

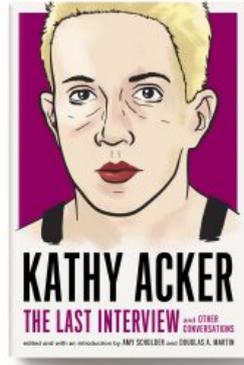
March 10, 2019

Deleted material from Kathy Acker: The Last Interview

by Melville House

At long last, *Kathy Acker: The Last Interview*, is about to publish (this Tuesday, 3/12).

At more than 200 pages, this addition to the series was growing rather long and we had to cut the conversation below between Acker and Rosie X of Geekgirl, written in 1995 while Acker was working on *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, and just beginning to explore the internet. Enjoy!



Pussy and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (or How to Be a Pirate Online and Channel Your Energies so as to Remember Your Dreams...)

Interview with Rosie X for Geekgirl, 1995

I didn't know what to expect of Kathy Acker, maybe I was a little surprised she was so damn pleasant and straightforward on the phone. Maybe I expected more of the wicked performer or a semblance of her famous cut-and-paste writing technique. Then again it was 2:00 a.m. her time, she was in the bath, and she had just come home after a near harrowing disaster on her much beloved big bike. Anyway, the bath seemed a perfect setting for a busy overworked pirate. Her new book *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, an apt title for an adventurous dreamer.

ACKER: Have you ever had anything as big as an 1100 between your legs, Rosie?!

X: Hmmm, can't say I have, not lately, no Kathy ...

ACKER: Well the damn thing's brakes seized up on me—shit, I nearly lost it. I love that bike... I'm a little wiped out but go ahead, I have to be up real early to go to New York in the morning.

X: Why are you heading off to New York so early?

ACKER: I have to do a speech at a college in New York, a speech and a read, they are flying me in for the day, so it's one of those things.

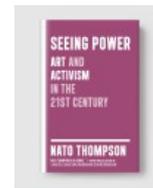
X: You've been so busy lately ... doing a lot of readings and more recently a panel in San Francisco, where you live.

ACKER: Yeah, I just did this great panel with the Krovers. Arthur Kroker is a theorist in the field of virtual reality.

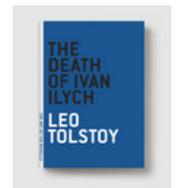
X: So I heard you got kicked off America Online, what did you do?

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ACKER: I was online with a friend of mine, we were a little drunk, and I can't remember what the hell we did. My memory is that Jenny had never been online before, so I remember saying, "Oh, okay, I'll show you what it's like to be online, although AOL is so boring. Of course most of the chat rooms were filled, and I said, "Oh, our next-best bet is the MTV chat room, not many people go there." So we went there, and I don't think we did anything wrong, I don't know... I think we asked if there were any dykes in the room, that's my only memory, and there was some guy who started pestering us, and Jenny recalls asking if we could suck someone's prick ... but I don't recall that.

X: Sounds like normal, drunk online chat, to me.

ACKER: Exactly, hardly anything out of the normal.

X: It's hard to understand the American need for control, when the impression we get over here is that the right to free speech is constitutionally protected.

ACKER: [laughs] Are you asking why Americans are so moralistic? I dunno, you guys must have got some good ones and we were left with the bad ones ... Americans have always been like that, nothing changes.

X: I had heard a rumor that you were kicked off-line for endless rants about masturbation.

ACKER: I dunno, what the hell, I doubt it was that improper. AOL had this attitude about me ... that "You have been a bad girl, and you are a bad girl, and we got this permanent mark against you" and they treated me in this way, which got me really angry. So I wrote to them stating they were a totalitarian state, and I told 'em I ain't paying for no totalitarian state.

X: Did they simply delete your account without informing you of what was going on?

ACKER: No, what they did is they deleted software and didn't delete my account. So when I tried to figure out what was going on, and why I was still being billed for an account I wasn't using, and they kept me on the phone for hours talking "techie talk" with no results, and working fourteen-hour days doing all this stuff, I finally said, "Ahhh go to hell all of you, just take me off the damn service."

X: Doesn't sound like a positive introduction to the Net, not your experiences with AOL anyway...

ACKER: Yeah, well, AOL. [hmpf] I wanna get on the Net directly—friends like R. U. Sirius and Jude Milhon (St. Jude) have been telling me how. I'm not that technical you know. AOL was the first service I ever used, so for someone like me it's gonna take a few hours of maneuvering to go direct.

X: It's the way to go!

ACKER: Sure, otherwise you are just being policed by these creeps.

X: Ahh, the "thought police" on the Net.

ACKER: Well, they are everywhere, not just on the Net—it gets me really angry. I am still very angry at AOL. They invaded my house as far as I am concerned; they went into my home/computer and took the damn software off, it was like being raped or something.

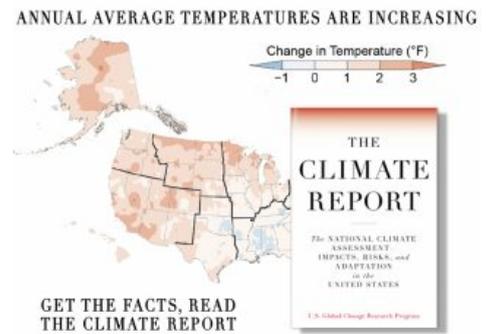
X: Not that bad...

ACKER: [silence]

X: The Net is far from utopian.

ACKER: At the moment it sure is.

X: Do you think you will create spaces for yourself on the Net, where you feel comfortable? Maybe you'd like hanging out in women-only spaces for example...



ACKER: I've always done my own thing haven't I? I'm no separatist, I guess I hang with freaks...

X: A lot of people suggest this form of technology is inherently democratic.

ACKER: Bhwaaaa! Oh come on, the world we live in! A lot of people here are talking how much they can police the Net. In comparison to that future, I guess it's relative. I don't think that's utopia, but it's better than potential censorship and policing of the Net.

X: Do you think about strategies when you're online? Your friend St. Jude likes to fight with words.

ACKER: I just do my books. I do what I do. I don't think about strategies. If a service like AOL kicks me off, I just think fuck 'em. You know... If we are talking about strategies and I haven't even thought of Net strategies yet, I think it's best to be as open as possible and just do what you do and let people make of it what they want.

X: Ahhh, books... What's the new one you are working on?

ACKER: *Pussy, King of the Pirates*.

X: [laughs]

ACKER: [laughs]

X: Cool title ... I like pirates.

ACKER: Me too.

X: You're such a prolific writer, how many books is it now?

ACKER: About nine.

X: The titles include...

ACKER: All of them!! ... hmm, let me see: there was the trilogies, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*; *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac: Imagining*; and *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec by Toulouse Lautrec*—that was the trilogy. Then there was *Kathy Goes to Haiti*. Then, *Blood and Guts in High School*, then *Great Expectations*. Then *My Death My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini*, then there was *Empire of the Senseless*, then *In Memoriam to Identity* and *My Mother: Demonology*, then *Hannibal Lecter*, *My Father* ... but something's been forgotten there. Heh, I feel like I am taking some kind of test!

X: Well, I have to make sure you are the real Kathy Acker. The first introduction I had to you was *Blood and Guts in High School*, and I wasn't so aware of it then but I am now, or I am convinced of it now... that your style is very hypertext. The way subjects, images, imaginings are linked, or should I say "hyperlinked"?

ACKER: Most people know of me 'cause of *Blood and Guts*. I agree with you about my work being like hypertext, it's extremely hypertext'd. I know a lot of the people designing websites, and some hypertext authors are making room for me on the WWW 'cause they know how well my work would fit into that environment.

X: Do you consider or do you refer to yourself/work as hypertext, now that there's a name for it?

ACKER: I do and I don't. You know in a way I write like that, I take stuff and I put it here and there, I write the way WWW people do, but I use notebooks; I still and have always used cut-and-paste, but I think my stuff is a little funkier than a lot of hypertext available material at the moment on the Web. I am not sure about that, but I will know for sure when I go direct!

X: Does the Net offer further expansion for your work?

ACKER: Sure! I have been talking with friends, and it would work real well with this little book I have based on the new novel. What we have done is taken a chapter and used some graphics/pictures... everything, and I'd really like to see it on the Net—eventually you can do real-time visuals and music

on the Net that I couldn't do alone outside the Net by myself. I think you can go way farther mixing media, it's perfect for the sort of stuff I do. The hypertext stuff I have seen doesn't mix sound and graphics, I am sure there are sites that do, but I haven't had an opportunity to see them yet.

X: What websites have you been visiting?

ACKER: I can't get on directly, which is a pain. I mean AOL was so boring I didn't really find anything that turned me on ... Friends show me the Web, and it's kind of a priority for me at the moment to investigate more of this stuff.

X: Generally, websites are collective ventures unless one person has a lot of time to devote to the site, you know authoring, maintenance, renewal. Do you like working in a collective situation?

ACKER: I don't like working with other writers much, it's kind of my own private little space, but I like working with other kinds of artists a great deal.

X: You haven't experienced a lot of the Net yet, have you?

ACKER: I am a complete virgin when it comes to this stuff, I admit it. St. Jude took me out shopping one day and said, "Kathy, what you need is a modem, grrrr!"

X: Jude is a techno-junkie.

ACKER: You're not kidding, but then I have been addicted to the damn thing since I got on too. For about a month now, that's all I have done... is been stuck in front of this machine. I'm obsessed. I work on my books, I do my readings, I go for bike rides—but the minute I am back inside that door, what do I do but turn on that fucking computer. I'm starting to dream about this stuff.

X: Do you like technology?

ACKER: I never thought about it before ... The only thing I think which counts as technology before this is my motorcycle.

X: In your writing, you have played around with role switching...

ACKER: Twitching?

X: Switching.

ACKER: Twitching? I like twitching better...

X: Okay then, in your writing you've played around with role "twitching." Have you used the Net to experiment with twitching gender roles and personality—have you had much response from others online (as far as you know they may well be doing the same thing)?

ACKER: I'm real curious about sex on the Net, 'cause I don't get that yet. I always think of role playing as being something you're not. I don't role play like that probably 'cause I don't have a strong sense of who I am—I basically have no sense of who I am, so I don't role play; I'm just plain ol' schizophrenic me or something. It's not like my online or real-life personality comes out from a centered identity.

X: Sure, but I wouldn't think you'd adopt another identity or persona or enjoy playing the pseudonym game online, why would you wanna be someone else?

ACKER: It made me feel really uncomfortable. AOL said, "What other names are you going to use online?" and I said, "Huh, what do you want, my stuffed animals' names?" so I chose some of them, and they seemed happy (not that I saw much point in it). With my new account of Eworld I am just "Acker," so I guess if people wanted to find me they could, it doesn't bother me. People have bugged me in real life, but it's not a problem online—not yet anyway.

X: What are the possibilities for anarchy and radicalism on the Net.

ACKER: Man, there are amazing things that are going to happen ... I can't tell you some of them. I don't know much about Australia, but in the U.S. we

have this huge overall monolithic government, and the one way we get away with being free and try as best to avoid the McDonald's culture, is that anarchists go unnoticed. It's the only freedom that's here. There's no freedom among the liberals or the conservatives, and I am sure the parallel exists on the Net in the same way as in real life. A huge organization like AOL, with 200,000 members, simply cannot be controlled, even if they do throw a few people off.

X: What will anarchy on the Net be like, will you transpose a lot of past radical ideas and tactics?

ACKER: I am sure that both old and new ways will be effective. Once you use a new medium, you do it different ways—in fact every time I write a book I do it a different way. I am learning a lot about doing things differently. This great woman, Freddie Bear, designed this little book that's coming out, and she'd like to design a website which is touch-sensitive, silkscreens which you can touch and they will lead to new words and links.

X: A lot of your work is thought of in terms of being a lot of different things: theater, dance, opera. Can you incorporate all these different styles into or onto the Net?

ACKER: I don't think we know what the possibilities of the Net are yet. I think what's happening is that we really should start concentrating on developing a new language for this thing. It's most peculiar—it's a big living mind.

X: A meme!

ACKER: Yeah it is, no one has even started to explore all the psychic stuff that goes around it. It works a lot with dreams now, and when I started to spend all my spare time with the computer, my dreams stopped and I thought, Hmm, what's the connection with that and having this living mind in my house... very weird.

X: Well, I think a lot of what happens with groups who are interested in those sorts of subjects is at present marginalized ... I think with continued Net expansion, we'll start to hear more about topics such as dreams, magic, etc.

ACKER: I think that's true, but I don't know what will happen.

X: Do you think that the Net will become another medium where you will be accused of trying to shock people?

ACKER: I was never ever interested in shocking people. People get shocked, but that was their business. People have always had a weird relationship dealing with women's bodies. Men and women—I'd say men more so—they are so bloody uptight, they just don't hear anything sometimes.

X: When do you get time to dream?

ACKER: You know I talk about it in my work more and more, like tonight we were using this book, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. I don't think theory disqualifies the dream experience.

X: Have you got a wicked dream you'd like to share?

ACKER: Nah, lately I haven't had time to dream. I think I am working way too much.

X: What do you think about cyberspace hype, what reality is being bent, manipulated, or extended when you're inside the machine?

ACKER: No, I have never believed reality was that rational or that predictable. I don't think reality is set, reality is living, it's constantly changing. I think the Net is cool, it's almost exactly the same feeling as when you are working psychically, or when you're meditating. What we do on the Net, others can do without all the equipment. It's like flying.

X: I've heard that people generally have more psychic or spiritual experiences as they get older. Perhaps the Net works as a catalyst for such things to occur. I've also heard that it's a human trait to resolve psychic and spiritual matters with visceral things before one dies—this isn't religious,

just a fact of becoming one with the planet (Gaia, whatever) rather than remaining a hollow blob.

ACKER: I think there is something to that ... You're not as driven by things like LUST. When I was twenty-three I couldn't see or think of anything else.
[laughs]

X: So, no Net sex yet?

ACKER: Do people get off on this? I've heard it's possible—I just got to get myself a direct connection!

X: Do you view the Net as pornographic?

ACKER: I think that about everything, I am constantly thinking about sex. I think sex when I am on the Net; my machine is a big ol' toy and I don't know all the aspects to it or about it yet, but sure, sex is one of them and, like everything else, I will explore that part of it too. Sex to me is like hunger, and I am damn hungry most of the time.

X: Do you think much of the relationship between sexuality and the machine?

ACKER: No, it's not a machine to me, it's more like a living mind. I am not interested in the machine parts. I think the same way about the motorcycle—I think of it as being alive. I have two bikes: I got a Virago 1100 and a 750.

X: I know you very much like the work of VNS Matrix. They have been known to say that "the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix," following on from what you have just said. I dunno if you'd agree with that statement.

ACKER: VNS are so cool. I connected with them a while ago. I am so impressed by their work, but I wouldn't agree with that statement, no. I never thought of the connection between the machine and me as being clitoral. Right now what does it feel like?... It doesn't feel clitoral; the clitoris to me is this kind of direct little burning sensation between my legs—this is just me, but it's kinda deeper and more general than direct. Everybody's body is different. The Net can be like an orgasm, but at the moment I guess I'd still say it was like flying, and having lots of fun. But I distrust it too ... Sometimes I feel like it's a mind, eating me. I have lots of theories about the ravenous nature of my machine, especially when I got it and it kept wanting more and more RAM and other bits and pieces ... Hmmm, I have to be careful it doesn't devour me. I imagine the computer getting fatter and fatter and not allowing me to dream ever again and sucking out my thoughts.

X: Could your machine replace a lover?

ACKER: No way! Net sex might be okay, but I doubt even that could replace my motorcycle or a lover. You really should get a big bike.

X: Hmmm, yeah. Is there a rise in poetry in America at the moment?

ACKER: I'd say there was a lull. Spoken word may be on the rise, but I don't know if that's the same thing as what people used to refer to as poetry. There was a big spoken-word phenomenon last year. I think that some of my work will be reproduced spoken word anyway, on say CD-ROM. I got two records coming out with other people. One of those might come out on CD-ROM. I speak text, and a band, Tribe 8, play, and a guy called Ralph Carney, who used to play with Tom Waits and his band, and myself kind of all jam together.

X: Do you go to clubs?

ACKER: Nah, I go to a favorite café. If I go anywhere, it might be Red Dora's or something ... I don't generally hang out. I have so much work, I can't see straight. It's getting a bit ridiculous actually. One more reason why I like the computer is that I can turn it on say at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning and communicate with people, it's better than waking your friends up at that time.

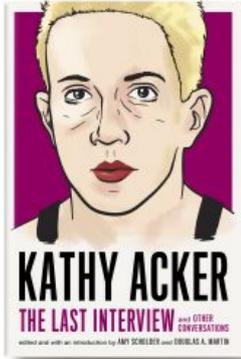
X: Can you work too hard—does it stifle the creativity of your work?

ACKER: Workin' seven days a week, twelve hours a day is too much. I am gonna get a long break in a few months. Maybe after my book about pirate

girls, I will take a well-deserved sea voyage or something. This book will be really good. You know I am hoping to come over to Australia soon ... there is a group of people up in Brisbane working on it. I don't know if they got the money together yet, it was gonna be this summer.

X: You must be making a lot of money.

ACKER: Fuck I am not! Why do you think I am working so hard!



Kathy Acker: The Last Interview comes out 3/12. [Preorder here](#) and see more from the *The Last Interview* series [here](#).

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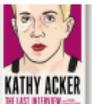
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