

Interview with Philosopher Simon Critchley

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Interview

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About the Series

Open Space is an ongoing series of interviews (recorded & written) that will focus on the diversity of space to be uplifting, provocative and focus on interdependence for the benefit of architecture, art and beyond.

Simon Critchley's Biography

Open Space's first guest is, continental philosopher, Simon Critchley. Critchley is the Hans Jonas Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York and a series moderator of "The Stone," a philosophy column in The New York Times, Critchley asks philosophers to weigh in on contemporary issues in art, literature, politics, and popular culture. His most recent books include *Tragedy, the Greeks, and Us* and *The Problem with Levinas*. He has written on topics as diverse as David Bowie, religion, and suicide. Recently, he taught a master class, introducing his philosophy to architecture students at Sci-Arc.

Summary of the Interview

I conducted this interview with, Simon Critchley, at the New School in New York on February 10, 2020. Initially, Critchley reflected on imaginal space, which is so important to architecture. We continue and focus on tragedy, the city and democracy, Judith Butler, Mystical Anarchism, the free spirit, female mystics, utopia, poetry and a provocation by Critchley, he stated, "What if we had a social and political structures based on grief? That would mean we begin from interdependence." His provocation is so relevant given we are faced with Corona Virus around the globe. Recognizing and shifting towards Interdependence is imperative for our future.

February 10, 2020 at The New School in New York.

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It is so great to have the privilege of interviewing Simon Critchley. Thank you so much Simon for coming today to do this interview.

Today I want to talk about imaginal space with you, and various kinds of space. One space in particular, I wanted to address with you is the imaginal space because I think it is important to artist and architects and well everyone. And also think it is deeply under threat and harder to experience and necessary for humanity.

The fact that you teach and recently said you want to, "save souls" "disaffected weirdoes", in an interview at Sci-Arc. I felt is important because of your impact on young minds and the specifics of your perspective in possibility offering people solace in life now. You've helped me understand philosophy in a deeper way so I can appreciate and engage with it more. Particularly when you described philosophy as communication with one with one's own soul.

Imagination

KC Sartre said in his book, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* discussed what the imagination showed about the nature of human consciousness. What does the imagination or the imaginal mean to you?

SC Different things. I suppose the first thing that comes to mind is the distinction in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* between imagination and fancy. Imagination and fancy this is a kind of classical distinction you find all over literature in the last couple of hundred years. In particular, the word fancy would be the same root as fantasy in the sense of making things up. So there is fantasy as making things up which someone like Coleridge thinks is inferior to imagination properly conceived. Imagination is the imagination, it's a conjuring. Some conjuring of things an attempt to shift the aspect under which we see things but it has to be rooted in a reality. So that imagination. This is a formulation you get in Wallace Stevens' poetry but it is kind of fairly common. Is that imagination without a foothold in reality becomes fancy. It just becomes making things up. So that whatever imagination is it needs to come out of, have a foothold in and have a reference back to reality. Is the first thing I'd say.

So imagination isn't just anything.

It isn't just making up stories or something like that. It has to be rooted in something. And that is the first thing I think of imagination as being rooted in reality and then it becomes a question of, I guess for me, thinking about imagination in relationship to world. And how

world appears to us. I think or at least a dominant view I've been influenced by is that, everything that is, **all the things in the world are not person independent. There are all related to us.** They are not things in themselves. They are not metaphysical entities or physical entities in their raw material character. They are things which show up in so far as they are things for us. And therefore they are dependent on the operation of the imagination which Kant called the transcendental imagination. Which is the idea that a really real world is something that we only get to organize through our activity. The activity of the subject in Kant. And so that faculty is the faculty of the transcendental imagination. On one level the imagination is the core of everything that is.

The second level the primary imagination. The secondary imagination would be what an artist's makes or a poet makes. There can be a poem which gives us a sense of how we are in the world and how that relationship to the world can be described, deepened, elevated, shifted in a poem or work of art. Going back to the distinction with fancy that secondary imagination can't just be something we make up. It has to be linked to something that is felt in a shared way and is real in a common way. So imagination for me is that. Maybe it's the core of everything that we are, what makes a world show up to a self, is a kind of primary imagination and the secondary imagination is the way that gets presented in art works. And that way that gets presented can't be arbitrary or fantasy like. It has to be the work of imagination both pushing back against reality but also having a referent in reality. That'd be a first set of things.

The City and Soul are Mirrors, Tragedy and Imagination

KC Let's jump to Tragedy and the imagination. In your book, *Tragedy, The Greeks, and Us*. You wrote, "The city and soul are mirrors for each other." Based on Plato's intended analogy of the psychic and political. Can you elaborate on that?

SC Plato's view on that. Plato kind of invents philosophy ways of finessing that claim but he did kind of invent philosophy (laughs) and he invented in *The Republic* the idea of what a just city be. A just city would be one where the structure of the soul, which is tripartite for Plato its based on appetite, desire, based on spirit, spiritedness and reason that tripartite structure of the soul is mirrored in the tripartite structure in the city. And Plato imagines three orders of people in the city. It is that analogy which he kicks things off with is at the center of *The Republic*. I think that leads to a kind of appalling, authoritarian nightmare in Plato. Plato is. These are extraordinary literary or fictional devices, *The Platonic Dialogues*. I am fascinated by them.

I detest the figure of Socrates and what he represents and what he is against. He is against these characters called the Sophists who are selling knowledge and there is a lot more to be said about the sophists. What he is really against are the theatre people. The tragedians notably. He wants them out of the just city. So what I am trying to do in the *Tragedy* book is to defend tragedy against philosophy and try and show how philosophy emerges in this war with theatre. I want to defend tragedy.

The strangest thing about tragedy is it an art form that appears in the 6c. BC lets say but takes shape in early 5th century BC along side another invention which is called democracy. So these two things tragedy and democracy kind of also mirror each other. 1:05:10 And I try and tell that story with the book. And philosophy is opposed to tragedy. And it is also

opposed to democracy. It doesn't like that. You are hard pressed to find a philosopher who supports democracy until John Dewey about a century ago. For me tragedy is about the experience of moral ambiguity, conflict and so is democracy.

Judith Butler & Tragic Thinking

KC Also from the book, *Tragedy*. When you ask, "What if we took seriously the form of thinking we find in tragedy and the experience of partial agency, limited autonomy, deep traumatic affect, agonistic conflict, gender confusion, political complexity and moral ambiguity that it presents. How might we change the way we think? And the way we think about thinking?" What would that look like? Could the imagination live in that space freely?

SC Yeah I think to go back to Judith Butler. I think that Judith Butler is doing tragic thinking precisely. Each of those terms could be used to describe operations in her thought. To understand that you have to understand what we are pushing against. There is a great passage in the first book of Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, is called, *The Prejudices of Philosophers*.

The Prejudices of Philosophers.

The real prejudices of the philosophers of Nietzsche is diagnosing, and Nietzsche is at his brilliant best when he is tearing something to pieces. His negative capacities are wonderful. His own views on things I've got different views about. He says that the philosophical prejudice is with the use of Reason we can look through at the world and identify what is the case. Identify the nature of substance, being. The mind can discriminate that which is understood. Whether it is nature of God or whatever it might be and on the basis of that ontological prejudice that *reason* can give us access to Being. You can then derive a certain moral set of imperatives.

The main prejudice of the philosopher is that the philosopher alone can peer through the veil of appearance into the structure of reality. And then come back with certain moral pronouncements to give to the poor, unwashed stupid masses that are waiting for their wisdom. And I think that is a catastrophic error that thinking is much more like what I was describing in that passage. So in tragedy it's not clear what the nature of things is. It's kind of skeptical about the nature of things.

We see families often back projected into an area of myth, which itself is important. The stories that we're telling the stories that the Greeks told themselves were stories of the deep past, Bronze age, the Trojan war, back, back, back in the day. Those stories they are myths were often rooted in family structure, in kinship structure and how families are defined. How families tear each other apart. How conflicts arise. **So tragedy in many ways is a family drama. But that family drama is also the structure of political power.**

What you find in a lot of the plays - the most obvious examples is, *Oedipus the King*. Oedipus has a weird family history to say the least but he's the king he is the tyrant. And so it is that mirroring between family structure and political structure that is being played out in tragedy. In a way that implies us. We are drawn in by that. **To go back to Judith (Butler)says in, "In the Force of Non-Violence", we're given over we're always given over. So what it means to be human for whatever reason is to be given over somewhere. We find ourselves**

kind of in the midst of stuff that we didn't really choose. Our family structure, our culture, our language or languages or whatever it might be.

We find ourselves in the midst and with these kinds of Titans of the psyche, father, mother, siblings and we are shaped by them and we struggle for a whole lifetime to kind of understand that, challenge it through it off. In a way its never free of ambivalence. Its never free of hostility. But its also full of love and affection. Two things at once and I find that richness. You've got an existential density of human life for me is much more powerfully displayed in theatre in tragedy than it is in philosophy. That's one of the reasons I like it so much.

Mystical Anarchism

KC After listening to Mystical Anarchism

SC Yes that was strange how that turned up.

KC So is that not recent because the date on it

SC No

KC ok the date on it is 2020.

I thought that might be kind of the answer. Or some way forward because I thought this is so relevant. I was so touched by that.

SC It does feel relevant. But it is actually quite old.

KC I thought it was really relevant in terms of #metoo and on many levels.

SC Yes.

KC In your defense of Mystical Anarchism, you said that we can "recover the garden of Eden – recover paradise, in paradise there will be no private property. And the mystical anarchism heresy is the idea that we can recover a state of primary perfection and edemic communist state and that move beyond the limitations of the needing the RC Pope of a king to do so." This is a beautiful idea. The Garden of Eden it is an imaginal space so many say they believe it yet it is hard find. **This would seem to liberate people. How could people allow themselves to take this on to be liberated?**

SC Well good question. I mean. How would I answer that? The idea of Mystical Anarchism I take from this historian called Norman Cohen. Norman Cohen he taught at The University of Sussex and the most famous book he wrote is called the pursuit of *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. *The Pursuit of the Millennium* and I read that with huge interest years ago and Cohen identifies a recurring heresy, a recurring temptation historically which is that we can not recover the Garden of Eden but we can - we can live together.

We can live together in our freedom of the spirit. Cohen sees that as a very dangerous thing. He thinks this is a delusion which is behind all sorts of forms of political and moral purity. He's writing in the late 50s and the book is then reissued after the 60s and he is very suspicious and hats going on in the student movements in the 1960s and movements of political and sexual liberation.

So he thinks that the recovery of the Garden of Eden is a very dangerous and beautiful project. I see it more as a recurrent temptation which I try to follow in this line of thought. I'm not defending it I am describing it. I'm describing its features. I'm very attracted to it. So I had in the early 2000s a much more practical realistic analysis of ethics and politics which ended up in a defense of what I called for a period of time neo-anarchism. And at that time I was much more closely linked to radical groups, activist groups, particularly in New York in the first years I was here. I think I can defend that anarchist's proclivity in political thought. But the *Mystical Anarchism* was, well how could you defend this? This is really wild. So let's describe this and see where that goes. So it was a kind of thought experiment on my part to try to lay this out. **The idea of a sinless union with others is powerful.**

It's been functional or operative in all sorts of revolutionary situations. Most notably the English revolution or the Civil War as its called when groups like the Levelers and Diggers were making arguments for autonomy. The Diggers wanted to get rid of property relations and they did this by going off to field outside of London, digging up the ground and growing their own vegetables until Cromwell the new model army slaughtered them (laughs). One of the mottos they had when *Adam delved and Eve span who was then a gentleman? So when Adam delved Adam was digging and Eve was weaving (laughing) gendered division of labor there.*

Who was actually in control? So this idea that there is an equality in paradise is very suggestive on the one hand. On the other hand, one of the things I did last summer is re-read Milton's *Paradise Lost* for the I don't know how many time I love that poem so much. **We left paradise and wandered East of Eden wandered down melancholy way into into the world and paradise remains a memory. But it is a place right? It is southern Iraq, which is kind of ironic. It is in the area which was invaded in the first Gulf war. The probable location of the Garden of Eden.** Anyway I find it fascinating, compelling, I am drawn to certain ideas of utopia you know I am drawn to that without being fully committal. And that played out in different ways over the years.

KC If you broke down anarchism, to me, it is alluding to the fact if we were all high enough spiritually or if enough people were evolved enough as human beings, you wouldn't need government, you wouldn't need churches, you wouldn't need police, you wouldn't need any of that. You wouldn't need to own property because people would just coexist and work it out.

SC That is the classical anarchist position. Yeah.

KC Do you think that could ever happen?

SC Well it has happened. But for brief periods it's usually been crushed by whoever is in power. So anarchism is on one level a beautiful dream. You begin from the idea that human beings are not sinful and corrupt selfish and hostile. But human beings are actually decent and well disposed and can get along. And the corruption and hostility and selfishness kicks in once government, police, state and capital begin to do their work.

No I choose to believe that I don't think it is an argument that can be resolved by argument. I choose to believe that human beings are fundamentally decent. That is my faith as it were. I think it is a faith because there is lots of evidence to the contrary. It is much easier to believe human beings are wicked and life is nasty brutish and short as Hobbes said. And

therefore we need the state and the police and the military to protect human beings from themselves that's the standard view.

I am very attracted to that classical version of anarchism. You can point to examples going back to antiquity but certainly English revolution, different experiments with forms of low level communal living without the state structure without the police. Anthropologists like David Graeber have done work on societies like Madagascar where there never was really a properly organized state for long periods of time.

When we think about maybe forms of tribal society which have functioned in that way. I mean there are all sorts of ways of criticizing or qualifying that but its happened. Its usually not happened for long because someone else is going to come along and crush it. A good example is the Spanish Civil War what was happening in Barcelona between 36-38 was a commune experiment. Fantastic experiment and it survived for a couple of years and eventually they the forces of Franco forces of reaction had bigger guns and sticks and they took control. Most people were either expelled or killed. And that's often the way anarchists' experiments die. So does that mean anarchism is wrong? No. It means its often short lived. Still worthy.

Another side of my thinking which is maybe a more practical side of my thinking is a kind of political realism which I've always been attracted to. Forgetting the anarchism and all that for a second. If you're actually interested in politics, then that means your got to think and act in a certain way. A concrete way. So for example I was in the Labor Party for about 12 years and was active in a low level crappy way in the labor Party in Corchester. But I was in the party and I was really engaged. I did what I could.

The imperative at that point or the issue at the point was how is the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher to be removed from power. This was after the Falklands War, resurgence of nationalism, a kind of on the one hand a nostalgia for family values on the way things had been, on the other hand a kind of rampant what we now call neo-liberalism economically. And ordinary people will suffer the consequences of that as they always do. But Thatcher was popular.

So how do you, how could Thatcher be defeated? The only vehicle was the Labour Party. Therefore, the Labour Party had to be turned into a party that could win an election. And that meant a whole series of pragmatic decisions that were taken over for a quite long period of time. A real struggle a real fight in the Labour Party and some people would say that the socialist traditions of the Labor Party were betrayed, which indeed they were. Eventually the Labour Party won. And it won big with Tony Blair in 97. Something I've never been able to quite understand. I am pleased I was really happy when labor won. It was like my team won.

On the other hand, at what cost. The point of the story if you are actually interested in politics. To which most people who say there are interested in politics are not. Then it does mean forging alliances, forming common fronts with groups which are really at odds and defined by contradiction. **And the political skill maybe even political genius, is defined by the ability to put something together in a contradictory and ambivalent field.** In a way that is going to win an election if you happen to be in a parliamentary democracy. And that's what would have to happen in the United States if Donald Trump was to be defeated. I wonder whether that might happen or not. I don't know. But it means the left has to actually

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engage in politics which is what people actually think and feel, living where they are and how take that and shape that into a potent political force. Dirty hands all the way.

Social Media

The other extreme of Mystical Anarchism I am actually very interested in. Always have been very interested in is the actual the practical business of politics. We are in a pickle. **Facebook is fucking the world. Social media is fucking the world. Everything has become divided and polarized. These are clichés** obviously. All opposition, everything is being inflamed and torn apart. And this is a way of maintaining power maintaining an order for the state.

SC Politics is a blood sport. Its always been about for me the key concept in politics is hegemony. Gramsci's idea of hegemony which is often misunderstood. hegemony and power. Hegemony is the way in which you articulate together diverse elements form different groups into a common front. Its never going to last forever but for a certain period of time it can be an effective unified front. What Gramsci called a historical block. That's what you want. So diversity is no opposition to that. It's a precondition for that. I think its always about diversity.

SC Funny the idea of Muchishona Zuboff's work on **Surveillance Capital** is kind of apropos that **what's happened in the last twenty years is an extraordinary kind of new colonialism** where what's been colonized is human experience. And we've gone along with that we are. Yeah you said we didn't realize what was happening. Our experience has been sold and then sold back to us in the form of advertising. Where do things go after that? I mean colonizing like the Americas is one long bloody history there's that.

Its like that process but with human experience. What we actually think and feel in our most intimate intimate forums that really is alarming. I don't know short of retreat, withdrawing, switching off, disconnecting. I mean there is regulation. The European Union is regulating big Data but there is no interest here because who is in power and how they got in power. So in the United States I am not terrible interested and in China you've got a twisting of this in a form of surveillance state capitalism or communism.

KC they are even more extreme with facial recognition

SC yeah that is really taking shape. At that point I am not quite throwing my hands up in the air. I try and read about these things and learn more. I have no particular pronouncements to make. If the p r disasters didn't really effect Facebook bottom line, which it hasn't Facebook is doing just fine. Then people are hypocrites we say we don't want this but we are still on there updating things and checking things, spying on people looking up old partners. The use of social media in this kind of sad masochistic way is really alarming. Comparison. We use social media to make ourselves feel bad. We kind of like feeling bad because we can't live up to that image of perfection we are meant to project on profiles short of switching off and running away, which is an option. I don't know what I am going to do. We will find out as Fred Larkin would say would have said. Anyway.

KC You also mention in this same talk that conservatism is deeply pessimistic. I think of Georges Bataille and how he thought we lived in terms of the economy, in scarcity and fear rather than abundance. Which is not dissimilar to what you are talking about and Deleuze and Guattari brought this up –refuting original sin. You are born operating at a loss. In terms

of the extreme right wing, I can't say leaders because I don't think they are leading us to tackle the most challenging issues in life now, like climate change in Australia with the devastating fires and certainly in the United States and throughout the world. **Do you think as stated in your talk with Judith Butler in the talk on her book, The Force of Non-Violence thinking or acting on the notion of "grievability" is a way forward?**

SC Yes I think it is a start. *Grievability* as I understand it. I mean Judith's (Butler) argument here is singular which is that the politics of equality she is defending is the equality of *grievability* is that every life is should be *grievable*. We live in conditions where that *grievability* is not permitted. Certain lives are mourned and certain lives are not. The lives of certain people are mourned and marked and other people get shot at funerals. Whatever it might be.

It would be a start that mourning and grief are so important. So incredibly important. But important in the sense that **mourning is something that opens the subject up it opens us up with vulnerable, porous, dependent, broken and if we started out with political thinking from mourning rather than our political thinking that we are individuals that can make choices.** I think that would be a start. If you begin from *grievability* you begin from an idea of interdependency. Whereas the liberal the lower L individualist societies we live in are based upon the basic atom the basic building block is the individual and their freedom. And that becomes more complicated in relationship to grief.

So I think mourning would be. I think an example Judith gives way back a text of hers what's it called in not Infinite Mourning it was in Precarious Life it was after 9-11. After 9-11 I think 10 days after 9-11 George W Bush said the period of mourning has to come to an end and now we got to go back and shop and were going to kick some ass in Afghanistan. He didn't quite put it like that its kind of what happened. So this was very sad 9-11. **We mourn for a bit then we go back to work. Go back to normal. What if that wasn't the case?**

What if we had political and social structures that were based on grief as the basic fact as to what it means to be human? That would be really interesting. That would mean we begin from interdependency. And the human self is essentially undone and open and porous rather than this closed heroic carapace of a self that makes choices. That would be something.

KC I'd like to see that.

Utopia

KC You mentioned The Shakers as a beautiful example of radical communism and utopianism so relevant to mystical anarchism. They made such beautiful furniture and yet are dying out because of being celibate. Are there any examples of what a utopian community would be like today now?

SC Not like the Shakers. I mean the circle that has to be squared were great. Ann Lee founded the Shakers she forms herself into the female compliment of God. There's Christ and there is Ann Lee. A man and a woman and they're equal. So the Shakers believe in gender equality. Their communities were egalitarian communities with both men and women which is often difficult. So places where we have those egalitarian communities are

often separately sexed. Monasteries, convents but what do you do with human desire, human sexual desire?

Well for the Shakers chastity is the answer so these are communities of gender equality which are chaste and the problem with chastity you then have to keep recruiting people. You are not going to reproduce. This is where the Mormons win and the Shakers lose. And so the Shakers died out because they could reproduce. I find the idea of chastity really interesting. And historically which is important and really important historically. One that we find odd.

Why would anyone be chaste? They must be weird in some way. But there is this real issue that human desire is a bundle of pretty nasty contradictions. The virtue of Christianity was that it recognized that and had to work with that and abstain from the sexual act through chastity. You so maybe a return to chastity that would be great population management. That would be my answer to the climate crisis – stop reproducing. I don't know. But I do worry about people endlessly reproducing themselves. They have a right to do that. Peter Singer raised that question.

KC You have a son. (laughing)

SC I have a son. And I'm dictating it. (laughing) Yeah so for the Shakers the utopian was tied to chastity and that led to them dying out.

KC It seems somehow that works sometimes and in the Roman Catholic church it goes horribly wrong. Maybe it is how people view sexuality. In Eastern cultures it is generally just your vitality so when you go for more traditional Chinese medicine they ask you certain question and you are given certain treatments so that you have your sexual drive and libido. Its seen as health and if you are not feeling that desire you don't feel that vitality you are kind of missing out on the vitality of life but I think in western medicine its more like well you will just take these drug so you can do these things. Its not a holistic approach.

SC Yeah well like the three great monotheisms of the west a billion or so people such as Moslems and Christianity or Judaism are all based upon sexual desires are very dangerous and need to be constrained and prohibited. Yeah its part of vitality that we really one we have to worry about. Quite em down. Yeah so. That's messed up. (laughing)

KC Laughing.

Free Spirits, Situationist, University

KC This was my favorite part about the free spirit.

When you discussed in mystical anarchism, how threatening the free spirit is because the lords spirit is within - in this sense a person becomes God. The pervasive notion of original sin would have us believe the spirit is outside oneself. I grew up with Irish Roman Catholic and I found it so hard to free myself of that. Maybe I am still freeing myself of that. I also think anyone or especially artists, architects and creative people would find your concepts about the free spirit liberating. Do you think minds are shifting towards the free spirit?

SC No. No way not at all. A very legislated spirit, I think the free spirit is in very short supply. And shorter and shorter all the time. The opposite. There is a book by Raoul Vaneigem, called *The Movement of the Free Spirit*. He was Situationist number two to Guy Debord and

he writes a book called *The Movement to the Free Spirit* one of his later books and clearly there is an echo or an analogy of the liberation movements of the 60s and the movement of the Free Spirit

There was something of that and that was good. It was uncomplicated. It wasn't always great for women. It was great for women some of the time. But I think that whole space of experiences is being closed down. And you see a microcosm of that in higher education. **Rather than a freedom of the spirit in the classroom in the university we have a disciplinary regime of law which frightening and constraining and it is not what students want actually. Maybe that will change but at the moment it is a kind of slightly oppressive structure. A weird way in which university structures have this disciplinary framework there is often good reasons for that because bad things have sometimes happened that is for sure.**

But its led to the idea of universities as really really free exploratory places is in shorter and shorter supply I think. My feelings is that students want something of that and their tired of being told what to think. To criticize the New School which is eminently criticizable I find the way in which the university in so far as it is a university is clothed itself in this jargon of social justice and that's become a kind of official ideology of the institution in both hypocritical in a sense since it is not true and it is also pernicious it doesn't allow for freedom of thought in terms of diversity of opinion.

KC Someone sent an emails that said to decolonize your syllabus it was a dean or something. I thought well why don't you decolonize the work force?

SC Yeah right.

KC Why don't you decolonize this hierarchy and pay scale with adjunct professors but if you voice that concern you will be sanctioned.

SC And the administrators because they are making the big bucks.

Female Mystics, Feminism, Ann Carson's Poetry

KC You refer to Marguerite Porete's book, *The Mirror of Simple*

And Annihilated Souls and Those Who Only Remain in Will and Desire of Love

SC Those Who Only Remain in Will and Desire of Love

KC You repeated in the interview and I felt as many as possible should hear this title. And you also discussed it in Ann Carson's poems. Why did you find it important to discuss these two women as it relates to *Mystical Anarchism* and the *free spirit*? I think it is great that you did.

SC Yeah I've always wanted tot be. Oh gosh this is far to confessional. I co-wrote a book with Jamieson Webster, *The Hamlet Doctrine of Stay: Illusion!* As it was called here. And part of what that was about was to try and write with another voice. I don' believe in fixed gender differences and all that stuff but I do think there are different voices and different modalities of voice which are distributed along lines of gender as someone who's a man been trained to do philosophy a certain way. **I find it liberating to read say the works of medieval female mystical writers. Fascinating and its something I wouldn't say. I wouldn't to be able to put**

it that way. That linking of intellectual vigor with a sense of spiritual revelation combined with a personal dimension of experience it something which I find incredibly suggestive

One way I'd put it in a provocative way would be, I've been trying to kind of hysteratize myself over the years. The problem with people like me is the tendency towards obsessionality. Towards rational control or an argumentative control or a control of writing. Whatever it might be which leads to an internal deadness. So I am always looking for something that is alive. I find that in people like Marguerite Porete and also people like Ann Carson or indeed people like Judith Butler. I find a different of what's possible as a voice. I am not going to imitate that or occupy that but I can try and learn something from that and try and find a similar inflection for what I am trying to do.

So my suspicion about philosophy boil down to Philosophy disguises its gender privilege which is male under the guise of a certain neutrality, neutrality of reason, clarity, rigor. I've never bought that. A first step is recognizing that there is a whole range of different voices and you can learn from them and try and write in a slightly different way. One of the things is that I am going to try and write next in the next couple of years will be on Ann Carson using some poems by Ann Carson and some text and try and engage in a reading by Julien of Norwich and Julian of Norwich is my favorite medieval mystic. I want to try something on her mystical vision.

KC Why is she your favorite?

SC Because she is the most sober in a way. The best theologian. The problem with some of the mystics is that they're kind of attention seekers. Noisy attention seekers like Marguerite Kemp or Angela Foligno they're constantly erupting in physical symptoms or throwing themselves they're destroying themselves. Its very attractive.

Julien is an anchoress she withdrew from the world before that she had this experience where she was dying. Actually, she was being given last rites. She began to have a series of revelations in relationship to a crucifix and it lasted for 20 hours. Then she spent years of her lifetime trying to figure that out in a very honest and a humble way. She is a voice which is often not adequately heard. So I want to try to write something on her. Which might or might not be called the Abdication of Ecstasy. I just like that title.

KC It is a nice title. I like it.

SC Sounds like an album doesn't it?

KC It does.

SC *Abdication of Ecstasy* (laughing)

KC One final question, Is poetry really important to you?

SC Ok. Yeah. Pop music was the way things first opened up. I kind of refined that through poetry. I used to go to any number of libraries and back then there were LPs of recorded poetry and I'd record them on cassette. And then I put them on my early version of a Sony Walkman and I'd walk around listening to them and memorize them and this became a way of possessing language for me. Still is. I find it beautiful. I find it a comfort. I find it solace. I find it funny as well but there is something about the voice of poetry.

For me its kind of is secular scripture. It's poetry of the largely of the English language over the last 100 years is kind of where all of our deep spiritual stuff has gone. And very often there is a kind of numb dogmatic character to poetry. In a sense in which I admire the formal brilliance of great poets the ability they have to master form meter rhyme or non rhyme or whatever. I find that fascinating there is something about the economy of language the attention to language in poetry which grips me and also the fact that poetry is **always the stuff that gets me is framed by a question mark about the ultimate nature of things. Poetry is what we have in the absence of religion for me. Poetry is about as close we get.** It doesn't give us answers. It indicates a route that could be followed. But mostly an attention to language.

And languages capacity to observe the world that gets me. How about that?

KC That's great thank you so much Simon I really appreciate it. It has been wonderful