
TEMBLOR

CONTEMPORARY POETS

ISSUE NUMBER 5

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John Ashbery *The Ice Storm*
Jackson Mac Low *Pieces o' Six VIII, XIII, XIV, XXVII*
and Words nd Ends from Ez, VI. From the Pisan Cantos
Leslie Scalapino *roll* John Clarke *Fourteen Sonnets*
Rachel Blau DuPlessis *Draft #1: It and Draft #2: She*
Clayton Eshleman *Two Poems*
Holly Prado *Ariadne Speaks Of Dionysus*
Nathaniel Tarn *Persephone West* Michael Gizzi *Four Poems*
Alain Delahaye *The immensity of the firmament*
Joseph Simas *Some Notes on Translating*
and The Longer Sentiments of Middle, III
Anne-Marie Albiach *"H II" linear*
Gerald Burns *A Chain for Madeleine*
Martha Lifson *Rhetoric* Paul Vangelisti *Los Alephs*
David Searcy *Air and Light/Miracles*
Alan Davies *Setset/Modes/ Words Work*
Nick Piombino *Attention Two Essays*
Charles Bernstein *Reading the Tree, 1 & 2*
John Cage *from Conversations With Cage*
Toby Olson *Unfinished Building*
Ron Silliman • Ghino Tenger • Anthony Barnett
Benjamin Hollander • Linda Reinfeld • Richard Kostelanetz

EDITED BY LELAND HICKMAN

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Issue Number Five · 1987

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North Hollywood, California

A reading edition

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About this Edition

Temblor ran to ten issues between 1985 and 1989, edited by Leland Hickman from an apartment on Cahuenga Boulevard in North Hollywood. This is the fifth, published in 1987 and the largest so far: thirty contributions over 165 pages, opening with John Ashbery and closing with an index to the first five issues. Jackson Mac Low appears five times.

This edition is set from the scans of a single copy. Every page has been read and transcribed by eye against the page image. The magazine is a small portrait book, roughly 6¼ by 8¼ inches, and this edition enlarges it to 8½ by 11 with a single wide measure, so that long lines do not have to wrap. Each contributor opens on a fresh page.

Twenty-five pages are reproduced as pictures rather than reflowed, because the placement of the words is the work: Anne-Marie Albiach's "*H II*" *linear*, widely spaced across nine pages; Mac Low's *Words nd Ends from Ez*, drawn from Pound's *Cantos* by a reading-through procedure, which italicises single letters inside roman words; Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Draft #1*; and Michael Gizzi. The type is reduced where it must be to keep the widest line inside the measure.

The Index to Issues 1–5 is the magazine's own, printed at the back in three columns, and is given here as Hickman set it. It is the only apparatus of its kind in the run so far and makes the first five issues searchable as a body.

Four pages carry unverified text. Printed pages 143 and 144, from the John Cage conversation assembled by Richard Kostelanetz, could not be transcribed by the process used for the rest of the issue. They are set from the machine reading of the scan, its two columns unpicked and its broken words rejoined; the words are reliable, the italics that distinguish interviewer from Cage are not. They should be checked against the original.

Printed typos and eccentric spellings are kept as they were set — *hopothesizing*, *commmas*, *themselose*, *Amirkanian*, *codifed*. No editorial matter of mine appears once the text begins. Set in TeX Gyre Pagella, with display type in Termes after the magazine's own masthead; the colour is the cover stock, sampled from the scan.

John Ashbery

The Ice Storm

ISN'T REALLY A STORM OF COURSE BECAUSE unlike most storms it isn't one till it's over and people go outside and say will you look at that. And by then it's of course starting to collapse. Diamond rubble, all galled glitter, heaps of this and that in corners and beside posts where the draft has left them—are you sure it's this you were waiting for while the storm—the real one—pressed it all into the earth to emphasize a point that melts away as fast as another idea enters the chain of them in the conversation about earth and sky and woods and how you should be good to your parents and not cheat at cards. The summer's almost over it seems to say. Did I say summer I meant to say winter it seems to say. You know when nature really has to claw like this to get her effects that something's not ripe or nice, i.e. the winter, our favorite of the seasons, the one that goes by quickest although you almost never hear anyone say, I wonder where the winter has gone. But anyone engaged in the business of swapping purity for depth will understand what I mean. So we all eyeball it, agog, for a while. And soon our attention is trapped by news from the cities, by what comes over the wireless—heated, and alight. How natural then to retreat into what we have been doing, trying to capture the old songs, the idiot games whose rules have been forgotten. "Here we go, looby, looby." And the exact name of the season that stings like a needle made of frozen mercury falls through the infinitesimal hole in our consciousness, to plummet hundreds of leagues into the sea and vanish in a perpetual descent toward the ocean floor, whatever and wherever that may be, and the great undersea storms and cataclysms will leave no trace on the seismographs each of us wears in the guise of a head.

To do that, though—get up and out from under the pile of required reading such as obituary notices of the near-great—"He first gained employment as a schoolmaster in his native Northamptonshire. Of his legendary wit, no trace remains"—is something that will go unthought of until another day. Sure we know that the government and the president want it. But we know just as surely that until the actual slippage occurs, the actual moment of uncertainty by two or more of the plates or tectons that comprise the earth's crust, nobody is ever going to be moved to the point of action. You might as well call it a night, go to sleep under a bushel basket. For the probability of that moment occurring is next to nil. I mean it will probably never happen and if it does, chances are we won't be around to witness any of it.

The warp, the woof. (What, actually, are they? Never mind, save that for another time when the old guy's gotten a bit more soused). Or the actual strings of words on the two pages of a book, like "I was reading this novel, I think the author was associated with the Kailyard School. What's that? Wait, though—I think I know. What I really want to know is how will this affect me, make me better in the future? Maybe make me a better conversationalist? But nobody I know ever talks about the Kailyard School, at least not at the dinner parties I go to. What, then? Will it be that having accomplished the tale of this reading there will only be about seven million more books to go, and that's something, or is it more the act of reading something, of being communicated to by an author and thus having one's ideas displaced like the water that pebbles placed by the stork's beak slowly force out of the beaker—*beaker*? do you suppose? No I wasn't suggesting anything like that. I want to cut out of this conversation or discourse. Why? Because it doesn't seem to be leading anywhere. Besides it could compromise me when the results become known, and by results I mean the slightest ripple that occurs as when the breeze lifts a corner of the vast torpid flag dropping at its standard, like the hairline crack in the milkwhite china of the sky, that

indicates something is off, something less likable than the situation a few moments before has assumed its place in the pre-ordained hierarchy of things. Something like the leaves of this plant with its veins that almost look parallel though they are radiating from its center of course.

It's odd about things like plants. Today I found a rose in full bloom in the wreck of the garden, all the living color and sentience but also the sententiousness drained out of it. What remained was like a small flower in the woods, too pale and sickly to notice. No, sickly isn't the right word, the thing was normal and healthy by its own standards, and thriving merrily along its allotted path toward death. Only we hold it up to some real and abject notion of what a living organism ought to be and paint it a scarecrow, that frightens birds away (presumably) but isn't able to frighten itself away. Oh, no, it's far too clever for that! But our flower, the one we saw, really had no need of us to justify its blooming where it did. So we ought to think about our own position on the path. Will it ever be anything more than that of pebble? I wonder. And they scratch some of them feverishly, at whatever meaning it might be supposed to yield up, of course expiring as it does so. But our rose gains its distinction just by being stuck there as though by the distracted hand of a caterer putting the finishing touch on some grand floral display for a society wedding that will be over in a few minutes, a season not of its own naming. Why appear at a time when the idea of a flower can make no sense, not even in its isolation? It's just that nature forces us into odd positions and then sits back to hear us squawk but may, indeed, derive no comfort or pleasure from this. And as I lifted it gently I saw that it was doing what it was supposed to do—miming freshness tracked by pathos. What more do you want? it seemed to say. Leave me in this desert . . .

As I straighten my footsteps to accommodate the narrow path that has been chosen for me I begin to cringe at the notion that I can never be accommodated here, no not like the rose blooming grotesquely out of season even, but must always consider the sharp edges of the slender stones set upright in the earth, to be my guide and commentator, on this path. I was

talking to some of the others about it. But if it didn't matter then, it matters now, now that I begin to get my bearings in this gloom and see how I could improve on the distraught situation all around me, in the darkness and tarnished earth. Yet who will save me from myself if they can't? I can't, certainly, yet I tell myself it all seems like fun and will work out in the end. I expect I will be asked a question I can answer and then be handed a big prize. They're working on it.

So the sunlit snow slips daintily down the waterway to the open sea, the car with its driver along the looping drives that bisect suburbs and then flatten out through towns that are partly rural though with some suburban characteristics. Only I stay here alone, waiting for it to reach the point of cohesion. Or maybe I'm not alone, maybe there are other me's, but in that case the cohesion may have happened already and we are no wiser for it, despite being positioned around to comment on it like statues around a view. The dry illumination that results from that will not help us, it will always be as though we had never happened, ornaments on a structure whose mass remains invisible or illegible.

October 28. Three more days till November. I expect this to happen in a soft explosion of powdery light, dull and nameless, though not without a sense of humor in its crevices, where darkness still lives and enjoys going about its business. There are too many stones to make it interesting to hobble from one to another. Perhaps in a few days . . . Maybe by the time I finish the course I am taking, if sirens don't dislodge me from this pure and valid niche. I feel that this season is being pulled over my head like a dress, difficult to spot the dirt in its mauve and brick traceries. I am being taken out into the country. Trees flash past. All is perhaps for the best then since I am going, and they are going with us, with us as we go. The past is only a pond. The present is a lake of grass. Between your two futures, yours and his, numbing twigs chart the pattern of lifeless chatter in shut-down night, starstruck the magnitudes that would make us theirs, too cold to matter to themselves, let us be off anywhere, to Alaska, to Arizona. I am fishing for compliments. The afternoon lasts forever.

Jackson Mac Low

Pieces o' Six VIII

IN A CAPTURED NET THE JEWELLED SIGNATORIES easily resisted. The park surrounding them was darkened by a partisan fury. Less well than fulsome, the hearty enactors of pensionary pacts showed little inclination to lessen braggadoccio or illusory containment. Severe as continental trunks, their infected gazes sapped their targets' inculcated caution. Tosses of vertical patterns cracked the packed corrosion. Notions of fatalistic pasquinades opened the social wheel. Gelatinous squeals emerged from the saturated bordel. Corridors devastated lymph nodes exposed by the quicksilver-tinctured night and closed around the fertile hands that had hacked a sovereign path from the prison to the shoddy-apertured gateway where gazelles lounged amid perfumed herbicidal clouds and comic crowds of untested sufferers offered revenge to surly titular newcomers frosted in incompetent calculation. Nascent abstractions flattered addled Trappists and role-playing freedom fighters lost on unclarified paths. Saturation bombing added manifold inconveniences protested by the unmolested signers. Mindfully the labile anchorites rushed to stanch the visible gush of fortune. Normal coronation would have naturally been favored, but the archimandrite's rudimentary knowledge of the protocol he cast aspersions on so readily was eventually accepted as a useful excuse for postponement. None of the editors was fazed by that negligible farce. Partial inclusion was followed by abbreviated greetings and pharisaic hollow-seeming swallows. Locked in fatuous combat, the instant gladiators hissed and sneezed with ambivalent correspondence forgotten in their pockets. Artfully, under cover of commiseration, the words had worked to waken their panic manhood. Masks had flooded the gutters and tipped the scales. Skulls had floated on arbitrary folds. Toneless predicaments patched a sapped incursion while rapidly wounded entities shifted and pitched in blinding immaculate practice matched by talismanic oarsmen and ripe, overconfident archers wrapped in suede and sweaty frolic. Toxins seized the air. Wayfarers begged for ordinate decoding. Sober chords poured from the island's shoulders. Nerveless consequence delivered idle roars replete with caution and inaccurate pharmacology. Scarred by fallow raptures and led on by a mixed environment of cartwheels and enclosures, affected tattling goalies sowed their concupiscent doggerel in the banlieues of the capital and the hallways of their daughters. Taut with the spice of absence, they slackened in their adversary tactics and laughed at public witchcraft as a sacrament of adventurists and a futile classicization of charisma. Intolerant of incompetence, they racked factual declivities before the riptide moaned and lent a communiqué to monstrous communicants under the guise of progressive stabilization. Able as acrobats and decently indoctrinated, they switched once a minute from one trickster to another and let no bleeding lemur give them pause. "The lacier the better" was the tenet they pursued, linking lights first conceived in passion and only later regularized and coded by the hopeful, who lingered beside the font poised in notable conditions, staring through the giant mica lens. No uncommon expenditure bade them welcome. Territories soggy with smoke spited the wings of wayfaring ephemera whose only misadventure was their birth. Remedies were offered by interested Swiss. The narrative took a jump into the future. Doomed by an innocuous falsified footlocker, a cradle will anticipate an answer. Clarified by regret and fanciful sanctions, an absently testy fencer will emerge and launch a tentative abrogation. A coarsely reckoned portico will hold a finite actress with a stoutly illuminant oil lamp and a limp. No prize will be too small to be awarded. Necessary claims will be transferred. Anxiety will flatter discontent still more readily than research will belie an ardent charm. You'll react with the conscience of a quail. You'll pay out a colored kite string while the temporal zephyr holds and lope across the parkland like a llama. Waiting in the rain will acclimatize the

heart and allow the revolution to proceed. A passable eastern needle will be invented. Ten or more troubled senses will no longer be uncommon. An alternate rollicking master will eventuate. A precautionary task will be awarded. An orphaned carpenter's hatchet man will snatch the invitations. Historians will pack the site in silence. Riled by planification, an orderer of debris will loose the lacy lightning of a crier and lean in a wieldy action toward a crosier. Caked with ancient camouflage and strategies, its natural antecedents will be grasped and its stoic penetration will be praised. Enacted on a u-boat or a carrier, the least important move will be the last. The legendary warden will be censured. The aggressive tiresome teller will have a comeuppance. Few will move when the soothing finger strikes. Always the willful loser, brash contender, compulsive simplifier, or adequate tracker, the tan empirical pollster will renege, and spoon a tapster's prattle into a flavorsome computer whose only toll will ring the bell of toil. Foisted on an arborist through a curtain, its blacker dignities will still the whistle of a prince and skimp on a celibate's moderate alimentation. Grace will have trouble breaking through an antiquated sporecase and reaching a meadow where its spread's assured. Heads will turn with unacknowledged fervor or contempt or to scan a packed committee bereft of its thunders or worm its information from its chairman. Its only defense will lie in its lack of dignity and the catcalls from the pit when the curtain falls. Exorbitant portrayals of the poor, their industrious clatter of sympathy must be meant further to alienate the passive-aggressive victims of their aid. Nothing's left to chance. All gateways to escape are fused shut. Peninsulas are ice cream in the cryogenic distance. Mufflers are doubled and tripled around throats coated with spray that's as brinily germicidal as defeat. Reeking of unseemly satisfaction, the bartered sufferer clanks across a grave, reselling a different story than before, with the same props, but this time too far gone to be believed, so that verisimilitude's broken as an aim or a token ideal and "nothing" is welcomed as much as the fullness of

being. The enactment becomes a coarse commemoration. The atrophy of senses, mind, and conscience is complete. None of the savage cynics waits for answers. Each of the deaths the subject is only too eager to confess to is acknowledged by being passed over in obvious silence, as dreamlike in its arbitrary stillness as a face card coming to life and speaking Dutch. Activities of a wan defensive wrestler are coldly assessed by bullet-headed assassins. She's glimpsed through a telescopic lens. Bright teeth are showing. Excitement perfects the time of its arrival. Its effects have been foreseen, its knowledge untransferable. Its sources have been muffled. Its legs have been snapped. Its kinship to mere terror has been stressed by indirection. Its flashy indiscretions have been pointedly overlooked. Its libidinous antecedents have been wrecked and left to rust. Its artless, uncalculating voice has drowned in a flagrant bath of flattery. Most of its representations have been frauds. Its will will have been broken. It will have been quenched by the secret future of its own perfection. Its private documentation will have been socialized, its genitive lesions exposed like cracks in a pavement. It will have become an emulated cynosure. None of its characteristics will have escaped. All of them will have been itemized and coded pending the time when its last manifestations will have been snuffed. Fat saprophytic agents will have eaten its deepest roots. The ultimate age of contentment will have arrived—and none too soon for most—for they'll have been flailing with flaccid fingers a viscid tide that long before will have drawn a majority under. A remnant will have been saved—far from the best. Whether any of the latter will have acted in time to survive will have been a mystery till descendants will have chosen to reveal themselves, acknowledging their discontented forbears. The neuter pronoun's lively antecedent will have pursued them over a page, more or less, till nature will have blown its and their long-gelid cool and excogitated, melancholy cover. Fire will have risen as a serpent through the vertebrae. Air will have entered the nostrils from all quarters of sky. Water softly falling will have reached the blistered throat and ascended and descended through the blood tree to the cells. Earth will have grounded the feet and pleased the toes. And ether will have been known again as immeasurable matrix, imperceptible and all-pervasive context.

1-2 November 1983, New York

Leslie Scalapino

roll

A printed hand-drawn brushstroke rule, a long wavy horizontal line with a small upward kink near its centre, set across the middle of the page between the second and third verse blocks.

the men — in the new bar — with the new
wave clothes — that are just outfitting them —
young — which are modest —
producing — that — but from them
— as really — something

their — who're — not
wealth — like — as
grueling, deprivation — of that place — but
of the really — modest —
small means — from that — new wave clothing

as their — who're
muscular — fragile — though employed at
some — low — or modest unexciting type of
work — not of the power, wealth — and
producing — which isn't — abroad

people vacillating — though an
overall stillness — butt, of the corpse, but not that as the
matter — in this — and as a really passive
thing, but which fleeces or with — their — hard — constant
work

the dog coming trotting down to the bank — off from
which — we were in the boat — people bathing off the
steps — where a — corpse has floated
— there for burial — to the bank — the dog beginning to eat flesh from
the buttocks of the body — but not as — our — from the outside
— the flesh being very soft coming off easily

A printed hand-drawn brushstroke rule, a long wavy horizontal line with a small upward kink near its centre, set across the middle of the page between the third and fourth verse blocks.

the people — not mocking — from the boat rowing by — the
people bathing, off the
steps — who're filming, from the boat
— appearing such — not as — our — from the outside
— from the soft flesh of the — corpse — that had
been washed, up to the bank — but the innocent-looking
bathers, who're concentrating — facing, we were in

the buttocks — of — the corpse — so facing
us, the boats — though submerged, with the soft
flesh of the butt — to the dog — who ate easily — the
bathers in the water — off the steps — close
who're inside — not noticing — I would think

seeing a movie — of it — before — but having seen that — of
the corpse floating in the river — before — now — and
actually seeing it again — close — to people
filming, this time — as not having to do with that — from
the soft flesh — or — their, who're bathers

a boy — we were in a busy street — kicking
a dog hard, who's done nothing to produce
that, another boy, responding by a joke
of kicking — the dog — again — between the two
children, or adolescents — having nothing — to do — with the corpse's
soft flesh, after

salespeople — who're insistent — whether
they're not bothered — or fully saturated
— with — the sight of the bathers, the corpse — before —
floating, there for burial — to the bank
— commonly — so as — not having produced

weeping, having been a
long time since doing that — not from
— the sight — of the corpse, soft flesh — or
the dog — from being outside — which is
irrelevant — a funny thing

A printed hand-drawn brushstroke rule, a long wavy horizontal line with a small upward kink near its centre, set across the
middle of the page between the second and third verse blocks.

someone having been abusive — of
that type of thing — and to have gone ahead
and do that — with people — with no thought
— as transposed — our — which is
funny — stupid thing

just kicking it out — with some beer —
not — a reference — to — the dog — or
boys — with it — the corpse, soft flesh — up
to the bank, having floated, there for burial — being
irrelevant to it

someone, before — having, so what
been abusive — as irrelevant — so when
there isn't anything there — the dog —
regardless — with it — euphoric — not
from having it there — as it not a repressed thing

that — there wouldn't
be any change, as irrelevant — in anything,
what occurs — over decades, not fleecing — or if it
does — as not viewed as having a function — whether
that is a — fragile — living in that phase

the function — of the man — liking — utter
submission — as raw, fragile — of
a woman — reaction — imposing his personality and
voice, as being de Sade — fixed and
in that — reaction

A printed hand-drawn brushstroke rule, a long wavy horizontal line with a small upward kink near its centre, set across the middle of the page between the second and third verse blocks.

the man — liking — the imprint — not
of the person — raw, fragile — outside of
the reaction — fixed — with no change in it
of society — over — something — as
stupid — that is in it

people wanting money — but — and disappointed
at not getting the amount, as a necessary living —
which just happened that
way — as whether they'd worked or were just standing there
— when it's given — and that had produced — the
— butt — or not producing — anything

the inverting — of someone — not floating on
the water, which isn't a reference — to the corpse, bathing
— but not in submissiveness — as a reaction
or euphoria, which would continue — as
far as his ability to

tears — on someone's
part — as an odd — reaction
— when there's no reason
for what had produced that or
conceiving of it — which had occurred

A printed hand-drawn brushstroke rule, a long wavy horizontal line with a small upward kink near its centre, set across the middle of the page between the third and fourth verse blocks.

my naivete — in regard to people with
real power of political or wealth — with it
not a matter of it with me — but feeling —
like — nothing — in an irrelevant situation — that's
producing — my — or — butt

as being what there is — for me — not as
producing — except grueling, deprivation which isn't
the thing — from the inside as only that continuing
in the situation — whether or not there's
wealth somewhere else

the grueling, deprivation — of
everyone — with it, not a matter of it — so
that it's up to — as many people — as there are
as that as the continual run for the entire — din
— but feeling — so that it is the matter of it

as the fragile — muscular
— who're young — of the men in the new
wave clothing — as to — being —
the grueling, deprivation — city — which is
the really — modest means — they have

not mattering — that — they have
those means, which aren't wealth — or

which they aren't — abroad
— fragile — though muscular men who
were there — in that situation

a driver — going back — behind — taking a piss
before going — after, another driver, going in the middle
of the night — people sleeping on the sidewalk who are
innocent-looking — are — in that situation
constantly — not — like — that

not mattering — whether or not it does — of — their
grueling, deprivation — that appearing
as the substance — with it, and with
there not being — any — irrelevance in
to that situation

to have simply lived in the — lack of resources — that's entire
and to have trashed things — working hard — or some
getting past having access to it — that — isn't known
to the graceful men — not from being obtuse — and
as the same — work

*

— so irrelevant — to everyone in
— that setting — as up to — open —
believing the ridiculous — our florid — as a negative
though which is outside — and — so — doesn't
matter — that that is — what

the belief in — manifestation — of what — without
thought — on their part — supposedly,
which is the florid — as a positive thing — while
all there is — what — and is a necessity
— feeling — in some — and only
their — conglomeration

A printed hand-drawn brushstroke rule, a long wavy horizontal line with a small upward kink near its centre, set across the middle of the page between the second and third verse blocks.

so what — as
not that — many people on the dividing
strip with flocks of kids, begging at the
cars — coming to the red lights — who're available
living at the side — as not the controversy
and engrained

— him — having — intensely —
loved her — as the representation
— could — actually occurring — in
the building — which is simply
that thing

when — then people have been
abused — as children — not having happened to
me — in real, physical — work — over — at that
young age — a huge number of people — and far removed
from it now — as their open — or view and

sensation

a friend — who'd
been abused — and abandoned as a child
living in the park — as the sensation, not
mine, who was
irritable — not with any clear sense — though fairly
clear — of a few thoughts

the man, on a bicycle — near-by — in traffic
— not abused, or having been — at in what's — seen
— of him — though from not eating much — waiting, at the light, as
working as that sensation, event — of him being on the bicycle
being the work

A printed hand-drawn brushstroke rule, a long wavy horizontal line with a small upward kink near its centre, set across the
middle of the page between the third and fourth verse blocks.

the boys' souped car — is identifiable — from
them on the — freeway — some abandoned — but most with the
crowd in them — and not going — behind — pissing
anyone — which could be — and isn't what
they want

a death of someone, a relative
— occurring
with — the writing — not
produced — by it — but expressed
or seen — before
it

the relation — as the
representation — of people, not them being — having been
abused when they were children — here —
not coming from
it — but it seems to be

myself — seeing as a child — the
confused — setting — that's really
deprived — grueling — and — people sleeping on
the street innocent-looking — as usually — with my
not having been abused, as a child, nor they — and have that
then, returning — not have changed — with just
— anything — being there

my grandmother dying in an accident — with
— my imagining or seeing the scene, but as it
happens expressing a man's
situation — whom I knew — projecting myself as or in him
— becomes — real — which I knew after — in her
dying

can't imagine — what — someone's
protesting — or writhing — they — not with
change being relevant — or not — that kind of abuse — at
any time — and as grueling, deprivation
not existing — or that

John Clarke

Fourteen Sonnets

The Man Who Looks at the World

I wanted at last to push on further into
the restivity which merits our patience
to match the restocking of the common
place begun in *noos*, ending in grief
which is the corporealization of the world
we now live in, as prosperity is never
measured by death, arcanelly as it may
seem to guide aspiration through the portals
of chance in a world ungoverned by rest,
the very basis upon which this second
chance was granted within the *teleme*
that we should have been so fortunate
as to have been here again just in time
to receive the full scope of its perusal.

Hesiodicity

Sit down on demand and there she comes,
drinking and spilling over the edge of this
precipice which we all know better than
to hesitate over, just because our poets
have so judged it to be without formality,
the blackest need that any little red thing,
great or small, ever trod without having to
show its colors in the face of such a
flagship of despair leading the fleet
into the other hemisphere just to prove
our failure to observe the sea water ways
that run through, even still, the tendril
of space left over after all is contracted to
this white cliff created next after the sexual.

The Return of Hecate

Her purity flies through the night
and wraps the moon in its aegis,
what an honor to witness *in absentia*,
not even from the halls of Montezuma,
just me, here alone in my own home
waiting for the sunrise the world is
no longer waiting for. All conditions
of mind must be given up to free it
for use. All the old stories must be
allowed to fall away from the circuit
of attention. Nothing must remain but
the Falconer (Yeats established the whole
program) who waits for her return flight
in awe of her chaste claws upon the night.

The Added Burden of the Lost

You are finally also led up against

the other half of the story which led to
or preceded the one you've spent so much
time on, why in the first place you write
instead of dictate to uses of yourself as
response to soundings versus expressions of
in some sense proposal of what is desired
at any given moment, i.e., without special
effect or occasion for set-up beyond defining
the appropriate structure of desire itself
so all goes before any of the interesting
dilemma and its solution gets to be told as
audience response almost as though the contest
were untouchable or taboo as subject of writing.

Having Looked at Each Other and Made War

Quick engagements without resolution, spittings
like thunderstorms, energy discharge as nimbus
of distance, pray the heart not be too tender
by nature, the real thing, *lebenswillen*, put to
the test, how to get from three to four, hardest
thing there is, harder than Maria Prophetissima,
harder than Venus and Adonis, the storm of spite
that Lear was in, with Gloucester blind (Duncan
knows something, but not this), no simulacrum
the androgyne who stalks the enigmatic night
for Antigone, no hetaera either, nor Mars, Mama
Mia, what shall we do? Maybe just fall into
the world like Charles said, fall into the sea
whose anger carries more weight than this rancor.

Broke Him Up from His Delving Root

The bump and grind of present authority
is not from before or what can be made of it
in the paradisaal flow of time, song as trapped
paternity, Merlin caught in his own stones,
the jealousy of anything to conceal its own
human origins, as if Typhon were anything
without Zeus (ideas in things as Vision);
objects stand clear by seeing them in song
of the Sampo, the egg prior to the chicken
Sherwood Anderson made of American sentence
without concession to previous worship of
convex maturity, the oldest stone unkicked
by foot of Berkeley, Blake's thistle upon
the path, Old Man Gray returning from Felpham.

The New Writing Conundrum

"Most thoughts are only profiles
of thoughts. They must be inverted
and synthesized with their antipodes."

— Friedrich Schlegel

"Every word is an exorcism. Whatever
the spirit calls, a kindred spirit
will answer."

— Novalis

The most uncongenial thing about returning to Neo-

classicism via a little learning is the loss of the end
of a golden string already passed to us by Romanticism,
the fear of misuse that led to the holocaust now numbs
the very hands that would wind it up and build Jerusalem
rather than a dangerous thing. How carry the conundrum
to the breaking point—instead of taking the words to
a place where kindred spirits fear to go, especially
if, unlike the Modern, it is all high style & society?
Are "the Chronology Powers" still the answer to the gap
between disenfranchisement and the sequestered profile—
surely not exorcised by I.Q., which isn't high enough,
given the One and the Many, to divest Babes of the Boom—
of contrary thoughts already ensconced in antipodal war?

The Fourth of July 1980

If you want to keep Psyche for political reasons
always reform rather than break connection
so everyone can come, plus there's much worse
evil out there waiting for someone to fall for
rather than enter into as a "physics of Psyche"
which is already a world waiting to be taken up,
that hair of difference which produces change is
a Prigogine catastrophe on the Whitmanic open road,
the living measure without abstract atomic scale
of flashing vertical daily minute forces, strengths
which return to the Underworld in a premature rush
if we don't close the door on the quest for knowing
the Unknown and go to work for a cause common to all,
the awful Newtonian completion of God's secularization.

The Calm Before the Storm

As Jesus entered Jerusalem resolved
as Ahab the jaws of a whale impaled
upon the verticality that was once
trajectory as Ulysses' oar stuck
in the hump of white land as old
sin of shooting Albatross Artaud
intuited was wrong with Coleridge,
that misapprehension of the value
of sex as Cupid's arrow shot into
the dove's breast and unforgiven
guilt entering the mound impelling
movement as froth of Venus removed
causing the land to spout and move
in waves Constance saw coming home.

Abstract Folly As Foster Mother

With personal unity as receptacle of becoming
one can be trodden out and still remain
oneself as the natural matrix of all occasion
however changed by whatever has entered it,
for bare of form the all-receptive locus of
identity is seized by the no longer forbidden
dimension fostering all circumstances emplaced
within the platter conditioned by compulsion
of its own past, and by the persuasion of
its immanent ideals one must never sin against

at the risk of tearing one's wholeness in twain,
this is the true dual-unit, never forgotten,
only begotten, never improved upon, one's own
dish or cup of tea, the only thing that can contain.

The World of the Imagination

Quantity: time of the system (Blake's own),
full circuitry of thought to traverse world
circumference (imaginal limits), not Self,
not Body, etc., but the actual crested size
of apprehended form, the gravity of narrative
time it takes to complete cybernetic loop in
space *statistically* 'proven' to exist as reality
of identity (thus ecology obviating the 'split'
even in entropy theory by definition of organism)
so that we have a "World"-frame proposition to
call Human equal to the Universe we otherwise
surrender to as God, the power and glory of
complementarity as only more of the same,
therefore a way of being satisfied in time.

Metanoia

Address gnosis of present to stars
in public without crank access to
direct knowing shot instead of bio-
restraint or bias toward presented
image facing the world as such
with singular talent practiced as
point of residual access and back
to possible hearing what penetrates
the love established at beginning
like Valentine arrow into heart
and forwarding American progress
into full disease of the present
that now everyone knows full well
is context not nuclear war or else.

The Rekindling of the Planet

From water comes fire—that is the mystery
of creation, not natural, or cosmic as it is called
loosely, but human, the same thing that makes
these other two realms of containment, once touching
sufficiently for something to return to the world,
the same human channels of unfathomable giving
that gave rise to the gift of generation initially
when life was just as new as a Cocteau play,
whether you read French or not isn't the point,
but whether you are willing to, in spite of lack
of time, go back and grab hold of the world
so the planet is again permeated with the smell
of fondness our animal scent is vestige of, why
love conquers all, it can contain this mystery.

Although I Don't Compete With Herman Melville

My heart performs an all night vigil
as though it were a fire that would not be

stayed, nor drew no moth to its candle,
for its molten remains solidify, fly
up before such flame can kindle a lure
to catch the ends which are prematurely
black breaking horizon cast over the edge
of our perception, as though history held
against the romanticism so deftly seated
by time in the making, or is it just by day
that nobody knows how to live other than by
the structure of wit in the 17th century?
Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit
the Night that follows the End of the World.

scape striated with historical sentence.
have seen sheep, knolls, pebble turds in piles.
A mark, a tuft, a makr a / a \

makes meaning it's
framed marks that make
meaning is, isn't
it? Black

coding inside A
white fold open eye
open a little
slip

= =

To what purpose reveal details of fleshy registers one
CAN have, blah blah their charm? It's not
irony (really); it's awe.
They are what we are, we are
that,
,that's it; it's only what we are, we write our bodies
all and only what begin space
(maybe) by talking
the tizzy dizzy spin at the window the
stars; a meaning's point laid lines weather
perfect, the turnings talk
in it;
two shadows blown

is one way of hinting it.

= =

It is not surprising that where in the placement of
saffron this is simple 'you'
It is not surprising, are listening 'I' am alert
that. enough 'she' is learning how to
talk 'we' are reconstituted.
It
is not surprising That. This is the spoilage of
presence a condensation of
It's the little stuff that slips the wink rot ick or
slides past phatic split tingle
under all those sheets "what
dog is woofing" what shuttle
brights what warp? WATER damage it really needs
replacement

Can I heed you, it? This line, scrawl of a bird line
tide line

= =

I feel the
The strange light scuds
jewels to say
anything (it) must be half-eaten apple
mistrusted.
wedged under me in the car.
It must be loved like milk.

= =

(parole prevailing against long)

It, is so
long.

= =

To reinvent "attention" is narrow tho tempting.
Doesn't get the folding. I
is it

The
generative
nor jargons in antiphon mist
I always thought "antiphon" was the most

fat shadow. beautiful word. slight show.

A white house seems
to be a further
coagulation of mist
Lucite see-thru overlay, mark upon mark
glistening thru those microtimes of day. Stein in short was

No postcard poetry, a this a that like
a boat like a dog and not just any dog but eliding
an over-eager retriever on waves over
maybe like chickens bobbing. the over.

= =

CANO, cano, yes no
conno-
tations of impurities fill the fold.
Why that, or why
"sea blazed gold"
why
re-up anyway, to artifack
art pac, o me
o my.

= =

Nostalgia for a touch
resistant how
the language forms of sweetened
clouds for fat and white I love
you Little whirlwinds of paper caught in the
clouds cross-currents of systems (skyscraper wind
as clouds tunnels, roads cut, built, then lined with
shadows creased in heaps and brights delicate
garbage, a land-
not literally thighs. lessness even as we squat here so
on the land we are) the

lyric?

= =

putt (pitting) the tiny word
litt
it
on stage in a "theatrical" space
a
space white and open a flat
spot a lite on
it something
alight like wings.

Well now what's
to speak what is
to speak when that
Object (pronoun)
squeaks its little song its bright white
dear dead dark.

I hear, I do. YO! hear it
hear "it"? hand it into the wings.

dat dat dat
didn't want any beauty
tender
but

theater of the

page cream space peaks

= =

where in the space of particularity one passes
beyond ego; where in the placement of saffron
MA ME I AM A WAKE a and black tuft of heide, no
hoy ma milky-moo hurt to the heath, not hold
bright boo. the heart is empty being so
full of a calmness marking minute practice.

= =

Let silence
in the form of words'
in. IT.

= =

Some ART today:
a
mimetic use of mottled crepuscular marble to make a
pop ice cream
cone of,
vidi (!),
I saw—impossible
NOT to argue in light of it.
I'll make a representation
to you about it
later. After I end my song.

Shame is ordinary. Shamelessness
just a bit less. The real
interest is
limpidity,
power, the necessary

no and yes. I wouldn't want to spread
Nos and Yesses incessant. myself too pointedly.

= =

There's no way to read it?
One point is to achieve a social momentum of switched
referents and (merry coral white clover
ding ding ding) commentary in which what he (you)
says or does must be read differently from what she
does or says whether he, you does it to her or them to
it (of whom?) she to it feels different (nights of Holly-
wood fascism) in an unsettling but not articulate way.
power power imbedded in, in its (days of military realism)
place on the pronoun grid, cells squeak in protest "it's
just language" "we're just nature"

= =

TORN FROM (A PAGE)

a kind of orange it happens
a kind of orange
IT HAPPENS
rose rinse, vertical green.
Away anyway has shadow
"a typical Rachel shadow"

A hand-drawn ink stroke, a forked branching line like a bare twig or a bird's footprint, standing below the word ching.

blue starts limb long and torso struggles
its window when all around there's not a single
wall, NO blockages
hardly stopped at all except by the pleasures
of color are you getting the picture
it hpps BLUEW one from the sequences of looming
comes longing

= =

There's *no*; read *it*. Down
under where broach is, a
nuzzle a quick fat. It is the
"it" characteristic of everything. Yes, read it!

A narrative, a story, a plot, every word "a plot
against the reader"; coagulations of it, rays
pleased to be doing what they're doing not cynical yet

and plenty spaces

= =

The struggle from whiteness
into whiteness
via black wit-

ness

I

ching.

= =

Overlope loop. Laugh language laugh.
Standstone reach overload wrack
parabolic pools, warm line harken
shells I
want to be *in* it, but it is not for
in it it

is it.

Little girls little legs jump the wine dark line.

= =

No "books" no ministers no tow art
 "no sandpoems" build of it, not on it
 it is sacred what you can do with it
 The general aura of quest just as a baseline.
 This silence awash with
 bodies flowered aglow astripe to be
 folded over signals.
 Words' ribbon-wing hover, hovers, hovering.
 Silence, silence, silence
 was, this was, the implicit subject was
 never foolhardy.
 = =
 Silences are the reaches of discourse
 (rich incipit's big initials)
 There is a yes and a no walled
 welled up
 Sorrow? weeping yes and weeping no
 it is the definition of speaking;
 gladness too is it, its weeping.
 Silence is not the only subversion; it is.
 The letters rise into a consuming which makes more
 black fire flaming on white fire.
 Fire fear (fears) fire. Scared is sacred.
 Black arrow shot in blacker sleep
 green word fold in greeny pock of folk
 Speak, quiver, before your waves grow destitute
 Dark feather dropped in foam of darker, antecedent sea.

May 1986—January 1987

Notes:

"Torn from (a Page)" is the title of a painting by David Hannah; the section contains other of his paintings. There is an allusion to an important statement by Paul Celan.

Draft #2: *She*

The white one turns red they say
 then peach to white grass rich the edge-fold
 space
 slices of porcupine deep underground
 and et that red-grained fat.
 "I be good girl with my magic
 markers."
 (marks hands up red
 makes henna dark touch)
 Taboo thy ruses, moues and roses, shh.
 Terracotta, ochre smear of Provence
 stains
 shadowy stairs .
 Ask for danger, say
 "I want that danger."

•

Who has
 rise
 how images rinse and erase how
 can the rose
 speak and how much

can you in fact stand that lobotomized
memory you have been washed up
into
do you

NO?

Dear (name),
 I (morder)
 for departure's sake
further reaches.

The thin voice of the thin space.
Red red the rushes rise
down down by the salt tide veil, that
Love depicted as against itself:
small happy (guillotined) family unit
petal lashed to petal.

•

Families set like junket IN milky rooms'
schematic valleys—
V-shape of the young runnel;
rennet sweet-white jellies
over cascades of russet granite.

•

Lightly risen, of a plastic
pink too close, too
bare,
tho luminous Food one could imagine there
the Moone
when next I spy
retracts: a dime-size toy-tied dish my moony
 better
quest too dumb to ask a bitter question.
Still such catheter stuck there into my any fleck is
profligate.

•

 jests
Of suggestive twists, of wax rib
 joists
stuffed by a potential crime,
do you read her as
'Mother'? 'Woman'?

 "Bandit
one-armed "Angel With A Lamp"?
 "Badger

beam my way, beamy tinkling light; be me now
O Be Thou Me, sinuous one!

The piece, it's fleshy, picture perfect,
peachy . . . wax torqued up
 fill
to fool this unrelinquished peephole.

Luminosities enormities of
key-shaped air in which she

flocks, twisted in brush,
sine curves verbatim.
A pubis allusive; the eye penises thru the keylock;
the eye is complicit and so is
HUNGER
NAUSEA
hurl
for I am afraid to hole it TOO MUCH
hurt
not speak of hold me.
"I am your danger."
"I am your anger, ranger."
"I am your angel, dudgeon."

•

Red orange with red veining
shading raised
rib of same
color runs into large gold throat
suppressed heart, green.
Pale peach that by evening has a flush of pink
There is a pink rib goes
deep, up to the hilt,
rose heart, bound.
Between me? that?
heavy-eyed light gazing.
Daylilies open and drop
opal nenuphars of tears;
"I am your angle, stranger."

•

Each word a cryptogram
never too much:
in narrow, nah
in ride, rid
in courage, cor and rage
in flax phlox hemp feather, hook
garland pull
a cryptic outline OF something
word shoal staunch blood
food
stood at the edge of well-beloved veins
looking cock-eyed at all their deep,
at all their deep blue writing.

•

Shadow under-word
lopes thru stands of wet papyrus—
microclimates for this ploy
versus that: rain warms here; wind twists there;
one family eats well; another eats each other.
House of the soul is filled with little
things, clay vessels, slipped and glazed
all smallness green leaf offering;

sweaty flower; baby loaf;
small as half an envelope which wads up tight
the poem's patchouli.

In shires, shrines:
you're going to have something
about aging teeth, you're going to have left
something half-chewed
in front of that house,

food on the plate of the moon?
mets sur l'assiette de la lune?

That hard to write
"the mother"? to get that
empty for that full
mouth(e)
her(e)
sh(e) ?

•

A borer, a beetle, an eater,
who will evaluate hunger?

Bowel, bowl, daughter
whosoever siphons undigested words
requires a wide tube .

•

Dabbles the blankie down
din
do throw foo foo
noo
dles the arror
of eros the error of arrows
each little spoil and spill
all during pieces fly apart.
Splatted crumb bits there and there.
Feed 'n' wipe. Woo woo petunia
pie.
Hard
to get the fail of it,
large small specks each naming
yellow surface
green bites
Red elbow kicks an orange tangerine.

The time inside, makes tracks, seems a small
room lurches into the foreground, anger, throwing, some
dash, power swirls up against MErock, pick it UP,
Mommy me NEED
it a push a touch a
putsch pull a flailing kick a spool
for her who is and makes thread
"T"
The she that makes her her
The she that makes me SHE.

•

your

Practicing ferocity on her self

the mother a change.

You become the monster certainly a chain.

foaling

Is this failing the mother?

finding

Top half poison yellow light from above
ivy next half scritchings blue light swells from earth
the garden red bruising a frame

Digging, I sit on a flower.

Counting the steps of bright shadow, the pure pause, paces
clusters of ripe tones making up loud and then wispy forces
across one singular place saying no to itself with meditative
privation, yet unfixed, so spun out of, *or* of, being or
seeing. Which is not, but as it starts, starts a little
rivulet sound and voice, another, it fuses, pivots, a sigh
and sign; desire's design, blue transparencies rich for
thirst listen, to listen is to drink
how can there be
another cry: whom; one of another, who?
who cries? who listens?
hear here the liquid light
swirl and merge with drinking calls.
A sigh, a moan from what is waiting. Sweet sweet
sweet teas
Another cry, a honey voice

Another
one.

All told, a voluminous backdrop:
crevices of the night, 4:32 exactly
silver hush behind, curdling
a shaggy hurt bleat.
Eat that moon's sweet light.
Bird's blood is brown.
Her words, some said, they're just a
"bandaid on a mummy."

Wad reams of rems into mâché
my eyes chewing.
She screams unassimilable
first dreams.

Hold her unutterable

And press another quire of girl bound in, bond in, for pink.
Draw drafts of "milk" these words
are milk the point of this is
drink.

June 1986—January 1987

Notes:

The artwork alluded to in the fifth section is Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnés*. There is a citation, later, from Gertrude Stein.

Clayton Eshleman

Two Poems

The Sprouting Skull

"I let them shit on me
because I'm out of it, because I
try to make false contact when I should block
their false contact. I let them shit on me
because I can take it, I'm so tough
no matter what they do to me
I'll come through, I will assimilate what
they do and be a stronger
corpse for it. I let them shit on me
because I'm sacred, and dead,
because their shit may revitalize
my mound."

Or so the poem sang,
the corpse in the poem,
the self-avenging angel, known as the Covering Cherub,
who grabbed the poet and dragged him into Paradise
there to hack down trees with the Cherub
sharing his "flaming sword."

It is all in the word
Poem, the Cherub explained, all your vitality,
your love for life, your self-esteem,
are mixed in it with the ignorance of others as
to what you actually do, so that when you say
Poem you feel foolish, because the business man across from you
thinks you are a fool, or a pointless dandy,
the word Poem the ultimate Oedipal
object, a large quivering eye the nature of things has
suddenly, always, laid in one's hand,
a kind of egg without a shell,
kin to testicle and oyster,
it is warm with you and your mother
as if inside it there is reunion, as if Poem were
panopticon, an all-seeing everywhere,
a monocle at whose iris sat the poet-guardian
monitoring, and imagining, all the activity in
the raying-out spokes, as if the world were
in corridors to this person—

all this the Cherub said
as we hacked at the stumps of Paradise.
I knew with each swing another mystery would fall,
I knew that poetry now was more a prisoner of this world
than an alternative to it—and this is why
I have drilled holes in my poems, fearing that no termite
would probe them,

why I have scrubbed them with tripe rags, fearing they
would have no odor—

How must it be outside Paradise, I asked the Cherub one day.
Moreorless the same as within, he responded—
with eternity, the infinite, forever, and always
buckled into mortal uniform, each man wears his own glass

enclosure,
 in which he is innocent, guilty, condemned and freed
 all at once,
 ,thus the most substantial word now is nothing
 —and saying this, the Cherub lifted his dress—
 But what is this power of nothing, I inquired.

 The pain life assimilates and records, he answered,
 you feel the tendril tip of it, and say: my soul,
 but what would you say if the pain of Guatemala
 were to be suddenly pumped through your veins?
 You'd explode. The power of nothing is this cosmic soul
 composed of life's unexpressed pain. Artists are valves,
 through which some of this grief, by hiss and whistle,
 is atoned. And these paradisaical trees? They are aswarm
 with bedbugs, napalm, and Trojan gleet. But do not despair.
 We are brothers, you and I,
 laborers in the same plantation. I've left my position
 before Eden's gate—I no longer intercede
 between a poet and his desire, or really,
 between anyone and his lust. Sound good?
 Not so good. What happens when the door between the roaring
 maniac and his victim is unhinged? When that "old
 black magic," known as the Reality Principle,
 is develed? I was that Miltonic man buried in iambs
 who has left his post and joined all of you,
 or, I should say, invited you to join me.
 But do not forget Leverdant's words, 1848,
 where he stated the basic task of the avant-garde:
 "to lay bare with brutal brush all the brutalities,
 all the filth which are at the base of society."
 While your task may seem impossible, you have at least
 got your toe in the socket I have set into these trunks.
 Now, again, take my flaming sword and insert it
 and try to get beyond the mere froth of
 "a fly we have which immediately lays eggs
 when you put it on a wound. They filled our mother's body
 with worms. The soldiers stood guard over her
 night and day so that none of us could free her.
 She struggled a long time and then died under the sun and
 in the cold."

 Or was that story *made up*, the Cherub stared at me.
 I inserted the sword and watched the sparks flee from my wrist.
 How do you get beyond what is impossible to understand?

[30 Nov. 1985]

Impotence Still-Life

The gestures of Paul Blackburn's
 mid-life are a slow recombining still-life.
 At one moment he arranges his balls, dead rabbit feet
 push them off camera, at another time his penis

 What will men have to go through, again & again,
 at the expense of all they hurt
 in themselves, and in others,
 before they start their own feministic, their own
 femasculinic assertion? (not as a lost card
 in a magic show,
 but as new terms for poetry

I here join all those men
 who have not said their fantasy and dream
 because they hear their own flaccid or desperate urge
 at the moment their imaginal attention sparks,
 I offer this as a gentle hymn
 to whatever images of the human their fear encysts
 —in memory of Paul Blackburn who may have stopped being
 a poet
 which meant to die because he could not imagine
 his impotence,
 because he felt that he was only
 the literal descriptive meaning of his failure to be a man.
 If he had gone a bit further, he would have stuck
 these difficult masculine silences in the fore
 of American poetry. And what else do we
 have to be proud of, as American tax paying killers,
 than of our unreleased unwritten
 midrifts, our lower booty, our own generational
 basis as old as Laussel?
 If we could say it,
 as a lost tribe, cohesively forming for the first time,
 wouldn't we lose interest in some
 of our fabulous mayhem?
 Probably not. We would retube
 our navels, or fulfill that old old challenge
 to ejaculate out our throats,
 Fire-spitting men

*

These are not failures of masculinity
 but pits, alcoves of secretive unfolding, male flesh
 doubled back upon itself,
 tender, depressive. Unable to fire forth soldiers
 I cower on the numb testicle-way,
 frightened, ferocious,
 working out my spank scene
 beating my own meat into the turmoil
 of a mutual lake
 —or so this voice now speaks, freed
 of my own semi-worked-through bathroomal vaults
 but they are not a diversion here, this must be as grim
 as the encysted metaphor, to puncture not Lowell's ass
 but that conveyance by which the wild held withheld
 evidence
 steamed literary veneer
 gale of that split
 shoot, always white is it a stripped tendon of the Greek
 Goddess, our handful of come or our failure to even
 pulse?
 but why not the Confessional Poets? Why
 did they not open up the real Pandoravaults, rather than
 gumming merely the ache of a repressed social body?
 Why no diving balls into the lower body
 after Nagasaki? Fucking hindsight, how pure you are,
 the clutch, what makes us live or fail,
 is the present, and to be in the present
 is to be free, in imagination,

I cannot be free in a social sense until
 every other person is free, thus I am damned,
 a prisoner, and thus in conflict to
 the extent that I am aware, but I am not simply
 Sisyphus—I can,
 if I swallow all that I know about me, get loose here,
 and essentially, then, want to live.

But to get loose here, as a man is to unlock
 the lower palace, I don't want to harp on it
 but men have a terrible relationship, if one at all,
 with their semen, shit, urine, erections, soft-offs,
 midnight ooze, with the messengers that cut through
 Catholicism to sting a message home,
 like do you recall your Etruscan birth?

but the foetally-embarrassed heterosexual male cannot stomach
 rolling back upon himself, or if he can, how
 can he say it or write it or paint?
 My proof is the absence in art as direct gift,
 NOT ALLUSION, but a churning of the image
 to respect it as material.

<u>Everything</u> <u>material</u> .

The fear appears to be
 that if we do open all the hatches
 (Christian apocalyptic fantasy)
 all will be over, meaning you
 masturbating or impotent
 one, if you speak, if you lo
 your circumstance, relate it to
 the moon, if you ride your
 own moon, no matter you share it
 with a dog, or with death, or
 with your own puzzled ore,
 —the fear is

that the male parsley
 is only for decoration,
 and not to eat.

But if everything is material, then everything (mentally)
 is edible,

 and the death all over my legs
 the cock husks abounding in Blackburn 1963 to
 66 poems, these are gist, or gravel,

 no discussion of Eden or Paradise that would mean
 anything to you, Rachel, Lyn, Jerry, and me
 can take place until we bulldoze the unsayable
 padlock on the male secret of despair,

 Blackburn's hornpipe is a Panic fall,
 the shuffling of amoebic penes, like berry clusters, toward
 a sun that will never rise,

 is it fair to expect him to give us news of
 what is in a tunnel? Celan evokes it via insects,
 body-clusteredness, dots alive in the bio-stream,
 rash speech, blips charged, the organs of Blackburn
 come alive, they prance in pre-Renaissance anatomy,
 pelvic-hearted,

 I hear them shuffle into this room and anvil
 their desire, I see the balls placed, and the Abraham
 Caravaggio stroke, that the cutting edge of art is finer than

ongoing law

[23 April 1986]

Jackson Mac Low

Pieces o' Six XIII

IT TOOK SO LONG TO GET SAID WHAT THERE WAS TO BE SAID! But as usual here, what there was to be said wasn't known till after it had been said, that is to say, written. In writing whatever turns out to be what was to be written, the writer may not know what is going to be said, much less what is going to be written. Here the writer speaks, or writes, about *two* "things": what is said and what is written, about which one *cannot* write, or say: "said, that is to say, written." And in neither case would one be speaking, or writing, with reference to the audible voice. "Audible," I write, to avoid having to deal with assertions that thought is subaudible speech. Here looms the assumption that a process of thought precedes a process of writing (or of speech)—or possibly that it should! Easy acceptance of the assumption leaves one open to "accusations" of "logocentrism" or "logolatry"—where "logos" means precisely *not* the "word"—the expulsion of breath and vibration of vocal cords modulated by the pharynx, buccal chamber, tongue, lips, and so on, to produce the series of phonemes constituting a free form—and not the written or printed series of characters spelling it out on paper—but the "idea behind" the spoken or written word. Experience bears out none of the dogmas! It's not a matter of necessity but of contingency. The three (or more?) processes do not *necessarily* either precede, succeed, or accompany one another. Any may be absent or may relate in any way to any of the others. The argument that speech is a kind of writing (or that even thought is) seems far-fetched, but not inherently impossible. But literally, then, the movement of chemically mediated and modulated energy through the synapses is—a kind of writing. And if so, who is the writer? Or does the writing precede—or bring into being—the writer? The engrams in the neural tissue *constitute* their writer. But bluntly speaking, where is *agency*? In the neural process? In the unvoiced inner voice (the one "in one's head")? In the subvocalized voice? In its organs? In the audible voice? In the voice apparatus? In the hand? In the writing instrument? Who or what *does* the writing (or the speaking or the thinking)? Is this a companion case to Yeats's chestnut tree and dancer ("O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer, / Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole? / O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?")? If so—as seems likely—one cannot insist on *any* relation(s) of precedence, succession, or simultaneity. But what if it be insisted that one of them has demonstrable, possibly aetiological, precedence (e.g., the French philosopher's "arche-writing")? The gap between the terms, propositions, and canons and methods of proof involved in such a demonstration and the experience of thinkers, writers, and speakers—potentially, that of any self-observant and outwardly observant user of language, any member of the species *Homo linguisticus*, a.k.a. *H. sapiens*—is too great for the demonstration to be relevant to such an informal, quasi-empirical meditation as this. But writing is distinctly unlike either a train of thought or a stream of speech—and reading is similarly unlike self-awareness of a thought process or hearing a vocal utterance. Writing can be interrupted and even changed—revised—before a reader encounters it, and the reader may be—and remain—unaware of the change, while a speaker may not change what has already been said, or even make a correction without the hearer's being aware of the change, unless the latter's attention and memory lapse. As for a "train" of thought—the thinker may change its direction, scope, and parameters a thousand times, aware, unaware, or alternately, fluctuatingly, both, but unlike an interrupted vocal utterance, this can only be known to the thinker, and unlike a piece of writing, the final state need be no more final than earlier ones, unless there be expression—that famous movement from thought to speech or writing downgraded, if not denied, by the antilogatrist. Even if the inward process—whether inaudible or subaudible speech or outwardly unscripted

writing—suffers inevitable changes in being uttered or inscribed—this does not lessen its importance even though it may dull the luster of its primacy. The inner process and the processes of writing and speech are inextricably intertwined—the latter react with and change the former as the former may the latter. We come back to the questions of agency and identity. And this writing circles upon itself once more. It must break out of this circle. That is, the writer—that all but doubted agent—must consciously change the direction of the writing. Does this mean that the accompanying train of thought jumps the rails?—or even that the thinker/writer changes trains? Perhaps so. Perhaps following out the implications of the metaphor—like a "metaphysical" poet—would be more fruitful (what the seed? what the tree? what the flavor of the fruit?) than endlessly circling—or oscillating?—between thought, speech, and writing. The movements of mind—the activities of that often doubted and debunked ghost—seem to involve countless parallel and intersecting tracks—are there then more than one train or even more than one passenger? The doctors (and even many potential patients) seem to think so. Even those of us adept at "thinking something through" experience many interruptions—derailments or transfers of luggage or person, as well as unaccountable changes of direction and even of total location. Another track may become suddenly this one. We may find ourselves moving through an entirely different countryside. Train may change to motorboat, airplane, space ship, bulldozer . . . ; vehicle to passenger or vice versa. Even polyphonic music helps the deception. The various voices usually relate, and even when they do not, as in strictly aleatoric simultaneities, we either feel that they do or experience unassimilable multiplicity. We edge back from accepting such multiplicity as mirror, though the claim be advanced that it is by far the truest. Even when we admit we "contain multitudes," each of us continues to sing a "song of myself." *Finnegans Wake*—that laudable artifact!—has little to do with our inward experience (do I mean in general?—or only in reading that

text?), and even that (as we read the text) moves from letter to letter, word to word, line to line, page to page. When we guiltily dip in it randomly or flip back and forth in it, we know we are violating the explicit linearity of the text. In fact, the faithful linear reading of a finished text more truly mirrors life experience (its ongoingness, its incremental nature). No matter how much we circle in our minds, each moment of seeming re-experience is inescapably different from its counterparts, if only by virtue of its envelope of memory and expectation. Radical disruptions—brain damage or electroconvulsive shock—may modify or poke holes in the envelope, but is any "thinking again *as if* for the first time" really the same as any thinking for the first time? Time's arrow never turns back on itself, no matter how vivid our Proustian moments of recapture. If we think the "same thought" now, with no memory of our having thought it before, our central train of thought—to get back to the railroad—will be subtly different because those on adjacent tracks will differ inevitably from those that accompanied it before. How different writing is! We may expunge all revisions and return to our first draft. No reader (except the writer or another who reads all the drafts in turn, including the return to the first) has an experience from the text different than if there had been no abandoned revisions. Only writing has the capacity to be invisibly revised or restored to a former state—and strictly speaking, only when all drafts except the final one are destroyed. This can be done (at least exteriorly) with speech also, but it requires far more drastic actions—destruction not only of all records, written, photographic, or electronic, but of all hearers of the earlier speech (but there's still the speaker—which is the reason for the "at least exteriorly"). Every kind of swearing or frightening to silence or mind-tampering is uncertainly efficacious. And even murder may out. As for the movements among thought, speech, and writing—they're as multifarious and problematic as ever. The thought that accompanies (and is said to be "expressed in") writing seldom takes place without the writing—or at the least is very different in notable ways, when it takes place without writing, from what it would have been if it had accompanied writing. And after writing the writer may well disappear—inevitably does, since the person who reads aloud or silently or explicates is no longer the author at the moment of writing. And speech weaves among the other two, interrupting and modifying them when it seems most silent or absent.

10 November 1983, 7 December 1983, 24 May 1984, New York

Holly Prado

Ariadne Speaks of Dionysus

Of Life Beyond the Old Story

This morning, the sandalwood incense of grain. When rain joins wheat, I know he is moving there, is the wheat, wet with high bird song, the grain's yellow struck with sun, with water, until it is all his white music.

He has come from years of wanting me.

We are real women here,
rising from generations of fear of women,
lifted out of the lie of subservience.

My eyes are as wide as the mouths of the people outside,
shouting to welcome him. I rush, I hear

The freedom we will have with each other. His white hair is
my cotton robe, soaked with years of waiting; we are wet then
burning I am

The bird

While heads of grain burst as if it is spring, not late summer.
Seeds open to sky and
we kneel.

The maze solved, our animals befriend and surround us. My hands
are sheep's wool, goat's milk. Their language is mine, all
secrets drop

Red, on the sheets, and I swear that the sheep sing.

The promise I make, married, is to neglect nothing, to be
entered by every season, to grow old in praise of this blood,
loosened from mountains, which pushes toward language that has
always been used, forgotten, recaptured in

The animal that I am, the woman who will bear his vines, tangling
and untangling in his rich shadow, made true to myself.

Would you resist a feast? Lungs whole in animal breathing
over and over
the god of virgins young mothers wrinkled bellies.
Mother and father, this quick-hoofed,
clean bed.

Earth! Look at what I become:
white flowers, white breasts, their red nipples the perfect center.

And, in spring, every moment a labor — to bring forth one leaf
is to birth a child. I am the pregnancy. My husband writhes,
groaning, the force behind the inevitable pain. And our wild laughter
when anything green does live: olive trees, grapes. Calves, fish,
new birds. Men are not ignored when children are nursed but are
ripe with milk themselves, fertile men with their poems and art,
their way of talking so that words set next to other words are
cells of the body, fresh

Food. Rain channeled into streams, crops tended, nourishment
given to

Edible knowledge.

You think there must be terror in this, that a story is foolish
if it tells only joy, but I am the string-breaker, the refusal to
perpetuate obedience by fear.

Monsters: the grotesque lines of our own faces in water,
rippling, subsiding.
The hateful, weary of itself.

We do not sacrifice pigs or cows or children.
We do not commit suicide. We do not ask others to kill themselves.

Snarling mouths have nothing left to teach us.

Women, penetrated, enriched, dance from the spine, are the axis
of the world. Everything spins from our thighs, the willingness
to love what can return our own harmony to us, to increase what
is already present. This is peace, friend.
This is the future.

Faces carved above doorways can leave their stone if they wish.
Any art, touched by spirit, comes alive.

As string-breaker, I bring you new weather. My husband's inspiration,
my freedom

Fertilized with images that lift themselves from earth's mud,
good sleep, the silken-eared ability to listen to what moves
through us, always:

Seeds planted in birth-labor, melody and pause, not a mystery
but breath,
natural,
high-pitched
excitement, then a throat filled with
the exchange of hurried youth for telling time by the ocean's moon.

Our animals write our hymns. The women chant; the men add flutes
and horns. Children with their small drums join us. No one
excluded, nothing invisible in this place of

Image: the immediate, many-voiced prophecy. We are not drugged.
We are

This island of bloom and art. Our images spread like coins,
all wealth at once,
tossed onto your floors to be spent.
All stories are made of one thing becoming another,
every moment the same moment and all moments. Not time passing,
but your last night's dream, mine.

These new images:

The snake is the bowl in which you will gather herbs.
The umbrella of Hades is his desire to shelter his wife in
the time she is with him. When she returns from his world,
she is the healed cat.

Worlds mingle, combine themselves, never as distant from marriage
as you think. Grapes robust as cheese. Melons hatching as honeyed
cakes.

Breast, hoof, palm, beak, udder:
After a lifetime of waiting, a lifetime of passion,
given to renewal. Images, not philosophy,
create us.

Mate with what frees you.

My broken sister, the Ariadne of the wrong time, could only fall,
turn her bones in her hands until she rotted into this new island.

To trust heroics is to forget that war does not love us. The
rising life is this white god, this equal. The goats prophesied
many children, and I have given them, in my sister's name: the
health of strong wings, the old story now a bright star, light
within the labyrinth. My sons and daughters shine as the next
chance.

We begin again, every morning.

One daughter's braid has grown as long as her spine.

I am proud of what I see in her that is in me.

Daughter, the bird who has cracked its shell, who dances her
wings along the grass.

"Mother," she calls to me, "he will come today," and she means

Dionysus who is her father and her husband and
her brother, her children.

Spring, coming and coming; whatever season blows in the trees,
the green effort bursts

not just once

but every morning.

In whiteness, I am my daughter,

as she is

the son who remembers our history in his poems.

We worship what we are meant to find.

Cool soil after ecstatic mouthfuls.

Nathaniel Tarn

Persephone West

One

WAITING FOR HER AT THE AIRPORT, first time in a month. Maze of absolute hope, absolute despair. White courtesy telephone, please. From the other end of America. Legions to the white telephones. White heat of courtesy. Amazed, he'll learn his fate at the other end of America. Kneeling at the gate. Her face will burst out of a dream, the dark door of the walkway. Dead wife, returning from the dream, bursting into awakening. Buried ear of maize, shooting. Not even mortal anymore, beyonded. How to hold back tears already shed for months? Can they even greet each other? They greet.

Interminable precincts. From one airline concourse to the other: her thread of darkness. Passing over Rockies, Canyons, Sierras. Until this final shore. Dark skies, Pacific mist. Shades of gold awaiting. Corn wife, back out of hell. To stay one day: the season of one day. Then, back down forever. No springtime evermore. Or shall he hope?

He'll tell by the first look in her eyes, or second, or third. How she greets him. If there is a leaf in her hair from the Eastern Fall. Red hair, red leaf: freed at last from her own blood to shed others'. If she gives him that leaf or smiles. Not set faces from elsewhere. With which she greets her subjects. Not speech, but rhetoric. Coded sentences. First fathom.

He'll surely tell and hope it does not kill him. They must talk. Unfinished business together. Children and unborn things—and things and things and things. Unconsciously drawn to children, not knowing they are the dead. The thousand things, sighing in the pines back home. The whole place howls for her: *ma-dove-e-la* [*Per-se-pho-ne?*] Her plane is late. She is late. She's been late all her life.

By her walk, he'll surely tell. Maimed or not. Fast or dragging. Out of that dark gate. Still retained. Or free to leap into another Spring.

Two

FOREST BURNING. SO IS SEA. Beach the only way. Everything he sees in her absence becomes important, down to the last book of matches in the last restaurant. He has to tell her where to have her last meal, before his execution.

This is precisely. No further West. Anywhere in the world but here he could face it—but it has to be here time brings him in its courses. Eleusis, Greece; Eleusis, Italy, O.K.—Eleusis, California, no way. Due course, due West, falling sun. She comes out of his heart, leaves it behind on a rock—like losing

camera or sunglasses when bathing—the heart rots quickly in the sun. It is all a matter of minute intervals. Microseconds before reprieve, or dissolution. Bitch mouthing salad.

On this spot, she decided. Carved rock she selected as an omen. Rock said "leave home, feed off another." In a photograph, torn into seven pieces, two pieces identify the rock. You can find it, coming from anywhere, going any place.

"Of the sea" name-place. In any known language. As two fish from the sea, she comes and goes. Part of her goes; part of her stays with him. Then the part which stays parts from him and her lips join together elsewhere. He is talking to air. Salad, salad. He talks to air for years.

Her smell in his nostrils as he walks the beach. He cannot forget those ovens. He watches the sea, unprotected by rocks: all peace flies in his face. A wave brings in the final solution. She elects. Beach burns also.

Three

LIFE IS NOT THE MATTER. It's the interval. Corridor for the quick mouse of death. This is where he is today. On a beach, watching the final war. Out of her navel rises a mushroom. Armies enter her spread thighs. There is space for a legion of world-trees on the rim of this beach. His house sighs, collapses.

The air he breathes has been sucked in. No further basis for his lungs. In this condition: continue. Give to her who have nothing to give. Speak to the deaf, point to the blind. But above all, give. Deductible charity. Manifest her. If you think she has buried you under a mountain, become that mountain. These are her ultimate instructions.

His body continues to live, without air. Lungs function at empty. Tears fall into no fountain, fountain into no river, river into no sea. This is not a writing: it cannot be read. Only suffocate or be suffocated. Every moment, her beauty collapses in his lungs like condemned towers. Ships sink at sea. Planes fall out of air. Trains derail and plunge into forest.

New life pushes up elsewhere. Back of the sun. A wall of mica descends over the beach, closing off the East. Westward is all he looks. He feels alien sprouts in his lungs, but cannot name them. She will bear them back East. The daughter will finally bear children. No more mothers. Seeds are her children now, with her agreement. Her hand to her thighs, she has drawn up the contract. Unbeknown to any, she has plucked the pomegranate. Seven seeds a body's jewels. Married to the dead.

Seeds are reborn from a previous life, when everything was normal, everything talked it. You said it. No gathered meaning yet. No semantics. Here is the place exactly where life stopped. First man and woman of the new world look at the last man of the old world and cannot figure out what he is saying. Mica concourse between them. At any moment, all things abandon him again. Again and again, he walks through loss like a ghost. Giant or not, he is a ghost. It is ages since he moved one last stone to music.

Everything he did, he gave her in his mind. Now, he speaks deprivation of meaning. How can you give no-meaning? How can you give beyond the blind? What is it that she does, apart from him? How can you believe she is no longer present? How can anyone believe? On this final shore: what do you believe *on*?

Four

ON THE BEACH, FUNERAL PYRES TALLER THAN CITIES. Bodies heaped up by the million, some six they say. No sexes on the bodies: vultures and jackals ripped them off. Teeth, finger and toe nails, all the

gold. Smell of stale sweat. Forest stumps reek of it. A few ultimate gods douse themselves with perfume. Otherwise could not act, eat, drink, make love. Or abuse themselves, thinking on fallen spouses.

Here she landed, ran towards her new season, arms opening over and over to enfold him as if she had never embraced any being but death. Here he comes up out of his walkway, hair full of snakes, as if he had never loved another. As if he had not come, in that black wheelchair of his, time after time to seduce women. They shine with innocence, the new lord and she. A perilous virginity. Exactly here. Where they had sailed before disaster to talk with whales at sea, aeons ago when seas still breathed.

Practice for departure. He carries the final solution everywhere, in a vest pocket. He has familiarized himself with the procedures. When it doesn't matter if you go or stay, how decide? No one to talk with. No wood, no trees, no forest: no basis for number or election. It is a very small thing in a large universe. Everything continues around him, in another life.

She begins a new life underground, here in the West. Where energy for that life arises, he cannot understand. She cannot understand that he is breathless now. They cannot astound each other anymore. For the first time in the old life, or new, he is indifferent to go or stay. To her, engines still run on the immense machines. To him, all things desist. There is no one of his rank to consult with. The sun shines for no one at all.

He runs full tilt at the beach, opening arms over and over. Until sun reflected in sea takes out his blindness. And abdicates.

Five

THE GOING ON DOWN IS. WOMAN IS NOT. Detaches herself from his lungs, comes forward, out of breath, shines on his breast. Hair drops off, breasts billow resplendent. Woman walks forward, out of her shadow. Time for mothering breasts. Stands apart, still wanted. But where is? *Ma-dove-e-la*. . . ? Ate seeds, sprouted in health-food stores, all over shopping-mall plazas. Meat on slab: lain down like the past. A mortuary. He said she was the woman of his life, but if the life went out, where is the woman? Pillowed on his fair love now ripening.

They are survivors. They are unspoken. A habit once acquired of voicing visible only. She was pumped to this breath through arteries of mercury—now rages free. Free, still wants her, all things considered. Everything transponded, will still accept her, available or not. She is the shadow of a great apple tree standing at the far end of gardens, under paradise. Walks towards her. Says: you are my world nevertheless, I fly to you. Flies at his meat. Summers of discontent dragged underground. Resistant Spring.

They had the opera tickets. The whole season they held in their minds: even without the premieres. Any last performance would do. You die of it, but live to. She does not live inside him anymore—but goes before him like his dog's shadow. Dog licks and snuffles at her crotch. Flies at his flies. He botches overtures. Question of acts, one after one, like rain.

He plays the overture, single-handed. With one single hand. She gets to sing every one of the parts. Her voice abounding from her, as from a tomb, rises on the midnight to a burning sky. This is the latest opera: PERSEPHONE WEST. It will go down in music's history.

He writes the score, music and reviews. It will be said the world had ended on that day: his music's fans will have no further season. Metropolis closes for the duration. He proves the fiery rain.

Six

AT THE VERY TOP OF THE HOUSE, power-seat of the celestials, Father talks to Mother, enlightenment to compassion. They bend their brows toward each other. Volcanic concretions link them knee to knee; threads of common understanding twin their hands together. Thick cloud of incense, only talk in the house. In the underworld, he hangs on her hook, decomposed. Hook threads through the bottom of his jaw, up into his palate. He presses down on it hard to die. Saints are singing together in his heaven.

In mid-house, nothing. Walls, ceilings, floors drained of their brides. Inner space drained of its mistress. Mistress of each room, uncountable shards. Life once led returns in a thousand fragments, time handing to time, space to space. If he

breathes and, at the same time, sits in his entire body, everywhere at once, breathing is stronger.

There is a need, shared perhaps, to pass into silence. It is called birth-silence. It is called death-silence. It is called by many names, all of which bestow it. Flatter it. Praise it. Too much: of this silence nothing but silence can be said. Speak the silence. His silence is greater than her time, becomes a greater time than hers—which is simply slow, sallow, telluric. Or, in the negative, slothful. Because the hardest thing to spring to speech in the whole world is that organ in her which breaks silence. The furrow of her voice, alas, has always been shallow.

In the infinite distance, she acquiesces. She will go for the whole season without coming up again, due as she is. Children to be born without her. Weathers to fly the airways without her. Waves to time themselves without her clocks. Nothing breaks into flower. Fruit lies dormant, curled in on itself, all pulp drained out, seeds long since broadcast. Surgery has taken out her womb, her inner breasts, her vulva. She is nothing but hands, clutching air. Meantime acquiescing.

"Descend into thyself, father of no one! Into thyself, son of no one! Given unto no bride, husband of no one!" No one appears, behind the mask of her face, veil which her new lord has put upon her. It is a face slightly differing in detail from the face she wore above ground. You could call it a mask—except that it does not change her mien entirely as masks are said to do. She is still recognizable.

In darkness, smoke, mist of incense, she recognizes him. Guards him among her thousand hands; pressing him into her hollow breasts; burying his face into her hollow lap; his face down hard among her furrows vanished into the flattened earth. Lost all the plenitude! Among these hills and valleys: not one high place, not one low. This very day, he begins to sell off their tribes, to the highest bidder. In an opium fragrance, drifting over the barren land, tribes melt away, lineages disappear.

Powerless as she is, let her do the work. Let her, somehow, somewhere, gather the tribes again together. Inana, in another time. Inana, in another place. Let the armies of ants run hither and thither like grains of sand scattered to the wind, fruitless themselves, assembling the fruit. The barren queen will mother them. Insert them on the final day—into his heart.

Seven

HER NEW LORD PRESENTS HIMSELF at the gates of their house in his black Mercedes. The new lord has been invited by her in his own absence. He assumes his rights immediately, without first thought. In subsequent photographs, the new lord and she stand together side by side. Sequence. Of course, there is a third—as in all erotica—to take the pictures.

One: she stands, head up, chin in the air, with the radiance of full blossom. He bends his head toward her, looking down in ownership, his arm around her waist. Two: he has picked her up in the bride-crossing-the-threshold position. She is a little stiff, still. It is hard to see but her eyes seem closed. Three: She comes up from this radiant again. The new lord looks thoughtful.

They may have been cracking jokes. Or smoking hemp. But it is rather like happiness. One she may not have known before. The radiance tells. At what moment she became woman, coming forward to this.

He comes upon the pictures unexpectedly, long after they have been taken, long after the new lord and she are gone. Why were they taken? Why were they left behind?

Sun in the West they were facing, light irradiating their bodies. Each time they breathed, think of immortal light. Had they opened their mouths, light would have shone forth from them so strongly, the photographs would have been drowned. The witness would have lost her sight. As when you cry to spy the sun in eclipse. You can go blind that way.

People standing or sitting, people actually making conversation to him. He looks at the people as if they were photographs, frozen in a former time. There is no light in them. Whether they show joy, sorrow, or simply themselves, in whatever action is theirs at the moment, they seem bored. Immense *ennui* shadows them out. Certainly, they do not show forth any radiance; they emit no light. Not between breaths, not in sleep, not even if they were to die of the very death they already carry. Those intervals put out no light. The Clear Light of wisdom is utterly extinguished.

The dead are her children: she will have none of her own. Whatever the evidence of the photographs, her womb is barren. Even if there were to be some miracle; even if the pictures should emanate with little children running all over the porch where they stand. They would be ghosts.

Are you writing he is asked. By some pipsqueak of a girl who thinks that poetry is writing. He says: no, look at my belly, it is completely flat: there are no more poems in there than there are children in her womb. He doubts there will ever be poems again. The photographs have been successful. They have killed him outright. He will not flower or fruit. His time is over.

In the world above ground, they prophecy rebirth. A good ship always returns steady to keel he is told: you will recover. The optimism! Of those who have never known the light! Who say, *bueno*, all you have to do is again love, again fall for the image, again send forth the energy, again emit the light! And, like moths, they will flock to you, the fly, the diamond girls, and they will fructify, right there, in your dead eyes.

The photographs have frozen him in time. His quicksilver runs dry. There went the chariot of mercies, away from the house, running down that hill, away from the house, over and over again, away from the house, on the afternoon of her departure. He with the beard and hair full of snakes laughs with his ownership. At the bottom of the hill, takes her off his knees, moves her over into the passenger seat, hand still hot to her butt. They drive away.

Eight

THE GRAVE HERMETICALLY SEALED, yet light shines from it. Time, why Time, is all I wanted! She took her way among the lights, from juniper to cranberry, from piñon to maple: southwest to northeast, with no revenue. Having eaten of the seeds, secretly down there, and admitted into herself the body of

darkness. Who then shone with a slowness of off-color, as it were slight to herself, slightly to the side of herself, as if with an aura of nadaism. Who thought, as she saw sea again, she luminesced. Nude, seems, not off-pink, as the whites are, but greyish, cloud-colored, dappled, hermit-like: of the tone of her new lord, or of her own tone, since he is but shadow. Nonentity of the Clear Light. Women who fare the less always fuck shadows.

The lights of his many rooms shone down on him at first, greybeard, leary; daughters all given away in marriage; one son left—to take in all the other daughters of humanity. Light shone slightly upon him—and he varied them all the time, the bulbs, that they might come up, hyacinthine and sweet-smelling in the prevailing springtime. Daybreaks occurred at greater length from equinox onwards. There'll be less need of her light as the days dawn longer. Yet of that light he had made himself all these years and intends persistence. From now on: light to others, charity.

That she be taken by her new lord's darkness, over and over again; that her thighs open to his dark voices, his multiplex commands; that she be violated repeatedly by his dumb tongues; that her body melt into the coal ore; that her voice become more and more feeble as the days pass after initiation; that she fade at last into the pictures he had drawn of her, departing this house, this mountain, this hillside, this empyrean, this imperial sky; that she fall, fail, fallaciously commingle with his flesh, the fellation of him, that fallow father of nethering; that she be lost forever under the sable mountains, under the sable valleys, buried, *ensevelie, à la tour abolie*: thus obviated!

That she be the lady of those who do not die, will be all his effort, his salvation. That she break the waters of oblivion in shallowness, in harness. That she forget to register her marriage in any known chart. That she sing forth as the morningstar, preceding the moon, and as the eveningstar, preceding the sun, where the West lies down in the Clear Light. That the butterlamps kindle in her eyes like anemones in springtime. That lovers kindle in her eyes like buttercups in springtime. That she be like a loaded gun in the center of his forehead: and now you have asked, and now you have been told.

Rain seeps into sand. Snow seeps into sand. Sandlight seeps into her eyes. Darkness becomes her. She wears darkness like to a new hat. She never knew what she had done, taking her way thus into Fall, on the other side of darkness, where blood is born again in leaves, where the Clear Light is born, except that she took her darkness with her to smother his light. She spat fire at his light, now extinguished. But he forced children upon her, those of darkness, by his sacrifice: for a while, there, it looked as if he'd conquered space!

He had come down and made himself flesh of her flesh and saved her. Saved, without knowing it, she went forth from him like a cloud of darkness, scattering seeds of light. She wrote page after page in her darkness, generating daughters of light. Barren all the daughters: gnomes dancing in starlight. Out of the shadow of his bed she crept. Enlargement of the dawn. Gorge on the dawn in her throat, down into thorax, roots of breasts, mamillaries, thighs, lips, small, hard, flame. Shrieks of apparent delight. Her shit: the only syllables of light. The whole world sold for a song, paid out distinctly, presently, for the most part away. Pale female figure with the other two in the lowest circle: distaff treachery. They say it needed doing.

Nine

EVERYTHING IS ACCEPTABLE BUT DEAD DEATH. Live death is O.K. in any of its forms. Until now, neither of them had ever known anything but live death. It comes in the form of children, running all over the known map. The unknown map is dead death. She continues on her path, bolting away forever,

seduced by children. Long ago, she preferred her own songs to having children. Now, she takes to the children of others. Specifically, a head full of snakes she gives head to. She will inherit a basket of snakes.

For years, she had been the girl. Face growing older, wrinkles deepening, chin doubling, muscles slackening all over: but still the girl. How could one know such things? Because she had killed her father, twice over, in the depths of the ocean sea. It is the worst wars kill fathers the first time. When she had killed him the second time, he died backwards with the face of a woman. Down the face of the woman had drowned backwards; down all her hopes had sunk *à reculons*; down she never saw her womanhood again.

On to kill fathers over and over in every breathing thing. On to swoon under the hill. On to spend the whole of life dying. How could one know such things? She grew the perfect mask of woman, over the girl's face. She had not been awoken. Was the time unripe? Was she? Was he? Impossible to know. Time came, her own womb shrivelled: she chose not have children. Time came: corn-mother died. Time came: her own sick womb ripped out. Had never undressed from the outside. Now to undress from the inside. Imagine the eros of the inner lining! At that point, ate the seven seeds of death. Would a woman ever admit that? Carried the death about her, say seven months. Then exploded. You have seen seed-cases explode. Exploded across the landscape killing everything together.

Here he comes up out of his walkway, hair full of snakes, as if he had never loved another. And has loved so many, has undone so many. Here she gives head to her new lord, swallowing his snakes. Here the snakes replace her womb with a ball of fire and here she fancies she has turned to woman. Here she says she is a volcano, sitting on a cosmos of fire and ice. Is it

fire? Is it ice? Who can tell? She fancies fire. We know snake blood runs cold. We know the snake is ice. And, if he be wisdom, wisdom is ice. Gone, gone, gone utterly beyond, to the shores of the icecap. Deathless as neither fire nor ice. A merely human blood runs out of it. Tepid at best.

Even if there were to be some miracle. Even if the pictures should suddenly emanate with little children running all over the porch where they stand, they would be ghosts. Ghosts of her own children, hers and his. He who had become the semblance of the lord of death, wearing the first face of her father: he may yet turn into life. He who had become the likeness of the lord of life, with the snakes in his hair whirling like dancing children, he may yet be unable to put out green leaves. Who can tell? How can one know such things? "Regrets" she will surely experience. Surely mail out.

He had always been the elder brother, thunderer, father and creator of all known worlds. When suddenly his brother death had proved himself older. Had taken his woman, up from his old black wheelchair, out of the canyons. Left him no longer the lord of worlds. But a small wee thing, a babe in arms, true child of the circumstance. This is the one and only child in the picture can start you up again, can get you going, can do you any good.

All of us stages on the way to one another but never one another entirely. From which comes all suffering—and all is suffering; from which comes all death—and all is death; from which comes only—a small part of life. The rest of life is elsewhere and we have never known it. It is in our child's face—but have never seen it. The face of the child lies behind our own. Our face lies to the child.

Aspens out West had turned dark. Eleusis, California: in her dark groves she prospers: still life of death with mother. Mother undone for years. Sick aspens on the hillside: no further gold. Snows. Snows, another year. And another year. How long life grows. The small child's hand reaches out to the snows, touches black trees, glows them back into gold.

Michael Gizzi

4 poems from Continental Harmony

from *Continental Harmony*

1. Behold, planter a simple earth
Atlantic heart with infinite pleasure
Trace benevolence to human race
Light
the asylum of man admire
And what with a powerful way of expressing
Speech the natural trance in a man
Abundance breathing air of place
Tree who hath studying stars been to Paris
over great seas pitcht upon thee correspondent
A woman
every syllable in sober earnest intention
seizes us all
& methinks embryos hold ruins of towers
love talk of our settlements
huge forests peaceful and benign
Spring forward anticipated fields
Opulent farmers singing and praying
Seagown orchard peaches and milk
and whether thou canst dish them up

3. Now comes the eye landward to woods

The virtuous comforted by sympathy & attention

Under shady tree praising straightness

promiscuous breed, variegated pleasing

As useless plants wanting vegetative showers
invisible navigable silken bands

Embrace the broad lap
Conceive in woods men like plants

Space will polish some into rejoicing
climate become in time as language

A river over liquid

5. Rife day tiny caw

our summer fields our evening meadow day lifting nude yawl.

Bull leaves honor mill onion end
commodity leafing.

Shady beaten love at bay.

Saddle dune or pace off Lent in

Risque Yuma.

Flower'd lair spurr'd nectar pulse

included then stunn'd silly, buzzy.

Fen muzzle on lay maiden drips trout

nude ink.

In blazes lichen tannin belly warren

by alder. Alto eagles waver

7. Near Senegal

— for Barbico

*In the regions of the Senegal and the Niger
it is believed that the Sky-god and the
Earth-goddess are the parents of the principal
spirits who dispense life and death, weal
and woe, among mankind. — Apollodorus*

thought she was clinging there
as if it were
soft warm dusk had her
and this above
warm the river sparkled
him she was African
envy the woman with desire because he was
naturally a breast was words
but the last
how do you get thee there he shook his head
here heading north

*

door he saw stars for them
through a woman
say that she was
a curse a little later said of course
that only think it
said it's what you do thoughtfully
and yet a word have you ever
outside with a woman before but had a shawl
understand he fell silent

of course the girl lied again
it had been beautiful don't you think
suppose he went on the door
or whether she had

*

said it doesn't matter nodded
yes she said her head
hesitantly yes
one I was forced to
him she said that
good do you remember
no not so far
anyhow did he a lot or did he remember
it seems sure and I remember
dressed otherwise I can't
said the girl bent forward certainly she said
no I think it was for him she fell
would you for me

*

anyhow he had him
self how much do you
listen he said I think
but that other man
his voice had grown inaudible
in what way were we getting it

after all that evening what had she
something she just said
quick she was appealingly as if
swimming and she met him her as long as you
while looking at the man
yet not so far as that
we can locate him as dusk
fell over

*

floral but so the picture was
paper it was a man
his head as if himself
the man him obscuring his head
kind the picture was summer and more than that
hot on the grass say
and they could grace when he focused
silence a wasp could be
sure but even so imagine
and then you tipped
this way you'd never said and he sang
annoy me about
every time I remember him mermaid
he wondered
full as he also had dead calm
with foliage

Alain Delahaye

The immensity of the firmament

translation: Anthony Barnett

*"there was adoration of everything; summer stirred in the depths of the text,
plenitude gave itself in the soul, an immense
and radiant calm arose in the choir of eyes,
with each word presence opened wide,
there was a fire without fire, the source and the ocean
held the same language of illuminated silence,*

unbelievably alone, and I listened to this music"

1
this was light in the flight of syllables,
perennity of voice in all things,
the tree of apparition came everywhere.

*

if I move on past the myth,
what inversion was this song I sing,
the other house, where I never enter?
hand and colour on every line,
the path of the vertical soul.

*

or a source open against its course:
true landscape is at our backs,
watching us, shrouding us.

2
world and word would lead to dark
were I not thrice born
of ingot breath repeating death.

*

stars in a sky of intonation,
the bit to move on, or in
accompanying the world in loving silence.

*

homeless the simple, wandering
flower of fact unfolding in the transition,
at night, and I gazed at signs and moments;
they are turned towards the invisible,
they steady, they name.

3
as breath is always incomplete,
protesting, forgetting

in a flash the exterior and centre,
the child was already counting the detours
to the constellation of blood's void.

*

picturing a lost garden
pacing its distraction,
free from the happy tree.

*

door to the heart of darkness,
the immensity of the firmament opens
or simply the space of a voice.

4

in looking this way you come to enter
in the name of your soul the clear water of being,
there to be bathed in the glory of the book
as the earth turns the hand into earth.

*

a step, in the breadth of the one,
and the word would unfurl
illuminating two faces to the sky.

*

the gates rush the memory,
petty plenitude in your timing of a score:
this interval at the lips, and abode
"you have to here".

5

the embrace or the break speak the same voyage,
the opaqueness of the proportions opens
the design out of a necessity:
multiple house, insignificant among
those remaining.

*

its body a length between light and voice
completely come, unclear in the air.

*

thus the announcement, the invocation, the buried splendour:
you walk under the vault of birth,
traces separate the waters
still, and fade into them.

6

I listen leaning on the preparations, I see
to the far reaches of the universe.

*

unceasing the air rises to a steadier presence
with the voice rapping and renewing
to infinity this day, this night territory.

*

some colour has strayed
on to white's intractable emptiness;
I thank this precarious colour, hardly there,
like breathing on a space,
I thank the hand
passed over and above the world.

L'immensité du firmament published in *Argile* XIX-XX, Maeght Éditeur, Paris 1979

Joseph Simas

Some Notes on Translating (And) The Poetry of Anne-Marie Albiach

for L.

An Initial Approach

A STONE NEXT TO ANOTHER STONE, and then another. "Inhuman, a word in the passage from one word to the next, like the wind." [1] Between lives, that potential action.

An accident once meant "anything that happens." Now, event does. But it is this sense of accident that describes our tenacious belief in the unforeseen quality of all events, that anything in fact *might* happen, despite the odds, especially in romantic visions. We tend to be even more tenacious when the subject is fateful. Accident also has a desperate fatality written into it, which event today does not. One sense of "anything that happens" is that it all can, and, probably, will. To use "accident" meant to include all events. But this meaning of the word is nearly lost.

Now often a collision between bodies, an accident is usually considered a "fateless" event that happens unexpectedly, without forewarning.

We change worlds here.

In order to think about translation as it relates to both action between texts and to action between a reader and a text it should be interesting to think of accident historically, which is to say to combine several of its time-specific definitions into one. This is not a lexical game, but rather the search for a vocabulary that will properly constitute my thoughts as I go along. I have chosen this word because it seems to have a peculiar and yet resonant connection with *desire*. All this is to say that the "object" of desire is not, properly speaking, an object but rather the event or action that takes place between the desiring subject, a person, and the object, a thing, person or idea in the world. By calling what happens in this between place "accident" we suspend the notion of causality, which is to say we suspend our tendency to believe that we attain or procure an object of desire *because* we desire. Accident also gives *exclusions*—which are the necessary debris surrounding any object of desire—an unwilling, and less controllable, quality.

Trying to construct a vocabulary is seeing a word in relation to the world *first*. This is not always possible. It seems like everything we perceive is related to the world first, except perhaps when we perceive a word. Objects, as part of the world, are in relation to that world, and as such have a kind of "belonging" to it—whereas, with words, it is rarely the words themselves. The "belonging" of words is between the words, in their meaning and syntax, "in the passage from one word to the next," which is dependent upon a great number of contextual elements. Naturally, I try to relate a word to the world—which is to say the world of "things," "subjects" or "bodies"—and end up at a distance, unless, as if by accident, another word comes along to lessen the gap.

The word is concrete in that as all things it has a body and refers, it has physically definable contours; but at some point it is reference that becomes the object itself, its mirror image, and as such becomes the verb from the physical world to language. This "verb" or "passage," the area or time between objects and their perceivers, is "inhuman" in this sense that both object and perceiver *disappear* into the word. This is where I would like to introduce experience. Though experience sidesteps the problem of reference, I want to make the claim that language—in all its elements—must refer. Which is simply another way of saying that a word also has life in the world, outside itself; it refers to our disappearance, so to speak; it *is*.

If, at some point, experience is dependent upon language for its survival, so language calls upon experience in order to situate itself in the world. But experience is something we "undergo," and is contingent upon things, people, and events outside of our immediate control. In most circumstances, language is the primary mediating ground between what happens *to* us and to the world in which objects and events take place.

Direct perceptual experience—the sensory perception of objects—is, on the whole, taken for granted. In other words, we need only the slightest of contexts to accept the figure of a (physical) object in language. Despite the fact that the word used to refer to an object will evoke as many particular examples of the object as there are people who use the word, we tend to accept their existence in language—as substantive—without question.

But when faced with the existence of psycho-physical states—so-called abstract nouns—in language, we often demand a contextualization of a different nature than that which we demand of names of objects. Yet, except in perhaps the most extreme of cases, this is not because we deny the existence of such states; is it, then, because we have a more difficult time of evoking their "beings" than the beings of objects with physically quantifiable characteristics? The questioning I am leading to is this: once manifested in language in the form of a word, what is the difference between a psycho-physical state—pain, depression, happiness, and so on—and a physical object—spoon, tree, chair—? Why do we question the existence of one and not the other? Or, why do we demand that the former be contextualized while the latter is, in most cases, accepted when and where it happens to be?

One answer is that we have come to distrust the self-centeredness implied in the naming of psycho-physical states, whereas objects seem to happily avoid the connection to a self from the start. But I do not think the naming of objects is that innocent. In many cases, one could say that the naming of objects is in fact the very description of a kind of self: Rolls Royce, Mink Coat, Swiss Bank Account. In other words, naming—in both cases—can be thought of as implying the constitution of a given world. *This is the case.*

The difference between these "states" and "objects" might reside in the respective demands they make on our attention. In any event, their value in relation to the question of a self is determined not by their inherent natures—however different they may be from one another—but rather by the language context in which they are placed.

The Poetry of Anne-Marie Albiach

"Is it possible to bring apartness itself before our mind's eye, to contemplate it as the poem's site? . . . Who is the departed one? What is the landscape of his paths?"[2]

The approach above is, in part, an attempt to confront the difficulties of determining the "poem's site" as well as to introduce some terms that seem to constitute the "landscape" of the poetry of Anne-Marie Albiach. If the language in this essay seems to be concerned with "philosophical questions"—and particularly ontological ones—it is because the terms are present in the poetry, and because I believe Albiach's usage of these terms "lines" them up for (poetic) questioning. I have had to go in search of them, and have come to various sources, including some sources which are philosophical. Nevertheless, it is the matter of the poetry that most concerns me, and is what I would like to keep closest at hand.

"Accident" and "desire" are, I believe, vehicles of the acute apartness of her work, that sense of existence in which words and their meanings are the primary constituents of relations. I insist upon the usage of these terms and the questioning of the difference between physical objects and psycho-physical states in language in order to posit a kind of concreteness in her work that happens resolutely between words on the page. Not only are the often "abstract" terms (their meanings) in this poetry more concrete—in and of themselves—than we might admit, but they are rendered even more concrete by the roles they perform in the discourse or syntax of the work. The physical qualities of the word—typography—and the page—white space—are, as well, used in such a way that they clearly determine relationships in the discourse—the FICTION—of the poem.

The relations of the meaning of single words in the poem's discourse are established not only by their definitions, but also by their physical characteristics on the page. For example, the word "chorus" in "H II" *linear* appears in no less than five different forms. Each variation on the individual letters of the word concretizes its ever-changing position and meaning in the discourse of the poem.

Words denoting psycho-physical states also undergo this "objectification." In fact, there is an astounding exclusion of words referring to material objects in her work, as if these objects would bring *too much* attention to the word itself, and thereby distract the reader from the syntax she is in. A language of (human) conditions is thus brought to the page as analogous to the language of things which exist in the world. The conjunction and interdependence of these "two languages" establishes the poem's site or discourse.

"Wherein resides the relatedness of two languages, apart from historical considerations? Certainly not in the similarity between works of literature or words. Rather, all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole—an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language."[3]

Translation may be seen as a paradigm for thought or the writing activity. As, in Benjamin's words, two languages "strive to exclude one another," one might think of writing (or thought) as striving to exclude life in the sense that it is the struggle between the two that determines both. I bring this up not only because I translate Albiach's poetry from one language to another, but also because I think the language of her poetry generates itself in a clear, though problematic, relation to the language of the world. In her words, "One should say that the FICTION . . . takes on the value of the Real."[4] The fiction and the real act analogous to the way two languages act in translation: each assumes the other's exclusion not in order to *replace* but rather to fill in a deficiency they both share in relation to the world or text.

For Benjamin, meaning "remains hidden in the languages" until a "pure language emerges from the harmony of all the various modes of intention." Poetry is one of these modes and someone must release language from the grips of too many intentions at once. As "writing is the statement of eventfulness,"[5] it is the construct of a discourse—syntax and fiction—that sets up the potential for analogous action, the relationships between once removed events. Its purity derives from the poet's ability to envision a kind of third site; it becomes the statement of an Intention that is neither "human" nor "thing" but *of* each and thus intimately related in its separateness or "apartness."

But what is perhaps most important here is that the poetry becomes the site—statement of eventfulness—of *a life*. It is here that the reality of painful states—angst, paralysis, alienation—can be played out in positive, and at times celebratory, manners. The apartness thus becomes one of the pure sites of meaning, a necessary separation from the human body in this case. Exclusion is a process of the necessary exchange of values between fiction and the real, language and the world. As Benjamin's separate modes of language "*supplement*" each other in order to attain pure language, so Albiach's poetry is dependent upon the mutual exchanges of value (in language) between fiction and the real.

Desire

"The notion of *desire* is primordial. Through the most obscure of situations, writing endures in the ambiguous pleasure of *desire*. Exists, within the I, the problematic of Him (or Her) is posed. Their relations, their alchemy, reside in the withdrawals of meaning. The statement is not conceived as statute, but as articulation. Which should permit a multiform and ever various writing/reading.

'the body (of writing) carries the white (breath and opacity) of the *Fiction* dividing it.' "[6]

It is in this negative space—the withdrawals of meaning—that the human body, willful and desiring, comes to meet the body of the text, an articulation, in a kind of never conclusive fiction, an unrealizable vanishing point. The result of this encounter, in the strongest of works, becomes the product of the activity writing and the body desiring: the text. Prior to the text each is a separate form of the division between language and world. The fiction, then, as well as being the division itself, is also the stage on which the two bodies meet.

In this sense the text becomes "theater." The analogy between writing and (live) theater allows the physical dimensions of words and their meanings to enter into play on the page, which is to say space and duration. The theater's acute humanness also helps us think of the reader—who is also the writer—as actively present in the various constructions of meaning in the poem. The writing becomes that place in which "real" life and fiction are no longer distinguishable, playing a constant exchange of values, "manifested as moments that would be connected by the order of a corporeal memory: that of the 'author-reader'." [7] The writer becomes not only as author-reader but also as actor-spectator. Word, too, becomes that which is read, and that which reads, taking full place in the world it has engendered. Person and text speak the same language.

Identity furnishes the characters that will inhabit the space of this theater. This is not a simplistic search for the roots of an individual identity—who am I?—, but rather a staging of one's desires and fears, body and thought.

"[Identity] is questioned by way of the other. It is a position in mirror/in memory, which is to say that the identity which becomes a question is posed because, to accept the characters, one must still ask oneself if one can admit the I." [8]

Thus one of the initial aspects of identity is the body of the self, though in Albiach's work it is a body constantly divided, multiple, forever double: social. Grammar becomes one of the instruments allowing the body to appear and identify the self in the Fiction which is the poem. Pronouns, rather than metaphorically substituting an other for one's self, are language's examples of its own body (bodies) and thereby establish a context for events (accidents) whose shape and nature are recited in the form of verbs and prepositions (movement and position).

" she would have lived the double"

"

of the image

as in"

inlets —

"identical"

And later in the same poem:

"she feigns authenticity" [9]

The characters—grammar's "persons"—take on various identities, again, not in order to become some referable and namable subject as such, but rather to articulate and investigate the differences and similarities between subject and object, subject and event, the body of meaning. Hence the articulation of meaning becomes the time in which identity reveals itself in its various forms. Duration becomes another of its aspects and posits a subject, among other things, as something or someone that *becomes* in relation to how its various and multiple aspects act and appear in time and space.

The writing also takes on body through Albiach's use of typography, as mentioned above, a kind of carving of the word into the white space of the page. Lower point capitals, capitals, italicized letters, italics, quotation marks, etc., gives words and their movement on the page a sculptural quality, drawing the reader's attention to the physicality of the word and movement as well as to their meanings. Thus Albiach considers the abundant white space in her work as "syntactical," part of the very body of the text and significant not only as breath but also as literal space, absence, duration, and distance. Here, again, appearance—the object world—is one of the writing's constant preoccupations, as in "DiScourse," "Etat," "*desire*," Epic.

Not all poetries (should) make us consider the connection between its words and the author's life "behind" them. But there are those poetries in which the relationship between the experiential life and the written life is so intimate that to separate them is to limit our understanding of them both. "Given that writing is referential, I don't think it can entirely take the place of life. Life is its reference. . . . There are not only books as references, but also people, identities, bodies. . . ." [10] The notion of reference here is a measure of the intimacy shared between the poet's life and her words. In other words, this intimacy is referential as opposed to causal, which latter form would be an attempt to explain and mimic a life in words.

The biography of this (any?) life and work should, then, I think, be an attempt to locate the terms shared by each separate mode not in order to *explain* either one or the other, but rather to determine the terms of their interdependency and how this in turn creates the third site—Benjamin's purity, Heidegger's apartness—which may be thought of as the life/work combined. For example, solitude becomes a reference not only because of the fact that Anne-Marie Albiach *lives in solitude* but also because she perceives of the poem as self-engendering, a discourse tending toward excess which is necessarily apart from our ordinary uses of language (e.g., it is not idiomatic speech).

an order might establish itself
 in confinement
 the return of a multiform identity
 occlusion: devouring and overtures
 "noises"
 : the eclipse
 of the voices
 THEIR INTERROGATION PERSISTS
 [11]

Instead of thinking of solitude, then, as merely a common characteristic of two separate forms (the life and the work), we can look toward what this means to the site of the poem. *In the poetry*, solitude is a kind of questioning, an "interrogation," which applies not only to the poet herself but also to the characters which appear in her poems, not only to her life but also to the life of an other, not only to the human condition but also to the condition of language.

What did they know,
 and her, Expelled,
 feigning through the
 movement of her lips
 the common tongues
 of Babel

[12]

In a similar manner, "paralysis" in her poetry was an experienced event in her life, a loss of control over her body. Its recurrence in the work and the memory and fear of it in the life becomes, in the poetry, a way of testing the notion of control over body, putting the body into motion on the page, creating a literal geometry that situates not only the idea of body, but also the body of the word, the sentence, the page.

a precision

reiterated in the disproportion of a knowledge

THE OPENING

accentuates the detours

"pierced and motionless bodies:"

the Difference

institutes a recurrence: abstracted

the involute

pathway

a line

without detour

Abusive

for a distortion that gives no respite: *the voice just this side of*

theme

a moment

brought back into play: the look accentuates such

deviation in Difference: a clearing given over to

free reins

DETERMINATION: an Other defines the body's limits

[13]

So that poetry becomes the ground where both language and life are abstracted from their habitual contexts. Whether this (new) site is taken as the real or as fiction, the words denote concrete relations, things and events. By virtue of this there is no need to search for an author *behind* the work, but rather *in* the work, as both author and text delineate a separate, and yet shared, area.

Setting the stage ETAT[14]

Referring to Albiach's *Etat*, Keith Waldrop writes: "The poem—it is a single piece—does not progress by images . . . or by plot. . . . The argument, if it were given, might include the following propositions: 1) everyday language is dependent on logic, but 2) in fiction, there is no necessity that any particular word should follow any other, so 3) it is possible at least to imagine a free choice, a syntax generated by desire. *Etat* is the 'epic' . . . of this imagination." [15]

"A syntax generated by desire . . ." *Etat* lays down the foundations of this grammar. Whereas desire is often restricted in meaning in the form of wanting something, here desire becomes a mode of ontological investigation that engages all forms of human knowledge, including the literary, sexual, mathematic, theatrical and so on. "*Practical endeavour: for we must know*" [16] turns desire into an impulse to action (recalling Zukofsky's "A"-9), the emphatic *must* transforming particular desires, wanting, into points on a trajectory leading toward what the actual (poetic) work can enact for us in terms of knowledge and being. It is important to note that this trajectory is not unidirectional, but rather extends through all times, moving toward

the past as well as toward the future. Memory thus becomes a literal subject, and functions as a kind of (neutral) third-person in this grammar. It is not personified, but becomes subject, able to set both things and events into motion.

"the unspecifiable / the inexhaustible novel / / of a situation"[17] is perhaps the statement of need for fiction enacted, rather than described.

body caught
by knowing
the exposures
elucidation

to this envelopment
the forms
recover from their
most circumspect slowness
become heavy
attention is crude
(managed to stay awake somewhere the studious
odium
of doing)
pretence

our censure
for the white nakedness of the letter
[18]

Again, Desire is not a wanting to possess but a wanting to enact. In our efforts to possess we fall into a kind of ontological stasis, an inertia that prevents people, things, and events from generating meaning, from "taking place."

In the habitual directionality of our thought, causality is retrospective. In other words, we see a thing, experience an event, and look for a cause behind it. Desire, in the form of a "practical endeavour," as enacted in language, however concerned with what may be wanting, also gives us the choice of "engendering," of acting upon the impulse to know *in reference to but not dependent upon* an object, situation, person, or event. The object, then, is as if it were its own cause, with implications that do not necessarily lead anywhere but to itself. This self-reference could become a kind of ghetto if the notion of causality were allowed to enclose it, but an object is not the cause of itself, rather it is its own measure, its own witness, forever double by virtue of its analogical existence in two languages at once.

III

*Commentary on the preceding event: on the act
of begetting the word. Rejection of causality.*

"

*has only the market value pure and simple
without reflex
for none whether terrestrial or
of silence which is number of
the word, but image. . . ."*

The last of these circles
and the spheres of degrees
of fiction the beginning
that it contains
For cloisonné it's not
whilst
active aspirations

never identical or repetitive
descent
ascent towards
which is contained but cannot name

Its Attributes:

he in past tense

he opens the site
inscribes
While still a stranger

let him go over
the relations and their endings
 only
analogies might approach
two terms in linear, surfaces
and cubes, spheres and movement
repeats twice-over

the reciprocal shaping up
"just now becomes
a character in
the Epic"
The dimensions are its Attributes
Once upon a time refers to the passage
 of place
in desire
a geometrical development

in the desire for passage

FICTION

not turned mental divulges in
the image only the inadequate image of gesture

[19]

An Initial Conclusion

I have used translation as a vehicle for this reading because I think part of this poetry's meaning resides in that separation—"deported"—which is made so material in the act of translating.

"The activity of translation is *an activity of assimilation*. For me Zukofsky can come through and act in a text not as a referent but as *the text itself*, albeit deported. My relation to Zukofsky is a relation in reference to the *economy of body* and of *being* according to what we call the social . . . he is one with the text's discourse." [20]

A "syntax generated by desire" would then be one in which the space between words is questioned, hence the instances of withdrawal, opening, white space, overture, song, violence and biography. The choices in any order necessarily exclude others, which exclusion also becomes a part of the work's site.

"Inhuman," *and in* the outside of language. In the conjunction of any two languages—French and English, Fiction and the Real, Mind and Body, Author and Text—there arises a separateness which nevertheless includes both, "as pure as the wind."

she was well aware
"the transvergent line"

there where the cesura is
visible

in ennead form

myth at its most abrupt
such optic
figure
 and metaphor
 distant
they reduce
 speech
 to the Chorus
neither astonished by their actions
in space nor by their
 division

[21]

I would like to thank Robert Kocik for his criticism, questioning, and sympathy in the course of reading several drafts of this essay. Please note that the solid lines in the printed passages of poetry indicate page breaks. White space in the poem has been reduced, though kept proportional to that in the originals.

1. The actual quote was one I thought I'd heard at a reading by André du Bouchet. In fact, I did not hear it very well at all. It comes from Du Bouchet's "Notes sur la traduction," and reads, in my translation: "The freshness of the inhuman, like the wind. From one word to another, like the wind."

2. from Martin Heidegger, "Language in the Poem," in *On the Way to Language*, Harper & Row, New York, 1971.

3. from Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 1969.

4.-8. from "An interview with Anne-Marie Albiach," in ACTS 4, edited by David Levi Strauss, San Francisco, 1985.

9. from Anne-Marie Albiach, "H II" *linear*, in *Mezza voce*, Flammarion, Paris, 1984. English translation by Anthony Barnett and Joseph Simas in TEMBLOR 5, edited by Leland Hickman, North Hollywood, California, 1987.

10. from ACTS 4.

11. from "Theater," *Mezza voce*.

12. from Anne-Marie Albiach, "L'objet anarchique," in *Figure Vocative*, Lettres de Casse, France, 1985. English translation by Anthony Barnett, "An Object of Anarchy," in *Vocative Figure*, translated by Anthony Barnett & Joseph Simas, Moving Letters Press, Paris, 1986.

13. from "Winter Voyage," in *Mezza voce*. English translation by Joseph Simas.

14. from Anne-Marie Albiach, *Etat*, Mercure de France, Paris, 1971. English translation by Keith Waldrop, forthcoming Awede, Vermont, 1987.

15. Quoted by Paul Auster, "Introduction," in *The Random House Book of 20th Century French Poetry*, editor Paul Auster, Random House, New York, 1984.

16.-19. from *Etat*. English translation by Keith Waldrop.

20. from "Entretien avec Anne-Marie Albiach," *Action Poétique* 74, edited by Henri Deluy, Paris, 1978.

21. from "H II" *linear*.

Anne-Marie Albiach

“H II” linear

translation: Anthony Barnett & Joseph Simas

she was well aware

"the transvergent line"

there where the cesura is
visible

in ennead form

myth at its most abrupt

such optic
figure

and metaphor

distant
they reduce
speech
to the Chorus
neither astonished by their actions
in space nor by their
division

II

retract.

the practice of pronominal
 fiction

or
represent

horizons
"cataclysms"

III

the Chorus: to the uprooting
 the site of

Reduction:

she believed in the memory
"them" of perfectible memory

(facilities
common
to the organs)

and the body (one)
nutritional genetics

at the horizon : the uprooting

IV

"

no to manage
 "the story"
 tells
 longer contradicted"

horizon:

judgement of sight

inverse:

" she would have lived the double"

"

of the image
as in"

inlets —
"identical"

V

Since the evasiveness at the start
they came only

took themselves for a name
other

repeating

to tell (thus)

the elaboration in
they only want it more
(this *white*)

crowd the Chorus passage *here*

the shrewdness of anterior steps
simplifies the body to the body
working so hard *on its appearance*

VI

Danger *before*

and their approach H II *(linear)*

VII

of gender

FIVE. the Chorus

she told

"the development of myth
where only two reconcilable

terms

matter"

(the cesura)

"she feigns authenticity"

five the treason of volumes

for not to suffice

to her own blossoming

"All verbs
and attraction"

in alluding to the body

the abrupt form

they proclaimed

implicitly deduced
in its formulation

as well as
explained by the modeling
"because of whose eye"

actions

VIII

"Curtains"
the uprooting

from the horizon on her right:

cube

"grotesque experienced in the frame"
memory :

(projectible)

There is this logic
and body

EXERCISE:

(the figures of the body)
imperative

the Adhesion "Chorus"

IX

directions: play at being

(withdrawal
towards the Court)

of the uprooting

one dimension they could
not refuse

withdraw: necessary

*"since he has no
role"*

His role:
their ecstasy
(here they feign ecstasy)

(because they said so)

Chorus

of

Answer: they left again (apparently)

X

the chorus says the crowd, compatibility itself

XI

repetitive

So That you know
(Post anterior)

Crowd:
this manner
(in a foreign language)

repetition:
object she'll tell

Address

so as not (to tell)

"THE CHAINS OF CONCILABLE PERFECTION"

Chorus: FIVE

a neuter propositions
figure

Chorus:

of a system of
memory
chorus gratuitousness

like a reference

refraction on the immediate

where displacing us

Chorus: they are still unaware of the scars
 which disfigured him
 (agreement)

Answer: this sequence
 with its risk of *eternity*
 resembles.
 (cube)

XII

Answer: he to he
 and I repeat I

Instructions:
 which pronoun

in the future

XIII

This vulnerability of a manner of being

*"... in the past anterior it was a question
of his attributes;
once named in the past
(anterior)
"you want to eat me"

"where I saw her at our knees"*

< a line

That more or less I recognized on his brow

the dedication

XIV

ANTITHESIS

XV

Acidities
this point not yet black
precisely
a "force"

"he was unaware"

an optical
grammar the result of its gender
repeats itself but
preceding him was naming her
Agreement: elaborates on
what it was in kind
the hyphen and
this *point*

XVI

"to sum them up with splendor"

referring

where one runs on the reflected diagonal

XVII

this space arrived at
and opaqueness of manners

XVIII

: towards the stage
Conclusion: the Chorus

this measure"

Ghino Tenger

On Joseph Simas

Drawn out through inner diction

a reading of Joseph Simas' *Entire Days*, Parts I–IV

Entire Days [Rhode Island: Burning Deck, 1985], a 20-page book containing the first four parts of a long poem by Joseph Simas, is found to explore the poetically central themes earth, book and texture, where earth and book together form a theme called volume. The main themes play against a rich motif texture. It is shown that while the motifs converge in the final Part IV, the main themes display from beginning to end an interesting thematic anamorphosis that means continually shifting figure-background patterns. A pursuit of these shifts in the text and its blanks (pauses), both on the signifier level and on the deeper level of sense, reveals that a certain emblem involving both space and time beautifully assembles the poem's musical structure.

The thematic anamorphosis discussion briefly mentions analogies with particle physics, implying that themes are something formed (and possibly communicated) on the micro-level of the brain's neurological activities, the material substrate of language. So it is natural that they should exhibit complementarity and uncertainty laws (observer influence) similar to those valid for quanta as waves/particles, and that the anamorphosis figures obtained should be only projections, in the way of Feynman graphs, onto a flatter space of an emblem that belongs to spacetime.

And why this interdisciplinary talk in a poetry magazine? Because it follows that all poems can be divided into two classes, those where an anamorphosis of themes occurs and the others, which raises the question what other important differences the two classes manifest and may open up new ways of determining how and why a poem works.

— G. T.

[For easy reference, here is the complete text of *Entire Days* (Parts I – IV). The numbers within brackets refer to the page numbering of the *Burning Deck* edition.]

ENTIRE DAYS

by Joseph Simas

I.

[#1]

The strength of emotions, rising. A litany of shapes.

An eclipse on the horizon. Laboring hands. The contour of soil, of low rising hills in the distant land.

The shape of emotions, spreading. The various levels of land.

The lines followed from any center out. The length of any growing shadow, of any measurable distance over land.

[#2]

The time of emotions, aging. An accumulation of peculiar rites.

A succession of days or years. The experience of following certain lines or shadows, and remembering how and when they got put there.

The breath of emotions, measuring. The register of a line or thought.

The time it takes to get there. An interruption in the period or gathering or time. An error in the era. The intentional errata.

[#3]

The sight of emotions, shifting. Any change in the possible perspective or object.

The broken pendulum. The various possible multiple-takes or scenes. The physical effort it takes to get there, and back again.

The smell of emotions, invading. The rites surrounding any certain death.

The air around burning incense. An area around anything burning—a flame, a crowd. The recognition of a passing cloud.

[#4]

The taste of emotions, disguising. The various textures of a crowd.

The belief in a certain cloud. A manner of hesitating before the act, of swallowing the air around it before the candle.

The sound of emotions, increasing. The possible responses from the crowd.

An ear to the ground or one of the many warnings. Any of the possible areas in which the noise is harder to hear or ground.

[#5]

The voice of emotions, breaking. A signal or its place upon the land.

The space around one sound to its rest, and back again. The punctuation of an echo reverberating across an area of land.

The feel of emotions, seeping. One of the limits stuck in mid-air.

An echoing through the crowd, a flag in the landscape. The death of a whisper, the decay of a scream.

[#6]

The body of emotions, moving. The passage through one of the many rooms to the next.

The art of shadow-boxing, the nature of passing clouds. The planting of words, the cultivation of dissent.

The state of emotions, defining. The culture of any land and its words.

The spelling of a land and its real picture. A gutted stream, a blind alley. The image between flower and soil, talking and tongue.

II

[#7]

Constraints into action. Systems flower into blue cold. Items reach their number. Order attains its hue.

Serial ocular. Several occurrences flee toward dispersal. The sky retains its scatters. The constraint obeys its lower order.

Necessity commands the action to order. Roots constrain the tree. Elements line up at desire. Eyes become the scene.

It constrains them. Clouds dramatize the absence of stars. Elementary objects are acted upon. The figure believes its command.

[#8]

Compulsion follows its signature. The light on the soil flourishes in the light. Signs proceed formally into the act.

The voice compels itself to sing. The signature succeeds itself. The subject follows forcefully upon its own act.

It compels and is compelled. The signature of the act is gathered by its differences in order. The act is the effect eyes gather.

Necessity compels. The notes become order in or of each interval dispersed through time. It blooms at the surface of previous sight.

[#9]

Pressure builds. The red light is filtered through layers, the blue light is colored in mass.

The pressure is unable to continue. The eclipse acts upon the horizon. Landscapes flourish in the light.

The pressure is bound to escape. Vision is built upon the ability to replace. The ground displaces itself.

Pressure precedes the relief which it is built upon. Necessity succeeds itself. The variations of color precede light.

[#10]

Resistance exceeds established force. Force is a variant of this desire. Order is achieved through fits and starts.

III

[#11]

So that if nature experience. If it rises rise. So should eyes succeed, a work, not "belief", ought to arrive at these hardly gathers. That what it does should around or about. There it

Hence drama. Logical scenic (a mountain or voyage across land) quantifies. "Between", if increasing to final speeds, a place. Not progress if to be a value, but fact. Stares out

[#12]

From behind the faces. The whole sandbank will fall. It follows, before and after the flowers, a day's end entirely times it. The only number it multiplies, too, will begin. A part

Of the order will define the whole. Approaches are at odds with proximity, a (blue) horizon may seem closer than this. The river is here, but within. In doubt enter limits. I am

[#13]

During the fate. What it surrounds, confuses, or obeys. Since yesterday, a weather. Then the colors, a continuance, a remembrance, placed inside a time only from within. A change

In the weather. "Spring has come", like a cloud. It is part of a memory. More than what it becomes, an order, an hour, that in each stem or leaf a season previous returns. It moves

[#14]

Away from itself, towards an apparently opposite name. The "light", if so brightly diffused. In the words around parts of the river. A color (blue) haunts the accidents of time. A value

Through an accumulation of particular acts. One mountain can slowly disappear. A calendar scores the skies' movement through sky. The river grows, a plant appears only when wanted. It endures

[#15]

Beyond the senses. What is now immediately happening. A general candle throws light on the room. The room is also blue or blue-green fading towards dim light. The light flourishes. A change

Around any river. For example objects evoking a weather or lines. That in between the objects exist additional lines. In doubt limits charge empty space. It might define them. It is

[#16]

Between limits of day. In each break a gathering. Within pistil (stigma), through stamen (anthers). The river grows down through lines of red or (blue). A fragrance is served. It carries

Throughout limits of its own kind. Then moments also accidentally flower any given time. Reading "petals 2 night-blue the third", mistaken, or four times three. Three and within one four. A day

IV

[#17]

Differences in light
 In a twilight light twins remembrance equals equal
 to a day's continuance
 Or order in a memorable end
 The book begins
 And two twice plus one plus one and so on through
 twenty-four
 Counting the years as faces

[#18]

Circles of sand
 Thus on land around night fall it blesses strayed
 between these ways
 Drawn out through inner diction
 An earth before
 Behold maternal indices water air fire through changes
 in enduring an earth
 Any face of it changes

[#19]

An experience in
 Or order in a line memorable life signs variable
 in an optic
 Enduring the inquiry as changes
 A desire elaborates
 Lust and fertility as such oils would articulate given a
 single era
 Within its name

[#20]

The destiny of
 That in a mother's hand lines shape an ancestry its
 memory endures
 Value through manual traces
 A determined order
 Endures an earth as inner nations relate specific areas
 of its land
 Including previous delineation
 La Poésie, proche l'idée, est Musique, par excellence—ne consent
 pas d'infériorité. Mallarmé, Le Livre, instrument spirituel
 About my poetics— / . . . / An Integral / Lower limit
 speech / Upper limit music Zukofsky, A-12
 How generously / Mallarmé's late / thought minds / 'the
 book however seeming never begins or ends . . . the
 crowd other than by silence takes part exults as choir . . .
 voices . . . vaults' Zukofsky quoting Mallarmé in A-19

TWENTY PAGES QUESTIONING POETRY's fundamentals, the whole of it a musically structured single poem so multifaceted that only the application of various critical and reading methods could possibly exhaust the offering.

With no pretension to apply a rigorous method or an eclectic choice of them, this review centers on thematics and the discovery of thematic anamorphosis in the poem.

Etymology and word history fall outside the scope of this treatment; be it mentioned, however, that the poem shows consistency in this respect. Particularly the very last line's word choice 'including' is more remarkable than it may appear at first sight. Mere dictionary findings reveal behind this word a Cicero, Quintilian and Virgil history that brings the poem's main themes together in this one end line word.¹

The poet's Zukofsky readings were indicated to this author when the ideas of the review were already conceived; the choice of *en tête* quotations reflects those ideas. Although the poem takes up some Zukofsky motifs, it reads well as an independent work. For example, the words 'endure' and 'duration' in the poem have a Zukofsky history related to a poet's reading another's work², but appear in this poem as fresh variations—'duration' probably also in the old Bergsonian sense.

The rich polysemy accords well with the poem's title³ which immediately suggests days lived on all possible levels (of life and readings) and in their intervals. Besides this involvement, the etymon *integer* brings in an ancient sense, detachment. Thus the title at once leads to the opening with a transition from emotion to its recollection.

1.

The strength of emotions, rising. A litany of shapes.

An eclipse on the horizon. Laboring hands. The contour of soil, of low rising hills in the distant land.

. . .

The breath of emotions, measuring. The register of a line or thought.

The time it takes to get there. An interruption in the period or gathering or time. An error in the era. The intentional errata.

Here is Wordsworth recollected in theory. Collected in Part I are twelve aspects of emotion(s) acting or being something—a motif ambiguity which announces the whole poem's double character, its thematic anamorphosis, and leads to the poem's focus.

The motif ' , rising' is both act and quality; each one of the twelve stanzas of Part I begins by presenting the ambiguous gerund.

'A litany of shapes' announces the substantial forms to come; few of them are lyrical, most narrative or documentary. Ritual-bound motifs spread over it all their aromatic unity. 'Litany' evokes both text in general, thereby book which is also volume, and the texture peculiar to this kind of song. After 'shapes' come three phenomena: the first one astronomic, evoking the earth as planet, a physical and geometric volume, and giving a line part of texture: horizon. The second one, 'laboring hands', is a motif that will return in the concluding Part IV. The third one, with contour, is back to texture; with soil, hills and land, to earth; with 'distant' it implies interval, part of texture.

Not only are the themes earth, book and texture intertwined in the lines; the voice, by using essences rather than particulars, refers to inner events at least as much as to a landscape. The voice is speaking its book on the background of its earth and speaking its earth on the background of its book. Similarly it goes with texture. The poem's main themes, *volume* (the double earth-book theme) and *texture* both *act* and *are something*, playing in turns 'acting' figure and 'being something' background. At the same time they reflect the poem's text and blank spaces

A stippled anamorphic wedge shape between the labels FIGURE/BACKGROUND and BACKGROUND/FIGURE, and, in the right column, a transition graph in which arrows run from the stanza 1 items to the stanza 2 items.

that are no voids but signify punctuation or silence as a place for echoes of the text. [See *Burning Deck* edition for measure of spaces between stanzas. Ed.]

The anamorphosis of themes thus means, both on the signifier level and on the deeper level of sense, a continual shifting of a theme from figure to background and back in the course of poem time. The area of special interest is the limit where almost imperceptibly as it were figure and background exchange roles. The language endeavors to make these transitions perceptible. In a spatial model the focal area is quite obvious even when not one-dimensional as in this picture; in a poem, the time dimension adds a touch of excitement to the game—the excitement that physicists felt in the early days of quantum theory when focusing on the transition between the particle and wave nature of quanta, a case of anamorphosis in nature.

Intensely involved in the limit events, the poem, like the physicist, 'interferes' with the world it perceives: its language speaks of language, its voice of voice and of inner experience. In *Entire Days* this conclusion had been reached intuitively before the text began to unfold: ' . . . in a memorable end / The book begins'. (The quoted words contain of course other possibilities. The 'memorable end' could have been Wordsworth's definition of poetry; in a de-finition is heard a finalization, not only on the signifier level but in the act itself. Or it could have been the definition's contents, the literal end of time-bound emotion.)

Parts II, III and IV consistently exhibit the anamorphosis of themes as will be seen, while each one of them adopts a different approach to the continuation and completion of the proposed song.

2.

Constraints into action. Systems flower into blue cold. Items reach their number. Order attains its hue.

Serial ocular. Several occurrences flee toward dispersal. The sky retains its scatters. The constraint obeys its lower order.

. . .

. . . Eyes become the scene.

. . .

Compulsion follows its signature. The light on the soil flourishes in the light. Signs proceed formally into the act.

. . .

. . . The notes become order in or of each interval dispersed through time.

. . .

The pressure is bound to escape. Vision is built upon the ability to replace. The ground displaces itself.

... The variations of color precede light.

Of the main themes, book and texture dominate in Part II; earth makes few brief appearances. What the litany had 'planted', the motifs here make 'flower', 'flourish' and 'bloom'. Otherwise, too, the verb dominates, mostly in the active indicative mood. All the phrases are of the subject-verb-adverb type sounding like 'furious craftsmen' at their slow rhythmic work in *Atelier Brain*.⁴

Part II explores the effects of constraints imposed on, if one may infer, remembered emotions. In the first group of four stanzas 'constrain' and its noun together with 'ocular' and 'eyes' reveal a visible therefore outside force. In the second group 'compel' and its noun together with several circular phrases, for ex. 'The subject follows forcefully upon its own act' and with 'signature', 'signs', 'order' repeated, oppose a couple of inner and outer forces acting on the voice now 'compelling and compelled' to bring forth further song, potential text. In the third group 'pressure' draws out of the voice various effects of light, among them a powerful return of theme: 'The eclipse acts upon the horizon', and ends with three circular phrases.

Thematic anamorphosis occurs both in the signifiers and on the level of sense.

On the signifier level, let us call 'figure' any theme that a word refers to explicitly, 'background' any theme that is only implied in a word. Doubts about a word's ex- or implicitness then mean blurring in the picture. When a theme is present both ex- and implicitly (through different words) in the stanza considered, the contours of the figure are not sharp. Motifs other than words, like the gerund (as syntactic unit) in Part I, could also determine whether a theme is figure or background. This procedure is so straightforward that there is no need to apply it all through the poem. Just to show how it works, the first two stanzas quoted above yield:

stanza 1:	stanza 2:
texture ('systems',	texture ('serial' etc.) and
'number', 'order')	volume (earth) ('sky'), both
on	explicit, are figure
volume (earth)	
('action', 'flower')	

'sky' seems explicit enough a reference to earth, but there are implicit references, too, notably 'flee', which blurs contours in stanza 2. In any case, a transition from background to figure does occur.

In Part II it is singularly difficult to obtain clear pictures, whereas in Part IV most pictures are clear. The poem works like a piece of music does: from an abundance of changing patterns ('any face of it changes') toward increasing clarity of structure reached in the final Part.

On the level of sense, phrases that accord well with the anamorphosis are: 'Elements line up at desire'; 'Eyes become the scene'; 'The act is the effect eyes gather'; 'It blooms at the surface of previous sight'; 'Vision is built upon the ability to replace'; 'The ground displaces itself'. The same is obviously true of all the circular phrases, one of which was quoted above.

3.

So that if nature experience. If it rises rise. So should eyes succeed, a work, not 'belief', ought to arrive at these hardly gathers. That what it does should around or about. There it

Hence drama. Logical scenic (a mountain or voyage across land) quantifies. 'Between', if increasing to final speeds, a place. Not progress if to be a value, but fact. Stares out

In Part III the passage from 'So should' in the first stanza till 'drama' in the second is the first one to base its polysemy on a ruptured syntax. It takes, however, the foregoing double imperative to liberate the voice from earlier constraints so that the syntax can break into music and the first punctuations of mid-phrases by blanks mark a new rhythm. The phrasing that follows mostly keeps to conventional syntax; the rule breaks are highlights.

Among the motifs stand out 'limits' and 'between', both taken up from Part I; the latter from the significant 'The image between flower and soil, talking and tongue'. The Part III variations are, besides the 'between' in the above-quoted stanza,

In doubt enter limits.

In doubt limits charge empty space.

It is / Between limits of day.

It carries / Throughout limits of its own kind.

These liminal perceptions are the verbal analogue of the already mentioned involvement of the poem's language in the area where figure-background transitions occur. The motif 'doubt' adds weight to this statement.

A new motif, 'river', meanders through this Part, sustaining the overall vivacious tempo that the varied syntax forms create. A future appears: 'The whole sandbank will fall'; a past: 'Since yesterday, a weather', 'a memory'; so do opinions:

a part / Of the order will define the whole.

An order, an hour, that in each stem or leaf a season previous returns

A value / Through an accumulation of particular acts

That in between the objects exist additional lines.

Finally the classic, quattrocento and today's basis of any order, number:

The only number it multiplies, too, will begin.

Once more in the last stanza:

Throughout limits of its own kind. Then moments also accidentally flower any given time. Reading "petals 2 night-blue the third", mistaken, or four times three. Three and within one four. A day

The richness of motifs and their play in Part III easily diverts attention away from the main themes. One must replay the whole to find out that their presence is more balanced than in Part II, although book and texture dominate.

Signs of thematic anamorphosis are many, as the following passages testify:

Stares out / From behind the faces.

. . .

It moves / Away from itself, towards an apparently opposite name.

. . .

In doubt limits charge empty space. It might define them. It is

Between limits of day. In each break a gathering.

4.

'poet living tomb of his
games—a quiet life for
an ocean: *the emphatical decussation*
quincunx chiasma . . .'

'yet always
few genera rule without excep-
tion,' Zukofsky, *A-22*

The suspended end note 'A day' of Part III still echoes when the *finale*, Part IV, begins with *the* music: Mallarmé's dream of polyphonic plural meanings and multiple suggestions—his intransitive suggestions realized in the famous 'A la nue accablante tu / basse de basalte et de laves'⁵ where the polysemy based on ruptured syntax is evident.

Part IV balances between this and conventional syntax, mixing lyrical and documentary language, and flows in a solemn *legato* manner of three-line stanzas and pauses. Discussion will now be centered on the convergence of motifs and a lingering anamorphosis of the main themes, volume and texture, that will also converge in the end.

Differences in light

In a twilight light twins remembrance equals equal to a
day's continuance

Or order in a memorable end

The book begins

And two twice plus one plus one and so on through

twenty-four

Counting the years as faces [*page #17*]

Earlier 'light' motifs converge in the first stanza, 'number' in the second.

In the first stanza one perceives texture as figure because it is explicit in 'order', and volume as background because it is only implied by the middle line phenomena.

In the second stanza 'book' as volume and 'number', obviously texture, are both explicit and figure on the earth-half of volume implied by 'years'. Since the pause, the blank, does not exclude a continuous reading (without compelling it either) 'in a memorable end / The book begins', the pause carries the following transition:

Four transition graphs, each setting a stanza 1 column against a stanza 2 column with arrows, horizontal and diagonal, running from the first stanza's terms to the second's.

stanza 1:	stanza 2:
texture	volume (book) and texture
on	on
volume (earth)	volume (earth)

Besides the horizontal earth-to-earth move there is a diagonal one from earth to book. In the blank space, the pause's time, the first stanza's background thus generates figure for the second stanza.

Circles of sand

Thus on land around night fall it blesses strayed

between these ways

Drawn out through inner diction

An earth before

Behold maternal indices water air fire through changes

in enduring an earth

Any face of it changes [*page # 18*]

Here the earlier circular phrases converge in 'Circles' while 'sand' recalls 'the whole sandbank will fall'—including the future in this motif. In 'Drawn out through inner diction' all the motifs converge. 'changes' . . . 'enduring,' a new twin motif, will reappear once, with one 'changes' dropped, after which the form 'endures' alone will stay.

Reasoning as before the figure-background transition becomes

stanza 1:	stanza 2:
texture ('circles', 'diction')	volume ('earth')
on	on
volume (earth) ('land')	texture ('face', 'indices')

The transition is a simple switch of figure and background into contrary positions.

Also in the continuous reading 'inner diction' An earth before' the pause carries, on the signifier level, a clear figure-to-figure transition from explicit texture to explicit volume. (But on the level of sense, what was earth before has become diction; signifier and sense events form a chiasmus, are 'decussate,' as if Zukofsky had prophesied.)

An experience in

Or order in a line memorable life signs variable

in an optic

Enduring the inquiry as changes

A desire elaborates

Lust and fertility as such oils would articulate given a

single era

Within its name [page #19]

'era' recalls an earlier motif. The figure-background transition

stanza 1:	stanza 2:
texture ('order', 'line')	texture and volume only
on	implied, as if both
volume (earth) ('life')	were background

becomes a transition from a clear figure-background image to a figureless background or, possibly, a blurred image.

According to the continuous reading 'as changes A desire elaborates', this pause destroys figures or blurs them to a near invisibility. In fact, 'changes' is implied texture only, meaning that contours are not sharp in the first stanza figure; blurring has started there.

The destiny of

That in a mother's hand lines shape an ancestry its

memory endures

Value through manual traces

A determined order

Endures an earth as inner nations relate specific

areas of its land

Including previous delineation [page #20]

Earlier 'lines' here converge in 'hand', itself taken up from Part I ('laboring hands'). In 'endures' is written the destiny, within this poem, of that word itself. Earlier 'order's converge in 'A determined order'. In 'inner nations' converge earlier implied affiliations to schools of thought (*natio*), 'belief(s) in a certain cloud'. 'relate specific areas of its land' brings all phenomena, i.e., the volume theme, well-proportioned into the poem. 'order / Endures an earth' is *tension become text*: the lasting tension between phenomena and the laws governing them. In the last line 'including previous delineation' *converge all earlier motifs referring to texture*.

The figure-background transition is as follows

stanza 1:	stanza 2:
texture ('lines', 'traces')	texture and volume both
on	figures (explicit)
volume ('mother's', implying earth)	

What was changing tension in the multiple figure-background transitions before, throughout the poem text and time, becomes in the last stanza unchanging tension between the main themes, in accordance with the finding above. Neither theme recedes into background.

Reading again across the pause: 'manual traces A determined order' results on the signifier level in the pause carrying a transition wherein texture *maintains* its figure status while, according to the transition graph, volume *gains* a figure status. In the focal area—during the pause—the first stanza's background has again generated figure for the second stanza. Once more a pause—blank space, silent time—has been more than punctuation or a place for the text's echoes: it has transformed 'being something' into 'acting', been a 'Constraint into action'. Thus in two *pauses* of Part IV all the *forces* acting on the voice before in the poem *converge*.

And pauses appear as vortices where relations established on the signifier level are tested on the deeper level of sense.

The quincunx is a handy tool for representing the four transitions graphically. Let shaded areas (the quincunx proper) mean figure, white ones background. Cut the quincunx along one of its diagonals (Kandinsky's 'dramatic' diagonal) and have the lower half represent the first stanza, the upper half the second one in each couplet. The

Four three-by-three grids, each cut by a diagonal and part-shaded, their cells lettered V and T, standing side by side under the headings p. 17, p. 18, p. 19, p. 20.

four transitions then look like this as is immediately obvious:

p. 17 p. 18 p. 19 p. 20

"Deformation of the quincunx"

V means volume, T texture. Optically, the deformed picture seen through each second stanza is a regular quincunx from each first stanza angle.

Who likes 'belief in a certain cloud' will see here a reminder of the poet (Zukofsky) as a prophet who has spoken of things whose future significance he may not have fully understood.

Graphs like those above are two-dimensional projections—analogueous to the so-called Feynman graphs in particle physics—of the poem's five-petalled song flowers whose one dimension is obviously time. Gathered and arranged, these four-dimensional 'flowers' form a multiple anamorphosis quincunx representing the poem's entire musical structure. Read and listened to in this spirit, *Entire Days* realizes Mallarmé's dream of the Book as an emblem, moreover, a relativistic one.

Notes

1 Cicero: 'Includere verba versu', 'Put words into the line'. Quintilian: 'Includere aliquid orationi', 'Enter something into a speech'. Virgil: 'Inclusere eos undique colles', 'Hills closed upon them on all sides'.

2 '... sometimes a word impels, well, an impersonal thing—a feeling of duration, best defined I think as Spinoza defined it, an indefinite continuance of existence.' '... what *dures* or endures as impersonal friendship when one poet reads another is a reading removed from yet out of time, without actual mutual influence or conscious awareness of tradition ...', Louis Zukofsky, *For Wallace Stevens*, in *Prepositions*, Horizon Press, New York, 1967; quoted from Expanded Ed., University of California Press, 1981.

3 It has been suggested that the title refers to a line of Catullus; according to the poet, this is not the case.

4 *L'artisanat furieux*, part of *Marteau sans Maître* by Pierre Boulez, to poems of René Char. First performed 1955.

5. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Pan* (a German review), Berlin, 1895. Quoted from *Oeuvres Complètes*, Pléiade, Gallimard, 1961.

Quotations *en tête* were taken from the above-mentioned *Oeuvres Complètes* of Mallarmé and from Louis Zukofsky, *A*, University of California Press, 1978. I thank Eric Selland for calling my attention to Simas' work and to Zukofsky's. — G.T.

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Joseph Simas

The Longer Sentiments of Middle, III

SOME THINGS ARE NOT MADE TO BE ALTERED when burning: now and then the surrounding center in the order of other elements is total presence or loss. When I turn toward you I am unmistakably not alone and flicker, and can only regret your absence in the foreground of usual contemporary pressures which fulfill. Later on, it might be difficult to describe our efforts as an object of the will because somehow the table is nearer in thought, hard to penetrate. Though the candle is spent it might be put down on enduring the spot. I've managed to hear live and cornered voices filling up the room at times when, in fact, I'd rather sit there listening for just those tones which constitute my own in flatly extremist states.

Now how do we meet if a plant or object intervenes, contiguous with planes drawn by the body, and accumulates in the gap of what was torn away? What then happens when I grab you by the body and fill without the obvious benefits of a third? How then do we know who we are if, in this sordid warfare, we are not observed coming back?

Islands, insofar as other icons too, may be observed rounding the corners to meet at that mirror of an eternal you staring me in the face. I want the two of us to settle down and fuck, get tired, and, for a talk, cut the ivory interiors, hold each other without islands. How close can the opposing scene become? I want to sit against the floor and curtains in a flurry of flat surfaces.

Approaching some slack between lesser images we expect the worst of delays. We set ourselves up to be watched and then fight and flicker because someone approaches from an angle neither one of us understands. In the earlier version you had me up against the wall. I bit back. You turned your eyes back toward the clock. Somewhere always nearer the middle words fashion.

Lost, in darkness, they breed a kind of memory appearing earlier than the table or varieties of beings and objects generally recognized here. There seems little toward which to refer back even if they recur incessantly. Which is why I thought the two of us might just go on like this and satisfy our silver urge. How else should we behave under pressure?

I have to come back, clumsy, not desperate, and accumulate even subservient to respectful reverence embodied in others. Theirs is, a body not my own, nothing I would have if I were able to be alone. And what does that make me other than the hold to which I come back if I stay there. If I stay there and stay or behold.

The spring urges forward and backward slinking its disparate members over the obstacles of condoned behavior. A silverish thread seduces the transparency of cotton leading to the smooth black skin of your inner thighs. How can I keep my tongue from straying when there is nothing to be gained or lost? The notion of a title seeps in expanding softer interiors.

Nothing that matters after really seems to enter in time, though its existence does suddenly then come to matter. If I had actually foreseen all the manners I would have been bored and churned rather into the state of things. Instead there was the ways of the way. I had to look up the livid darkness. I had to consider that this being meant something in between, after our destinations had been checked and crossed.

Now I want to follow the forays into matter, as brittle a place as I want to think and am caught here in this activity which surrounds, of needs and gender. There is more here than my hands, more than mistaken sums spreading into foreign lands, more than the common dialect of what we may understand in bindings. I do not desire truth make the movement toward, let this which is another come along and signal me, relinquish my voice to longer matters continuous enough after the fact.

Who called life the inner model? The longer sentiments reached beyond to somewhere other also in them. I want history without progress. There can be no improvement across these notions. I can't touch them. But I touched her belief in his stories and thought about rounder ties between things unable to accept indifference. It is nearly a convenience which relates while most of my nights are lost in dumbfounded sleep. Somewhere out there is my body at bay, allowing motionlessness.

Now forays into desire for objects only. I was in the corner. An awkward hand holding cigarette. Complementary colored scarves. An old hand at the counter. An eye's look away from the letter. A printed list of objects. Churls of smoke through hot winter sunray. Truncated A props. An actor intervenes through side door at limits of vision. Shadows waver across tabletop. The round one. Two circumferences merge through continuous slant. Foreign and not sisters. It can't go on, goes on before I have time to catch up and then resist. Here is nothing to hold on to which I must absolve within imbalance. There were two sisters in the following sense. This is what I had to say. One sun drowned behind his left shoulder. Light fell across the nearest chair.

Breathlessly composed. Her reclining body turns the book into statuary around the edges of a page never turned against the wind. The long staff against the yellowing paper is not a member to withhold and seduce. He had her eyes turned to the side to mistake the sun around corners. A window is never controlled.

I was reading a handwritten diary composed by a deliberately controlled hand. What is it stands between me and the building across, through the window, between the letters unless there is an individual tracing that belongs to me and as such not exactly so to another? Anything reflected could, should?, be brought in if given its proper place from the outside, the lathe in your eyes. If the foreign models force to withhold slowly, compose according to time elapsed before erase. Therefore transitions give life to things in the gulf between words, not forcefully hoarding.

We come back to the mirror to be seen out and elsewhere; around this image of ourselves might be another holding before the idea of talent steps in next to the twig.

This is an odd habit which still hurts my hand; I want to copy myself—closer to nature's idea, perhaps to bring the other into personal scruples, my shoulder next to the window, down by the star. Is the artificiality bound to undermine analogy from the start?

The river continues its drone, which is one reason I am fascinated by the practice of losing track of the sentence I am presently writing in. She mentions "the swelling and fading sound of the water". I am trying to imagine a thought that exists as dissolve of the spectrum of language surrounding it, a dejection or convergence, rather than trying to control any determinable course of events. It might end up as a positive following not totally dissimilar, a series of wavering transitions between a particular instance and another effect. The breaking of the river through a plate of glass.

We could be nearer the finer edges if cut to fit angles in the word. The allegory of another doing something else, somewhere different, yet near the eyes in thought and predication. How much of the outside should be allowed in, how many, when all of it is out there circling alone . . . around which project of exchange I am turning.

As where such lines or turns meet to follow the story, other than to relate. To some other change of level at which he and she, they, meet, directly stammering down the stairs. The analogy kept this going. There were no middles other than this, something to attain toward, the notion of a way which prohibits destination, in the influence of clocks. Anyone then who had been burning would also be taking, which is why you see us turning to books.

I can't go on, could, must, but not in this which is only mine as property is mine, nothing truly to be handled. Yet there is an urge through to another's voice, something makes him want, desire, hold, which is intimate and part of this time only. The other is what we easily appropriate such as an institution not to be mistaken by. Even when you turn toward the mirror it is not your own and the image there is something as falters without a third. You can't see your voice, gathering along as it changes, following the strut up the line. Which then is present, touches to the excited difference of exchange in no other fashion, and is a contemporaneous complex, nothing to avoid other than building up alone.

Shifting up around the ice as it floes, a becoming to be static for a second or two. Then melts down with no excuse. If then knowing has not been proved out as solution which is liquid from the start, flowing up the wrists. There we follow contours closer the edge, significant from a cliff or higher instance. I look down upon myself and frighten if only because to have met the one following the tick in time. Suddenly confronted as a lapse between possible identities under normal strains. Abruptly imagines and loses the fear. I am rarely immediate.

That was why I picked up the mirror in the first place and have a collection farther than the eye can see. The vertically standing spines do not hesitate the hand that moved the words between even forgotten covers. When the attention floats perhaps this is when the train of imagination begins before disbelieving eyes. One of the negative stacks between eyes and hands is the brutality with which the former treats of transitions as if an attention is mongers. A mangy dog followed by a bar of soap could be a detective or the next national plan. Why not send the master on his own raid and stop spangling with identity . . . as if there were no singular identities better off than our own.

I love you in direct proportion to the time it takes to constitute the third. How far have we come when things appeared easier? Here the transit involves more than anchoring the boat, the one from the dream, which had never before shown its stripes or reading knowledge. There the whole world falls floating lightly between separate actions neither of us can behold if not mistaken. If not then a partaking to become.

Here I am trying to furnish and obsess upon tactics to describe what is tonal intends, something between these words and our language, something closer to how the body appeals in early morning light. I wake up with you next to my side and sit and wonder where the third has gone during sleep. Then I go through normal routines burnished by the thought of grasping other familiar obstacles within reach. Ouched by the knowing of your familiar. I run my hand along your softer parts, not to own, as if to delimit part of my possibilities throughout the day, something I might lose. Watching you come out of your rising haze, that pleasure in being there when someone you know awakens to delineate that much of another space never totally dreamed or imagined. I often mistake others for what I want in you, never actually inventing replacements though there is this fear that again, how do I know when I touch you through this constantly changing space if not because this familiar is something we disgust to behold? My fear rarely startles unless I look at someone else and see you. I know there is something I should be able to share and it must come from areas between neither of us if what we feel is useful to a generation of newer classes. But part of what draws my limits is how far I can see myself being imagined in you not in an effort to be discretely multiple rather along one and changing before this area is up. Something allows me to wander through without the necessity of increasing constraints while this intends another warmer dilemma.

In the store of images, they do not pretend closer political rivalries. But the overriding system is reveille. A call to the horn flogging, driven through by system analysts or auditory hags. Smaller groups are hoarding survival while

we sit around and talk about lesser means away from the can, aired or not. Perhaps it is truer to say that we can never escape attempts to define identity through insidious compulsory means, though we will probably always be remembered, when it comes to sending out invitations, by those little groups that flutter in timeless instances of dark.

Some of the other aspects of incest do not involve the actual coupling rather the mist of thought spreading across several centuries of concerned behavior. If we choose such subjects the danger is limiting their environment to the surrounding of bodies whose effects are stumped on contact. I want to talk openly about desire without running the risk in company of

bringing the sexual out in order to create a scene that might shock. I am not suggesting that one might also fling the meat about with the same contest. So much of what happens on the inside is mirrored accordingly in the faces or thoughts of others and we rarely give ourselves the means to be upset without progress. I am learning to displace guilt onto subjects of embarrassment. Tenderness and scandal are often unfortunate results.

The story begins with a young girl in a city park surrounded by other children she knows. She is playing with another one inside of her, to keep her other body company, for lack of someone else. The girl has made up a dance and seriously performs it in front of her physically absent other half. She momentarily stops and turns around to mimic the spectator's response. The dancer continues to thrill her. The dancer is alone and yet slowly begins to react to a partner who is not there. None of the children in the park are concerned with her behavior. The dance is ignored. Suddenly the spectator starts clapping, the dancer bows, the spectator claps, the dancer speaks: Why are you so happy? I am not alone. You are a beautiful dancer. I made this dance up for you. What is your name?

Nothing really happens inside the mirror though we have been caught, in love there, staring to undo—for to hold on is to explain the nature of love. Which will recognize the other first? Who will be caught in another? and realize the insistence of this obsessive angle as the body bends toward itself?

The candy pig is never full up to the brim in another language. Someone always comes along to sweeten so the hat can be thrown on, a hook for the coat, a place to stay. Then one begins to dig in until it is caught up in its own keys.

I was on the verge of yawning, sitting there waiting for a friend who has several times crossed my mind while in this book, reading a book, and I thought I had to sit down and write this, to make it present. I can presently hear the sound of the machine's keys, and a woman, undoubtedly, walking in the courtyard below, out of sight. The windows over my right hand shoulder are closed and curtained, which indicates expectation on my part. I have never met them. I am daydreaming about her archives as longer gaps fabric a denial in my wondering then. But this is still all toward the feeling that something does not relate, is outside, in that distance called between, enduring neither in nor out. In some respect, the project must define him, reach out, capture the seemingly understood words under the covers of disbelief, in order to go on—for what other reason would he not stop the inside from insisting.

Now I have managed to go so far out that not even the notion of relating relates. To what? But I might have told the story if I were able, how within that wondering I had replaced her hands with yours and heard you call out my name as if you were on the other end of a distant phone call. And I kept wondering how far her hands would venture between my thighs, the soft warmth of sweat skin, while my sex began harder against the paper sheets, urging her and wanting to hold back for the softness of your wet lips and the acceptance of warmer.

In the meantime . . . but does it matter? Here I have tricked myself into another spot and might flog if the morals were higher. You knew my name all along. The skirt, I must admit, was way off the social sum. Once the acting is through the order changes calling into some other action the thoughts and feelings previously guided. It's all mixed up in the intimate quarters while the multiple levels keep pointing to yet another displacement far and away beyond the interior trains of thought or feeling. This is partly why I have continually gone from what is closest and slightly shocks.

All arguments are articulate.

But who or what is the figure?

In how many premises and faces may we find one?

This is incomplete.

All articulations are arguments.

Therefore all arguments move.

Something has been left out. The first figure is *I saw your face* and *your face saw me*. The second figure is *I know what you look like* and *I do not know you*. The third figure is *your face recognizes me* and *your face sees a part of itself*. The fourth figure is *your face is on me* and *I am on your face*. The fifth figure is the difference between the phrases of the previous four. I am lost. Then the ambiguity is put into a box, stamped and addressed in an ordinary envelope. From afar I pray you will not be upset.

A cacophony of voices comes within my demand. The ambient regard signals a sterile interest in my profit person. I expected a real message.

I am naked. It is winter and once again I am alone, waiting—for what?—; my voice trembles: "Almost . . .". "Almost what?" I-am saw the vamp at the side of the black ship. He cowered, escaping the analogy: "My eyes are empty, I am cold and brutal—yet my hands are soft as silk, and my mouth is tender."

"Are you sleeping?"

Yes, let her flick her tongue there where caress my body's member startles. The room is slightly lit. The nurse had come to warn him. An example, for turning round: "Do not falter, lest you be buried forever in shame's pitiless pit."

He is like all the others, abandoned, alone in the crowd of enticing lights behind faceless mongers. His eyes, whose variable tones deny the subversive, identify.

Most of the myths are ridiculous alone. If there is no

relation to body, the mind falters, and left to its own resources finds itself exiled into the far reaches of an indefinite and evil soul.

There is, however, the public aspect of individual voices in sorority. Figures huddled together on cold winter streets, crowded sidewalks, the underlying value of song, repeat, in relation to clothes, rent, exploitation, fear, joy, and efforts to

concert actions between images and speech. It still hurts.

Finally, this is what he wastes to turn on slowly. What really is the meaning behind repeated forays into darkness, walking the blind alleys and narrow streets, looking for the sight of faults or seizures in time as these surfaces are smooth and voluptuous. Highlighted at the expense of discomfort, shaken by a maternal smile or heavenly wink, here the words "come and see" signify the greatest distance. What is it to listen to the sound of oneself behind the eyes of another, hold on, come around, bite down hard upon the steel bar of self-defeat?

This casual inertia has blank eyes for all those walking past. Longer lines wait for themselves stretching out into distanter reaches beyond command. There is a tacit agreement of principles as long as no one is expected to wait and linger. How do habits interfere with the not-yet dead?

Some of the people behind the mirrors have certainly brilliant bodies. He went often enough to make certain that I could be seen if the desire were there. In fact, however, the desire is not there, though I, among others, have been seen. Otherwise you are cheating and often expect the stranger to understand the role you have put him in, as if the universe were created to understand you. Part of the duty in alienation is to reveal yourself as you are as much as possible, at least to perfect strangers. It must be taken for granted that there are perverse desires in each and every one of us, for not to accept this as a relative proposition is to deny that we are temporally conversant in the strictured bounds of death. I, we, are not alone.

It is complex to consider particular events. The function of irony is a reflection of distance, and should only serve long enough to bring the matter close, making sure attention is acute. It is obvious that because of a certain rhetoric we are double-faced, two-sided, liars, and cheats. I for one identify with our hoods and share my penchant for facades and pretension with long-term strangers. So there are individual voices, singular and sufficiently risen to bloat in lighter circles. This stems for the perfect celebration in the nature of our beliefs. I like to sit and watch the way a self-sufficient body fakes its way through time in wonders, and do not feel precluded or threatened when it is time for me to step in a break across.

I am now thin and beautiful and in my eyes the white line travels through air and across valleys to the only mountain standing within hours of here. There is much I do not know. My skin is smooth and touchable and from a distance my posture is perfect when erect. I often rub the soft part of my thighs when on the phone or when I hear a voice in the distance I might start to sweat or think of an animal inside of me before it is too late. I am trying to imagine myself and all I can see is an animal of the future and a white line coming from someone else's mouth.

The sky is gray outside and the air is fresh, a liquid clock, clean, crystal, taut movements in circular glass containers do not apply while something like constrictions of the throat are similar to the effect of four walls, ceiling and floor, the weight around nothing like to sit and stare at the sky with a mouthful of food or liquid before swallowing.

There is a part of someone else's body in my mouth. I am talking on the phone while in the corner on the opposite side of the room there I am in the blue light slowly undressing as I imagine this. Here is someone else. What she meant to say was I am standing in the distance between myself and someone else. I am standing alone in the corner and the hours are lined by white.

The moment obsession turns to charter hugging the line between separate morals from below. Turns toward you in a series of spectacle lines coming from all times walking past. Sucking up into the vacuum person on the brink. As uglier lines show their brittle perfectly groomed. A mass of hair is a literal connection to the transcendent electric pulse. An ear is battered.

There you are feeling how sick I am of the props. Even perfect proportions. An even anything, down the subtler curves of her breast to her lower back before the sweating conclusion. The occasion is suck, the prick a hard angle. But these edges finally bleed less than they suck up. Grappling with debt at a distance when nothing less is due.

While the others expect more on hold at selfish containers once the foothold creeps in. Holding the possible of feel, the way his flesh turns into rock. Nothing but the bow pulling all the strands nearer suitable endeavor.

I'm looking for a necessary place to break it down and leave you between these words and potential biographies, as all ends well in cause or mistake.

The first step is I am neither male nor female when doing this. I'm trying to put this down simply. It's a tremendous jolt to identity and suddenly makes the body seem equally less and more than it is. I am disowned. Shunted. But taking to notions the furthest right is inward, therefore feminine, in the way it gathers and grows round. The argument juts which is hardest to nothing more than a spurt and may spawn. There is that aspect but the longer is duration and must go round. The understanding is forceful gathering and applies as shedding through identities which come first in time.

But perhaps the issue of gender simply diverts and has been overcome despite obvious traces for wayward attention. I was named before being born. This lineage is directly caused by others. It may be our first excuse and pause. How could I have gone on then being constantly referred? I had to stop and think about it unwittingly. It took me years to stand on my own two feet. I was the only center around for a time. Now I think the strangeness of being outside must have stunned for a clip. But once cleaned off had this referable form and seemed to join the chorus, "It's about time!" Then so close and swaddled it just took and took out of habit, then stuffed full of attributes, and endured.

[The second part of The Longer Sentiments of Middle was published in Temblor #4.]

Benjamin Hollander

On Emmanuel Hocquard

... not self-conscious

in doing that—simply ...

A Day in the Strait by Emmanuel Hocquard,
translated by Maryann De Julio and Jane Staw.
(New York: Red Dust, 1985)

NOW I WANT TO MAKE THIS SIMPLE because each chapter here is a story or part of a story both simple and distinct yet uneventful in itself, so that likewise I want to make this uneventful in itself, not self-conscious in doing that, although it may seem so, primarily.

Now as the center of this narration could be viewed as a prolonged image depicting the experiences of several characters spending a day of fishing in the middle of a strait, there are other stories, from other times and places, touching on this one, each of which could be viewed as a center upon which the day of fishing in the middle of the strait touches; which means, simply, no center applies to Hocquard's narration, only edges and borders, sections of a frame to be assembled.

For instance: On this day, before the boat leaves, the narrator is on one side of the strait digging into the beach to discover "fragments of stoneware two thousand years old, identical to those I had been seeking twenty years earlier on the other side of the strait, on embankments exactly like this one, bordering the beach." So: A day in the strait borders, exactly, at least one other day twenty years earlier, and the story of that other day remembered itself becomes a fragment of time to be recovered on this day and identified through a period of waiting and drifting across water covered by the passage of a narration.

Now I want to return later to this sense of passage and period because it represents something specific and common to the act of writing itself, which initiates a passage that quite literally comes up against and through the periodicity of its letters. Or, put another way: Each letter stands as a raised border between where writing stops and where it hopes to cross to.

Likewise a word, when pressed, will become a border between meanings, its own and those of others, like the word "strait" in the one page chapter VI of the first part (there are actually only one page chapters in this two part book—"A Shadow Theater" and "Pictures From A Book"—with prologue and epilogue). In the simplest sense—that of definition—the word itself is a story which defines the events around the stories in the book:

The Bloch and Wartburg etymological dictionary lists *détroit* (strait) between *détritus* (debris; from Lat. *deterre*, to wear away by friction) and *détruire* (destroy). The word itself, before denoting a body of water that connects two seas or separates two land masses, evokes the idea of constriction, distress, anguish. ...

[First Part, VI]

Now the resonances around this word itself assume multiple story lines as they also charge the fields of memory and writing covering the thirty years of narration in the book. As a passage through space and time memory becomes another border between what remains and what's been destroyed.

An example: For an instant four brief chapters (pages) illustrate a story of houses, a town, its inhabitants, its gardens—those who have abandoned it and their devotion inside it; a religious site marked by the stations of a calvary, a cross, votive tablets, writing and images on the tablets depicting the histories of Mary and Jesus; a place where "everything, once devoted to simple rhymes and colors, deteriorates a little more each day. ... One of the calvary stations survives only as a fragment of the frieze that used to frame it." Simply put: For four brief pages (chapters) I read the plot of a whole existence, the frame of which gradually comes apart, the memory of it to come in the next chapter, a transitional point between what remains (of this story, of the book) and what's been destroyed:

All of that began to come apart in Betera, near Valencia, during the summer of 1978.

I spent two days scouring the gardens of the calvary, and met some people who had come there late in the afternoon to enjoy the coolness in the shade of the trees.

[First Part, V]

Transitional: from the exiled gardens to the memory of the occupation of the strait:

... Yet I couldn't manage to make my pleasant memory of the strait coincide with this image of strangulation dictated by its origin.

Forced by circumstances to stay on in the area, I decided to go and spend a day in the strait. It was in May.

[First Part, VI]

"It was in May." And later—a corresponding signature: "It was in the afternoon." Both memories definitive, or so it seems; both signs of what happened and ended and was destroyed at that date, except that remembering them somehow defines an echo which returns you to a point of resonance beyond what is remembered—to the present. Uneventful in itself, in the flattest of registers, what remains are the compressed bones of a sentence, and a memory; a memory recovered without rhetorical flourish through the passage of the narration, yet the effects of which are felt during the period the narration stops (as if present, as it will be, still later).

Now I want to return later to this sense of passage and period because it represents something specific and common to the act of memory itself, which initiates a passage that comes up against and through the period remembered. Or, put another way: Each period is a raised border between where memory stops (constricted into silence) and where it hopes to cross to.

Likewise a strait, when entered, will also become a border between one place and time and another, and it will quite literally rise into consciousness as the fracture between them—concentrated, amassed:

I was cold. We had been drifting for a long time in search of undetectable landmarks in the shifting scenery of the coast. And I was beginning to understand that it was not just our day of fishing that was lost.

What was in the process of coming apart in a single day was thirty years of narration, all because of this story of stones, marks, and shores. Space, like time, was shrinking so steadily that I could sense the moment when it would rise like an immense pane of glass in the middle of the strait. When the strait itself would be nothing but a vertical surface, empty and transparent, separating without reflecting anything.

[First Part, XVI]

Now the configuration of the strait itself as a transparent, vertical surface which separates you from your return to its other side (time) twenty years earlier—yet welcomes your vision of it—assumes multiple story lines as it charts the fields of memory and writing you come up against and through across the thirty years of narration in this book. This, I know, is to repeat the form of what I said earlier, but I think it is important to remember here to keep casting these images of memory and writing as they become passages through space and time, because they illuminate so often the stories that touch upon each other in the book itself, which represents if nothing else the lived experience of a shadow theater.

As an example: For an instant four brief chapters (pages) reconstruct the memory of the remains of a shadow theater found "in a wicker trunk" of a garage "overlooking the sea":

. . . a stack of sets in multicolored paper beginning to stick together from the dampness; nearby hundreds of flat figures in black perforated cardboard—the old characters—bound up with string.

The frame of the theater had long since disappeared.

[First Part, XX]

The frame, remembered, informs the theater of Hocquard's writing, directed, enacted to set the scene:

It was a rectangle of laminated wood, painted black, fifty centimeters high by one meter long, broken up by three rectangular windows fitted with shutters. The middle window was larger than the other two. These openings represented the three stages of the theater. The translucent sets were lighted from behind, and hung at the openings, which were recessed slightly to allow the silhouettes to slide forward on a double rail hidden under the lower edge of the stage. There were three thin wooden plates, with enough space in between them to slip in the small cardboard tabs used to manipulate the characters.

[First Part, XXI]

Simply put: For four brief pages (chapters) I read the plot of a shadowed, fictive existence in miniature (as the book itself is a compressed miniature of thirty years), the frame of which is missing, the memories of which will transmute later into the material of the real:

Is it the imminence of departure? Opposite, along the quay, the houses and their reflections in the water seem to be made of the same material as the thin, translucent, colored paper used to construct the sets and characters of the theater.

[Second Part, XX]

These are the transitions—the transmissions—from the imaginary sets of the past to the present, which become correspondences as well. As an example—this time to describe the method of the writing itself: the descriptions from memory are as precisely framed as the theater itself. But where writing graphs a grid to enclose the memory, the memory empties out of it, as if an abstracted light has pierced it through. So: How does one give the impression that everything has been circumscribed and none of the facts suppressed and at the same time create the impression that everything speakable has been forgotten except for the light and shadows of another time, place? Or, put another way: How do solid blocks of opaque, undramatic, and measured prose let memory enter to illuminate the fullest kind of slippage for the light?

Now I want to make the response to this sense of joint opacity and transparency simple (although there is a difficulty right off in drawing on these two kinds of surface without coming up against a meaning you can't see through) because it represents something specific and common to the pictures from the book itself, which is, that as you come up against—quite literally—the letters and words inside the book, you have the attendant responsibility to see through to the meanings behind them, which may be lost or simply silenced but still remembered—where there is no vocabulary for memory:

. . . Beyond the last buildings on the Paseo Marítimo, the eucalyptus branches stir in the sky. R . . . talked about remembering trees in the wind. A memory like that is outside the narrative.

[First Part, XXIX]

But the memory of writing is inside it, and this is finally what you come up against, like a period, even as you pass through to remember what is beyond it (writing): memories of fear, separation, oppressive threat, menace, and loss. You would not think so, but this is how a child can be so graphically silenced:

I learned, too early, to read and write with the help of alphabet letters painted on top in red enamel, and cut out of heavy cardboard. From one letter to the next, the red was not exactly the same. It was hot. I learned the shape of each letter by

running my finger over the smooth surface of the original. Then I copied the outline in a notebook, making the lines as straight as possible.

[Second Part, I]

In the morning there was the beach.

I ran along the water's edge to gather and throw back into the sea—if they were still alive—tiny fish the ebb tide had surprised, prisoners in the ripple marks several meters from shore.

[Second Part, II]

From the association repeated daily, of the dying fish with the red alphabet of my apprenticeship, I retained this: while it may appear to convey meaning in order to ward off an oppressive threat, a word, a text, a book would always first be a collection of letters, as is translated rather well by the transition in Latin of *littera* to *litterae*—from which literature is derived.

[Second Part, III]

And this is how Emmanuel Hocquard derives literature from childhood, by learning the pained lesson of a first writing, remembering and returning to it even now in the method of this book—straightforward, framed, level and evenly smoothed, measured and finally frozen without meaning, *if* that meaning emerges *only* from writing.

Now I want to return later to this sense of how writing produces a physical block (and I don't mean the conventional usage of that word to mean "writer's block") you come up against as something else (say memory's shadow theater) passes through and beyond it, because it represents something specific and common to the act of this translation itself, which cuts out, exactly, the "smooth surface of the original" while it illuminates the evanescent light of its transparency. Or, put another way: Each cut-out—whether of letter, word, sentence, or story—re-conceives the borders drawn by the original French writing (I am thinking of how faithful the translators are in reading and re-locating these borders through equivalent English prepositions, i.e., "above," "below," "beside") while it leaves in its wake a hole, "empty and transparent," through which the light passes. The language of the translation is sparse, simple, direct and pulsing, and it is, more than anything, a sign of the translators' remembrance or homage to a reading of the original which recovers the impulses behind it.

Now one does not have to return to these things later—the things I said I would come back to—if the form of the writing makes them apparent as duration in the present.

Simply put: If you want to remember the enduring clarity of Hocquard's narration, and the memories that pass through it, your reading must first simply and at some point stop.

Jackson Mac Low

Pieces o' Six XIV

THE HAND BEGINS TO MOVE ACROSS THE PAGE, leaving an irregularly interrupted trail of spiky or convoluted figures, each composed of interwoven thin connected lines. It relates with thought and speech, but could be seen without such relations. One from a completely nonliterate culture—in which even the possibility of writing is unknown—would only see a series of arabesqueline patterns separated by small spaces. What might such a person, watching a writer write, think the writer was doing? Would the watcher sense any connection with speech or thought? Would that observer assimilate the action with drawing or decoration? Feel, without admonishment, a need to observe silence? But how can one "observe" silence? One cannot see it, nor, by definition, can one hear it, much less feel it, smell it, or taste it. The only way to *observe* silence is to *be* it. Silence is one of a class of things that may only be observed by the observer's *being* them. Those who think they are *hearing* silence are only hearing a lesser amount of sound than they are used to hearing. Such "heard" silence is merely a marked reduction of sound around the observer. When one *is* silent, the ambient level is irrelevant—one observes silence by observing herself being silent; another observes silence by observing himself being silent. Whoever observe silence observe themselves being silent. This is not really true. The nonliterate watcher, fascinatedly following the writer's flourishes without in the slightest comprehending either their purpose or their purport, may well *observe* silence without observing her- or himself *being* silent. Oblivious of self, the mesmerized watcher bends as close as possible to the writing hand, the pen, the paper, the characters forming as they flow from the pen. How can the writer convey to the observer of silence and writing who's never seen writing before what writing is and means? How can the observer be led to link the written text with speech? By the writer's pointing to a word and saying it? What if the observer's language has no visible equivalent—not even one devised by the American Bible Society—and the observer can no more understand the writer's spoken words than comprehend the written ones, since neither in any way knows the other's language? What can the writer do to explain what's being done when the hand moves and the ink flows and the little chains of filigree fill the page? Since neither knows the other's tongue, neither writer nor observer can help the latter link letters to speech, much less to thought. A fine state of affairs!—especially when the writer's concern may be to keep the nonliterate culture letterless! A far cry from the American Bible Society's alphabets for lesser breeds to give the latter God's words on paper! The writer, at once anthropologist and author, may follow an idealistic program of cultural noninterference, while knowing realistically the program's futility. Every slightest contact may begin or hasten the change. Literacy looms ever larger on a far horizon. The nonliterate culture, with or without the American Bible Society's help, is on its way to literacy, and sure, one way or another, sooner or later, to get there. Literacy's contagious—but only, it seems, up to a certain level. Above that level the infective power seems sharply to fall off in strength. In most literate cultures most members are minimally literate, though many may seem more literate than they are. In a nonliterate culture, as long as it stays nonliterate, none is less literate than another. But contact with even a minimally literate person makes a change take place toward literacy. Each begins to become more or less literate than each other. It's only a matter of time before the American Bible Society or a linguist from the West gives God's words or the language's phonemes or both a full-fledged alphabet. The cat is out of the bag. Nonliteracy's gone forever. Some may become *illiterate* by not acquiring literacy at all when literacy strikes, many minimally literate, and comparatively few "truly" literate (whatever *that* means!). The writer's nonliterate watcher is well on the way to illiteracy. Nothing can be done. In a moment the culture's nature's changed forever. Goodbye, nonliterate bliss! (if that's what it was)—hello, all the hassles

bred of letters. The writer's observed. The culture begins to crumble. But how does being observed affect the writing? More than observing the writer writing affects the observer's culture?—Or less? Who can devise a common yardstick for measuring effects on culture in general and on particular writing? Not I. I sit here writing in a 200-page blue-lined "composition" notebook with red left-margin lines and stiff black-and-white marbled covers. Just above the middle of the front cover the marbling's broken by a shape like that of a television screen's frame: a quarter-inch-wide white frame is delineated inwardly by curved black lines. Just below the upper line a rectangle (one half-inch by thirteen sixteenths of an inch), outlined by black lines about as thick as the curved ones, frames the phrase "SQUARE DEAL," in solid serified capital letters, one word centered above the other. Below the rectangle the word "COMPOSITION" is printed across most of the "screen" in much larger centered serified capitals. Below "COMPOSITION" are two parallel horizontal lines as thick as the curved frame lines and a half-inch apart. On the upper line I've written "Jackson Mac Low." On the lower, "21 October 1983," the date on which I wrote the first of the "Pieces o' Six." Below that and near (but above) the bottom curved line is printed in small sans-serif letters (each word initially capitalized) "The Mead Corporation, Dayton Ohio 45463." I'm writing this—as I think I've written all or almost all of what appears on the preceding 82 ½ pages—with a Rotline, size 0,3, technical pen (a German version of a fine-point Rapidograph). It was bought for me by Rosanna Chiessi, a publisher and art collector, in a corner stationery store in Cavriago (near Reggio Emilia), Italy, so that I could complete a series of lettered collage-drawings that she planned to publish as four-color serigraphs. They were to constitute an homage to Bernini and to include words, phrases, and sentences pertinent to him and his works and images of the latter, predominantly sculptures and buildings. I began the project that summer of 1980, completing two "layouts" for the serigraphs. The words were hand-lettered with this

and another pen point, somewhat thicker, that she bought at the same time, and the images were collaged xerographs of Bernini's works. However, the project has never been completed, since I've never been able to return to Cavriago to work on it or to find time to do so in New York. The pen points and barrel remain, and I've often used them to write poems and prose, as now in this composition notebook. Sometimes I write very small with them, as I do now. At other times, as when I wrote what's on the first dozen pages of this notebook—the first two "Pieces o' Six"—I write relatively large. "Pieces o' Six—XIV" began fairly small, but the writing's gradually gotten a bit larger as I've gone along—neither very cramped nor very spacious. If a nonliterate observer were watching me write this now, I'd probably find it hard to keep on writing. I'd become—ironic epithet—"self-conscious." All my words and ideas would dry up, and I'd probably burst out laughing at the solemn, steady, close-range nonliterate gaze at my moving hand and pen and their residue. I'd laugh, and maybe I'd get beat up. Who knows? But certainly that understandable, all but ludicrous, curiosity of the nonliterate about what's going on when writing's going on would not be titillated further that day, much less satisfied. Maybe I *wouldn't* laugh at the nonliterate looking so earnestly at my ordinary occupation. Maybe I'd *try* to show the nonliterate one what and how the letters and words and sentences mean. I'd consciously begin the cultural infection. I'd try to explain how looping lines can mean what spoken words can. I'd fan the glimmer (or rather, the glow) that'd lead to the flash after which the former nonliterate would participate ever after in the eternal idea of writing. That oral culture was a goner anyway! But so, perhaps, is the literate one. Is the shape of its successor on the cover of my notebook?

24 May – 27 June 1984, New York

Gerald Burns

A Chain for Madeleine

Of how quartz stones rolled by even lake waters become, wet, opals
to the eye and to the fingers granular translucent well not
pearl quite or the flat striped sand-dollar stones in upper Michigan oh
vowel's velvet (eye today going to a blur almost porous
one in a thicket one listening to the sea.
A lavender host over a paten, fashion like Necco.
The insides of shells trap water at the molecular level, and this is like
"walls" said of intestines, innards. Velveteen linings in cosmetic cases
are constrained around boards pressed in tops, bandbox, Tissot models
with parasols that don't distract.
There's other beauty—Darwin at his desk with oddshaped-bottled specimens, the broken
greenhouse panes his germinating lids, things taken as Schopenhauer would say, barnacles
and crinoids, exhibited by being there to inspect.
The Victory for instance looks put together from rolled bits of clay, a
flocked one in an escalator coign fatal from not getting the wings on right, or the front angle either.
A mausoleum with a bit of Sphinx on it will only do for Baudelaire if it has plumbing.
In Lincoln the Four Elements in floor mosaic (lightning and so on) the
people toenailed, nipples exist the way the four elements would if personified, in spheres as one may think
that is where Worcester is half map half traveled, less,
the extremities of irregular stone in cellars flush.
A horse head in whacked stone like Elgin but no ear, eye comes after Baudelaire by
Rodin and Carpeaux Spirit of the Dance up up above cupid with Punchcollared sistrum the tambourine, all
side tuck eye expressing what his terracotta Smoker does all lapel,
the poet's skull round and square as a patent Japanese melon and one
vampiric ear, the face vulnerable from having so little hair.
In Providence the church set sideways to Benefit with a roundarched paned window in the steeple gave
Lovecraft a set, already a touch threatening, above the Meeting House and Poe imagined walking
the gaslamp
milieu needs an Inverness and the satchel or hair trunk with his lovely handwritten manuscripts, life
recopied, lost when he called for Reynolds and died, scrolls.
Beauty may have hurt them, not because they couldn't afford it but the furious shape she
lit into Helen with, "plagues they have felt—for thee" and that
it's an affront, people resent it unless
a handsome daughter supermarket cashier, pleasure to find it functional doesn't
make the pot boil in Dublin pokerwork steam or insects exploding the bark.
Pot the second, stave tankard withy-wrapped (that did like a leather jack, anything, anything to
drink with) for village tipplers improved on the hand cupped, a "cappy" in dialect few left for Burns
to drink with, thinnish wood slightly bent that was a fiddle, texture to which
they grumbled or sang, that Joan is greasy no conjecture but that her hands are chapped.
The other way to go at it, that its judgments seem universal, is also smart, farthing
on watchchain adolescent panache, his thin silver unless he employed a fob, these
words beginning with f for bits of money or tag, seal, as we saw
tudor pendant rubies and diamonds alternate and hanging pearls that when she put it on was alive
and we thought of May Morris, whose work is in the Victoria and Albert.
Imagine a capsule containing an unpleasant powder floating on the Seine that as
it passes Notre Dame, on a fluctuating ripple, picks up a reflection of its back parts and dissolves.
Its vanishing is where we go to, bolus of caring for fairies hiding behind the eucharist,
butresses like heat dissipating vanes. There's an oil Dufy of this.
Baudelaire's head in a Sekhmet's chest, Silenus of desire and cant
is the disingenuousness of hinges that concealed or not really move,
a hangman's rope in a shadow frame there as posited, tubes over the side
an imagined diver, our bread waddage also sinking.
The level of despair at which Französischen floats in the mind, foreign

appears as a comfort like the dusty orange Everyman essays
 by Belloc, Chesterton, Hunt (Swinerton's number 943 another)
 bookman's sharkskin modulated into practice.
 They did them, Dickens's face under horn, tinted miniatures instead of jewels because the
 author's face ruddy or cheeks slightly orange became its face, just under plane of it,
 pitted elbow potato we posture with—one with the plumber's collar could be *called* Olympia
 and that at best allusion though it would get you looking at how slots take light.
 Fancy is still around. Sheep are bobbins, the spool and sheaves township shield in dark
 wood sullen as a scout citation or bad calf on Milton on government, thing
 found wending.
 Representative views, cover our nakedness with bits of mirror or outer casing Rubens may pour, over,
 polished shields in a corner by a tree (in all his Judgments) nearly hid, the warlike aspect
 like a chimpanzee in a box, or a truck shaking with it.
 I had a while on handmade paper a Monte dei Paschi 300th anniversary ticket with
 the three beehives or bread ovens or whatever they are, money out of sheep not
 three walnut shells and where's the romance of this except having seen 'em in a poem.
 Verso a piece of paper with an urn on "For ever wilt thou" in brown water with
 rice, pea, bean some intimation of color and Greek voting (the
 E's changing from chicken crating or ideosun coming up by fiat)
 chucked in a culvert settles in brown leaves till
 the top unscrews by rust acting and waters equalize.
 Any of it since the war has become a kind of kitsch, Viking ships going out to
 mauve sea flaming, any pearly shot of anything, vista. My lake
 exudes now clear ice slabs indistinguishable from lucite or butcher-thick tabletops
 Hockney can draw his (so thinfaced) father's shoe through, lines in
 the face and the shoe, stitching. It's hammy white paper
 and knowing this will be a master drawing.
 The urinal projection so like Andromeda's rock or pebble tool controls
 splash while white as adjacent organically connected porcelain, two
 holes toward the back invisibly airfoil, waterfoil, finding this enchanting a link to Hartford.
 Personally I like the ringed slabs and trees underground bearing jewels like fruit,
 and always wanted to eat an amethyst.
 The physics of artificial snow in a crystal gradually coating hut, tree or effigy
 would not depend on the appearance of having settled, dusty briefcases an interval, a
 briefcase in one suffering gray particles or a furled umbrella in effigy the same,
 a made-for-ness not tender but still a picture of pity like a trashed Bacon painting.
 Darkle then, another crusted car, rococo wall bent to Roman shield on which
 (white on white) Quintilian on a sugary marble bench contemplates octopi in terrazzo, film
 of water over as if the Penguin *Origin* cover or he confronting spilled squid and so on that
 relaxing heap.
 Or string tied to make a circle with fractured eggshells convex
 side up and deceased immature mammal will be "stony field" with a—what? unmatable carcase

 and you can now return to twine, shells and kitten like a dugong on pebbled beach . . .
 Wells and Bennett (as if Thackeray condemned to be significant) exploit a vein, alter shape
 by muscular operations; she looks for everything they miss (coarse, male) fluty virtue a
 pediment with sundial under a teacup.
 Varying light from the sky itself on a set-piece Constable initiates
 a push-pull, bits done in different studio lights coming alive, perspective altering.
 Your gray church, sir, your river, sir no cottage-quiet ruralities even if
 all looks ready to sink through the marshy land, nothing left but
 rainbow and quaking churchshaped dint.
 The immediate glow (Williams's second Deliberate Exercise on M. Parrish) or what seems one in any
 post-Claude Goyaesque backlit
 promethean oneeyed Salvator Rosan intimidator of microscopic ships, lost like Turner's anatomy in sea
 nymph but
 iced-fish "monsters" but that's woolly, pearly and it's honey-copper the northerner
 assents to on Nemo's dented ball, or leaves by Tissot's pool where letters are read, people picnic, the beanie
 the teacake
 also cooler.

and so in this garden Tennyson or
anyone cloaked sits.

Martha Lifson

Rhetoric: Ten Poems

Rhetoric

Rhetoric

Does one tire of rhetoric, ever?
Shall we get lost on the freeway together,
love, stare at the Market Basket moon,
caught as always in electric wires,
a tangle of sentences about motion,
tv, or crystalline Marxism, which kind,
and where can one find a couch that feels
at home, unsettled as the cushions are.
Sweet peace, where have you got to
in this reign? When I got the notion
of it, it was too late, that's what's at fault,
timing, gait, the inability to read signs
on the connections between Pasadena, Silverlake,
the way you are when you can't control
almost everything and how you worry
about lying, the smallest, really, of sins.

Clouds

I can't utter, I began, a simple truth,
utterance without the mental cloud of
"it's impossible to know," utter nonsense,
and the likelihood of betraying what
two seconds previously passed
like those "real" clouds, watching
from a lawn marked by a live oak, two streets,
skirts spread out like fans as exotic as truth,
sky, death. I've mimicked the stuttering
of a student who says, eloquently,
he is wed to language, nevertheless,
suffering her veil, her ruthless eyes,
saying, "I do, I do," until the utter end
of time, sucking on collapsing teats,
and still remembering ecstasy.
"Very like a camel," I said incredulously,
stale perception come upon me newly,
like your lead weight that keeps me
simply, from evaporating, lying.

Rhetoric

Why does "it" rain, it's raining or it's wet
everywhere, why does "it" hurt, displacement
away from the center of what can't be
conceived—self, sky, what's up there somewhere
bringing to or toward, a finger cut
slicing a hunk of bread, "she" grows faint, "we"
lie on the floor by the green rug,
"I" forget about it until washing a plate
it aches and suddenly it's pouring floods of

childhood somersaults into the French doors,
blood on the carpet I said was the sea.
But who was it stood upright there
by the rain gutters near the oak tree,
who would have thought the faint wail
of a freight train would be memory not fact,
the pain of losing it all clearing like rain.

Rhetoric #

It doesn't matter, let it go, washed off
queerness of the moment, how unsettled
the weather makes days of rain and damp
settled into bedclothes, minds clogged
with the inability to think straight through,
memory coming on us like clouds dropped
about the farmhouse so he drops the glass
on the brick floor and we hunt in the dark
for slivers of light, say it doesn't matter,
can't stop thinking of the child who fell
to the ground, a blackening triangle,
pain in his crumpling knees, in the voice
I hear over the crackling wire, he wants me,
I want to be with child, chill breaks
ordinary needs for food or ease, leaving
only an ache in Bressonian wrists and arms.

Rhetoric #

Like rhetoric memory's fashioned of whirls,
embellished meringues dissolving on the tongue,
taking on the lemon, abolishing the bland.
I hear her voice in scarabs she wears
heavily in dreams before they're stolen
by men at the piano bar. They tip their hats,
we've met before, remember the evening we "dined"
before what's his name in Richard II?
The genoise is made without baking powder
for a birthday I see in newsprint
come off on my hands as I wrap packages,
tie them with string. What's decadent, he asks,
turning almost fifteen, what's love?
Since you said his name on the phone I've dreamed
of him seven times, lost him seven times more,
given speeches with closed mouth to cakes and clothes
as if laundry could get up and walk.
My dreams come in color, the necklace of my mother
vividly rust, the smell of tombdust
a rhyme, too painful to name.

Rhetoric #

If one cross into memory,
an endeavor affecting no world, no choice,
yet one returns edgy, bruised,
in spite of avoiding the expected
fall, as once—emblem of this—
hands guided me across a room,
up a set of stairs, a public and ordinary
abandon I couldn't nor yet can explain

the recurring desire for
except as memory is loss,
not only successive moments passing.

Rhetoric #

Say nothing matters but the world created,
the larger one beyond all the commentary
of female newscasters, interviewers who make
a moment in a film stand still. To effect
change, move a stone to nestle beyond the grassy
knoll, dig up an Australian fern. We've dug into
our money too soon. The dying woman balances
her check book each day, makes list of what's sent
to every chemotherapist and crank. The child's hair
stands in peaks from cherry picking, juice runs
down its arms and legs. The bucket spills, the pie
is sour, the radio presents a history of the dance.
What's left but Cole's *Destruction After Empire*,
fleshed out refusal to look death in the face.

Rhetoric #

Before the time, dying before one's,
cantelevered out and dangling, this sly
purchase on a view, who's to say what might be
seen. Sitting on the pier I saw no leap
but the circles after, my son said, there's
a fish, o see its feathers, but I said
the crane that walks the steamy lawn
at breakfast might have if you were close enough
but fish have, and he replied: time was
once upon fish flew across painted sky
landed with mouths open to the air,
swallowing and denying that three doors down
his grandmother breathed her last
and lifted her fingers across the sheets
like the legs of self-conscious birds,
awkward pencil-drawn stick feet extending
into the future, a blank page, blue lines
like veins and what's to come ever the past.
I Squanto teach you to plant blue corn.
I Pilgrim marvel at the many fish.

Rhetoric #

To believe whose talk or later in the day
walking is beyond anyone's description,
ache in the loins, loitering where the bus
stops for each gullible man, sleeves rolled,
untethered ramble lurks in the mouth,
pronouncements rapid as mosquitoes buzz—
who's one to have faith in—
concentration and confidence are and have been
undermined, Melville, James, and Whitman knew
and what tradition is this we partake of,
eating garlic, chilis, sweet onions
and pretending to be out on the town
entertaining multitudes in Italy, Spain.
Here, soon as I hit the sofa I sleep,

even in the middle of a lecture
can't remember what I was to say
about *The Making of Americans*, America itself
bastardized. Yet someone had a big moustache,
looked like Mark Twain and it wasn't just
make-up, a big roller of a cigar.

Rhetoric #

Night climbs into my forced horizon,
limb by creaking limb. Who goes there or
lift up your lanthorn, buddy, let me pass.
Oh, he says, in the imitation voice
of a jazz musician: fuck it, falsetto,
fuck it, out back is where I live, musty
and let me carry the voice of old Virginia or
any other influenced by Gullah and games.
My skill at hopscotch reduced to marginal notes
or what's left in the left hip no one can hear
except like the lilt of a song she says,
Jacksonville is where I come from
and not until the words drop away
does the sound make itself known
like ribbing on a strong ship's hull.
Who would leave where growing up occurs as if
it were obvious. Later, nothing's spelled out.

Paul Vangelisti

Los Alephs

an answer is only on occasion an answer
although nocturnally speaking act as
anodyne to bad nerves bad credit
and too many midnight drives to Arizona
animal in the dusk is it you
another time or just a shadow
anxious to learn these fingers to the bone
a point, Adriano, is space after all

barely noticed any of her was gone
bones too in the long-range prognosis and
beginning of a new day thereof I preen
bootless and you crush a cigarette to say
balls! it's not sticks and stones
but dreams ate innocence
Bob, maybe I've missed the point about victims
but forty years in this third-rate Babylon?

clearly this is an empty word
capable of chance or habitual inspiration
curable by whimsy shame or self-regard
conventional as a boatride to Catalina
cavernous as a mirror clamoring for speculation
carnivorous to the extreme of nostalgia capriciously of
course anticipating compunction
Chiara, isn't your name always unclear?

does it strike at all unfair I mean
don't you find it irritating to be born in
Dallas and translated to San Diego by a name so
doubly verbal? or maybe names
draw very little from a painter unless
darling in that hush the riddle of her
dolphin face once staked you to?
Don, has your name always been a verb?

even words hardly keep such restlessness
expecting to squeeze the lie out of them
equally regret is no more than an enzyme
evidently an ellipse implies vanity
eagerly one denies what one just wrote
Emily moves too languorous for my own good
elephants like insomniacs remember Egypt
even if they forget it's late to be sincere

freedom I am told I enjoy too much of
freedom to scribble freedom to accuse
freedom I am told is the opposite of terror
freedom insures Fred and what's-her-name
freedom to shop in Fribourg or Fort-Lamy
freedom it seems is the fatal comfort

freedom to rattle insipid verse
freedom I am told is like money in the bank

gallantly you address a new wine, Giuliano
Giulia, your tippling is generous as the
grasses of the field you, George, appear to
gamble your pose on what you have been
gnostic as the glossary may seem thirst
guarantees all a niche in this
gastro-intestinal cloister of the art thus I
give you each the first today with this hand!

Hobbes and hippopotamus were unquestionably critical
hierarchies as such never fail to concern me
here I am not entirely honest
how little concerns me these days
however Wittgenstein writes: the world of the
happy is a *happy world* as it
happens in this book you gave me when you came back
heartless from an Italy I wouldn't know
incidentally would our world have borne
Ingres the Iguana? the thought came up as
I read more Wittgenstein: death
is not life's event/ fear of death
is the best sign of a false life
in all this I translate W. from the
Italian as ever my passion for you is most improbable
I grant you this: *Vivi felicemente!*

jejeune jesuit dogs run
jealously across our dreams dropping as
Jarrell put it from our mother's sleep
judging us anyhow somewhere below Mason or Jones
John, we have heard worse than the eternal footman
jabbering at us 'Get a job!'
just when we had the steeple invisible and the
jackass rig halfway to China

knowing you 13 years without
knowing that in Japanese theater
knowledge is in the face not the feet without
knowing that Noh masks are
known to shift expression with the light
keeping marvel in the voice or dominion
Koki, no wonder these 13 years
kindness remains your necessity

left with talking and space these eight
lingering years unless
latitude is abandoned half the distance
likely to the angle of desire unless
lost desire the target is a desert a
limit to what we may know how my
loveless angel do we deserve when
longer is all we may hope to live

merely your name starts with the same three letters
maybe what one learns is chance
marking time to the charm of recollecting
more or less fourteen years as you strode into the kitchen on
Montana I recall your eyes and
mouth and the way of your long
mannerly neck craving any or all this
morning I fuss with circumstance isn't it
merely like hers your father didn't want you to dance

nevertheless all of you came west
needing this once deserted page
nonni e nonne Nicholas Nicole
Nevin Nathan to name only eight
needless to say there were many more
nameless enough to have translated the place
no reason for being here besides the past
nothing but blinding light up ahead

once upon a time I relied on Madame O
oasis in that voluptuous desert I
off and on penetrated even now she might
oppose what I have written
only she needs rise from the dead
or at least Israel and anyway
only God can make a tree
or a sentence imperative as Madame would have wanted it to be

probably just the residue of translating
peccare pesca pecora pescatore
preoccupied as I've been counting sheep or peaches or the sins of
poetry or the fishiness of my semiotic prosperity
perhaps I'm recalling Bukowski
putting it in his novel that I was a better fisherman than a
poet no wonder I know no one from
Pescara, Peppina, ora pro mihi

qualitatively *anywhere out of the world* seems like
quibbling the Land of Cockaigne runs
quite everywhere on this dear delicious globe that
qualifies progress is democratic
quick, please, by order of management
quit your guns and your hearts at the door
quixotically speaking have you ever met anybody from
Quito, mon semblable mon frère?

ride one's humor into the ground and
ridiculously enough one has satire or catharsis
rid of purity or the singing voice or the odd
risk of someone's spittle in the mouth
riddle it anyway you must you
ring *satura* [*satira*] mixed dish, medley
right on to *satur*, full or sated
Robert, was it satire or satyr you asked me about?

some months after you are born I
sit one morning not unlike this
surrounded by leaves quaking in the fog

so determined I am to begin 'for Simone
six-months old' that I overlook the
stupid secret in the air and
stubbornly name you 'my little sister' even if the
surrender will not stop

that fathers and sons disappoint
that our *own little worlds* are disapproving seems
the least we can allow
to outlive such platitude undertakes
the rage fathered in you or the bitterness or
the reflection you must have found in my eyes
Tristan, you are written after all the rest
to admit the abyss we blame each other for

undoing light in that green flash
unclad in virtue
unsaddled with desire
unapproachable uncertain
unfeeling uneasy
unfinished is happiness as
usual a dream and what remains
unspoken unmade love?

vainly the name I resented so long and
vastly foreign and forced me to pronounce
very careful polite the
verge of shame beneath each sound especially
V no not B but
V and then S not F but S
virtuously spitting out the letters in
victory

with or without hunger a new world is
what I speak you speak
we all speak for nobody
who in the long run put out the monster's eye and
went round the world to find his way home
which by some perilous and
windy door brings me to your saying,
William, never fall in love out of town

X represents the city to die in where
X is an old man
X marks the table in a corner of Pietro's where
X dines alone not at all
xenophobic and always good for a laugh
X at the bar filling his eyes like Balboa a little
xanthous before that Pacific

you used to be in pictures mostly foreign
yet furnished my private art
you lived for years with me under the sun
you turned away your proud head as I turned and
you looked on as another
you stepped through my lunatic door
younger than the moon

you always made me laugh even in the dark

zero is how most of us start

zero zip nada the perfect doubt

zeroes in like a victim dying of thirst

Zanagani, Carolina. 1901-1984

zero suffered magic in her heart

zero rattled in her voice like a door

zero her shameless eyes

zero 'where once the sweet birds sang'

David Searcy

Air and Light and Miracles

from *A Trip to the Sun*

Air and Light

1.

IT SEEMS STRANGE TO BE INVOLVED in two elements—different parts of your body required to negotiate such different media as solid land and atmosphere at once. Terrestrial animals should fall down more often and maybe they do stumble and trip in the normal course of their lives more or less regularly—a catastrophic loss of equilibrium, barely maintained in any event, peculiar to large land animals and especially human beings. What's the threshold size among land animals for the sustained tendency to collapse without compelling external cause? Certain very large African beetles might exceed the limit but, as they aren't strictly terrestrial, being capable of flight and spending much of their time in trees, if one falls it's a translation from one forest stratum to another. Thump, goes the goliath beetle and it is not him but his former condition which has collapsed.

An out-of-focus black and white photograph in the American Paralysis Association newsletter for December '85 shows two paralyzed young women equipped with experimental electrical muscle stimulation devices dancing with two apparently normal gentlemen who might be fathers or husbands—it's difficult to say, the photograph is obliquely lit and uniformly indistinct resembling photographed details of paintings. They are posed like ballroom dancers in what seems to be an empty motel lobby, the two men (maybe they're doctors) looking right into the camera and smiling to establish the intention of what they are doing. It's as strange as if it were in the Sahara at night illuminated by a camp lantern or a fire and as if, striking this attitude, they have undertaken in the exhilaration of discovery immense risk and vulnerability. The formality of it suggests the novelty and risk of anyone standing up and dancing, of anyone ever having done it. Modern details, the clothing and furniture as in medieval depictions of biblical subjects, extend rather than confuse the significance: it is the discovery of ceremony. They are blurred by a kind of momentousness the way old photographs of miraculous public demonstrations sometimes look—Houdini upside-down above the street, hazy as if from unlikeliness or disbelief like subatomic events which remain ambiguous on principle, confined by blurriness which is not a compromise but a property.

The photograph summarizes the idea of formality and ceremony as well as the difficulty of it although there is, except in a broad sense, no volition on the part of the women. They are carried away by what's happening—the electrical stimulus presumably—and it's hard to tell if in the picture they look resigned or entranced. They are being held as though presented (the one nearest even seems to wear a circlet of white flowers or else bright light falling on her hair is blurred into a halo giving that impression). It's like an allegorical tableau. Something like an original primitive impulse has been reconstructed or synthesized and that it can feed directly, instantly into such an urbane and specialized form suggests not merely that ballroom dancing is decipherable in primitive terms but that it is, entirely on its own, a legitimate grade of frenzy.

For the sake of argument the opposite of the Hun is the mole. One disregards what consumes the other. Neither wants literacy or formality. There is no ceremony in their lives because there is no need for any organized idea that the world is divisible, composed of parts, and hence no need to confirm it. This is a formal idea and it takes large, clumsy, sedentary, terrestrial animals to acquire it. Really to understand that what you stub your toe against is not yourself is a fine distinction which is not inevitable; it requires repetition to drive it home, familiarity with your surroundings, sustained precariousness and, ultimately, an inability to concentrate. The mole does nothing but concentrate while the Hun lacks even the principle. What's needed is formal inattention, the admission of lapses—interruptions—into the body of the world. That comes from living in two elements and believing them both.

In English speaking countries the sound of mystery is a prolonged, softly whistling, slow expulsion of breath. You do it to be funny or theatrical, to imitate the sound of the wind, to suggest an ominous windy silence when telling ghost stories to children. It may seem to carry portent or desolation depending on the moment but basically it is just mystery—the sound of the atmosphere reminding you the atmosphere is there occupying the spaces between things, the gaps in your knowledge like radio static. It could be a remnant from some pre-literate, pre-formal state like the hiss of interstellar microwave background radiation—residual memory of something once present within the vacancies between the definitions of things.

Look at a piece of ground that's not paved or relieved by any feature of particular interest. You can find features of interest; this happens automatically as soon as you pause to look but you can ignore these or at least set them aside in your mind and when they are replaced in your attention by other features or objects or even relationships these can be set aside also and, in fact, the entire unavoidable process of recognition can be set aside as a superimposition founded upon a more primitive kind of understanding which has nothing to do with notions of the ideal or imagined essences or potentials (it doesn't belong to objects, for example, unless you reinterpret their surfaces as maps) but which carries or constitutes the

initial instruction for recognition. It tells you you can remember, that therefore you are located, that therefore you have someplace to go and that things and events mark destinations. Everything you recognize (everything you know)

not only looks like you but holds a place for you as well and what's most fundamentally mysterious is the initial instruction, the code for divided attention, for the distance between things, the intervals which, for convenience and by general consent, are filled with air.

Dancing is formalized collapse. You dance like the wind, even slowly in a ballroom hardly lifting your feet you are regulated by the periodic, and in this case imperceptible, moment of wild abandon and the possibility of collapse. The main thing threatened with collapse is knowledge; madness itself doesn't contain much stable information. Old couples dancing are the best example—they are taking greater risk. They are threatened with collapse to begin with, like high-performance aircraft they are more responsive because instability is built in. They are biased toward collapse, toward death and the loss of information so when they dance, carefully and slowly, each regular shift away from equilibrium is genuine, much closer to real catastrophe, and every reclamation of balance is short of perfect, more urgent and distinct. In fact they are probably much nearer than younger dancers to an understanding of the risk—not just the possibility of injury but formally, within the rhythm of the dance, the cyclical abandonment of memories and facts, the persuasiveness of these intervals.

On the old Lawrence Welk television show sometimes you could see these couples celebrating some advanced anniversary and testing their balance, their old affections and habits of thought. It's hard to believe but every step was like the creation of the world, back and forth swaying just enough to tilt them toward ecstasy, dissolution and back again and again—the frequency so compressed and the amplitude so low it could not have registered consciously at all but there they were appreciating all this at some level nonetheless.

This is what standing upright is all about; formality is impossible without it—to have relieved oneself from the landscape, to perceive oneself extended vertically, artificial as a circus dog. A trained poodle in a tutu is funny because it looks natural which is to say it looks about as natural as you do. How strange it is to be always upright, always looking around as if sensing danger, doing everything while sensing danger. Maybe what you think of as knowledge is really a construction of fear and apprehension or is driven by apprehension and is deeply comforting and even compassionate because it is a kind of modulation of it. Goofy demonstrates that knowledge is exactly as surprising and improbable as annihilation. This suggests not only that the more you know the less likely it becomes but that knowledge, in the sense that it is decorative, is virtual—not to be confused with notions of truth which are extrapolated from it. Houdini suspended may be the epitome of knowledge. He is relieved entirely from the landscape. Hanging in the air upside down he couldn't be more precarious, more explicitly improbable and at risk. Could he have felt as blurry as he looks in the photograph—the blood rushing to his head, the sound of the wind? In a strait jacket he is complete and shut off; he now has only a formal relationship with the world. The trick is that in a minute, inexplicably, he will return to us, lose his broader significance and be let down. But right now he is like a dried animal or a bundle of bones dangling over the gate of some tribal village—unidentifiable from the distress of too many rituals but suspended conspicuously and removed from the world; it says: "Look here. Watch out. Don't forget."

Goofy, on the other hand, is an idiot. He is at the verge of knowledge, incompletely separated from the animal condition (it's one thing to live in terror and another to recognize it). He acquires knowledge without really possessing it; whenever he gets information it passes right through him like an electric shock or leaks away into the background; so to receive new facts he has to regain the concept and it must be this which is terrifying because information is compassionate.

Goofy has to get information in a kit. He receives instructions along with the object; phenomena beckon and instruct him into amazement and recognition over and over; he is pulled and jerked toward knowledge and compromise. Probably if he were left alone he would become a simple animal again like Dr. Jekyll or Bob Steele or regressive generations of once-domestic swine turned loose to forage. What is the value of formal idiocy like this—just barely pulled up above the animal level and held there permanently surprised and endangered like a caught fish dangling in the air and light? Clowns and magicians—the purest low comedy—express the terror of knowledge, the original surprise that precedes compassion. Think of Neanderthals in a state of comic terror—red hair and noses (unpreserved except as a kind of racial memory—who could have dreamed they looked like that?), big feet, good-natured. Their strange, long skulls with the bun-shaped occiputs were roomy enough for empty astonishment, brutality and tricks. A small tribe gathered on the open savanna at dusk, silhouettes in the distance, might be heard quite far away calming down gradually for the night, preparing to sleep; one subdued, final exchange of whoops and farting then the crickets take over and the frogs and night birds. *Commedia dell'arte*, *commedia erudita*.

2.

Foreign art films in the fifties and sixties liked to portray memory as events that have been overexposed. The past is a glare you recognize immediately. It might seem like a heavenly glow or pallid and residual but you can tell either way someone is in a reverie; it's too bright and clear to be the present, too much clarity at the expense of depth and detail in which respect it may be like childhood perceptions. You think of the end of Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* when the old professor returns to his childhood again; the screen goes clear and luminous. He is looking across a little bay at his father fishing. It's not just the idea of things past and lost but the great clarity of it that is heartbreaking. His father waves back and so there is a consolidation of some kind which seems at the simplest level to involve a reconciliation of moods—that of the

present with that of the remembered past. The wave is like an invitation to be memorable, to be overexposed and clear without depth, to think of the present in the same way as the past and to

understand that this requires, more than anything else, a change in mood, an adjustment of the light.

Remembered events feel like invitations—something recognizable and therefore someplace to go. Goofy, half in and half out of the ordinary world, has no sense, understands remembered events as attainable destinations as, sometimes in a dream or just coming out of one, common sense can be withheld and you find yourself able to believe in the rearrangement of causes and effects and the possibility of returning to the past—not magically or mysteriously but simply like getting out of bed in the morning and walking down the street, amazed at how you ever managed to think it could be otherwise.

Given knowledge of things, you expect knowledge of events but what you get is something like knowledge of things again as if things shone with events, emitted them like radioactivity. Imagine from inside the bleak little house with the wavy-edged asbestos siding and the barren front yard looking out the window in the summer. Insofar as a house can be thought of as a kind of schematic for knowledge and its maintenance, the ground and distance and heat around it are somehow unknown, completely baffling in fact. You think you know something about it but really you don't. That's primeval distance receding in the glare across the dirt and grass. You think it leads somewhere, across fences and shrubbery, to other houses and places you have been. You think knowledge will occur.

A house as plain as this one tends to get filled with unrelated facts. At this level of simplicity it happens almost spontaneously like crystallization in exceptionally pure substances. It's the preliminary form of knowledge—all the knickknacks and ornamental things you can imagine that come with such a place, decorative objects and treatments of objects which leave the plainness untouched because they ignore it, ignore each other and the rest of the world. They aren't intended to inform you about that; each is a primitive fact probably untranslatable except to announce that information is a possibility and, in this case, that's enough. All that's really wanted is to mark the places knowledge can be. A little tasselled pillow shaped like a kitten, for example, does not intend to tell you much about animals or human comfort; it's holding a particular space for general knowledge. Content is not its main purpose. It's like the aircraft-shaped decoys of some Melanesian cargo cults. Extremely ordinary houses without landscaping are close to the origin of knowledge; in the summer especially they seem to approach a flashpoint and you get these little domestic miracles that make life worthwhile—sacred images on tortillas and screen doors, a kind of meta-ornament. From a place like this when you look out an open window, feel the breeze through the window screen, you can't help anticipating the past as well, lost youth, knowledge of events. It might be out there like everything else. This is where knowledge gathers after all; it comes in through the windows and doors. A house without complications is like a lure. But then imagine what the Melanesians would think if some foggy morning it worked; and the whole village were caught in a blinding light, a rush of frightened dogs and children, then the ground-shaking roar of real engines approaching and the shadow of real wings.

Miracles

JAMES LYNCH, A DALLAS TAXI DRIVER, has suggested that the most striking component of highway debris is shoes—single example of all types which occur with inexplicable frequency and present, he believes, a deep and subtle mystery glimpsed, in this kind of phase transition between more and less organized states, like evidence on the beach of some unrecorded marine catastrophe.

One wants, of course, unexplained disappearances, mysterious rains of shoes, for shoes to possess just the right topology and mass to respond to extraordinary physical agencies operating without observable effect for millions of years before the development of modern footwear and for single shoes thus to be distributed quite uniformly over the earth's surface—lost in the oceans and hidden in the woods and meadows—with apparent concentrations revealed as sampling errors, paved roads merely having rendered them visible along more frequently travelled routes. But what you have is something modest, only slightly skewed from normal patterns of refuse scattering and accumulation yet compelling nonetheless like a shred of nightgown on a thornbush or a bonnet on the surface of a pond.

As for the actual mechanism, it's hard to imagine anything really sinister. Surely people would notice if something were happening to them, become aware of bizarre compulsions or at least be observed in their stocking feet, eyes glazed as they lurched onto buses or stumbled across the highways in a dream. Perhaps you shouldn't look for a responsible event; it could be statistical or even deeply statistical. Can there be, for instance, anything like a macroscopic analogy to the notion of "virtual particles" which in quantum physics allows the description of pure vacuum as an undetectable froth of rudimentary bits too short-lived for conventional existence but in principle required because the possibility cannot be excluded? Can the beach be like a vacuum; can the highway be a beach?

Maybe it's lack of imagination that makes shoes seem less fundamental than crystal spheres, say. Like cows, shoes tend to be silly and they have moderate bulk. They are among the first things exaggerated to make a clown ridiculous. When random objects are flung in cartoons a shoe is as likely as a brickbat. If a fool goes fishing he catches a boot. It represents any silly, incidental, valueless thing and in this sense is fundamental—not that things are made from it but rather that toward its condition they may eventually be reduced and so, in a way, inferred.

Think about roads. What are roads? They are like a vacuum sucking you along, vacancies where obstacles have been removed, where stuff of all kinds has been pushed aside; and think about a lonely taxi driver at night—so much paved receding surface after a twelve-hour day. Remember the *Twilight Zone* television program, the introductory graphic with the

weird landscape—where do you suppose that comes from? You see variations often enough—the flat, uniform surface sometimes with parallel lines to show perspective converging toward the vanishing

point, isolated, usually fantastic shapes erupting from this symbolic-looking flatness and casting long shadows. It has become a standard format for science fiction book covers and magazine ads for mystical societies; its effect is easy and sensational and, at one time, was nearly as popular as the face of Donald Duck among school children, a few of whom could always produce one or the other upon request as a kind of currency. It's the average surrealist landscape, sort of a basic starter set—the best-loved devices of Salvador Dali reinforced where they coincide with the more concentrated and easier to copy pictures of Yves Tanguy. But what's essential is the pavement, the smooth, vast imaginary extent perpendicular to the picture plane. This, along with mirrors and cartoon faces, has to be one of the elementary delights—that you can believe in some sense such a violent optical illusion which, in turn, suggests ways to believe just about anything you want. Saints and angels, life after death, all the unlikely things you hold in your thoughts would like to be let out onto such a surface.

What would looking at Masaccio's frescoes in the early fifteenth century have been like? For the first time linear perspective was under control and holy thoughts and objects occupied reliable holy space. It penetrated solid walls and must have seemed to justify and even explain what appeared within it as if, insofar as a place for things established their possibility, it caused them; miracles tumbled out, accessible, direct, without translation or suspension of doubt. Saint Augustine, a thousand years earlier, confessed to having found it remarkable that Saint Ambrose habitually read silently to himself, receiving information directly with no intervening sound, no testing of the word against the air, no doubt whatsoever. The wonder may have been that Ambrose possessed sufficient faith to do it; to accept knowledge unannounced without, somehow, trying it out in the world first; that he had the compassion to see the world in the page. And if there were something alarming in this it might have been a problem of too much compassion, that believing what is read silently invites belief in anything.

Whatever that surface is in the pictures of Dali, Tanguy and even de Chirico, who seems to have invented surrealist pavement as a foundation for ideas of vacancy and dead space, it does not participate in the generation or dissolution of things appearing upon it. It's not like earth or lawn. Unlike soil, it's not the extreme disorganization of anything. It's just where things appear and if, as is frequently the case, they appear in a condition of decay they must be subliming into space because the ground is not absorbent; there's no common chemistry. How strange that the surrealists should seem so conservative in this way—so often requiring such a basic kind of landscape as if they needed a safe place for their startling gestures like a child issuing taunts behind its mother. Like children's pictures, first there is the ground then the things that go on it. Even members of the group who never adopted this specialized surface as part of their iconography found it creeping in sometimes as if they too really longed for a place to put their ideas—truly surrealist ideas which came in discrete packages and needed someplace to be stored.

To the extent that it's possible to show it at all, de Chirico's paintings show the strangeness of pure distance (as opposed to romantic or historical distance for example, distance as gesture) which fails to convey grandeur, inevitability or much of anything else, is constrained from gesturing and is left for the most part as the simplest and emptiest fact of extent and isolation. It isn't a conveyance. It is without potential, uninterpretable in the same way flat unpainted areas of rock separating paleolithic images in caves are uninterpretable; it's an inconsistency and that's why it's strange—that distance relieved of function (even of atmosphere if you believed the long hard-edged shadows) becomes a discontinuity unexplainable in terms of the things it separates, that distance (at least as painted, imagined) is not plausible except as a field of action for either the viewer or the contents. So, do miracles count as actions? What do you call the kind of distance in Masaccio? When it was new it must have seemed strange as for the first time noticing a familiar object in the mirror or after a long absence; you have to re-recognize it which entails a revelation: "Oh, yes, distance, that's what it's like." And if de Chirico in his metaphysical pictures is really receiving anything from the Italian Renaissance beyond some of the forms and a sense of pedigree, is really discussing something about it, it might be the original astonishment, a vision of the awfulness of distance and the spectacular separateness of things. He has to get at it differently of course; coherent perspective no longer carries the surprise and power to drive that kind of spectacle. De Chirico's spectacle is like a salesroom display. Things are items staged at the ebb of events, withdrawn as far as possible from action and interaction. They recede toward any number of vanishing points, coherence having been abandoned for emphasis—a kind of raving, indiscriminate repetition of effect just to get the main idea across, insisting on it here and there at once, forcing the illusion to dissolve and recur over and over as accumulated errors overload belief and confront you with the mechanism that draws you in again.

How would Saint Ambrose have felt at first without some sort of purchase, a point, at his end, where belief attached to the world? Without utterance he must have been adrift sometimes before getting used to it, lost with no provision for knowledge to emerge into the air to be calibrated, signalled with little clouds of breath on cold mornings, little echoes up and down the hall like candles. He must have oscillated a bit at the beginning the way Masaccio's early audience probably couldn't help doing (the way de Chirico's is instructed to do), accepting then recoiling from the illusion—this was no puppet show after all, no place for a wink and a willing suspension of disbelief—this was the real thing, a letting go altogether, giving up the moment of permission and transferring belief toward a point as far away from utterance as you can imagine utterance may once have been from the simplest experience of things.

[Previous installments of David Searcy's *A Trip to the Sun* may be found in Temblors 1 and 4.]

Alan Davies

Setset / Modes / Words Work

Setset

1 4

Most people cannot read long or complicated sentences. Life is a product of imperfect people. My feeling at that time was of despair constant and infinite. There's no proof of cause and effect apart from its suitability as explanation within a context. An infinite number is a finite concept as any infinite number is not. Small boys like to see and touch girls.

7 5

I need more time like a table. Everything you say you end up doing. Everything revolves around the ground. Run it up your flag pole. There's a lot of verbatim attention in the air these days. I had forgotten to remember that I would see things that are new now. I have myself eating her out of my hands. You have those dreams because you know where the power relaxes.

3 2

Even the air smells weird on a night like this that's so thick. There are pale flowers in the light. You look at it and realize that each thing is as far from each other thing as it could possibly be. The look of him waiting is the look of one already in the next moment. The light shone on a wedge of her coat. It appeared to shine through it. Placid lakes are full of water.

8 6

All of these pages have writing on them. I've seen the notebooks. I think I would remember had I done. There might be eight pieces of rhythm in one part of ten. Genius is interrupted. The imagination is for what is impossible to the flesh. It's the minor composers that you hear when you're dying. Society means that the occasions come with instructions.

5 3

It was by no means or necessarily a permanent relationship. This is one of those special instances of which I spoke. They're very pliant at that age. Indiscretion is a mystery. I went there. I was there until I got back. It was as if she was naked in terms of this is what I have to offer. The vagina already had a theory of movement.

10 9

Get the insanity out of your gestures and into your actions where it belongs. Sometimes I just go for a walk down a different street. You can smell neuroses. At one dollar a copy a thousand copies only cost a thousand dollars. The horizontal has depth when you live it head first. I've forgotten so much that I can't remember the half of it.

2 1

A person who doesn't know who she is might do anything. A man fails to get off the train at the station when there is no one there who greets him. If he notices on leaving someone moving he takes the next train back. When there is no one there to meet him he hails a cab and lets it take him anywhere. He thought and yet the fur between them could be sweet.

11 11

Women tell the story. Life is content without form. I thought the abruptness of the question following hard upon the statement would call the statement into question. The exceptions occur in the most common cases. There is a clear distinction between the left leg and the right leg. There's nothing but constants. Her belly had a pearl stillness.

4 7

She was the sort of woman who washes her curtain in egg white and lemon. It must take a very long time indeed before the dominoes are placed the way the words are laid. They're flushing the aisles. History is remembered for what it was. Maybe they were from the same time. The self is already a technological construct if it depends upon a mirror.

12 12

They also wait who only stand and wait. Always keep an eye on your executioners. There were some things she was too young to forget. If it's simple and direct it's clear. Live like you are going to live. Just wait while someone does something. No one uses the word audible in conversation. I think that's more of a personal thing than time allows us to think.

6 10

Those particular legs enclose the chest of drawers in which our dreams are made and stored. This is this situation. Heat from the tree is what we get when we read. I'd like to project this idea for you for a moment. Someone you know really well might look right at someone else you know and not even recognize them. I feel like I'm not going to have time.

9 8

I should have worked harder on some of the sentences but what are you going to do it's a real world. We all know because it is where we live that there is no such thing as the fine line between fact and fiction. Well when you get to the point where you don't need anything anymore you might get everything that you used to think you needed. I used to think so too.

8842786

Modes

Speak instantly . . .

Is it still possible to speak of *the* world, after reading this?

with authority . . .

end of the world. end of a life.

(punctuation)

each word's . . .

Strain every word particle-fibre.

*

The verb particles in every word.

*

In relation words swell or diminish.

The fluctuation's meaning.

concerted working.

paralogical statements.

*

Using words; hold stringently to degree of force, vector, weights moved, direction (movement off previously-established lateral plane, etc), constantly new vista with each sentence . . . phrase . . . breath!, the electrical charge used and that emitted, what is controlled and what given.

(Strange, need metaphor to talk of the speech activity.

Also, that it becomes, like, idealistic; talk of enlightenment.

Impossible totally doing this. Get close via refined attention correlative with say solitude; not there.

—No external authority.

Write clear; space required like blank page. Again, solitude.

Have to move over the entire white; then write. Absolute choices, one after another and together, to make any and what parts black. Importance of the *design* of a work; holds the pattern of choices, to blacken. More important than meaning or intention.

Space already part filled, charcoal on patches of page. Must write around those areas, or clear through them. Very difficult to obtain 'the whole thing clear' to work in.

(Mallarmé, closest

Sense of a life inevitable, because of unclear areas. Clear language writing thus *partly* possible.

Undisturbed attention, clear itself, gets on.

Speaking instantly with authority each word's concerted working. —No external authority.

Words Work

The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley

University of California Press

IT REMAINS A HOT SUMMER IN MEMORY. There were days when showers fell softly and perpendicularly on the square.

We tend anyway to open the valves of our memory to heat and to close them on the vagaries of inclement weather.

The majority of the days that summer of 1972 in Cambridge, Massachusetts were clean and dry. Robert Creeley's class met on the top floor of a new and antiseptic Harvard building. Twice a week for four hours or so the weather played little part in the minds of twenty or thirty people assembled attentively for the class which was called, if I remember correctly, Readings in Modern Poetry. We read with pleasure and with the advantage afforded us by Creeley's conversation, recollection and insight, the writing of the four young poets, Ted Berrigan, Tom Clark, Joanne Kyger and John Wieners, each a friend of Robert Creeley and each a friend of his mind. Each of the poets was young in approach, each had learned from Creeley's work, vantage, and critical approach, and each was a new name to most of the students.

What I remember most is Creeley's presence and the exceptional generosity of that presence. He censored nothing of himself. What he said was what he thought, all of it, and the way he acted was the way he felt. The person was the teaching, and more than whichever subject at hand, the teaching was the body of gestures in thought.

He had known Pound and Williams and Olson and others, knew all of his peers and artists at work in areas other than poetry, each of the poets with whose work we were concerned that summer, and he was not averse to getting to know each of us. His range was entirely human, and the intellect was continually reembodyed with humor and pleasure as the tool in the pursuit of knowledge of the human presence on earth. Language was speech and the subject of speech was language as thought.

Each class achieved a kind of modulation. The duration lost its significance because of the strength of modulations. Time went quickly. We listened a lot, and talked, and the talk informed our senses of what it was to speak, what it could be to listen, and what it could mean to read and to write. Out of volumes of information moved and moving in restless directions about us and through us and in us, the simplicity of the strength of the human action.

The surges of constant conversation on those afternoons made for a kind of quiet. We learned that the mind is quiet when the mind is at work. We learned that, that is the paradox which permits and produces writing, and we learned that writing is precisely that place where tautology and paradox meet, where a confrontation between what is the same and what is different produces the world's dimensionless object, the mind quietly at work.

Those are the things that I learned.

The conversation itself would have been restless, excited, moving quickly from time to time, place to place, from one work or body of work to another, and passionately from person to person with we the persons between, the participant recipients. Creeley was the focus of our attention, and the device of that focus. Perhaps his excitement was his reward for our use of him, but I am certain that he never questioned that. His place did not need to feel secure, because it was. He neither sought nor needed our esteem, because his work is his own certainty, such that he doesn't need to recognize it. His presence is in the right place.

Mr. Creeley has written his poems with diligence. I choose that word first from among the others.

That is why we call him Creeley. It is that persistent attention following with words upon persistent attentions, that has given him, in and through time, the last name of his father as his name. It is that name by which we keep him.

Diligence does not preclude fun, but it includes it. It includes sentiments, thoughts, feelings, sensations, whatever it wishes. It is in its ability to include whatever that we recognize its energy and its devotion. Its energy cleans its devotion from that which is cloying. Its devotion cleans its energy from frantic error.

Diligence is the persuasion that we bring to language when we think equally in and of it. This persuasion bends the language so obliquely that it meets itself acutely, and traverses at once back over itself in the most direct of assaults upon the world.

It is therefore diligence which makes us break the line of thought. It is diligence which makes us, and whereby we, make verse.

The broken articulation of Creeley's lines often seems to be connected with faltering emotions or with rapidly stuttering perceptions. Often it is. But it is the alteration of thoughts which are mindful of these changes, and alterations in the mind which make the line of verse.

The mind finds in these flexing attenuations its delight in itself, and we find in that delight our own delight in the world of verse, and in verse in the world. In this way verse is always the actions of the next intelligible thought, that is, of thought coming to itself and with already the next thought in mind, and, when writing, then also quite literally, in hand. Perhaps it is, after all, a relationship between the mind and the hand, which makes verse.

In Creeley's as in other of the best verse it is not a question of the mind having driven the verse on, or of the verse having driven the mind, but of a quiet unity of the two that makes a pact of the language and the world. It is not in his writing a matter of which of the two, of any two, is the stronger, but a matter of a strength, of any strength, too strong to stop long at the notion of two. The lines count the world and the world counts the lines in the mind.

Lines of verse have the quality of having meaning at the end and at the beginning and in the middle. This gives the lines of verse a compactness in durations and it is a compactness magnified in reverse by comparison with the

more stentorious lines of the most articulable prose. Lines of verse intensify the feeling of the mind about its work. For Creeley the awareness of that work is an awareness of that feeling. It draws all feeling into itself, a line at a time, and the time of feeling thinking draws into itself all thinking feeling, with all shorter and longer durations, also. Creeley's line bears what he thinks he feels in the world. As we wear his lines in our minds we wear them not as armor or as aimless thought. It is an arm that writes and writing arms the world with mind.

The durable pressure along the lines of Creeley's verse is pressure within the line of thought within it. This pressure creates the impression in our minds of the problematics of reading his, and it intensifies the pleasure of our knowledge of our reading of it. It is this pressurization of thought by feeling which informs the status of an understanding of the world. The sequenced release of that pressure is the function of its containment in active verse, and the action of this verse is its release, our realization.

The fact of duration about the line, the fact of its ending before it is through and of its ending in order to begin, places upon each word in our knowledge of our reading it, its necessity in being there. To an idle mind this necessity seems impolite, but to a mind at work what a polity it makes, of any one of us.

At the end of many of Creeley's lines there is that uncertainty which is expectation, and in expectation the certainty of some satisfaction of meaning before the end, or of the end as certainty qualified by extensive expectation. It is as if our knowledge of our experience of cursive writing informs us as we read, so that we know the way the muscles of the arm feel at the end of a line of writing, tensed by the locomotion and made thereby ready to relax, but finding also in the slight relaxation of moving to start a new line, a resistance in the tension such that the arm will go on. This is exactly our experience also as we read this verse.

The resilient beauty of the verse is nowhere to be matched, not with that life in that. The American language is a flux of detritus. It's the best language in the world for talk, and when talk informs the mind with diligence it charms. The charm of speech is life and life is strength.

It is an indication of poetry's connection with the mind that the words in a line are best chosen faultlessly by it, and not haltingly, by speech. In this way, as the poet's powers progress, a feeling of the necessity of each word and of its place, comes

unerringly into focus. There begins to come to be a seamlessness, if not of result, of effort. The mind perseveres, is active, when speech is a corner of silence.

Creeley has more and more written his lines such that each word within one and then bears a certain prescience, the prescience of sentence, its own. We feel that each word has demanded its place, and, equally, that it has been demanded by it. It is this equally weighted demand which creates a weightless clarity, and it is this clarity which demands our attentions.

When the words on their own appear to mobilize this perseverance, the temporal unity of the poem is assured. Its pace is guaranteed by the absolute precision of the words, such that their pace makes of the poem a necessarily correct unity, in time.

The spatial impingements, the structural absolutes and near absolutes, are resolved in other ways, on levels other than that of the word. It takes time to resolve them, but time is not their resolution. In Mr. Creeley's verse the structural resolve is anticipated usually by the presence of stanzas. Even in his collection *Pieces* and in other poems in like form, it is the possibility of the stanza, which is moreover occasionally represented, that precipitates for us and for the words themselves, the form of the sense they make.

Finally, the quiet persistence of the words won't let us tarry on anything longer than the poem, and on nothing shorter. Sounds and words, and lines and stanzas, and poems and books. It doesn't stop there. This is a lifetime of careful work, and nowhere any detritus. The locus is never lost, so the person not ever lost in it. And time is not tamed, or the tamer, so nothing's made tangent to time. The body of the work, works. This invites us to take the initiative and read, and with such pleasure. It's the measure of our minds, in his.

Some times we wait whole lines for the resolution of some thought, the solution of some perceptible sensation. The diligence of his effort we have together caused to become the diligence of our effort. We wait. The imminence of this reading space is our wait in it, and its excellence the weight of lovely thought whereby and with which we for some moments leave it.

If we were in being to transcribe our feelings into thought, our thoughts into feeling, if we were in that way to acknowledge them, we would have for ourselves the lesson of Mr. Creeley's work.

It is important to note before it is too late, here, the variety without unnecessary divergence of what things he has written, and in what ways. He has written what is at once one of the most articulate and framable of American novels (*The Island*), and a collection of stories whose immediate turgidity is everywhere landscaped (*The Gold Diggers*). There have been three books of poems since those collected (*Hello, Later*, and *Mirrors*), the latter of which reaffirms his ability to scintillate with absolute control the materials of depth. He has written prose texts (*A Day Book*, *Presences: A Text For Marisol*, and *Mabel: A Story*) which, by their variety and in their ingenious prose, strengthen for us what we think of when we think of the text as a region for literary effort, or as the modern literacy of forms. Our own intelligence, of how and why one works with words for meaning, has been informed by his critical work (particularly *A Quick Graph*, also *Was That a Real Poem and Other Essays*, and the interviews collected in *A Contest of Poetry*).

He has written it with his own life. We ask neither more nor less of anyone, and that is the point at which we stop.

Perhaps there would be more to say had he not said so much so well with so little. We get ahead of ourselves, trying to say it, and find ourselves where he has already been. If there were an occasion for any furtherance we will find it, and we will find it in saying this.

Ron Silliman

On George Oppen

A poetry of the meaning of words

And a bond with the universe [1]

IN THE LAST POEM of *Primitive*, George Oppen makes a pointed reference to the title of his first volume, *Discrete Series*:
writing

thru the night (a young man,
Brooklyn, 1929) I named the book
series empirical
series all force
in events the myriad
lights have entered
us it is a music more powerful
than music
till other voices wake
us or we drown [2]

This conscious act of closure, the poet at 69 writing of himself at 21, raising as it does the issue of how his or anyone's actions must inexorably be absorbed by the greater powers of human and natural history, a dialectic set up between a young man's desire for control, that the world be rendered empirical, hence discrete, and the discovery of time, that our lives are the texts through which the world's events shall be written—all this seems to me a thoroughly typical moment in Oppen's later poetry at its best, not only because it presents a complex situation with great economy, but also because of the poem's ability to keep the reader focused on particulars while invoking the scale of an entire life. The result is a tension set up between argument and event, rhetoric and referent, as well as between the alternatives, waking and drowning, posed in the final couplet.

To a degree matched in his own generation perhaps only by Zukofsky and Bunting, Oppen's verse is one of tension, of strong impulses carried in the same moment in multiple directions, of aspects pulled taut yet seldom, if ever, breaking. Nowhere is this more evident than in his use of the sentence, that unit of prose and figure of closure which, until the late 1960s, was a major organizing principle in his work. Because of the emergence of the sentence in the past dozen years as a primary element *and issue* in the writing of many American poets, and because I think Oppen's work anticipates the concerns and recognitions which have led to this renaissance of the sentence, this aspect of his work is worth examining.

By "sentence" here I mean something deliberately ambiguous insofar, as I've noted elsewhere, as this phenomenon, particular to writing and foreign to speech, has never been the subject of an articulate interdisciplinary consensus. Its primary attributes, the visible bracketing of initial capital and terminal punctuation, and the more powerful presence of a hypotactic or hierarchic logic, both tend toward the invocation of a complete thought, in which the ultimate emphasis almost invariably is given to completeness. This is worth noting because speaking moves in exactly the opposite direction, toward parataxis, a language of juxtaposition and equivalence, of openness and multiplicities that defy completion—and because Roman Jakobson, the linguist whose work has demonstrated the greatest applicability to poetics, suggests that the poetic principle itself, to the degree that any such thing might be said to exist, is fundamentally paratactic.

Yet George Oppen chose, in his own words, "to entrust / To a poetry of statement." [3] A poetry whose aims—completeness and thought—closely approximate those of the sentence. Indeed, there are no less than 18 poems in *Discrete Series* which are, or else can be read as (with no large leap of imagination), single sentences. For example:

Tug against the river—
Motor turning, lights
In the fast water off the bow-wave:
Passes slowly. [CP 9]

Or

The edge of the ocean,
The shore: here
Somebody's lawn,
By the water. [CP 9]

Miniature as these haiku-like pieces are, their grammatical structures both dominate and are foregrounded. And their employment of the sentence is far from regular.

To the ear, the first sounds nearly "normal": only the omission of an article before *Tug*, a touch of Poundian *condensare*, hints at the work's poetic ancestry in imagism. Yet, rather than commas, the use of the dash after *river* and the colon after

bow-wave actively, even violently, disrupt the smooth flow of logic that typically characterizes a hypotactic ordering of details. Both dash and colon are marks which indicate a leap or gap in syntax, and which suggest equivalence instead of hierarchic organization. By placing not one, but two breaks between the noun *Tug* and the verb *Passes*, Oppen effectively transforms the first word of the poem, which may or may not identify a small boat, but which now resonates simultaneously with its potential to function as a verb and its indication of a force, a sense of resistance pushing "against the river."

The other poem, which is lacking any verb phrase and which, by observing a shoreline from two distinctly different vantage points, physically moves the speaking-subject, a subversion of presence in the most literal sense, is no less complex.

Though *Discrete Series* was written more than three decades before Oppen would publish his second book, *The Materials*, the continuity of his strategies as a poet are immediately visible. Although these texts are longer and accordingly more faceted, some, such as "Population," "Travelogue," "Stranger's Child," "Pedestrian" and perhaps even "O Western Wind," can still be read not merely as one sentence works, but as equations of the poem to the sentence itself. Even more significantly, Oppen by the 60s had developed an ability to control the relations between sentences as elements of weight, as sheer prosodic mass, as well as elements of logic or argument. The effect is nearly painterly in much the same way that the use of mass in a Rothko can be. Thus in "Ozymandias," the first sentence is composed of four couplets in short lines, while the second, just two words *longer* than the first and beginning with "And," yields instead two couplets with larger lines. A similar balance is created with two much lengthier sentences in the first section of "Image of the Engine," and with three sentences in "The Undertaking in New Jersey." In the remarkable "From Disaster," a short sentence sets up a much longer one. In "Chartres" and "Squall," two short sentences lead to the lengthier finale, while in "Eclogue," two very brief ones lead to a sentence twice their length, and it in turn to one twice as long again. I list these examples simply to demonstrate the prominence *and the consciousness* of this device. George Oppen is not only counting sentences in these works, but is using them also as units as much of prosody as of statement.

This evolution in *The Materials* accelerates in *This In Which*. From the poem-as-single-sentence of "The Occurrences," "Night Scene" and "The Zulu Girl" to the use of short sentences as mechanisms for setting up truly long ones in "Alpine" and "Rationality," Oppen's earlier techniques are extended here with a confidence and skill that can be breathtaking. "Penobscot" is a 52-line poem composed, if we judge by the use of periods, of just five sentences. Each is progressively shorter, the first being over 38 lines long, the last taking up only three-quarters of the final line. Often, as in "Alpine," the longer sentences (or perhaps we should say sentence-like structures) in this book contain multiple verb phrases with few or no clues as to which might be the main one from which the others descend. The sentence which begins the third section of "The Green Room" proceeds beyond the two bullets well into the fourth section of that work, an extension of the sentence beyond the closure of the poem's own divisions, a device that will be used again in the long title sequence of the next book, *Of Being Numerous*, where sections 32 and 33 are composed of a single sentence, and sections 34 through 36 another.

Then, just one poem after "Of Being Numerous," written at the height of the war in Indochina, Oppen's use of the period begins to rapidly disappear. Given the dominance of the sentence in all his earlier work, it is remarkable that in "Myth of the Blaze," newer work which made up the sixth section of his 1975 *Collected Poems*, should only have two periods, or that *Primitive*, published in 1978, should have only one. Indeed, "To Make Much" in *Primitive* is essentially a reworking of "To the Poets: To Make Much of Life" from the previous book, and one of its most significant changes is the erasure of the final period. In these later works, phrase and line emerge as primary units of composition, with enjambment at both these levels, as in the poem "Semite," becoming a major device. The poet's ear is often given privilege over "the meaning of words" here (for example, "The Little Pin: Fragment"). Increasingly introspective and retrospective, these are poems of an almost pure parataxis and sometimes extraordinary lyricism. Yet they are not works which engage any sense of an ongoing struggle for a possible future.

Why Oppen gave such precedence to the sentence in the first place, and why he abandoned the period, its clearest marker, later, can best be understood in terms of the primary themes of both his work and life. Much more than his mentor, William Carlos Williams, Oppen, for reasons that were entirely consistent with his political commitments, was deeply troubled by the inherent individualism of the subject. In a quotation in the 12th section of "Of Being Numerous," he even employs the phrase, "an experiencing subject," where previous poets would have used "person." For Oppen, the tragedy of the 20th century was precisely "the shipwreck / Of the singular," a phrase which is foreshadowed in "From Disaster," made explicit in "Of Being Numerous," and echoed repeatedly throughout the rest of his life. Yet, even if

Obsessed, bewildered
By the shipwreck
Of the singular
We have chosen the meaning
Of being numerous [CP 151]

this solves nothing. Contrary to the assertions of George Lukács, the capacity of the individual, in the west at least, to experience the world from the perspective of a collective or historic subject is limited and problematic. Even if we consciously accept and act upon and through our social roles (for instance as feminists), our personal experience of such participation tends to be as individuals. Conditioned and ideological, certainly, but as individuals nonetheless. Far from being simply the effective dimension of the capitalist stage of production, and thus transitory, individualism may possess an

inexorable dynamic of its own. The ultimate implications of this for writers, persons who compose in isolation for readers who consume in solitude, and for the world itself seem profound: "We are at the beginning of a radical depopulation of the earth," Oppen concludes in "Route."^[4] Possibly tribal peoples, as the 12th section of "Of Being Numerous" suggests, had an alternative consciousness, a truer communism, to offer. Individualism, that same dynamic which has made modern poetry possible, has doomed them, and

This will never return, never,
Unless having reached their limits
They will begin over, that is,
Over and over [CP 155]

If Oppen's history as a Marxist differs from such early anti-Stalinists as Adorno, Benjamin or Marcuse, his final perspective does not. There is a brooding aura of despair in his later work that is more compassionate than, but not alien to, the dark vision of *Minima Moralia*. Conversely, it differs from the grim misanthropy of a William Bronk precisely in its grounding within a politics and sense of history. Not seeking to make a poetics of speech, with its implicit roots in the body, that fetish of individualism, Oppen's poetry of statement found in the sentence the best available terrain for a full exploration of this Catch-22 of modern existence: the inescapable closure of the subject, the self, experienced as the completeness of thought. In altering and problematizing the sentence—much as he does when he breaks the integrity of a continuous poem into a series—, Oppen throws this subject, in both senses of that word, open to question. If there is to be no way out, no way to make ourselves transcend, thus to become as impenetrable as nature, the sole remaining option is that "one may honorably keep / His distance / If he can."^[5]

'Whether, as the intensity of seeking increases, one's
distance from Them, the people, does not also
increase'

I know, of course I know, I can enter no other place
Yet I am one of those who from nothing but man's way of
thought and one of his dialects and what has
happened to me

Have made poetry
To dream of that beach
For the sake of an instant in the eyes
The absolute singular
The unearthly bonds
Of the singular
Which is the bright light of shipwreck

[CP 152]

1. From "The Poem," published as preface to *Paideuma*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring, 1981.
2. "Till Other Voices Wake Us," *Primitive*, Black Sparrow Press, 1978, pp. 30-31.
3. From "Some San Francisco Poems," *Collected Poems*, New Directions, 1975, p. 221. Hereafter cited as *CP*.

4. CP 196.

5. *CP* 95. See also p. 156.

Nick Piombino

Attention: Two Essays

"The Object Is Poetics"

Francis Ponge (remark attributed to Braque)*

Currents of Attention in the Poetic Process

I GLANCE AROUND THE ROOM, directing my eyes in various, apparently random, ways towards this or that object. At the same time I am trying to concentrate my attention and focus it in order to grasp, to *apprehend* my thoughts. The dictionary defines "apprehend":

1. to take or seize; to take hold of: in this literal sense, applied chiefly to the arrest of persons by legal process, or with a view to trial;
2. to take hold of mentally; to perceive with the mind; to understand;
3. to fear; to anticipate with anxiety and dread;
4. to note; to learn by observation; to discover by experience.[1]

The definition reveals both the importance of this word in describing conscious experience and, less obviously, a way of seeing that our verbal description of many uses of conscious attention to the thought process is combined with images of anxiety, dread and extreme forms of human control.

As I concentrate, trying to apprehend my thoughts, I try to take note of them, to discover them by experience, to take hold of them, I may also fear them and try to *arrest* them. There is a cue in this to alert ourselves to aspects of attention's vulnerability. This vulnerability is revealed in the experience of attending to and apprehending thoughts in the face of every conceivable distraction. The inner complexity of the dynamics of the process of forming an attentional focus is nowhere more evident than in any systematic attempt to direct it towards an objective to which there is an internal or external resistance.

As I glance around the room, my eyes darting from this to that object, I follow my thoughts, struggling to locate the place, to arrest my attention, to stop it. I'm reviewing my thoughts, paging through them hurriedly, attempting to pause at the locus of greatest significance, meaning or resonance. At just this juncture, my attention is often divided into two or more currents, as the thought process now is tracking points of connection in as many various categories of actuality as possible, or at least as is necessary, to apprehend the sought for reality. All literary forms are, from one perspective, bounded, representational "circuits" for some process of utilizing the attentional focus or beam.

With the discovery of free association and the psychoanalyst's corresponding "evenly hovering attention," Freud created an axis between mental attention and speech which utilized many functions which before had been confined to drama. Some of the functions of the more recently created "novel" form of drama were also expropriated. Speech and writing, by means of movement of focal attention, were utilized for the purpose of mental transformation. In psychoanalysis the aesthetic motive for self-expression is subsumed by the purpose of self-transformation, aligning aesthetics with philosophy by means of a transcendent human value and goal in self-knowledge.[2] Thought is here combined with speech in a way which corresponds to writing (and all other symbolic structures) whereby the valued outcome of self-knowledge is in turn at least in part again transcended by an aesthetic function in regaining an access to mobility of the attentional focus.

The parameters of human relating are in some ways conditioned by the parameters of human attention. These limitations are ideally, and theoretically, transcended by the apparent boundlessness of consciousness. The apprehension (in all senses of the word) of the unconscious created a new concept whereby the limits of consciousness may be redefined. Freud was able to conceptualize from many perspectives a way of reasoning that was both scientific and poetic. This was achieved, in part, by explicating and describing the numerous forms of attentional focus which can be used to apprehend actualities. Here actualities are apprehended by negating denial in all its forms, by connecting denial to repression, and by rendering unto all experiential actualities their due weight in shaping all of reality by means of their conscious apprehension through tracking their manifestations in many spheres of actuality.

Repression and denial, for example, two central psychological "defenses," function by means of diverting attention. Thus, while the mind compensates by allowing a greater concentration on other details of experience, the realm of experience which the repression and denial are covering will not "allow" attention to focus on it. This is almost entirely unconscious. The defenses include, as part of their function, a compensation which consists of substituting actions for comprehension. Thus attention is further diverted by the transformed outcome, although relief is temporarily offered by substitutions and displacements. This compensation for repression is explored in such artistic methods as surrealism, including such bizarre literalisms as Breton's image of firing a gun into a crowd as a surrealist act.[3]

The expansion of inner attention to realities which have culturally enfolded certain actualities may be illustrated by the story "The Emperor's New Clothes." Since the poet is as vulnerable to the spell of accepted reality as anyone else, she or he

must somehow find a way to concentrate the attentional beam on areas of experience that were hitherto "clothed" and therefore not apprehendable. In despairing of finding any help other

than artistic example in strengthening the attentional focus in the mobility of consciousness, the poet must still find some way of directing the gaze of consciousness onto literally inconceivably complex and entangled linkages between various modes of experience. Then, having linked them, must hold them "long enough" or tenaciously enough to relate them with signs which resonate with them or transmit images and/or meanings which resonate with them. This affinity must be found despite the almost infinitely variable sequential orderings, transformations and variations which disguise in language by means of deceptive, illusory images, the underlying actualities.

Throughout all history with every advance in poetic apprehension of uncharted actualities, often including advances in applications of techniques and methods, came a parallel physical technology which sought to apply these poetics to everyday life. With the combined leverage of the new poetics and the new sciences and technologies, new orders of experience were reached. The frightening difficulty emerged, however, that the technologies that were developed had drastic side effects which were unpredictable. It may be argued, of course, that the technologies and sciences are an entirely separate development from the modification of consciousness for purposes of apprehending poetic actualities. This is also certainly true from some perspectives, but what I will attempt to show in this essay is that while technologies and sciences emerge, in general, out of our comprehension of natural phenomena, and poetics emerges out of our understanding of inner experience, in general, there is an oscillation, or combinatorial of the two processes which is central to sensory and cognitive evolution. The fascination with combustion, for example, which is also enhanced by the human quest for power, can be partly explained by its great power with relation to very brief durations. Human change, human transformation, as evidenced by evolutionary processes, is unbelievably slow by comparison. This is also amply illustrated by the experience of psychoanalysts, who must acknowledge the durations of time required to obtain therapeutic results through psychoanalysis. New methods have somewhat mitigated this by means of rapid, dynamic focussing.[4] These methods also operate by utilizing a rapid directing of the attention of both the analyst and the analysand on highly specific areas of focus, thus refining further the uses of free association and evenly suspended attention. Scientific, artistic and popular curiosity about methods of concentrating energy over very brief durations of time which can produce lasting effects continues, the most recent technological object being the computer. Condensation of energy by means of attentional focus has nowhere been more keenly investigated than by poetic means. This tracking of the actualities of experience constantly brings with it new forms of significant expression by enacting an alchemical overlay and blending of temporal and sensory experiences and therefore correlated forms of focussing attentional consciousness on actualities. This transformation is in turn expressed in language by new syntactic and morphological forms.

The experience of form and the forms of experience. The branches of activity that may proceed from this oscillation range from the metaphorical application of forms of technology for means of human expression (such as musical instruments and technologies for the purpose of recording and transmitting voice and music) all the way to the application of forms of movement to the transportation of human beings, animals and objects by air. Thoughts "go" through space and objects "move" through space in a cosmically graceful way, just as words may be chosen and arranged according to the aesthetic forms implicit in various actualities. The technological risk is also analogous to the poetic risk in that if an idea "falls flat" one predicted range of actualities did not turn out to actually be there. The existence of realms of actuality is, of course, not self-evident. Thus technology is needed in order to put a startling new actuality "on hold." Without the technology, we experience a combination of uncertainty and curiosity which can reach levels of extreme discomfort. Technologies are also needed for the preservation and understanding of bodily functions, as well as the transformation and coordination of a vast range of natural and human physical and communicative phenomena. The very oscillation physical/mental is ample metaphor to illustrate the interdependence of actualities for their experiential value. While great latitude is given to common sense in determining the most productive oscillations of these two basic categories of actuality, when the attentional focus struggles with the application of our technological extensions of them, we often tend to freeze into postures of singleminded applications of sensory/cognitive representational forms.

The conservation of human purposes and needs with relation to technological developments of great significance for the arts may be illustrated by photography. This technological development displaced a former function of painting and simultaneously freed painting to develop a way of focussing on the "inner landscape." At the same time photography and cinema have, for the most part, confined themselves to "realistic" subjects, despite the far reaching implications of Dada, surrealism and abstract expressionism. It is as if the child has deferred to the parent, allowing it to complete its development in dignity. Or is it that painting, seeing the implications in human terms of the new optical developments, took these insights to their essential representational actualities in new geometric and poetic forms? Such speculations, if they do nothing else, clarify the connections between actualities and show us that it is the combinatorial, the play of levels of attitude and forms of apprehension, that gives us the clearest sense of these connections.

There is no realm of actuality upon which the focus of human attention and its denotation by signs cannot shed light. Actuality includes all that can be experienced and imagined. Actuality is the totality of all experience

actual and projectable (theoretical). One of the functions of art is to propose methods of confirming otherwise elusive actualities. One role of science and technology is to apprehend, to track and to denote relationships between actualities. Einstein and Freud were both deeply curious about the way sensory experience can be expressed by thought. Each invented

a special formal matrix for this tracking of resonances, Freud in using free association and evenly-hovering attention to uncover unconscious thoughts, Einstein in combining pre-verbal visual imaging and a visual/verbal/gestural resonance in his thought experiments. The primary cognitive instrument in both experimental methods was the use of an attentional focus composed of conceptual/visual imaging. Yet the lack of response on the part of Freud and Einstein to contemporaneous developments in the arts and literature outside their respective fields contributed to the idealization of action over theoretical conceptualization which has characterized the development of even their own fields since the reception of their monumental contributions. While Einstein and Freud acknowledged "free play" of ideas and concepts in the development of words and signs which correspond to a mental apprehension of actualities, and Freud did make many attempts to apply his theory to cultural processes, apparently both theoreticians were too unconsciously held to their own cultural, philosophical and aesthetic viewpoints to acknowledge the cultural implications of the very applications they found of the greatest interest and most valuable human use-in-language.

While Heisenberg has put forth a conceptual framework which points a way out of the dilemma of the current impasse between technology and theoretical conceptualizations in philosophy, science and art,[5] his basing his theory on the positive side of doubt, uncertainty, is not exactly an innovation, if one examines it in the light of theories and philosophies of the past. Doubt is the center of human conflict inasmuch as its sublimated forms provide the intense energy needed to actualize the strange mixture of curiosity and perseverance needed for creative artistic and scientific work. To say that nature is indeterminate appears true intuitively because human beings have always placed a high priority on the implications for the future that lie in the combination of creative and destructive forces in any dynamic system whether observed in nature or constructed by people. Yet doubt has never before been understood and described so clearly as it has by psychoanalysis, particularly in comparison to those ages when it was the task of theology alone to provide a focus for the investigation of those realms of actuality about which we are perpetually in doubt.

Certainly an assertion that science, even psychoanalytic science, has no application to the arts is false. The creation of translational media to transfer the knowledge of one discipline to its useful application in another often raises serious epistemological difficulties. While both Freud and Einstein contributed new terminologies and notational systems which opened up new access routes to artistic and aesthetic, as well as physical and physiological, processes, neither could fully grasp the implications for the way they were shaping new uses of the attentional focus. It is important to recall that the arts must play both a critical and recognitive role with relation to the sciences, while the sciences and technologies direct the arts towards complex realities which heretofore had been intuitively recognized actualities, tracking and authenticating the significance of actualities for natural phenomena and human experience and their part in structuring the current view of reality.

The implications of both Einstein's and Freud's understanding of the use of the mobile attentional thought process extend beyond the borders of their own fields. Their theoretical constructions regarding fundamental human experiences led them to examine in perhaps the most visually apprehendable, or visually/verbally comprehensible manner the relationships among thought, language and visual/verbal perception. Einstein wrote in 1945:

(A) The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be "voluntarily" reproduced and combined.

There is, of course, a certain connection between those elements and relevant logical concepts. It is also clear that the desire to arrive finally at logically connected concepts is the emotional basis of this rather vague play with the above-mentioned elements. But taken from a psychological viewpoint, this combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought—before there is any connection with logical construction in words or other kinds of signs which can be communicated to others.

(B) The above-mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will.

(C) According to what has been said, the play with the mentioned elements is aimed to be analogous to certain logical connections one is searching for.

(D) Visual and motor. In a stage when words intervene at all, they are, in my case, purely auditive, but they interfere only in a secondary stage, as already mentioned.

(E) It seems to me what you call full consciousness is a limit case which can never be fully accomplished. This seems to me connected with the fact called the narrowness of consciousness (*Enge des Bewusstseins*).[6]

Similarly, Freud sought for connections between elemental sensory experiences by means of new ways of examining the nature of the translation of thoughts into words and pictures in dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he wrote:

Thus dreams make use of the present tense in the same manner and by the same right as day-dreams. The present tense is the one in which wishes are represented as fulfilled. . . . But dreams differ from day-dreams in their second characteristic: namely, in the fact of their ideational content being transformed from thoughts into sensory images.[7]

In this way, Freud shifted our comprehension of the morphological implications of the process of transformation of language into sensory images in the thought process. By connecting this insight to the use of the attentional focus in deciphering languages at various stages in this morphological process he found a doorway to the possibility of changing the

nature, the "script" of human experience itself. In "Psychoanalytic Reflections On Einstein's Centenary," Erik Erikson quotes Einstein: "I sold myself body and soul to Science—the flight from the I and WE to the IT." [8] Erikson also writes about Freud's "Id" in this context. But is not this "IT" of Einstein and "Id" of Freud the "otherness" of experience itself? It appears that both Einstein and Freud intuitively understood the relationship between time and the actualities of human experience by learning to direct the focus of attention within the thought process not on words in a literal way but on the correspondences and resonances among words, signs and actualities in the pre-verbal imaging function of the mind. There is an elemental combinatorial in the morphological and syntactical structuring of language. Words, in their structure, are like Japanese or Chinese characters, or like hieroglyphs, as Barthes and Derrida have often pointed out. [9,10] Words have characters and histories which are recoverable in the same way we apprehend visual perception on an unconscious level. Einstein writes in Appendix V, *The General Theory of Relativity*:

We have seen that we feel ourselves impelled to ascribe a temporal arrangement to our experiences, somewhat as follows. If β is later than α and γ later than β , then γ is also later than α ("sequence of experiences"). Now what is the position in this respect with the "events" which we have associated with the experiences? At first sight it seems obvious to assume that a temporal arrangement of events exists which agrees with the temporal arrangement of the experiences. In general, and unconsciously this was done, until sceptical doubts made themselves felt. [1] [This footnote in Einstein's text is to the passage that follows:] For example, the order of experiences in time obtained by acoustical means can differ from the temporal order gained visually, so that one cannot simply identify the time sequence of events with the time sequence of experiences. [11]

Here, Einstein intuitively establishes a basic connection between our experience of actualities and the sensory anomalies created by their interconnected use in the apprehension and measurement of experienced duration. Similarly Freud saw recorded in the unconscious as expressed by dreams the highly complex and deceptive relationships between images derived from various sensory forms of inputting. We divine this combinatorial by focussing the attentional beam on the "station" (so to speak) *before* the literally verbal/visual one we use for speech. In this locus of attentional focus, Einstein and Freud "felt" "saw" and "heard" the nature of time as it is present in actuality, not as it is apprehended in our commonly held metaphorically visual version of this experience. They devised other measurements of temporal experience which could also be authenticated through visual/verbal resonances, but theirs located the site of this apprehension in a place where words and actualities have a different relationship to each other than the one where our attention is riveted to the moment to moment confirmation of our shared seeing of the world. In this resonance words, things, temporal sequence whirl about within the perceptual matrix, spinning out signs which combine meaning and sensory experience in a way which can be re-connected to the human experiences which formed the original attentional tracking of actualities.

The associative combinatorial consists of an oscillation between the acoustic (verbal) image, the visual (representational) image, gestural (muscular) imagery, olfactory as well as gustatory imagery. The associative combinatorial, suspended in the oscillation among these sensory elements, necessitates a synchronous fusion of elements of actuality in creating language. What is created is not only a trace of language, but a highly complex tracking system which can literally "play back" past experience by transforming actualized linguistic elements by means of the mobile, transformative capabilities of the attentional focus. Freud is pointing to the "ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated," [12] in tracking the locus of this sensorial, conceptual matrix. The attentional beam utilizing the associative combinatorial is discontinuous because of the necessity of this oscillation. Continuity would exclude the past and the future since each sense-perceptual experience is discrete and simultaneously "touches" on earlier ones as well as synchronistically connecting to future ones. To sense where we are moving unconsciously, to utilize what is presently being experienced for that purpose, means to split the attentional focus into past, present and future. To relate seeing and hearing with the evidence of the other senses as well as the cognitive capacity and the memory function requires a system of imaging which coordinates all the sensory images available, imaginable and assimilable. As explorers of incompletely charted regions we track and strive to comprehend the coordinated evidence of all of our senses, including the symbol-making, language-making process. This concurrence of symbolic, syntactical and morphological configurations of sensed actualities points us in the direction of the actualities we wish to focus on and apprehend.

Like poetry, mathematical formulaic equations modify the meaning of sensory elements by utilizing systems of subtexts. These subtexts define the alterable magnitude of the images associated with the signs. Subtexts are a logical extension of symbolic texts because what is ordinarily represented through repetition or duration is sig-

nified by altered scales of magnitude. In "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" Freud observes that "Dreams even take the liberty . . . of representing any element whatever by the opposite wish, so that it is first impossible to ascertain, in regard to any element capable of an opposite, whether it is to be taken negatively or positively in the dream-thoughts." [13] This aspect of dreaming, like poetic creation or mathematical creation, utilizes the actual representations as transformable elements. This transformability is activated by the transformable attentional focus which "vibrates" or oscillates the elements to create an overlay of meaning and experiential representation. The transformability of magnitude, of scale, represents dynamically the actualities which lie beyond a particular reality offered by focussing the attentional beam on a composite, recognitive point of synchrony. Poetic configurations are, in part, the outcome of an attempt to reconstitute the early responses of the mind to experiences because these primary associations themselves were formed at the point in an interval of experience when the impact of the actuality had the strongest effect on the form of the conception itself. This is the

moment in the morphological process when the signs themselves are closest to experience, though this gulf is, as Einstein suggests, apparently unbridgeable, by definition. It is as if at this pole of thought the mind is closest to the transmissions of external actualities, or that the attentional beam of the mind can "touch" the actuality itself. Optical and acoustic instrumentation give us means of comparing these relationships at different scales of magnitude, just as written signs may represent scales of relationship among actualities, including sensory experiences. In reflecting on the powerful effect modern recording techniques had on his consciousness, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote:

At one period, when I began to interest myself in Arabic poems, which seem to owe their existence to the simultaneous and equal contributions from all five senses, it struck me for the first time, that the modern European poet makes use of these contributors singly and in very varying degree, only one of them—sight overladen with the seen world—seeming to dominate him constantly; how slight, by contrast, is the contribution he receives from inattentive hearing, not to speak of the indifference of the other senses, which are active only on the periphery of consciousness and with many interruptions within the limited spheres of their practical activity. And yet the perfect poem can only materialize on condition that the world, acted on by all five levers simultaneously, is seen, under a definite aspect, on the supernatural plane, which is, in fact the plane of the poem.[14]

In this essay Rilke goes on to theorize that, using the analogy of recording sound by scratching a surface while speaking into a cone, "what variety of lines then, occurring anywhere, could one not put under the needle and try out? Is there any contour that one could not, in a sense, complete in this way and then experience it, as it makes itself felt, thus transformed, in another field of sense?"[15] Here Rilke compares the synaesthetic, transforming function of poetry to a similar action by a technological instrument of sensory reproduction. He saw a hopeful aspect in mechanical acoustic experimentation in that ". . . if we are looking for a way by which to establish the connexion so urgently needed between the different provinces now so strangely separated from one another, what could be more promising than the experiment suggested earlier in this record?" [16] Rilke's suggested experiment consisted in trying to replay the "primal sounds" of humanity by "playing" the grooves he observed on the coronal suture! As a poet, Rilke understood that actualities may be reproduced by means of resonances between other proximate actualities and that such recording methods, like writing poetry, track actualities by means of sensory responses to these relationships. Similarly, Einstein and Freud tracked the nexus points where actualities are transposed into communicable realities. Memories, represented by sense experiences, track protolinguistic visual/verbal/gestural/olfactory/acoustic/gustatory/tactile images which direct us to the boundary points of the relationships among actualities. Although these actualities, like the realities which come to represent them, may not be invariant, the principles governing their relationship may be invariant and therefore predictable. These relationships are reconstructed in the thought process over and over again with each apprehension of a thought. This apprehension brings about a focus on an interval of causal experience. This focus is ordinarily what is taken to be the meaning of an experience. As I put it in my essay "Writing and Conceiving":

The sign constantly displays its maddening ability to outwit its supposed 'associated' thought, and as its creator seizes on the reminiscence of its genesis, the acausal connecting process of association determines the actual signification. These meanings ordinarily are interpreted in intervallic measures or 'beats' of time.[17]

Although indeterminacy is one way to describe the oscillation (or discontinuity) that underlies the perceptual process, this blur is actually one state in the focussing of the attentional beam. Moving from one perceptual matrix to another creates resonances and interplay—the combinatorial interplay that Einstein and Freud identified. This attentional focus may also be directed according to the metaphors available through the optical and acoustic action of current technology. The photograph, the microscope, the telescope not only provide the means of picturing for us the external actualities but also show us how to explore, by analogy to the attentional thinking process itself, ways to track glimpses and contours of uncharted actualities. While the physicist directs attention to the speed of light, the poet is soon wondering about the speed of dark. This is the nature of the combinatorial interplay in the poetic process. As Freud makes clear in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, one function of the unconscious is to be the locus of the combining of sense perceptual data.

Since consciousness must be influenced by the mobile, attentional focus, a portion of the mind must have the function of blending bits and pieces of perceived actualities synaesthetically into meaningful configurations (a syntax).[18] All of this must be carried out by the poet in the darkness of almost conceivable and inconceivable actualities.

The act of reading itself restores the visual/acoustic pictographic combinatorial process which is the mind's "mystic writing pad." When the thought process centers on an acoustic perceptual matrix, for example, the hearing process, hearing fades out from one locus of attention to another. Signal decay may be observed in the oscillation of the attentional beam from one mode of sensory experience to another. We go from one mode of attentional focus to another by means of the oscillations of the transmitted emanations in the overlap of this combinatorial. All apprehensions of this combinatorial are analogous to the sense of touch, in some sense. These oscillations may form an exchange of energy so great as to cause a shift in magnitudes of attentional focus, condensing and fusing the sensorial apprehensions at many access points of actualities in relatively short intervals of experiential duration. It is the analogy to touch, to direct experience of the most fundamental nature, that magnifies the attentional focus in the apprehension of an actuality that had heretofore been only sensed, or intuited. Erik Erikson quotes Einstein:

A wonder of such nature I experienced as a child of 4 or 5 years, when my father showed me a compass. That this needle behaved in such a determined way did not at all fit into the nature of events, which could find a place in the unconscious

world of concepts (effect connected with direct 'touch'). I can still remember—or at least I believe I can remember—that this experience made a deep and lasting impression upon me. Something deeply hidden had to be behind things.[19]

The oscillation of sensorial experience to comprehension to analogy to a technological instrument back to the primal sense experience in the apprehension of uncharted actualities is made clear in this nostalgic reflection of Einstein's.

Touch is the sense which is our most primordial mode of authenticating actualities. Thoughts can't be touched or seen or heard. Only through some form of language can this authentication take place, by means of a correlated focus of the attentional beam. At the juncture where sight authenticates touch, touch moves from the level of direct apprehension by sensorial means to a level where its action may be recognized by another sense or combination of other senses. This oscillation of senses in turn molds the thought process and attentional process itself, adding layer after layer of complexity with each permutation of the interacting senses and cognitive denotation. The medium of consciousness which responds to and in part coordinates this ensemble of sense-data is the attentional beam itself, which Freud labelled "cathexis." Freud's concept, which has not been particularly conducive to theoretical developments in the area of experience which Freud called *pcpt.-cs* (perceptual consciousness), is rooted in the conceptions of the transmission of physical energy of his time. This theoretical difficulty is partly related to an analogous one in physics to the wave and particle theories of the transmission of light. In any case, an analogy to the sense of touch is needed in order for the mind to apprehend and authenticate completely any characterization of the attentional process of consciousness as a beam, ray or focus. Freud's image of the light beam's reflections in a telescope draws attention to the fact that the action of the attentional focus is analogous to the action of light beams in a mechanical manipulation of those beams. In his *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, Derrida quotes Freud with regard to the locality of the sensory combinatorial:

What is presented in these words is the idea of a *psychical locality*. I shall entirely disregard the idea that the mental apparatus with which we are here concerned is also known to us in the form of an anatomical preparation, and I shall carefully avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion. I shall remain upon psychological ground, and I propose simply to follow the suggestion that we should picture the instrument which carries mental functions as resembling a compound microscope, or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a place inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and the telescope, as we know, these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated.[20]

Such analogies can help us to track the movements of the thought process, its circuits, its ways of responding to "reflection," as analogous to the ways some physical substances respond to light beams, to magnification, to concentration, collision and the proximity of other types of transmissions or emanations of other actualities. In the example of the compass, Einstein's finger could "touch" the action of a hidden force in nature—not depend on the eye to verify it or the ears to make sense of the verbal explanation of this action. Touch needs little or no explanation, leaving less room for doubt.

Of all the arts, it is poetry which most aspires to render experience into a directly apprehendable medium of the greatest inclusiveness. I do not mean here necessarily printed or recited poetry but the poetic state of consciousness which makes possible an expansion of the absorbability of experiential data by the attentional mind. Intense wakefulness is stimulated by an oscillation of types of mental attention—reverie, obsessive attention to detail, symbolic transpositions (such as reversals of sequence and significance). Intensive verification of any actuality, whether real or imagined, necessitates an oscillation, a combining of sense-data, which makes abstract thought necessary for its coordination and translation into various realms of experience. From this combinatorial, abstract thought proceeds, from the weighing and

comparing of likenesses to an intermingling of senses in symbolic or metaphorical terms, to a synthesizing formulaic condensation into abstract notation. Experiential "replay" of the notation then yields both images of the corresponding sense experience plus the possibility of new combinatorials on an abstracted level. This yields the enactment of prediction (in science) and prophecy (in art).

Our actual experience consists in great part of what we pay attention to. This is why I would term a tendency in the arts towards synaesthetic processes and an emphasis on inner experience as a means of actualizing artistic expression "actualist." Surrealism placed its emphasis on sectors of experience above reality or outside of reality because of a goal of exposing the illusions and delusions implicit in our shared conception of reality. But an inner emphasis has also to do with depicting inner *actualities* as an access route to the real body of the "emperor" and the empire of actual experience. Such a conception of poetics would be a call for actuality over reality, actuality consisting not only of the area of experience now available to the attentional focus, but all actualities which can be felt and sensed in the total experiential process. World events are thus reported re-enactments of thought processes which have commanded psychic attention. All other events are also actualities but ones for which sense experience offers direct apprehension but the thought process has no focal point, and are thus still blurred. As the poet Charles Bernstein wrote:

The signs of language, of a piece of writing, are not artificial constructions, mere structures, 'mere naming.' They do not sit, deanimated, as symbols in a code, dummies for things of nature they refer to, but are, of themselves, of ourselves, whatever is such. 'Substance.' 'Actuality.' 'Presence.' The very plane through which we front the world, by which the world is.[21]

The poetic process actualizes experience by creating ensembles of notation which when oscillated by visual, acoustic or cognitive attention of certain types reproduce actualities of experience which can rarely be recorded or reproduced by other

means. This notational system literally oscillates the attentional focus through the matrix of experience by means of a kaleidoscopic refraction of types and sub-types of representations of meanings overlayed and condensed with types, intensities and magnitudes of sensory experience. "Free play" of conceptual combinatorials is needed to provide the construction of overall principles of perception that effect findings in all fields. A more complete apprehension of broad-based actualities demands a broad-based matrix of attentional forms.[22]

NOTES

* (*epigraph*) Francis Ponge, *The Power of Language*, translated by Serge Gavronsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 47.

1. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Second Edition (Collins World, 1975), p. 91.
2. Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
3. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), p. 125 (originally published 1930).
4. Benjamin Fielding, Ed.D., "Focussing In Dynamic Short Term Therapy," in *Colloquium* (Volume 2, Number 1, June 1979), p. 64.
5. Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1962).
6. Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), pps. 25-26.
7. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Avon Edition of Standard Edition, Chapter 7, Part B), p. 573 (originally published 1900).
8. Albert Einstein, *Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Gerald Holton and Yehuda Elkana (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 154.
9. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).
10. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 76.
11. Albert Einstein, *Relativity, The Special and the General Theory* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1961), p. 140 (originally published December 1916).
12. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 575.
13. Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers, Volume IV* (New York: Basic Books Edition of Standard Edition, 1959), p. 184 (originally published 1919).
14. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Where Silence Reigns* (New York: New Directions, 1978), p. 54 (originally published as "Primal Sounds," 1919), translated by C. Craig Houston.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
17. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Number 13, December 1980 (edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, New York, 464 Amsterdam Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10024). Republished in *In the American Tree* (National Poetry Foundation, Orono, 1986), edited by Ron Silliman.
18. Barrett Watten, *Total Syntax* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), p. 65.
19. Albert Einstein, *Historical and Cultural Perspectives*. *Op. Cit.*, p. 154.
20. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 574, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 216.
21. *Open Letter, Third Series*, No. 7, Summer 1977 in *Poetics of the Referent*, edited by Steve McCaffery, in Charles Bernstein, "Stray Straws and Straw Men," p. 96. Republished in *Content's Dream* by Charles Bernstein (Sun and Moon, 1986).
22. Roman Jakobsen and Krystyna Pomorska, *Dialogues* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 71: "Over the centuries, the science of language has more than once addressed the question of ellipsis which manifests itself at different verbal levels: sounds, syntax, and narration. It should be noted that for the most part these questions have been worked out only episodically and fragmentarily. A technique which today receives even less consideration is that of elliptical perception, by which the listener fills in (again on all linguistic levels) whatever has been omitted by him as speaker. We have also failed to appreciate properly the subjective attitude of the hearer who creatively fills in elliptical gaps."

Subject To Change

IMAGINE READING AS A KIND OF dilation of attention, allowing the mind to register information coming from more than one source. This maximizes the combinatory potential of the various sources. In this kind of reading, the goal of organizing and developing subject matter (which is to sequence meanings in an expectable way) is subordinated to the necessity of maintaining this dilation of the reading attention. The pulse of information is distributed in such a way that the mode of perceiving the subject matter being focussed on currently is itself hypostatized by the act of reading.

The physical facticity of language, in interaction with space and *its* apparently identity-less quality, in its finite representation as substance, can be oscillated by the attentional reading focus with musical and mathematical precision. This oscillation of meanings and perceptions, like a form of physical measurement, marks and calibrates areas of intersection

between language and experience. An apprehension of some potential understanding of relationships can be approximately marked in this way, indications for an inner site of meanings, an interval to be further defined by further connection with other fractions of meanings. For example, a literally proximate meaning can be examined for its relationship to a nearby field of meanings. In her essay "Procedure," Tina Darraugh writes that Francis Ponge introduced her to procedural writing. She is interested in the "coincidence and juxtaposition of the words on the page in their natural formation (alphabetical order). In reference to each other they have a story all their own." [1]

Realizing and comprehending various literary values for thought, experience and language puts the writer in the position of deciding not only specific meanings for specific parts of texts but also what use the text will be adapted to in providing a setting for the reader to experience perceptions. It could be said, in this context, that the more various the ways the text may be read, the more complex and subtle the meanings can be, because it may be projected by the writer that eventually the many patterns within the blur may come to be perceived, given time and attention by the reader. Memory overlays the accumulated experiences of perceiving these various meanings over time into a "holding" pattern by weaving many partial meanings into a gradually "visible" or "visualizable" coherence.

Just a continuity of existence in the same nameless space through time elicits around any object of attention or experiential locale a kind of penumbra, a reflexive identity, as visual and linguistic associations come to rest around this apparently non-identifiably different, but specific area. In this way sections of actuality are marked, if not yet comprehended, so that a passage is made between a yet unknowable actuality and reality as we ordinarily experience it and explain it to ourselves. The poem "Man Carrying Thing" by Wallace Stevens, which I think could be aptly subtitled "Poet Carrying Subject Matter," provides a clear evocation of the place of actuality, comprehended and not, in the universe of the poem:

The poem must resist the intelligence
Almost successfully. Illustration:
A brune figure in winter evening resists
Identity. The thing he carries resists
The most necessitous sense. Accept them, then,
As secondary (parts not quite perceived
Of the obvious whole, uncertain particles
Of the certain solid, the primary free from doubt,
Things floating like the first hundred flakes of snow
Out of a storm we must endure all night,
Out of a storm of secondary things),
A horror of thoughts that suddenly are real.
We must endure our thoughts all night, until
The bright obvious stands motionless in cold. [2]

Poetic creation is the result of a complex form of attention to inner experience so far as to include an outright resistance to the rational, "intelligent" organization of sense-data. Although the poem consists of perceptions and thoughts, it emerges as an accumulated "bright obvious," a thing-like shape of realizations in the form of a poem, in the cold sunrise of poetic apprehension. Whatever subject matter there may be to poetry, according to Stevens it would of necessity be a theory of poetic creation itself. He writes:

This endlessly elaborating poem
Displays the theory of poetry,
As the life of poetry. A more severe,
More harassing master would extemporize
Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory
Of poetry is the theory of life. [3]

Stevens' view of subject matter in poetry sees its function as a question of philosophical focus, as a poetic way of understanding any kind of being, a foundational substructure of any ontology.

*

Two ways of focussing in search of "materia poetica":

- 1) On the accumulated facts
- 2) On what keeps coming to mind

The line between experiencing reality obsessively and experiencing it freshly, anew, is a similar proportioning as between the compelling (weighty) fact and the compelling (weighty) thought. Subject matter is an account, earning interest; but it is possible to let writing breathe, let it interact continuously with thoughts and experiences as it emerges, rather than just put it in handy, consumable, identifiable, perhaps intriguingly attractive boxes (categories).

To follow the tracks of subject matter is to follow the fragments of evidence of actualities now collapsed into a scrap-heap of partly comprehensible feelings and thoughts and half-forgotten sounds and images. These are included in the subjects and objects of poetry. As Mallarmé put it in *Afternoon of a Faun*:

Did I love a dream?

My doubt, amassing ancient darkness, tracks many a
 Narrow branch, and these, living
 Like this in a real forest prove, alas,
 What makes us come is the ideal absence of roses[4]

*

In the development of a new theory of physical reality, Einstein underscores the anomalous character of the interplay of the senses within the perceptual system. He uses the illustration of our perception of thunder and lightning occurring separately, which is based on our sensory evidence. With knowledge we come to understand that objectively this is not the sequence of events. Only knowledge can change our perceptions of reality into a perception of the underlying actualities. Both art and science do this, in part, by bending and shaping our ways of perceiving the actual sensory types of input which create what we experience as reality.

I wonder what it would mean to suggest a conception of experience that would not be durational in our comprehension of it, or in our description of it? We usually describe experiences as *moments* or a series of clustered moments as an *event*. We are familiar with such conceptions in visual terms, particularly in the static, yet potentially dynamic images of painting and photography. Poetry, in combining visual imagery with auditory imagery, enables us to create a form of experience which in turn may be used as a kind of experiential lens, itself fixed, yet capable of registering ongoing experience with sensitivity and accuracy. Seen this way, the poem, rather than "reflecting" experience, offers us an experience of how to redirect our attention to experience. Once we are familiar with this mechanism, like becoming familiar with a camera, we may use our poem-lenses to help us inwardly visualize experiences, trace them, so that we may better comprehend them, enjoy them, and communicate them. In an age when the inexpressible is a commonplace, when so many times so many people have been so awed and so horrified, such approximations of experience-images provide, by means of accumulation and combination of part-images, the blurry outline of a sensed, but previously incompletely apprehended actuality. The limits of language in this way may be pushed past the boundary of already existing cultural images.

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Subject matter-centered text: significance tends to be rapidly absorbed by the outside world; non-subject-centered text: tends to absorb significance from everywhere (super-saturated). Subject matter as text gives writing little to build on because it exhausts its significance in the value of its use—rendering the world fuller and literature emptier, like a strip-mine.

It is in the nature of subject matter-centered texts to eventually be exhausted of meanings. Writing which is not structured along subject matter lines does not "face" exhaustion in the same way. Beginnings and endings of texts, as a result, depend on the reader rather than on the nature of the subject matter. To read non-subject-centered texts is to forego the exclusivity of interest for a focus which is at once near and far, egoistic and selfless, physical and psychic, specific and free-floating, logical and transrational. No need any longer to discuss the limits of the rational: the 20th Century has provided evidence enough of this, as well as the limits of the irrational. The boundaries I have outlined here are those of an ordinarily durational and sensory concept of experience which fastened experience irrevocably to a static concept of subject matter. This concept of rational experience is anchored to reality by means of the same communicative channels between sensory experience and concept formation that are basic to the psychological structuration of all ordinarily sequential forms of temporal experience such as remembering and anticipating.

To be able to transform subject matter into words as a writer and then transform it back into experience as a reader is the alchemy of the writer blended with the alchemy of the reader. The possible permutations are immense. This is similar to the transformability of an equation (such as $E=MC^2$), a highly simplified sign, into tremendous physical energy; the writer-reader relationship, like the scientist-technician relationship, can create immensely powerful new actualities. Francis Ponge writes, in his poem "Reading The Sun On Radio":

Since such is the power of language
 Shall we then mint the sun as princes do money:
 To stamp on the top of this page?
 Shall we make it climb as it climbs to the zenith?
 YES

So that the answer may be, in the middle of the page,
 The acclamation of the world to its exclamation[5]

In *The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words* Wallace Stevens writes that "The poet refuses to allow his task to be set for him. He denies that he has a task and considers that the organization of *materia poetica* is a contradiction in terms."⁶ Stevens further counsels a move away from the "pressures of reality" for the poet, who must be free to pursue this noble rider towards sound. From a political standpoint this may appear to be irresponsible. And yet Stevens seemed most concerned with the preservation of aesthetic experience and grants a poet a privileged role with relation to experience and work. In any case, poet or not, the privileged usually have access to a greater piece of the "action" in the game of language—with more knowledge of the plot, the story, the narrative unfolding, the true influences. This is a privilege, literally, of place represented

by the fact that we, the audience, sit in rows gradually receding away from the action, as in the play forums of ancient Greece. Ultimately, though all the circles surround the inmost core

of subject matter, the outer rings are less and less a cohesive part of the whole; hierarchical ordering is part of the nature of organization. The immediate cohesiveness brought about by an elimination of apparently irrelevant message receivers fragments the actuality of the neighboring universe from the perspective of the universe of the subject matter under scrutiny. This fragmentation, now part of reality, must be reflected in any symbolic rendering of that new configuration. Subject matter = authenticity = public confirmation = scientific verification. Somehow, with subject matter we often have the feeling of being left out or just barely included in the action, that somewhere else there might be, for example, more up to date material, a more authentic source of confirmation, or an authenticated furtherance of the tracked configuration. It helps, however, to remember that in all cases, no matter how purportedly neutral, it is the final word of the individual(s) organizing the material field encasing the so-called subject matter that determines its system of inclusion and exclusion. It is just this exclusionary aspect of hierarchically organized subject matter that makes the discontinuity of poetry so necessary and so appealing. Poetic experience is one of the few experiences that enlarge the range of types of attention and perception rather than sharpening its focussing power by limiting it structurally or thematically or by content. The poetic process is one of the few ways of increasing the experiential scope of language in an increasingly publicly codified network of universally communicated and accessible viewpoints and phenomena. "What changes the day into night?" the computer-dictator asks the investigator-agent Lemme Caution in Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*. Lemme's answer destroys the computer's control of language and therefore of the society, and his answer is "Poetry."

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Where subject matter is the organizing principle of writing, organization is equated with classification, which in turn is equated with keen attention to the similarities and differences between things. This way of focussing attention and perception exercises a powerful exclusionary factor. Strong borders guarantee an effective exclusionary action—an action which encourages focus and retards combination. Organization by subject matter effectively regulates accumulation and condensation of related materials and encircles an area of experience. This is why subject matter is so related to place and is so easily adapted to a concept of place. As K. C. Cole, a writer on contemporary physics, puts it, "Part of the problem comes from our propensity to place boundaries between things where boundaries may not naturally exist." [7]

I want to move towards a metaphysics of language which shifts the creation of significance away from an emphasis on metaphorically physical conceptions of subject matter and the powerful psychological and social determinants behind the ownership of meaning creation towards a conception of the actuality of language in the creation of meaning as experience. Once I ask myself to track my experience in the creation of language and not the confines of conventionally defined subject matter, I feel like I am experiencing writing taking place, not the taking of words *to* a place, to place them there and keep them in their place—now everywhere.

In this everywhere which is each place and not one place, the significance of place itself no longer towers and intimidates—it's just there and its scale is human-sized and its time is yet infinite and universal. With these two foundational planes in flux, the specificity of subject too begins to oscillate, in its significance, collapses in on itself, and having shed this one focus, a kind of attention to actuality emerges during this transformative motion which, in turn, is able to focus perception differently, that is, capable of evolving a transformable scale of times, places and meanings.

To redistribute the focus of the reader's attention in the writing of texts may help one to see that rationality itself demands that we "read" (comprehend) experience in a highly complicated way. When we read texts, there occurs an inevitable comparison, both conscious and unconscious, to the flow of everyday thinking, feeling, observing, intuiting, deducing. Texts may be constructed which follow this rhythm, for example by imitating the structure of the syllogism: major premise, minor premise, conclusion. This pattern conveniently corresponds to the organization of subject matter according to a recognizable flow of sensory perceptions, such as those obtained by visual, auditory and tactile experience.

On the other hand, texts may be constructed which resist such an expectable development, much the same way that experience at times is unpredictable. Dreams provide a very good model for such constructions, continuously offering us a reminder that conscious and unconscious processes contain a highly complex overlapping of raw perceptions and mental responses to such perceptions. Frequently, dreams draw attention either to an apparently trivial object of a perception, or to an apparently unconnected field of experience which surrounds the central focus of ordinary attention. In the non-subject-centered text, such enlarged details, intuitively brought into focus by the text's construction, increase the reader's awareness of the mobility of the attentional process, often at the price of defying everyday "logic." It is important to note in this context, that discovery and invention are also often encountered in the course of setting aside or even sacrificing everyday common sense.

Such awareness of the mobility of the attentional focus can help writers to reveal and readers to apprehend elusive or hidden actualities by foregrounding through combination and contrast otherwise unrelated perceptions. In the construction of texts, this may be accomplished in part by causing the reader to also "read" (or *track*) the reading and writing process itself, while simultaneously attending to the revelation of subject matter. As a result, the "stimulus" of the text includes not only the thematic material corresponding to experiences of "the world" outside the text, but also some thematic or formal representation of

the world's impact on the genesis of the text's construction as well as its constructive principle. The writer's expectation that the reader's attention will be mobile and self-referential, as well as rationally prepared to compare the movement of the text with the ordinary flow of perceptions of reality, makes it possible for the writer to move the reading attention away from an exclusive emphasis on attending to subject matter towards the riskier process of observing inner speculations and subjective associations to the text.

*

For the most part, language functions according to the rules of physical reality as its most apparent surface imposes itself into physical reality as our means of using it as a communicative medium. However, as the experiential properties of the sign-making process emerge we must acknowledge the limitations of the subject-centered view and use of language because, in its nature, the language-making activity tends to cause a transposition, in the mind, away from its roots in substance of which subject matter is one metaphorical application. As this use turns in on itself, enfolding its own structure more and more in its turns, another structure is built up which supersedes the groundedness of language in substance and again turns to a wider, and more inclusive, focus. Since a basic aspect of actuality is the innerness of experience, in this way the innerness of language perpetually reconstructs itself, rising, like a Phoenix, annexing itself to sources of originating energy unknowable directly to the senses, but only traceable by some imaginative extension of them.

Perhaps the reason for the preoccupation with subject matter in writing relates to our preoccupation with the identity of things, due to our need to communicate their qualities to each other, human beings being among the most interdependent of all species. Our ability to distinguish things from each other is connected to our extraordinary capacity to survive under the most difficult conditions and to seek out ideal conditions. It seems that in the development which follows the full blossoming of this capacity, to distinguish between things, comes a refinement in our ability to distinguish experiences from one another. It is not just that the subject matter has changed. It's that we now can place knowledge about conceivable experiences more at the center of our attention, than knowledge only about things. And even this knowledge we find it most difficult to express in terms of known actualities but tend to remain with each other's external behavior as if this behavior made each other into subjects and therefore more like things. But the flow of experience cannot be understood simply by describing it or characterizing it, because this again reduces itself to movements and more abstracted actions—like emotions or thoughts—which when simply described in language still fail to satisfy our need to give expression to the full range of conceivable experience.

Webster's Dictionary defines subject, the noun, as 1) one who or that which is under the power, control, influence, observation or action of some other person or thing; especially a person who owes allegiance to a ruler and 2) that which is treated or handled in discussion, study, writing, painting, etc. This synonymous connection between subject (in the sense of a person hierarchically beneath someone else) and a subject as a point or thing reinforces the notion that the subject matter way of organizing language use can be a way of denying actualities rather than acknowledging them and defining them. Yet this way of "controlling" associations potentially focusses the attentional image-beam sharply enough to see the implications of one perspective through a labyrinthian series of developments.

In her book *Sympathetic Vibrations*, K. C. Cole points out that the two physicists Robert Wilson and Arno Penzias tracked the presence throughout space of radiation still in existence from the time of the creation of the universe. This followed their noticing a continual buzz on their radio telescopes that they originally thought was noise. As Cole puts it: "One person's noise is another person's information." [8] One way to shift the centrality of subject matter is to replace the sender/receiver model of writing with a receiver/sender/receiver/sender model where both "terminals" acknowledge their part in comprehending and redistributing information about the sought-for actuality. Conventional narrative writing emphasizes past experiences just as conventional speaking emphasizes previous experiences, as Erving Goffman has so persuasively argued in such books as *Frame Analysis*. [9]

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K. C. Cole also quotes Lincoln Barrett from his book *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*: "In trying to distinguish appearance from reality and lay bare the fundamental structure of the universe, science has had to transcend 'the rabble of the senses.' But its highest edifices, Einstein has pointed out, have been 'purchased at the price of emptiness of content.' " In Ron Silliman's book *Paradise*, he writes: "This was and now you are constituted in the process of being words, your thought actualizing through the imposition of this syntax. Resistance alone is real (coming distractions)." [10] I wonder if Silliman is here comparing the poetic process to one aspect of contemporary psychoanalytic theory in which the central focus of the psychoanalyst is to identify the nature of the resistances on the part of the analysand to certain types of subject matter that reveal repressed wishes. This method of extending awareness becomes a way of tracking repressed subjects rather than a way of perpetuating already existing subjects. Charles Bernstein's poem "As If the Trees By Their Very Roots Had Hold of Us" has a line in it which could aptly be applied to the sense of subject matter I have outlined here:

"Maybe if we go upaways we can get a better
View." But, of course, in that sense, views don't
Improve. [11]

In order for writing to enter into the experiential territory in which kinds of perceptions are no longer literally

describable but must be approximated, writing must enter into theoretical and hypothetical modes which do not literally characterize realities as they are currently visualized. The experience of comprehending experience often has the effect of interconnecting subjects so completely as to render the divisions we ordinarily think of as subjects themselves of limited applicability to actual experience.

Jackson Mac Low, in an article titled "Language-Centered" writes: "Thus it may be most correct to call such verbal works *perceiver-centered* rather than 'language-centered' (and certainly rather than 'nonreferential'). Whatever degree of guidance by the authors, all or the larger part of the work of giving or finding meaning devolves upon the perceivers." [12]

The reading of non-subject-centered texts, requiring as it does, mobile, multiple forms of attention, elicits a type of reading analogous to the way a radar or sonar device tracks a moving object. The attention is directed to a representation of the object which may be continuously transforming its movements and its apparent surfaces so as to elude perceptions unassisted by the device. The construction of the non-subject-centered text may be partly motivated by the wish to provide experiences for the reader in using, hearing and understanding words in a similar way. One important facet of this kind of language for tracking is the use of language for evoking kinds of attention, forms of awareness, rather than describing particular identities of objects or beings. Subject-centered texts tend to use an historical, a "which came first" or even "me first" or "us first" type of verbal organization as compared to non-subject-centered writing which tends to juxtapose many types of subject matter for the purpose of demonstrating that this experience or that type of symbolic expression has some relationship, often serendipitously, to this other representative expression or area of language-events. Often the purpose of a non-subject-centered piece of writing appears to be to create the possibility of finding relationships between otherwise disparate meanings or experiences, which in turn can reveal suppressed or repressed actualities. The experiential text, ever intuitive, seizes on the particular. The conventional narrative, ever characteristic of visible reality, seizes on the type.

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Subject matter organization tends to circle around discrete moments or discrete events or discrete facts. These need a hierarchy in order to relate each bit of information. *This* hierarchy may be actually more experience-distant than perceiver-centered texts. The subject matter text tends to reveal a chronology which finds continuous connections between moments, facts or events. The non-subject-centered text tends to manifest the discontinuities inherent in experience, tracking instead, connections made apparent by the awareness which emerges out of such transformations of states of being. "The purpose is not to disclose the real essence of phenomena but only to track down, as far as possible, relations between the manifold aspects of experience," [13] said one modern physicist. And Walter Benjamin: "Continuity in historical terms is that of the oppressors. History for the oppressed is one of discontinuity." [14] And Bruce Andrews, from his poem, *Jeopardy*:

Words were what were whole what wasted
 words want
 waiting whose travel there- tips threats necessary
 noise nothing needed noise noise not order [15]
 And Tristan Tzara:

We are often told that we are incoherent, but people intend this word to convey an insult which I find rather hard to grasp. Everything is incoherent. The man who decides to have a bath but who goes to the cinema. The other man who wants to keep quiet but who says things that don't even come into his head. Another one who has an exact idea about something but who only manages to express the opposite in words which for him are a bad translation. No logic. Relative necessities discovered *a posteriori*, valid not from the point of view of their exactitude, but as explanations. . . . The convention of spoken language is amply sufficient, but for ourselves alone, for our inner games and our literature we don't need it any more. [16,17]

NOTES

1. Tina Darraugh, "PROCEDURE" in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 107-108.
2. Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Knopf, 1954), p. 350.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 486.
4. Stéphane Mallarmé, *L'Après-Midi D'un Faune*, my own translation adapted from that of David Paul, *Poison and Vision* (Vintage Books, 1974), p. 161.
5. Francis Ponge, *Reading The Sun On Radio*, in *The Power of Language*, translated by Serge Gavronsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 97.
6. Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 33.
7. K. C. Cole, *Sympathetic Vibrations: Reflections of Physics as a Way of Life* (Bantam, 1985), p. 59.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 52, p. 57.
9. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Harper and Row, 1974).
10. Ron Silliman, *Paradise* (Burning Deck, 1985), p. 40.
11. Charles Bernstein, *Senses of Responsibility* (Tuumba Press [Tuumba 20], March 1979), p. 1-2.

12. Jackson Mac Low, "Language-Centered" in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, Volume 4, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (*Open Letter*, Fifth Series, No. 1), p. 26.
13. K.C. Cole, *Op. Cit.*, p. 211 (quoting Niels Bohr).
14. Walter Benjamin, quoted in "(In)citations/(Ex)positions" by Didier Cahen, *Banana Split*, Number 14 (27 Bd. du Roi Rene, 13100 Aix-en-Provence).
15. Bruce Andrews, *Jeopardy*, version in *Wobbling*, (Roof Books, 1981), p. 90.
16. Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, translated by Barbara Wright (Riverrun Press, 1984), p. 111.
17. *Subject to Change* was presented as part of a forum on Subject Matter at the Poetry Project of St. Mark's Church, New York, 11/24/85, introduced by Charles Bernstein, and again at *Intersection Poetry and Prose Series*, San Francisco, 8/11/86, introduced by Roberto Bedoya.

Jackson Mac Low

Pieces o' Six XXVII

THE CLOCK HAD STOPPED. Going into a trance did not help. Stuck on the wall like any dead artifact, never a clever move could get its limbs to move again. Merely a three-D flash card for teaching telling time, soon to be outdated when digitals turned universal. What stance did that allow? Would the optimist repeat the old wheeze, "It's right twice a day"? Why bother? The pessimist wins hands down. Nobody, after all, without *another* clock at hand, and an accurate one at that, could know at *which* two "split seconds" the stopped clock was right. Had a clock mender been called in and given up on it? Was it hopelessly broken or, "merely" neglected, would it soon have, or had it already, decayed to that state—through rust, dust, insects, or other allies of time's anonymity? Useless questions no trance could answer. The hands' dance had ceased. No click of escapement talked. Mouse escarpment lacked. No dickering with the hickory. Never a slap or ever. Sleep could last or never overtake. Flakes fall past, velocity zero. Acceleration flattened. Fetish secure now in fineness. Decorative president. Whip nor hope. Soul? Fled? Flakes? Into the black and silent lake. Dust caked on face. Trembled off hands truck passed. Did it rest? Do the dead? Category mistake. Analogy encryption. Action's fraction movement lacked. Intention's heady absence. Stolid sculpture, nested presence. Flecked, freckled: flies, untimed. Passed. Excremental signatures. Once upon a time. Twice? Thickened. Syntax lost its wickets. Kicked. Flywheel spring sprung. Repugnant sponge. Seconds. Into the black lake. Twices. Silence. Flakes. No count. Drifted past the window. Sifted through onto the inner sill. Sentences. Thin scum on surface. Water not quite ice. Snow's own face. Admissibly cryptic. Flickering. Crinkled. Shrinking from the fact, nonticking ticker. Fixed. Unfixable. Temporary fixity, mimic eternity: flicker? Frozen? Tears ice dust flown past. Overblown wretched watch, ratchet clatter over. Done with. Undone. Paint flakes fallen, metal uncovered, rusted unconcealment: eaten. Thinned hands wither. Twist. Time's broken-winged chariot. A fine unpresent face. No ghost. No machine. Unclean. No time machine. A stop of a clock will never abolish time. *It* had stopped. Not the flying flakes. Silent twices melting into wind-roiled blackness. It stood there. It hung on the wall. It sat on the massive mantel. It was where it had always been. All the time. It was what it had always been. Passing the shifter. Rust on a round unpleasant face. Later. It couldn't tell the hour. Unbroken duration flowed, time untold, moments unclosed, marginless, even, eventless. Banausic. Pawl rust-stuck to ratchet. Inarticulate. Flickerless. Accidentally false crystallization. Flavorless. Had anyone seen it stop? Was the time it told—the time it tells, seems to tell—the time at the time? A lie? No machine can. Could. Wood, metal, plastic, glass, paint. Stood. A classic case: time stood still. No. Uninterrupted flow unquantified? Time's quanta flicker on. Attention. Attention. Escapement had clicked their mimesis. Attention. Sentences claw at the page. The clock may not be there. The clock may not have been there. The clock wasn't there. The clock hasn't been anywhere. The clock is not there. If the clock had not been there. If the clock will not have been there. Once there may have been a clock. Once a clock was. When the hands moved. When the longer hand went 'round twelve times more rapidly than the shorter. If it was a clock that chimed. More of a tune each quarter hour. If it. The clock. Attention flickers moments. Escapement. Serial crystallization. Blinking. Once one intended a clock. One mentioned it. Once one said there was a clock. Stopped. Once one saw a clock. Once a clock one saw—had stopped. Once a flow was blinked articulate. Attention. No clock ever paid it. An escapement pawl will never release duration. A frozen click will never bind the flow. A snowstorm. Occasions. Quanta that are who. Whoever entered the room could see the clock had stopped. The clock was seen to have stopped. A clock had stopped. What

was the time? Whenever one looked toward it one could see the clock had stopped. Snowflakes blew through the movement. The mainspring, too tightly, clung to itself, or gave itself too freely. Each when will have been. How long is a moment? A stopped clock will never have abolished time. When does an event end? Not only attention articulates duration. How far above "the" horizon must an event have risen before it is recognized as having begun and being underway? Events nest. The undertone of time. The ellipsis. The lacuna. The caesura. The quantum leaps. Across/over/under, "from" one side "to" another of. The illusion of I going on . . . being I am experiencing? When awaking, how/why does the I awaking identify with the eye that has been seeing the dreams being awakened from? This is the end of time. At the still point. When a clock stops, time goes on. When a consciousness stops, time goes on. Why/how does time go on *then*? The introspection of duration. An internal cinema. (Russell first went to the movies to understand Bergson.) When I was little I thought and I said that I didn't have dreams but "sleep motion pictures." What happens to time when I dream? There is the time the clock could have measured if it hadn't stopped and the time the dreamer experiences. Is the dreamer's time "true duration"? Disarticulated memories. The waking man's guide to reality. In less time than it takes to say it. This is one of the two times the clock is right today. It is on time. It was. Was time on *it*? Did time proceed from the clock and its beholders as the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father and the Son? The end of time. History is that happening which takes place through time upon active and passive humanity and through its agency. Does this historical happening mean anything beyond the merely factual? What might this meaning be? What is the historical process leading up to? Is the end of history the end of time? An overheated interest in "eschatological" questions. An especially high measure of sobriety and exactitude, indeed the explicit renunciation of any answer. Should the question of the end of time not be left alone altogether since it is scarcely possible to answer it? Aristotle held that the process of history, like that of nature, is a cycle that continually repeats itself.

Even men's opinions are identically repeated, "not once or twice, not a few times, but an infinite number of times." It appears impossible to reflect on history without enquiring as to its end. We see it as a directed happening. Beginning and end. Time must have a stop. The time that stopped when the clock stopped. The time that will stop if time has a stop. The eternal return returned after the director was said to have absconded. Undirected, history's happening circles history circles. Profound signs of the times. Signs of time. The human race frequently proclaims actions and events which are leading it to destruction. I can predict to the human race its progression towards the better, which can never again be wholly reversed. The human race has always been progressing towards the better and will always continue so to progress. The doubts . . . of unbelievers. Philosophy too may have its Millennarianism. The conjectural beginning of human history. The conjectural beginning of the universe. The conjectural beginning of time. The course of human affairs develops gradually from the worse to the better, to which progress, then, each one of us is called upon by Nature herself to contribute for her part as much as lies within her power. The Last Things. The Victory of the Good Principle over the Evil and the Establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Men may, in their folly or wickedness, blot out civilization or even, it may be, bring to an end the existence of the human race. The universe may have begun by quantum-tunneling from nothing, a state with no classical space-time. The clock that stopped is not. The natural, mystical, and topsy-turvy end of all things. Nothing but not just plain old nothing. Each present occasion emerges from and is haloed infinitely by pasts and by vectors toward futures. Time inheres in being but is not being, nor is being time.

c. 19 December 1985 – 7 February 1986, New York

Linda Reinfeld

On Charles Bernstein

Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984, by Charles Bernstein
(Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1986)

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT BOOK, serious in its concerns, generous in its address, playful, high-spirited and without meanness. Come to it cold, or at home in the controversies surrounding current literary practice, and you will find an engaging introduction to language poetry, writing that invites you to consider language as something more and other than a vehicle for transmitting meaning from one point to another along a predetermined route. Come to it as a pure theorist, or as an academic critic looking for trouble, and you will find a good fight: Bernstein defends his borderline practices and pragmatism with the enemy's own weapons—Derridean wit, deconstructive *double-entendre*. Come to it as a poet, as a writer, as an interested reader looking for company in the space opened up not so long ago by Stein and Zukofsky, Williams and Creeley, and you find yourself in context once again—not agreeably, always (and the group is not exclusive), but surely among those declaring themselves fully present.

Many of the pieces collected here first appeared in small literary magazines like *Open Letter*, *boundary 2*, *Wch Way*, *The Difficulties*, *Credences*, *Sulfur*, and, perhaps most noteworthy, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, which Bernstein himself edited conjointly with Bruce Andrews. It is in this context that, beginning in the early 1970s, a new American poetics—philosophically oriented, self-aware, conscious of Continental theory but even more conscious of its need for local roots—has been publicly shaped and debated. Reading Bernstein is reading at the edge of an exchange. Why, then, given the care and writerly consciousness of these essays, given their thoughtful articulation of theory, their range, are they presented now as *Dream*? This dream is a reply, perhaps—a response. *Of Grammatology* ends with a shimmer of invitation from Rousseau: ". . . the dreams of a bad night are given to us as philosophy. You will say I too am a dreamer; I admit it, but I do what others fail to do, I give my dream as dreams, and leave the reader to discover which may prove useful to those who are awake." Charles Bernstein, awake and ready to use the material at hand, would like to begin here, where Jacques Derrida (ever elegant) steps aside.

The performance is a lively one. From the *Preface*, first words: "Night falls, is used to; when all the cues seem larks and constancy's brocade fan. Say, contentious, each becomes logician of her argument, in turn a pearl, in turn appalled." (9) This is writing designed to remind (*Genesis? Scheherezade? American Disseminations?*), aglitter with profusions of allusion, always on the move. The implication is clear: to read is to participate in making up the text—an activity. Never mind the rest for now, then, nor the fixed interpretation, though "Somewhere there is a Peloponnesus of the heart's own measure, which stops and stuns." (10) Charles Bernstein moves upon the (pre)face of the waters, dreaming you.

Content's Dream—your dream, an allegory of writing (thinly veiled), a life—but who's content? Not this dream: desire disrupts, writing confronts us with the wrongness of the world. Bernstein constantly resists the wish for pattern, definition, form. Reading is process, meaning flows. And if form is never more than an extension of content (Robert Creeley remembered, further extended), "theory is never more than an extension of practice." (397) The practice, then:

Thirty-seven separate pieces, special as birthday presents (Bernstein was born in 1950), each text or talk wrapped for a particular occasion, each an adventure in style: essays, expositions, interviews, parodies, talks, turns, meditations—465 pages, some of it difficult, none of it dull. Bernstein's project: "To tell some tales of terms, each the story of its tug." (10) Six terms (the seventh, sabbath, absent) serve as headings under which these tales are arranged, stages in a hinted pilgrim's progress, beginning with "One/ *The Secret of Syntax*"—language beside itself, personal, one with its meaning.

Bernstein's writing moves from the personal to the political, shows how the political is the personal. "*Ordering and sequence express values*. If, in poetry, we wish to take responsibility for the work, the text, then we must intend the order, take the order as a crucial part of what we are doing." (75) The arrangement of these essays is itself an arrangement of states. Similarly, "Poetry is a private act in a public place—the public place being both 'the language'—which is shared by all—and the page, open as it is to reading and rereading (by oneself and others)." (77) One-ness is the point we start from—one: singular, social, citational. And from the beginning, in the title of the first essay—"Three or Four Things I Know About Him"—Bernstein, always responsible, acknowledges his debt to Roland Barthes. The earnestness, the practicality, of the New World is not enough. Though Bernstein resists both Continental disengagement and Puritan legacy, he is concerned to preserve the value of playfulness, the tradition of "IDLENESS AS THE POLITICAL VALUE OF POETRY" (82). The writer does not serve the consumer; poetry must aim to be both good and good for nothing. "Instrumentality in contrast is labor done to produce a product, the means for an end." (83).

The essays that follow are partly poetry, partly means. "Two/ *Film of Perception*" shows us Bernstein at the movies, his critique of our "Frames of Reference"; in "Words and

Pictures" (after considering the poetics of Blake and Zukofsky) he makes clear his own position on the complex relationship between the visual and the verbal: "Inhearing in a poetics of vision or reflection [. . .] is a poetics of sound.

Words returned to a sonorousness that does not require the validation of fixed images, of sight and insight, nor deny its common roots with visibility." (160) But it's in "Three/ *Reading, Person, Philosophy*" that we first meet Stanley Cavell's Bernstein, Bernstein *filis*, Bernstein exposed as philosopher engaged in sober academic discourse. One has to admire the man's courage at the crossroads:

I want, finally, to briefly compare Wittgenstein's views (in Cavell's reading) with those of the Jacques Derrida of *Of Grammatology*. For whatever similarities there may be—specifically in respect to getting rid of the idea that words refer to metaphysical absolutes, to universals, to "transcendental signifieds" rather than being part of a grammar of shared conventions, a grammatology—the two seem fundamentally irreconcilable. What Derrida ends up transforming to houses of cards—shimmering traces of life insubstantial as elusive—Wittgenstein locates as *meaning*, with the full range of intention, responsibility, coherence, and possibility for revolt against or madness without. In Wittgenstein's accounting, one is not left sealed off from the world with only "markings" to "decipher" but rather *located* in a world with meanings to *respond to*.

The phrasing may be tentative, but the intent is sure: Bernstein wants to lay the foundation for a new American poetics of presence—without getting caught inside a logocentric system.

He is not alone in this project. With "Four/ *Conspiracies*"—the longest section of the book—Bernstein as (latent) poet places himself beside his contemporaries and his teachers, those who, in some revolutionary sense, share his hopes. Here are fine readings of (among others) William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and a number of newcomers as well, including Clark Coolidge, Hannah Weiner, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and Ray DiPalma. "Five/ *Flesh*" makes energetic—even sexy—connections, asks us to consider language as embodied, "writing as a kind of psychic surgery . . ." (351), ". . . the idea of the interweaving of all the work of a single author and beyond that of the related interweaving of the works of different authors." (360) Bernstein is disturbed by the present gap between writers writing and theorists theorizing. What he hopes for is ". . . the possibility of a more reciprocal relationship between political, cultural, and literary theory and contemporary literature." (382) These essays, I think, help make such reciprocity more likely.

Some question remains as to whether the often very difficult poetry Bernstein himself writes can find readers among those more accustomed to the practice of literary theory (where the major concern is with writing of established authority) than to the practices of contemporary experimental writing. In "Six/ *Catechesis*" (according to the *OED*, from the Greek, "instruction by word of mouth; originally to resound, sound amiss, 'din one's ears' "), the mature Bernstein addresses this question. Here he reads himself, reveals himself in interviews and conversations as he defends his markedly unmatched prose styles and poetic practices, his own sometimes obscure "din." But how to characterize oneself or another without "naming" or "defining?" How not "to kill something in order to catch it and hold it . . .?" Bernstein opts for variety, "different approaches": "Essentially any kind of characterization involves a system of metaphor because you're characterizing something *by* something else. It's always a partial view." (432) His remarks on "Standing Target" (a poem including quotes by which Bernstein himself was characterized as a child) illuminate text and context: "It's a poem about my own hostility, my resistance to characterization, to the use of code words that should definitely be attacked." (435) Yet even characterization—the critical enterprise—has its good uses:

It seems to me that criticism, rather than trying to establish fixed things which are good for everything, in its best exists in a provisional level, and that that provisional quality doesn't need to be masked. But the wrinkle in it is that masking has social power. If you don't mask it, it doesn't have the impact on an audience.

And, again, I'm going to be ambivalent about this issue, which is certainly something that I should be criticized for. (443)

I, for one, am entirely charmed by this Bernstein—perceptive and earnest and funny at the same time, tolerant of difference, but willing to put everything at risk. Beyond irony, beyond allegory, Bernstein proposes the (dis)solution of laughter, the dream that deconstructs itself: "What I want is humor that opens out into a multivolitional field destabilizing to any fixed meaning that can be assigned and then persists out of context." (462) "But then," he adds, "I wouldn't want to make humor into too serious a business."

Charles Bernstein

Reading the Tree, 1 & 2

Reading the Tree: 1

A litter bin vexes the mill, we howl
 for more. The complex call, the xenophobic
 alternatives, with related concerns having
 reached a critical mast. What is shared, at
 best, is intriguing, your life, this
 surrogate social struggle. Language a
 sorrow gate, malled environ, woody
 ardour. In doing so clearly foreground,
 is now plain, of particulate importance, if
 only in reflected convenience. "I hate
 speech" & speech don't like me none too good
 either. Instead of rat brains I ate gnat
 wings. East of paradise, north of the
 corridor, to which none is subject, all
 member. Stepping through the water to the
 mops. Snow covers the boats, smothers
 the folks. Otherwise, the damage already
 glows, slows, mows. A cause, a
 pose, something on vapor (they used to be
 the leaders of the avant garde, but now
 they just want to be understood). *Only*
fragments are (f)actual. Shapes sloshing,
 the wave of pandemonium or gloss of
 consternation, mute in the (a) sea that only
 scatters. Everyone keeps shouting
 in my ears: but rest assured, dear papa,
 that these are my very own sentiments and
 have not been borrowed from anyone. I want
 to put *this* word *here* (the dead
 should have known better). Folding cups
 to receive syllables. The
 flimsy charms, hysteric prognostication. She looked
 so nice you kind of wonder about her
 husband. O soredea! O weedsea! Men in
 Aida are appealing, aren't they? A day
 with Achilles in silly garb, Apollo on a
 deep hill—all pay high prices for full
 head, misunderstood as a measure
 of distance across a level field of things
 each defining a spiral dressed in shadow,
 tracing the rustling of language's identity
 turned into creamed figures, like constant
 commotion, repeatedly connoting. *This*
 I saw and said before dis-
 covering the wren. An ordinary, empty
 tune, inflated yet miniature, elbowed
 enzymatically. Stillness
 crumpling; holding the map that is
 unattached, figurative boot in backstage
 foolscap. Apply thumb
 for answer: insatiable

fatigue. For polis is peals,
pelts, pages. Deep snow
behind a red temple. Last week I
wrote, "This morning
the swelling's died & pilots
compete for the sober hue in a pile
of broken-up sentiments (tenements)." *Not
fixed!? When then!?* All that
aside, a girl is running. (—Don't
tell *me* a girl is running.)
Wild vistas inside blistering
paint (pant, pummel the
chimera). My vision of aspects
houses prefabrication (the enigma
rose before the triangulated
nose). (Looking on hopelessly
like children eating baloney.)
Derision thrives whether or not
it is possible to reply. I have
destroyed my ammunition to make way
for an ocean that shadows me as
I walk in the unpaid-for park, yet
the traffic draws away from me and I
am ill at ease listening to the sugar
pour and the gravity steam. Shall
we stroll into focus or submerge
in ponds: example is gratified
by its spout. On the way to L.A. I
meet a surrogate for you in a bar, give him
room in the passenger seat and desultory
conversation, a smoke, kisses, blowjob,
encouragement, \$5, concerned disturbed
uptight look. How can I characterize you
that way? You're really gone. I confuse
you with the reader. I can't scream
in space. I come at myself (I'm
not interested in *pursuing* lines
of thought): you can hear the shapes
and grates of the swoon. If to witness,
if to judge, which is to say exacerbate
the only sign of mottled hiss, embroidered
embrasure. These
are not my words but those that summer
gives me, with a tenderness quite
unknown in the real world, where
there is little to remember but
stormy days. I would have a house
of my own, with a bay of pastel
miasma, reality leaking
from its edges, as the context
conditions. Therefore, my style
seems to have fallen to
pieces, deteriorated
in the three-year interim
between books; others
may write better-made poems
but those poems with their elegant
turns of phrase, their vivid
imagery, even their conceptual

excellence, often add up to nothing.
 Either poetry is real as, or realer than,
 life, or it is nothing, a stupid
 & stupefying occupation for zombies.
 For my poetry is informed by
 something inside that doesn't
 flinch & won't budge. & I
 could never have done it alone.
 I may work in the factory but I glide
 to the music of the anemones.

Reading the Tree: 2

The part plots a spindle but the
 true scales wattle off the clock.
 At at which pops as someone
 nodules quarts, wholly non-check
 slowdown. Bend nothing & nothing
 will bend you, jam the gorge
 astride the loom, black-away to
 tending send. A single everything
 points: the mud of bulk, tonal
 belief, perfect compassion. &
 graciously pissed (oh Hannah!):
 acting like a typical male
 chauvinist pigsty. Nothing
 comes quickly, too nervous,

 bulb which whose, you thought,
 screened bottom (I likes my
 repeated stupid) across (don't
 complete) sent(i)ence. That's all
 a silhouette for obedience, the
 oilcloth cuffs quip, maybe
 accuses the whole world of his
 darkness. You seem unable to
 understand that (pygmy whitemeat):
 drooping as texture, each embody
 dynamite *bluntesse*, puffing
 lint wheels syllabary to
 tea cakes. OK? Monotonous
 agitations thrown across spent
 bonbons. Well well well well.
 You have to enforce digestion.
 May I slip through the greased
 palms of sociology tonight? Without
 even knowing what it *looks*
 like. I'm always resistant, while she
 sets as the shadow of my
 thoughts. Passion toys curiously: seem
 to recall, holding what you expected
 to be left out, finalized
 occurrence, past eventual
 pronouncing. At home, it means
 light to them. Luck as forced
 movement, passionate bondage.
 Only by the moon's house, the
 light's frost . . . Arm
 jammed, meaning's glance coats
 cool, cones emblem's jars, erupts

immense drone, cucumbered out
of clock, load dickered. Tuned
full, leveraged gline. This
is the evening before I ask,
my hands hardened to let water
in, or substance, acceleration,
a line of sight inflating to
become extinct. *Listen*
to reason. It's only a few hours
away and plunges down. Great
logs of the moon: The things that
make up daily life, meteorites and
meteroids, air, food, housing.
Years stars caught in space.
My reefs, my trees having fallen.
Then the reader crowds the page
with the rush of ideas: a portable
altar strapped to his back, waving
fables and faces and manoeuvring
between points, holes in clouds,
condensing into a stream of ink.
The present moss tears backward
shading the grief
of heaven's earthlessness, and melting
into empty air. Blind love for the
future, I used to say, as if
measure met my graze. Dreams
wheel their pale course, we write
in sand. . . . But you've
changed—money, self-destruction,
metabolism, large major things,
the real stuff. I remember you
in certain immense situations: how
the timing was wrong, or don't
surge with me now, how what I
could accept purples your words,
flash images of fractional chance,
crystal methodology, giddy
visibility. When she smiles
another star is lit; when she laughs,
she drops the balloon. Carrying
swollen changes that rip in the whirl
responsiveness makes. Lining
the pictures & deliriously
swinging upward toward our hats.
I used to be American but now I just
speak English. Conventicles sledging
tumbled delusions, danishes in
the pool. As per permanent noncling 100%
banlon fodder (semidistinguishable
dent) nods out to liquidating
dropsy (would like to shut him out
of misbegotten congelation of
debasements). I mean I wanted to hear
everything, not any way to pass
judgment, as if one could remain
or could stand aside from things we
saw. Light long enough to recover,
to gain a second beam. Mother tongue,

father pastrami. Then one evening I
twist myself round, keeping track
of all my loose ends, which I hadn't
expected because I'd always come out
as component parts, so I cut back, can't
see, at which point I'm facing
perhaps the ablative absolute,
humiliation of a class system to
create final segment but now stands
by itself, in someone else's
clothes, as a way to set off to just
where I've wanted to be all along;
spectacularly encumbered but
composed (some might say extended), a
surface you can't hide in front of,
or out of fumbling exhalation—tense
windows—sound a press, gap a spill.
Browsing for ice, the fragrance of
its labor staggers outside the house
of Rimes, green bottles smoked as
they're hitched, the fish in the
pail, and the pail in my hand. Later
we go to lunch, but now we talk shoes.
I began all this in April, 1972, at
3:35 am. Those were the intentions
I wrote down. In this way, from
the outside, I put everything in.
On April 11 I dreamt the history
of all people in the world, good &
evil. In June I started it again
& what started it was that I wrote
this: Her pins prick my skin.
A blinding wedge, maybe the shape
of selection (seduction): you leave
traces impossible to tear, I want
to get out of here. *Hide me.*
White verges, whirrings of remorse,
seeth through the terminal, a kind of
restored diligence, radial in its
appetite, when the evening shuts in
space or relaxes its axes
in translucent thirst, ineluctably
tainted by tendency. Whose blousing
anecdotes within which trenchant
anarchies tour ardor, penchant for
flatulent latitudes backing into
breath. The impact of the pipe
like ice cream at the end of a
sequence of themes memorialized
in a pinhole. Blurry wheezes in the
ricochet, crushing puffs of
swelling fellowship. The Hudson
lies, we get over who dies. Plethora
jellies where the Persian Gulf
empties into the roof. Say it,
damn it! Then suddenly, a sedan
comes around blasting and I drop
to the sidewalk behind a hydrant, squinting
to get the plate number. (Impotence

itself should not discredit a man,
but no one considers supporting it.)
It is seven o'clock. I put on my
coat and hat. Samples are recorded
with a spinning arc, balancing
incontinently to find the proscenium.
Yet politics excited them, the avarice
for neglected ideas under the locks
in the hallway. No end
in sight—nothing breaks, or
spend all the time pending, sense
of where, whose to what's, seen
as sidereal blink, as in: sure could use
a cold drink, a hot potato, an
exact definition (remonstration). I'm
afraid because I know a word
without having seen it or read it.
(All experience is conditioned by expectation.)
& my feelings yearn for names known
only by interval and tone. The points
connect *only once*. I come
to the door, I stop at the door, I
push the door open.

These works have as their source the poems collected in
In the American Tree, edited by Ron Silliman
(Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986).

John Cage

from *John Cage Conversing*
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An Ur-Conversation with John Cage on his Writings

I LEFT COLLEGE ACTUALLY BEFORE THE THIRTIES; I dropped out of college. And I had the intention of becoming a writer, first of all, and I went to Europe. What had impressed me in art was the art of the twenties; and in literature, *transition* magazine, Joyce and Stein, Pound and Eliot, and Cummings. The socially conscious poetry that came up during the thirties didn't interest me. I quickly discovered that I couldn't see eye to eye with the Communists of the period, who were very lively, because they weren't really interested in experimentation; and I am the son of an inventor, and the only way I would make myself useful was to discover new things.—Irving Sandler (1966).

Why are you in the habit of presenting your lectures in some unusual manner?

If a lecture is informative, then people can think that something is being done to them, and that they don't need to do anything about it except receive it. Whereas, if I give a lecture in such a way that it is not clear what is being given, then people have to do something about it.—Roger Reynolds (1961).

know the *I Ching* business of tossing three coins six times to get a number from one to sixty-four, and I got the number twenty-six, which meant that I had only to write twenty-six statements. Then I tossed coins for each one of the statements to see how many words were to be used in each one. That is why there are sometimes single words, because I got the number one.

Now I searched and searched for a way to write about Johns which would not only fulfill my musical obligation but would somehow suggest his work, or something that I felt about it. And one of the things I feel about it, that I don't feel about, say, Rauschenberg, or some other painters, is that the whole surface of the painting has been worked on. There is no emptiness in it. There is no place that something hasn't been done. There are a few exceptions to that, but few. So I made a text, fulfilling this obligation that I mentioned that produces jobs like this. And then I filled in the gaps, so that I too would have filled up the time, whereas in the Rauschenberg one I tried to give some reflection of that by the spaces that I left in time—there were spaces between those various obligations that I had to write. To write the Johns text, the actual writing

given, then people have to do something about it.—Roger Reynolds (1961).

How did I write the [much-reprinted art-catalogue] texts [about Robert Rauschenberg, Marcel Duchamp and Jasper Johns]?

The Rauschenberg text was written rather quickly, and followed a musical score of mine. It has been my habit for some years to write texts in a way analogous to the way I write music. Say I have four subjects that I am willing to discuss. Then I take a sheet of paper with four shapes on it. Over that I place a circle which in the case of music refers to time and in the case of a text, such as these, refers to lines on a page. I have the lines, I have another sheet with points on it (these sheets are transparent); and as the points fall over the one that has shapes, some of the points are within the shape, some are outside. Now the circle with the numbers and other circles—another page not with points, but with *O*'s (circles) also is laid over this complex, then a dotted line which is wiggly (meandering) is laid over this so that it intersects at least one of the points which is within one of the shapes and intersects also the first circle. It will possibly, very more likely than not, intersect with other points which are either within or outside of this shape, and the circles. In the case of the Johns text, if it intersects with the circles, then I am obliged to present an idea. If these points and circles are within the shapes, the stories and ideas are relevant to his work; if outside, relevant to his life. And all of that within the number of lines that is given by the intersection of the dotted lines with the first circle.

The Duchamp text was written in a simple way. You

there were spaces between those various obligations that I had to write. To write the Johns text, the actual writing took me, I think, about three weeks; but the coming to how to write it, this way of writing, took me five months of constant application to this problem of writing about it.—*Artforum* (1965).

Words and information have a terrible way of getting in and sticking and preventing anything else from getting in. It merely clutters up your head.—Susan Reimer (1973).

I've been asked to make a text for *Art in America* dealing with Marcel Duchamp whom I knew quite closely in recent years, particularly in Cadix (his Costa Brava home); before he died we were sometimes two weeks together. So I agreed, naturally, to do something but said I would like to do what I've been wanting to do: to make a text which had no syntax. And so I subjected the dictionary to chance operations—the *I Ching*. All the words, so that I could divide all the pages of this dictionary—1428, including the boys' and girls' names at the end—I could divide that by 64, producing groups of pages of 22 or 23. That comes out to 64. Then I subject 22 and 23 to 64, to get groups of 2 or 3, so that when I get another hexagram I know precisely which page I'm on. Then I count the words on the page and relate *that* to 64 and know immediately what word I'm dealing with. Then I ask how many forms does the word have—if it's a noun, if it's a verb; is it singular or is it plural? If there's an illustration, is it the word or the illustration? etc. So that I finally pinpoint what it is I have to do in the text. Then *where* on the pages does it go?—The page likewise submitted to the *I Ching*. And I

did it very finely so as to avoid a module. Again, by means of abundance; quantity not quality.

You see, from Corbusier's point of view, which is quality, a module becomes of great importance. From a quantitative point of view, which I'm trying to work with, a module becomes, if *necessary*, then something to obscure. Anyway, the place, the direction of the word, and then submitting each letter to the chance operation—is it present? Is it in the process of disappearing, as Duchamp himself had disappeared, you see? Is it disappearing structurally? If it's an E, it has four parts, the three horizontals and the vertical; which one of them is missing, if one is missing? Or is it being eaten by some disease—as the poor man, too, was. Then you have in the end when you superimpose many realizations of this process with that instant lettering business, you know, when you have 261 typefaces, you then work into a very rich situation. And some of the typefaces are—from a value point of view, qualitative point of view—clearly poor typefaces, but from an abundant point of view, they are *Yatha butham*—just as they are. And when they are just as they are in this rich configuration of things, they are beautiful. And the Lord must have had a similar idea in mind.—Don Finegan, et al. (1969).

Have you seen the book on notations that was just published [*Notations*, 1969]? This is the collection that I made for the Foundation of Contemporary Performance Arts. Painters had given the Foundation paintings and they had been sold and so we got money for music, theater and dance, and so on. Then I thought of this project of collecting musical manuscripts, hoping that musicians could help themselves by ultimately selling it to a university or to a library, and then using the money to support the works of the musicians, dancers, and performing artists. And the book has this character that I've been speaking about of no value judgment placed—so that in one and the same collection, there are good things and what people would say are poor things. And there are things of all kinds, and they're not organized into any categories. So that it's like those aquariums where all of the fish are in one big tank. As a result I think it's very beautiful. And then the text is mainly different intensities of typefaces, like music notation which has light and dark in it.—Don Finegan, et al. (1969).

Let me show you my recent text. It is called *Mushroom Book*. I had for many years wanted to write a mushroom book, and I found that when I concentrated on mushrooms it was not interesting. So what I did was to list all the things that interested me. So: mushroom stories, excerpts from mushroom books, remarks about mushroom hunting, excerpts from Thoreau's *Journal* about mushrooms, excerpts from Thoreau's *Journal*—anything, remarks about life and art, or art and life, life and life, or art and art. By that I mean life becoming art, and I think of Fuller.—Niksa Gligo (1972).

I have become interested in language without syntax. One of the things that separate the people of the world is not only the various cultures, but the different languages; and we see already the development of language which is graphic—anybody can understand it, regardless of where they come from. This has become necessary through travel by air. I noticed in the plane I took to San Francisco

recently that it didn't say "No Smoking." Instead, it has a picture of a cigarette with an X across and the same for putting the belts around yourself. Also, when people love one another, they don't speak so much; or if they speak, they don't make sense. They tend to make nonsense, when they love one another; so I think we need to have more *nonsense* in the field of language, and that's what I am now busy in doing.

In other words, your words will have no meaning?

I have noticed that people looking at these things I am doing, instead of following a line, begin jumping over the page, inventing words that I don't even know are there; and that is what I wanted to do with music—to let people hear it in their *own* way. And now I am hoping to find a language in which people can read in their own way, no matter where they come from.—Alcides Lanza (1971).

Having agreed to write a text about electronic music, and having noticed that HDT—that's Thoreau—listened to sound as electronic composers listen to it, not just to musical sounds but to noises and ambient sound generally, it occurred to me that making a chance-determined mix of his remarks in the *Journal* about sound, silence and music would make a text relevant to electronic music. Therefore, I gave it the title *Mu* (music) *reau* (Thoreau).

What was your method?

I went through the index of the Dover edition of the *Journal*, and I noticed every occurrence in the index of anything that could be remotely thought to be connected with music, and then I listed all of those appearances; then I subjected it all to chance operations in terms of sentences, phrases, words, syllables and letters. I made a permutation of those five possibilities, so that it would be each of the five alone, or in any groups of two, or any groups of three, or any groups of four, or finally all five.

In gathering the original material for Mureau, you took phrases out of Thoreau and sentences out of Thoreau and words out of Thoreau.

First I listed all the things having to do with sound.

Listed in what form? Sentences? Words? Page references?

Page references, just as they appear in the index. Then I asked, what it was of all those permuted possibilities I was looking for, whether I was looking for all five together or a group of four of them, or a group of three or a group of one or two. And when I knew what I was doing, my next question was for how many events was I doing it? And the answer could be anywhere from one to sixty-four. Let's say I got twenty-three. Then if I knew that I was looking for twenty-three events which were any of these five, then I ask of this five which one is the first one. Which is the second? Which is the third? So I knew finally what I was doing. And then when I knew what I was doing, I did it.

By what kind of process did you identify a syllable?

I used the syllables as they appear in the dictionary—the breakings of the words.

You took the words as they existed in Thoreau and simply broke them apart and thereby made them part of your syllable collection.

If I was looking for syllables.

So you have a syllable collection, along with a word collection, along with a letter collection.

My letters become quite interesting. Letters are either vowels or consonants. But it was the diphthong that taught me to think of letters as possibly being in combination. AE, for instance, is a diphthong. Therefore, I thought if

vowels can join together to make diphthongs, why can't they join in larger groups and why can't consonants join one another? And I decided that they would. Then, if I landed, by chance, on the letter T in the word "letters," the T is connected with another T. My next question would be: Do I take just the T I landed on, or do I take the one adjacent to it also? And if it were B and J in the word "subject," and I landed on the B I would accept the J if chance said I should.

By what process did you land on the B?

Well, by counting the letters in the line, and then relating that number to the number sixty-four and the *I Ching*, giving me the number that would give me the B.

I think you've skipped a step of your process. Let's say there are one hundred and twenty-eight letters on the line; you consult the I Ching and get, say, the number four. That would mean you'd use the numbers eight and nine? I'm making a very simple example—one hundred and twenty-eight letters. Let's make it really simple—sixty-four.

And we get the number fifty-three, so it would be the fifty-third letter. The letter, say, is a B and it's adjacent to a J and preceded by a vowel. So we ignore the vowel, since we're dealing with consonants. . . .

And the word in this case is "subject."

And I ask whether I use just the B or the B and the J.

You make it then an either/or question.

If I throw one to thirty-two, it would be the B alone, with the J being thirty-three to sixty-four. But say there were five consonants. Here are four: N, G, C, H—the NG from the word *I Ching* and the CH from "chance." Then my question is, since I've landed on the G, do I take the N in front of it and the C and H after it? Or what do I do? My first possibility would be to take the G alone. My second would be to take the NG, because it's in the same word. The next would be to take NGC, and the fourth would be to take NGCH. Is that right?

There are more possibilities.

What are they?

Well, if you landed on the G, why not take just the G and the C that follows it?

Because the N came before and belongs in the same word. That's how I worked anyway. I did leave out the GC; you're quite right. Or the GH too. I took the G as being primary. . . .

If you took the G as being primary, therefore the G is necessarily connected to the N because both come from the word "Ching," but is not necessarily connected to the letters of the second word.

Well, you're quite right. Now I think that that's a very good question. What you suggested could bring about a change in the way I work, because I realize I've omitted certain possibilities. I didn't mean to. What would you do? You would have the C, the NG, the CG, the NCG, and the NGCH; would you accept that as the limit? That's five. Then one to twelve will be the first, thirteen to twenty-five the second, twenty-six to thirty-seven the third, and thirty-eight to fifty-one the fourth, and fifty-two to sixty-four the fifth.

And that's how you divide the sixty-four options of the I Ching when there are five alternatives.

That's how that works.

One reason why your poetry is so distinctive is that no one else writes poetry in this way—no one. Then how did you decide to begin work, in the case of Mureau?

I wanted to make a text that would have four parts, and it was written for a magazine in Minneapolis called *Synthesis*. And they were written to be columns.

Written to be columns?

I was a columnist for the magazine. I don't think of these texts as lectures. They were conceived as columns, initially, and if you'll notice, the columns have different widths. I did that on purpose.—Richard Kostelanetz (1979).

But I'm really interested in the piece you're writing now about the weather.

It responds to a commission by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in relationship to the Bicentennial of the United States. Since it came from Canada, I accepted immediately. The man who wrote me in the first place suggested that I work with the writings of Benjamin Franklin; but after reading a little bit of Franklin's work, I felt that I couldn't do that, that I was still, as I have been for many years, devoted to Thoreau. I tried to take myself for this occasion away from Thoreau; and I bought several books that are anthologies of American writing. But I found that I can't take myself away from Thoreau. I'm still too fascinated.—Walter Zimmerman (1975).

In Empty Words you went back. . . .

I was continuing Mureau, but extending it beyond Thoreau's remarks about sounds and music to the whole of the *Journal*. To begin with, I omitted sentences, and I thought of *Empty Words* as a transition from literature to music.

We would agree, then, that Mureau is a literary work basically. It's meant to be printed in a magazine or book.

Yes. In the first notebooks of *Empty Words*, each part is called a lecture.

So Empty Words was initially conceived as a performance piece.

It was something to be read aloud, and therefore I made it a length that some people would consider excessive; I made a length of two hours and a half for each lecture.

How did you determine that?

Most people consider this excessive, and they don't want me to give it as a lecture. I think that's because the average lecture, say in a college, should be forty minutes.

Why did you make your own lectures nearly four times as long?

I don't know whether I can answer that question. I had been very impressed by an experience I had in Japan, in 1964, of going to a Buddhist service in a town called Nagoya, the one where all the temples are. It's in the same valley as Kyoto. Anyway, we went to an evening service there that went on for hours and hours, and we had been warned that it was going to be tiresome. I was with Merce Cunningham and the Dance Company. It was very cold, and we were not protected by any warmth. They had told us it would be uncomfortable and long, but we were told also that we didn't have the right to leave once we had decided that we wanted to stay. So we all suffered through it, and it went on and on and. . . .

How long? Three hours?

No, more than that. It was like six, something like that. And then a few days later, or maybe it was on another trip to Japan, I was in a Zen temple in Kyoto. When I was invited to go to an early morning Buddhist service, I did. I noticed that after a lengthy service they opened the doors to the temple, and you heard the sounds coming in from

the outside. So, putting these two things together, the long night business and then the dawn of the opening of the doors, I thought of the opening of the doors occurring at dawn, and making four lectures and the fourth would begin at dawn with the opening of the doors to the outer world so that the sounds would come in—because, you see, it was a transition from literature to music, and my notion of music has always been ambient sound anyway, silence.

Let me go back to the origins of the work. Why does it have the title Empty Words?

It comes from a description of the Chinese language that was given to me by William McNaughton, who has made marvelous translations of both Japanese and Chinese texts. The Chinese language, he said, has “full words” and “empty words.” Full words are words that are nouns or verbs or adjectives or adverbs. We don’t know in Chinese which of these a full word is. The word is so full that it could be any of them. For instance, the word “red” is an adjective. It could be—I’m hypothesizing now—it could be the same as ruby or cherry, if those were names for red. *It is a full word because it has several semantic possibilities.*

It can mean any one of those things.

An empty word, by contrast, is . . .

A connective or a pronoun—a word that refers to something else.

Or it has no meaning by itself. For example, if I say to you “it,” that would be an empty word.

Yes. I’m not being at all scholarly about my use of the term “empty words.” I’m suggesting something more in line with what I’ve already told you, namely the transition from language to music, and I would like with my title to suggest the emptiness of meaning that is characteristic of musical sounds.

That is to say, they exist by themselves.

Yes. That when words are seen from a musical point of view, they are all empty.

They’re empty semantically?

How do you mean?

“Semantic” refers to meaning. They are also empty semantically.

I would rather say that they’re empty of intention. And now we come back to the emptiness of full words. Because we don’t know if the full word intends to be an adjective or a verb or a noun, it’s the reader who brings the intention to it.

Which is to say, when you say the word “red” in Chinese, you can . . .

You can go in any one of four or five different directions. And the person who lets it go there is the receiver.

No, but when you say the word “red,” you may mean nothing more than the word “red”; but when I hear the word “red,” I think of red apples, red cherries, red beans, and so forth.

I think this is going even further than I meant to go. I would like to go back to the difference between red and blush and cherry—because that’s very basic—that’s more basic than a red apple or a red cherry. It’s whether it’s a noun or a verb or an adjective. In other words, we don’t know at all what it is.

It doesn’t know what it is. We give it a syntactical content.

And it could be any one of these things. It is without intention. And I think haiku poetry is somewhat without intention. I think it may be that the author, if not without

intention in writing a haiku poem, has a plurality of intentions, more than one.

How so?

In writing a haiku poem, which as you know is just five, seven, five syllables, there are so few ideas present. An example is: “Matsutake ya/ Shiranu ko no ha no/ He-baritsiku,” which is mushroom/ ignorance, leaf of tree/ adhesiveness. That’s all there is in the poem. And it’s by Basho.

A master.

What does it mean? R. H. Blythe translates it: “The leaf of some unknown tree sticking on a mushroom.”

He inserts a lot of syntactical connection that is not present in the original.

He has to; he is obliged to. Now we don’t know what Basho meant. It could be, “Mushroom does not know that leaf is sticking to it.”

There are all kinds of connectives the translator or reader can put between Basho’s words.

Many.

Those words are full words.

Yes, but you see, what I’m saying now is that, full as they are, they are somehow in Basho, too, devoid of intention.

I can’t believe that, not with full words like those. . . .

But then if he was intending something, why wasn’t he more explicit?

You’re right. So, therefore, you had this notion of Empty Words in your mind at the beginning. You also had the notion of developing a piece that would be away from something that was just read on the page to something that would be performed, as it approaches music.

The approach to music is made by steadily eliminating one of the aspects of language, so that as we start Lecture One of *Empty Words*, we have no sentences. Though they did exist in Mureau, now they’ve gone. In the second one, the phrases are gone, and in the third part the words are gone, except those that have only one syllable. And in the last one, everything is gone but letters and silences.

So you’ve had a further reduction within the piece. But let me go back a step. Were the same compositional methods used in manipulating the material from Thoreau in Mureau as were used in Empty Words?

Yes.

Then why is Mureau generally written continuously, like prose?

Because it was a column.

And, as we can see, Empty Words was written with lots of white space between the various parts.

Mureau was a column to be printed in a magazine, and *Empty Words* is a lecture. In fact, the whole thing is, through chance operations, put in the form of stanzas. Poetic stanzas or musical stanzas?

Well, just stanzas. That is to say that one part of it is separated from another part.

Okay, parts; let’s say parts.

And the parts were determined by the appearance of a period following whatever word, syllable, or letters that was chance-obtained.

When you found a period in Thoreau, that punctuation mark ended your stanza, and forced you to go on, vertically to another part.

That made a situation that brought about too many parts. Let’s see if I can give you a . . .

You’re now showing me notebooks which have Roman numerals.

The Roman numerals are volumes of Thoreau’s *Journal*. Page numbers, and then occasionally English words.

Right. Now I'm trying to find an example of too many periods close together. Well, here's one. There's a period. "Hauling off" period. And before it is "teenth" period. As part of, say, "nineteenth," you had just a syllable there. And "hauling off."

Which you took as a phrase.

And each was followed by a period. And I did not want there to be so many parts that every time a period came that would be a stanza. So when they are adjacent like that, I asked the question, which one of them disappears. By a decision of taste, you decided that one of them should disappear. Yes.

Then you used the I Ching to decide which one should disappear.

Now when they were that close I had another device to see whether one of them disappeared and in this case they didn't necessarily disappear. It was just more difficult for them to disappear. So that sometimes two words can make a complete stanza, as in this case: "comes hawk."

Which are two words vertically aligned. Where do those words come from?

One comes from the eleventh volume, and the other from the sixth volume. But they were both . . . let's see what they . . . they were both words.

Now I'm lost. Go back again.

Here I have the notation "W 32."

That means you had a word. And "32" means . . .

There are thirty-two words to be found. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. . . . Thirty-two words in that section.

And now we have phrases, words, and syllables, and there are fifty-four of them.

So then you found fifty-four, and once you had found fifty-four . . .

Then I found word, syllable, word, syllable, syllable, word, phrase, phrase, phrase, phrase, word, phrase, word, phrase. . . . It's an interesting way to work, and it follows the title—it's emptyheaded.

I understand that. But it's still dealing with a very pregnant, resonant, and, to you, very relevant, text in Thoreau's Journal. So there was an exercise of choice in selecting it, rather than another book, and that choice would influence an awful lot.

I know, as you know too, that, were the same kind of thing done with *Finnegans Wake*, the result would be entirely different.

Or if it were an urban writer, it would be different. If it were done with a . . .

Or with a different language. Or with a combination of languages. It was certainly suggested by *Finnegans Wake* that one should do that.

Since *Finnegans Wake* is a combination of languages—that is its principal linguistic characteristic—any work derived from it would reflect that fact. Let me go back to the question of the four major sections, or "Lectures" as you call them. When did one of them end?

When there were 4,000 events at least.

In other words, there had to be 4,000 extractions from Thoreau.

In the case of the First Lecture, there are 4,061, and the reason for that excessive number is this: when I got to the 3,997th event. . . .

You threw a sixty-four.

Right, I threw a sixty-four, and it took me up to 4,061.

What are those halfmoon marks in your notebook—halfmoon marks that we use to connect letters to each other over space, as when we make

a superfluous space in typing. You have them all over the text; what are they about?

It was the last thing I did before I finished the text. I went through and found out which things were to be read as connected to each other, so that this "R" from "hear" instead of being separate from the "th" of "the" in the following word goes together with it, so it's "RTH," instead of "R,TH."

The letters are printed together in the text, and pronounced together when you speak them. So these were derived from an either/or situation with the I Ching. So, half the bits—should we call them "bits," or is "events" your word?—are concerned, and half of them aren't. How did you decide, in typing out this work, to go onto another line? How did you decide that the space should not be a space between words, so to speak, but a space between lines?

I set up a certain number of characters for each line, a maximum, and I did not permit the breaking of a word, and I used commas as ends of lines.

So, whenever there was a comma in the original text, that indicates the end of a line.

Or any other kind of punctuation.

Including a period—a period that you ruled would end a stanza. So, it's simply a matter of when the words or bits fill up the available line, then you go on to the next line.

I hope I can show you that.

We're looking now at Empty Words, Part One, as it appears in your book.

"notAt evening comma," so that was the end of the line. A comma in the original ended the line in your text, but that comma is not reproduced here in the book.

That's right.

"Right can see," and there's a hyphen. And those three words are separated.

"Suited to the morning hour."

And those five words are separated from the following stanza. Now, in the opening line, the first two words "not" and "at" are run together, into "notAt," because by the I Ching process that was thrown they had to run together. You kept the capitalization of "A" in "at," which was in the original Thoreau.

Yes. Then the indentation here is obtained by subtracting the number of characters in the line from the maximum number, which is probably something like forty-two or forty-three.

If you have forty-three characters in a line, what do you subtract?

Subtract the number of characters in the first line from the maximum. And then subjecting that number to chance operations to discover where the indentation was.

I'm lost; I'm sorry.

There are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen characters in "notAt evening." I subtract that from forty-three, and I get thirty. And now I relate thirty to the number sixty-four to find out how many spaces in from the edge I should indent the line. Say I got the number two. I'm working with thirty characters here. The I Ching works with the number sixty-four. So looking at the table that relates thirty to sixty-four, taking my next I Ching number, I found out, if I get the number one, for instance, I got something very small. I have to begin the line one space in from the left. But the next time, instead of being right underneath the first line, is indented toward the middle.

In the second line again, by the same procedure, you counted the num-

ber of characters, subtracted that from forty-three, put that number through the I Ching with its sixty-four options, and thereby determined where your second line begins.

Now, when there was no comma, because it looks like there wasn't one here, then I went as far as I could in the line, up to the maximum, without breaking the line and without breaking the word. If there were only one or two, then I left just an either/or about the indentation, and it looks like it. . . .

Started flush left, until you go to one of those punctuation marks that would prompt you to go on to another line.

That's right.

And continued to do the same thing.

Right.

And in *Empty Words*, Three, you removed the possibility of words, so you had just syllables and letters, and then in Four, just letters.

I had one further idea, and that was to sit in profile for the first one, then face the audience for the second one, to sit in profile again but on the other side for the third, and then with my back to the audience for the fourth. And it was actually at Naropa that I sat with my back to the audience, and they became infuriated.

Each of the four works comes with a preface—actually each section has a preface that incorporates the prefaces of its predecessor, until there is a four-part preface for the last one. What are they meant to do?

All the information, all the answers to all the questions, such as those you now are asking me, are given as conscientiously as I can in these introductions. I tried to imagine what it is anyone would want to know, and then I give them that information in the introduction, but not in any logical sequence.

How were these prefaces written?

The first thing I did was find out how many words I had at my disposal for the first remark or for the first answer: one, two, three, plus two plus two plus two, eleven. I had eleven words. Now I thought, well, what shall I say. And it occurred to me to say at the beginning how it was that I came to be in connection with Thoreau. That seems to be a reasonable beginning.—Richard Kostelanetz (1979).

But isn't it important for a poet to make sense?

Just the opposite. A poet should make nonsense.

Why?

Well, for example, if you open *Finnegans Wake*, which is I think without doubt the most important book of the twentieth century, you will see that it is just nonsense. Why is it nonsense? So that it can make a multiplicity of sense, and you can choose your path, rather than being forced down Joyce's. Joyce had an anarchic attitude toward the reader, so that the reader could do his own work.

Do you write with intent?

People read thinking I'm doing something to them with my books. I'm not. They're doing something to themselves. . . . What intention could I have possibly had in writing *Empty Words*?

Well, you may have wished to speak of Thoreau.

No, he was just the source. I picked Thoreau only because his journal had two million words. I don't want my reader to experience *Empty Words* except in his own way.

And if I find *Empty Words* obscure?

That's your problem. You're interested in other things.—Lisa Low (1985).

Ever since I stopped smoking about six years ago a kind of cloud has come over my voice, and more and more my interests move toward the voice and toward the use of the voice in connection with music in performance. I had in mind, for instance, to read all of *Empty Words*, which could take a whole night long. I wanted to read the first three parts, which could take seven and one-half hours or, with two intermissions of one-half hour each, would take eight and one-half hours. I have that eight and one-half hours precede the dawn, so that the fourth part would begin by opening the doors wherever it is, to the sounds outside. By now I don't know whether my voice would put up with it. Not knowing whether I can do something leads to a decision to learn how to be able to do it. What it has to do with is breathing—a whole area to be investigated.

That is a new frontier for you.

Breathing and speaking and the use of them for the voice. I know enough about it to know it has an effect upon the mind.—Interview with Rose Slivka (1978).

I still think our time sense is changed, or that we have changed it. With all these pieces that I've written in recent years, they can be quite long, hours long. All of them can also be just a few seconds long, did you know that?

No.

They don't have to be played for any particular length, that is part of the principle of indeterminacy.

But would you prefer them to be longer than shorter?

No, no. It doesn't make any difference to me. I wish to be, as it were, useful and practical, so that if, say, there was an occasion when one wanted two seconds of music, one could take *Atlas Eclipticalis* and play it for two seconds; it's unlikely because it takes too long to set the thing up. You could set up however one part of it very easily and quickly and do it for two seconds. Because I conceived that a long work which has many parts can be expressed by any one of its parts or any number of its parts for any length of time. When you started this part of the conversation I found that I was thinking about the difference between prose and poetry. I was thinking that Webern particularly suggests poetry, and that this activity on my part suggests perhaps a big book, that does not need to be read.

And also can bore you for long passages at a time, but still leave a mark.

Right, and you could read it, for instance, for any length of time. You could, in other words, have it around, pick it up, put it down, or you could settle down and read it for several hours. And you could, as in the case of *Finnegans Wake*, read it without understanding anything for a long time, and then suddenly you could understand something.—David Sylvester and Roger Smalley (1967).

Very little of my time is set aside for reading, but a great deal for writing. I don't read very much; for the last six or seven years I've been reading almost nothing but *Finnegans Wake*. That has obliged me to read a lot of books about *Finnegans Wake*. I could go on with that for many years.—John Roberts (c.1980).

Could you say a few words about your present concern with mesostics?

I take a name as a kind of discipline and the first line must have the first letter of the name and must not have the second letter of the name. That must appear in the second line. And so I am able to do either by having syntactical

ideas, as in the case of the mesostics on the name of Duchamp, or I can do it by chance operations, as in the case of the Merce Cunningham mesostics. And there I applied the operations to the book on choreography by Cunningham and to thirty-two books from his library that had been useful to him in his work on the dance. So that those, even though they do not make any sense syntactically if you read them, the nonsense is the dance.

Why do you write these mesostics?

Questioning why we do what we do is very curious. I think we do what we do because we slept well and when we wake up we have energy and we try to think of what to do, and we find something to do and do it.

Is your present concern with mesostics a kind of splendid isolation?

No, it is my present concern with language. You see, language controls our thinking; and if we change our language, it is conceivable that our thinking would change. I noticed that all over the world language is changing. There was talk formerly of Esperanto, but it was too localized, because it used European languages only. But now, as people fly, we come to the ideas of Buckminster Fuller. As people move around the world, language begins to appear as something that separates people from people. Rather than a means of communication, it becomes a means of not-understanding. And so we see, for instance, images. In the airplanes, instead of saying "no smoking," we frequently see a cigarette with an X over it, and that can be understood by everyone. And my mesostics became things that you can see and understand the way you understand "No Parking."

Do you make your experiments with nonsyntactical language because you feel somehow bound by syntactical language?

I think we need to attack that question of syntax. My friend Norman O. Brown pointed out to me that syntax is the arrangement of the army.

Yes, that reminds me of Nietzsche's saying that our need to have grammar is proof that we cannot live without God. If you are opposed to syntax, do you think that we do not need to have God?

Yes, and Duchamp too, when he was asked what he thought about God, said, "Let's not talk about that. That's man's stupidest idea."—Niksa Gligo (1972).

What about mesostics? When did you start with this, and why do you put words in this very strange, but very structured, literary form?

People are always asking me to do something, and I heard long ago that the Japanese people, when they wrote letters to one another, wrote poetry; and I found that if someone asks me to write something for them when they had a birthday, or some other reason, that if I used the name down the middle to make a mesostic, it entertained me more than if I just sat down and tried to think out of the top of my head something to say, because that discipline of writing the mesostics helped me get an idea.

And when did you start this?

I started it about fifteen years ago. Now I'm very good at it. I can do it quickly.

And you like more the mesostic than the acrostic?

I like the look of the margins being ragged on both sides. What I don't like about the acrostic is that the margin is straight up and down. I prefer to have the middle straight up and down.—Klaus Schoening (1982).

Your subsequent literary work has...

To do with *Finnegans Wake*. It's quite different from *Empty*

Words. Writing through *Finnegans Wake* and *Writing for the Second Time through Finnegans Wake* have been mesostics on the name of James Joyce. That's a different discipline and doesn't involve chance operations, but involves something else entirely—painstaking examination.

Coupled with devices in selecting from Joyce's work to ensure that something other than the original Joyce emerges. What in past poetry have you been relating to?

When I was first aware of literature beyond high school, it was Pound and Eliot and Joyce and Stein and Cummings. And then I lost interest in literature in the thirties. I didn't become interested in the social concerns of Auden and Isherwood, and who were the others? I wanted a poetry that would continue from these five I just mentioned. It took a long time for that to come about. There was a kind of revolt against them, wouldn't you say?

Well, not against Eliot, but against some of the others, yes—against Cummings and Stein for sure. They were definitely neglected for a while.

And Joyce too. Joyce is only accepted by Joyce scholars, don't you think?—Richard Kostelanetz (1979).

Your poetry in mesostics—the process of writing where the name of the person you're writing about is spelled in a vertical row within the text—led you to discover a means of translating any book into music. This happened while you were composing Roaratorio, an Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake. How does it work?

What I suggest people do is write through a book in order to reduce its length to a reasonable musical length. In the case of *Roaratorio* it's one hour, from *Finnegans Wake*, which is 626 pages to begin with, and becomes in my writing of mesostics on Joyce's name, something like 41 pages, and those 41 pages can be read comfortably in the space of an hour. The translation can also be identified by page and line, so that it's like a ruler going through the book.

I can go through the book and find out where I hear something, for instance: if the writer says someone laughed or a dog barked then I can jot that down and I can identify that by page and line and I can then insert a barking dog or a crying child at the point that it belongs in relation to the ruler that I've already written. And if places are mentioned in the book, I can go to those places and make recordings and put them where they belong in relation to the ruler, and eventually I have a piece of music.—Paul Hersh (1982).

What are you working on now?

I'm writing now, through the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, mesostics based upon Pound's name. And I'm just completing the fourth writing through *Finnegans Wake*; I've also started the fifth writing. It will be like *Mureau*, you know that text in which I use chance operations to locate different parts of Thoreau's *Journal*. This time through the *Wake* I will not go linearly, as I have been doing with the mesostics, but as in *Mureau*, I'll fly backwards and forwards.—Middlebury College (1981).

Can you tell us about Muoyce?

That's the first syllable of the word *music*, and all the name of *Joyce* without the *J*.

I some years ago wrote *Mureau*, which is music-Thoreau, and it was the subjecting of the journal of Thoreau to chance operations whereas this does the same to *Finnegans Wake*; and unlike my first four writings through *Finnegans Wake*, it is not made up of mesostics but is like *Mureau* a

collage of typescript. Many of the words are brought together, as they are in the thunderclaps of *Finnegans Wake*.—Charles Amirkhanian (1983).

Instead of going from the beginning of the text to its end, I flew over *Finnegans Wake*, landing thorough chance operations here and then there, or on a letter, or a syllable, or a word, or a phrase.

Muoyce can begin anywhere in the book and move to any other point. It's perfectly aerial.—Klaus Schoening (1983).

And there's no punctuation. I think it is certainly the most difficult text to read [aloud] that I have ever encountered.—Charles Amirkhanian (1983).

When I first wrote the text, I had great trouble pronouncing it. I didn't know what the sound of it should be, or could be. I tried everything I could think of, and among the things I tried was whispering. When I whispered it, and voiced the italicized syllables, it clicked for me.—Klaus Schoening (1983).

It makes no sense [semantically]; but as I read it, and I'm sure as people hear it, ideas come into their heads; but the ideas are not so much coming by intention from me but simply as the result of the concatenation of phrases, words, syllables and letters.

So it's an evocation of sense.

I hope so, but not an intended sense. I think something automatically comes into it of *Finnegans Wake*—Joyce's concerns with the church, and also with vulgarity.

How many times have you rewritten Finnegans Wake?

This is the fifth time, and the last time.

Why the last?

I'm not going to do it anymore. That doesn't mean I'm through with the *Wake*, but I'm through writing through the *Wake*; but I enjoy reading it.—Charles Amirkhanian (1983).

Recently I wrote mesostics on the name of Ezra Pound all the way through the *Cantos*, which is over 800 pages; and I felt a little foolish doing it. I had never read the *Cantos* and there was a magazine editor who wanted me to do it, and so I thought I'd take this opportunity to get through the *Cantos*. Now that I've done so, I must say that I don't regard them as highly as I do the *Wake*. The reason is that there are about four or five ideas that keep reappearing in the *Cantos*, so that in the end the form resembles something done with stencils, where the color doesn't really change. There's not that kind of complexity, or attention to detail, as there is in Joyce. In the *Cantos* when something changes you can say, "Oh there's that again."

In my book *Themes and Variations*, which was published this year, I wrote quite quickly and spontaneously about certain ideas whose subjects came about by chance operations. But then I used chance operations with regard to several such spontaneous writings, in order to get a final form, which I say in the introduction to the book, is not about ideas but hopefully is in a form which produces them. *Themes and Variations is not only composed in mesostics but utilizes renga, a classical form of Japanese poetry, in which several writers contribute one line each. How does renga affect the spontaneous production of ideas?*

If I have five texts and make a sixth text from the first line of any one of the five (as chance determines), and the sec-

ond, again, from any one of the five, I then write a text which was not spontaneous but which was written by different poems, even though they were all written by me. It's as though they were different people or different times, so that something happens that was not in my mind, and which is not glued to my intentions.

Themes and Variations is another step toward a text without syntax, something "polymorphic" in the Norman O. Brown sense and thus seems tied to the Musicircus or Roaratorio.

Yes. This is what I enjoy most in art: some kind of activity which is not stuck to the creator's mind, but is free of it, so that it can be enjoyed in different ways by different people. I think fundamental to all these activities is the absence of intentions. You can, in the *Musicircus*, have an absence of intention through the multiplication of intentions.—Paul Hersh (1982).

What about when you were working with James Joyce, or works from the past—because you've isolated and changed, transformed older texts. We've been discussing whether that should be called a form of collaboration.

Well, if it's a collaboration, it's one-sided.

An involuntary collaboration.

I mean, poor Joyce, he has no way to fight back. The only thing that happens is that I'm obliged to give a percentage of my income to the Society of Authors, so that the Joyce side of the collaboration is now purely financial.

When you were working with Joyce, did you feel in contact? You're not doing a mustache on his Mona Lisa, you're not transgressing him. Or do you think it is transgression?

It has nothing to do with him. It's something else. He would have enjoyed it, and there are some Joyce scholars who think that Pound would have enjoyed my writing through the *Cantos*. Certainly there are more Joyce scholars who enjoy my writing through *Finnegans Wake* than Pound scholars who enjoy my writings through the *Cantos*.

And in a traditional paradise, you wouldn't have thought of presenting it to Pound or Joyce as a gift in your mind?

I would have, yes. I would have thought that. Not in my mind, but I would have actually sent it to them. I've always thought that if I did work with somebody's work or have some kind of connection, I should let them know, if they were alive to know. For instance, one of my first such works was the setting of three short texts of Gertrude Stein, and I wanted very much to meet her then, and I remember thinking that anyone I wanted to meet might be in the neighborhood. So I actually looked through the telephone books of the Los Angeles area, thinking that Gertrude Stein might have a summer place or something, or a winter place. And I came up with some Gertrude Steins, but never with the real one.—David Shapiro (1985).

Do you react to [Finnegans Wake] in a musical way or in a literary way?

There's a strong connection between music and literature. The obvious connection produces songs and operas, and so forth; so that the arts which are so friendly are music, theater, literature, and dance—in other words, literature, when it is not read but comes into the theater or into the concert hall. I have recently written a number of texts in different languages which I don't know. And I also responded to a poem in Swedish, which I could not under-

stand. Imagine the sound of the poem in Swedish and write it in English with a similar sound. It's very funny. I didn't think of doing that myself. I was asked to do it by Dick Higgins. He asked a number of people who did not know Swedish to translate the poem into English. It made a very funny poem, but then one work that I like very much that I made this year is the French text, and the previous year I made a German text; and then when I was in Japan, I wrote a poem in Japanese. These I could not hear. All I could do was look. I could see Japanese, and so I wrote according to what I saw. And then I wrote a poem under the name of Octavio Paz in Spanish. So I'm getting to be multi-lingual, like a kind of hamburger.—Thomas Wulffen (1984).

What would Joyce think of your "Writings through Finnegans Wake"?

I don't know, but I suspect he would enjoy them.

Do you have a favorite masterpiece that hasn't been "deconstructed" or "declassified" yet?

What do you mean? Written through? At present I am in the process of writing through *Whistlin is did* by the Australian poet Chris Mann, *The Agenbite of Outwit* by Marshall McLuhan, and the Bible.—Jay Murphy (1985).

We were wondering what you are working on now?

I'm writing a piece for orchestra ["A Collection of Rocks"], and I'm planning with the help of a mesostic-intelligent word processor, being programmed for me by Jim Rosenberg, to write through the Bible, the New King James Version. It doesn't have as many "beholds" in it. Left to myself I would have written all the mesostics on the name Jehovah, that is, for the Old Testament; for the New Testament, I will change to Jesus Christ. But at the sug-

start it going and it makes mesostics on any text I wish. And then after the mesostic is made—it gives only the spine, so to speak—then I can compare that with what's left over and make a poem, you see. I'm having a program made shortly so that I could every day, every hour or every minute make a new poem on the same subject, so that could kind of be as though poetry was put on the stove and was cooking, and you could taste it, and each time it would taste different.—Thomas Wulffen (1984).

At the moment, having, as I do, a computer, I'm able to work much more rapidly than formerly, so that I have a great deal of work that could be published. But I'm not publishing it as quickly as I could have formerly, because I think we're almost at a point of change. The change, I think, will go from a book-publication as we know it to some form of electronic publication. And electronic publication would not be something with paper and binding but would be something that you would simply have access to [*The First Meeting of the Satie Society*, over 200 pages, my most recent work, can be accessed on the Art Com Electronic Network carried by the Whole Earth 'Electronic Link. For information contact Art Com: (415) 431-7524 voice, or (415) 332-6106 modem [ENTER g acen AT THE OK: PROMPT]; "We are getting rid of ownership, substituting use" (1987).], as you do to the voice of a friend on the telephone; so that you would be able to dial, so to speak, a book and receive it on a screen or on some erasable material that you would have beside the computer.—Birger Ollrogge (1985).

[Writing on a computer] does not completely change your mind. When you write a text as I used to write with all the crossings out and everything, you have a picture of

name Jehovah, that is, for the Old Testament; for the New Testament, I will change to Jesus Christ. But at the suggestion of Klaus Reichert I am going to use not just this Christian name of Yahweh but the earlier Hebrew names as well. The first two mesostics on the name Jehovah go this way:

Jabal
hE was
tHe
Of
haVe
nAmE
He

Just
walkEd
withH
gOd
filled with Violence
And
flesH

It's sort of Genesis in a nutshell. It's quite terrifying. That takes us through Genesis 6:12 in, so to speak, two steps. This is an example of a 100% mesostic. That is, between two capitalized letters of the name, neither letter appears. *Jabal* is the first word in Genesis that has neither *j* nor *e* after the *j*. *hE* is the first word after *Jabal* that does not have a *j* or an *e* before the *E* nor an *e* nor an *h* after it. Of course, it has nothing after the *E* except the *was* which I chose to include.—Kathleen Burch, et al. (1984).

[My computer] is a great liberation. I have a program now, so that if I have a text in memory, in any language, I

your mind. When you write a text as I used to write with all the crossings out and everything, you have a picture of the past along with the present and you develop a maze. With the word processor you have only the present so that you're really in a new mental land. I think what it also shows is the disappearance of the middle-man. There is going to be a great directness between making something and its being enjoyed.—Deborah Campana (1985).

NOTE: Credits at the end of each passage identify interviewer, or locale, as well as date of conversation. The editor's insertions appear between parentheses; Cage's emendations appear between brackets. *Conversations with Cage* will be published in 1987 by Limelight. Copyright ©1987 by Richard Kostelanetz and John Cage.

Jackson Mac Low

Words nd Ends from Ez, VI

Words nd Ends from Ez

VI. From the Pisan Cantos: LXXIV-LXXXIV.

8/1/81

(EZRA POUND)

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1-10 August 1981, New York

How "Words nd Ends from Ez" was drawn from *The Cantos*

"WORDS ND ENDS FROM EZ" was made by applying the "words-nd-ends variant" of the "diastic chance selection method" (DCSM) of generating poems and other texts to all of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* while I read through the latter.

The diastic method, developed in January 1963, was a successor to the acrostic chance selection method (ACSM), developed in May 1960, through which I made the poems and prose texts in *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* (written May-October 1960; published in 1972 by Something Else Press, Barton, Vt.) and the "501 Numbered Asymmetries" (written October 1960-January 1961), about half of which were published in *Asymmetries 1-260* (published in 1980 by Printed Editions, New York), as well as many subsequent texts.

Both are "reading-through" methods: one reads through a source text and takes into one's derived text series of words or strings (series of words such as phrases or sentences) having certain orthographic characteristics.

In using ACSM one appropriates—takes into one's own text from a source text—words or strings beginning with the successive letters of an "index word or string," e.g., using "Cantos" as index, one might draw from a text a line such as:

(C)urtains (a)nd (n)o (t)horough (o)xygen (s)olutions.

In using DCSM one appropriates words or strings having the letters of the index in corresponding places, e.g., applying DCSM with the same index—"Cantos"—to the beginning of Canto LXXIV, the first of *The Pisan Cantos*, one obtains:

(C)lara m(a)ggots fi(n)d Wha(t) cand(o)r?

bring(s)

using the question mark to determine a strophe break after "candor?".

The "words-nd-ends variant" of DCSM, first developed and used in 1978, draws in words and ends of words (fragments ranging from single last letters of words to all of a word except its first letter) having the index word or string's letters in corresponding places.

In making "Words nd Ends from Ez" I repeatedly used the index "EZRA POUND," while reading through *The Cantos* from beginning to end, to draw words and "ends" from Pound's text into mine. Thus the index is sometimes broken by a part division of my poem, the first index letters being found at the end of one part of my poem, the second at the beginning of the next.

Part V of "Words nd Ends from Ez" was drawn from the two Italian-language *Cantos* (omitted from collections of *The Cantos* and never published in English translation), LXII and LXXIII, which immediately precede *The Pisan Cantos*. The "EZRA PO" of the index drew (from the end of Canto LXXIII) the last three lines of Part V of "Words nd Ends from Ez":

Erno aZra i pRigionieri.

gliArdo Piritò

iOia,

the "UND" drew in (from the beginning of Canto LXXIV) the first line of part VI:

moUs am iN houlDers

and the whole name drew in the subsequent three and a half lines:

Es!

s Zuan n,

oR th LA Posa

pOnsa l oUr tioN y neeD . . .

In "Words nd Ends from Ez" the letters of the index name are capitalized; if already capitalized in *The Cantos*, they are set in italics, e.g., the "Z" of "Zuan" in my third line. Strophe endings were determined by end marks (periods, question marks, and exclamation points), other line endings by other punctuation marks and by line endings in *The Cantos*.

The first two lines come from the first three lines of Canto LXXIV (I parenthesize the words and ends drawn in):

The enor(mous) tragedy of the dre(am in) the

peasant's bent s(houlders)

Man(es!) Manes was tanned and stuffed,

Then I had to skip to the next-to-last line of that page to find a "z" in the second place to correspond to the "Z" in "EZRA" and that and the next two gave me the rest of the index name:

thus Duccio, thu(s Zuan) Belli(n, or)

wi(th La) S(posa)

S(ponsa) Cristi in mosaic til(l our) time /

deifica(tion) of emperors

but a snotty barbarian ignorant of T'ang

histor(y need) not deceive one

As I read through *The Cantos*, I looked for each needed letter in succession and, when I had found one, I would count back from it to the place in the word that begins a letter string that has the index letter in the same place as that which it occupies in one of Pound's names. I would then take into my poem all of the word in which it occurs, from that place in the word to the word's last letter: e.g., the "d" was found in "shoulders"; counting back from that "d" until it was in the fifth place in the letter string, as in "Poun(d)," yielded "houlDers"—which ended my line since it ends the Canto line in which it occurs.

If there weren't enough letters in the word in which the index letter occurred, I had to count back into the word before: counting back into "dream" from the needed "n" in "in," I had to take the final "am" of "dream" as well as both letters of "in" to make the "n" of "in" fall into the fourth place as in "Pou(n)d."

"Words nd Ends from Ez" was written intermittently between 9 January 1981, soon after Michael André asked me for something for the "Cantos" issue of his magazine *Unmuzzled Ox* (in the first part of which—*UO* no. 23, 1984—Part I eventually appeared), and 3 May 1983. Part VI, from *The Pisan Cantos*, was written between 1 and 10 August 1981. Part IV appeared in *Abacus* no. 13 (Oct. 1, 1985), and Parts II and IX were published in my book *Representative Works: 1938-1985* (New York: Roof Books, 1986). I hope eventually to have a book published comprising both "Words nd Ends from Ez" and the 50-odd pages of shorter "words-nd-ends poems" that I drew from various texts I was reading in 1978 when I developed the method.

Jackson Mac Low
18-19 January 1987
New York

Toby Olson

Unfinished Building

The sun brings forth
false carolling from the trees—the old fool;
a season in transition. And the other fools
 climb to the roof again:
a single shingle, butted in, left flapping
lightly in the breeze,
 where they quit it
when the old fool was gone
and there was a hint of rain.

He shines again,
sending perverted messages to the birds,
 whose songs are tentative—
wiser than he is, closer to the earth.
Only a solitary cloud, but a sheet of haze,
and close (and just over the lip)
thicker ones, and rain again.

It's the fitful start of summer
close to the finish of June.
A stiff wind rises,
 blowing petals among the roses;
their own futures in their sight now—
a symmetry around a center
which is dying.

It was a dark and stormy night;
a band of robbers were sitting around a camp fire.
The leader spoke, "Jack tells a story!"
and Jack began:

 "It was a dark and fitful night;
 a ring of robbers were sitting
around the ring of a camp fire. The leader spoke,
'Jack, tell us a story,' and Jack began"—

 It was the hour (before rain) of a false sun;
a jagged link of workmen
were sitting around a pile of shingles
on a new roof. One of them spoke out,
 into the breeze—
torn pages from a book—
a bright voice, indistinct, and laughter
 (shingles rising from the pile
and shifting, the wind stiffening);
tell us some sort of story,
of pre-fabricated houses
before it rains;

of nail guns, a power saw, the way the rafters
are jacked up by a crane,
 the house rising
in a single day, and Jack began:

 "It was a tedious night of group therapy in Boston;
no propriety for cocaine, but the marijuana
 (oil, thick in our hair) perverted us to insight.
We were a group of fabricated thinkers,

sitting in a ring around a table
afflame with roses; some had

 buds in their hair. I was hooked in,
wired in, to thoughts about building;
everything
on center, each stud,
and flashing in the cheeks . . ."

 I gathered the torn pages from the air,
and they were scrambling
down from the peak, and it was raining.

 The rain wets the petals, a few
cling to the split rail;
 the pink and devastated roses
rise along the post:
a symmetry
around a center, which is dying.

It was a clear and lazy day in Savannah—
up North it was raining.
A band of casual acquaintances
 were gathered around each other, walking.

There was a flea-market:
 old tools, glass roses and flashing.
Moss hung in the small parks,
Spanish restaurants, awkward in their architecture.
Somebody told a quick story,
soon forgotten.

Then came upon the house shell
and entered it.

 It had once been three stories;
and could see the notches in the brick,
rhythmic, and rising
where the beams had been set.

 There were trees dancing,
waving, in the empty frames, shifting shadows.
All the notches were perfect, true
and symmetrical
to the high ceiling.

Up North it was raining, water bleeding
along shingles

in the cheeks of false chimneys.
I lifted
the assembled book and smelled the pages.

But the roses! I was listening
to Bird across the water from Boston.

 It was a dark and stormy night,
but the band held
the station

 (a camp fire in the hearth).
I had salvaged two buds and a fire-cracker
honeysuckle more dramatic,
and one full bloom — already
pink petals
gathered around the small blue vase;

 Bird on the water, stormy
on a stormy night:
the dead sing better than the living.

The old fool is out again.

The birds are unconvinced; only
a young sparrow tests him
swelling, on pine's limb, and facing him.

The young fools
stand at the flimsy walls (the sheets of mock cedar)
testing the breeze, turning in a small band,
laughing and joking.

As the breeze shifts, from bay to backside,
I can hear them. One reaches for a head band
and adjusts it (a sweat or rain band):
I can make nothing out.

It was a dark and stormy night.
A band of arsonists were sitting around a camp fire
in a cozy house shell in Savannah.
The leader spoke, "*Jack, feed the fire.*"
And Jack began.

The studs were thin kindling, the beams,
bowed from the span,
were cracked against his knee;
he crushed chunks of sub-flooring in his hands.
The leader spoke, picking his teeth
with a post, "*Jack, tell us a story!*"
And Jack began.

"It was summer, and the wild
wood was bleeding;
amber of pine sap,
dark shadows of tree cutters in the forest.
One of them carried the work load chit—

anything would do:
they could grind and press it,
call it board. The sun's
branch cut beams
lay in patterns on the sticky bark,
then faded: a storm was coming.

(Down South it was mild and sunny.)
And they killed a tree
and built a smoky camp fire
from the raw wood."

But the roses! The dark
and sweet smell of the fallen petals!
To keep the fool off,
I wet and stick one on my nose.
Thorns hold out stronger than standard nails;
a line of red sap, oozing
along my arm.

The birds are singing, the pines
full now,
a band of sparrows
in crooked chain on a thin limb.

Dull thunk of the nail gun;
they're up on the roof again.

I had imagined rain.
I had imagined the moon setting
the needle on center again,
unwavering, the day moon—

the sun brash and inconstant—
the birds answering only to the moon,
even the night birds
in the day light.

I had imagined Savannah—
the house shell— my brother, Jack
in Wisconsin,
mild and sunny down South,
a dark storm in the North:
a dead player, but a live saxophone
across the water.

I had been thinking about roses;
the way the house
rose in the distance,
petals, and rows of sparrows.

Jack rows to the center
of the flat mountain lake;
the bird is an osprey,
his voice screams on the water; he reconstructs
a crane in a bare tree;

the crane is screaming, the tree shaking,
but the crane's house holds,
shudders, and holds.

"Jack, tell us a story!"

And Jack began with a storm,
fishing in high country
miles in.

It was crisp and clear, a blue sky,
and rose at the tree tips like fire.

He was intent on the water,
until the water darkened: a sudden rain,
and then thunder and more rain,
and the trail flooded.

It rained for two days;
there was a constant and stiff wind.
He built a lean-to against trees
in the rain, managed a small camp fire,
and stayed dry.

When the rain stopped, he came out.
It was a dark and stormy night,
but there was a full moon.
He found he had built his house
against a tree
in which there was the tight, dry house
of an osprey.
That was the story.

Underneath this story:
It was a bright night of remembrance in Boston
which is recorded, like therapy
in pages gathered—as if petals—into a book.

Maybe it was not that:
Savannah? Wisconsin? a saxophone?

It could have been
a band of children sitting around a camp fire—
Pepperdine, the Boys Scouts, 1947—
twisting plastic strands

into lanyards: everyone to have a whistle
for warning, keeping the household ghosts off,
possible tent fires.

The leader spoke, "Jack, tell us a ghost story,"
but Jack was missing.
We found him
snug, in the log house,
writing.

And for punishment:
to build a small cabin with Lincoln Logs,
to true up each angle,
doorway and frame. In a window,
on a small chair, he put a saxophone;
there were shingles, a stoop,
a stone chimney—
a wonder of ingenuity—
emblem of the country: tight fitted notches.

And the leader stood
straight on the caps at the peak, half mesmerized,
looking out the window and across the water
(at Boston? Savannah? Wisconsin?);
the house held, and Jack began:

and the story unpeeled like a sheath
of onion skin paper, a book
made of pulp in Savannah, from wood cut
in Wisconsin, sold in Boston—
of fine trees used to make saxophone reeds;
there was no moon, but band held bars
of Bird over the water,
the bright bay,
and over the Bird, dark clouds:
unexplainable rose petals on the bay's surface.

And the story continued to the first light of morning;
the clouds were clearing,
and Jack began
bringing his head up: to discover
he was alone at a desk among scattered pages,
rectangular petals.

The sky was vacant;
the old fool shone forth.
Out the window
the roses were buttons on the stems.

And there, in the distance, the innocent house
had risen in the turn of one day—
the band of young fools sat,
gathered around the false chimney at the peak;
they were laughing and telling stories.

Their leader, the architect-builder,
was on the ground
standing among the discards,
hands on his hips, looking up, and smiling.
Jack could make out the songs of the sparrows,
the dead, alive in the saxophone, across the water.
He saw the clouds
move in over the strains, saw the architect-
builder look up also.

Both Jack
and the leader knew
that before the day ended
it would be dark and stormy.

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Issue No. 4 · Contributors

Notes on Contributors Issue Number Five

ANNE-MARIE ALBIACH lives in the south of France. *Etat* was published in 1971 (Mercure de France); Keith Waldrop's English version is forthcoming. With Claude Royet-Journoud, Albiach co-edited the review *Siècle à Mains*. In 1984, Flammarion published *Mezza Voce* (of which "H II" linear is a section) at the same time as Spectres Familiars published a book of her critical notes, *Anawatha*. Her translation of Zukofsky's "A"-9 was published in *20 poètes américains* (Gallimard) . . . Among the most honored of contemporary poets, JOHN ASHBERRY has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975). Any list of his many books must include *The Tennis Court Oath*, *Rivers and Mountains*, *Three Poems*, *The Double Dream of Spring*, *Houseboat Days*, *A Wave*, and his *Selected Poems*, which was published by Viking in 1985 . . . Still untitled, ANTHONY BARNETT's collected poems is forthcoming in November of this year from Allardye. Burning Deck published his *A Forest Utilization Family* in the United States. He lives in England . . . CHARLES BERNSTEIN's latest book of poetry, *The Sophist*, will be published later this year by Sun & Moon Press. *Artifice of Absorption*, a 3000-line essay/poem, will be published as a special issue of *Paper Air* this summer . . . GERALD BURNS' books are *Boccherini's Minuet*, *Letters to Obscure Men*, *A Book of Spells [first third]*, all from Salt Lick Press, and *Toward a Phenomenology of Written Art* from Treacle Press. Temblor has published *A Book of Spells II* (issue #1), *The Prose Object*, (issue #2), and *Twenty Four Gnostic Poems* (issue #3) . . . *The First Meeting of the Satie Society*, JOHN CAGE's most recent text, over 200 pages long, can be accessed on the Art Com Electronic Network carried by the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link. For information contact Art Com: (415) 431-7524 voice, or (415) 332-6106 modem [ENTER g acen AT THE OK: PROMPT] . . . JOHN CLARKE's latest book, *From Feathers to Iron: A Concourse in World Poetics*, is scheduled for April from Tombouctou Books . . . ALAN DAVIES lives in New York City. His recent books include *Active 24 Hours* (Roof), *Name* (This), and a forthcoming book of essays called *Signage* (Roof) . . . ALAIN DELAHAYE lives in Northern France and has translated a number of British and American novelists into French. His own books include *Pour Dreeve*, London, *Siècle à Mains*, 1966; *L'Éveil des Traversées*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1971; and *L'Être Perdu*, Paris, Maeght Éditeur, 1977 (Anthony Barnett's as yet unpublished translation: *The Lost One*) . . . Current works by RACHEL BLAU DuPLESSIS include essays in *The Iowa Review* (1987, on H.D.) and *Ironwood* (1986, on Dahlen); poems in *Oitotole 1*, *Temblor 4*. Her second book of poems, *Tabula Rosa*, wants to be forthcoming . . . In 1986, Black Sparrow published CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's *The Name Encanyoned River: Selected Poems 1960-1985*, with an introduction by Eliot Weinberger, and in the same year Braziller published his co-translation (with Annette Smith) of Aimé Césaire's *Lost Body* (with 32 engravings by Picasso). Eshleman edited and wrote the introduction for this spring's Sun/Gemini publication of Paul Blackburn's *The Parallel Voyages* . . . MICHAEL GIZZI lives in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. His most recent volume of poetry is *Species of Intoxication* (Burning Deck) . . . BENJAMIN HOLLANDER's writings have appeared in various magazines, including *Sulfur*, *Acts*, *Conjunctions*, *Hambone*, and *Temblor*. He is Associate Editor of *ACTS: A Journal of New Writing*, which has recently published issue #6, *A Book of Correspondences*, writings on the work of Jack Spicer. For *Acts 7* he is editing a special feature on the work of Paul Celan, specifically engaging Celan's translations and the influences on French critical discourse Celan's work has generated. He is currently writing a talk on "the analytic lyric" (*analytic lyric: critical music*), of which the Hocquard piece included in this issue is an example . . . RICHARD KOSTELANETZ' "production" of Cage interviews, *John Cage Conversing*, will be published by Limelight this year sometime around John Cage's birthday in September . . . MARTHA LIFSON teaches English and Comparative Literature at Occidental College. Red Hill Press will publish her first book this year . . . JACKSON MAC LOW last year applied his "words nd ends-diactic" method to poems by Goethe from *Alles an Personen und zu festlichen Gelegenheiten Gedichtete* and *West-Östlicher Divan*, the first 40 pages of which were the text of a 4-speaker hörspiel produced in July at Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln with Anne Tardos, Gisela Saur-Kontarski, Peter Behrendsen, and Mac Low as the speakers; first broadcast was from Cologne in November. Mac Low's *Representative Works: 1938-1985* was published by Roof Books in 1986 . . . TOBY OLSON's *We Are the Fire*, a selection of poems, came from New Directions in 1984. Recent novels are *The Woman Who Escaped From Shame* (Random House, 1986) and "Utah" (Linden/Simon & Schuster, June 1987). He works on a new group of poems and a new novel, "Dorit in Lesbos." He teaches at Temple in Philadelphia and writes, mostly, on Cape Cod . . . While maintaining his private practice in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in New York, NICK PIOMBINO has published recent essays in *In the American Tree*, (ed. Ron Silliman), *Poetics Journal* #5, (eds. Barrett Watten and Lyn Hejinian) and *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (eds. Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews); and other prose and poems in *Sulfur*, *Sink*, *Boundary 2*, and *Gallery Works*. Sun & Moon will publish his book *Poems* and his collection of essays, *The Boundary of Blur* . . . HOLLY PRADO's novel *Gardens* was recently published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. She's finished a second novel. Her poetry has appeared lately in *Temblor* and in *The Indiana Review*, as well as in the anthology *Poetry Loves Poetry*, a collection of work by Los Angeles poets . . . LINDA REINFELD, a graduate student in SUNY-Buffalo, is at work on her dissertation, *Language Poetry in America: Writing As Rescue*. She has poems forthcoming in *Sulfur* and *Black Mountain II Review* . . . LESLIE SCALAPINO's books include *Considering how exaggerated music is* (North Point Press, 1982) and *that they were at the beach* (North Point Press, 1985) . . . DAVID SEARCY published *Flash Gordon Whom I Loathe* serially in *Southwest Review* and *New River*, and his book, *Peter Rabbit's Trick*, is available from Salt Lick Press. He lives in Dallas, Texas . . . Among RON SILLIMAN's ten volumes of poetry are *Ketjak*, *Tjanting*, *Bart*, *ABC* and *Paradise*. He edited *In the American Tree*, an anthology published by The National Poetry Foundation in 1986. Forthcoming from Roof is a selection of his talks and essays entitled *The New Sentence* . . . JOSEPH SIMAS lives in Paris and is the author of two books, *Sets* (TELS, Tokyo, 1986), and *Entire Days* (Burning Deck). *The Longer Sentiments of Middle*, parts I-III, is seeking book publication, while Simas is at work on a new book, *Other Double In Person*. From Paris, he edits *Moving Letters* and *Moving Letters Press*. His translation of Anne-Marie Albiach's *Theatre* (from *Mezza Voce*) appeared in *Acts 4*, 1985 . . . NATHANIEL TARN lives in Santa Fe, NM, and has recently published: *At the Western Gates* (Tooth of Time, 1984); *The Desert Mothers* (Salt-Works, 1985) and *Palenque* (Oasis/ Shearsman, UK, 1986). He has recent pieces on poetics in *Conjunctions*, and *American Poetry*. A manuscript, *Seeing America First*, awaits publication . . . GHINO TENDER writes from Japan. Her previously published works in English are *On the two-nucleon problem and the nucleon core* (in theoretical physics journals from Amsterdam and Helsinki), and poems and a close reading in *Printed Matter*, a TELS

periodical (Tokyo, 1986) . . . PAUL VANGELISTI lives in Los Angeles. He has published numerous books of poems and translations. He recently completed a long poem, "Villa," an epistolary fiction set in second century Rome.

Omnipossible Contamination

in the Inconclusive Zone

Steve McCaffery has written (*North of Intention*, Roof Books/Nightwood Editions, New York & Toronto, 1986; p. 63): "Derrida describes . . . a fundamental ambivalence within definition. . . . [A] semantic *corruption* . . . is always possible in the inconclusive zone between intention and typographical error and [we] must admit . . . that any omnipossible contamination" (*here McCaffery quotes from Derrida's "Limited Inc, abc"*) " 'cannot be a mere extrinsic accident supervening on a structure that is original and pure, one that can be purged of what thus happens to it. The purportedly "ideal" structure must necessarily be such that this corruption will be "always possible". This possibility constitutes part of the necessary traits of the purportedly ideal structure.' " Granted—sheepishly—that McCaffery is here discussing B. P. Nichols' paragrammatic method, might not his words (and Derrida's) also be cogent in case of unintentional displacement of a word by a near antonym? Bruce Andrews says no: "You did a wonderful job typesetting my pieces," (*I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up*, Temblor #4) "for wch much grateful: they look just fine in there. There's one harsh note, though, wch distressed me—you managed to misprint the subtitle—it's *Social Romanticism*, not *Social Realism*. Normally a title misprint is no big deal, but here that bogey-man 'Realism,' 'Social Realism' comes in, with echoes of a social-aesthetic position I'm thoroughly opposed to & opens up, or encourages, a seriously reductive reading of the works." Continued reductive readings are henceforth emphatically discouraged. Temblor apologizes to Bruce Andrews. And to its readers. (And Steve McCaffery.) (And Jacques Derrida.)

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Operator

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