinking about language. I think one thing that's happening with younger artists now, which might differentiate them from the earlier Mallarméan tradition, is that they are extremely critical of and upset by the relationship of art practices to neo-liberal markets and capital. Poetry can seem like a zone of practice that is free of such appropriations. Whether or not that's the case is a whole other argument. Young artists want to think of poetry as a utopian zone because it's free. It's given away; it's kind of difficult; it's ugly; it's embarrassing. I think all those things make it an attractive practice for people to move towards. Poetry offers a potential liberty from market pressures and the political structures that determine markets. I have a more jaded view because I am aware of the institutionalization of poetry and the way power actually can and does circulate through academic careers. But at the same time I feel if young people are taking poetry on in a utopian way, it's my role to support them. It is the best-case scenario. Maybe art is the more relevant field for experimental poetry now.

R: Since we are nearly out of time, I guess I only have one more question, and it is a quick one. So, you mentioned early that you wrote the horoscope column for Nest Magazine. What's your sun sign.

L: I'm Cancer right on the cusp, Cancer-Leo cusp. What's yours?

R: Taurus. Just thought for the last question, it would be a fun little thing to ask.

Well, thank you for your time. It was a real pleasure talking with you today.



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Pataphysical Bookstore Names:

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