
TEMBLOR

CONTEMPORARY POETS

ISSUE NUMBER 9

\$ 7.50

Robert Creeley *Eight Plus: Inscriptions for
Eight Bollards at 7th & Figueroa, Los Angeles*
Kathleen Fraser *In Commemoration of the Visit of
Foreign Commercial Representatives to Japan, 1947*
Gerald Burns *The Passions of Being*
David Searcy from *A Trip to the Sun*
Susan Howe from *A Bibliography of the King's Book; or, Eikon Basilike*
David C.D. Gansz *The Sentencing from Millennial Scriptures*
Aaron Shurin *Continuous Thunder and Temptation*
Laura Moriarty *La Malinche and Before the War*
Joseph Simas from *That Other Double In Person*
Craig Watson *Learning To Disappear, White Days, and Fourth Wall*
Tom Mandel *Ramah* Keith Waldrop from *Transcendental Studies*
Benjamin Hollander *A Note on Lyric Contention*
David Levi Strauss *A Note on Us & Them*
Ron Silliman *Poets and Intellectuals*
Charles Bernstein and Tom Beckett *An Interview*
Rosmarie Waldrop from *Lawn of Excluded Middle*
Nick Piombino *Aftermath* Douglas Messerli *Three Poems*
Martha Lifson *Misled by the specificity of prose and Three Alibis*
Paul Vangelisti *Loose Shoes, or An Account for a Son*
Robert Crosson *Egypt* Todd Baron *'this . . . seasonal journal'*
Alan Davies *On Nick Piombino* Gerald Burns *On Todd Baron*
Bruce Campbell *Nine Readings: Robert Duncan*
Rachel Blau DuPlessis Laura Moriarty Craig Watson Aaron Shurin
Michael Davidson Barrett Watten Stephen Rodefer Lyn Hejinian

EDITED BY LELAND HICKMAN

TEMBLOR

CONTEMPORARY POETS

Issue Number Nine · 1989

Edited by Leland Hickman

North Hollywood, California

In Memoriam Adriano Spatola & Antonio Porta

A reading edition

Contents

Robert Creeley	<i>Eight Plus: Inscriptions for Eight Bollards at 7th & Figueroa, Los Angeles</i>	3
Kathleen Fraser	<i>In Commemoration of the Visit of Foreign Commercial Representatives to Japan, 1947</i>	7
Gerald Burns	<i>The Passions of Being</i>	14
David Searcy	<i>from A Trip to the Sun</i>	24
Susan Howe	<i>from A Bibliography of the King's Book; or, Eikon Basilike</i>	31
David C. D. Gansz	<i>The Sentencing</i>	59
Aaron Shurin	<i>Continuous Thunder and Temptation</i>	71
Laura Moriarty	<i>La Malinche and Before the War</i>	73
Joseph Simas	<i>from That Other Double In Person</i>	83
Craig Watson	<i>Learning To Disappear, White Days, Fourth Wall</i>	88
Keith Waldrop	<i>from Transcendental Studies</i>	103
Tom Mandel	<i>Ramah</i>	107
Benjamin Hollander	<i>A Note on Lyric Contention</i>	119
David Levi Strauss	<i>A Note on Us & Them</i>	121
Ron Silliman	<i>Poets and Intellectuals</i>	122
Charles Bernstein and Tom Beckett	<i>An Interview</i>	125
Aaron Shurin	<i>A Postscript to "City of Men"</i>	130
Douglas Messerli	<i>Three Poems</i>	131
Rosmarie Waldrop	<i>from Lawn of Excluded Middle</i>	133
Martha Lifson	<i>Misled by the specificity of prose, and Alibis</i>	135
Alan Davies	<i>On Nick Piombino</i>	138
Nick Piombino	<i>Aftermath</i>	139
Paul Vangelisti	<i>Loose Shoes, or An Account for a Son</i>	141
Todd Baron	<i>'this . . . seasonal journal'</i>	144

Gerald Burns	<i>On Todd Baron</i>	149
Bruce Campbell	<i>Nine Readings</i>	152
Robert Crosson	<i>Egypt from Field Notes</i>	194

About this Edition

Temblor ran to ten issues between 1985 and 1989, edited by Leland Hickman in North Hollywood. This is the ninth, published in 1989: twenty-seven contributions over 197 numbered pages, opening with Robert Creeley's inscriptions for eight Los Angeles bollards and closing with Robert Crosson's *Egypt*.

This edition is set from the original and split-page scans of a single marked copy. It assembles the supplied page-by-page transcription and completes the previously missing printed pages 125–133 directly against their scan images. Machine reading was used as an aid, not as a substitute for those pages. The magazine is enlarged to 8½ by 11 inches in a single readable measure, and each contributor opens on a fresh page.

The issue moves repeatedly between verse, visual fields, interviews, and criticism. Spatial pages are retained as monospaced fields where line position carries meaning; prose printed in columns is reset as continuous reading text. Susan Howe's highly spatial pages remain spatial, and Douglas Messerli's paired poems retain their two-column relationship.

The source copy contains handwritten editorial marks. These annotations are visible in the archival scans but are not part of the magazine text and are not reproduced here. Advertisements and non-textual artwork are omitted; their positions and descriptions remain in the rebuild transcript where supplied.

Printed eccentricities are kept where they belong to the text. A colored [?] marks only a reading that could not be settled honestly. No editorial matter appears once the issue text begins. Set in TeX Gyre Pagella, with display type in Termes after the magazine's own masthead; the red is sampled from the surviving cover.

Robert Creeley

Eight Plus: Inscriptions for Eight Bollards at 7th & Figueroa, Los Angeles

Inscriptions for Eight Bollards

at 7th & Figueroa, Los Angeles

for James Surls

What's still here settles
at the edges of this
simple place still
waiting to be seen.

You went by so
quickly thinking
there's a whole world
in between.

Human eyes
are lights to me
sealed
in this stone.

You walk tired
or refreshed, are
past in a moment,
but saw me.

No one speaks
alone. It
comes out
of something.

If I sit here
long enough,
all will pass me by
one way or another.

They say this
used to be
a forest
with a lake.

World's
still got
four
corners.

I didn't go
anywhere and
I haven't
come back!

Wish happiness
most for us,
whoever we are,
wherever.

It's not a
final distance,
this here
and now.

Nothing left out,
it's all in a heap,
all the people
completed.

How much I would
give just to know
you're standing in
whatever way here.

Night's eye is
memory
in day-
light.

No way to
tell you anything
more than
this one.

I've come and gone from here
with no effect,
and now feel
no use left.

How far from
where it
was I'll
never know.

I'm just
a common
rock,
talking

You there
next to the others
in front of
the one behind!

What's
that
up there
looking down?

Could I think
of all you
must have felt?
Tell me.

You've got a nice
face and
kind eyes and
all the trimmings.

What's inside,
what's the place
apart from
this one?

We talk like
this too
often someone
will get wise!

Kathleen Fraser

In Commemoration of the Visit of Foreign Commercial Representatives to Japan, 1947

for Bob Glück

Preliminary words

In language, you once hovered. Now you are the hunched body holding the blue oar, so useless in waves. Before I knew your plan, you had already purchased the picture book I called “mine”, with its memoir of brown sand extending so casually its territories, pulling through gravity as if to pause in its downward pouring.

My ignorance in this cannot be excused, yet everything in that room offered itself to me: it was the Foreign Representative who finally caught my eye, between brass hinges. You knew my weakness but sent me there anyway, wanting screens, and you had inscribed the invitation on thick, creamy paper you thought might provide a solution for my tentative despair.

Abruptly, just as I stretched out my hand, the mountain presented its snow and deep blue slope, the Foreign Representative’s delicate breast. If we can talk about distance, I would propose that series of thatched roofs furnished with clumps of ginkgo, foregrounded precisely as the faded hem of the boatman’s blue jacket.

Away, my page is one inch longer than at home, with narrower margins; my brush unused, except in commemoration.

I imagine each scratch on the glass pillow to be a person, waiting for the single evidence of moonlight.

1. The general headquarters of the allied powers

Beginning from the perspective of “the personal”, you surprised me with your concrete buddha and dark woolen coats of young European style. How those diminished shadows of trees subtracted us from winter. Badly tinted sky does not represent the “traveler’s dream”. In your twelve letters, I read a different set of requirements and expectations: our powers linked by windows.

Now our ambitions grow sharper with each darkening rectangle: buildings as grainy as rice both dry and thick with moist steam. Blue water makes its ally with

unnatural embankments, yet bodies cling to the edges, and one can see a pair of white trousers in motion, caught with the same swift closure as the black car behind it. I must confess, I had expected the clichés of my childhood and miss them, although I understand your discomfort on hearing this. My hunger requires a bowl of rice between us. With a finger (on the steamed red lacquer of the bowl), I draw an ideogram to show you what I mean.

I count on you to translate, as your training requires

2. *Yomei Mon, the elaborately carved gate of the noted Tokugawa*

Shogunate Mausoleum at Nikko, representing “one of the

finest Japanese carvings and lacquer decorations”

What can be represented by this “finest carving” which is too exhaustive to retain? Our guide has proposed a second look at garish green-and-pink petals, as if to raise his glass in a toast to our arrival and departure. One struggles to find “words”, yet feels the soft diminishing of oxygen. The monumental divests memory of its pockets on foreign soil, where time is a cloud made solid with carving. I am blinded by my bad faith or lack of appropriate counsel.

Yet this elaboration of gold fell short of sight, as we entered the gate. Thoughts of death, while normally disturbing, seemed rigidly “notable”, instead, as if an excess of enameled color, banded by red, could justify any harsh loss.

“Ashes scattered on water or under trees”, was my family’s solution, although now I cannot find my father or my sister and have no specific location for my grief. If their ashes and bits of bone were here, in little painted boxes, would my thoughts arrive in calmer progression?

3. Japan’s “world-famous” Mt. Fuji

One thing appears to be certain. We stand gazing from separate windows in the same hotel. You note the white veins of snow and the pale crusts yet remaining on the near slopes. I think of the Foreign Representative’s delicate breast, before confusion came into its dark silk, and economy staged itself, as you might expect, in the popular guises of fame and reform. This drift of cherry blossom so close to the hotel window, branching a pale longing for historical calm—has it changed you into a person someone might banish from sight, for lack of a perfect description? How fortunate for you, who travel by yellow boat, that the April sun is rigorous and punctual; it casts a gloss on every surface, spreading another mountain through the barely moving inches of grey sea. You imagine yourself at diplomatic attention, even choose your trousers and jacket with a longing for precision, while I import a suspect leisure, having served on another occasion.

Now my wish comes and goes with the sun's rigor, expanding and diminishing as if I were one of those white buildings at the foot of the mountain, still read by afternoon light which may fade in an hour, and return.

4. *Ashi-no-ko (Lake Ashi), on the top of Hakone, a "famous
hotspring resort"*

Commas, necessarily magnified, curve inside walls, separating rice-paper screens from oxygen. One can consider private matters in silence, give over entirely to the skin's necessity, the water's sulfurous fumes. *A towel, please*, I might have said, if you'd been with me. But these learned modesties soon fall before the tremor of red roofs lining the port. The architectural jump creates false pleasure. A colonial banner flaps in wind like washing hung along the inner court. My tea soothes entirely, in spite of premonitions, and the Foreign Representative tucks the layerings of embroidered silk in the creases of her folded knees and thighs. She hands me the fine-haired brush and a stick of ink, with a little water. I think of drawing you a letter, because words are slipping and faltering under foot. I paint a path of stones which you will recognize, one at a time, as you attempt to extend your influence from those dormer windows, so clearly positioned for their view of flagpoles just at the lake's edge. I imagine you eating exotic ingredients, untied from papyrus leaves which preserve the ancient flavors. My tea leaves are drained of tea; now they rest in the celadon cup, where a guest may read their meanings.

Decisions are being taken among the allied powers which, later, will be regretted.

5. *Toro Hatcho, "one of the most picturesque pools in Japan"*
(Wakayama Prefecture)

A "traveler's fatigue" might diminish the fifth day of commemoration, but for the presence of water on all sides. I am taken on a boat just wide enough for myself and the boatman, unless we should encounter your party at one of the crossways. Then I would wave to you, hoping to separate you from commerce and modernity, indicating with my parasol another seat in the boat and a little sweet rice-cake wrapped in seaweed. Can you feel a drifting like sleep, re-shaping the first idea we were given when they sent us here? While I am not alarmed, I wish to compare these recent days, and the views of water so amply restored to each morning's rising. A certain formality beckons and forbids.

Without speech and the ordinary comparisons, I can only return to the two-hundred trunks of trees, cordoned like rafts, floating just to the side of our boat, which drifts down the Toro Hatcho. Blue shines up, from between the rafts. I

watch the backs of the pole-men pushing their load to the next town. They call out to my boatman, wave a fish and laugh and beckon to us. Their bare toes curve with the wood.

No buildings, for miles now. Only shoals of rock and sharply dropping embankments, leading in no direction I recognize. I look back, thinking of our first meeting and the later dream where you were a woman and I was a man. Now that we have exchanged boundaries and blood types, it is easier. If I do not see you at the impasse, I will understand your message and return to the hotel lobby.

6. Hirosaki Castle, in northeastern Japan, a "typical citadel" of the feudal lords

"Be a flame for them to pass through", you advised me.

7. Goju.no.to (five-storied pagoda), in the Kimomizu Dera ("noted Kwannon temple"), in Kyoto, one of the twenty-five sacred temples in Japan

Sacré Dieu! Profanity hath wings. And when profane doth enter sacred, what fire then? A sudden wish to petal forth, imposed upon by such holiness. Her highness. His wholly. Roof upon roof of slate, layered slabs of sacred red lacquer. This red will swallow, this temple surround.

Now, calm

The trees lean and persist, worn thin by wind under pale clouds of blossom which do extend and levitate. Just-barely-tinged-white cherry breaks without sound. Bark, leaf and nub salute the small man in gathered cotton trousers with garden shears, now trimming, now bending back a foreign branch. And his father. And his father, before him

8. Itsukushima Shrine, in the Inland Sea, "one of the best known scenic spots in Japan"

I've lost sight of where you are journeying, because of reordering myself at the carved railing. Even the iron lamp swings a bit above this walkway, although the wind is mild; it must be part of the planned charm of "best-known scenery". Weather's unplanned damage to certainty. I could remain here until your return, pulling carp from the water, watching the flicker of silver fins without economic planning or commercial gain. The ordinary is my altar this spring day: I find a white awning pulled tight above the cafe just fronting the Inland Sea, under which I think of you holding your favorite tea-cup, inviting me to commemorate the line of blue hill behind the red gate of the shrine.

For the first time, I refer to your letter and read your ambivalence, no, your wish to note each change of heart and the substitution of *path* for *daughter*, animal love for speculative representation.

9. Mt. Zao Skiing Grounds, in northeastern Japan

If white equals mystery and snow equals death, how am I to understand the two bent figures in black on the ski slope? I choose the one with his shadow intact and hope that it's you, for lack of binoculars. Your form appears admirable and the shadow to your right, entirely severed and autonomous except at the feet. From this perspective, a diagonal gash of blue sky gives geometric relief to a moment so perfectly caught it might slip into fiction. I could "go on" about the snow-covered trees but decisions are hovering like already memorized language. You are needed by the allied powers who require your shadow ability. I'm tapping the air between us and hoping you can hear me. Do not depend on the former treaty or visual aids. Here is the list you sent me:

"rough, smooth, dark, blond, rich, middle class, tender, cruel, narcissist, altruist, east west"

No one is "alike", and neither are you, though joined at the feet with your daytime abilities.

*10. Daibutsu, in Kamakura, the giant bronze Buddha image, rising
forty feet high*

I think that SCALE must be the shadow of domination. I cannot look. (Or is it, "You don't want to.")

*11. Arashiyama, in Kyoto, noted for its cherry blossoms
and autumn leaves*

Again, the human. A silly heart for Sunday—today, hands inside of hands, the procession of covered boats rocking from side-to-side in their slow pace down the river. Your "daughter" holding her paper parasol painted with falcons and Lily wagging her tail and limping along the left bank of the Arashiyama, flowing over—almost—with melted snow . . . such patient and difficult lovers.

You leap to the boat, a little drunk, and I am your ally in pines, grilled sea bass and rice. I have not booked the return trip due to a seasonal error. The errand you sent me on, also the Foreign Representative arriving for tea and the multiple bodies of water in my life are discrete but not conclusive arrangements. What was once a refusal lingers, as if pine needles had broken and spread their scent on the skin—a new ideogram I am trying to paint, whenever I lift my brush.

*12. Nijubashi, the "famous double arch bridge, the gateway"
to the Imperial Palace*

Tunneling forward, towards the awaited arch at the opposite end, the mind *does* see, then the eye—following yearning—grabs hold of space and watches it expand until the curved frame is lost, the opening regained.

We observe the double arch of Nijubashi through this split-second lense, so that reflections of imperial design may curve and flash as if we were looking for ourselves in the moving plaits of water, the solidity of human desire all equal and held intact for our reference and imagined stability. How tiny we are, seen from there. How calm, the unsevered branches of silver and green, the lush and edible yellow fruit of the ginkgos about to pierce their coverings and burst through.

Because we opened the same book, we are bound by these ties of silk, particularly at the gateway.

MAY, 1988 ROME

Gerald Burns

The Passions of Being

Artemis it is, with bow and greyhound coursing along, the cast yellow
so, she is blonde or reddish, the strap for quiver bejeweled (adjustable?) at scapula
the dog with a collar. She has a crescent floating on her hair.
Verbs are curbs. That which, loving, descends to where “no birds sing”
experiences gelatinization of the verb, frozen Tanais
ig-mobile. “Consider,” I once said to a psychologist, “the Eskimo”
as Lucretius might raise tribes with eyes in breastbone
a cure for myopia the looking through fine-sawn bone lattice.
These trees, dark so the figure can be light, are in the branch an oakleaf
cluster, what the Antipodes saw (like a tie worn upside down, Alouettes)
the Choice of Hercules or Paris stochastic as a fork.
Tissier in Old Bond Street has an oval garnet pendant (large, cabochon)
enameled red and green with diamonded oval hanging from it ending with three
gold balls
—the mate to it in Johnson Walker & Tolhurst, Burlington Arcade
a bit more worn, minus the case and chain but identical, mock-Tudor.
Inns showing the magic jug, rustic fingerpad on the deermouthed airhole whorled.
Mat weights (miscalled sleeve-weights) call up wind-infested houses
may be, Jane Whittaker’s antique pennycandy weights in Mile End, matched
London Museum set (also brass), lion weights in the BM (the Assurnasirpal frieze)
lions upstairs ungonaded and run to the king in cages with a raise-up door so like
Mike and Missy’s
circus ones, there.
Ducks in the canal behind COM/Energy, and a softball-sized ball
any old trash, beamed at by Williams, became beamed-at trash
BEING, collaborating in romanticizable durée
as language spits, solder with flux at the core dribbling tree gum.
She circles warily around a herm, with her dog, as if Elizabeth
left Dudley one of her naked, whiffing a perfumed Goa ball
and that association, jewel-encrusted, lasted.
Upstairs in a room no one can find Dee, aged beyond compute
talks to himself, the stars, angels, his equipment like Turner’s record-book
reduced to its binding to carry watercolor cakes half dissolved to natural shapes.

Gods are always a problem and it is probably best to render them
 like Tiepolo's thrown up through the ceiling, looking down at you
 like the memory of the Renaissance, perspectival because earthy
 the way a vein of sand will stain your hand yellow as turmeric.
 I think of hearts, fatty tissue and clinging veins rendered in porcelain,
 the Indians who liked removing them with obsidian
 having provided Dr. Dee with a circular flat one (cylinder in section), good
 platform
 for such a heart, exhibiting even the colors as colors though
 reflected in black. Break 'em and a clean white line would interrupt the glaze.
 Write on parchment dusted on the underside with talcum on the stone, lift,
 read, erase.

We blur what we touch sometimes, just by living as long as we do—
 our moist interior surrounded by a drying avocado
 or prow like a ball mace with Punch's mouth coming at you out of mist
 the intimations of wan life in the pages of *Phantastes*, spirit smoked
 in iodine vapor, bromine, businesscard propped over the crystal
 Misses Stein and Toklas jolie, even Arp essaying printed wicker.
 Arraigneth as the spider texturizing in low fields becomes Riemannian
 funnels and curves the dew a dust catastrophizes for us
 shape for its own sake Klein or Euler would applaud in the morning
 a thing bending gracefully around what's there for purposes of its own.

"The eare is a rational sence, and a chiefe iudge of proportion, but in our kind of
 riming
 what proportion
 is there kept, where there remaines such a confusd inequality of sillables?"—
 Campion.

His heard what he *knew*, weight as lead shot in a capsule flips, up
 inertiality of meaning imposed on the ideal pattern, Q.E.D.
 It's awkward, hearing a life in a sentence lace from a wrist might ape
 (cuffs now turning over sleeves again, Pepys notes on attire) the sumptuary
 laws Cromwell established not unlike those instituted by Charles II.
 Cupido in Louis XIV fountain statuary devolves to inexplicably fat baby
 the gold on the "comet" (star with multiple-arc'd tail) above the
 globe in armillary sphere atop Busch-Reisinger, now all scaffolding, faded,
 museum now shut.

Tsunami, nefesh, what would Larkin say to other tongues announcing contexts
 men leaping across long fields, ambulances, Mr. Bleaney and chiffon weddings
 poems in a book. Checkbook entries looked at would be poetry

in Arcady, each shepherdess (still thinking of the lace dipped and fired)
 with a heartshaped ruby at her porcelain throat. Dressing them is like furnishing a
 doll room,
 billiard table no larger than a playing card, balls smaller than peas, velvet felt.
 There is chagrin in the presence of the orchestrated small.
 Searcy says it is easy to imagine an ant so small that it has no
 inner workings, and John Dee thinks the point may have begun creation.
 Reprieving the obsolete prolixity of shade, umbrage may be taken to spread (that
 is to say extend) a darker lawn like oil in gobbled smears, Tissot flowerpots
 luminous
 from taking finer strokes to make the lawn at all, young woman with croquet
 mallet
 exhibiting her estate. They work, in their straw hats, against a time line.
 Most activities are sideways from the need of defending, hemisphere
 in grass never to roll (miracle) into the flowerpot on its side.
 In any case a Morisot of occupied lawn all sloshed in does for how “lush”
 suits summer grass in experience and more importantly memory, gowned people
 record.
 Complexions attach themselves to seasons as Helga loden-caped in boots
 accompanies her tree and Hogarth’s Shrimp Girl enjoys day yellow
 as projector’s bulb (the picture cooler gray and pink) age
 tinting bare canvas.
 There’s good in this book by Kipling (*Seven Seas*) and I’m troubled some
 by *next* year’s Lammas set with Moons twenty-eight points in prefixed
 with simulacra, full, quarter, half, in a line down like marbles
 —and this is a sound learned from Amy Lowell, like using “tune” of a poem.
 It bids fair, Frost could write, fund of sentiment inherited
 the Stevenson fingered yesterday, cheap enough paper and porous to be
 volumes, the Vailima edition, Tusitala, Bennett writing (of hotels) on his yacht
 and Hardy staked down by dissertations. Housman rolled on, having learned from
 Byron
 to be flip
 all of them provided with straight razors, fathers, Gosse.
 Does bad art imply the existence of good art? Gilson on Darwin
 says imperfection’s no argument against teleology—look how poetry
 becomes (like an undusted corner) the refuge of these webs.
 One can, like the gods, let it seep, embrace the fact of embracing, caress Willendorf,
 her
 flat curls like the raspberry pattern gummy candy’s moulded in,

cap over head over breasts. Everything is always the Antipodes.
 A list we concoct of peaches, lizards, apples becomes like an Elizabethan pie full of
 sugar
 and little birds
 the “little” a tipoff (Stead says, following Eliot) that one is a Georgian or Dante.
 You could think of a poem as full like that, pastry top humped up
 the critics prick to see if what comes out is steam or ooze
 blood off hedgehog noses strung by poachers like quinces.
 Embracing a series,
 caddis flies build tubes of rubble, graveled covering for sensitivity
 goes to politically sensitive places, calls them Juan, Solomon, kidnapped larvae’s
 cemented ruin.
 Dissolve the glue from anthill grains and they will lie flat as if rained on.
 One thinks of the grains as shiny mica cubes, vermiculite, mirrors for homebody
 domestic Shalott.
 Gifts of geometry—astrolabes in the front hall, and circular bamboo sliderules are
 that in which sentiment, the picturesque, fight it out with praxis, the god on the
 flintlock tool,
 displaced from a bowl of grapes. It’s too vile, to say women made the moon, then
 measured it, as
 in Eshleman’s poem the grinning (or deadfaced he said but shiny-eyed) other
 some kinda animus . . .
 it’s true Athena’s owl on the coin has eyes that repeat as a point, dot, in a circle /
 like /
 the pinnacle in the middle of a moon crater like a Chamberlain wrecked-car grill
 erect on a
 wall, ’tis art
 hath ravished—as Ovidian narrative occurring in another language makes art
 something caught
 in the rearview mirror.
 Oceania some place or other, Neptune’s Palace in the toy theater
 exhibit sunk ships and nets mermaidly all cardboard painted
 space for romance (Trammell’s sounds intrude) to occur.
 In the MIT Museum four pigs on a printed sheet
 with dotted lines that show you how to fold it get you Hitler
 Hesiodic to think smudges on a pig make a moustache.
 The labyrinth was not simple, Piranesian elevators
 with a beast, romantic in, with steaming hands.
 How light filters through large enclosed spaces is fear itself

looped chain or rope swags.

Romanticism, I find (listening to Franco's verse) is without verbs, Foakes arguing political and religious power words fade in them, mat down, cheap insulation spaces in verse apposable abutments for nominal phrases which makes even nouns adjectives, Amy's texturization of the act of writing which made her at least a good slow-motion reader of Keats a pressure of mind so evenly distributed as to be hydraulic the moon entailing the mountaintop, hence shepherding and nothing written by Spenser could effect a change at court. If the sexes are like right and left, as in navigating a long corridor with elevators on one side only "forward" is also required or else it's slopping about, BB in handheld maze, knifehilt or religious device . . . tassels are not to "soften" the crispness of steel.

The pen is feminine; down sticks to my ink.

The armed woman, with bore-speare and bow and quiver gay (Belphoebe it says in brown ink on my *FQ*, II, iii) awes unnamed as one encounters, on these journeys, describable anonyms and metaphors to match hove, settle like birds on trees, their function. Camouflage them, Ishmael in Bergman, huntresses the arc of bow and moon suggesting crescent puns—Searle's "Cannibal" medallion, cookieshaped with tongue and a U-shaped eaten bit.

There are flecks of tea floating in my tea, Cynara, Idea, Laura, "a strainer is built in to the pot," they having mislaid the mesh one (flattened as a slipper, homey thing)

the lineage of written-at women striking. Plainchant leads to Satie's *Socrate*, a line of sung talk.

(She finally found and brought one, black as a burned muffin.)

Idea herself is the idea of service,

batailleur who draws them to his conjuring, their puppets.

Round yellow spots the size of half-dollars on the gnome's mushroom hold us, names

of alkaloid-bearing fungi

as if the Arabic retained something arcane, the cow-pat thoughtful rather than generous.

Petrarch dried in an herbal is (somehow, unimaginably) Petrarch still some silly picture of a rhino in an old book making do for a pressed animal.

I tried in "Madeleine" to plot Beauty, foolishly because (it turned out) memory can't. Dante manages Purgatory breeze as fresh even if

you're reading backwards. Given linearity you could end blackening in stench and
why not, even

Hegel free of the illusion an arrow means *that* way.

Narcisse in a garden might become by reduction the silhouette business suit
(head a circle) dead center on a silver square, glued to a door, so quick
the recognition or move toward it as if male and female float, conceptual.

The pigeon lines its nest with shredded descriptions of courting.

Ms. Digges brings the finches into her verse with reflections on migratory
paths, dotted vectors of whale carved in ivory enhance the saloon
and lovers become their surfaces, Leander on the waves (a deader)
pneumatic as a dinghy.

I am trapped in Christianity as if in amber. Thinking of the
political body caressed by Auden in *Age of Anxiety* this suffering
homo politicus is a corpus, thing more than notional (a million
Spaniards exercising ingenuity to give it glass eyes and blood)
that we say "iron thorns" and you *feel* the seepage, compassion for plaster limbs
the "hair" stringy in pain or glorious as a girl's, hence
the poem cubicular on cigarette papers or Jeyes smuggled out.

Standardization produces spectacle, carlights on roads, Whitsun weddings
for us to integrate, Coleridge's telltale
the color of robes on a Cynthian visitant
toplit as if by fotoflood, and cataracts.

We've been presented images, alabaster fruit
in bowls of similarly moisture-entrapping rock.

The sedimentation of roughly equal verse is rhyme.

We have in Boston a statue in dark stone, her brows
nearly straight across, crinkling (as if the makeup's sculpted)
that's been, the guide said, through fire, at least is cracked all over.

Spirit of tact provide acrylic for such fissure.

The Romantics—Leroux's Phantom living on as the memory of his own music,
Berlioz in Berlin and St. Petersburg to make a living—became their histories, lived
what they did
in ways we don't.

That inertial mass of sherry-purple velveteen, cloaks made from theater curtains,
move at the lower

hem, clapper to its bell. Under the shattered wax Price's eye on the chorine knows
what art is

the body, wrapped, thump. Shelley, nympholept, fell for Italians with names like
Guiccioli.

There is a name in a dreamed language for one whose fascination with an
instrument
surpasses his ability to play it. Bad art is to fall from that which, inhabited, expels.
Verse establishes green on which red rounds appear as apples, is color at all, no
shields or Marsyan faces like bats among but a tale in which a woman
accompanied by a
dwarf comes into the hall
saying you will go with me and he does, fruit hung on the green called tale.
A roundbellied flask distorting Newton's *Opticks* (rainbow, reflected panes
Elizabeth in silver silhouette) raises light and glued paper to a 31p level of regard
versus *Mandragola*'s mock-doctor peering at pee analytically, gap occupied by
realpolitik
shows us if your science is pretty people will put unicorns on it (scarlet lions
wearing
gold thistles, 18p)
attraction of the marginal, physiology's vorticismo; our natural state is to be
medieval
Grosseteste a kind of divine college administrator, Colet lecturing on Paul,
prismatic color, inexpressible, of communicable tenet. The plotting of refraction
inside
a crystal sphere
meant one could keep one on the table, sitting (it would be) in a puddle of red,
yellow, green.
When Poe thought of an ideal language he imagined it was spoken by angels
Israfel, Eiros and Charmion, "Silence—A Fable," cat on a plinth, what the
commercial greeting card, valentine, borders with stamped lace, a sense that what
was
no one's in particular might have been yours (the *noise* of barrels on Whitman's
wharves,
mossy, shifted).
All right I'm going to put this damned sheep's bone over the fire, scapulamancy
the cracks after
and it is to be what experience is, lace in a watercolor window, how we're
supposed to feel
it blowing in. Scribes of Monmouth and Winchester wrote their histories as a series
of islands
surrounded by writing. Love and war, the disposal of property, led by common
sense and entrail to

Cicero's extremities nailed up, the warning to others nonetheless expressive
gesture.
I drew a Raven Rattle for Trammell, body beak and wings, on its back a man with
his knees up as if
under a table, sharing a tongue with a frog facing him, Egyptian hawk's head at
the table's
foot, violence
from everything presenting itself as a face, our parallels identities.
They all started in a way with Keats, "I would write / you down / In a style of
leaves growing"
La Farge stained glass harboring meaty cast in glass peonies and peacocks with
spots
strewn, wonderful
borders, slats of dark olive and crimson, Duncan lisping Yeats and Hopkins to his
Falconress, Tiffany opaline
in American lead, Rimbaud says a locomotive burning on its tracks. In Franco's
dream
Duncan on his catafalque says "Michael, you must find a cure," stiffening on
flowers.
Oranges nestle in artificially green cellophane, as Easter eggs never felt satisfactory
to the touch, loose edge,
tendrils for the forefinger to skid over the moist surface, perhaps crayonmarked
meltings
Swedish pull toy's oblate red one rotating on wheels the same green. Scan
for me Buck Rogers pistols, scrap dollies stuffed with nylons, detrital hominess
as if any Dutch landscape, no matter how bleak, might be said to entail a child.
Any hole in the earth with flowers growing in it is a socket
song by Rabbie in serif letters on marble the fovea, at base animals
grazing on trefoil.
Possible to nibble at roots among rigs, powdery feel of the 1786 Kilmarnock
facsimile
with legacies from sheep in that curious speech the point of which (dignified,
intimate)
was man needs no elevation. A ploughman's lunch, they call the solidest thing on
the menu, shepherd's
pie, anything with a bit of woodcock and a boiled egg.
Ravens speak to the humblest, tell them things three times, fly off
with an emerald in the mouth that wouldn't fit the tree's dragon's boxed hoard
of rubies, blue sapphires, pearls, layered like lasagna, annually inventoried

(and David now has a proof that the space of events is not, so to speak, spatial, as
if
reinventing Bergson), from this a distance except for the magic of it to a Fragonard
we saw in New York, pinkgowned blonde on a swing so far away
no features show, others reclining on twilight green and closer to us
palest pool flanked by dolphins like library lions turned sideways to us, above
them
 cupids with bows
aimed anywhere, fragile as frosting. In Bergdorf's window, safari clothing for the
well to do.
It is now a matter of shame being in love; the confessor of faith cringes. The street
child
who climbed a lamppost for a view of Mother Shipton (was it) impaled himself on
 area spikes, writhed
as one opening a tomb from the side sees a golden tongue, indeterminate toward
the root.
The passio, thing undergone as a clear crystal in streambed won't visibly divide
water but
downstream maybe a grain or two, turbled. In Sobin's poems all crystal
except Heidegger (a sphere of smoky quartz). To live as if light is food
makes the opaque a source of turbulence, sullen pipe or faucet under
its cap of snow.
Condoms like galoshes, Codrescu suggests, are now appropriate
the marvelous fifty and seventy-five cent ones in gas station lavatories and
 stripjoint men's rooms
promising delight even in their color. Diving into the pool in full tux
to retrieve sunglasses I lost conjuring equipment in a forgot valise but was given a
 glass of scotch; the
restaurant float balloons were purple to look like grapes.
A tissue of relations delicate as thin surfaces or cracks in the ringlike
orbits in Houghton's orrery you continue as spheres in the mind only
(but actually under Victorian tomato-frame panes)
no more reclaimable by memory than beauty, some corollary to Berkeleian
proofs about size not involving distance, scotch heady after immersion.
It's easy to dream of Bennett eating asparagus in Ostend, even to the consistency
 of his plate
absolutely plain, not even a gold line, certainly no Venus in her grove
conscious as we are that negation introduces its subject, absent warmth of the
porcelain pears

fixed as joke on their plate, study in gradation of blush.
The difficulty is with time, not with fact as such as, growing up, I was "in" where I
was never
absolutely. A clay head as if shrunk, eyebrows lightly inked, in a jar with tinted
liquid to show
the neighbor,
product of artistry. Barnum and Dickens, probably, were in that jar, and food-
coloring red only
remembered blood,
the effect of an effect. But imagine me later, living outside Detroit in the ambience
of headlight and
car grille;
time would settle like the curious powdery yet oily secretion out of Michigan air
(it wipes off) on
vehicle chrome, and I am reminded of the Amish sect which allows cars but paints
such parts black.
A crystal with one broken end, A Date to Remember around a plated basket with
rubies, emeralds,
one topaz
on a bank receipt, the happenedness of what unphotographed still troubles by the
half-coiled fuse,
braided lighter wick.
It's as if Manet at age five knew he wanted to paint like that, one stroke for a
knifehandle but didn't know how to handle paint (Soutine's excitement), Van
Gogh sometimes
like this—
a reflection taking off from the framed reproduction of a covered bridge, vertical
side
planking coming loose. Two children approach it through inadequate tall grass,
the brass
plate tacked to the frame saying (really saying) NOSTALGIC SUMMER.
Longfellow's bust has
Poet and laurel sculpted above, by French.
Anything counts as itself, can be taken at its own valuation. Hiawatha, looking
very noble indeed, wears a wolfskin loincloth which happens to include the head.
The bird chittering is a bird chittering. Cedar chips around bushes inhibit weeds,
smell
of landscaping

more of the permanent transient alterable as software. Canal water from its depth
or sides

has an absolutely characteristic color; the stitching of another softball shows,
floating.

MacDonald loves it if, waking, asking where's the stream your fairy guide would
point

over your head to the ripples, water babies I suppose, Keats, Poe's City in
the Sea. Cupid's parlor trick that that which quenches lights. There's a vertical
Fragonard with languishing woman, marvelous semidistinct satyrish people
around a pillar

altar and Cupid, mature

and upside down in flight touching her rose with his torch, the Sacrifice thereof
its explicit subject. But look how inexplicit, some smoke from it
almost in the imagining alchemical, but—a rose! pluckt, there's others
and she, delectable with something unintelligible going on in her mind, vessel
once some

Ursuline ingot.

Now I have bought an *Alma*, crowing to find it secondhand as I did
for her other two, and reading it is putting it off, the white
space of the page for us a track, "the huge white blot which still denotes the
eastern

and central region of Arabia" (W. P. James's *The Lure of the Map*), the stone
cover woman poor substitute for the kouros Elie says comes right out of the stone
in Naxos, as does carborundum, cycladic art polished rather than hacked
and David's meticulous drawing of a hand ax might in its technique
be applied to an emergent trilobite its size. After a while it's pointless
to imagine a process of manufacture, any contemplation jittery, divergent
—don't hypnotize yourself even by Hypnos, the flaws in a tiny pocket crystal no
bar

let nothing move you off recollection. A bubble (as he says, an atmosphere in
amber)

is itself ball. Four fingers pointing up hold a crystal you can see, though there's
nothing there

and a hut of modular plastic I see in dramatic light has a cream rug over (drying)
is a hun tent, the first with a blue ladder up and slide exit.

I throw seven stones, one kept back on the gray velvet bag because
not everything is used and it's a good meaning for imponderable. Jasper, crystal
and

five green, the quadrant imagined, earth at the left hand, water right.

Hardly the "first rock or stump" (Whitman), and no fetish, these tumbled chips assert pattern, dimension, fishhook the greenstones made with birthstone bloodstone at the tip, far down far right the clear one (few bubbles in it).

Denise Levertov's name in brick, the poem barely readable, incised multiple indentation then her name lowest level of the Davis Square subway to walk on almost as if on cobweb or wood grain, not walking on words at all, edges, trace of her trace. The mountain crumbling to highway shows how things not crystalline present faces, ah the access road cut deep in striate bluebrowngray rock not shale at all. Mules pick their way through her
VE, RT.

The Birth Record office in Spanish Town, walls yellow wood (large horizontal panels) and grillwork over oak, behind it, functionaries, in front massed Jamaicans on benches (as if at church), the universal squashy orange juice carton and soft drinks in a cut-down oil drum with welded handles on milk crates for height while we wait on Ethel Laidlaw, St. Elizabeth 1903 who never loved the lizards we do, one this morning in a basket on the aviary,
questing

intelligent head like a transparent mongoose. Rooms with bound and rebound ledgers,
the walls

green and what's called distempered, maybe, columns darker green below, Miss Thompson finding her for us (1901), three copies certified, recovering grandmama. The eighteenth-century mansion Annie Palmer inhabited, current wood paneling
an

allusion to hers, killed by a slave deservedly, the guide says with a practiced lilt because she was a witch, killed husbands, ha ha, becomes a nineteenth-century
slave's

troll legend, dungeons now the gents. It's like Larkin's "Church Going," the evil's gone. Impossible to get back to, legend is a lie about memory, framed
voyeur.

Bergson reprints. The time for this is now, that he'll be no French Whiteheadism. Flux, a symbol you can't focus on, lovely robot becoming femme. "Images" from film, Golem village roofs, are the Stop n Shop we pretend's telegraphable, like saving meat tokens for themselves, slither of reddish cardboard. A pin in the Boston craft show—wad of silver
flattened

like (say) a tiny pair of shorts, crumpled near pockets, amber gem outjut at the side
and

sticking through below a stitched thumb of smooth leather, an index, intrusion of the

sarc, peau, covering.

Don't bother to keep it, the Healthy Heart embracing fish, amative in fictional space, kidney functions inimical as lion and lamb. Leaf through the thin-paper Banana Republic maps punched for pocket looseleaf, flippable.

In linear strings identicals may appear reversed, chiasmical (as if the spectrum might throw off green again), the Eternal Recurrence a remark that life is not at base linear. The bars on a general's chest don't go off in fantasies of wars, cribbage

turned to a board stuck with tiny turned-wood cabbages. Oh the edibles on Claudia's desk, scoop of ice cream, steak, small chop, handful of spaghetti, beans even a butter pat, latex, bread, cornflakes in a bowl, inedible standards pointable at (was it as big as that).

Dollhouse displays in London include butcher shops, cut meat, sausages and birds,

spurious plenty . . .

It isn't simulacra and *their* scale, but that anything not present's out of that to which scale might apply, the chandelier's gray globby crystals. It's fetishes in the full magical sense for which Lolita's heartshaped frames in red plastic are antitypes.

"Better than all measures" (in the voice of Creeley, 1966) how Zukofsky gets the sound of someone reading Shakespeare and wanting to write something, the C-shaped

stanzas pretending, lettrist. Our notes differ always, aren't notes, whiff of air over flutehole. Todd Baron incorporates *80 Flowers* in a poem by naming it, thankit for soothing. It was the "The," Zukofsky's numbered lines so early, only theoretically

"like" Eliot's quotes, another poem functioning behind as notes, the Washstand, approach to hellenism by way of Doric column and marble, then little songlets and "A," barely digestible wedge (and widely, title phrases like "and widely") that creep into our verse as the feel of someone remembering listening

through Zukofsky's lines to what he thought he might be sounding like.

This brooding *over* measure is part of his effect—not setting it down like expatriate prose, rendering so much as singing (making sounds any way you can) somehow appropriate

to "the" subject, demonstrative substrate (often vanished away like tablets you
 can't see
 under the prescription) and the straining spaces that open up when five short lines
 pop rivets like a shiny beetle under torque. There's something of Oz in his
 imagination,
 Paul's elbow
 vivified, sawing away. Nothing satisfies like Shakespeare's "Full fathom five,"
 eerie song not probably from a human throat, ghost canary from
 a magician's sleeve. They do sit on the page like cages. Olivier Bernier
 once thought to ask a well-known artist to draw a large cage
 he'd then have made to fill with a little finch he knew of, black
 with red wings.
 There are fish tiles let into the floor of the Alewife station, in effect a bit like
 Peabody's
 coelacanth
 so startling to see in preservative, floating like a guppy, monster limb, the
 wax fetuses Walker photographed in dull black and white, wrinkled like anything
 folded on itself.
 It's all a thing you see through to see a thing, nothing usually direct, *a se*
 in Latin (for itself and with itself, the circus would say.) Our selves
 in rectilinear boxes, aquaria are thoughtful as the coelacanth in urine-colored fluid
 mounted on pipe. Indeed the pipe, now part of the fish, is also on display.
 If poems are a commodity so is time, in the old Adam Smith economics,
 political economy carried on the wrist, settable as a windup lamb.
 John Ahern taught Death of Socrates and Augustine's *Confessions* to boys who
 were moved
 (time is that in which one thinks about stealing pears, prioritizing matrix), the
 pendulum superimposed, that which dwells in itself
 Heidegger's space acquaintance with nonspatialized volition
 become longing, the pear itself soaked in Calvados.
 Truitt mentions the difficulty (of spirit) repairing damaged sculpture—
 the finished thing returns, bread with mercury dented, soaked
 and you wonder that you've spirit left to do that *again*, our fixed BMW run into.
 Could the little candleholder clay pot cylinders like the barrel ends of shotguns
 be Adonis pots strung up, a seed in each you wait eight days
 for the spears, symbolic of themselves hung high like lamps
 on raffia twist.
 You paint a thing sky blue—there's an Ashbery all in fours I looked at like that
 thick walls the surfaces of which fluctuated slightly, then

these acidulous colors as if of fruit beverages or cars
 (Ed showed us strings of them in Prague the same height, vista)
 the African I heard in A. D. Little's bus this morning, so unlike
 Kafka's bureaucratic German, pale feet in espadrilles.
 Hall's life in tens, *The One Day*, his own light, Dickey, Bly and I think
 for the looseness of MacNeice. Horses turn heads toward each other unlike
 Scotties on Alnico flecked with gleams like mica cast, sheared.
 When you think to weigh the life you end up looking at some dippy thing
 woodspurge or Coursey statuette, stick-on numbers at the waist
 being wrapped in having not thereby salvageable. Thoth in
 sugar pine with jointed arms "weighs" a heart, the reading foregone
 a grace picked up from the German, the heart the root *ver*.
 Cabalists named angels too easily . . . you want presence uncharacterized, not
 even a bar code.
 Anything extant is a midst, context including itself foggily interior, as a
 track in ethyl and methyl alcohol (for the different weights) fails near the source
 thickening to fur.
 You also number them, though they are less likely to respond to the fact of
 numbering.
 It was a notion you could call them like a dog or a child, make them *do what you*
 wanted,
 access to something now imagined windowed in COBOL, language to itself a
 trampoline, magician's
 finger through derby.
 Saying a name familiarly is like recognizing a face, you'd think, more like
 touching a thing you carry habitually, a pistol handle or smooth stone, odd feel
 off the article.
 You could tell from the quality of affection in them one *Paradiso* character from
 another, not quite the
 thickness of the body thinking, not the heresiarchs carrying their heads (which
 speak) oh think
 to meet one of those grotesques not finding himself herself grotesque, which used
 to mean
 suitable for a grotto, eldritch, broken, the bit of mirror or coral put where it will
 surprise you.
 Angels go where they have business, whilom as a beast with eyes and horns
 meant to be ecclesiastical history, village's green man, crozier akin to wicker.
 Some dolmens will've been named by those carting and tilting, folded up
 bodies in the cavity, socket dug for them, meant to last and oddly unlike things

first made in
wood, adz marks made by the thumb in clay. Germans came to recognize
redfigure style
the painter named for his city, figures named or speaking in letters against the
common ground.
And what is it to "put them in" a poem, mention it or make reference as if meaning
can be borne
or names refer, which isn't true at all. They're cries
of their occasions, the ancient star's courage uncatalogued,
the figure W in the sky a bat-wain dipper. Assembling perceptions is not prior to
care.
Goddesses fall for lads who die gored, their blood silver ichor in odd
measures like but not like classical ones, some sort of rush of movement as
translation-lecture strictures
stipulate, now nothing but stuffed finches in a row moved slightly to background
singing,
no vectors from their bodies (rolled like cigars) to an imagined shroud below,
concupiscence.
Digs out of it, earth shouldered up by animal, climbing out of the mud hut the
simoom destroyed
is local color, not even an event given baking of the same clay ruins in sun,
hence native notions giant sloth and armadillo bones are normal. The garland
of flowers does not wither on the terracotta brow, our care not to
overincise pupils, technology too boringly there to render the highlight, ruining so
much
otherwise unremarkable sculpture by tethering it to a period in which French-
Italian
models were thought
(by French and Italians) coexistent. The error that light *means* life is disprovable
by any backlit four by five oil sketch of any head that jacks light down below
lid, lash "definition," the socket vague as tongues behind mouths just opening.
These rulers carved in fine basalt that feels like slate (her skirt so fine, just a line
over the pubis)
seem to like each other, be on an outing even, and don't mind at all the stone
they're
rendered in
is so like shadow. The painted wood baker could be pressed in bread
reduced to occupation as the others hoving behind the curves of sovereignty are
not, imperial

smile moving toward genuine recognition, their perception of their likeness
bestowed.

These are not to be looked at in books, as in a peculiar sense it doesn't matter who
they are,

like snapshots found in the street, the grinning couple over the cake,
invariably the finest possible clumsy portraits, our sense in
these others that the humanity preserved for us to see is accident.

We don't want to know them, eat their cake, sit down with them deploring
their horrible wallpaper so much more generic than themselves in its vertical
bands,

quincuncial flowers.

A bee this morning nuzzled in some weed, the smell rank as marigold from
everything
(nearly festering)

wanting so much to seed before winter, this meaty desire of plant by still water to
map Africa,

rhododendron stems as good as banyan, shopping carts for hippos. We are near
the T, black tau cross on cement depressing as a cufflink or religious giveaway, the
assemblage of familiarity excused as a sign of care, eggbeater sunk in old coffee.

A route retraveled becomes familiar, and though it need not be loved lets itself be
looked at, somewhere

in the middle of the banyans a huge square stone with a ring of brown steel, big
as the logo, leading

to caverns in which what we're familiar with is drawn, in no order, heap of images
we're to think refreshes but it doesn't. Thermometers incorporated in beverage
signs

tell temperatures like beads. The marvelous is any old place, that X is, is, in theory.

One has oily berries ranged in rows of two, like grapes.

The shocks we stand are not proofs we are translucent, absorbers of any
experience, amoeba or gummybear consistency proof against, proof of,
muscles invariably

coordinate with mind. The history of what we wish, *Anatomy of Melancholy*,
Delusions

of Crowds

are large books, unaccountably of the sort one dips into for comfort.

Mines green as the copper ore of my native state would not delude, are as
green as that, of a thoughtful milkiness even, sometimes the metal itself
hammerable, pure.

Zodiacal tables made of it may go on the table under the crystal, with a wand and
dagger

like any card, the young cup and ball conjurer taken to mean something. Gaps
between the teeth

or toes remind us we are a sort of comb for experience, krill not sought out but
come on in our

medium of transit.

That my treasure invariably occupies the water quadrant suggests it *is* water
crystal to heart's jasper, a middle term. The tendency of things
to occupy themselves with things is not reprehensible. That we also
express things with things, space a thing, even time a thing means we are among
among,

in the thick, in medias, whenever we hunt a paperclip, passion behind all, prior to
choice. The circles on the copper plate interlock, are connected by satisfying lines
identified with characters likewise graven. That any plan, projection is there
for contemplation pleases, the universe erupting on the table like a coral island,
fanned to reefs in

some cases extended off the edge the plane's continuance likewise projected
if only by the dots which by election we declare emergent.

Shades of meaning implies continuum, the space between definitions (say, of
light) penumbral

not linear as volcanic regions connect on charts, fiery zipper
but the egg's moisture, that makes a hen's hard to spin, a blue patch
on which bisected with a pencil line so easily means ocean, the ease
with which appearances run into one another the last proof that meaning is
a notochord, some graphite cincture floated on watercolor. What floated
into my mind was a diorama we like, a foot of forest floor expanded, leaves
crawled over by ants the size

of crayfish, millipedes express trains, and just right of the middle
an acorn the size of your cupped hands among the litter, perfect except
for, in the smooth side facing us, a little hole that is
a perfect circle.

David Searcy

from A Trip to the Sun

continued from *Temblor* 5

Part One: Geography continued

Miracles continued

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.

Goofy, remember, speaks; although he somehow lacks utterance—the ability to produce that kind of felt exhalation of belief, like a sigh, that accompanies things, permits them in a way but holds them off, establishing enough room for something like resignation to occur. To Goofy facts are self-sufficient. Belief, resignation, isn't really an issue as if the airlessness you sense in cartoons means action at a distance, instantaneousness, the impossibility of any mediating event. This must in fact be close to the simplest experience of things; Saint Ambrose, accustomed to the exercise of faith, may have been predisposed to it—a whiff of Neanderthal thoughts like the dwellings of the poor unapproachable without compassion.

The photograph of the poor nineteenth century frontier family with their possessions assembled outside for the camera, primitive cubism notwithstanding, how like a surrealist landscape it is, how miraculous to be able to see such things out on the prairie miles from anywhere just set out on the uneven ground, everything tilting a little one way or the other, leaning against the house or being held. In the fresh air these things are unutterably precarious. At best they have the value of trinkets or maybe debris, stuff washed up overnight or something stumbled upon like an old cow skull worthless but picturesque to pause beside

and get your picture taken, good for nothing but to mark the moment. But imagine what sort of conviction and serenity is required to be content with these objects in the middle of the afternoon on some dry lake bed, take up positions with them, smile and be still, grown-ups and children as if they were standing among mystical emblems, symbols of dreams.

Whatever surrealists thought they were after, to a large extent it was this. What happens to things, to thoughts, in a vacuum; with the air pumped out (utterance, belief) if there isn't collapse is there a miracle? In the photograph what's going on is even more fundamental than showing off. It's not just that these people have managed to acquire useful things, transport them and possess them so far out in the wilderness (although there is that, as well as the feeling that such a display may also respond to laws of thermodynamics, things tending to tumble out the door in a rush of air compelled by the bleakness and vacancy of the surroundings like the catastrophic decompression of an aircraft at altitude) but that in such an environment they can simply unfold like this automatically—so easily it seems for so little reason. They can't really have time for it. They're not graceful hunter-gatherers with leisure built into the rhythm of their lives, periodic stretches of basking ease that make it natural to wait on photographers and anthropologists; they have no excuse. It's surely not friendliness—not in the ordinary sense at least—these people don't look friendly nor would you expect them to be. Still, here they are entirely emerged, spread out with all the stuff that in a hundred years might adorn the walls of a barbecue restaurant but for now is like a flower inexplicably opened up the way patches of desert under certain conditions can bloom in an instant. Like a magic trick. Behold, what's this? Look at this stuff, there's no explanation for it, amazing as if it were all nickel-plated and floating in the air. It looks sad and even desperate at first glance but look again—these things are to be understood as radiant, how Gerard Manley Hopkins imagined the grandeur of God, "like shining from shook foil."

So, what if this moment of discovering oneself installed in strange territory, looking across strange distances, were so powerful it constituted something like an archetype, a formula expressing, reenacting, the sort of rudimentary eruption of self-awareness that Goofy is condemned to represent, and diverging from which could be

traced all kinds of harmonics and symbols scattered around like the little stone neolithic and bronze age "idols"—flat marble schematics of the creative principle it is believed—that radiated throughout the Mediterranean like ripples from the ancient thought? At one end you might have, say, the hideous and enigmatic Texas souvenir clock and at the other, somewhere back toward primordial origins, the pioneer family on a sunny afternoon. Like shoes on the highway it could be

universal but more easily identified and followed here than some other places perhaps due to the uniform surface, the geological clarity of the southwestern United States. The archetypal condition might seem less remote in featureless country—fewer distractions, not so many wavy edges, corrugations for immediate thoughts and memories to gain purchase; the mind can drift further back for its bearings and you have this more or less commonly received idea popping up now and then unpredictably.

What does the souvenir clock really say? Like the photograph of the frontier family it says wherever you are is the archetypal encampment where multiplicity, the distribution of things, is miraculous, pre-literate, ornamental and radiant. And like the photograph which presents the moment like a thing, it says the same of events. The chrome-plated trinkets surround the clock at the center as if evaporating from it. They represent events as well as things. The inexplicable distribution of events and the inaccessibility of them that seems so confusing in old photographs (because photographed events appear recognizable as things and should, therefore, be as accessible) might be resolved if things, too, were understood as inaccessible as the little ornaments embedded in clear plastic—if the accessibility of things were only apparent, virtual, an artifact of utterance/literacy, a convention necessary for the operation of knowledge. That the concept of accessibility is undiminished for being called an artifact suggests all this is trivial except for a shift in terms which may be trivial as well but at least makes it seem like there's more to work with if, rather than inaccessible, events could be thought of only as unutterable. Thus longing for events becomes longing to pronounce them, to be resigned.

What actually seems to enter the common intuition, however—what is kept, can be felt and simply understood—is the pure, concentrated value of ornament as protection. What it protects against immediately—in ways developed knowledge, being otherwise engaged, cannot—is death. In this respect it is especially useful to people at the frontier and to those who, sensing precariousness, perceive themselves to be. A plaster yard ornament, say a pink flamingo, is installed in the midst of a great mystery, its inappropriateness disconnecting it from everything but its main purpose which is to address the mystery—death; the distances, intervals, between things; the sound of the wind—and survive. What could be more extraordinary? Every day rain or shine there it stands, a pink flamingo, just there even in the dark. There's absolutely no excuse for it. But it doesn't go away or fade to the color of dead grass or sky. It is never assimilated, at least not in theory. It's a miracle. The creative principle.

Pure ornament is apotropaic. The Gorgon mask or the painted eyes on sixth century Greek cups may be what ornament reduces to; then any decorative

flourish sufficiently thoughtless wards off evil, may constitute a stare (even proxy) and, to the extent things are essentially ornaments, show how even at the simplest level they are personifications and knowledge (exactly as Goofy fears) is a kind of mitosis.

Wilderness

The Monty Python routine about the chartered accountant who dreams of becoming a liontamer until persuaded of his ignorance regarding the difference between lions and anteaters is funny not because of the error itself but because of the fullness of his passion in spite of it. There is simply no way to tell, at first, from the quality of his fervor, his appeal before the vocational guidance counselor, that his ambition is founded upon the wrong animal. Something essential to liontaming is so potent it is unobstructed even by such a radical alteration of terms.

The poor accountant on the other hand is obstructed entirely. He is left with a vision perfectly coherent and suited to an object rendered unachievable by an inconsistency. His dream is cut loose, inactive and platonic; but it is not absurd unless strictly applied. Possibly he will retain it like an exotic mathematical model whose integrity is unaffected by external contradiction. It may never deflate and he will have to live with it—an indirect but flawless intuition not really demonstrable by ordinary rules. What is one to make of this? We understand that accountants may not wish to tame lions and that anteaters shouldn't require taming. Yet one may wish to be a liontamer and in terms of less dangerous animals. Thus it is possible to contemplate the void, to have some hope of addressing very primitive questions.

To the accountant liontaming is so primitive that, confronted with the reality of it, he is appalled, chilled again into dullness; put in his place. What did he think was really out there? Where did he get the passion to invest? What did he imagine he was dreaming of at his desk or at home assembling this strange notion? On summer nights when the breeze came through his window did it carry such obscure possibilities—longing so dense it clouded his perceptions altogether? Even in broad daylight, pausing before the comics rack or a circus poster on the street, did he see his own animals there arrayed in some incomprehensible relation to the heroic goings on? If there were ever a moment when he could have shaken his head and thought, "What am I doing?", it must have passed—a brief suspicion, the sort of momentary doubt that flickers at the edge of any remarkable idea. Here, in the larger sense, it is the priority of insight to content—the arbitrariness of terms.

It's as if thoughts, having to be seeded like crystals or rain, needing a speck of something in order to form, might form around anything; as if content were

deeply random, purely decorative at this level. Terms are mementos, each a kind of general-purpose souvenir, a charm, appropriate to every occasion. And to the extent intended ornament at the level of everyday experience is the most arbitrary kind of content—more explicitly random, hardly content at all in the simplest case, more finely granulated and less likely to gather into inflexible clumps—it may, like iron filings near a magnet, reveal more clearly something about the

instruction toward multiplicity, the force and pull of preliminary thoughts.

You'd think if it were only possible to pay close enough attention to the most thoughtless kind of ornament you might really understand how it originates—follow the simple presence of the flamingo, the vacant pink envelope of it, down to the tip of its spike in the earth and find what instructs it there; trace the impulse to a point, the essential instant above which someone says, "Let's place this here," and it's done. You'd have it: at this point a preliminary something—a thought or a thing—and just below it the instruction or what carries it, an absolute ground like a fossil lake that subtends everything. This amounts to finding the smallest recognizable, least personifiable thing, what even the Gorgoneion, in turn, reduces to—a kind of proto happy-face.

The problem is that recognition/personification doesn't itself reduce; there doesn't seem to be an atomic state. The slightest thing, the paramecium, the unidentifiable speck, is fully recognizable. Unnoticed, completely beneath your attention, you have warm feelings toward it. It looks like you with no trouble at all; as easily as any anthropomorphic hamburger above a roadside stand it develops compassion, a smile. But how can it be meaningful to suppose everything is deeply familiar? If it's a realization what form can it take—"Ah, good old stuff, good old kindred phenomena"? As opposed to what? What other thing? Does reassurance, a sort of, "Boy, am I glad to see you" accompany every discrete perception? This suggests that even at the most mechanical level of experience there is something like fear of the dark. Maybe absence, distance, what surrealists liked to represent as a diagram—the endless ruled surface, formal to show it's a difficult concept, parallel lines to let your thoughts slip past; you're supposed not to dwell on it. It's badlands. The last place you want to be—where Bob Steele was lost and the Illinois farm couple and de Chirico, convalescent on an autumn afternoon in a Florentine piazza about 1910.

When you think of de Chirico's revelation in the piazza it helps to remember his intestinal problems. An upset stomach gives it weight, centers it the way nausea, traditionally included among the effects of faster-than-light travel in science fiction stories, seems like spiritual disruption, residual belief in the soul. Here he is not quite recovered, barely emerged (you imagine him still moist from confinement like a new cicada), sitting out in the middle of the square and fastened on this idea

of bleakness so strong it glares through quaintness and history, clears away all the clutter and reference (what's mysterious in the paintings is how there can be picturesque elements without reference or with reference somehow inactive or reflexive) leaving the Piazza Santa Croce as plain and ideal as the most ordinary suburban American backyards each devoted to the thought of land in the broadest sense, as a grand phenomenon, and required to summarize it as briefly as possible. Think of de Chirico in a backyard like that in a lawnchair suffering. He suffers because of the gulf, the rollercoaster swoop between things. His misery is like mown grass. A well-kept yard says, "Look at what's essential, what there really is; you think there is volume but that's only a special case, gaudy and spectacular like paintings on velvet or 3-D movies; in fact your thoughts spread like dye between glass, fan out like a delta."

An ordinary backyard can be a model of the world as easy to deal with as one of those molecular analogies made of colored plastic balls and rods. It's a kind of de Chirico space as long as it's not sophisticated (no large-scale self-knowledge); the kind of backyard that knocks you over with the collision of love and hopelessness (balls and rods): cyclone fence, clinical, nearly abstract; swingset; bushes hugging the house like a sea wall and the grass in between, dividing attention or at least representing whatever does. The notion of luminiferous ether rises automatically from such a backyard like gas from a swamp. But the flatness comes first and bleak and even terrifying as it is, it's close to the heart; you carry it around with you like the puddle of terrain at the feet of toy figures, like a map. What separates things isn't really some airy vacancy but, in a sense, this flatness. We have frog brains—something like a simple horizon at the base of the skull like the surface of an underground pool, a spirit level. Maybe it's impossible even to imagine anything except geographically. Flatness like a prairie always follows your glance. Look up into cloudless sky in the afternoon; the backyard rises also, a ghost of it tilts up into clear space to tell where you're looking. It's the direction insight takes. It might be a kind of tautology, in fact, to make anything of it—just to say thoughts are world-shaped, a remark like, "the Eskimo knows a hundred words for snow," or, "El Greco had astigmatism," to suggest that thoughts are geographical thoughts, that something is gained by understanding divided attention, the fact of many as opposed to whatever might be the alternative, as deeply geographical as if geography could still keep something of its dustiness when extended like that. You need a point of leverage to think it and have it mean anything (for astigmatism to make more than metaphorical sense requires one good eye for the canvas). So maybe thoughts are geographical because they are about geography as El Greco's astigmatic eye is a sort of commentary on the good one; or just because thoughts are about things at all as geography is essentially about things, tells a

little story about them, a fable. Once there was this or that—a hill, a simple distortion is easy enough: "Once there was a hill," you say to yourself as soon as you see it; and the reason you know "once" and "there was" is because of the landscape. You can't really have a story in empty space. You can't imagine it. Think of a bright red ball floating in the blackness and it's incomprehensible without a story. Either the ball becomes landscape or it acquires one. All of which may reduce to psychology, a matter of predisposition, that you look at sky the same way you look at the landscape because it's habit to see things as destinations. But it feels like there's more to it (or more to the habit) as if landscape were like one of those inexplicably evocative smells that catch you every now and then with an unlocatable sensation of dredged-up memory, essence of old-experience-in-general, instruction without content.

Decoration is the simplest durable expression of what goes on all the time—everything and everything's parts are personifiable; anything exists upon or becomes a surface to support recognition and knowledge. Happy-faces sprout like flowers and vanish. Wherever you look there is a background noise of provisional facts, little bursts of ter-

ror and compassion, generally undetectable, bubbling over the surfaces of everything at every imaginable scale, each surface divisible and, in the other direction, subordinate to some larger landscape until you get to actual groundlevel—flatness like the cancellation of opposite waveforms as if right here on the ground, in the backyard or wherever, what you sense is what happens when the mechanism of recognition tries to interpret itself.

Even events seem to be out on the prairie somewhere. It's surprising to think it although, unlike things, they don't entail a story—when you remember something you don't think, "Once there was a memory," or, "Once there was a thing that happened"; that's been taken care of. It's more like a wish: "If only once there were a thing that happened." Maybe only the wish seems located.

Events entail sentiment that doesn't distill into anything easier to deal with. It doesn't yield belief the way a geographical fable leads to utterance, repeating the story to yourself, reassurance like a lullabye. Something like longing simply follows events like trails in a bubble chamber, event as something thrown off in the creation of thing and geography—you want to imagine the truly fundamental particles assigned to generalities like gods or humors, about the size of beachballs invisibly bouncing around and bursting like piñatas into commonplace experience.

You've seen very young children—say two years old, barely sentient—dressed for winter; how involuntary they look. There might be two or three layers under a quilted jacket made from fabric composed of long molecules suitable for a garment

with ten times the area but in this case folded and compressed around so small a form it tends to spring out, go spherical straining away from the center as if outside in the low-pressure cold the failure of a single snap might be catastrophic. There should be rubber boots, a knit cap with earflaps and a tie beneath the chin, knit puppet mittens also, each with a different animal character dangling uselessly beyond the fingers like parthenogenesis. All this to keep itself warm and loved in a vacuum. Everything it needs to know for as long as it is likely to be loose envelops it, is layered in somewhere (the floppy puppet animals may be understood to accompany it like ushabtis into the less familiar world, or like fuzzy dice hanging from a rearview mirror). For a short while this will be home, like a nautilus, a bathysphere. Watch the head as it turns to look at something of interest; the body continues forward uninvolved like a limousine. Ontogeny and phylogeny. This is what it is like to be a Hun. Every tale is a tale of terror.

II. Space

THE BEST THING ABOUT SATURDAY MORNING science-fiction TV shows in the 1950's was the feeling that space travel was such a wishy-washy undertaking, neither here nor there, not much more than a kind of isolation in small rooms caught between more fully developed ideas, something anyone might achieve given the right frame of mind. It quickened the pulse to think it might be like that among the stars—no theatrical value, just a vague, domestic-looking, shadowy confinement as if you could drift off into the darkness as easily as hanging around the house. It seemed to confirm an old apprehension—the immanence of the void, what you sensed in the white noise your mother made shushing you to sleep (a metered release of blankness like an inoculation against the greater emptiness). What was that? Just distance, multiplicity, geographical strangeness batting against the window? All of this one learned to live with—there were stuffed animals, knowledge, compassion always accompanied the terror. No, it was something else but how unparsimonious for there to be two sorts of emptiness, thoughts of one tending to copy thoughts of the other so it was hard to be certain but, watching the space cadets and thinking back to seminal childhood, there it was, nothing articulable at this point of course but at least an intuition to formulate later on: there are two kinds of space, geographical and the other one. Look at children's landscape pictures again. It's possible to sense in the mysterious gap between heaven and earth a vacancy of a different order from the pre-literate, geographical sort that's operating in more obvious ways. It looks at first like the extreme clarification you're used to in young children's pictures and, in fact, can be read that way—like a typographical device, proto-paragraphs. But underneath this, what's hanging over the glyphs for house and tree is such a deep trough of

inattention it seems not to operate at all. Clarity isn't an issue. It reminds you of those movies where the painter or photographer unintentionally records among the autumn foliage some horrific thing which, identified, naturally loses its interest as a formal element. Surely at whatever stage the crayon sky descends it happens suddenly; it's hard to imagine sneaking up on a realization like that although it's not difficult to believe there might be a general, more or less gradual closing-off going on, only the tail end of which happens to overlap recorded history as the sky is brought down the final thirty degrees or so—a little late like the delayed fusion of the cranial bones, the joining of continental plate-like thoughts to complete the vault. Look at it one way and it's literary, geographical; look again (put on the red and blue-lensed glasses) and all the emblems for the things you love are perched along a cliff, pressed forward into present tense, maximum brightness and simplicity. The vacancy above and among them isn't really the same sort of vacancy as de Chirico space or the rock between Magdalenian painted animals. It has potential. De Chirico space is used up, entirely expended in maintaining the idea of distance as discontinuity. Plop something down on surrealist pavement or paint another bison on the rock and the surface surrenders to it, rerouted like a stream. It can't participate. Nothing derives from it. But the void in children's landscapes is framed by a continuous intention so it's not an interruption but an inclusion like a bubble in amber, primitive atmosphere. It hasn't anything to do with distance; it doesn't inhibit; it's blank permission like the blankness you get staring at one spot too long without moving your eyes. Something is going to happen there and anything might as long as you concentrate. Concentrated inattention. Amor vacui.

So here was this peculiar emptiness detectible on TV Saturday mornings and you could tell they were having a hard time putting a good face on it. Exotic instrumenta-

tion like pots of flowers (sadness in the set designer's voice—"Maybe put one over here"). How were they to act? 1930's Buck Rogers space was like a curtain between sets; later on motion pictures could afford to construct outer space like an amphitheater—either way you had an idea what you were dealing with, but on Saturday mornings there was nothing like that. Only a faint and variable concern for something to be careful of like snakes or poison ivy, earnestness without conviction gazing out portholes with legs apart as if bravery were required or even venturing outside in magnetic boots, tiptoeing into it not sure if it were exactly underfoot or not but wanting to be careful. Whatever was outside it wasn't a medium (certainly not the ether-like vehicle that conveyed comic moments through the Burns and Allen house). What were they looking at? Were the portholes real glass? Could they see props and equipment, bolts of black felt, get

tired between takes and drift into reverie listening into the imaginary vastness like a seashell for reassurance? "Shh, go to sleep," it seemed to say.

TV space cadets had a conceptual problem unknown to kids with cardboard rockets. Refrigerator packing cartons, for example, are flexible and unpredictable like dreams; similarly, they require inconsistent, casual space. On the other hand, everything about TV space cadets was intended to be strictly specialized, their eyes (on posters and lunch boxes) directed upward as if they knew about space, where it was and how to approach it; the set of their jaws, their massive, beaded, triangular gorgets told you this—heads could not loll casually upon such a collar. They might have fastened on space like bulldogs but, for budgetary reasons or the physical constraints of a small studio, addressible, theatrical space never really developed. It remained pretty much the kind you had at home.

Maybe it was having to deal with this non-specific, general purpose space that accounted for such mime-like concentration on the part of Commander whatever his name was soloing off on a desperate rescue mission seated at the console of his lonely rocket, leaning forward with his hand on a big knobbed throttle lever—light years having to sit like that, zillions of miles in the dark, the strain on his face as if that lever were heavily spring-loaded. It was a knob for heroes and he strained against it metaphorically.

You've seen old people driving that way—far out at the edge of their lives, barely visible above the dash, leaning over the wheel and peering ahead. Who knows what is being addressed, what things look like to them, the concentration required, the heroism? It's not possible to ask. What could they say? "You see that object which to you looks like a tree by the side of the road? Well, to me it's something else. Although I recognize it the way you do it's not so simple when you're old. Recognition is no longer entertaining enough to keep the mind from slipping back to when it was—a natural, romantic sort of instinct; you're always needing love—but it makes it hard to drive if everything is a reminder first and simply present as an afterthought; it's like in football trying to run before you've made the catch. There are bound to be mistakes. But when things are going well and the traffic is light, then you can concentrate. What looks like hopelessness is concentration and what looks like a tree is more like perfume or smoke. You concentrate on the past anyway. You don't think about it because you're young enough to do it easily without straining but when you're old you have to pay attention which may mean sacrificing something of the here and now. The compensation is not having to maintain yourself as a reference, not having to tell yourself stories anymore, at least not to the same extent. The interval between me and the tree isn't the same as that between me and what the tree reminds me of. Between me and the tree is the fact or means of doubt, testing and recognition—

dubious space which has lost its charm. But whatever the tree brings to mind, whatever old trees there were and tree-like pasts, these are incomprehensibly displaced from me—there is doubt and recognition of a kind (it can't be helped) but they attach to the interval. They aren't transmitted. There's no exchange between me and the thing remembered. There's sentiment. Storyless. Pure and motionless like heat from a jammed electric motor. Imagine how difficult it is driving an automobile under these conditions. It's no wonder we appear to shrink and hug the wheel for balance. When the most doubtful things are the obstacles. Nevertheless we like to drive because it enables us to intend to navigate the incomprehensible interval. The automobile supplies intention. Around we go in it, back and forth almost always to places we've been before. Yet the car isolates us from the intention and its consequences, takes most of the wear and tear and some of the desire, leaving us with a sense of ourselves preserved, unaltered since we last came this way or that. So, vaguely by extension, we expect remembered places to be unchanged as well and, although this is never the case, at least we are brought to this expectation. We are enabled to be disappointed at worst or at best surprised. We are gliding along, hanging upon the intention of the vehicle. The car doesn't help us cross the interval but it takes us more abruptly to it, gives a more accurate, cartographic sense of where it is." Imagine, further, a simplification and spreading out, in old age, of longing or desire for remembered things until it seems to involve the space around events like a navigational technique—how ancient Polynesians are believed to have sailed toward symptoms of destinations, peripheral, obscure properties of islands like wave interference, swell patterns, investing the ocean with such potential the subtlest change in the rocking of the boat might come to feel like fulfilled expectations. Too many memories without some kind of reciprocity or proof might produce that effect. Longing relaxes, attenuates, levels out like the open road.

How can you recognize an interval unless the interval describes a relationship engaging something recognizable on the other end? Can there be a monopolar relationship, an unrecognizable destination, something unpersonifiable, untestable yet admissible in some way—a wish or a promise, the past as a (counterintuitive) state of potential? Or maybe a closed loop, a false or reflexive relationship giving the illusion of displacement but actually bending back on itself—dynamically opposite the geographically dead flat moment of self regard; feedback, recursive amplification rather than cancellation. Can there really be a geographical instruction for memory or just a geographical predisposition to think so? You'd think location (multiplicity) requires memory—the possibility of relocation—but in what sense is it useful to think location has priority? That seems like a primitive notion.

In children's drawings events are a consequence of multiplicity. The gap between sky and ground, like the region between electrically charged plates, is where things happen. Events are like sparks. They require this interval as if there were no potential otherwise. (The Polynesian creation myth tells how ordinary activity was impossible until the forcible separation of heaven and earth made room for it.) But what happens to depicted events as pictures become sophisticated? By first grade or thereabouts when the gap has disappeared, the sky descended and the ground line withdrawn to the horizon, event space is implicit. It has to be there—events continue (although maybe less freely and clearly) so it must have sublimed into the rest of the picture somehow, combined with the geography. Everything is implicitly eventful. Things look pretty much the same but now they are part of history. Everything carries the implication of that whole unexaminable emptiness around with it. Even the most schematic objects in such a picture have beginnings and ends. The cow can grow old and the grass can die in general, you might think, just because the diorama, like a mechanism, is complete in some essential way—things can begin to run. But exactly, in the most simpleminded sense, it's because events no longer have a reservoir. Events have become such an intimate, fine-scale consequence of geography they are like a quality.

But imagine such refinement forestalled—an undeveloped present tense, neonotous like childhood retention of the embryonic skull, incompletely sutured, left open like a window, geography like ice at the edge of a pond. Remember the puddle of plastic ground at the feet of mass-produced toy figures—neither frame nor territory but a kind of compromised, blurred geography, random to allow for the passage of time. The toy soldier isn't blurred, only where he stands; it's an event reservoir, where the action takes place. He is focussed, specific, resolved in every detail yet, still, he is taking place. He is not simply ready for action but acting already—understood to be acting even before he's out of the bag; that's what you paid for—active warfare, disordered, incoherent like white light until you lined them up. (Prone riflemen were exceptions; they required no base, were impossible to knock over and were disdained as monuments, decor, little statues of Balzac.) A sophisticated toy soldier in a battlefield diorama, on the other hand, looks defined but only because the implicit blur of his life has been sectioned along with his surroundings; resolution is at the expense of completeness—you know you're not seeing all of him; his birth and death are implied and omitted. He's believable as far as he goes but not something to play with.

For proper toy soldiers then, complete in the present tense, memory (puddled at one's feet, holding one up) permits resolution, definition by reserving an unlimited range of locations within a kind of random pool. One imagines a direct relation

between the degree of resolution (insignia, visible bootlaces, etc.) and both the size and randomness (whatever that might mean) of the support until, arriving at the level of genuine soldier, the support is so broad and deeply random it's not strictly visible at all—just a haze of event space evident internally to the soldier himself who is thus completely defined to the point of personal identity.

Randomness in the case of the genuine soldier has to do with being aware of a range of locations but unable to fix oneself or prove oneself fixed within it—you feel fixed but you'd feel that way no matter what. An imaginary detachable self (again) placed and replaced anywhere between birth and death will feel fixed—the haze of locations/memories always looks right. The self could be scanning, as it were, back and forth continuously along the entire range and still feel securely located, self-sufficient, unmoved except within the normal passage of time. In fact, given an information-free self (an unrigorous and probably romantic notion which nonetheless sits so heavily in the mind you want to allow it), it seems there should be a proof that personal identity requires "scanned" or arbitrary location—a random historical puddle so that one may always be definite yet always taking place. Here you are on your sixth birthday and here you are on a cloudy day forty years later—you can switch back and forth and never know the difference. The sense of location is seamless; information parts like water.

But what an insubstantial thing. An arbitrary present tense, massless, shuttleable about without effort or effect, makes you suspect that trying to imagine this you're just slipping along the boundary of useable terms, pressing too hard against the frictionless surface of the set of all locations and skidding off in every direction. Then how can the idea of simple identity be meaningful except maybe as a kind of (pre-multiple, pre-gradual) fact of something, an "event" like a mishap, stumble or interruption, content (proto-content) bumping into itself and deciding something else is there—the creative instant Goofy, ancient half-animal eyes wide with terror and delight, reenacts when he falls into a keg of nails and says, "Gawrsh!"? If you try to think of self without content you tend to get down to something revealable by content and which, if not multiple, you imagine linear like the void in children's landscapes always extending past the margins but surrounded, in each case, at each moment, by a single intention—information strung out like laundry or birds on a wire. Especially on a snowy day you wouldn't be able to see the wire, just discrete lumps of birds against the sky. They aren't your ordinary allegorical birds simply standing for the soul; they are more like points through which it passes. They are perforated, you might say, each grasping identically this fact—the space where the wire runs through—and sensing his grasp as the fact of his location, the definition of it. Only the sense of location identifies each bird to (thus constitutes) itself and this sense is uniform at

every point along the wire so, although any member can differentiate among the whole gathering, he cannot fix himself beyond the self-defining/locating fact of his grasp. In effect (maybe even in principle) each grasps the entire length of the wire, the complete fact of location as it extends out of sight across the fields to wherever it goes.

Where does it go? It seems to go anywhere you can think of, stringing the possibility of you right along, rotating the possibility between past and present. How strange that even the direction of distribution, in terms of past or present, should seem arbitrary, disoriented, forcing you to imagine diagonals (here you are as your neighbor's ances-

tor); is the analogy so flexible because it's weak or has event space, in spite of ways to talk about it and the unrecognizability of events, combined with geography to the extent you can only barely sense the difference? Think of the wire at night, icy, birds here and there along it, so cold it's like a superconductor, identity throughout, sparrow essence above the snow. The wire has to be the principle of location, multiplicity, so there's not much you can do toward describing it. It's a way to store the question how can there be a here and now (exactly by definition); but is there no way to gain some leverage on it? At the instant Goofy is struck with his terrible realization, as content slaps into him like a wave, humanizing him briefly until he sinks back below the threshold again to wait for the next comic moment, isn't there a point where straddling both states could be possible and a kind of information might leak across? Or, if not (by definition), does the event leave ripples, echoes like residual background radiation? The form of Goofy himself, for example—the personifying mechanism of recognition allowed to root and bloom in the object, transform it and grow wild, a demonstration (like immunosuppression in laboratory animals to reveal the normally undetectable effects of everyday bacteria) that everything carries the possibility of being you; everything is meant by admitting it might be you, by the (ordinarily) brief imitations, little reenactments of the deeper fact.

[Previous installments of David Searcy's *A Trip to the Sun* may be found in *Temblors* 1, 4 and 5.]

Susan Howe

from A Bibliography of the King's Book; or, Eikon Basilike

Making the Ghost Walk About Again and Again

ON THE MORNING OF 30 JANUARY 1649, KING CHARLES I OF ENGLAND walked under guard from St James to Whitehall. At 2 pm he stepped from a window of the Banqueting House, out onto the scaffold. He was separated from the large crowd of citizens who had gathered to see his execution by ranks of soldiers so his last speech could only be heard by the attending chaplain and a few others with them on the scaffold.

The King's last word "Remember" was spoken to Bishop Juxon. What Charles meant his chaplain to remember is still a mystery.

Philip Henry witnessed the spectacle. He later wrote: "The blow I saw given; and can truly say with a sad heart, at the instant whereof I remember well, there was such a grone by the Thousands then present as I never heard before and desire I may never hear again."

The gentle and stoic behavior of King Charles I at the scene leading up to his beheading transformed him into a martyr and saint in the eyes of many. His fate was compared to the Crucifixion and his trial to the trial of Jesus by the Romans. Handkerchiefs dipped in his blood were said to bring miracles. On the day of the execution, *The Eikon Basilike, The Pourtraicture of His Sacred Majestie in his Solitude and Sufferings*, was published and widely distributed throughout England, despite the best efforts of government censors to get rid of it.

The *Eikon* was supposed to have been written by the King. It consists of essays, explanations, prayers, debates, emblems and justifications of the Royalist cause.

Printers of the *Eikon Basilike* were hunted down and imprisoned. But in spite of many obstacles the little book was set in type time and again. During 1649 fresh editions appeared almost daily and sold out at once. The *Eikon Basilike*'s popularity continued throughout the years of the Commonwealth and Cromwell's Protectorate.

The *Eikon Basilike* is a forgery.

At the Restoration, John Gauden, a writer who was also a bishop, claimed authorship. He was advanced to the see of Worcester in recognition of this service to the Crown, because Lord Clarendon and Charles II believed him.

King Charles I was a devoted patron of the arts. He particularly admired Shakespeare. His own performance on the scaffold was worthy of that writer-actor who played the part of the Ghost in *Hamlet*. The real King's last word "Remember" recalls the fictive Ghost-king's admonition to his son. The ghost of Charles certainly haunted the Puritans and the years of the Protectorate. Charles the I became the ghost of Hamlet's father, Caesar's ghost, Banquo's ghost, the ghost of King Richard II.

In 1649, two months after the execution, John Milton was awarded the secretaryship for foreign tongues to the council of state of the new Commonwealth, in recognition of his pamphlet "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates."

The *Tenure* is a defense of Regicide.

The chief duties of a Latin Secretary were the drafting and translation of international letters and treaties; Latin was the diplomatic language and was used in diplomatic correspondence. While Walter Frost, the general secretary, conducted most general correspondence, Milton was expected to intellectually bolster the new and struggling civil authority. He examined state papers, investigated and interrogated authors and suspected printers, and as a "diligent . . . partisan, controversialist," composed several crucial political tracts for the Council of State. If Royalists represented the killing of the king, in sermons and pamphlets, as a secular rite of passion, Milton argued that Charles had been an ineffectual leader,

"a deep dissembler, not of his affections onely, but of religion. . . People that should seek a King, claiming what this Man claimes, would show themselves to be by nature slaves, and arrant beasts; not fitt for that liberty which they cri'd out and bellow'd for, but fitter to be led back again into their own servitude, like a sort of clamouring & fighting brutes, broke loos from their copyholds."

Charles I had been a threat to true Christians who followed their intellectual consciences as informed by God, instead of performing empty and dogmatic church rituals whose purpose was to support a corrupt state. Milton defended a new rationalism, *instrumental reason*, in the violent revolutionary struggle.

Eikon Basilike means the Royal Image. *Eikonoklastes* can be translated "Image Smasher."

One of Milton's chief points of attack on the *Eikon* concerned "A prayer in time of Captivity," said to have been delivered to bishop Juxon, by Charles, on the scaffold. The prayer, a close paraphrase from "no serious Book, but the vain amatorious Poem of Sr Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*," was the prayer of a pagan woman to an all-seeing heathen Deity.

A Captive Shepherdess has entered through a gap in ideology. "*Pammela* in the Countesses *Arcadia*" confronts the inauthentic literary work with its beginnings in a breach.

Fictive Pamela's religious supplications were a major issue in the ensuing authorship controversy. Scholars and bibliographers accused Milton of "contrivance" in procuring the insertion of her prayer among the King's last devotions in order to ridicule the authenticity of all the gathered notes and essays. The charge has been confirmed, and denied.

In 1680, an official edition of the *Eikon*, sanctioned by King Charles II, subtracted all the prayers. Other post-Restoration *Basilikes* and *Reliquiae Sacrae*, some dedicated to the new monarch, included the seven prayers with Pamela's leading the file. A great deal of energy and confusion has been expended and expounded; by bibliographers, scholars, poets, critics, and other impassioned crusaders including Samuel Johnson, Christopher Wordsworth, and William Empson, over correctly identifying the first edition to carry the "forged" prayer.

The *Eikon Basilike* is a puzzle. It may be a collection of meditations written by a ghostly king; or it may be a forged collection of meditations gathered by a ghost-writer who was a Presbyterian, a bishop, a plagiarizer and a forger.

Eikonklastes is a political tract. It was written by the poet-propagandist-author of "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Comus" and *Areopagitica, a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, To the Parliament of England* while he was acting as the Latin Secretary, a government censor, and an image smasher.

But it is the *Bibliography of the King's Book; or, Eikon Basilike*, by Edward Almack, that interests me. My son found it at one of the sales Sterling Memorial Library sometimes holds to get rid of useless books.

Almack's *Bibliography* was published in 1896 in support of Royal authorship. Francis F. Madan's *New Bibliography of the Eikon Basilike of King Charles the First, with a note on the authorship*, was published in 1950 in support of John Gauden. A *New Bibliography* is still in the library.

Webster's Third International Dictionary says a bibliographer is "one that writes about or is informed about books, their authorship, format, publication, and similar details." Is he or she supposed to compile a set of authoritative texts that can withstand the charge of forgery, the test of time, the timeliness of libraries?

A bibliography is "the history, identification, or analytical and systematic description or classification of writings or publications considered as material objects." Can we ever really discover *the* original text? Was there ever an original poem? What is a pure text invented by an author? Is such a conception possible? Only by going back to the pre-scriptive level or thought process can "authorial intention" finally be located, and then the material object has become immaterial.

Here is a book called *The Bibliography of the King's Book; or, Eikon Basilike*. Edward Almack meant to describe each material edition, but the vexed question of authorship kept intruding itself.

Pierre Macherey's description of the discourse in a fiction applies to the discourse in this bibliography: "sealed and interminably completed or endlessly beginning again, diffuse and dense, coiled about an absent centre which it can neither conceal nor reveal."

The absent center is the ghost of a king.

C * R and skull on covers

MADESTIE

More than Conqueror, &c.

Published by Authority

King on the binding

1 blank leaf

The lip of truth

A lying tongue

Great Caesar's ghost

She is the blank page

writing ghost writing

Great Caesar's ghost
Through history
this is the counter-plot
and turns our swords in
The First Revolution
The Foundation of hearsay
Horriying drift errancy
A form and nearby form

In his sister's papers
they often had discourse
The King was trusting
the Kingdom brambles
Printing an edition
of the *Eikon Basilike*
Insertion of prayer
from Sidney's *Arcadia*
The *Eikon* is an imposture
True image antic sun
Amateur such as the King
Saying so I name nobody

Et Chaos & Phlegethon
Mrs Gauden's Nar-/
rative
attributed in Primitive
times to Jesus Christ
his Apostles and other
papers Regicides took
The Dutch Narrative
and Perrinchief's *Life*
Harsnett's *Declaration*
is a weapon

Real author of *The Lie*

"*The Lie*" itself

fallible unavailable

Thin king the Personator

in his absolute state

Absolutist identity

Imago Regis Caroli

Falconer Madan's copy

the Truth a truth

Dread catchword THE

the king exactly half-face

Face toward the Court Silence

Scope of the body politic
Mock alphabet and map

Daniel's way was to strew ashes
Ashes strewn on his path

Daniel's way Daniel's way
Archaic Arachne Ariadne

She is gone she sends her memory

In the hall Justice Justice
Parable embedded gospel

upheaved among remembrance
Unfinished four last things

Blunt to a wild of nothing
face the Face of the Court

Truth is property and lie theft

Lesser marginal writers

Unutterable gathering darkness
Fragmentary narrative enclaves

Metaphor of a sea raging
Stormy frontispiece
and striking capital D
Threat cord flung
undone in Chalk County
Oak cleft to splinters
storm in the Storm itself
Turned to watch Wrath
Eating our bread heads
we wonder under water

Ever after the monarchomachists

The regicide hack

Robert Robin

piled up syllogisms

Opening words of *Patriarcha*

Sentences in characters

Judges and ghostly fathers

The First during his captivity

Omitting the *Life*

almost hissing his regality

off the stage Untruth

SALMASIUS. His Dissection
and confutation
of the diabolical rebel
Milton's book *Eikonoklastes*
So bewitched by him
I am afraid of him

View of magisterial authority

Sound of the hammering

Mask Visor disguised Representer

To walk side by side with

this chapter was Tumult

sacrosanct veils liturgies

First defender of Regicide

Any authority all authority

In Darkness School distinction

of one fact for one fact

What is salvaged saved

exempted that falls Protector

form of figure of thought

Came petitioning to levellers

People under the scaffold

Refusing to be on the scaffold

Vast space where restless

half-forgotten mass migrations

Even the kings of Judah failed

The large cloud breaks open

Style of the Regicide tracts

Fanatical swift-moving authority

Perpetrations

Thirsty after fame
in the very Eikonoklastes
he was the author Enaki
 aulter

Bruterar

Impartial Scout
Mercurius Politicus
Melancholicus

Who is not a wild Enthusiast

in a green meadow

furious and fell

Arriving on the stage of history
I saw madness of the world

Stripped of falsification
and corruption

anthems were singing
in Authorem

Father and the Father
by my words will I be justified

Autobiography I saw

Legal righteousness makes us servants
All good hearers

Opposers or despisers
Night page torn word missing

The family silence
gave up the ghost

I feared the fall of my child

resting quietly with some hopes

as a bird before any

This proclamation, beginning 'Charles R. |
Whereas John Milton', is dated Whitehall,
13 August 1660; the text is mostly in
black letter. Milton, described as 'late
of Westminster', is said to be in hiding
to avoid trial; the three books are to be
handed in, or else seized and publicly
burnt, and never to be reprinted. The last
line of para. 2 of the text begins 'brought
to Legal Tryal'. This edition is Steele 3239.
with coat of arms, no. 67, measuring I15/16 x I11/16 in.
And three other copies. Bodl.

Election-Vocation-

Justification-

Cape of wind wreath

fame out laughing

Seated on cloud

Seacret drift

seacretly behest

the dear She

comes to all Guilty

all circling

Eye window soul body

Pride cannot bow

Ariadne's diadem

zodiac helmet belt

A poet's iconoclasm
A bestiary of the Night

I am at home in my library
I will lie down to sleep

A great happy century
A little space among herds

In the High Quire

We that are distant

Paul also was Romans 7

and Ezekiel 36 I will take away
the stony heart

C

in the ace of fame

Spelling surname speechstone

intent
thuriel

Maii printed so

second i falls below

the line

Maii dropping below

the line

"I Become Friendly With Mr. Dick"

'Do you recollect the date,' said Mr. Dick, looking earnestly at me, and taking up his pen to note it down, 'when King Charles the First had his head cut off?'

I said I believed it happened in the year sixteen hundred and forty-nine.

'Well.' returned Mr. Dick, scratching his ear with his pen, and looking dubiously at me. 'So the books say; but if it was so long ago, how could the people about him have made that mistake of putting some of the trouble out of *his* head, after it was taken off, into *mine*?'"

He was sequestered pursevanted plundered judged after sheet 0
Upon authority and extreme rabble cudgel time of Rebellion

aftershock of His own peculiar spelling founded on the Scottish pronunciation
 iconoclasm in *Leviathan* So falls that stately | Cedar
Aftershock of iconoclasm

18th in Wagstaff's first list

utmost

light
mote

Spire

TheFrom
evry
all edge

Illimited
Ariadne led Theseus in every

let down perceptive

Minos' from Sphere
daughter Thread pierced
Thought Trace Plight symbolism
weft

daughter
SWADLIER *Centuries* I No
rhid

To her Face

Fire

CLOATHE

fate

distant

the lay

Island place

deathless

Place they stood on

Stars

away who remember

Flood Crown

she wore

and the sea

up

Eyes

to

Fire

Dominant ideologies drift

Charles I who is "Caesar"

Restless Cromwell who is "Caesar"

Disembodied beyond language

in those copies are copies

K CHARLE | WORKS | VOL I

K CHARL | WORKS | VOL II

Number of Prayers, 3.

pp. 1-102 ending "FINIS"

It has remains of light blue silk

strings

I was going away, when he directed my attention to the kite.

'What do you think of that for a kite?' he said.

I answered that it was a beautiful one. I should think it must have been as much as seven feet high.

'I made it. We'll go and fly it, you and I,' said Mr. Dick. 'Do you see this?'

He showed me that it was covered with manuscript, very closely and laboriously written; but so plainly, that as I looked along the lines, I thought I saw some allusion to King Charles the First's head again, in one or two places.

'There's plenty of string,' said Mr. Dick, 'and when it flies high, it takes the facts a long way. That's my manner of diffusing 'em. I don't know where they may come down. It's according to circumstances, and the wind, and so forth; but I take my chance of that.'

The Personal History of David Copperfield, Charles Dickens

S i l k

symbolic

Praeparative

faith

Ariagne

Idman 'satter

the s e t

Penned

stars

ARACHNE SUN'S

deft ray

through s h i e l

She

was Tshhrieeldd

winding trace

weft

wool

Cloud

soft

threada

twist

David C. D. Gansz

The Sentencing

(*anima christi; anima mundi*)

Part III of *Millennial Scriptures*

"Nay", said the voice, "but there shall come a man which shall be a maid,
and the last of your blood. . ." — Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, 1485

I

Int'r-fear temerity; In the city four-
corn'red, con-fused w/ blackness noon-
day's jet. Piscat'ry, the cryst'lline
bed behung w/ snow's silv'ring thing
manglt holy. Lasts while't you're the
symb'l. Nev'r a comm'n'r thing'll be
body.

*

Dispelling mercy less introversions
graph't the light'n'd wince. Must that
happ'ns ev'ry thing. Of the sweet
sighsat the time to disord'red lust
lay laden nigh. Noyous recumb'nce the
frowsy misease. Endited withal an hideous
host.

*

Dwindlt the quick'n'er to hungry quartz.
Terrene, comminglt the feeblest.
In-amour'd twixt hold'r'n' held,
shad'wy exultation's tawny light'nkindlt.
Warpt the light-womb things be, come
what they're. Here-lies-the-heart'n
tuberose.

*

Perish, the thought'n lusty april.
Be-mused, for yr flesh, hungry.
Coldspoke th'earth a duty of secrecy,
stitious. Apt, the mainstay brast.
Abide'n a bale the burning, slow.
Where yearsint'r-vene, 'ours seem'd
short.

*

Enwrap't of light
the point, wistf'l.
Ensapph'rin'd the
bloody unfruitf'l
riv'r. Unwint'red
fire's native speech,
mantling bright. Wits
re-sign'n'n ard'nt
slant. Accurst
th'eyebeams' dis-
dains've thriv'n, sub-
stantial shadows
accident.

*

Wint'r less the knotty
casuistry. Terr'r,
shift'r of shapes,
shorn the fair'nto
unknown. Retail'd'f
the bridled tongue,
taciturn. Fructified,
somb'ring appeals less
chatt'r'd the solace.
Immort'l the sequences,
pro'n' con. Exception'l
garnisht the

seed.

*

Of souls'n' snow
a ghastly grimace,
o'er that filthy
sludge. The city,
solit'ry, sitsin the
land of utt'r bleak-
ness. Fixt'n wint'ring
a second tost'n the
quiv'ring, starless
air-death. Tonguing
thievish fire to whiten,
we snuffle a rav'nous
birth.

II

Whenas torn all inwordly, right-
wise painsunfair skin grimly.
Of in-itiative robb'd the summ'n'r.
Yearn-ing, torments manifold
sore. Gramercy, this quitt'nce.
Mysterious handsight torches
sculpt.

*

Deeply, belowsense feeling. Gaunt
per-usal the tanglt seas'ns moulting.
Abasht the fixt yrs befell a pricking
slaught. Of burning hesive, at th'age
irretrievable. Poignant, co-
agulates wield the creaturesin
habit.

*

Birling mighty shadows the dead

northt. Green'd w / human voicesweep.
Sur-rend'red the phys'c'l too, ideals'n
ideas. Wond'rs per-form the mauling
hoursmelt; per-plext the high ascents
sur-vive their de-struction
objects.

*

Brindl'd'n' dis'ndow'd, the fresh
crackt em'r'ld per-fect blood un-
drunk. Missibly wond'rments, drowsy'n'
blithe, miraged. Curdl'd re-semblances
fum-blingly fixt. Comminglt'n pulsing'n-
groov'd grave citizens
spring.

*

Mischance, hard'r'n
stone the marv'ls
maim. Con, sequences
seacold. Seen the
briar a prickly
thing the wince't
objects exhaust'd.
Red serp'nt hold'rs
saw, elms regicidal.
Whett'd up on them
selves, visuals eat
the sin-eat'r's
sins.

*

Expresst a candescent
ser-vice, nift. To ward
offences landshut the
hedge of mist. In-
suff'able crept the
condemnation, to fire

hard'n' fast. Forceen'n
appetition'n dis-contents
urbanic jointure. Of'n
tensions writhe'n
stillfall'n mast'rd'm.
Chide un-dead,
se-quest'red.

*

To falsity, foreign'r
shoot to root. Seagirt,
the mundane frenzy's in-
numerable. Of women the
thoughts'll tremblingly
learn. Waitsintemp'ring
pivot the pilot-point.
Washt'n unlim't'd
nurtures the spoil.
Awaiting a hand'n' a
wrist the monstrance.
Slept'n the darkness a
honing.

III

The widow'd city'n black, all new're
made things. Ravisht th'ice'n'
be'n a ransom'd wrld. Missl'd in-
sate cravings in-here, a sev'ring
flame misled. Palsied off springing,
roseal injurieslight. Fetchtafar wrds
rejoind'er.

*

Nev'rmore scars unfor-getting the wound.
Envir'ns th'und'rgloom, dockt at'naudible
ports. Misspoke wisd'mry stonerec
hedgeroses. Waxing, floribund,
lyric'stripling. Attimes'n'n places

par ticulars pression em-
braceable.

*

Leg'nd'ry flagstones rareified. Alone'n'all
one, inawood desolations abominate.
Brevities int'r change to mis take
the laudable stand'rds. Light in-
sep'rables distance, citif'l
finities. Waking's anxious silence,
reveal'd.

*

Dauntless the caustic pillory.
A woef'l dint this comp'ssing
priv'ty. The witting sleights
drave tomorn. Scabrous the flame-
col'r'd wat'rs embrace. En-venom'd
the cunning tongues to'er her
sorrow.

*

The bodice'mbellisht
ashambles. Misshapen'n
hesion times've
been. Loves be-
longing to love,
affright to sav'r
life. How'sit to
darkle the spectacle,
motley. Scores drama-
tic, the formbeam a
rosy fatigue. Bemockt,
the slovenly vow'ls
askew.

*

Starr'd w/ jew'ls
the fissures in
vis'ble speech.
Tremulous dissuasions're
burd'n'd'n' curst, of
time's-twist'd hand
th'appalling vigilance.
Restive the shooting
shafts of day're'f
may'em stript.
Moulden, the writhen
love throes
tremble.

*

Illimitable torr'nts
of grace throng
floreate. Smitt'n'n
nibbling heat,
unquencht thirst's.
Foliage lept.
Second'ry things,
dishev'll'd, stand in
dividually. For you
a melting we've, so let's.
Inebriate raptures
yield light'slivering
thaw.

IV

Talking leaves of wood'n ashes
the carrier. Stupefied to fiery
seeds by squint of mind sown. Fung'l
the grave's mounding mournf'l. Mis-
appears'n lineaments, bound'pon life,
the child'f abom'nable desolation the
city.

*

Nev'rtheless wreckt,
aband'n the barb'rous
trackless forest,
civilization. De-
position fraught, mis-
carries the maid'nking's
newsin's exult'nt.
Swindl'rs stressed on
the misspelling, pliant.
Engend'red, a child'n
doorless rooms gruesome.
Vaticinations ab sent
themselves.

*

Spectr'l stupor the frost con-geals,
an hindr'nce offrank'n' modest blood.
Brimming con-sent untenable tongues; con-
fess camp's onl'nd drown'din flame.
Dwell, w / 'n yr dust of sub stitution the
child. Per-missions landage
made.

*

Wrappt'n flame'n
living cores'ffire.
Twain love's noose'n
the healing gaze.
Wish'er well'n' pass
of the window the
lady; charity's flame,
vesture'f humility.
Centr'l the christa well
come's the beautif'l one;
To be a tree, say. Be,
dismemb'red, she who
can't.

*

Widewhere, dight w / truage ill-be-
stead. Un alt'r able of the shadow
queen the lofty desert. Askance, the
heartsrule'sinviting light. Reft, per-
chance wat'r's daring, gallant. Lavish,
'ours trill'd languages all'er heart
knew.

*

Assuff'rance'n glances,
deeds wrds hide. Furtive
thresh holds' lib'rtinages.
Shafts of wond'r un-veil'd
truth eclipt. Vapour
eyesdeliv'r'er god'n'
death'n' life, you're.
Scortcht'n middleearth'n'
plosive, shadowless
westoxications. Re-
create the daylight
carv'd; deicions
monu-ment'l.

*

Sapt from th'organ-is'm a thirst
to satiate th'em'r'ld orbs. Neth'r-
most, of pard'n the pass, trundling
aery bodies dispatcht what's passt.
While burning tombs marcht'n' bleed
-ing trees quencht, the cup'sit's
content.

V

Bathed'r ears a
hand, some voice.
Rightforthness

free'nformation.
Sleep, lashtto rabble,
whelms erect. The
naming fixt yr
writt'n'n vapourous
air, pacific. Anima-
tronic beginnings of
dread sew love's bed.
The burning's achiev'd,
premorbid.

*

Per-suasions be fall
a smutching, intro-
versions pieced of
gold'n chess. Deftly
charm'd, th'un-
ruly el'ments red-
ness calls. No easy
target's pestilence'n
the wrld of hands a
seas'n'n' a knife.
Danglt'n flight'n
epistle to the
proximate.

*

Vague, crim-son in
tuitions ran sack
vigi-lance for fear.
Chemise a-versions
out of mindsight
straight a way.
El'ment'llattices
inmost foil. Wat'r-
bridges fail, the
deceit'd machinations.
What might'vebeen

volutions, mariolatrous,
punctuate.

*

With history's scribbled wrath, adhesive.
Per happenings fast and eerie
swirl, substantially void. Crept
the partial gratulations, clamorous.
Jittery sprinkles as well, fleet the
wrung foibles smart. Tempted, prehensions
decide.

*

Jarring reliquary rainments, venerable
recompenses quit. In sections
vertical counsel take. Sumptuous
infinite moments vulnerable. Lustreless,
laden with persecutions wrest sub
versive. Nightbound mercifuls
stray.

*

Budding, tastes bequeathed yonder the freshest
grave's breath. Sotted girding filcht a
mensurate plow. Thistling eremitic stench,
a pang for saken in difference. Swept, a
mused demonstratives must be ere long.
Surances inhibit to enter tain
dismay.

*

Concealed by habit's lifeless hand,
the blemish of earth. Bluer the
heart, flaming salamander all equivocal.
Panicked, lest it prove comparable,
the bed's burning asunder. 'Tween
final night and primal day a life-eater's

truth.

VI

A shimm'r deceitf'l
trods. Cessation's
a primacy, supine.
To-wit a surefit
comfort, bearable
transience, machined
ineluctable argument.
To the wand-with'red
summ'ry, slow, of re-
call tramming a vert-
ic'l wire of doubt.
So to the sodd'n
respire.

*

Timelessuit'n
pensive fiery winds,
left'nsnared. Behests
vermilion, blazon'd to
be-wilder. Swordbridge,
clusive chasms pur-
gated. Radiances purge
gilt-regal, savant.
Fect'd silage, winsome,
tinged w/ drouth. In-
perpetuities throttl'd.
Ruint gushings forth
dissuade.

*

Amiss'n'ntrancemeant
garn'er, sev'n'n-
chain'd. Dasht'n'-
taint'd scowly
mar distresst.

Forst joint, specious
contracts phonemic.
Wat'r be-striders bash
the bend'd hoax. Purloin'd
a stablisht resilience,
contagion-spoilt.
Enrapture vast
naught.

*

Nerveless, the blust'ry conceal-
ment; a storm offlow'rs flung.
Reelingly a stray'n the staunching
be-reft. Call'dto the so-much un
said left'n'r lips the name, piti-
less. Larches denuded a fession'l
maul.

*

Per-use the red-action hind'rance
con-genit'l. Placed'nto rusht the sect-
ioning gathers. Dwelt'n the unkempt
verve begem. A mast'ring of strictures,
talkt'nto grave'n direst'nce. Rem'nents,
the dying scar-let's no ord'n'ry
bright'ning.

*

Chary, the shapeshift'r usen'to.
Missaid the daring kiss. Child
offortune's wheel bestead'n nouriture.
Vocative magic of sympathy, lack
lust'er. Issues, forth'n the days
last. Helianthic rememb'rances
anglt.

*

Lockett sensate, lacklustre spectacles
shewn. Singly pinn'd the singe-eye
foils, restitute lubrican'ts pun-
gent. Burning of hell, lamps're
way before the gate. Inwells'f
sombre trouncing the sieve-hand
vict'ry.

VII

Intrusting skin awake-
ful textured the re-
joice. Wood-bound,
glist'ning fragments
innight, detachm'nt
where's pourous.
As motion's quick'n,
to sound in flect
this. A stone crux'n'
leaden the singe.
There's moisture'n'
brought to the callous
sanding's.

*

An arm'ry of tortured
soil the mastiff.
Relent-less, a crowning
of ex-plicit stares.
Repose'f'l, the sectioning
reticence gath'rs.
Unchart'd, the questioning
tubers return. A
chest-fault writhes und'r
clocking, so. Sickly the
twice-born resurgence: Un-
timely the twist-fallow'd
corn.

*

Wheretobe, so-call'd,
witness; The moon'son
spasms periph'r'l.
Bespeaking, softly,
sigh'd re-joind'rs,
demanding. Over
tak'er''nobled, kept'n'er
flesh to perceive'n'
believe long enough.
Resemblt a finding,
libations. Mirrors'n
flame, no shadow
cast.

*

Consanguinity solarized, as-cend
the living throne. Secret's two
partners, time's a flame'n w/
his-tori-cities stand. A
necess'ry balm, to be this woman.
Replenisht, chaos' cruciform
anguish.

*

Rupturedin'nsorceled emanations,
mortified. De-ceast to be the touch-
ing mem'ry quipt. Proff'r'd the
blooming spurge'n mixt yr jilt'd.
Stranglt w/ decalogistics worshipt.
Stoppt'n'r tracks w/ faith the lady
we.

*

Speechless as the wood'n' wound,
transhumanized limb'r'n' nimble
stript. If'tweren't for sens'tive
blood mens kiss the taste offor-get

fullness'n' death. Splay'f the voice-
less bush the coat'd w/ poison lips
whet.

*

Riskt'ntincture the pulsive beatrician,
thrift'n shewing. Horizonseventually
out-of the moment passt. Naught
creat'r yr'f terr'ble aspect lord.
To die't the righttime, palliative
child'sb'ry dis'ntoxicates the
stars.

Aaron Shurin

Continuous Thunder and Temptation

Continuous Thunder

There exist rebels, strange possession joined a conspiracy and in question were arrested. Worthy men consult death—his favorite player—he was a lover of morals—the fine arts of enemy have won him a historian. Write anything for pleasure, one forms a vast stage for his monster forms.

Suddenly one of his most famous roles probed deeper: "condemned to die." When people are using an expression they can still distinguish the actor, the day arrived. He walked and saw a singular beauty in the impersonation of the possible real. To me, believing in the idealization as alive, a fury blended my eyes for you around his head that irrefutable way, trembles has never left me, beams invisible while I look for words but visible to me. And that abyss, on the edge of paradise, does not see the whole audience.

Everyone gave himself up to the voluptuous pleasures of the grave. The noise joined him without a qualm of mourning. Did he feel in his forecasts the striking justifications flouted in his face as I watched the pallor compressed and applauded his fire? At a certain moment his lips flashed across his face, he left.

A few minutes later a hiss awakened; the theater of his mouth fell backward. There is ground for the last time—sweet and large—but none has been able to rise. They say he was almost one of the friends, a discontented attraction; those like myself staggered forward a step. No punishment remained.

Temptation

The stairs of sleeping climbed against the first night with real gods. Communicates with him an imperious air of ambiguous sex. And of his body softness, heavy eyes, vague lips, lifted its head and suspended vials of personages in relief. He sighed, secret insects of his breath hung in the illuminated air, warm, purple, and turned toward him with shining eyes.

His hand spread the contagion of a golden chain—look down as he was, attracting to yourself the sculptor of clay. In a melodious voice of insidious pleasure escaping a greater master.

If you wish, keep your remembering; the second air insinuating vast proportions hung down over his thigh. His hurrying skin representing figures to lose themselves in yours. Recognize that perfumed beauty in another being, you forget your dubious disadvantages.

This one said "procure everything!" Seems to hold their fascination as of voice—huskiness washed with echo—and the seductive trumpet of those pipes reverberated the unbridled air.

A laugh went rolling, bore the indecent names. A certain person drinking his fury somewhere. Still musky with pleasure he lifted his eyes, looking for actual men. In truth I am awake, begging them to forgive me

Laura Moriarty

La Malinche and Before the War

La Malinche

Money was anything that came to hand

She had lips for his eyes

(a violent forgetting that forced return)

Because there was no electricity

A man fucked

Because there was no water

A woman from behind

The children passed into the train

She was spent

The iron money of the Spartans

We wished we were already there.

Pressed between them

Black inside the train. The landscape was red. In the dark
sacristy the heavy lace and peculiar smell of holy water.

The green cross of the Inquisition set into the local pink stone.

The circulation of money

The water was infused with a way of life.

Or buried

Yes I know it the Tacuba. Green and black light. Pink and green
frosting like stone.

The one you don't want to lose

"Of the Series of Masked Aggressions"

Black tea with heated cream in copper.

Or blending with the street where

The lions. Blue tiles. The House of the Inquisitor has balconies
which fly over the street.

As official interpreter she put his orders in the form of
rhetorical suggestions tinged with irony.

He put himself inside her mind

Surrounded by souls. A hundred men in black and silver costumes
play as they scream.

She had lips painted gold

On the day of the burning everything was draped in green.

Charged with being enlightened.

They close around him

The dark air of the city. She was forbidden to come. There is
always a red zone. It means nothing.

Even if "understanding" here means "destroying"

The sound of *geodas*

A white flowered pitcher sells itself. The weaving machine in the
hotel Goya. The carriage carries us through the trouble which is
black and blue.

Were thighs made unstable

Those who take on the manners of foreigners.

Because beaten or flattered

The Annunciation here retitled Temptation of the Virgin.

He would do.

The twisted train on its back. Corn spills out. A dark woman in
her best dress is transparent.

These romantic landscapes also contain elements of desire,
skepticism and anguish.

We found them buried in the remains of the river.

They called him by her name.

From inside a shudder

But coins were not the first money.

The monkey put

We meet again for ices. The color is poison.

"Cortez's Henchmen Contemplating the Demons of the New World"

The dead people at the edge of town. The play in the language of
the conquerors.

A Saint signed by the Treasurer. Every day there was new money.

Because there was no water

She took it

There were no equivalents

The glass coins of Egypt, the knife money of China

She had enough

She had lips for his eyes

A man fucked

A woman from behind

Pressed between them

Or buried

The one you don't want to lose

Or blending on the street where

He put himself inside her mind

She had lips painted gold

They close around him

Were thighs made unstable

Because beaten or flattered

From inside a shudder

She took it

She had enough

Before the War

Aware of planes on a ship
A red car a blue car used
As a ship or something like
Tentacles curl over it
The deck tilts
Seamen laugh
Scramble to escape
I am them
Aware of planes
The current takes the ship
Breaks on its shore
Disguised as an island
The ship is in formation
I am myself again
Aware of planes
maskikovka
Radioelectronic struggle emerges
Blue land / red land
Which intensifies starlight
The viewer does not have to get used to the dark
The pictures are agreements
Targets which are abandoned as
The viewer gets used to the machine
When the land "thinks"
(The war opens the minds of the soldiers)
It thinks of us
The conflict between the invisible and the invisible
doesn't require any special effects
Because there are no obstacles
the room fills with wind
or civilians who don't exist

If necessary our absence from certain grids can be correlated to determine our location in what used to be called real time. But it doesn't matter. The new audio-visual weaponry has changed more than how we see ourselves. We are in love with fear.

It was natural to want to become part of the landscape.

A figure with his radio. It's a complicated room. There is a painting at one end which seems like a reflection. There are garish colors. Otherwise a kind of emptiness. A staircase which may not be usable. A spiral. On television a man says the storm is like a heat machine moving energy from one place to the other.

The Lake

Non-time targets

Listening to those being bombed

You sink up to your knees in impalpable dust

A list of cities

The huge truck was typical of the country

The weather being artificial

Like a windshield of candied glass

An electronic storm began to form in what we called The Lake. There was a sense of whirling about a core. Using your own electricity against you they

They do in fact. They are like a backdrop.

Space recedes in a perfect illusion of perspective which falls apart later when the painter changes his mind.

Longing for more than one view

To exist at the same time

We write about the same thing. I write about the war.

A pink staircase. The too bright sky. The animals are part of the architecture. We have no life of our own.

The attack started as if we might have said anything.

The heightened color affected the action. A body seemed to dissolve.

Night and day on either side of the door.

A man mostly obliterated by a lion.

And he can feel the danger but there is nothing out there,
nothing to control.

Before the war

Airplanes over the snow

They are what is gone

Down they come

Faces made mechanically smooth

The North Pole has been taken

It reminds you of recent news

The planes are unloaded

Before the war is over it's over

The camp of future winters is pitched

The people are uninvolved

The pages are missing

"This translation stiff as my heart"

(They can fly thousands of miles without a stop
until they reach their distant goal)

And lay down like sleepy children

Before the war

Joseph Simas

from That Other Double In Person

I HAVE YET TO GO TO A DOCTOR FOR THIS AILMENT; it is a disease which I cannot explain, and one which will not last in medical terms for very long. The thought of going to an additional third person for a cure—perhaps necessary on occasion—is more often than not a farce of misplaced expectation. For, if I were to go, what would I tell him? and how would he treat this unwieldy mass through which my blood also flows? This paralytic mass I feed is not without hope, and has its moments of concerted and smiling reflection. But it will not leave me alone, and in its indifference to my actions I can see myself looking down on me with no little hint of disdain. Yet there are no other guidelines to follow than this incessant awareness of something like yourself forever and constantly beside you.

This marriage has nearly torn me in two and while your distant accompaniment has been essential there is still a sponge in my head that makes me think of you. I know my attempt to suck you in from the start is blemished. I suppose I could sputter or get lost at the bottom of some big tub but this does little to change the water we are all in. I cannot tell you if I can swim any other way—I do not know.

I believe I am trying to explain a death which is imminently close to me. I cannot admit that it be my death, nor, for that matter, is it the death of someone who is near and close to me. It is the angle of death that is undeniable and frightening beyond that first belief. A pain starts which is of a nature that lies behind the tissue of muscle, and is cold, and has no flower. It neither blossoms but to proliferate an absence of body which is the death of pain. This is where I am not alone.

She had this idea that longevity had a complaint against pleasure and that to prolong her life it was necessary to bring the clock down to its most ingratiating effects. Suffering, though far from ideal, had this virtue that permanence could become an interminable state in which thought was finally one with the measure of time, a measure whose particular quantities bloat, can be filled with interior bubbles, and there in the womb of duration the groping hands invariably fill a humid softness which is the return of all events.

How closely is this question of character taking someone else's body's place? Once one has stripped away the possibility of replacement, when there is nothing left but that which one believes is about to begin prior to stopping, what then can either self *or* other do? How close can this relationship prefigure the example of a

body that has yet to come while nevertheless being completely involved already? Every aspect of this first body is put into all manners of hesitation and involvement in the duration of an event that prefigures its next instance according to one or the other measure of time or line. Nothing works closer to the body than this. How transparently can it be told?

Now in the light of having pulled the glass around the house, there are unpredictable actions having no less than a full effect on my ability to perceive anything at all. Reflected or superimposed, exterior or interior, animal or object, a quality of weather or time unrolls a veil or curtain which accompanies my frail body to an experience of life that dissolves whatever may be in front or behind me while nevertheless insisting upon the necessity of the other to stand resolutely apart.

I have sought distance from the body in order to lessen the interest it bears upon others. Certain means are safer than what might appear to be crude and dangerous. Yet the numbness incurred through these latter means has a tradition of reflection that is selfless and beyond the breach of an arrogant will for kicks. Having others enter this circle of perdition is not for me to decide. Even if I am lost in my need for them, I must have faith in the possibility that someone close to me will come along to figure us out, for only then will I have pushed back the borders of time.

Why is it that the words inevitably beg for another person? that alone, I can find no better solution than the experience itself, however costly? Now I want to listen to the outside.

To know myself cannot transcend the individual.

The paws of the lion are claws; the worm knows where it goes.

There is a crack in the stone.

That ball of twine is for the dance floor.

Will the rose of America please go home. Soviet Russia clap your hands and stomp your feet. Europe open that door!

There is nothing left of my memory of you.

My inner voice is my own worst thought and wishes only to get the best of me. I am nearly done in.

Have poets always heard the authoritative voice, a singular oracle? a clear signal? a radio at full blast? For if they have, I am not a poet. The tones I hear are muddled and intermittent, and while they may describe a line they do nothing to fill in the particular contents of address which are as much the afterevent of thrashing about and lying as of research and honest care. What is it that prods you along, picks you up, leads you to that next instant which is proof of your decay in time?

There is no progress other than this decay, no construction stands which is not a continuous act of preservation in the spirit of some thing or mind. Furthermore, aside from the circumstantial fact of physical presence, we have guiltily created a self who cannot exist without the ongoing practice of confession, as if to say that to relive one's more bothersome efforts were another way of killing time before something else takes place. Yet I have no one to whom I can confess—or, rather, I cannot confess for there is nothing to confess against. There is no model, no higher ego, no law, no other ideal to measure up to than this assumed protection of one's self which is merely another example of avoiding the task of suspending time once and for all.

Nevertheless, I must confess something, if only to get you off my back: I have broken every principle I have ever stated or held at least once. The list is long. To my knowledge I have never harmed anyone physically, though I have been known to level heartless (and hypocritical) psychological attacks on several people. Some of these have lasted for months. I lie easily and with a straight face. It is rare that I am caught. I pretend knowledge where I have none. I have been vain and complex.

What now? Drugs? Sex? I have done just about everything imaginable to escape myself. And there is no question that some of what I have done has helped . . . temporarily.

I remember the dates for the most part. My side would show a fair measure of accuracy. The persons involved could not weasel their way out. I might be kicked and beaten, spit at or insulted, but I would also be taken to dinner, and share in that joyous pleasure of seeing someone's day made. In other words, I do not know the language of these events that relates to the part of them in which I was not there . . . or to which I had escaped.

Now I can hear that same inner voice telling me that perhaps this is after all the easy way out. You will admit nothing and instead hide behind some theory of memory and history you know nothing about. You always back down when the time comes or settle in until you have reached a state of oblivion. There is something on my mind and you must say it!

But I am not trapped. I will no longer listen to that voice which has pushed me into events and then pretended to get me out by allowing me to tell myself what in fact has just been done. I do not want to pretend that I am possessed, no, for then, I think I would be happy. Rather, I am increasingly aware of this interior voice which has never left me in peace. It is bound to bring me down.

I am unfortunately in the position of not being able to complete this body alone. Yet . . . Is there not a chance of solitude in peace? an outside? an undertone? There is something inside which is wet

A coldness of being wet and it aches
Specific displacement which cannot be vanished
But it grows into an undergrowth.
There is no third day.
It has already turned back on itself to face the first
Which is luminous and does not turn
Night was born from the second day.

Its Physiology as Medium

I have finally come to meet myself, face to face, and in the darker nights I nevertheless find another self listening in. In the end, there is no sense in avoiding the virtue of the existence of self which is an ethical double defining the self social through its relations with others, and proliferating against impossible odds. I find that I tend to efface the nobler virtues and never carry through completely with my acts. *Yet I cannot seek through you.*

It is possible to speak to you directly. To address you I write simple handwritten letters with some mistakes. Yet this does not apply to seeking. I can see through you, but to seek I must go beyond what I see.

I must meet the requirements of vision through what I see, but you I cannot see. What I know of you can never be more than a fragment of what you are. Hence our inclination to want to believe in ghosts, folders, and autobiographies.

It must be obvious that I am in the confines of an absolute duty to seek the body of a story I do not know and have only read insofar as I have lived it. Literature, and not life, has given first purpose to my seeking. It is a kind of undergrowth or bed of impossible conclusions I am left to deal with and pretend . . . up to that point of duty when I will be on my own. For when I speak of duty it is not to pretend a higher moral character than what I know I owe to myself, following close upon the footsteps of what I have been told by those who have come before me. Soon enough, the others will take off and leave me to rest in a body which is cold and useless: only then am I certain I will not want to be alone.

O the multiplicity in the key.

There is no comfort in having others enter into the circle of what one creates alone unless they take full part in describing it. The language of the times seems to leave little room for any meaningful description or enactment, if only because it has come to a suitable end with polarities, dialectics, and paradox. That these symbols of the old thought system are more apparent than ever before is both proof and fact that they are mounting their last stand. Irony has come along to help them. But the old system will not last for long. And if we survive its death there is no reason not to be optimistic: whatever language is invented

or recovered will take years to come into its own, and it is only in infancy that the world appears to be permanent.

My crib is language and the emotions I feel are like those hanging toys, little birds or shapes with things inside that shake and rattle as the spring bounces the contraption down from what appears to be the ceiling but which in my life is the sky of observation, the platform dividing the inside of my head in two. On one side I am damp and somewhat dirty, beneath a house on stilts, but fresh of mind and willing to come out and play on a moment's notice; on the other side, it is cold and dark, elevated yet heavy, dense of mind, and I spend the whole night groping around looking for a few words of comfort or light, planning to get down the steps this time without breaking my neck. I never know how I manage to get up there without using the stairs.

I was listening to the wind again, a voice, a person, an animal, a kind. I burrow deeper and deeper into bed as the pressure increases. As soon as I believe I have found a way to live forever the density rises and my head takes the whole weight right out of my body and feels like it might explode. I suddenly want to do everything for everybody and my light feet carry me quickly on the way until I realize that I have all the time in the world, nothing to worry about, why hurry?, yet no longer is there any time to wait around for and I am invariably stuck, caught there until the clock strikes again.

Regarding that theory of bodies which are not of degrees, solids, or liquids, the mind is one thing only and does not exist, as such. Our various angels are personifications in a science of theory we cannot lay to waste, however futile or fictitious. Art is a constant displacement beyond its source. The lake is an example of the small room.

Yet the task of permanence remains the same for every generation. I wanted to tell my father that I had just given birth to him, but it was of no use. I saw him crawling upon the cold and symbolic tiles and I could feel the cold and picked him up and swaddled him in warm blankets and nursed him unto death. The wind carried him away before I had the chance to come into my own—I had never been more than shadow. And it was not until I had become myself that I could begin to understand his absence; this body of water is a lake, this land a shore. It must have been my understanding of him that caused his death in me. I was left alone, knowing that the wind had brought someone else into the house, and it was not him.

The animal made its need a material thing and stood the body up entirely within the frame, positioning each of its members precisely. I could not do without a bed of some sort. I have become painfully aware of finishing and if I do not want to abandon or get it over with, I must simply come out and say it: I am afraid of

change. But I am the dark side of my mistress. And when I inhabit time in this way, I am the white and futile coin of change.

Clear water follows the exact contour

Of any solid placed within it.

This is your skin.

There is no room for your mouth.

You have no external organs.

You are the meat of internal rapture.

You are a muscular thing.

There is no single double to be exposed and depicted as if this were nothing more than what had come to me before I spend the time it takes to draw it out. There is not enough time to be anything more than what is in the durational state of aging, taking care, or simply letting one's life go on despite the occurrence of this or that event. If I want to describe someone I do not know, I begin by seeking those images which give me a picture, however partial or accurate—resemblance is merely a divining rod. In any event, the purpose is no less than to find someone else to converse with, someone who might sit and talk for a stretch without going home, while nevertheless being someone who is of no bother to me at all.

This approach may be criticized, and I may suffer personal abuse for being inept at living in a fiction which can be no more than the creation of an other-world however passionate. But the virtue of attempting what one cannot quite do is that one is forced to enact incomplete promenades that never manage to keep in step with what that other world expects—yet in the course of variously serious wanderings unforeseen trails are found, and the wind finds its way back to the small room.

He dug the hole for me and I covered the small box with dirt. Had he not looked me straight in the eye, I would never have believed he was gone. In fact, I had been talking right through him, and were I to see him again, I am certain he would learn to be content with having nothing left to say to me, at all.

I went to the little window near the back of the room and watched him. His actions were slow and methodical, having the kind of care of someone who is certain enough that his return will only happen bit by bit, finally forming another place of little pieces.

Years later, I continue to be intrigued by what I was able to see in the glass jar of fiction. It is a child's view, a distant scheme without the virtues of congruous laughter and bodily fact. This one had locked the door behind him; I walked toward farther limits, dug a deep hole, and filled it up again. I spent the entire day speaking to myself, arguing with another person, a kind of inner voice or version. I think it was seeing myself in this box, unable to reach beyond, that helped my self

to kill me. I was still under his power, but I began to see that I might have discovered the mirror inside.

I felt something move and stopped to stare down—it was a humming, a near-sound. I felt it moving toward articulation, to speak from me, but I could hear nothing and my mind was blank.

He was asleep when I arrived. I sat staring at him until he woke up a few hours later. He seemed angry and told me to leave him alone. I fixed myself dinner and went to bed without speaking to him.

I know what he meant; I felt a strange thrill in his blank stare. He did not need an answer.

I knew then what I had become.

I never saw my father dead.

The Poem as Filter

There is nothing hereditary about this. Any family in its right mind would disown me from the start and my disassociation would be reciprocal. At odds to accept my fullest behavior, I can no longer imagine a self which is anything less than a crowd of interpenetrating principles above and beyond my wildest sexual relief or social endeavor. If I present myself as a fool, it is merely to keep the numbers down, thereby restraining influence to that spirit which is beyond the simply personal, knowing nothing of the appearance of things. I mention others in an effort to communicate the physical and ephemeral pain that is most acute in the intimacy of vigorous conversation, and I now know that my regard for them has very little to do with what I might desire myself, which is only natural. What we share is the ability to act in each other's space, or to replace each other in the crass destructiveness of jealousy.

The slightest whim can presently sling me for a loop out into the farther reaches of that potential experience I can only describe as dumb, in that it bears my dumbest and most overwhelmed expression. My enthusiasm for the world is contingent upon a willful endurance of the very forces that strike me dumb and to which I give in at least once a day, isn't that really awful. I seek refuge wherever I can find it and am mistaken for being someone with high and lofty thoughts worthy of emulation in some circles; in others, I am simply ignored, or if the sheer power of my presence is forced upon those who would just as soon pay me no heed, then I am insulted and told to leave—if not forthrightly thrown out—and this is exactly as the world should be. I have no room for the dirty motherfuckers anyway, and to those who ignore me, I nearly worship their agreement with the way I've been striving to treat myself for years. Let's face it, I've never been more than an awkwardly gruesome pulp, an idiotically meandering puddle of slime, an

inwardly circular syntax of airy heights with no other substance than that which some analrectic system of critique pretends to invest with sense. What I can't get over is how popular I am at parties or seriously intellectual social events. Someone comes to shake my hand and suddenly I feel my thigh bubble to accommodate the mushy bloke. A friend asked me recently why I'd taken to wearing ties and I said so that I wouldn't be mistaken for soup. Some straitlaced snob asks me to dance and I take off my shoes and spit at her in lieu of a kiss. The jerk next to me faints from the smell and I stomp on his head, cry outrage, turn over the bowl of punch, and slap the face of the host, who is by now on his knees pleading with me to stay: "For you are the life of the party! How shall I placate the figures of discourse?" I threaten to piss in his hat and walk out.

There is no cure for going home alone when it is impossible to sleep without having someone there by your side, for whatever purpose. Sweating and afraid, I wander the streets in such fashion as to draw attention to myself in the face of the gentle ones who might understand yet who fear retaliation from strangers. Trees at night take on those aspects of an upwardly directed body pleading with the sky to let it disintegrate and flutter high in the realm of angels which are memory's ends. In winter, trees explain in naked prose the particular qualities of their defeat. On certain streets, suddenly the sky is unveiled and rolls out before one's eyes carrying the ephemera of liquid that keeps our world from being a dry and barren waste. Here a dark gray cloud billows slowly behind the massively vertical rectangle which is now the center of attention for a number of lives, minutes, seconds. I stop and often experience the vertigo induced only by manmade things, a vertigo caused by the fragility that such great monuments belie, that they might just slump to the ground and die, as unaware of what is happening to them as the person whose breath is gone from one moment to the next for no explicable reason. The glow of the city lights softens the deliberate movements of an inchoate group of wanderers milling around on all sides. I keep my eyes focused just above head level and meander aimlessly, though nevertheless prepared to follow some kind of light.

I know no one word for what I am seeking; there is no one. In fact, I do not know if what I am doing can even be called seeking, for in seeking there is some kind of destination or end or sight. It does not matter whether the words one uses apply to some identifiable detail, fact or object, tag or trademark. There is no need to apologize for the application of general or abstract thought in a world too full of detail to count. Resolution, whether musical or intellectual, impressionistic or obsessively acute, may be the best one can hope for. These words are not meant to function in any other way than to hint at the way all words might function if they were at one with what I do and the way I act. How much do we really need to

know in words to keep the human species alive? Could not most words be replaced by simpler signs and orders? Ones in which meaning would be the same for speaker and hearer alike? Would we be hindered or helped if tomorrow there were no words to speak for?

I have yet to be given a name other than the one you might assume I want, and though I may act evasive my words are as measured as you would care to imagine. In truth, all I want is to sit here in my cosy home on my soft and inviting couch and call out my own little name in an elaborate exaggeration of chant and song; but I am still not tired and cannot sleep. Every time I've tried to sell this place I just end up with another one, twice as big and that much more comfortable. Now I have three cars, a toaster, a washing machine, and a servant couple, husband and wife, who do everything I ask them to, yet who understand hardly a word I say. I let everything drop to do this. I had so much money I could have kept an entire community alive for a hundred years. I would have sent the young blonde girls down by the sea to sing and dance, their long blonde hair blowing in the wind; the dark little boys would have been sent up to the hills with goats to read and study poetry. The second week they would switch and every Sunday there would be a big ball. I'd have gone to all this trouble simply to remind myself that I am not alone and

that the nation of my birth could just as well be a mistake, or rather it should be, given our forms of education.

Who then is left to help name me? and how long will it take?

Please forgive me for all my stuttering, my digressions, my translogical developments. I am certainly not myself and am yet to know who I shall become when I have strangled the hourglass and finally stopped its malicious flow. Not even a speck of dust will get through when I am done with it! If the simultaneity that results is one big flash, then so be it! I will go happily, turning my jealousy away from what I was, away from you and the rest of the world, away from the countless objects of desire that have been leading me around by the nose for so many years! I shall sit here in this chair and forget what is mine, forget that I have or have had a body and trust that whatever is left will express its meaning in tones that are inclusive of all living things and beings.

Little by little you have already reduced me to a half-person, on with it then, and destroy or multiply what is left! I haven't the slightest idea who or what you are—how could I? And what is this motive that makes me continue as if you will let me know at last? I am drawn toward you! Your elegance is as subtle and convincing as a lie, your silken body is a bed of thorns, the gentle knowledge you have of your own powers belies the ruthlessness of your sharply pointed stake. But I am not afraid, and have learned to buffer your threats, translate your

mutually exclusive terms back and forth, create a swelling forth in which you too are confused and thrown about. My approach is near, and though we may never meet face to face, there will be a sign of recognition that neither of us shall deny, a common sharing then, an equally destructive or mending fate.

There is no land in literature or life which is not personal, and it has taken me this long to realize that I belong nowhere other than in the land in which I believe, the one I have been making up for the most part unwittingly. Now, in the quietude of mind that accompanies the experienced traveler, I can steal and protest, pillage, burn, glorify, spiritualize and even represent without the slightest worry that what I am called as a result will do any harm to me at all. The sadness is that the desire to have one's lifework read is contingent upon conforming to the social networks that produce and distribute it. Elementary! Yet here I come to the only plausible proof that a text has no author—and, actually, that seems to be merely beside the point. It is nearly unimaginable to believe that, as human beings, we can do nothing alone. Solitude is the great mirage, self the great deceiver! which is to say, this new land has been written.

There will be banners of Me-dom replacing the corny flags of nations whose designers are worse than publicity clones hacking away at the wheat on a starry night while the red sun disappears cunningly down below the horizon. I can be anywhere at every time in disguises too verbose to remember. The justice of this is that I will have no claims to make at all. No propositions. No statements. No handles, measure or rhymes that are not the result of an instant gone before it exists as the passing of time has been proven to be an instrument of torture and neglect. Here the land will proliferate as many I's as nature can accept and you won't know but a fraction of them, one at a time. In my life outside the creation of this land—for its ground is merely pregnant, and can only afford to feed itself—I will learn to be forgotten once I am gone, remembered only in the instant of my presence, and then just enough to get the task of relating done and over with.

Take these things literally

The screen upon which no memory is left

Nothing to seek beyond your regard

Still dizzy in the ambient crowd

Sought to remain unattached

Finally as oblivious to the clock as possible, I hear a voice coming from an indistinct spot in the crowd: Do you think you are exempt from experience? I come to realize then that the world is made up only as completely as one can imagine it. I had been in waiting for well over a year. I could read no further than up to that point when I began to envision myself in a world slightly other than the one that had just been. And toward some vaguely identifiable largeness. Yet my attention

span is short; of course!, the crystalline shifts of light through the early morning sky . . .

There is nothing quite like being sought after, perhaps no abler character than found; the visage has turned itself inward, its address projected onto clouds.

The first section of Joseph Simas' *That Other Double In Person* appeared in *Temblor* 7 (May 1988).

Craig Watson

Learning To Disappear, White Days, Fourth Wall

Learning To Disappear

THE YEAR WAS ENDING, THERE WAS WRECKAGE EVERYWHERE: cracked eggs, splintered rudders, mirrors and clocks, like sleet from an invisible sky. The season surrounded by its twilight, the great horizon sunk behind a wine sun. He wanted to wake up blind to everything he had ever seen before. But it is not for you to know whether the heart or the brain is going to die first. The difference between life and death is the difference between a journey along a paper calendar and the shadowless landscape of a constellation. The best route is always the shortest.

When someone steps on your grave, sleep explodes. A fine rain began to fall, matching color-for-color the moor and dune and sea. Fire congealed in the vanishing light, first into stacks of brittle iron, then whirlpools of vapor. In his mouth this melting air marked the limits of sense and the precipice of secret thoughts. Behind him everything was something else becoming the same. From that point on, the only direction is out.

Because the spirit absorbs and radiates each circumstance and enclosure, you have to ask yourself were you really born or was someone else born for you? Is this the tomb of another world or a room where a darkness has been thrown over your face by the perfection of history? And what becomes of the vacancy you displace? Have you become this emptiness, looking for an object to swallow? If everything is as it must be, complete and fulfilled, hunger has been replaced by the absence of possible desire.

Inside, as ever, the same difference. First he stood still in the room, hand-in-hand. Then he swam in a labor of strokes, ventilations, grasps. The foreground leaked toward the middle, the picture of duration. He could not exhume it. Thinking is an incandescence that does not grow brighter but only increases in volume. He felt his way along the wall.

In the open air, the unknown died in its niches. Through an enormous landscape light spread slowly, not by the dazzle of distinction, but by its thin sourceless pallor. Familiar shapes bleached away shadows. At the edge of distance he painted hands on his arms and feet on his legs.

One question closes the next. In stutters, in songs, in thickening clouds of whispers, his breath fogged and darkened. His voice ascended through awe until sustaining a dull howl. Across the basin, listeners beat the air; threshing each drift and flutter. Possessed, the message changed: from pearls to ice to poured water, then to echoes within echoes, rumbling in the gutters of ears.

But you don't make a mark. Between pauses, wordlessness escapes. It snows in swaths and collars among the abandoned architecture of waiting faces.

He scattered himself through the blue night air. How can you see what isn't, or what is but remains missing? How do you see without seeing seeing? Or how do you see only your gaze before you? He walked the ridge between two beaches, one above, one below, one frozen solid, the other crusted over. The sliding surf had preserved in layers of salt ice the captured edge of the sea. On the surface, nothing remained of the sprawling, purposeless world.

Ghosts cannot cross water. Isolation unifies, generous to produce so many limits. The end began again, complete though undesigned. The sand moved beneath his footprints, hunted by the seething heartbeat of the sea. Spray smoked. Every sign of struggle was erased.

Later, he was walking back when he found his father's body on the beach.

White Days

a desert
bursting with heavens
bounded by blackened suns
held fast by collapsing distances

a morning
of weak blue sky pressing
the weight of light into a hollow sea
that spills a glass skin over land

there must be one right place
at a time only and all others
stand for that,
equal though elsewhere

Take it.

It comes.

Great streams of water, clusters of stars, melting stone,
hours of night, ground warmth radiating from an after-glow.

Between the relief of material objects, vastness swells and
overflows. A figure attempts to appear in a moment, crawling towards dry land to
assume a shape in the blue phantom light of electricity.

But in this land of disappearance, human vision is complete
whiteness and total dark. Congested eyes adjust to looming solids that, only a second
before, have been air and sky and days. Blankets of sunburn merge every angle,
every
point of the compass, every whirling edge.

mountains in chains
rivers in flood
the wasteland of the sea

echo overflows its shell

gather in the empty egg
a body with no desires, advancing to obey

one as one as any other
one

Repeat the question.

The beginning ends: the ceaseless return of something not
recalled closing a fist on its hollow wake. Full view strikes from the uniform
invisible,
then dissolves in the filmy atmosphere. The next breath once belonged to someone
else; the common fractures its measure.

•

Belong to the obvious absolutely.

Where there is no explanation,
there is no occurrence.

Or a life replaces disguises, wind precedes a storm, fear
interrupts a soft sleep. The burden of waiting is not anxiety, but inevitability.

Darkness congeals from the twisted wreckage of twilight.
Then the shadow disintegrates in the pure black air.

imagination seethes in whispers
 dreaming of separation through
 tightening embraces

voice as ballast
the subject of
 zero
the cusp
 extinct niche

X in the figure of X

try to survive
 to be desired by what is known

needless

point-blank

Fog dream, clinging finger silence.

Everything that moves bears naturally to the left. Memories
and predictions drain the green sky, then wash back as dust in the corners of hills
and
rooms and bodies. A mouth insinuates its sound so passion can hear its breath as
well
as see it. Volume breaks on tongue; a brittle ear continuously whistles.

Another other floats over distance in hollow clouds,
unseeming and indistinct, shrouded in naked and lit by lines of sight waiting to be
occupied. Positives and negatives are neutral, specific to consequence.

If the picture pictures, continually
surrender to it

Walk a slow mile
then rest.

Which is to wait
and which to thicket among

Steps fall fail

 This is not a whole.
Rain climbs the trees and drops through the air again.

 The center has a word for the periphery. A window could be a table, the
result of devoted devotions. Thought is separate from thought, that is, a glossy
horizon.
Smoke doesn't come out of the fire, it is alone among the sound of a stick striking the
floor or a tear dropping out of only one eye.

•

stopped in the ears
 sound of rain sound
 of wind sound of
 outer ocean on a beach

Towering exceptionally high
the sky appears upside down.

A dark spot is ahead: uncertain light trapped between thick milky
forms. The future searches for mirage on the horizon in order to rescue the common
from the spectacular.

the white sound
foam in swarms
pulse of shape

the shimmering uninterrupted
single breath

And love, like language, lives in pauses and distances, where the
hand impossibly floats among its mutilations.

Fourth Wall

room. the solid sponge

•

glass bowl, dark table, curtained bed
property of no trespassing

standing, walking between windows

each configuration of secret

beautiful face. the repeating body

•

examine square inch of skin then

the nakedness deducted

light in its shell

waiting to eclipse

drowning mirror. the familiar language

•

please touch please promise please tell

word smothers breath

inhabit silence spilled from listening

debris of afterthought

clear night. the blue exhaust

•

the constellation of the waiting mouth

still an insolvency between limbs and

the volume of the minutes

desire first the next desire

sleeping hand. the eroding shadow

•

someone is denying:

it is a way of wanting

someone is speaking:

it is a way of giving up

someone is leaving:

it is a way of taking possession

Keith Waldrop

from Transcendental Studies

after this, the cold more intense, and the night comes
rapidly up

o

angels in the fall

o

around a tongue of land, free from trees

o

awakened by feeling a heavy weight on your feet,
something that seems inert and motionless

o

awe-struck manner, as though you expected to find
some strange presence behind you

o

coming through the diamond-paned bay-window of
your sanctum

o

a crimson flowered silk dressing-gown, the folds of
which I could now describe

o

deathly pallor overspreading

o

describing the exact nature of your nightly troubles

o

discomfort at seeing a surface spoiled

o

echo and foretaste

o

the entrance blocked, not only by brambles and nettles, which have to be beaten aside, but by piles of faggots, old boxes, and even refuse

o

expecting every moment to see the door open and give admission to the original of my detested portrait

o

fantastic wigs, costumes, other disguises

o

filling up the width of the street

o

frequent tussles

o

the glitter of silver and glass and the subdued lights and cackle of conversation around the dinner table

o

high-backed carved oak chair

o

I have omitted in my narration . . .

o

in a great raftered hall

o

in a *tableau vivant*, as an angel, sewn up in tights, with wings on your back

o

light your candle and open the window

o

lines of your dress, with a hint of underthings

o

looking up, our problem still unsolved

o

luxurious with heavy silk and rich rococo furniture,
all of it much soiled with age

o

many questions about the stars, of which you gave
me my first intelligent idea

o

meanwhile, the snow, with ominous steadiness, and
the wind falls

o

my weakness for the Ypsilanti Waltz, which I did re-
gard as the most wonderful of compositions

o

neat strip of fine turf edging the road and running
back until the poison of the dead beech-leaves kills it
under the trees

o

never venturing farther than a sandy beach, but los-
ing everything at sea

o

not crawling or creeping, but spreading

o

not just out of repair, but in a condition of decay

o

only a foul trick after all

o

on the face of the judge in the picture, a malignant
smile

o

profound impressions of unearthly horror

o

rambles and adventures among the rocky banks

o

the rope of the great alarm bell on the roof, which
hangs down

o

rough horseplay and quarrels

o

sashes that splinter at a touch

o

the serpent-like form of the seraphim

o

something uncertain at work among the monuments

o

the thing on the bed, slowly shifting

o

till this particular day has passed through all the seasons of the year

o

the vicar, who used to tell us the story of *Robinson Crusoe*

o

waves and their whelps

o

while with a sickening revulsion after my terror, I
drop half-fainting across the end of the bed

o

with a pair of great greenish eyes shining dimly out

o

within the lattice fronts

o

with painted carvings of saints and devils, a small
galvanic battery, and a microscope

Tom Mandel

Ramah

Ours

*ours is a uniform tongue
that we might have one language,
and peace and love
enter in our midst*

*but among the other nations
you will find numerous variants
in what is called one language
for the nations have
already been exiled and intermingled*

*and there is not today
a distinctive people except Israel*

Five Spells

1.

If you spread a name you lose
that name. If you will not study
you will die. If you place
the crown on your head, it is
too large, falls over you,
you vanish suddenly.

2.

In the world on high
you will be questioned on a name.
Because you know the name
you will be transported

to the world on high
to answer questions on a name.

If you have not learned deduction
nat made your own deductions
you will die many times over
manifold painful deaths.

But if you know these things
and answer the questions
put you on high, you may
ascend to the upper world.
Or you may descend to the
lower world and depend.

3.

Now those who ascend
in a chariot of fire
find the fire transparent
and see as it is.

Each thing in its place,
palaces of hail,
torch-stones on the porch,
the spell and the seal.

Binding the heavens to earth
causing the earth to flee,
the universe to tremble,
They open the heavens.

They uproot the earth
from the waters' open mouth;
They water the universe.
The universe grows confused.

4.

The great spell is promised,
but the spell is not preserved.
Letters made the mountains;
a vowel built the hills of heaven;
other letters liquefied.

They are seas, lakes and streams.
Trees, herbs and greenery
are letters, and all planets,
are letters ours included.

5.

are you thirsty? *don't drink.*
are you hungry? *do not eat.*
are you tired; are you drowsy?
stay awake and do not sleep

there are three of you:
one is hungry
a second sleepy
a third is thirsty

hungry sleepy and thirsty

sitting by the side of the exalted one
their complaint rises to the holy one's
ear like a bad smell to nostrils
spirit, demon, shade, harmer, injurer
the name is a magnified amulet
hanging from the holy one's neck
wrapped in words of cloud-thunder
are three she-demons I command: begone

Marble Flames of the Sixth Palace

1.
What I see
in my lifetime,
and others will
see when they
die, set down
in the middle of
the sixth heaven
waters that storm
like hundreds of
thousands of waves

without a drop
falling, leaving
neither time to
live off of, nor
time to die of,
and I don't give
a shit at all, the
marble plates are
tesselated water.

2.

God permits
angels to guide
man to behold
mysterious realms
he enters asleep,
and his sleep
brightens the sun
sevenfold to equal
the bright throne
of the least angel
asleep in the palace
of silence, clothed
in the garment
and adorned before
the open gates
the man walking
through.

3.

Flames pour
mountains of cloud
build from your
mouth, your august
repetitiousness.

Wreathed, crowned, chorused
enthroned in flame
in the presence of the presence
set apart from the servants
your name surrounds a flame

of glowing coals around
the burning of his name.

4.

Annul the decree
undue the oath
remove the wrath
avert the anger
recall the love

set before
the splendor of
the temple
of our awe.

Are you afraid?
when at other times
you rejoice
Do you sing?
when at other times
you are aghast

5.

The beginning of praise.

When you walk down stairs
you must sing the beginning
of the song.

As you sway upon your return
climb the center
of the song.

When you lie down in bed
you must sing the song's
ending.

6.

When I sleep, I praise your hair
and it grows.

The color of your hair is like
the color of the sea if the sea
were the color of your hair;
it is like the color of the sky

if the sky had the colors
your hair has; it wears colors
of the corona the throne of glory
if the light surrounds the head
of an angel attending, present.
One voice one word one mind
and melody.

7.

All vision is of something created, I mean
we see high rank final and divine.

The measurement of every limb most minute
the nose for example receives length
of the little finger when you haul me over
the struggling soil

Nomina Barbara

For "all those who *do and do not*
go down to the Merkabah"

Seated, sunk in ecstasy, in the temple
where he is forbidden, in a city
forbidden to his people, his words,
transcribed by his folk, describe those
gatekeepers of the sixth heavenly palace
who threaten initiatives of destruction
against some, like him, who ascend
and in whose periphery the dimension
of their pupils stands about, wondering
at the formula of his return or
leaning to one another calling for him
to return from the vision, explain
who does and does not go down to
the Merkabah. He seizes upon a
piece of finely combed wool and turns
to the close neighbor of his mind, the
servant whose servant he is, and says,

lie next to this woman, cover both of you
with this cloth and she will declare
the majority with softness to remove
a hair from your eyeball, soak the cloth
in oil and cover me with it and I will
emerge to you all, yet as the tongue
died away from this word "all . . .", he did
emerge, dismissed from the presence
before whose appearance he'd sat beholding
and here spoke *Wonderful loftiness*
strange dominion, Loftiness of exaltation
and dominion of majesty, Which come to pass
before the throne of glory, Three times
each day, in the height, From the time
the world was created and until now,
for praise, which we strive to
study and fulfill.

Do not argue against the great lion after the lion is dead.

Brilliant Star

Brilliant star,
plate of the holy crown,
rock of assistance
whose head reaches
into the clouds,
whose air is
the life of souls,
the tribes have gone up
to your royal city
clothed with nations
and princes,
as her honor befits,
o cloud, bare your
greeting to the stars
that issue forth from you.

Whole from the Parts

To create filled all needed space.
The Infinite withdrawn, redrawn,
creation and the thus-formed
vacant vessel retracted from Itself,

formed into a divine light, hand's
breadth cast in form, open to break
creation's vessel of light on
the vacuum divine.

Too strong, light scattered
strong shards of mixed creation.
Shattered brands light the gutters
where we raise these sparks.

A Revealed Pattern

Having ascended Sinai to receive
the tablets, Moses found God
seated, affixing flourishes of fire
to the letters of the commandments.

*Universal Lord, is not the substance
complete? Why all the ornaments
asked Moses, greatest of the prophets.*

*At the end of many generations, the Holy One
replied, Akiba will arise and expound
heaps of laws upon each stamp.*

"Permit me to see him." "Turn around."

When Moses entered Akiba's academy
and sat at the back of the classroom,
he was unable to follow the arguments;

he was ill at ease; until, about a
certain subject, the disciples asked
the master: "How do you know this?"
"It is a law," Akiba replied,
"that was given to Moses at Sinai."
And the prophet was comforted.

He Was Like

Now enemies pursue us, the prince
whose kind hands were our weapons is gone.

He was like a warrior,
without shield or buckler other than his epistles.

He was like a muzzle on the mouth of our enemies
so that a child might play in his days, upon the vipers' nests.

He was like thorns in the sides of our enemies
that with his passing again are thorns in our side.

He was not afraid to don the robes of sovereignty.

The Bloody Man

You preach vanity and live
lies; you pronounce a name
I do not know. You proclaim
glad tidings you never heard.
Nor will I hear them,
except from you
who always force them
in my face.

You offer my mouth wine
of lies, and you set
truthless bread on my table.

The Messenger

To send a messenger
to the king we asked
you to rent us your horse,
to illuminate our exile
with his understanding,
penetrate wisdom with a name
greater than ours, slaves
of the royal treasury.

Our thoughts are perplexed,
immersed in a pit of innocence

until you proclaim release
and through intelligence
redeem them from ignorance.

Fire of Wandering

Remember to remember and never forget
never to forget. I will come to
an agreement with those absent.

What do you mean by these stones *what do they mean to you?*

The great city you did not build.
The house furnished, full, but not filled by you.
Water in wells you didn't dig.
Trees and vines you didn't plant
are bearing. You may eat your fill.
Beware what brings you out of bondage;
remember what brought you here.

Death of his Son

Let the bereaved father alone,
don't climb all over the tree
whose branches *Sheol* consumed.
Were I a swallow I would fly
to his grave and water its dust
with my tears, with my soul's thirst.
My soul toiled to make my son wise,
would it had rejoiced
in wisdom he attained.
The angels covered his intellect;
would he had been a fool.
God will be gracious and turn
to comfort my soul as he has bereaved it.
He has afflicted and will bind,
he has smitten and will heal.

Do Not Ruin the Foundations

Make our words complete
destruction overflowing with righteousness
pitfalls of their fitful path

I too have briers and thorns
always about me, and I sit
upon a scorpion

Make league to close
up the breach in his people

Seek After Secret Things

of your concern.
The upper worlds are blessed
through the arousal of those below,
by their worship. Whence blessing
flows to causal agents
by the nature of worship.

Olam ha-ba

*Receive instruction from one inflicted with the reproofs of
instruction.*

Feet strayed into the fortified cities
lost in the scape of their streets
opinion where the branches are lopped
off the trees the roots deepen
drink from the invisible supports

I was angered by a tumultuous voice
striking terror into hearts
weakening warriors uprooting mountains
shattering rocks, a voice that rends

innocent souls, that says 'Cry out
all flesh is grass, its goodness
unrewarded as the flower of the field'

I am like the last of summer fruit or corn blasted
before the ear is grown out
like the gleaning grapes when
the vintage is done

Why is my pain perpetual my wound uncurable?
I fled the iron weapons and the sword
the brass bow struck me through

The godly man is perished out of the earth
the upright man is no more

The Master Said

The master said that the dead
will not live
nor shall shades rise again,
neither their honey nor their sting.

Only the souls will hover about
the world
and fly in the air like angels.
The fire of wandering.

These were the words wherein
they quoted the master,
God the faithful King.

Olam ha-ba

Thunderous Shouting of Princes

Find their hands and feet in all the boundaries
where their rod blossoms, ravages and destroys,
dishonors the glorious throne.
Their lips boast in a different language.

But I have not allowed my mouth to sin
against the great Master who lightens
my darkness, sowing light over the edge
of oblivion, growing a tree of wisdom,
lighting up knowledge from within darkness.

Manassah

Through a secret tunnel in the heavens
tunneled by God, Manassah rose repentant
unnoticed by the Attribute of Justice,

smuggled to redemption.

Wine preserved in the grapes
from the six days of creation

Communication Through Hints

*"And I wonder, according to these signs why the Son of David does
not come in this generation of ours!"*

Dwelling in your courtyard
without your knowing about it
I don't have to pay rent.

"The gate is smitten by destruction",
What am I a termite, eating away
at your foundation?
I haven't destroyed anything.

All I deposit in your courtyard
is time, and I remove it when I leave.

I warn you, do not gaze at the moon,
do not gaze at the rainbow, gaze
at repentance profound, hidden from the eyes
of all the vain things the world is
founded on: eyes of a bat stare
at sun and stars. Even whores
paint one another, scholars how much
more so. There is no instrument
of creation, creation is not
by instrument nor is it an instrument
of lives cut off in the pit of Exile.

Exaltation in its throat
but life and death its breath.

Beloved Are Israel

Whoever occupies himself with Torah
for its own sake causes peace to reign
in the heavenly *familia*
and the *familia* here below.

In what way is the soul superior
to the body? One God created

them with an equal hand
in righteousness and wickedness,
why should soul merit more than body?

A man has no portion in the Torah of Moses
unless he believes all things happen to us
as miracles, none are by nature.

Beloved are Israel
for to them was given the precious instrument
through which the world was created.
Still greater love is theirs

in that it was made known to them
that to them was given the precious instrument
through which the world was created,
as it is written: *I have given you good doctrine;*
do not forsake my Torah (Prov. 4:2).

When Sleep Wanders

nectar and honeycomb delight in time
ours, song hymned when sleep wanders
all being testifies to none but one
exalted, blessed back by the blessings
he gave Abraham, Isaac, Jacob's dust

sing the song, the words our pleasant city
signs bound to us bind each to you

Swords of Perplexity

Awake! all the scholars of the day
knock like beggars at your forehead,
at the door of your understanding,
and meditate upon your teachings,
purified like gold.

Like swords of intellect flashing,
like lightning in darkness, sharpened
for the innocent, smoothed
by oil of discernment, through
apple-like words in filigree

the lost of the generation gained
understanding, the neglectful
were strengthened
in the fear of their Creator.

They see swords of perplexity.

The springs of your teaching
watered my soul, who will sweeten
bitter water now, split open
springs in rock? Like a swallow
I fly to your grave, water your
dust with tears.

Affliction & Honey

A wand with milk sawed the honey
of our voice, cried on us. A wand
what laid upon us.

A great hand sojourned in our mighty
flowing honey. We cried its
outstretched arm to land and
flow with us.

Flow with us, God of a voice that
brought us hard our toil and dealt
ill with milk, of a voice of
afflicted fathers.

Our voices heard bondage wonder with
a wondering. The God of oppression
heard our Lord.

Egyptians dealt ill with numbers.
Egypt with wonders. Great milk.
Terrible honey.

A wanders upon this place of our
affliction and honey, wandering
on an ass with arms.

Our toil becomes our honey. Flowing
with bondage, our fathers' affliction
is milk.

Ben Sira

cast the search for profundity behind you
do not be busy with things too great for you
incline your ear to the King's commands
bind them to your heart

Seattle Sepharadi

I hear voices let me out, a room close up,
that slip away from advice inside
my own, and listen as it works itself
into so much talk; as if a king would spend
all day peaceful with his people
and in his palace, one day so passed
with the king follows another. Of course!
It's simple, fine gold shines;
if you've nothing else, there's always
your own eye to nag out. Run faster
to fall quicker. Look farther
and see over your shoulder, then if they
call you a jackass, maybe when you look
you'll see a tail, who knows?
Does a camel see its own hump? Bless
whatever you see, frontwards or rear and
remember: eat baked things while
they're hot. Any questions? Any wagon
you ride on, sing the same song. Sing loud
the load. A blow with one hand,
comfort with the other twenty four. Your
mouth opens, & the next bubble's identity.
Have more means want more. It's
from eight that eighty comes. Or nothing.
Night black; voices sound. A lone word
to the discerning: no garlic
without a skin. Yet drum and clarinet

will pump and the lax not get it. A stone
lodges in a blind man's eye. Mend
what you wear; it'll last you another year.
Food's found on a table, and a mouth that
says yes the same way it says no.
Still, eat the fruit, don't ask what tree
it fell from. Good heart thumps character.
Every rooster sings in its own coop.
Measure a hundred before cutting one.
Run around with interested people, and
suddenly you're interesting. Enter
darkness with a light. Whatever you possess
describes a debt to someone's lack. God will
save you from a neighbor's advice.
Like, he says 'lie down with dogs, get up
with fleas.' but a dog can give you comfort.
Iron is stronger than you are; glass
more fragile. Don't count another's money,
feel his pleasure's yours. Your belly full,
the hungry sound like liars. Much
honey nauseates; free vinegar is sweeter
than honey. However little if it's mine.
A stingy nickel, spent twice. Black
doesn't stay the same either. Laughter
fills a small house, but the palace echoes
a solo voice, In a gambler's house,
happiness doesn't last. Still, out of money
is not broke like no ideas. Who knows what's
in the pot like the spoon that
stirs it? Don't tell the dancer to dance;
don't tell the singer to sing. None to ask
or to answer to. No rest for you here?
A climb alone's better than bad company.
Let me in, I'll make myself some room.
Luck doesn't come, you have to seek it,

and not by following a lazy man's advice.

The cheese is gone and, flies not flying
into closed mouths, it must be that
rats ate it. Chicken scratched out his eye.

I fled parsley, but it grew on my nose. If
you don't wish evil on yourself, don't
wish it on your companion either. Don't
tell a singer to dance or make a dancer
sing, unless you also ask a friend
to loan you the contents of his empty pocket.

The pebble you don't think about breaks your
head. Go where you're invited not where
you think you're needed. Fortune doesn't brag.

A little talk is gold, much is mud. Master
of your speech & make no response?
Now you're talking money in the bank.

Homage

Settled against the feverish hillside,
leaning over illumined gravestones of
saints and heroes in anonymous ground

with grain flying up from weeds into
white sky above the blur of business
the last transactions before we die,

alive we are samples examples dead
of what sketched in bright constants
wondrous tongues and visions like the

handwriting of our day the merchant
thinkers extend in their concentration
leading each other on walks pointing

to gravesites and personages like
thoughts unsuitable written that spill
instead into brainy light and air.

"Negative Solidarity" Revisited — an editorial assemblage

Excerpts from Robert Kelly's self-interview in *Conjunctions* 13:

INTER: How do you feel when you hear a phrase like "Language Poet"?

KELLY: Happy indeed that someone has at last gotten it straight. That's the only kind of poet there is, and the best of the so-called Language Poets (I guess you spell it l=a=n . . . etc.) like Bernstein and Andrews and Silliman restore to us the ancient druidry of poetry, the sheer power of language to achieve the instauration of a new world. I'm an American. Every poet should be Columbus.

INTER: I don't think they'd be very happy to include you in their canon, though.

KELLY: Perhaps not, but it's closer to where I belong than anywhere else. Fortunately, one can live without a school. What school does Jackson Mac Low belong to, or Clark Coolidge, or Kenneth Irby, or Nathaniel Tarn—the school of inconspicuous exile? I'm there too.

Excerpts from Ron Silliman's "Negative Solidarity" as published in *Sulfur* 22:

. . . Like other avant-garde movements, "language poetry" began by identifying its own distinctness, criticizing the naive assumptions of a speech-centered poetics. But, unlike many of its modernist ancestors, "language poetry" also drew *positive* connections between itself and the work of preceding generations, most explicitly to the New American poets of the 1950's and 60s: the projectivist or Black Mountain writers, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance and even the Beats. . . .

Most importantly, both generations have defined themselves as opposed to the bland confessional narratives of workshop verse. . . .

. . . Yet, for the most part, workshop poets have responded to this most recent challenge of their institutional hegemony with silence. . . . Far more vociferous and hostile has been the reaction of some poets associated within or relatively close to the older New American project.

. . . Whatever the tactical advantages that a speech-based line and the distrust of theory held for the New American poets, their operational result was to abandon large realms of the possible. That these positions represented at best a strategic stance and not a fundamental poetics is visible through the many dissents voiced by these very same poets. . . . "Language poetry's" initial rupture with speech, therefore, was not so much a break as an interpretation, a foregrounding of concerns already active within New American poetry.

What we find in the attacks on "language writing," then, is a defense of a poetics that never quite existed. . . .

. . . The gradual absorption of their writing (and many of their writers!) into a rapidly expanding university system, reduced the activity identified with the New American project and rendered it far less visibly oppositional. . . .

. . . [O]ne impact for the New American poetry was the loss of its "outsider" status, and it is to this point that the complaints against "language poetry" has [*sic*]

persistently returned. Outsider status appears to have given some New American poets a sense of cohesion, possibly even identity. The existence of a different phenomenon occupying such similar territory suggests not merely the failure of their revolution, but also that the New American absorption into a heterogeneous "mainstream" could only have been accompanied by a parallel loss of internal completeness. . . . [I]ronically, the stance against "language poetry" represents a ground for a solidarity of its own, as well as for an alternative interpretation of the New American tradition, one that is individualist, anti-critical and speech-based.

The importance and political content of negative solidarity should not be underestimated. For example, the complaint against closet academicism—which subsumes the charges against theory and politics—reflects a larger anxiety over the increasingly dominant relationship of the university to the institutions of poetry in America. . . . Similarly, the critique of the aesthetics of "language poetry," particularly its stance against the naive assumption of speech, individualism or "beauty," reflects a parallel concern that any answer to academic colonization cannot be found at the individual or personal level. Maddeningly for these poets, the sheer presence of theory as an integral, if secondary, component of the "language poetry" project argues that *writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry*.

Well, it's not. Academic colonization is contemporary poetry's fundamental social problem precisely because it incorporates the politics of culture into a process that can only be determined institutionally. . . . Further, in arguing *for* individualism and *against* critical thinking, the poets who attack "language writing" are virtually forced to avoid stating the case for their own collective project positively. . . . Unable to speak the poetics of their own name, these latter day New Americans have at least evolved a genre through which this can be known. That its form, debunking the "language poets," requires that they always focus upon *other* writers, and exactly those in whom they claim to have the least interest, is an irony they may never learn to appreciate.

Dear Lee, 10/7/88

I have reservations about publishing this in *Temblor*, *only* because I don't know how responses to other work look like outside the magazine (*Sulfur*) the other work appeared in. But, since I'm *committed* to the arguments my response exposes and since you have no problems with "crossing" magazine pieces—that is, since that will not be your reason for not printing it—I'll let you decide if the response is cogent and well articulated and if you're interested in publishing it on its own merit. Even if you're not interested in this, I recommend that you contact Levi, because he's written a response to Silliman's piece which, I think, is right on the

mark, as it particularly focusses on the distortion of values articulated in "Negative Solidarity". . . . All best, Benjamin [Hollander]

Dear Lee, 10.20.88

Many thanks for taking my response to Silliman.*

I think you should append an editorial note before the piece, and you should mention that it was originally sent to *Sulfur* and that, for space reasons, *Sulfur* could not take it. I think, although I never heard *directly* from Jed about this, that *Sulfur* did not want to entertain any more pieces on the langs—that *Sulfur* felt they had already allotted enough space to the dialogue. This, at least, is what Clayton told me over the phone, although Jed has the final word on the NCR material. Your note, I think, would be important, primarily because it is an up front statement of my intentions—I don't want to mislead anyone on this matter. The reason I sent the piece to you is because *Temblor* is the only magazine I know which probably has a good share of *Sulfur* readers, and vice-versa. It makes sense in *Temblor*, where it would not elsewhere.

all the best, Benjamin

*You're taking a risk which I see & appreciate.

Dear Lee, 20;X;88

I tried *not* to reply to Silliman's baiting in *Sulfur* 22, but finally couldn't let the smear on Duncan pass. I discussed it with a number of people here—Aaron Shurin, Norma Cole, Margy Sloan, Ben Friedlander, Andrew Schelling—and finally sent the enclosed response to Clayton. Clayton replied that he was sympathetic to it and that he would pass it on to Jed, hoping Jed would print it in *Sulfur* 23. I then received a blistering reply from Jed, accusing me of a long list of abuses & omissions and saying he was altogether against printing the piece for a number of reasons, some reasonable and some not. "Silliman may in fact deserve all kinds of rebuffs," Jed wrote, "but the crucial fact is that he's learned how to play the academic game, and he's got his ass covered."

I do not think that is the crucial fact, I still think this needs to be said, and if it makes sense to you to print it in *Temblor*, please do. Let me know what you think. Sincerely, D. Levi Strauss

Dear Lee, December 7, 1988

Thanks for sending those two pieces, which I'd not seen before. They strike me as their own refutations, but for all of their grumpiness and grim willingness to miss the point, these aren't trash jobs. Levi & Ben at least want to argue the case *for* their aesthetics and I think that's all to the point.

It is worth noting that the original manuscript of "Negative Solidarity" that I sent to Jed Rasula specifically identified *where* I gave the talk—which is how Eliot Weinberger figured that out. *Sulfur* saw fit not to include that when they set it for

the page. I would appreciate it if you could expressly note that—perhaps as an editorial footnote to Levi's parenthetical comment thereon.

Otherwise, rather than simply get into a nitpicky fight with Ben & Levi, I think it would make more sense to respond this way: by publishing Negative Solidarity's companion piece—also presented at the 1987 MLA conference—which not only addresses many of their concerns, but does so in reference to the poetic tradition that Levi in particular seems to identify with.

So here it is: *Poets and Intellectuals*. I think it's in the right ballpark lengthwise. My suggestion would be to run [it] right after their pieces—maybe even to link them on the cover.

Thanks for letting me see all of this. All best, Ron

Benjamin Hollander

A Note on Lyric Contention

A Complement to Ron Silliman's

"Negative Solidarity" in Sulfur 22

I SUPPOSE SILLIMAN IS FUNDAMENTALLY RIGHT: *"writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry."* Any fundamentally sound project—say, lyric poetry—works its grounds of contention and "completion" elsewhere, either through the presence of theory and/or historical context, or via critiques from without and/or within.

From without, for instance, commentaries on the lyric critique what they distrust as the absence of critique within it. They tend to "complete" by exposing, with an aggressively rhetorical vigilance, the circuit which links the lyric to the romantic tradition, and so they defuse the discourse of power within that tradition which, through the lyric, valorizes the self at the expense of all other selves. The lyrical in poetry—a sensibility which is perceived to project the beautiful and the transcendent and the elevation of the individual (heard mostly through melodic incantations of a unified self with only one working vocal chord to utter "I")—comes to represent the dangerous specialness of an aesthetic which lacks a social sense by privileging individualism and therefore, by extension, egotism, competitiveness, and capitalism. It is good that there is a good vigilance in these commentaries which fights these bad things by making more sufficient our understanding of the power structures veiled within an aestheticized lyric. It is good for Silliman to fight these bad things. "I distrust lyricism," Silliman has written. "What is more deadly than a poem which seeks to be told it's beautiful?"

I suppose, however, that the most acutely informed of lyric poems *realizes* this critique from within, from the site of the poem itself, where language interrogates (itself) as it intones what it loves, and where the authoritative speaker(s) at the center of the lyric is suspect from the start. I suspect this realized critique from within the lyric suspends belief in its beauty as it extends it. What is more deadly than writing which keeps vigil over the power structures generating the discourse of the beautiful yet fails to account for the lyric which, in itself, radically questions what it assumes and even promotes—the beautiful, and perhaps more explicitly the fact that it seeks, *as it critically realizes the implications of its beautiful condition*, to be told it's beautiful?

If, however, "*writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry*," then a critique fulfilled from within the poetry doesn't really help because it's just that—within the poetry and not outside it—although it does suggest an "outside" which would make it more sufficient. Perhaps, instead of papers and statements which make theory integral to a poetic project yet accommodate themselves to the stylistic rules of the MLA Handbooks/Conventions, what is needed are critical responses which integrate and enact "antithetical" forms of writing to address a given poem or literary tradition. Such a response, for lyric poetry in particular, can be found coming from the "outside" at the level of a *lyrically explicative* critique of a poem or book of poems, a "secondary" commentary which takes up (picks up on) the latent signs in a "primary" lyric work and which sustains received objections to the implications of such a lyric while it retains the sound objectness and beauty of the language of the "original" work itself.

From without or from within these examples of the necessity of critical thinking simply argue that poetry needs its complements in poetics, and that Silliman is right: "*writing itself is not sufficient for completeness in poetry*." Furthermore, the situation Silliman describes—the "academic colonization" of contemporary poetry, where "the politics of culture" turns "into a process that can only be determined institutionally"—suggests that poets should be compelled to more actively engage an arrangement or syntax of a different order in order to theoretically situate *themselves* in light of their practice before it is situated for them. For this to happen perhaps it is necessary to engage, in Watten's words—and in a bit of instructive irony both Silliman and Watten themselves, as fellow langs., may never learn to appreciate—not only "a more total syntax for the statement that is a work of art," but for the statement that is a work of theory as well; and to "want an art [and theory] that reflects that total syntax," a statement to complement Silliman's, one he could learn from and most likely not disagree with: that writing itself—particularly in "Negative Solidarity"—is not sufficient for completeness in *theory*.

I am thinking here of how Silliman's piece manifests this insufficiency as it argues against it, trying to be complete unto itself—the final word. Quite simply: it lacks—a lack its construction *strategically anticipates and desires*—a view from the outside, "a syntax of context" (Watten) to address its "syntax of construction" (Watten). Internally complete, yet aware that, according to Watten, "there is also a syntax of context, 'exterior' to the work, in the way the work makes its statement at a particular point in cultural time," in the way "the syntax of the work travels outside the boundaries of the constructed work and into time and space," the construction of "Negative Solidarity" limits any challenges to its statements. It effectively silences its opposition by *implicitly refusing* the possibility of "outside" responses.

For instance, in claiming that "the poets who attack 'language writing' . . . [must] always focus upon *other* writers" because they are "unable to speak the poetics of their own name," Silliman leaves us no choice but to let him have his say—without us. He ensures that future reaction to "Negative Solidarity" will conform to his present vision of things, since any critical response would necessarily *have to* focus on other writers—Silliman, in particular, and "language" writers in general—thus only

confirming Silliman's point. Furthermore, even if any oppositional response did decide to state "the case of [its] own collective project positively"—what Silliman says it hasn't done—it would amount to an empty gesture, since it would not address Silliman's avowed argument and would be facing the wrong audience at the same time. The MLA would be the audience which would have to be addressed, if only because that is the group to whom Silliman's paper was originally presented. I imagine *Sulfur* readers know enough that they do not need to hear how various branches of The New American Poetics *could* define "their collective project[s] positively;" the MLA, particularly in light of Silliman's talk, *would* need to hear. And, as Silliman knows, the MLA does not constitute the better part of *Sulfur*'s subscription list.

Which brings up the "syntax of context;" or how "Negative Solidarity" is arranged to make "its statement at a particular point in cultural time" for the MLA and then, without a footnote indicating its prior audience, reappears (seeks a different arrangement) in *Sulfur* to make the same statement again, yet differently. The difference being that, in Watten's words, "values for context are either not [being] developed or ignored." I don't mean so much that Silliman's MLA address constitutes a sign of his "closet academicism." I can think of any number of writers from "alternative" canons who have entered the convention halls without being irreparably tainted. It's something more than this. It's that Silliman focusses his paper on the tensions between (at least) two *alternative* poetics, *neither of which* the MLA is likely to know or care enough about to be able to critically respond to Silliman's charges. Thus, by stating "the case for [his] own collective project positively" at the expense of another counter-academic group, and exactly one like his "latter-day New Americans" who he claims argue *against* critical thinking, Silliman's position before the critically-minded MLA knowingly guarantees that its theorists move to confirm his reception without a hitch, because they quite literally don't know any better—and have never known any better—the alternative sides from the start. This is simply bad politics on Silliman's part. It represents his enactment of a "social model for literature [based on] intense competition, my team versus your team," "language" writers versus "New" and "latter-day New American" writers:

I have been trying to fathom of late why some of the "actualist" poets, particularly Darrell Gray and Andrei Codrescu, feel compelled to assault in print the "language" poets with a venom that is genuinely disturbing. Each tendency is, after all, equally the progeny of the "New American" poetries of the 50's, which should mean that there's a substantial area of concurrence as to certain literary values. If one looks at the relation of the writing to one's life, however, a significant distinction does occur which helps explain (nothing could "justify") their behavior.

"Actualism" buys into the anti-intellectualism which characterized (and eventually destroyed) the "New American" writing. Ostensibly, the "actualist" text is not serious. Yet their social model for literature is one of intense competition, my team versus your team, whereas writing is taken by poets such as Rae Armantrout, Bruce Andrews or Steve Benson to be a far more collaborative project, a vision of literature as *communitas* which I personally feel is very moving and powerful. And the work, while it is filled with humor, is understood to be serious.

Founded on a model of individualism, that capitalism of the spirit, the "actualist" line of thinking leads to an unhappy conclusion. The failure of the "language poets" to disappear is taken as an indictment. It's not merely that "their team is behind and we're into the seventh inning"—they might not understand just which game is being played. The depth of the bitterness such thinking leads to can be gauged by the fact that *Exquisite Corpse* and *Black Bart* are blatant imitations of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, a magazine each has ridiculed in print.

Competitiveness is exactly like racism, sexism or ageism. It is something which every person in this society is instructed in virtually from the day we are born. Like those other isms, competitiveness is fundamentally anti-social behavior: it causes individuals to harm one another when called upon to do so in the name of gain, economic or otherwise. And, also like those other isms, it's something no contemporary of mine (and certainly not myself) will ever fully get over. All that can be done is to struggle with it, in oneself and socially.

This is why hierarchical models of literature—the essence of what the MLA has accomplished in American education—oppress writing, writers and readers alike. They presume homogeneous audiences over which writers compete for ranking, and they presume that one set of values is sufficient for all groups of people. . . .

Not an unimaginable portrait of the "my team versus your team" attitudes present in "Negative Solidarity," of the oppressive competitiveness which distorts all questions of value and which Silliman continues to struggle with—both in himself and socially—this is in fact quoted from Silliman's interview with Tom Beckett in *The Difficulties* (Vol. 2, No. 2, 1985). That his fundamentally sound approach in this interview complements his argument in "Negative Solidarity," that the insufficiency of "Negative Solidarity" works its grounds of contention and

"completion" elsewhere—and exactly where "elsewhere" is in Silliman's words from his interview—is an irony, informed by "values of context," which serves to undercut all signs of his "rightness."

David Levi Strauss

A Note on Us & Them

A Note on Silliman's "Negative Solidarity" in Sulfur 22

SILLIMAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN QUICK TO REPLY to (and gleefully encourage) the kind of "Us & Them" animosity he named "language bashing." Why is it then that whenever someone attempts a more substantive engagement (recent examples include Robin Blaser's address to the Spicer Conference, transcribed in *Acts* 6¹, and Don Byrd's "fine rhetorical brush" in *Sulfur* 20²), they *always* go unanswered and ignored? Is it because any opening of discourse on broader substantive grounds is more threatening to his Project than is rife polemics?

Don Byrd writes: "We live in a cultural regime which features the proliferation of meaning and a loss of personal commitment to meaning. The spiritual crisis is not the loss of meaning but the loss of value." This crisis is exemplified in Silliman's increasingly slippery polemics. In a footnote to his MLA address (reprinted in *Sulfur* without reference to its origins), Silliman writes: "Tom Clark, Edward Dorn, Robert Duncan, David Levi Strauss, the late Darrell Gray and Andrei Codrescu are some who commented upon 'language poetry' in terms that echo Norman Podhoretz's dismissal of the 'Know-Nothing Bohemians.'" In making this equation, Robert Duncan (and anyone else who criticized the Project) = Norman Podhoretz, Silliman dispenses with all questions of *value* in order to produce an *effect* (slur by association). This is propaganda, not poetics.

Here is Podhoretz on "the Bohemianism of the 1950's": "It is hostile to civilization, it worships primitivism, instinct, energy, 'blood.' To the extent that it has intellectual interests at all, they run to mystical doctrines, irrationalist philosophies and left-wing Reichianism."³

How is this "echoed" by Duncan's statements on the proscriptions of and historical precedents for "language poetry" in 1980: "What else but this unwarranted transmutation of meaning and realities needs the art of Poetry? Poetry is made patently of words and lines on the blank ground of the page and should be, as the purists and post-semiotic New Critics of the Language school tell us, chastened to do away with reference and the delusions of communication, much less of enchantment or of musing?"⁴ And in the 1985 interview Silliman quotes from: "The students in our (Poetics) program really came

in reaction to the language poets' program. I find their poetics reductionist."⁵

The right-wing Commentator Podhoretz attacked "the new Bohemianism" (of which Duncan was a part) for being mystical, instinctual, irrational, "left-wing Reichian," and altogether too democratic. Duncan attacked "language poetry" for being repressed & repressive, reductive, academic, and totalitarian in their "mind in control of its language." The only way one can make these two reactions *equal* is by subtracting all questions of political, social, spiritual and poetic value from the equation. L equals A equals N equals. . . .

Once these larger more difficult questions of *value* are removed, we are left with Silliman's sectarian rhetoric and ultimatums.

In fact, many of the ideas and concerns that Silliman has tried to reserve or usurp for the Project are shared by a large number of writers who are indifferent to or actively repudiate the Project. These concerns are part of our common intellectual history and radical tradition, not the private property of a small self-defined group. As Denise Levertov put it at the Alabama Symposium, "It is making private property out of the public beach."⁶

This is the practical political problem, not at all "theoretical," that outweighs most other reasons for "negative solidarity," and accounts for much of the widespread rancor toward the Project. In a prophetic letter published in 1979, Bruce Boone articulated the problem: "Two propositions seem timely here as beginnings, that language poetry is unquestionably the hegemony movement of the day and that, on the other hand, it lacks a developed social sense. Poetic practice in the future might well involve getting these aspects together."⁷ Silliman replied to this by saying that language poetry didn't exist.

Now that it does exist and Silliman is appealing to the MLA to sanction his "alternative canon," heresies are bound to proliferate, outside. "The fin is coming a little early this siècle."⁸

Notes

1. Robin Blaser, "My Vocabulary Did This to Me," in *Acts 6: A Book of Correspondences for Jack Spicer*, San Francisco, 1987.
2. Don Byrd, "Language Poetry, 1971-1986," in *Sulfur* 20, Ypsilanti, MI, 1987.
3. Norman Podhoretz, *Doings and Undoings: The Fifties and After in American Writing*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1964, p.147.
4. Robert Duncan, Preface to Aaron Shurin's *Giving Up the Ghost*, Rose Deeprose Press, San Francisco, 1980.
5. Robert Duncan, interviewed by Michael Andre Bernstein and Burton Hatlen in *Sagetrieb*, Vol. 4, No. 2 & 3, Fall & Winter 1985, p.127.

6. Transcript of panel discussion at the Eleventh Alabama Symposium: What Is a Poet? held October 18-20, 1984 at the University of Alabama, published in Hank Lazer's *What Is a Poet?* University of Alabama Press, 1987.

7. Bruce Boone, letter printed in *Poetry Flash* #76, July 1979.

8. Angela Carter, quoted in *Copyright 1: Fin de Siècle* 2000, Fall 1987.

Ron Silliman

Poets and Intellectuals

"I *am* the wandering scholar, you dope."

— Charles Olson to Cid Corman, 1950

TODAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A GENERATION, American poets are being attacked in public.¹ This may be a good thing, even for those being attacked. A symptom of intense activity, these events are forcing poets to think through their writing and its consequences, as well as prodding readers to make more conscious choices. Yet perhaps the most important dimension of this debate concerns poetry's relationship to the changing terrain of intellectual life in the U.S.

Thirty years ago, when Norman Podhoretz was defending western civilization from such "barbarians" as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, the rhetorical reduction of American verse into two camps, one "academic," the other variously termed "anti-academic," "beat" or—as I prefer—"New American," failed to acknowledge that most poets fit into neither category. While the discussion focused on the legitimacy claims of the New Americans, the less examined (though more widely reviewed) phenomenon of "academic" verse was itself undergoing a profound institutional transformation. This development was obscured, in part, because academic poets controlled the means of critique and were in no hurry to examine, let alone challenge, their own legitimacy, and partly because some features of the dispute, such as the debate between open and closed verse forms, or between an Anglophilic received tradition and the Yankee individualism of the opposition, replicated aspects of an argument that has continued almost unbroken since the so-called Young Americans of the early 19th century expressed their distaste for the drawing-room sophistication of the Knickerbockers.

Yet academic poets-in-residence of the post-World War II period were themselves a kind of "new American" phenomenon—the first generation whose presence on English department faculties was *not* predicated upon other areas of competence. Where there had been a few such poets decorating these programs before the war, "academic" as an epithet referred primarily to scholars and critics who *also* composed verse: Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, Mark Van Doren, Allen Tate, or Yvor Winters. In the years leading up to 1970, as older universities grew in size, statewide postsecondary systems were organized and consolidated, and new campuses dotted the suburban landscape like educational

shopping malls, academic employment leaped exponentially. To quote Russell Jacoby, "Between 1920 and 1970 the United States population doubled, but the number of college teachers multiplied tenfold, rising from 50,000 in 1920 to 500,000 in 1970."² Dramatic as those figures are, the rate of increase in the humanities was even more pronounced: between 1911 and 1971, membership in the MLA, for example, rose from 1,047 to 31,356.³ Today, the creative writing teacher is a campus fixture, a recognized specialization with a service organization, the Associated Writing Programs.

While the evolution of the "workshop poem" as a distinct genre has been made possible by this new generation of poet-professors, another effect of higher education's expansionary period has been the absorption of the non- (or even anti-) academic literary traditions into the university, albeit marginally, in departments at the newer state schools, at consciously alternative private institutions, or in programs such as ethnic or women's studies. Most significantly, the growing reach of the university system has contributed to a radical reduction in the social space available to intellectuals *outside the academy*. The steady drift of the New York trade publishing world, once a major employer of intellectuals, toward an industry geared to and governed by the "non-book," combined with the contraction of a nonacademic institutional base for intellectual work within the organized left, a long process of erosion that began well before the McCarthy era, leaves the United States largely without any self-conscious, off-campus intelligentsia, with the notable (but still only partial) exception of the arts.⁴

But because poetry in America has never had much in the way of material resources, the university system plays the role of the gorilla in the old joke, "Where does a 500 lb. gorilla sit?" Accordingly, the lives, expectations and options of poets in the late 1980s are considerably different from what they were even a generation ago, as is their writing's location within society and the text's potential for mediation and intervention. Regardless of the type of poet one is, the writer's relationship to her or his audience must now be negotiated with an awareness of the academy's institutional reach over the entire field of literature.

This raises serious social and formal problems for the poet. The question of audience is closely aligned with that of the constitution of the subject: in the poem, the latter seeks the former, whether consciously or not, by functioning as an inherent definition of community. In Althusserian terms, the text calls to the reader. This can be as explicit as "I am woman," or even explicitly denied—"I write for no one"—but in either case, entails textual rituals and codes of *identification* and *recognition*, organized around tacit assumptions, implying not only membership, but meaning. In the framework of Roman Jakobson's six functions of language,

elements of both contact *and* context are necessary in order for us to recognize ourselves as the appropriate receiver of a message, a process with social, as well as psychological, consequences. If by membership within a community or audience we mean a reader's ability to assume with confidence that their personal priorities with regards to the text are those of the author's also, so that from this they might then generalize a universe of shared values, then there should be no mystery as to why so many readers over time have felt anger, alienation or despair at canons which propose that significant writing embodies the perspective of a white male, and only certain white males at that.

When Jack Spicer wrote

Smoke signals

Like in the Eskimo villages on the coast where the
earthquake hit

Bang, snap, crack. They will never know what hit them

On the coast of Alaska. They expect everybody to be
insane.

This is a poem about the death of John F. Kennedy.⁵

a complex series of presumptions are operating. On the most general level, the death of one individual is equated with the devastation of the 1964 Alaskan earthquake. On another, the inability of people to know "what hit them" in these two public tragedies is brought into sharp contrast with the representationality of language. On a third, language itself is alleged to be inadequate, first with regards to tragedy, and then with regards to representation. It's a matter of "smoke signals," and the onomatopoeia of "bang, snap, crack," in turn stands for two radically dissimilar sets of sound, just as the word "hit" carries different meanings. Cynically, the sudden reversal of the last line foregrounds that curiously extraneous word "Like" at the start of the second: so it isn't a reversal at all, only a trick of meaning, and the real tragedy is thus that language will never enable people to know "what hit them." From this perspective, if language *is* the primary instrument of rationality, then it is indeed reasonable to "expect everybody to be insane." But if a reader does not recognize, and even elevate, the subtext concerning language and representation, then the tangible emotional power of this short text will be opaque, if not lost entirely. In this sense, the title of the book in which Spicer first published this poem, *Language*, is literal, and the community or audience which it calls into being can only be one that would accept this assertion that the tragedy of representation itself is on some scale equivalent to a major natural disaster or presidential assassination. One aspect of the community of this poem would be a strong sense of the personal isolation implicit in Spicer's conception of language as anti-communicative. Another would be the almost

overpowering moral sense through which this becomes (or is perceived as) tragedy.

It is this moral sense that causes Spicer to manifest this complex at the level of the reader's experience of consuming the text itself—even if this rage cannot be "told," it demands to be shared. This is what separates the Spicerian experience of isolation from the flattened affect that is the defining feature of the workshop poem. That genre is also aimed at replicating an actually-existing audience, often one of a creative writing teacher within an English department. Yet, in identifying its audience, a primary presumption of the workshop poem—at least if we are to judge from representative journals such as the *American Poetry Review*, or the anthologies offered us in recent years by Daniel Halpern, or Dave Smith and David Bottoms—is that its readers do not willingly experience the act of reading. Therefore that dimension (the only opportunity for *direct* experience available in a text) must be stripped from the poem, or, more accurately, hidden from reader-awareness through a sequence of devices. Strict adherence to narrative framing diverts this to observation. In attempting to offer easy accessibility, the normative workshop poem instead invokes an audience seeking a more marginal involvement, a writing of passivity, a community built upon the denial not of its legitimacy, but of its very existence. Yet certainly some community is implicit in lines such as these by Daniel Halpern:

Now, after a party with the consul and our best friend,
my mother, I walk back to your flat over the Arno.

Here the workshop poem's recurrent themes of childhood, family, and lovers are raised to icons not out of some transcendent importance, but because they are very nearly the only human relationships imaginable. This is a writing that denies its function as a public sphere—yet it is one that is almost entirely contained within the university system.

The social implications of such denial are nowhere more sharply defined than in contrast to what superficially appears to be a parallel project. The writer as well as the reader whose identification is with a social grouping that has heretofore been the object, rather than the subject, of history—for example, women of color or sexual minorities—has a manifest need to *have their stories told*. This is, in many circumstances, a truly liberating project open to the poetics of transparency, precisely by positing this new subject in an emphatic and unambiguous way. Still, because it requires a context of prior absence as its source for meaning, cultural nationalism has a limit: it can propose inclusion into a status quo only while reinforcing the affective dynamics of the original exclusion. While this hardly resolves the problem, it can at least name it.

In contrast, a crucial aspect of the social content of the New American poetries can be found in their attempts to respond to this problem while the expansionary period of postsecondary education was at its height. The nomadic, bohemian lifestyle of the Beats posed the issue in an extreme form: the university system was merely symptomatic of a broader range of alienation, beginning with wage labor and the erotophobic nuclear family. The instrumentalization of life was to be fought at all times on all fronts. A more nuanced strategy, the New York School's alignment with the visual arts scene can be viewed as a recognition that another alternative, the trade publishing industry, was no longer a viable site for intellectuals. The hegemony by the late sixties of the *New York Review of Books*, perhaps the first popular intellectual journal to be explicitly academic, confirms their judgment. Even more than the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance recognized that the homophile community, as it was then known, also offered social space for opposition to what Jack Spicer liked to deride as "The English Department."

Robert Duncan is the bridge figure between the SF Renaissance and the Black Mountain or projectivist poets. Duncan's poem, "The Multiversity *Passages 21*," composed at the time of the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, invokes a larger "hidden community . . . outside the university"⁷ for whom the striking students function as representatives. Yet Charles Olson's earlier essay, "Against Wisdom As Such,"⁸ challenges Duncan's own lingering desire for a static or canonistic conception of knowledge. A long October, 1950 letter to Cid Corman, warning Corman not to seek a \$10,000 subsidy for *Origin* magazine from Brandeis, shows Olson to have already acquired a deeply pessimistic critique of the university's impact on intellectual life: "the poet is the pedagogue left. . . ."⁹ In spite of his own sometimes glib use of materials, Olson's conception of poetic process as a more incisive research methodology reflects the central role he saw poets playing in the constitution of an intellectual polis, itself posed as an active element within the republic.¹⁰

Yet, of the varieties of New American poetry, projectivism has proven peculiarly open to academic institutionalization—in addition to the teaching jobs these poets have held, the UC Press editions of Olson and Creeley, the existence of journals such as *Olson*, *Sagetrieb* and the special issues of *boundary 2*, plus the recent celebration of Black Mountain at Bard all are evidence not simply of continuing university involvement, but also of institutional interest in the projectivist project. It is here that Robert Richman's snide assertion that "projectivist poetry is a specialty language that lives almost exclusively in colleges and graduate schools" confuses cause and effect.¹¹ Seen instead as a

social project grounded in a critique of normative institutions, Black Mountain verse, particularly as envisioned by Olson and Duncan, always acknowledged the structural role institutions play. Olson's rectorship of Black Mountain College demonstrates that. But without the economic resources to maintain and develop their own counter-institutions unilaterally, the most significant alternative remaining that would enable these poets to continue to frame their work within this larger dialogue of the social was as critical voices from within a heterogeneous university system. In this sense, the turn back to the academy partly foretold and partly paralleled that of many New Left activists in the 1970s. The larger question, then, is not "Are the projectivists there?" but "Do they continue to function critically?" Have these institutions in any sense changed because of the presence of these poets? Secondly, have these institutions changed *enough*? While I might personally share some of Russell Jacoby's skepticism, voiced about scholars from the New Left generation in *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, that a left wing professor is a professor first, and a leftist as time permits, certainly Richman's attack on Black Mountain in *The New Criterion*, which is clearly part of a larger assault on left intellectuals everywhere led by Allan Bloom, Irving Kristol and the magazine *Commentary*, must be read as a resounding vote of confidence.

This leads to even larger, and still unanswered, questions. The attacks on the "language poets," my generation, can of course be read as a variation on the theme put forward by Bloom, Kristol, Richman, Hilton Kramer and others. Given that the vast majority of "language poets" are still well outside of the university system, what does this then say of our project, and how do our options differ from those of the New Americans, particularly the projectivists? If, à la Jacoby, the integration of those poets into the academy is interpreted as the loss of critical oppositionality, and at the same time the university system is perceived to be far more of a dominant social agent than it was just twenty years ago, what is to prevent "language poetry" from going into the kind of terminal blue funk that characterized the later Frankfurt School? At least in the 1960s poets could fantasize about the coming revolution.

Precisely because it incorporates the politics of culture into a process that is determined institutionally, academic colonization is contemporary poetry's fundamental social problem. Yet here is a new generation of poets who pay serious attention to social and critical theory. In so doing, these writers not only demonstrate what we can already imagine—that they are of their time, and have grown out of the same historical conditions that raised the question of theory itself within the academy—they and their poetry offer a specific reading of theory itself, sometimes a very harsh one. In some sense this may appear to reverse the

traditional, parasitical relationship between poetry and its critique. While this reading is only one facet of a much larger project, it raises the question of institutionality per se as a constituent element within theoretical, as well as aesthetic, discourse. One conclusion that necessarily follows is that *each theoretical approach should radically reformulate its conception of a proposed canon*. Indeed, the failure of structuralism and its descendants to do so suggests that the institutional component in critical discourse still far outweighs any particular theoretical assertions which are being made. What is not yet clear, even though there are now many younger critics who have themselves shared much of the history that has given rise to this poetry, how many, if any, are prepared to follow through on these implications. If they exist, and if they do follow through, then the interlocking futures of both poetry and theory will be quite different, as in fact will be the nature of the very institution along whose margins both reside.

[Originally presented at a special session on "The Political Potential of Modern Poetry," 1987 MLA Convention, San Francisco, Dec. 28, 1987]

Notes

1. See, for example, "Escapees in Paradise: Literary Life in San Francisco," by Stephen Schwartz, *The New Criterion*, Vol. 4, No. 4, December, 1985, pp. 1-5; and "Stalin as Linguist," by Tom Clark, *Partisan Review*, Vol. LIV, No. 2, pp. 299-304. In addition to attacks on "language poetry" and the San Francisco literary scene, there have been others, sometimes in these same journals, on Allen Ginsberg, the Black Mountain School and even on William Carlos Williams. See Marjorie Perloff's "Howl and Its Enemies: The Genteel Reaction" in *Sulfur* 20, Fall, 1987, pp. 132-141, for a recounting of the debate around Ginsberg.

2. "'Study in Total Depravity': How Intellectuals Were Absorbed into the Fattened University," by Russell Jacoby, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 30, 1987, page B2.

3. "Conventions and Membership," *PMLA*, Vol. 99, No. 3, May, 1984, p. 456. During this same period, the total number of books published in the U.S. slightly more than tripled. See my "The Political Economy of Poetry," in *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1986), pp. 26-27. Thus, in 1911, there was approximately one MLA membership for every twelve titles published during that year, while in 1971, the ratio was one membership for roughly every 1.3 titles published.

4. The most significant exception to this has been the evolution of a community of *neoconservative* intellectuals, often at think tanks or on journals financed by the most militant sectors of corporate capital. A second, smaller exception can be found in the gay and lesbian movement, where organic intellectuals of these sexual minorities have thus far not been incorporated into the university. See

"Pessimism of the Mind: Intellectuals, Universities and the Left," by Jeffrey Escoffier, in *Socialist Review*, No. 88/1, January-March, 1988, pp. 118-135.

5. *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*, edited by Robin Blaser (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1975), p. 221.

6. From "Summer, 1970," in *The American Poetry Anthology*, edited by Halpern (New York: Avon, 1975). p. 131.

7. *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968), page 72.

8. *The Human Universe* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 67-71.

9. *Letters for Origin: 1950-1956*, edited by Albert Glover (New York: Cape Goliard/Grossman, 1970), p. 2.

10. Interestingly, the literary tendency which has come closest to actualizing Olson's vision has been that of, by, and for lesbian feminists. A thoughtful analysis of the implications of this, and especially of the limitations that poetics may have imposed on the feminist movement, and vice versa, is Jan Clausen's *A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism* (Brooklyn: Long Haul Press, 1982).

11. "Notebook: Black Mountain comes to Bard," *The New Criterion*, September, 1987, p. 86. Richman, of course, could have attended the Kerouac conference in Boulder and drawn parallel conclusions about the Beats.

Charles Bernstein and Tom Beckett

An Interview

Censors of the Unknown:

Margins, Dissent, & the Poetic Horizon

Tom Beckett: Charles, back in 1981 we ended our interview for *The Difficulties* with your comment about the authorial/I as social construction. Since then, it seems to me, you have become more of a public figure within the world of poetry writing. I don't want to overstate the situation: you're not Michael Jackson or even, sorry, Pee-wee Herman. Nonetheless, I think that the eyes of your colleagues and "your reading public" are focussed on you differently from in the past. What I'm straining towards is a question pertaining to a poetics of reading—to issues, that is, of reception.

What are your thoughts about the ways in which your work is currently being bracketed or received?

Charles Bernstein: I'm not all that interested in focussing on my feelings about the reception of my work except insofar as this can become material for me to absorb into the work. While I have always believed that the approach to writing I have pursued makes the poems more, rather than less, available to those readers who wish to engage it, I don't think I could have expected the explicit acknowledgment of this provided in the response to my work in the issue of *The Difficulties* you edited, and other places. The companionship that poetry can provide, as if "I hear what you're saying" was not just a hollow formula registering that the sound waves had hit the tympanic apparatus, as if to hear meant to act more than react, has been for me a fundamental resource and motivation, and one that occupies me constantly, even when I should like to break off from it for a spell. And, seemingly inevitably, to be heard in this way is to cause disruption, as if to use the channels of communication is to offend some who choose not to, or to use different ones, because the waves are felt, rightly, as conflict. I think I could go on, no doubt differently, in the face of silence too; although I wouldn't want to imagine a situation in which I would be content with such silence; but then being content has an uneasy relation to my engagement with poetry.

Perhaps I'd better start by saying that I have been surprised and encouraged by the degree of attention focussed on the context for writing proposed by such projects as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E. But both positive and negative reactions suggest as much the neglect or repression of a range of acoustic, syntactic,

structural, and political dynamics in the reception of twentieth-century English-language poetry as any specific response to the works of an individual poet or poem.

Insofar as the climate of response to the sort of poetry and poetic thinking I've been involved with has opened up, or deepened, this can be attributed to the efforts of a number of individuals pursuing distinctly different—and, significantly, conflicting—courses who have nonetheless created communities of response as an alternative to the deadening isolation that has often been the fate of iconoclastic North American artists and intellectuals. That is, the conscious social articulation of a way out of "me-too" Romantic individualism—so often misinterpreted as collectivization and group formation—amounts not to the creation of a school of thought but to a poetic of response: a conversation not a thesis. Ironically, this process attests to the crucial role that individuals must play in resisting the "collective imperative," in Roland Barthes's phrase, of gregariousness, whether the collectivity is a national or local culture (society) or uniformitarian (including uniformitarian oppositional) aesthetic principles. Dissent and subversion remain operations that cannot be collectivized without losing their most powerful psychic effect; but only response—in the form of exchange—allows such acts to enter into a social space where they can begin to lead a life of their own.

Such rehearsings of who or where or what we or I or you are or may be or may be doing is part of the process of poetic thinking that makes me want to "bracket" however my work is being bracketed, to turn your question on itself.

If I say that my writing can be understood as research, I mean this literally as searching for new—in the sense of uncharted or undiscovered (unarticulated)—worlds within language. For New Worlds can be discovered within language just as surely as on the face of a globe or inside an atom. This is called invention from the creative side; but how can you invent what was a potential all along? (You don't have to know it's there to find it, said the man who fell over his own place.) At a certain point people stop saying the world is flat because they look at the horizon differently; they still may walk flat streets and write flat poems. Yet the investigation—in the sense of procreation and composition, investment and instigation—takes its own course, what makes it possible to go on. What I mean is that these inhabitations so created are there to be heard and seen. It's more that the complete breakdown of response can make you feel—and so go—crazy; to have some acknowledgment confirms that the compass you've made of foolscap and twine has gotten you through—rough trades, after all.

TB: Within the communities of response you have mentioned, within the chorus of gestures of mastery those communities support, the issue (as in all communities?) of censorship (and at many levels) arises. I'm thinking now

particularly of Marcuse's notion of "repressive tolerance," the idea that to tolerate what you oppose is to condone it. What role(s) do you see for censorship in your own (life) work? What role(s) do you see within the communities of response you have described?

CB: I see a number of thornily intertwined issues here and I'm not sure whether you want them untangled or fused. On one end of the spectrum is police-enforced censorship; on the other end is a poet's—or a poetry community's collective—myopia or arrogance or intolerance; and in between the more elusive, but surely pertinent, spectre of self-regulated "sense-orphism," in Bernard Noël's term ("the police are in our mouths") and "repressive tolerance," which perhaps is today better understood as

marginalization (free to publish in the sense of free to have a warehouse of undistributed books).

There is a thickening line between commitment and intolerance, between conviction and arrogance, between opposition and competition. Many artists, literary and otherwise, become (productively) fixed (fixated?) on their particular methods of practice and criteria of evaluation. This can lead to partisanship but does not have to produce dogmatism or sectarianism. (I would define "sectarianism" as when one party to a participatory "community of response" declares its own narratives of origin and value to be authoritative despite—or really because of—competing claims.) While "avant-garde" artists have traditionally been associated with a sometimes strident partisanship, the experience of twentieth-century modernisms suggests the relative modesty of such partisanship compared to the militant intolerance of those who define themselves against the "new" ("neoconservatism" is, after all, a byproduct [wasteproduct] of an avant-garde).

Naturally, when you are provocative people will be provoked—and it is an interesting spectacle to see such a panoply of fulsome anti-intellectualism and New Critical pieties provoked by recent poetic developments. & while it's unpleasant to be attacked, especially when an attack willfully misrepresents the positions it claims to be attacking, it is crucial to resist the paranoia (us/them) that such attacks induce—because paranoia destabilizes the ability to differentiate those who are sympathetic or neutral (part of the conversation) from those who are dismissively rejecting in their antipathy (trying to shut the conversation up). A result may be that divergent, but not repudiating, views come to seem unacceptable, wrong-headed, and, finally, malicious: "Either you are with us or you're in the way." (Although this us has by now become hard to distinguish from the individual ambitions of the combatant.) Bullying under the guise of

"confronting the terms" of those with whom you are conversing is seldom innocent.

However (always however), one person's sectarianism is another person's dissidence. In this sense, sectarianism is the opposite of censorship.

Surely, repressive tolerance is better than repressive intolerance. (The contradictions don't need more heightening.) & it's instructive to keep in mind that the structure of repressive tolerance allows for a wedge to be driven between its two terms: a wedge that makes possible a movement toward "progressive" tolerance. That is, the potential power of the margins is enormous but the effect of repressive tolerance is to neutralize (I wanted to say depotentiate) this power. The very conceptualizing of repressive tolerance can have this effect, for it can reinforce an already pervasive sense of despair if it's understood as a catch-22: you can't win. "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will": except that it is precisely the intellect that needs to be activated and the "idea" of repressive tolerance can be sufficiently dispiriting to fan the self-immolating flames of passivity. Indeed, repressive tolerance counts on a self-regulating passivity and insularity: the "margins" accepting that they are, and can only be, marginal; although all there are are (all there be be) margins [the ruling class is a margin with a nuclear strikeforce].

I'm always amazed at just how much any action can accomplish—doing what you've been told, or told yourself,—can't be done. Acting in the face of disinterest or rejection and at the risk of incomprehensibility. Speaking out rather than censoring yourself out of the conviction that no one, or not enough people, are listening, or the occasion's not right.

One thing that poetry can do is challenge such self-censoring (& censoring) mechanisms: that is, articulate that which is repressed not only by the individual psyche but also by the socius (collectively), a censoring that is encoded into the grammar of all our signification systems.

Out of fear of being opaque to one another, we play the charade of comprehensibility—for if you say nothing you void the risk of not being found empty. We censure the unknown because it has not always/already been understood and we call this communication, clarity, expression content. But only when the taboos against incomprehensibility are transgressed does it become apparent that there is an excess of meaning in the cracks we have spent our days sanding down and sealing over. The theory of relativity is well-known: what is incomprehensible to one is, to another, the exact words of her or his particular condition-in-the-world. To be comprehensible to all—the telos of the language of what is called science—is to censor (a collective repression) all that is antagonistic, anarchic, odd, antipathetic, anachronistic, other. (Marginal.) (Outside.) So poetry

can be the censor of these spirits from the unknown, untried, unconsidered—really just unacknowledged—that now, as if they always had, bloom in vividness.

Fear of contamination by the "other" is a foundational taboo of U.S. society, and a prerequisite to repressive tolerance. If I stop defining myself/my group against stigmatized others I will lose my identity. —I'm constantly struck by the fact that hostile/contentious/competitive remarks made about other individuals, other groups, or other ideas are considered more "honest" (uncensored) than conciliatory/supportive/ameliorative attitudes. Certainly, bad faith comes in all shapes: sycophantic compromising behavior is as endemic as competition in a hierarchic, corporatized society like ours. But the censoring mechanisms involved in competition are not adequately appreciated. For competition perverts the identification of difference ("opposition") from a source of pleasure-in-exchange to a source of invalidation, contempt, and exclusion.

A great aesthetic pleasure comes from the transgression of the already known in an exchange with the incomprehensible, the marginal, the outside (which in the instant cease to be any of these things). Exclusion is self-regulating: it requires something like a leap of faith—not arguments—to bridge this particular gap: a conversion into a conversation. This is the pleasure that verse promises—and why one reader speaks of hearing cascades from the worlds within this one, while another sees only inert black marks on a blank page.

TB: Ambliopia is the medical term for reduction or dimming of vision in the absence of apparent pathology. It is also the title of one of your recent poems (in *The Sophist*)—and an interesting ethico-cultural metaphor. Could you extend your discussion of censorship into the mythos of this work?

CB: A task of poetry is to make audible (*tangible* but not necessarily *graspable*) those dimensions of the real that cannot be heard as much as to imagine new reals that have never before existed. Perhaps this amounts to the same thing.

The body-with-only-organs may still be intact (there's still some time but the planet and those on it are in danger); then this dimming of vision (what I've called "sight") is something like hysterical, imaginary, but there remains the material organic possibility of ambi-opia—multilevel seeing, which is to say, vision repossessed.

This hints at the distinction Heidegger makes between the earth and the world. As long as the earth lives, there can be hope that the world can be transformed; but the world can destroy, though perhaps not kill, the earth (which has not yet happened) or it can occlude its communion with it (which happened long ago, perhaps when history began).

Could it be that language is as much a part of the earth as of the world? And that this is what is censored? That the tools we use to construct our worlds belong

to the earth and so continuously (re)inscribe our material and spiritual communion with it?

TB: Are you saying there may be a "natural language" we are somehow prevented from hearing?

CB: No, only that the distinction between nature and culture may obscure the bodily rootedness of language, which is impossible not to hear but difficult (as in "the difficulties") to recognize and to articulate. Perhaps beauty, or anyway aesthetic pleasure, needs to be understood along these lines rather than in terms of idealizations designed to erase just this earth-bound fact. And if we leave the earth, will we not still be creatures of it?

TB: "Think of dead ideas as deposited in language and writing, as the compost heap in which present language and writing grows. Suppose dead ideas as comprising an historical unconscious lived but as perception, as smell and taste, as speech. Imagine consciousness resounding with an inexhaustible repository of ideas, as a cave to be mined. And consider poetry as that mining, so the incorporation of dead ideas (call them prior texts) into a work is not simply collage or a familiar, almost comforting, defamiliarization technique, but the spiritual domain of poetry, its *subject* (subjectness) percolating through." So you began a recent article "Living Tissue/Dead Ideas" (*Social Text* 16, collected in *Content's Dream*). Talk about an organic, earth-bound poetics! How does beauty or aesthetic pleasure figure within the network of relations described above?

CB: I'm on call in Gibraltar but you can still use the number in Saskatoon. I'm out of sorts in Dominica but you can tune in on Q frequency. Where there's air I breathe; otherwise, you'll only see gas masks. "*But what the Devil is the nonhuman: or is all the universe consumed by your projections?*" "Let me out!" said the owl, but the fly just buzzed.

Yet "beauty is set apart." Or it's not beauty that we seek but someone on the other end of the line, a letter in the box, a song in the wind. Not the juridico-rational voice of authority, which has never made a place for any poetry that *claims* to matter. (Charley Altieri saying, all these claims get in the way! Give me a poetry that knows its place, that allays my suspicions that poetry's a disease for which criticism will find the cure.) The man in the silk jacket pales before the work and insists you dream in white and black.

For there's beauty in the *claims* of poetry; to think there are only texts—disembodied strokes—is to imagine that a plant has no roots; but a person can get only what she has staked out. There's beauty enough in that, a person standing by her word, finding the world in them. A journey to a star would be exactly half as far. After that, pleasure takes care of itself.

As if clouds needed to make room for sky. Not proportion but rage and regret; not the loss even of loss but *fabrication*. Spelling out what is on tip of tongue, words that break a spell in order to cast a new one, the effects of sound breaking into words (tangible as when a tractor hits square in legs).

Of course, we must bracket history and truth and reason else be deceived by the simulacrum; weave webs of veils. But Derrida is wrong to say that play and games are of a different order ("Play is always lost when it seeks salvation in games"—"Plato's Pharmacy," tr. B. Johnson); for all play instantiates and games are just what we've learned to call it when we stare over our shoulders into the fog. This is what it means to be born free but everywhere enchained: just that even when we're tripping out we're buying in, and the most elaborate edifice is a mark of evasion. Or say that play is for the earth and games for the world. Then perhaps beauty reminds us of this fact or reminds us to take pleasure in it. & the chains, which don't so much shackle as weigh down ("the only chains I know are these chains of love"), hold us to earth's gravity and give us something to fight with.

The jury is sequestered after all plea bargains are refused. I'm so hungry I could eat a truck.

TB: Can you tell me, while the jury is out, before sentence is passed, how what is "other" figures in your work?

CB: I'm alone on the beach & the tide is racing toward me until the spot I had picked out for its distance from the shore line has become completely submerged. My pad, pencil, & book float helplessly on the water's surface before being pulled, precipitously, toward the horizon, having met their destination.

For after all it is only after a work is completed—a journey that begins at the point a *text* becomes a *work*—that others may enter into it, trace its figures, ride its trails along tracks that are called lines. The other defines the work, completes the process and makes it definite. For no matter how heterogeneous I try to make a poem, no matter what incommensurabilities I attempt to rend my writing with, it becomes absorbed in that self-same project stipulated by the limits of my name: my origins & residencies, my time & language, what I can hear & see enough to contain by force of form. Yet it is precisely what I have contained but cannot identify that the other, being other, makes palpable, lets figure, & (hopefully) flower. It is only *an other* that, *in the final instance*, constitutes the work, makes it more than a text (test), resurrects it from the purgatory of its production, which is to say its production of self-sameness.

Bakhtin puts this very eloquently in a 1970 interview with *Novy Mir* (tr. by V. McGee): "In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and

comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others. . . . A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures."

To conceive of the relationship of the writer and reader (which gives birth to the *poem*) as dialogue is more fruitful

than to speak of the reader (or writer) as originator of the meaning of the text—and it would help frame (as in "I've been . . .") the systematic misconception (as in barrenness) of this perspective as the nondeterminacy of the text, open to the reader's *sole* discretion as if without constraint: as if to avoid nonintentionality you have to write commands not allow for conversation. (To have a conversation is not to stare mutely, or to utter minimally directive words & be consumed by the other—but to allow room for response while responding in turn.)

Part of the arrogance of what is sometimes (mis)called modernism, as if the modernists didn't know the Heavenly had passed into an other world but we, "after" this fact, have learned the lesson (which would be better to unlearn), is that one could incorporate the other within oneself (one's work), contain "all." For instance, that one could be *representative* of "man" or of a cultural moment or of a people. But every particular is such precisely because of what it necessarily excludes. So what is to be proclaimed is this not-all, this insistence that there are only margins, no universals; only partialities that are constituted by their exclusions even more than inclusions; that any claim to incorporate the other is, in effect, an attempt to disincorporate or dispossess it—call it heterocide or ektocide. This points again to the arrogance of an art (or critical theory or cultural "dominant") that claims to speak *for all* (whether high art/high theory or mass media) rather than an art that speaks for one among many to others among even more, literally and figurally, *unimaginable* others; for to imagine is to contain & to imagine all there is is contained is our unforgiveable blasphemy (which we compartmentalize as technorationality & racism, sexism & standardization). For "one" lives not to proclaim only but to listen for that which is not conceivable in one's "own" self-same world—that which violates its premises & perimeters, shaking them with the life forever *beyond* and *outside*.

Yet circling back with the dyspepsia of hindsight, it can also be said that language is *other*, which we make "ours" without it belonging to us; that "self-sameness" is a stylistic illusion in which individuation allows recognition of the social body that we are each a part of/apart from.

TB: In a recent interview, Larry Price remarks to Beverly Dahlen and Ted Pearson apropos their discussion of the writer's marginality: ". . . the idea of a periphery, i.e., points in relation to a so-called center. I thought of two analogies: one would be the standing wave, and the other would be the relation between phenomena and noumena. The standing wave is not generated by a motion in the center, but from multiple points on the boundary, so that the President is in fact one sense of an illusion, as we might likewise hold the subject as an illusion, a fiction, created by the boundary, only one of whose points is, say, the young Lyndon, or the actor Ronald. The other analogy, noumenon/phenomenon, is really more complicated because it doesn't assume a duplicity." Comments?

CB: The theory of relativity of the center: the center is a projection from the periphery. Or rather, there is no center, only peripheries that agglomerate in various ways—like blood clots at the sites of trauma. Or again, things are central only in specific contexts—for many people, the local paper (or maybe the folded sheets of a distant poetry magazine) is what is first read and one man's national media is another woman's regional effluvium. Or do I confute centrality and priority?

But there is power, & dominance, and these, anyway, need to be differentiated from centrality. Power and dominance are a function of violence. & this violence is not so much a "hidden" truth but a very explicit—and necessarily contested—dynamic. "Fashion" might be a useful middle term between power & dominance, on the one side, and centrality as its legitimizing facticity on the other. Fashion seeks hegemony but produces *resistance*—not just to "fashion itself" but also as the motor of fashion, Paris versus Milano, last year's shoes versus this year's socks. Fashion and dominance logically entail contestation and contradiction, along with a sliding scale of consequences if you are "wrong"—from losing a sale to losing your mind. That is, you don't need to "agree with" power, just acknowledge it: centrality is the power of the dominant margin. For while power appears factional, centrality has the epistemological clout of the given or normative, conventional or standard: power we've grown accustomed to.

In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche disdains attempts of the "weak" or "oppressed" to turn their marginality into a moral asset—that "slave revolt" or "sublime sleight of hand which gives weakness the appearance of free choice and one's natural disposition the distinction of merit." "It was the Jew . . . with the furious hatred of the underprivileged and impotent [who first maintained] that 'only the poor, the powerless, are good; only the suffering, sick and ugly, truly blessed. But you noble and mighty ones of the earth will be, to all eternity, the evil, cruel, the avaricious, the godless, and thus the cursed and damned!'" (tr. F. Golfing). Yet, all power involves a self-recognition of marginality and finding

some way to cash in on it: the powerful are not more noble in turning their violence into a virtue than the powerless are vile for turning their powerlessness into a kind of moral authority (phantom centrality). No doubt what Nietzsche is attacking is not powerlessness itself but the poison of self-delusion about one's marginality, the arrogance of self-righteousness based on one's marginal status, the devastating effect of a consuming and blinding hatred of the "center" in the absence of any self- or social-understanding or definition. Yet what's repugnant about his analysis is that he excludes the dominant from censure since such dominance is raw (naked?) rather than self-delusory. Perhaps a deeper implication of Nietzsche's polemic is that mass culture has become dominant by means of stigmatizing non-mass cultural values: thus any form of divergence—whether regional, ethnic, formal—is rejected as elitist or specialized or separatist, as *not us*. In this sense, what Nietzsche is charting is a mechanism of dominance based on centrality, at the epistemological level, or its moral equivalent—common voice/ accessibility.

The fiction of centrality that I am hinting at here is related to those other fictions that have been undermined in much recent poetry—voice and identity. In emphasizing the legitimacy of marginal voices, there may be a tendency to essentialize difference; so that from a promotion of decentralized dialects we can too easily arrive at atomized centralities (nationalisms)—that is, a reductively unified identity/voice of a "marginal" people or country or region. The contestatory nature of identity exists at *all* levels; Balkanization of identity is not necessarily a solution to multinational homogenization (or deterritorialization) of voice.

Essentializing the marginality of poetry into a transcendental human experience beyond the divisive fray of history and ideology is just what Romantic ideology is all

about. David Lloyd expresses this nicely in an article on the evasions of Seamus Heaney's Irish nationalism (in *boundary 2* VIII:2/3, 1985): "The discourse of culture itself originates in the moment that the division of intellectual and physical labor has become such that 'culture' as a specialization is privileged yet entirely marginalized in relation to productive forces, and seeks to disguise, or convert, both privilege and marginalization in a sublimation which places it beyond division and into a position whence it can appear to form the work of unification. . . . The discourse of culture consistently seeks, by representing itself as withdrawn from implication in social divisions, as indifferent, to forge a domain in which divisions are overcome or made whole. The realization of human freedom is deferred into this transcendental domain, with the consequence that an ethical invocation is superadded to the exhortations of culture."

Is it, then, possible to have marginality as a value that is not perfused by resentment or Romantic evasion? Insofar as marginality is taken as a positive moral value this dilemma holds. But it can begin to be dissolved when marginality is recognized, in contradistinction, as a t(r)opological prerequisite of all utterance.

TB: Linda Reinfeld's attentive review of *Content's Dream* appeared in a recent *Temblor*. Allow me to ask a question she asks: "Why, then, given the care and writerly consciousness of these essays, given their thoughtful articulation of theory, are they presented now as *Dream*?"

CB: *Dream* in the sense of *aspiration*, as in to breathe in, to pronounce with a full breathing: "the legitimate aspirations of the heart." I have a dream . . . "I have an exposition of sleep come upon me." (Say a condition of unsureness: "God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep!") Or, what is dream, a reverie that displaces the real or a hum that supersedes the repressed, whose logic is of desire not deduction, wherein we wake to dream not *from* it? Or, say, the dream of Content: what content would dream, if allo(u)wed, to state its discontent, anticipate its aspirations.

"I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell me what. Methought I was,—and methought I had,—but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it has no bottom."

"When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer."

TB: With a cast of Liubov Popova, Jenny Lind, and John Milton, "Entitlement" (in *The Sophist*) is a poem in the form of a play. Popova, Lind, Milton—why these historical personages? What or whom is entitled?

CB: Maybe nobody. Maybe it's a dream to think anyone is. I was thinking of calling this dialogue (even more than play) "The Souls of White Folks" as in, do we have them? To say that white skin is a badge of some dishonor as long as there is apartheid, but yet we have some heroes too: heroes in the sense of those who made a habitation out of a mar(k)gin—how these artists to exist had to become, one way or another, "dented tokens": Milton in his failed attempt at a public career; Lind, whose voice could be heard only as sideshow act; Popova, dying of the scarlet fever contracted in the birth of her child (stark symbol of the revolution that the futurians gave birth to putting so many of them to death—one way or another). So, yes, the margins again ("the soap in heaven's day long-wash?"), as a place to speak from, albeit a fictitious place with real-life scars. Thus, as comedy.

But: entitled to *what*? ("Bent is the promise.") Written as Reagan ascended to office on the premise of slashing entitlement programs (social security, unemployment insurance, public assistance grants), I wanted to picture these artists *sidelined*, waiting on the bench—which is poetry's table, after all—and speaking against the end of *time*, *for time*, *in time*, *to time* (one and . . .), with the tools at hand—a piece of chalk perhaps to start, maybe loneliness ("like a sealed dove in the rain"), or the (re)vision of (reversion to) some other space ("patina breaks and under more patina").

Maybe to be entitled to speak—to articulate—without that effort being shot down as lacking content; yet none of these could hope that their sense would fall on much but deaf ears—and deaf ears still surround. Maybe everyone is entitled to be heard on their own terms, with a presumption of sense; but here we live a Napoleonic code: inarticulate until proven coherent; as if innocence has to be learned or that you need study diction to say that you have hunger. (Yet *no one* is innocent just as no one is without hunger.) "You've got to learn to speak our language"—the carrot that hides the stick (so that's what is meant by a phallographic grammar). As if learning a language was translating some primitive set of grunts into a mannered code, the primitive method cast as some hidden or private system to overcome yet which each of us knows, or fears, can never be overcome, always "holds us back." As if we are always translating our thoughts and feelings into foreign tongues, the most sure-"footed" still a bit shaky, and no one on solid ground. "Surely verges all obtain"—that might be this poem's dream; that we be content to allow for difference ("content as stubble at the eventide"), to accept that we cannot always or immediately understand what other people say and that those gaps speak as resonantly—more resonantly—than any message extracted: so not make thought step to martial plan. So played as comedy.

[1/87-12/87]

Aaron Shurin

A Postscript to "City of Men"

Full Circle:

WHEN I READ MY EROTIC RAMPAGE, "City of Men," (*Temblor* 4, November 1986) to a group of students a couple of years back, one aw shucks type with wider than ever eyes responded: "Boy, that sure isn't safe sex!" Chagrined, I held up the pages, pointing to the poem itself, the act of writing it. "No," I smiled, "this is safe sex!" But—chastened—I'd copped out; it was exactly what I had not intended with "City of Men."

I did have a hidden agenda. The poem uses only Whitman's language, culled from poems in the Children of Adam and Calamus groupings from *Leaves of Grass*. As most careful readers of Whitman know, Calamus is his collection of homoerotic love poems, emotional, tender, idealistic, radically political, prophetic, obliquely erotic, but—alas—not sexual. If you want sex, go to the grouping Children of Adam, Whitman's putative heterosexual songs—they are filled with body and body parts, physical material catalogues, paeans to the sex act—but—alas—no love. The body is electric but it is not affectionate.

I have read Whitman's private journals, the most private parts where they are written partially in code to keep the secret—perhaps from himself as well as others—of his love for Peter Doyle, the secret—but we've heard this many times from the 19th and 20th centuries—torment of his awakening but not yet awake homosexuality, the revelations of his self-expressed desire to—using for homoeroticism his code word "adhesiveness"—"depress the adhesive nature/ It is in excess—making life a torment/ All this diseased, feverish, disproportionate adhesiveness." Depress it in himself! Anyone who has been there can immediately recognize the call of the closet. This pernicious disregard for truth caught Whitman—in spite of his revolutionary outspokenness about sex and the body as well as male/male affection—and forced him to sever his love poems—his writing of eros—into two mutually exclusive—and incomplete—halves.

My historical period has permitted me to come full circle, to write my eros out of spirit and body, shamelessly, and perhaps for the first time in history, from a completely integrated viewpoint. In composing "City of Men" I chose to graft—by interspersing them—poems from Whitman's Calamus with those from his Children of Adam. Where the body in Calamus is incessantly hidden, metaphorized as leaves, roots, blossoms, scented herbage, live oak, moss, vines

and buds, now it can be revealed in its polymorphous glory as arms, shoulders, lips, fingers, loins, elbows and necks. No more will we hear—as in Calamus—"I dare not tell it in words" or "Here I shade and hide my thoughts;" rather, as in Children of Adam: "Be not afraid of my body."

It seems essential to me, in the age of AIDS, to keep the body forward, to keep the parts named, to not let ourselves get scared back into our various closets by those who would profit from sexual repression, from sublimation and fear of sex. What losses do we suffer by blindly embracing—if not "compulsive" sex—compulsive dating, compulsive monogamy, compulsive matrimony and domesticity, and when does avoidance of particular sex acts deteriorate into avoidance of creative exploration: dulled nerves, consumerist complacency, couplist or nuclear family paranoia, social scapegoating, stereotyping and moral sanctimony? Didn't my generation become sexual pioneers not just by increasing the range of permissible sex acts and sex-enacted places but by tying sexual expression to socialism, feminism, national liberation movements, consciousness expansion, legal and individual rights and radical psychologies, and if it gets squashed what else gets squashed with it? The chaotic force of eros—once called desire—is a depth charge for change. Contain it and we may live an ordered existence, sure: following orders.

So I do *not* propose "City of Men," or any other creative act, as a substitution for sex. I do of course propose safe sex—medically safe but not politically safe, not socially or even psychically safe. And towards the day when the Human Immunodeficiency Viruses I and II are consigned to the dustbins of history, I'll dream—with Whitman—"Unscrew the locks from the doors!/ Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!"

AUGUST '88

Douglas Messerli

Three Poems

Mirror of Actual Notice

May look the lines took
to round violet
as the storeys out of which?
as surface but obliterate
So cold it congeals budding
even sometimes
whither? Wash
the silence soft as shod
cracks out the mouth of a smother.
Come hey, down down flat.
Fresh though as snow.

At the other side of code, nod.
"I" who is hidden in the stumble.
"I" am your angle, your disperse.

Twass The Night

The lapse of steps is fall, a sort of
without order as leaves
actually do, not to land
what might has been, clues
to stand: so we lie
awake the way a lake records
a pass, past now, truth
only to an instance
that since no longer is cannot
be even was, what we wanted

to forget at last. Such is solace

a circle of sun about to choke
the maiden aunt, and I
in my death bed and mother in her nap
snap open eyes
so surprised that we were
asleep we wonder if we really fell
under.

Rather Than Exact

The silence fractured, distances accumulate
terror to the dust of fictions face
the long look of anger. To and two grip
distance, arranging life from heart into
a fraternity of regret. Waiting
resents the mouth, and dissolute admits
the trail to heart. For to make the mouth solutions
wet man's silences as if the quake
of every port were not a skip in beat
but the hunter's art. You are that
sermon so inhumane in its beautiful desertion.
The islands are flashing eyes the holds lose
to thing. The regular details expression becoming
grace, and miles away preying on its skill
lays still on the lathe of language.
Will you free me? There is a land lateral
to the two chambered brain that retains
its origins in the sign of the sea. (Cross my palm
and I shall portray thee in the hold
that holds the mind as gorges retain the deep.)
There is an object that's split between dissatisfaction
and what is the matter. And it too is a port
that drinks in parallel punctuation
a past in which we dream of futures
and a future in which we wake past.
So be. The voices submit to their tracks
and you come to your senses with blood
upon the hands that beat at that to which
you have been led. Words erect a span
across what is and what
will was, a map of all afternoon
and evening where you are and I
impatient to express the patience
it took to pretend
pretends death.

Rosmarie Waldrop

from Lawn of Excluded Middle

The word "not" seems like a poor expedient to designate all that escapes my understanding like the extra space between us when I press my body against yours, perhaps the distance of desire which we carry like a skyline and which never allows us to be where we are, as if past and future had their place whereas the present dips and disappears under your feet, so suddenly your stomach is squeezed up into your throat as the plane crashes. This is why some try to stretch their shadow across the gap as future fame while the rest of us take up residence in the falling away of land, even though our nature is closer to water.

*

I put a ruler in my handbag, having heard men talk about their sex. Now we have correct measurements and a stickiness between collar and neck. It is one thing to insert yourself into a mirror, but quite another to get your image out again and have your errors pass for objectivity. Vitreous. As in humor. A change in perspective is caused by the ciliary muscle, but need not be conciliatory. Still, the eye is a camera, room for everything that is to enter, like the cylinder called the satisfaction of hollow space. Only language grows such grass-green grass.

*

Even if a woman sits at a loom, it does not mean she must weave a cosmogony or clothes to cover the emptiness underneath. It might just be a piece of cloth which, like any center of attention, absorbs the available light the way a waterfall can form a curtain of solid noise through which only time can pass. She has been taught to imagine other things, but does not explain, disdaining defense while her consciousness streams down the rapids. The light converges on what might be the hollow of desire or the incomplete self, or just lint in her pocket. Her hour will also come with the breaking of water.

Though the way I see you depends on I don't know how many codes I have absorbed unawares, like germs or radiation, I was certain the conflicting possibilities of logic and chemistry had contaminated the space between us. Emptiness is imperative for feeling to take on substance, for its vibrations to grow tangible, a faintly trembling beam that supports the whole edifice. Caught between the thickness of desire and chill clarity, depth dissolved its contours with

intemperate movements inside the body where much can be gathered. Can I not say a cry, a laugh are full of meaning, the surface of a denseness for which I have no words which would not channel its force into shallower waters, mere echo of oracles?

The affirmation of the double negative tempts us to invent a myth of meaning where the light extends its wavelength, looping through dark hollows into unheard-of Americas, or a double-tongued flute speeds decimals over the whole acoustic range of the landscape till it exhausts itself with excess of effect brought home. Can I walk in your sleep, a straight line of flight, in order to defer obedience and assent to my own waking? Or will the weight of error pull me down below the symmetries of the round world? Touching bottom means the water's over your head. And you can't annul a shake of that by shaking it again.

Because we use the negative as if no explanation were needed the void we cater to is, like anorexia, a ferment of hallucinations. Here, the bird's body equals the rhythm of wingbeats which, frantic, disturb their own lack of origin, fear of falling, indigenous grey. Static electricity. Strobe map. Gap gardening. The sun feeds on its dark core for a set of glistening blood, in a space we can't fathom except as pollution colors it.

Martha Lifson

Misled by the specificity of prose, and Alibis

In that chimeric moment she wore a pearl-studded codpiece and black velvet.
Also, she was thinner in the dream.

Yet, on the other hand, is a mode of speaking that can't be denied.

His particular way was to reach over and tap you on the shoulder.

His work kept him so occupied he didn't look up
except when they installed blinking lights across the street
and it wasn't December.

He fell down the steps staring at a hummingbird.

Is it a conquest to opt for a quiet life, to move backwards in time?
To walk down Western again?

Balance held her attention as if it were a point of light,
yet when she was dizzy she saw things denied others
and the blur of their faces drew her.

When he called, his torment brought her to her knees.
She wore red dresses and earrings that dangled to her chin.

Anemia left her floating in the sheets,
either before or after not taking the pills.
How many times did he deny him before the cock crew?

By the freeway exit they sell balloons; in the market they whoosh
as they are filled with helium, as children sigh.

They either met at the baths or not.
Her job was time-consuming.

There's always a party if you're an artist.
A gallery spreads its wares no matter what time of day or night.

At the Naropi Institute they celebrate the anniversary of surrealism.
The radio announcer says the wings of freedom spread out,
but does not say who was in attendance.

When his arm comes around you, you are hopelessly inert.
Even if it isn't love.

Breton believed poetry would eroticize the workplace.

No matter how much weight he gains, he's without presence.
You can't believe he's arrived. She says it makes her crazy
and refuses to eat, redefining the word, "morsel."

Some put their hair in ponytails. It is neither here nor there.
Narrative is epigram.

Afterwards she ran from the trailer into the night,
imagined she had eight children instead or that after eight
she visited him in his trailer and asked how he was doing.

He said, I have to work like a Puritan;
otherwise, I can't sleep at night.

My son says that when she said, oh my god, I made him an egg
and I forgot to make you an egg, but I will right away
was one of the best moments of his life.

On the trip to Sonoma he expected to get two things it's famous for
and got them both.

Consumer society produces consumptives.

What time she turns over frightened in bed.
How my stomach aches at not loving. None of it's risky, he says,
now take bullets say, or disease.

His simultaneous desire for leisure and the work of the revolution
baffled her. His daughter took riding lessons.

That she covered him in caresses gave him pause.
The day before she sat on his lap.
What was she thinking when she married someone else.

How many hours does it take so that the random stranger turns
and says, "you look beautiful." It took three hours to braid her hair
and she was already so beautiful she could have come in shorts.

What I'd relish on the other hand, she posed,
is a quick spin after dinner, top down.

Past the Korean sign you can buy Coors in English;
to be here means soaking in a gritty tub, no rain.

She came to the opening in cowboy boots and talked instead
of the bookstore selling Latin American artifacts

and of so much blood she thought the painting was a placenta.
In other cultures, they eat it.

When I see children, she said, I hope to remarry,
just to hear someone else's memories.

On the radio he said, if we have failed,
how not to forgive those who fail.
He reminded his audience of Christ.

A tasty morsel, he muttered, as it doesn't matter
one way or the other, as long as there're enough
at the dinner table.

To work at it won't make love work.
I worked on it all night, she said,
handing him what she had written.

That we want to be transported won't make it happen.
We're misled by the specificity of prose.

Her clothes were what he called knock her down and pump her heels.
Otherwise he spoke often of enduring family values.

The aftershock was worse. They thought it might be,
as the announcer said, a warning of the real thing.

Alibi

The worse are to oneself, scenarios
strung along the necklace someone else's
wearing, envy or leaving
in the morning as they do for a drive up the coast,
the line between truth-like and white lie,
the shore line crossed, on occasion, by waves.
Or sitting exactly where she is sitting
and crossing her legs more or less,
fretting along confessional lines
as if you could figure it out
or the evening planned in your head would unfold
involuntarily according to your wishes
and what a bad habit afterwards
making excuses for mortification.
It's not so simple as giving it up

reversing a line of direction,
the lies one tells oneself under the sheets
or taking hold of one's story, whatever that is,
as if any narration mattered, backward
or forward, except could one argue
to soothe feverish children. But is
a broken and fragile line
different how much from once upon a time.

Alibi

You ask me what I'm thinking, if life were
only thinking or what can't be
repeated so that in your question I hear
what I've answered so many times before, or
the simplest explanation comes
as close as one can come to what were you
thinking when you asked and if I say
"one" as if I were only partly there or
more specifically what I imagine "one" might
want to be or say she has fallen into
patterns she recognizes but it does her
no good since convolutions cater to
people, ah there's a word, like me, we
often try not to cut through nonsense
sensing the pleasure if not rightmindedness
of it all and passive, was he thinking
paranoia when he wondered if he
could presume to press in where I was
already speaking as close to any light
going off as idea or the potential of
a splendid vocabulary word, as allotrope.

Alibi

She had the perfect one, perfectly plausible,
smoothly articulated, after all she said, I lie
through my teeth and otherwise, stretching
lengthwise before lifting off to other plans
already adopted, modes and melancholy put-ons

for the purpose of pickling his mind. First I go
here, then there. Afternoons I swim, drop off
a packet for this one or that, but am always
already returned for dinner or a tad after
when the phone rings, water boils
baths drawn up like budgets based on
soft money and the means to better things.
Backed into a corner, she began
to describe the route in meticulous detail,
the turquoise light of the parking lot,
patterned drapes open to an expanse of glass,
the pocked cement of the underground lot
where she'd found her car and drove it
round three ramps to a machine punching out
tickets with the time on them
to show she had never given it up.

Alan Davies

On Nick Piombino

Poems

Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1988

THE IMAGINATION CONSISTS of the fact that we can look right at a sign and find meaning.

Anything more evasive than that, anything more effusive, is already straddling the realms of art, and its influence. Nick Piombino's *Poems* is in its own curious but non-ambivalent ways, evidence of those places of straddling. Without being burdened primarily by either hindsight or foresight, the works yet look back to those values of what we might as well call traditional verse, for reasons for being (at work at that), and yet they look forward through somehow already renewable textual formulas of formal address.

And yet we would not wish here to divide in order to conquer. For the poems are not necessarily more harbinger of the emotive nor the texts necessarily more autocratic, or diverse, or conscriptive, or heady. In fact it's rare to credit an author who makes a move out of older forms into newer who nonetheless steps also back, abiding always his own angles of personal visions and his own place of abiding within them. There's a unity about the work as a whole, and the surprise of that unity is enchanting in face of the specific diversity of the works.

Some of the poems begin as "a poem" and quickly diverge into being about "being a poem" while still staying what they were/are. This is the kind of evidence they give of being writing. And, this is probably the divergence by which the poem becomes (not separate from) the text, in verging to enumerate and, in the case of the text, having lopped off that poem as which it began, or as which it could have begun. Perhaps the text is the fossiliferous outer form that remains, the fossil being the hardened form of the poem organism and as such, itself a rarely encountered literary artifact. The poem enters the world to live in it. When hardened, no longer alive or livid, it is gone from among the facts of human intercourse, but its evidence remains, a hard version of the potentials for fluctuations within the systems of meaning.

And in other ways some of the poems flutter out, as if not having managed to sustain what they would get to be, as poem. As if, rather, they found a world inhospitable to their perseverance, one where it didn't matter, and where the only thing to remain to do is to stand and let the matter drop. These are not failures.

They are evidence of failures, elsewhere. There are chronic lapses and for some of them the poem as such can only dumbfoundedly account.

Most of these poems are about something. They sketch somethings in the air about them. Often there's a romantic coefficient, and often too a thought or dreamed one. These vantages open respectively the prospects for collusion (and of language to materials) and for reverie (or for reference). These attenuations are never strained, as such rather seeming as they do to come out of the breath of the one who would speak them. It's the most elusive form of dogma, the one that would instruct itself.

Time shoots through these works like a falling image. And it's this crest of decay observed that we see absorbing other of the lateral and imagined facts of our world. It's the poetry of (a) time in decline. Things are falling fast but the poet's perception, we seem to see, fixes them against the foredrop (the scrim) of language, this filter that when attentive veils our apperceptions, and our perceptions too if we let it. It's as if from time to time we see a hand with slow motion, only somewhat arrested, lowering a file folder into a drawer. For Nick the writing of poems seems to be a way to observe memory, and the slow rewriting of actions and things that goes on there. Things that go deep.

These account in part for the effusion of diverse details that clog the exit out of these works. It is the multiplicity, of available sequiturs and connections, that the writing striates, so that the readers can find places to leave their hats. There is so much, and none of it more oversold than we would have thought, so that we stay as if to beg the question of having to choose. This is no limp humanism, but the human is given a/as place, the language those vestments in some ways it sees itself having worn, those furnitures in which one moment it sat and thought. This holding of memories holds them slightly in abeyance, already "back there," and it's the structural fact of a language that comments on itself in being, that holds itself up for purview, that makes possible a delay of that other for exampled sort.

It's a privilege to have the occasion to entertain a new stance in the world. It's that privilege poems afford when they set themselves along vectors where our even being there mines us with meaning. It's a consistently logged occasion. It's as if it's the function of the poem to simply get us close, it then being up to what's out there to drag or permit us the rest of the way. This is only one of the classifiable functions of poetry, but it is one that classifies itself in relation to the facts of experience as to a kind of truth, and it is this formation of relaxed verifiability that gives it its particular license.

Nick's writing addresses itself as an equal. It doesn't advertise for some other or speculative thing. Particularly not even "the self." It adheres to the tenet that a

particular language will survive as long as it can/does, and that in the meantime it will be about its expressive business.

Nick's *Poems* is an unexcerptable text of grand units smithed in the manner of materials that will wear their uses. The writing is throughout fathomably energetic. These works which remind us of the other pleasurable inventions of the flesh strengthen the lives of readers who will return to them as to air or water or food.

Nick Piombino

Aftermath

AN INNER MEASURE OF THINGS taken as a palpable surface is engraved into a person's self by the constant pressures of experience. The mind has a chance of staying ahead of this—laboring to clean its own slate—but the disparity is hard on balance.

*

The closer you look into a mirror, the more you see your own face. Someone else is exactly what you won't find there.

*

Hold a few things in place and watch where the change occurs. Order is one kind of illusion very useful to steadying the structure.

*

The abandoned journey began with a single step.

*

To love is to return.

*

Not a form of address, but a language. The difference between a greeting and a truth.

*

In these days more often than not poems are slaps. And we deserve it. Deserve what?

*

Be prepared to make sacrifices, large and small, in order to take control of your life. But don't be in such a hurry.

*

Time took us apart. Why? Time put us together.

*

Style is as much a question of undress as it is of dress. Letting down my guard, I imagined saying things to people I would never allow myself to say in everyday life. In this fantasy, I usually pause for a moment of intense satisfaction. It is life, not the imagination, which is oblique and mysterious.

*

The source of humor in the tolerance and recognition of paradox and contradiction. Playful "attack" sometimes necessary for learning.

*

Sense organs are also sexual organs.

*

I hid my work—and hence my ideas—the way a parent protects a child. But then the child became isolated.

*

Every freedom has its price. But this is true because price is a parasite that feeds on anything. Freedom protects itself in its constant attention in watching for an opening.

*

Freedom is sometimes evasive—right. But this is in the spirit of advancing. While evasion contains a kind of freedom, it is not generative of freedom. Freedom raises, so it scares.

*

Structure is strong. This is why it sometimes seems beautiful. But the beauty is not in the structure. It is in the particularity.

*

Where am I going? Probably back to where all things came from. Why did I come? The tendency for things to come together.

*

Senses play with each other, like children, like birds.

*

People attach themselves to things and to ideas. Often the two conflict. But both commitments are strong.

*

The power of human tenacity is inestimable. Is this the most prominent similarity—in personality—to our ancestors—the apes?

*

Why do writers imagine that readers have no sense of touch in their eyes? Reading is *all* Braille.

*

Reader and writer—no faith in each other. Both fear betrayal—but the reader more, even though the writer takes most of the risk.

*

The final thought of thought is freedom from thought.

*

Coming apart at the seams: "What is = what I did."

*

Thoughts are an intrusion, but not that much of an intrusion. What is a true invasion is a misperception, a falsehood, a lie.

*

Even obscurity has properties.

*

Language gives form to the impact the world has on our inner measure of it.

*

Things that really come before come after too.

*

Having a thought is like eating an egg. The precision is all in the cracking.

*

Everything has its eye.

*

In order to do a different kind of thinking, we learn to do a new kind of writing—the *relationship* produces what is new, like a new kind of speaking. Art combines, where science atomizes.

*

If you want to keep it for yourself, keep it to yourself. Anything revealed is public property.

*

Through the mind of the critic to the heart of the poet—and vice-versa.

*

"The poet is pushed to the margin" (Wim Wenders, *Wings of Desire*). Often by other poets, I might add.

*

If you want to speak, ride the rapids of sarcasm.

*

Time sings us, plays us. In reverie we feel the stillness inside all the speed, glimpse how fast we must move in this social world, just to keep up with our "selves." Desire and expectation, pulsing, pulsing. Winnicott: false and true selves.

*

Time is sub-rosa ("the rose in ancient times was an emblem of silence.")

*

Now I see why I always mistyped "tiies" for "times."

*

A misplaced action corresponds to a misplaced thought.

*

"Missing" the present.

*

Eternal refrain of a child: "say it again."

*

Everything has its I.

*

Coagulation, struggle, dissolution, repeat.

*

As soon as something exists, it's complicated. Things quickly acquire other dimensions, if only because of what they are close to.

*

Movement awakens life.

*

"Seek and ye shall find." But what you find is how to find.

*

An interesting effect of John Cage's work is that it freed me of John Cage's "work." This is a profound philosophical effect and the music is no less memorable.

*

Art is finding, science is keeping, work is reaping.

*

To be decorous is not to be formalistic. The first may simply be showing sensitivity to a formal context. The second creates a context.

*

In everyday practice, truths are detected by apprehending cadences. These are confirmed by a kind of subliminal sounding that employs aspects of vision and touch.

*

Charm furthers propagation.

*

They can interrupt or stop anything but true celebration. Celebration, cerebration. Could this have been the first act of mental freedom?

*

Pierce the membrane between philosophy and poetry and something starts to leak, then flow.

*

Happiness is always "conventional."

*

Irritation: surplus stimulation.

*

Wisdom: does it consist of little more than accepting how long it takes for something to actually "happen"? If satisfaction is the measure this is easy to see.

*

Perfection is a kind of surface. Wholeness must be bounded by a shell or skin. To be a unit is to have an outside and an inside.

*

Place your bets, then laugh. And the game comes to an end so soon!

*

In case you might forget, exaggerate.

*

Adhering to the world by means of glue, ideas are useful mainly when they're wet. But the dry remains fascinate.

*

Reality is like a sea.

*

The world contains many thoughts and few images.

*

1/1/88-2/13/88

Paul Vangelisti

Loose Shoes, or An Account for a Son

*Wasn't it your daddy believed three most dangerous
things in the world was a jealous husband, a hungry man
and something else you can't remember?*

6/30-2 a.m., a Wednesday night in Modena, haunted by politics and distance I scribble instead against insomnia.

Like flying to Italy and lying awake in a room sweating and wondering about flying to Italy and lying awake in a room.

And yet the horse's breath and the lemon depends on the tree and the hooves never ring beyond an avenue of dreams.

If anything's clear it's that I'm tired of the reason words squint back.

Today, calling from Florence, Ippolita asked what I looked like, was I the same?

Constant as the wind, I said in English, though where I lie now there's often no wind and when there is it's not clear from what direction.

So, as you ask, I'll write about Italy, even when all roads lead elsewhere.

(Neah Bay, for instance. Seemed I was always explaining why you joined the Coast Guard.)

At the bar there's talk of elections, as they keep filling my glass, and how money's the same everywhere.

At another bar, the owner raises an arm and says in a town nearby, on a given day, more than 2,000 bicycles line the square.

And still I can't sleep bouncing back and forth like a top inside.

(Maybe getting tired—it's 3am.—and will fall asleep and dream I'm getting tired and can't keep the nag from under my window.)

A politics of images? Or is it more than hunger rotates in an empty mind around a notion like sleep?

7/1 — 5am. Poverty and the dim avenue keep me awake. Was mine always a mind scant of images, a clear idea nowhere? All roads, of course, lead there too.

Half an hour ago on the toilet I read a list in *L'Espresso* of what's avant and retro this summer, and among the definitely backward are *clear ideas*. Implications of which, not least of all for sleep, trouble me like angel's wings.

Jet lag? If so, the worst ever. Besides, that's too clear a notion for Italy this summer and has little to do with angels or falling off to sleep.

7/2 — Mailed a dress to Simone for her birthday on the 16th. She'll be 14! Drank through the day and to bed at 3am., tipsy, able to sleep until 8:30. Dinner on a terrace with a group of painters and their wives. Night ended with two guitars and Dylan songs that clearly held some nostalgia for them. The English out-of-place as I was nor could I recall what the songs made me feel, say in 1970, when you were two years old. 'Myself and strangers', said Gertrude Stein of her audience. One hell of a Paris.

7/3 — To Ferrara, Saturday evening, with Corrado and Amedea. Five shows opening at Palazzo del Diamanti, including "Poetry as Painting", "Some Aspects of Current Chinese Painting" and "The Brothers Bugatti: Furniture, Sculpture and Automobiles". Huge crowd around the cars of the once rich and famous.

Town shut down early, couldn't find much more than ice cream at 11. Had me back to Modena by 1. Tried to fall asleep by explaining to myself why you joined the Coast Guard.

7/4 — Up at 7am. and to Ferrara again with Giuliano, Sandra, daughter Virginia, Giorgio (driving) and dog Lu. To 16th century estate, with park, bought a couple of years ago by friend who made a million in frames. Lots of talk of trees, other flora & fauna, other dates & centuries.

(Rewriting this, humid Sunday afternoon, end of August, couples up and down the street visiting real estate, makes me glad nobody knew it was the Fourth.)

Drank and ate from 1pm. to 1am, at nightfall moving to another painter's house. Just wasn't there—wanting back to this sweating bed—as lately haven't been at parties back home. Maybe more of what, in your letter from Yorktown, you call 'solitude', what you now 'understand about me'. Though I've never stood watch on an open sea nor can tell you why the urge in me to draw back gets stronger. Exhausted by wine, slept almost 7hrs.

7/5 — Back to little sleep in the heat and remorse. Would be home on Berkeley Circle where the campaign's on more familiar terms. (Don't ask which—military metaphor only partly for your benefit.) By the way, apropos 'understanding' me, maybe it's what we do with fathers, wanting them more significant in the world, making our traumas and injustices at their hands somehow original. In respect to self-delusion, might not you have been better off sired by a banker? And then again look at me, an accountant's son.

Ragioniere is what Ersi keeps calling me. She's the Greek writer (now Cultural Counsel at their Embassy in Rome) who visited me in 1981. You may recall we—you, Simone and I—dragged her off one Sunday afternoon, in high-heeled boots, to hike to the top of Mt. Hollywood. Corrado and I, because of a railroad strike, met her in Florence, after this account ends. Drove back down to Rome with her to catch my plane. *Ragioniere*, accountant, one who reckons, who keeps track and, I

suppose, a little distance. As a term of endearment, not without irony. Do you audit the books I keep?

7/6 — Achieved, as one might say in Italian, 7hrs. of sleep.

Campaign flourishes, as do my allergies.

Serafino prescribes cortisone to start the morning: difficulty breathing, constant wheezing, though chest clear. Larynx inflamed in allergic reaction is the diagnosis.

2:30pm. Cortisone at work, breathing shallow but with some ease. Ask myself, since lately I find it hard to talk, why I'm here, or anywhere else? Or this too a mechanical reaction, an image again for nothing?

5:30pm. Bored with myself. Lymph node on groin swollen, hives on my ass. Scratches on my forearm trying to climb 16th century tree in Ferrara look infected. *Ragioniere*. Ultimately from the Latin *ratio*. A practical people.

7/7 — Still no sleep until early morning, drowsy at times but not so late at night.

Might be interesting were I all that memorious.

As it is, more like a boy at the blackboard trying to diagram a compound-complex sentence. (Do they still teach this at school?)

At the point of getting every word down something's left out and must erase and start all over.

O the sentence.

Others stirring now, soon will be hard to scribble.

(Anger and frustration—rhetoric depending on who gets up first—will be enacted over the dog shit in front of the fridge I stepped on in the dark. Wiped it up, though smell lingers, and too tired or adrift to recall where they keep the disinfectant.) Could it be I only dream English and struggle all night with a translation preparatory?

7/8 — Now on antibiotics and cortisone, slept 7hrs. straight. Advances are small, if significant. (Military again?)

Health, of course, a relative term. As Amedea, an M.D. and leukemia researcher, told me last week, on our way to meet Corrado for dinner, cancer is a battle between a potentially immortal and a mortal organism. (Medea, as she's called, has kept a family of leukemia cells alive for several years; patient from whom the original cell came being long dead.)

So, with cancer, mortality is health, immortality pathological. Nobody is as nobody does.

And the poem about hunger I started out to write, what health or pathology does it offer?

7/9 — Last night and tonight Pink Floyd in concert (stadium behind the hotel where we stayed in 1981)—70,000 tickets sold as of yesterday.

60s everywhere: sleeping bags, bare feet and chests, long hair and puppies under the arm. Many your age, maybe a little younger: where do you learn this revival? (Read about it at school?)

Slept a few hours and caught a train for Piacenza, leaving Giuliano's dreams of splendor, Sandra's passive resistance, Virginia's eternal rebellion and the dogs barking, pissing and shitting—along with the 60s—behind.

William at the Piacenza station. Train on time. We walk the bicycle to his studio where he has an appointment (former student, quite pretty, about 25). Excuse myself and head for a bar where I now sit. William's work—two or three large canvases I saw before the girl's arrival—goes very well. People cast civil glances. I write notebook on my knee. In a country devastated by angels I've seen few.

7/10 — Last night Festa del'Unità in Borgonovo. Drank till about 2 with William and his friend Luigi, truck driver, who asked if I wanted to ride with him to Vienna. Talked about the Party playing into the hands of the Socialists and then to someone else's house, who wasn't home, and drank two more fine bottles.

All night assured Luigi I was typically American.

Slept a stupefied six then wide awake with dry mouth.

Corrado just arrived in Piacenza with daughter Francesca (now 28 and amused) and his "client", also 28, who is to stand trial in San Remo. Dancer, performer, poet with a group of 'radical punkers' called CCCP, charged with flashing his 'semi-erect member' (said police report) during a concert last March. Quit cortisone, remain on antibiotics, 1200cc. twice a day.

7/11 — Managed 6hrs., sweating and tossing most of those.

Off to Bagnone to check repairs needed on roof of the house. Hasn't been opened since you all left in 1981 or so we've been told by cousins.

William and I to meet Corrado there in the evening on his way back from San Remo, Francesca and semi-erect defendant in tow.

7/12 — IERI SANGVE OGGI LA TVA GLORIA APVA MADRE

Reads motto on Bagnone's now abandoned city hall erected in 1929 under fascism. Bagnone doesn't seem to change, except for few more fake Mediterranean villas, less year-round inhabitants.

And then there was Monica—first real angel sighted this trip—working in a cousin of mine's bar. After about 5 min. in her small, dark presence (while I made obligatory calls to great aunt, cousin, etc.), William blurted out, "You are remarkably beautiful". I hung up the phone and said it was true.

And so went our afternoon, smiling and staring at Monica as do men of a certain age.

(William found out, while I was again on the phone, she's a grammar school teacher without prospects of work and so she makes espresso.)

Monica, dusky angel of perfect skin, nose and teeth, Monica from Pastina, 20 houses at the end of a road halfway up the Apua Madre.

3:30pm. Met Aldemaro and his brother (contractor) who went with us into the house, not nearly as ruined as he (Aldemaro) described by letter. Listened to their exaggerations of labor and material costs, all four of us ill with the performance, perspiring intensely for 15 min., and then ciao ciao ciao jumping into our cars to leave.

6pm. Corrado & Co. arrive a little euphoric: all went well, says Corrado, postponement and eventual dismissal. Rock star struts around the medieval alleys and lanes barefoot, in black halter, bare stomach, black leotard and no underwear. Everyone stares. Good dinner and quantity of wine make our exhibitionist almost tolerable. Left Bagnone around 10:30.

On the way to the autostrada stopped at a 14th-century church, apparently deconsecrated, roof gone and within the massive stone walls now a graveyard.

Halfway into the church—air very thick and heavy, so

many small flickering lights—quickly got back in our cars to find the autostrada.

7/13 — Got about 6hrs. in the heat; still on antibiotic though feeling much better, if a little tired.

On the train back to Modena consider what culture we've managed (we "on the left", intellectuals, artists, writers, etc.). Ours is a 'progressive', so-called 'Marxist culture' (maybe the whole damn entry should go in quotes) having a hypothetical, perhaps inverse bearing on the state of things; a politic schematized and institutionalized in the most *academic* sense of the word—e.g. third world writing, women's poetry, non-elitist art, the gay aesthetic, etc., etc. Certainly not, after 40 years of Cold War, any real sense of *praxis*.

As in visual art, where the violence of marketing devalues work and forces idiom and style, so with the written and ideal word and so with political speech. Languages of advertising, movies, radio & TV deny the word its body.

(Remember Walker, the Bird and the Idiot, the characters Bill Hunt and I made up when we worked at KPFK. The goofy voices helped me bear the daily lies of the radio station, Hollywood, deadlines, divorce, no money, etc. Also, I think, they kept me near you. And that time driving up Glendale Blvd. you were so embarrassed by the Idiot you jumped out at a stop light. Simone was in stitches and I so in-character kept on driving.)

So a body of language pre-empted by a language of the body: so a language of images or non-language:

Sound, the phantom of a voice: image, the ghost of a body,

Aren't we like the good Captain who put out the eye of the savage monster and now are blind?

7/14 — Six fitful hours, still on antibiotics and back in Modena. Nobody understands or wishes to understand what I'm doing here, while I've never claimed to.

Ippolita comes up from Florence to visit this morning.

Married in nine days and by the end of October will be a mother.

Soon I'll be anonymous and free again in my hunger.

7/15 — Ippolita overnight in Modena, took my bed, I the couch where I waited for dawn and a shower.

Agitated all day as we walked the streets and chattered and chattered.

Every half hour or so repeat the stupid litany, "And so you're getting married and going to have a child".

She never gave me much of a response except to laugh.

She held my hand all day yesterday and this morning before I put her on the train at 12:16.

Still on antibiotic and antihistamine again for runny nose.

7/16 — Saturday, finally rained last night. Rode back on a bike at 1:30am., a little tipsy. Giorgio brought us to an architect's for dinner. Barely there though I made sure to be pleasant. Loaned me their car so I can drive this morning to Parma to visit Adriano. Seemed remarkably generous.

Incidentally, I'm not sure why you joined the Guard but am more and more glad you did. Of course, I'm proud too but shouldn't think of that. Pride's one of those things keeps me awake.

7/17 — Yesterday with Adriano going over Caravetta's translation of *Portfolio*. Adriano insists it's awful and we (A. and I) must spend a few days revising it. Kept yelling about sending a letter to Caravetta's chair at CUNY denouncing his professional capacity. All seemed some crazy vaudevillian, as I sniffed and dripped and blew my nose and Adriano ranted on. Corrado came by and took the brunt of it for a while. Told us of an idea for a contemporary anthology of poetry—Adriano insisting it's genius—called "La musa smemorata" (The Unremembering/Disremembered Muse): poems composed only in the simple present, no past.

Kept feeling lousy; vitamin C, antihistamine and antibiotics.

7/18 — To Ferrara again with Giuliano, Sandra, Virginia & Lu. Visited painter, Giorgio, in his early 40s, with severe case of Parkinson's, rendering his speech unintelligible and he, in the evenings, more or less immobile. On his good days able to paint. Work is a third of the size of before and quite good, i.e. far more

intense and vigorous. Played ping-pong with Giuliano, Sandra and another painter, Sergio, and began to feel better.

7/19 — Talked to Bianca Maria yesterday who called from Sardinia to invite me there. (By the way, she and Brunello send their regards.) Said, among other things, she was attacked (physically) by the poet Dario Belleza at an event she organized in Rome. Outraged at being ejected from the hall for repeated heckling, and consequently skipped over when it was his turn to read, Belleza marched back inside, up the aisle and straight for the stage. Next thing she knows Belleza has his hands on her throat, they're on the ground, punches being thrown and a tangle of microphone and video cables. Lots of good footage it seems. If Brunello hadn't been there, she said Belleza might have seriously hurt her. O the Eternal City and its practical people.

Finished antibiotics, keeping to antihistamine. Slept a solid seven, best yet.

7/20 — Another seven; last day in Modena. Off to Parma and Adriano's in the morning, tomorrow night with Corrado and Medea in Cavriaggio, and Friday to Florence for the wedding.

Giuliano tried to do more sketches of me for the reissue of *Portfolio*, sitting under the trees and drinking at Serafino's. One might do. Five or six others ended up more like caricature. Giuliano says I'm very hard to draw, never still. I say I'm too easy around him, so much myself and nobody in particular. Hence properly ridiculous and not for portraiture. Something from memory might work better.

7/21 — 8am. train for Parma. Up at 6:30, last antihistamine and rouse Giuliano at 7:15 for final visit to cafe.

Lover of endings, I can hardly rein in the ecstasy of departure.

Even seeing Giuliano in blue briefs, one last floundering in the direction of the bathroom.

On the way to the station we find Ermes opening his bar and stop for a final glass of sparkling white.

Todd Baron

'this . . . seasonal journal'

OUR MOODS DO NOT BELIEVE IN EACH OTHER. To-day I am full of thoughts and can write what I please. I see no reason why I should not have the same thought, the same power of expression, to-morrow. What I write, whilst I write it, seems the most natural thing in the world; but yesterday I saw a dreary vacuity in this direction in which now I see so much; and a month hence, I doubt not, I shall wonder who he was that wrote so many continuous pages. Alas for this infirm faith, this will not strenuous, this vast ebb of a vast flow! I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall. (Emerson, Circles)

//

This sense of being read ("lack of control") is common. "Escape" even commoner. (use of the specific narrows it down.) That the word is squared and candescent. "luminous" used once in a letter, meaning not "light giving" but surely something rather awful.

(as if by being the owner of one thought I was actually something less than what I am/ that by taking on a job I could be "fired".) But where was the canon? a portion explains it best:

(. . .)

(when the machine bites you bite back.) things here fall apart but stay together. And the bell rings/& you hear it. . . Is Gaudi evident there-about? Can you find some black & white photographs? (Are there hanging gardens?)

(. . .)

Or a list of things unsaid that read *Our Virtual Friend, Bread & Butter Letter, To Read Away*. As if in a sampler I had no idea of. A series I can't get wet. Even the rent and that's for starters.

The body motions to get quicker and grammar goes to meaning. Now that I have a "bad" back I cannot do everything I've already forgotten. Once putting up a black curtain covering the back portion of the stage. But we had to sit in the audience. And after use comes not devotion but rather mis-use or ill-use or just plain.

//

It's what you do with a number of pages. But start to get in.

(. . .)

Happy to send along "permission" & such. Glad to hear about your book. What's always drawn me to yours is the dark meandering I find in MYSELF when reading aloud. Dahlberg too. If you have any advice on reading WHITMAN as a physical poet please let me know. I've a book coming out entitled *return of the world* but I don't know about what. Lucretius mentioned in a recent piece of yrs. recently read that is . .

(. . .)

//

Anxiety, as the customer told me, is the great achiever in *Moby Dick*. And relief itself is boundless. Ishmael & Queequeg in each other's arms. And the reverent aspect of being . . . (adrift on a casket.)

(. . .)

I'm right now reading Stevenson and had I a grant would write a nice piece I've projected on what you *can* tell from the isolated line of verse, taking off from a line in *The Spirit of Romance*.

(. . .)

Having bought or brought myself in this direction, knowing this pocket is the great enhancer between what is known and what is written. simplicity abhors devotion. "the sleeper falls. . ." but hasn't finished that yet. My response to her is to move away. How can I withstand this body? No one with reason would understand. even those that seem "pitched" would only think me an interpreter. notes scribbled before/when she was with me. I now have weeks to think of what to do next.

Not so that a given case means anything. It was said by November everything would change, and he mentioned my mother. The way in *is* the way out even with a normative stance. (as if I were trying to empty.)

(. . .)

But you don't have to suffer a crisis of belief over this. Whitman (not you) is the subject of your thesis, and he thought it could, apparently, so your question should be, why did Whitman think the physical body could become a written work—and why did he think it should?

(. . .)

//

So that I feel inappropriate to my time where it seems like a lot of people. And the kitchen is actually separate from the rest of the house but only in mine. They are real things to worry about. (in the middle of something "unclear".) As if I would turn and go toward some other. "pocket studies" drain the emotion. Too many holes by the side of the bed.

//

Epiphanies need change, like broken water. Waking is going out to them. (They swam back to shore.) But what matters is the use of the current word or words mentioned in the letter. How "they" make ideas for the body but nothing in form. My fingers hardly touch the page. I've written "change". (It takes only a moment to be "out on the street".) the political relishes food-sources, but the sun shines angrily today.

an example of the tongue moving finding reference unable to proceed/as if spelling made a difference. only.

what moves in reduced number by reading undefined or less than average relationships. How many times have I

wondered if "I was in the habit of wandering around our garden. . ." seeking to dispel its effect on me.

(. . .)

Yet the significance of finding an articulation of/for that non-knowledge is still present, since in its absence we have no inner constitution other than what systems of authority fill us with (i.e. bullshit.). . .

soon.

(. . .)

//

So the subject meets a subject, falling/fixed. (how is solicitude expressed?) Concern for abbreviated form without "what writing likes." a surge of power makes the disk fluctuate, the face leave guard. (maybe I can't use that word.) Situated on the bottom like I am yet with significance. The cause of restless sleep unable to constitute "bed" from "head" or "hand" or "cause". Of certainty covering loss: a grey number.

(. . .)

I find the form (visual) pretty but think in general it's too cautious—she has started in one fashion & pursues it too closely. th sound of th words is nice however + short phrases do add up.

in common,

(. . .)

The relevance of this to that, "so that's that. . . ." as if the signature were walking up to the counter with something on its mind. A statement or question but his eyes or her position. Reaching for an obvious book. Then "important reading." A portrait or sore or loss of labyrinth. The physical world in no other matter. (symbolism for. . .) The rough edge of the universe.

//

The pen became the motor but the hand became the energy & repetition's days are number'd. The operational mode. Flesh in *Sound & Meaning, Giving up the Ghost, A Woman Waits for Me*.

//

The absence of letters, who aren't here. Longing for "what I read," as read in order to avoid it. Hovering above cemented verses, as central power or the likeness of reflection of incongruity contended. "I myself have for many years given it up in despair."

(...)

The waves are hard when the trees are blowing. (The waves are smooth when it's morning.) But I don't like the hegemonic position it's attained. One last note, my only reservation about this reference was the possibility of being trampled on by anyone of 10,000 strange people.

(...)

Fear not the new generalization. Does the fact look crass and material, threatening to degrade thy theory of spirit? Resist it not; it goes to refine and raise thy theory of matter just as much. (Emerson. Circles)

//

Appointments kept but no time "coming in." Having left or about to leave the origin of the phrase or word continues. (This figure of a limb.) The absence of necessary fear in reading Williams. Like Dickinson pushed to the back of the cart. As if this shadow didn't play a meaning.

Background outlined in cloth or decay. "My soul in its profundity—that center. . ." yet took me in. Trying to gain access to the leaves on paper.

Therefore I take on my self in a world I had no meaning in, of my own making. As a corollary fact this dream of a house under a house but the geologic survey or man with an instrument or a book open to its pages. "memory is a kind of accomplishment. . ." made of memory. Post-mortem effects? "As soon as Walt *knew* a thing he assumed a One Identity with it."

(...)

This afternoon I go on with that book. Now that "he's" away I find no pressure to do the writing. It gets rather loud here but you know the state of my economic mind. I've simply never been taught how to control what otherwise would be called "luck" and now that I have this piece of security I can't seem to part from it, even though I have the right idea. the windows have been replaced but I still want to be alone. A few people to dinner but not all at once. This discussion of the incredibly wrong reading of *Symposium* (in part I suppose to prescribe & obey.)

I still go.

(...)

//

First representation of the world moving toward a single frame. The difference between "Remembering in a different ink," & what the record plays. (As in painting: trees fold.) Illusion makes footsteps around the pool/in the middle of night. My arm wipes clean the hand that stains me.

The computer writes "relationships dispel non-knowledge." Timeless systems won't bend. Poverty strikes the home that wears it. No "symmetry" w/out nature. "Length leads to length. . ." inducing reason. Pragmatic design forgetting the object's line of descent.

(. . .)

"It means loss." As single as that. A mess of letters in the rain. When I wake unable to feel like a natural person. Do you experience that when you put all that equipment on? I'm here asking if your legs are involved, please answer.

(. . .)

//

"If I know yet, what I would have. . ." Using action to drain the page, typing "the other room".

Curiosity & a mouth, two hands & a table.

//

The word crisis begins another sentence. A tangible form hedged in by its effigy. and the ground gets bigger in reading or intending to read the body as force see how the tension springs at the end of the line. Voice carried off to seed & down again as earth gives out inspiration. That's not to say breath is anything but artificial. The idea, for instance, that the line is born of birth. ". . . when the reasons for existence are lost in the struggle to exist." The temporal sanctity of Gold Crowned Finches & Stellar Jays. (Someone pushing at my door.)

Small wet kernels at ease in the damp patches of skin. *Having* to learn *anything* at the foot of a stake.

(. . .)

It was unexpected & before I lose it in the debris of ever-present self-perpetuating somewhat redundant correspondence which sprawls monologically on the rumpled blue & white rug awaiting word from me, I will answer it. I certainly sympathize with the problem(s) that occur between anticipating the themes & their unfolding & the attempt to fix the whole mess on a piece of paper. But somehow I missed the whole point—namely this fascination with the "physical body" and a belief that it has something or anything to do with (poetry). I just don't see it myself: the physical body *doesn't* become a written work—to answer your question bluntly. And so forth.

(. . .)

//

But without writing I can't say what it is that provokes me. Walking & falling towards both reading & traveling too. (A field/ or what we in the city call a field/ of action, bound between two forces.) A desire to have the assembly of soil we're made of. a leaf or leaf structure/ or is it "ink"?/ moving away from the bulk in position towering "Hues which have words. . ." w/ restraint, letting in Cornell's Medici Boy agonizing blue.

(...)

Poem is a body I keep to chart design & mayhem & throw off water. A hot bath in the morning brings relief but also desire & the need for flexibility. How one tries when one can't & what is "one" anyway? I'm sorry for this (these) postcards but only this shortness of breath in this season of remiss. fog in "use"/ what of it?

etc/ & yrs

(...)

//

"can't imagine the things some people say. . ." as working to fold into unknown containers. The phone rings but nobody "answers" and gesture *is* speech trying to get out of language:

//

Lying here reading your letter a truck stops in front of my room and I can't hear you speak. Light from the window seems forced in. How "normal" movement is portrayed as one in front of the other (and you hardly hear it.) Just as the individual is geologic strata and the hole in human nature. "It is no small matter, this round and delicious globe. . .," Stuff like this happens & then you're left hanging like a delicious nail, only you're broke & the song of the self rearranges your protons.

(...)

It's all right as an expression of what he wants and doesn't find . . . leafing through Browning, sounding Tennyson . . . But I prefer the odd little song . . . A musical modulation . . . if your cataloguing gets frantic enough, you develop a whole new reason for synesthesia—what he feels is what he *feels*. That ambiguity is built into the diction everywhere.

(...)

What's meaning but vanity?" (Mandelstam) lost on another occasion. Where the meridian slowly opens or closes along the equator. This sense of repeating myself, toward the garden, as if it's a roof-song pressed to the hip, walking. "Here, take this shape and gather it about you." where there's only the image of this question.

//

Where form extends this notion of content: A limb in water swelling to flotation. As if it were a made up thing. Order isn't the only reason. The romantic inconsistency in nature.

(...)

two nights ago i wrote to you telling you about the loud noises outside my window. tonight, i'm writing about political theater. i'm fascinated by people's ability to concede a part of themselves to a thing or being. Blind Faith is remarkably powerful & that sense of trust and hope is beyond my realm of feeling. as for your work well, how about that old adage of hard work being therapeutic. i don't buy it either but it's a good distraction.

(...)

Nothing born in order that we might be able to use it. ("but the thing born creates the use.") Sometimes a stream of particles and sometimes a stream of waves. I watch my hand escape my mouth so many times now.

//

what it is that I read? ". . . separated from birth," that Williams or Whitman didn't have to answer. The motion is there. The stretch evident in ways of walking. So that legs turn'd and the torso bent. That the family or operatic moment didn't need to stop. The world got in as "The World".

(...)

It doesn't seem to matter how much movement I have. The treatments seem to be working like magic. AS magic I should say since I believe them. How Whitman's interactions have come round again. Surrounding one's self with what's available, not simply pushing towards the front of the skin, lines gather moisture whether or not it's requested. I write something like an introduction to lyricism but I don't know what that is . . .

(...)

"A Slate Notebook" read as meandering, but turns like a single page. How can you doubt that depths have come to the surface diffused in the depths. Indications seep out & I lose the image set in an image. If only there would be air. Or a list of things describable. The mind wanders on a tide of drowsiness but is it sleep? Scattered this way and that by the same condition.

//

Structure of solidified rhythm in afterthought of representation, "If you write things down to make them real . . ."

Like moving around this building I continue a listing of names: *How German is It, Wieland, Hope Against Hope & Awakenings.*

(...)

Lying here a few hours after we part. I took a bit of a sleep, read a few pages of the book and am now writing you. I'm trying, thru writing this letter a bit, to understand the language of my emotions. I do miss you and have called out your name a few times now. It's hard for me to truly comprehend this monstrous feeling.

etc/or

(...)

What would otherwise have none, fails, the tip of the finger the eye of the mouth, as water normally speaks foregoing language in.

If words mounted as words, the meridian over the abdomen.

//

As if to say "it exists" walking around all day saying "this is a sign. . ." followed by dots. desiring everything around it.

(...)

A strained lyrical quality seems to bend back to itself, forced to write again. A writing somehow political in its "own" body. This constant voice of quotation at once both irritating & to the point. My only question involves the possibility of "locked" form that I think I see working itself too severely, but that just might be this assembly I have in front of me. In any case, again, I was glad to read them. Question tho, this "voice of God effect," how does it make you?

(...)

Not a song let go but a song impaled on its form. Control in order to speak. Something once read as a vision or gesture towards the written work as an open field. The reminder's an *actual* thing. A rose let out of its boundaries. Like a rock in the garden. Not only active but swinging back again, meandering (as) thought.

//

"I swear I begin to see little or nothing in audible words. . ." So much under the bed, "organic theory" or mechanical art grounded in human creation. Advancement wanting place & home again. (Where water goes into containment.) To know anything: how it's come about, in its form or series of forms local & temporal. Never *is* but always being. (The Promise of the Incomplete.) A sanction of dust under the table.

//

The muscles of the hand move in a single line towards an imagined light near the edge of the bed. So much depends upon the definition of rhythm, flow, sometimes call'd balance, time or pitch. (Tho the Bay is poisonous there are always swimmers.) A fine substance penetrating dream last time that I gave you.

(...)

What do I mean when I hear you say "thinking a thing describes it?" Or that's not what you said—The breach between the handwritten line and the printer's cable. Only the first block seems worth reading, then everything else gets in. "We're interested, but only in your writing." As pulse is a sound I'll mention, "What tartuffery there is in a literature for the PEOPLE." (Dahlberg)

(...)

//

nothing is revived, denying the spirit goes underground, rooted in flesh. But movement is small, as if that thing mattered.

(...)

The assumption that ideas are images broken by the sound of yr voice so far away. When I learned the derivation of things as connected but only if you see them in their respective poses. Your sense of being without a focus for the future doesn't mean a thing. What would you do if you had one? Thoughts about speech linger today. The clouds are finally vacant & the sun is slow to continue but I finally feel the heat,

without me,

(...)

//

"Empty quotes", as they fall into place, displaced as a means of reduction, turning the object to the object's face. "To the bone." as it's taken away, reinventing (the) experience.

//

fog tonight, /rice-paper shade/drawn/coming "in". "Who knows," as taken from a string of inspirations. A book in "my" hand? or rain in my teeth. The sense that Dialectic is removed from rhetorical persuasion. What's the use in Negative or Positive Thinking as a way to own Displacement? Architecture wanting light again, from room *to* room, quieting down; Schindler might have you sleep on the outside where the fire is.

//

Sun through grey clouds tho not grey entirely. Each step taken as action towards the change of wind. But "process" as function or form following fact in order to be seen as succeeding physiology. Symbolism gains in meaning as words extract, but earthly distinctions go where discovery is. That the voice is an inherited glimmering and the throat holds stress. Bricks in the tone or carriage, nests withholding within.

(...)

"What that white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid. "awaken in any man's soul some alarm," which at times

by its intensity completely overpowered me. Once while rewriting that book I took it down to the pier and onto that vessel. The movement of the boat in its moorings. The same goes for you and I too. I want you to know that those flights appall me. I had hoped to explain myself here:

but restless,
(. . .)

Why it's easier to write a letter than a sentence down, carving on the front of the work each notation, translating what happens /of the world/ "I'm in". absorption of nominal synthesis. Otherwise "boredom" or "every decision you make is a mistake." Verbs go without saying. "Water/ roamed/ the distance." (the house opens up to swallow them.)

//

"If anything of moment results—so much the better." That greeny flower in front of the wall. What matters is that entropy dwindles down. *Spring and All* and even *Big Money*. Outside today they scrape paint but hear it fall open and (the rent increases.) Is there weather really? (the cat sleeps by the door to get in.) The sink leaks outside a flight of transportation. Ice not glass but it melts doesn't it?

(. . .)

Your image of the writing hand or the stroke or the writing stroke of the hand as a blade against some skin. Your image of the image of a hand as a stroke. The sound of the image scraping the skin leaving the writing beneath. Your image of the possibility of the impossibility of what we're doing here. (or not here, but.) Your image of a suit of clothing underneath the skin. Your

picture of the reader existing somewhere as the singer of the book or The Book of Love.

(. . .)

Just to state something as it's said past the motivation of having said it. "Considering Language then as some mighty potentate, into the majestic audience-hall of the monarch ever enters a personage like one of Shakespeare's clowns, . . ." An attempt to say the bloodstone or "I've seen it so I'll believe." Everything in aspiration, yet, trees & form, an expanse of manufacturing or recreating "the work" we possess in common. Compassion's the slipped disk unable to move or go beyond the circumference of a room.

//

"the crisis becomes the texture." Poverty's not the lack of, but the desire for and towards. (and what of Schwitters' construction?) nothing by itself. as for Tentative Way like Beginner's Mind or sitting in a stance for hours. always . . the facial writing of the mark. What is the desert? Posture/ probably, but the really indistinguishable "other".

Almost without exception, subjects somehow previously imagined. So that not knowing the pastoral Arcadia for a pattern of ritualistic incentive. rigidity of structure as opposed to the calming of tension a human voice of things/ dependent on shore silhouettes: the Cormorant or Loon.

//

To say that a collection of glass blocks is all that we dream of. Where one is a temple that "sometimes makes us forget we are in it." Genesis in the morning, one sentence beginning a gesture, meaning what is felt. "the jokes/are ghosts." "no such thing as a singular 'thing.'"

I'm beginning to agree/entering the body makes him generic. I was telling someone the other day about Reznikoff's walks through the city, the basis of faith, if even to disable. I'm thinking of going back . . but where? the writing of the character. the first page always. "for every atom as good belongs to you." This reawakening span is inconsolable, like group identity. Anyway, I insert this now as something like fire-trucks outside my window . . . smoke? I write as much as I can.

//

"by accident/brightness." and a small brown notebook near the allusion reflected in nature. Visible stones mirrored in tables, recovering the degree of exaltation. Water/ piling/ in.

//

Body, Soul, anxiety, proclamation; geography of the spine, tempest, Vocalism, extremities: This sense of being past sense's rime, (today /rain, but tonight/ thunder.)

//

As we mimic by speech. Strong flower; by odor's breath; "iconic," laying on of hands, tongue & teeth; bringing back the imitation. But sun, feigning copy or image, to pose and answer only by convention.

//

Fidelity towards and away from "Love is a form", whatever that means. Days as substance's relief, touching a hand's (in)action.

(...)

I'm usually alone, isolated here, a loneliness that I've worked to accept as *everyone's* lot. I'm afraid I've put everyone off down here—& everyone seems to desire my attention—so if we resume friendship I advise you not to tell others . . . I am looking forward to *Return of the World*, lamentable fact is, I do not know how to read those pieces. Your presence may help.

(...)

The seed expands as its expansion. The flux of language within a continuum of growth, movement *through* words, receptors of degradation. Slight diskettes onto

which are "printed" nature's form. The flower out of Oedipus, always light generative extension counting syllables forebodingly.

//

"—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—" Obliterating any consideration, Beauty like a mask, dwindled to nothing, free as a sign of total detection. But what if the fusion of meaning occurs in the subject? flung out into the edge of language. or I "lose" my day as another impression. "some part of the truth," as strong measure. "Verisimilitude caught in the Penetralium of mystery—"

//

Progress of Stories, Travels in Hyperreality, The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma and what happens if and when or even why? "It is myself" and nothing else, a half-shadow on the bed, "as dawn races." inherent as necessary tension reading strategy as a three sided piece of glass: a prism. How the "real" gets in or out. "Ingredients of our poisoned chalice/to our own lips." extending service.

We all stand waiting, empty—knowing, possibly, that we can be full, surrounded by mighty symbols which are not symbols to us . . . (Circles)

//

Something like movement or sound, a point vanishing or its gesture toward disintegration. Hieroglyphic machinery. A two-fold question written as "blur". Sometimes a word like a song doesn't get out. A vertebra in the wanderer's throat: "the erasure," that signature well lit and maintained by eyes akin to an *impression* of poetry also.

Gerald Burns

On Todd Baron

Return of the World

(San Francisco: O Books, 1988)

ANNE D. FERRY TAUGHT ME that unless it was Milton you were to forget everything you knew about an author. If it was Milton it was all right to remember. Poems were to make their own way, nothing of height or eye color or timbre except what of these could be written in. Raised before I hit college on A. Edward Newton and the old *Atlantic* criticism which made later personalists look impersonal as partner-wanted ads this was an odd requirement, but something of it stuck. If Todd Baron has personal characteristics I haven't a notion what they are. All I know is what he writes. Sir Thomas Browne is no longer available, though Geoffrey Keynes prints a lovely picture of his skull. Baron's sentences, for me, are his face. "The Rooms," at the start, is more a stumbling block than some because of the ways it's always falling toward intelligibility (returning, I suppose, *to* the world, or "of" as in *Attack of the Mole People*). Since it's called "Rooms" it starts off outdoors, a startling first line ("we stuff machines or they stuff us") modulating, staggered, into a second, "yet coming back to one body" that may be what the poem or book is saying all the time—I'd say so—to a third and consequent lines "about" a recognizable—gutter water from an imagined carwashing, so it's as if we wind from token unintelligibility to the usual platform plum, recognizable to make audiences ah, that Language verse in decline so predictably provides. What we get instead, and I wish to stress that this is a real trouble, that one is in real trouble in Baron's poems, is a baldheaded man supposed or apparently supposed (or remembered, or intruding as in a dream), mistaken but only for a second for a guarantee of a kind of continuity at once subverted for a larger thematic unity, the room as a hole in air, always upper, in the postwar house with predictable stairwell, what David Searcy calls an Ozzie and Harriet house. Let me give you part:

we stuff machines or they stuff us
yet coming back to one body
that is really a gutter stream
from up the same block, some-

one washing or watering his car
was bald of course,
he had no hair & we being right
took what little comfort playing dead
in the upper reaches of a tree,
climbing thru a window to look for
something up there, up &
filled from side to side with music,
inside the room, was always dark, &
everyone's house was like that, no scheme
to the possibility that creation was all matter,
a boat somehow without lake, flying, above us,
no part yet to go to, it, being
nothing of the sort, we talk now, later
from an incomplete list brought about by some advent
that hasn't the time to
pluck itself from the book, to focus such
attention of the sound of this pronouncement,
careful in consideration, you might
smash the past with doctrine, making all time
an essay on syntax,
leaning to the remainders, a table, there, . . .

The end is very nice about ("about") evolving toward inhabiting spaces but not offensively textbook to one in love with Darwin as I am. The question is not, though it might be, is this a poem about what we all know, distressed to be trendy as one might be surprised by joy.

First I'm pleased with a diction. Too many poems like these put in a blender could be rearranged to make soap

opera scripts in which (I like to think) no word must jar, or surprise, or intrigue for what, in itself, it raises. Everyone's diction is always in danger of wearing white socks. "we stuff machines or" is a good enough opening, and nothing like *Tender Buttons* "Rooms." Whether by the "of course" baldheaded man we wind into a dream landscape as in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us," a poem as haunting (for me) as "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" about being haunted, we're amid (even amid ships) spaces defining themselves in three dimensions. In the heaven of memory mansions are, for Todd, rooms, meaningful spaces. He fronts these with the manner (in the posture) of a man about to say something. The relatively light timbre of these lines makes to take them as occurring in the second before speech.

Yet the words are chosen with great care, as in Lewis Carroll, are unhappy replaced by other words.

It's surprising how many -ing endings he gets away with in the rooms—the page even ends with fencing and barbing—when this is so almost always a symptom of Norman Rockwell poetique. The odd indentions are unmachinelike at the start, stuffing us with these lines, so much in appearance as if nearly randomly centered but not (one counts numbers of words per line and things, in case equivalent indentions mean something. They don't.) And one isn't stopped; it's what the -ings are for, flicking us with the uncompleted sense from line to line. Nothing that we've not had before, but from the ease of it the effect is lyric, with a kind of brash openness too, as a child expects us to be interested in what's said. The author is also, patently, interested *in* this broken line, discourse thinking itself down the page. No element in it, no half-line, is not like something we've thought ourselves or been vehicle for. Yet there is a press-sure from line to line, and how the lines choose to cut themselves off,

"see it
not break, but
see it imagine itself
breaking. "

as he says in another place, not about lines. His carry with them an imagining of fracture.

There are whole pages of short lines that aren't much ("I have emptied/ the morning// of multiplicity,// arching us more// on the pillow/ towards us.") I have? I have emptied the? His words get less distinguished as he denies himself space to go on, and I'd say his shorter-stanza aphorisms fall toward Zukofsky. Here is a piece of high sounding nonsense reading like *Quartets* Eliot making fun of such things but ending with the genuine and admirable sententiousness Zukofsky gets from playing movement against repeating syllables,

if, in a wet season,
a number of acoustic phases
induces reason, broken,
reflecting high decision,
regarded to discarded sentences,
approximated from the
cause diverted,
fully seeded,
all use evaded,
appearing ceases.

Still I prefer his raddled left margins by which, hammered into the world somewhere, he's a peg for a bit of snail shell or bird dung to come on, happen to cling to—

try to remember a thing, or
a thing doesn't remember me,
walks & talks & tries to,
air not clean enough, stance
really a sufferage worked by nature
to be still-born,
visible to emit
illuminating rays
to let the eye through,
a solid secondary root, lawn or grass
or front lawn gets cut every week,
but wood softens, is soft, what
need of sounds
to reciprocate,

as if the poem is a fence around the poet. The facing page has a lovely book-reviewish poem beginning "page a cipher word or script" about the reader's consciousness as "like" the writer's, corroding as he goes the bad (too purely conventional) writing he describes, to end prettily with

lines fade as
who is sung clings to the possibility
of particulars also.

He can be playful without being silly or foolishly arch, as in this wee anthologizable (another self-contained one),

an edible landscape
near the front of the drawer
the cassette
slips in.

These lines know other lines exist, that poems in clumps whisper on, the sounds they make moulting. There are zombie poems, duppies, built as if on the remembered vein structure of leaves fallen to lace. The best of them incorporate a sound made about intent. Baron's too good for this, his poems too interesting in progress, as they go, but he does end the book with a burning-deck recitation, kind of dauntless, that begs to end a review so I forgo it. What I'd rather observe is that after disorienting you absolutely by the mirror sculpture we all know how to do (so all that's left is to make it pretty) he can end any old time with a loveliness like this:

two or three stories at once,
then, in the passing phrase,
is it who or whom, made-up
in the upper reaches of speech
where it rains & doesn't rain,
this room and those rooms,
alive
to a particular place,
on the edge of a black and white set,
caught by a hook, going away
as syntax does not know
the words are not mine but written,
the words are not words, but lines.

There's a kind of dogged removal one can do (and I've done myself) with "not," like the dissolving hypotheticals in some Ashbery, that makes it awfully hard to keep a reader well disposed toward lines like these. I don't say it's our job to hold a reader's attention, or conciliate if it means decorating a poem with generica. I'd say rather Baron's lines are a lie; his syntax knows it's written and his words that they are lines, make lines. The scenes by him, caught by hooks, don't quite succeed themselves like slides, remembered as if heard, having been heard, and if his models for meaning are not very interesting his analogies are his life's, so genuine it's as well they're private. I could wish he (and maybe only he) would write his poems two ways, one rather placidly disclosing his hideous occasions. These skeleton confessions are like Mayan picture-books, what is that man doing with that knife . . . It would be, for one who never meets authors, like having the undistinguished dustjacket photo, usually taken by a loved one, to go on. How blank they are, as if the writer's dead, no one about whom one'd care. But it's something that I'd like Todd ("t b" in the title poem for which I do not care) to write paired poems to make him less an effigy, less the writer of these. A nervousness in these should be buried in mud, not "anchored in reality" at all, just vandalized a little.

Bruce Campbell

Nine Readings

Robert Duncan Rachel Blau DuPlessis Laura Moriarty Craig Watson

Aaron Shurin Michael Davidson Barrett Watten Stephen Rodefer Lyn Hejinian

"Momentous Inconclusions"¹:

The Works of Robert Duncan

ROBERT DUNCAN CAME TO HIS POETIC MATURITY at a time when well-wrought poems were praised and irony valued; and, although he too published in some of the periodicals dedicated to the preservation of such urns, his poetics can not be said to share those New Critical verities. Irony and craftsmanship had turned poetry into a game and words into counters. Yet, for Duncan, "the poem/ suggests skill is not sufficient" (*FC*, 7).² Poetry, then, had to mean more than good manners. Instead of skill, poetry involved permissions: "That is a place of first permission,/ everlasting omen of what is" (*OF*, 7).³ It wasn't something added to life; it wasn't a way of conducting one's life; it *was* life, "a life triumphant/ that demolishes skill" (*OF*, 32). Skill would be too weak; Duncan needed a "soul-making," not wallpaper finery. Poetry had to be a matter of life and death, if "there is no art except a man die" (*FC*, 54). This meant less that art must be continually remade (because the man or woman who had made it died) than that art depended on death in the same way "that death be the condition of eternal forms" (*FC*, 58). This condition enforced upon us a choice: to follow the convention, ignoring death, but, at the same stroke, losing our chance to live, or to break from the convention, risking calumny and despair, embracing the fact of death, while engaged in trying to make a life (our life). Poetry involves a choice and a risk. It is a game, only if Life is a game. It is for leisure-time only if Life itself is leisurely. Writing, then, wasn't simply "writing"—something cut off from all other facts of life; something practiced as embroidery to an otherwise dull (or pleasant) life or, even, as an escape from life craved because the escape must be ineffectual. Writing wasn't segregated from life. It was a means of creating life, of following "the creative order [which] is identified with the ultimate order of Reality" (*FC*, 125). Writing, then, is creative, not simply descriptive. It is an opening in a world of empirical facts and recycled coercions and, thus, need not reify what's already there. Perhaps that is why "to become a *poet*, was to evidence a serious social disorder" (*FC*, 112—Duncan's italics).

Poetry, then, is not simply or solely an accoutrement. It had to mean more than following the rules or reproducing a model (just as the poet couldn't simply be a good—and staid—citizen). Poetry had to be more than a representation of what already was: "I am not concerned with whether it is a good or bad likeness to some convention men hold" (*FC*, 15). Duncan's poetry is not to be judged according to some criterion of "likeness," however straight-forward or bent that criterion might seem. But, if poetry isn't a faithful reproduction, what is it? For Duncan, poetry meant "the making-up of the real through language" (*FC*, 71)—with its emphasis on the creative, not the representative—and "the Real is what we make it out to be" (*FC*, 186). As this real was not representative, it could seem, not simply idiosyncratic, but actively wrong to a representative mind. This Duncan recognizes when he admits, "mine is a questionable work" (*FC*, 226). But the fact that it was questionable, that it didn't shirk the burden of the questionable (didn't prematurely foreclose the questioning by forcing an answer), was its greatest strength: "The forcing of an ideal in any immediate event will be untrue" (*FC*, 168).

In part, the "questionable" nature of Duncan's work was a result of his being "a derivative poet" (*FC*, 199): "The accusation of falseness and the derivations must be then true to what I was, must be terms in which I must work" (*YAC*, vii). The dependence derivation showed could hardly seem the proper striving of a mature man. (How self-reliant can the derivative be?) But the "questionable" nature also resulted from Duncan's willingness to break the conventions of style, to interrupt "our composure" (*BB*, x), our composition. In short, Duncan had to be brave enough to write badly (or, at least, to seem to write badly) when the occasion demanded, for what seemed wrong because it hadn't been done before or because it violated the expectations of writing could be more truthful than the reification of lies told so long they had come to look like truths. As Jacques Derrida once put it, "Truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions" (*The Margins of Philosophy*, 217—Derrida's italics). Duncan didn't deny the existence of truth; discovering it, however, had become problematical, for we could distinguish more than one truth: "We protect our bounda-

ries, the very shape of what we are, by closing our minds to the truth, remain true to what we are" (*FC*, 53). So there is "*the* truth" and *our* "truth" ("what we are") and, if we are to reach for *the* truth, we must be willing to question or endanger *our* truth, to crack the boundary of what we have always been. We shall not find *the* truth without risking our security, our feeling of being protected within our own boundaries. Yet we rarely understand the cost of such security (or the cost of those boundaries). By maintaining our boundaries we are constraining ourselves, due to the "inadequate boundaries// of the heart you hold to" (*OF*, 15). And any heart content with its boundaries is necessarily inadequate: "All national allegiances—

my own order as an American—seemed to be really betrayals of the larger order of Man" (*FC*, 115). Further, as others are excluded, so are we ourselves, for "we ourselves are the boundaries they have made against their humanity" (*BB*, ii). Shall we be content with the illusion of our security and remain in-bounds, safely legitimate because strictly conventional? Yet, to search for truth, we must give up what seems certain (security) for what is anything but certain: "Whatever realm of reality we seek out, we find it is woven of fictions" (*FC*, 10). But how can it be that there is fiction in "*whatever* realm of reality" we seek? Because "much of what [Man] calls experience arises from purely verbal activity" (*FC*, 23).⁴ Reality isn't simply a network of objects floating in a languageless ether; it depends upon language, and language exceeds the sphere of objects or the criteria of actuality, there being more to language than simply the words for objects. This role of fiction—even where it would seem the least welcome—is another reason why Duncan's is a "questionable work."

Instead of being able to untwine the strands of a dualism, we find, in Duncan, that the opposite inheres⁵: we cannot untwine reality from fiction (truth from falsehood). There will always be fiction in reality, as there will be (usually) reality in fiction. In this sense, the boundaries are illusory in the first place. Yet, rather than make it less likely for the boundaries to be defended, this illusion makes it more likely. Our peace of mind depends intimately on the idea that boundaries will keep things separate and ourselves secure. We purchase this peace by remaining within our own bounds, but "we no longer inhabit what we thought properly our own" (*BB*, i).

Often, poetry has seen its boundary-duty and done it, aided, of course, by the criteria of style, subject matter, word choice—the various (and evolving) docorums of writing, in short—which have historically aided us in judging the worth of literature. For Duncan, romantic that he is, poetry had to be more than a lamination over old (and brittle) truths. Thus, instead of beginning from a point of knowledge (we know what poetry is and we shall seek to keep it within bounds), we begin from a point of desire (for the truth, at the very least): we "come in under the Law, the great Longing" (*OF*, 37). Instead of saying what we already know (though saying it better than it had ever been expressed before), poetry was, for Duncan, an "art in search of itself" (*FC*, 66). We can not predict what it would be or where it would take us. (Or, for that matter, what we would become in following it.) So poetry became discovery, not a parlor game: "Writing as revelation" (*FC*,

227).⁶ The discipline of writing for Duncan did not reinforce (or imitate); it meant opening himself to the process of writing, listening to what it told him, for "everything that happens in writing the poem . . . must be acknowledged and

undertaken as meaning" (FC, 46). Note the stress on the present (what "happens in writing the poem"); it was just such a stress the model would avoid.

Due to the stress on the present, there would be nothing to judge craftsmanship by; for, on the one hand, the craftsmanship could not be known in advance. Where it was recognizable in advance, we could even say that the craftsmanship had gotten in the way. Instead of honing the writer's senses and concentration so that he could all the better perceive what happened during the writing, the sense of craftsmanship had occluded what had happened; instead of creating a new path, the writer had followed the old path of least resistance. On the other hand, there was not only no model, there was no other record of what had happened, and so the poem could not be judged by a superior knowledge of the moment of writing, nor the writer faulted for missing this or overemphasizing that: "The poem, the creation of the poem, is itself our primary experience of it" (FC, 78). The poem itself was the record and could be criticized only by injecting ourselves back into the writing, claiming that it violated our sense of logic, reality, or human beings. As the well-made poem can be written (or recognized) only on the basis of the model poem and as for Duncan there can be no model poem, we have no objective measure of craftsmanship. And, thus, we might say the age of masterpieces is over. But if not masterpieces, what is there? "The end of masterpieces . . . the beginning of testimony" (FC, 90; Duncan's ellipses). Where a masterpiece depends on a conformity with criteria, testimony depends upon a living condition of awareness.

Implicit in Duncan's schema is a subjectivity. What he recognizes for Whitman is true for himself as well: "*Meaning* . . . flows from a 'Me myself' that exists in the authenticity of the universe. The poet who exists close in on the vital universe then exists close on his Self. All the events of human experience come as words of the poem of poems" (FC, 191—Duncan's italics). A "masterpiece" would subvert this precise dependence on "the authenticity of the universe" and Duncan's insistence on "testimony" is designed to reverse the subversion. The masterpiece followed a model: the author kept himself out of the way. Testimony will follow no model: it shall flow from the truth of having seen, of having been there.

Duncan isn't willing to cede all to subjectivity. When he wrote, "Facts or ideas or images are not true for me until in them I begin to feel the patterning they are true to, the melody they belong to" (FC, 31), he sought a principle that would save him from having to accept a poem (any poem) as (by definition) the best record of its own composing. There must be more than recording in the poem; the poem must follow the law (or pattern). "Until in them I begin to feel," however, traces a limit in the individual trying to discern the pattern as much as it does in the "facts or ideas or images" in need of a pattern to cohere to. Duncan's principle makes it possible

for us to judge (not simply accept), but it does not—as it honestly can not—give us a principle to clearly determine if it is the lack

of a pattern or the lack of feeling the pattern that is at fault. But, without the pattern, "facts or ideas or images are not true."

Underlying the notion of pattern—perhaps understandably so for a writer—is the sentence: "The unyielding sentence that shows Itself forth in the language as I make it" (*OF*, 12). The sentence is a law⁷, and "THE LAW I LOVE IS MAJOR MOVER/ from which flow destructions of the Constitution" (*OF*, 10). But "Freedom and the Law are identical/ and we are the nature of Man—Paradise" (*BB*, 74). So, it is through obeying the law that we find freedom. And it is the law which allows our nature to become a paradise. Moreover, the pun on "sentence" (as a lawful judgment) is crucial to Duncan: "*Suffering joy or despair/ you will suffer the sentence/ a law of words moving/ seeking their right period*" (*OF*, 12—Duncan's italics). So, not only is composition bound by the law of the sentence, but we are bound by the law of the sentence (as judgment), for "suffering joy or despair" we suffer the sentence of joy or despair, too. But the sentence doesn't stop there: it leads us to express whatever feeling we have been suffering and the point of that expression is not the feeling but the realization that expression, too, follows the sentence, "a law of words moving." Thus, the joy (or despair) is not the end; the expression is not the end; the sentence is not the end. The goal is for expression to seek its time (its "right period") and yet the time, though it comes, never stays: "Period by period the sentences are bound" (*OF*, 16).

There is a pattern then which we must cleave to. If we do not, we risk showing the falsity of our "facts or ideas or images." On the other hand, if we don't use the pattern to express what we are currently feeling, if, in short, the pattern is already filled with expression(s), then the "facts or ideas or images" are also false. The testimony, for example, can not be "translated" into writing; it does not come before the writing, staking a claim to truth which the writing must then fill out; it does not come after to adjudicate the failures or successes of the writing; it *is* the writing. And the writing is a formed thing. Language is the witness, "faithful to itself" (*BB*, v). But of course, there must be something for language to witness. So, "in Poetry, too, something goes awry if in our adoration of the Logos we lose sense of or would cut loose from the living body and passion of Man in the actual universe" (*FC*, 144). What happens if it goes awry? "If the actual world be denied as the primary ground and source, that inner fiction can become a fiction of the Unreal, in which not Truth but Wish hides" (*FC*, 145). This means, more than ever, that poetry is a testimony, that it must be a witnessing.

The model, on the other hand, circumvents the witnessing of language, making language's faithful reproduction of the model more important than the testament

to the actual. So, if not responsible to a model, the writer's responsibility is to be attentive to "*everything* that happens," for "every particular is an immediate happening of meaning at large" (BB, ix)—a "meaning at large" which is meaningful only in terms of a pattern. The pattern, though, must be applicable to as wide a range of experience as possible, for "there is not a phase of our experience that is meaningless" (FC, 82). We want to extend, not constrict, meaning. The model—this is both its advantage

and failing—can never attend to everything; it is prefocussed.

The model is prefocussed because it is preconceived and in that preconception is coercion. Duncan clearly sees the coercion of models—model experiences, as well as model poems (or model human beings). In his introduction to *The Years As Catches*,⁸ Duncan identified his poetry with his homosexuality—in both he belonged to a minority and it was precisely in the area of the model where he could be most threatened. In place of the model, Duncan (like many writers and painters of his generation) placed process: "I evolve the form of a poem by an insistent attention to what happens in inattentions, a care for inaccuracies; for I strive in the poem not to make some imitation of a model experience, but to go deeper into the experience of the process of the poem itself" (FC, 34). Duncan sees process as evolutionary ("I evolve"), an evolution wrought by dichotomies (here, attention and inattention). The emphasis on the present moment of composition overrides the criteria of correctness—inattentions or inaccuracies are just as real, and, therefore, just as important, as attention or accuracy. They exist: they play their role in the poem. No prior idea of what is correct can delegitimize them, for, to the extent that it can (and does), the present moment (open, as it is, to error) has been cut to fit what had always been there—the notion of what should be. And, so, intent on correctness, we lose the presence of the present moment and turn it into a generic fraction of a timelessness that never was.

But, what, after all, is really changed when we move from a poetics of the model to a poetics of process?⁹ First, a model is static. Therefore, time does not matter for the model—there is no time, for time is change and change threatens the stability of the model. So, too, there are no individual variations, for each variation is an error. This model which has naught to do with time or individuals, by the way, is an ideal model, one which may never exist concretely; thus there may be disagreements over the interpretation of the model but not over the primacy of the model, nor over the fact that meaning is vouchsafed to an ideal moment. On the other hand, the process is mobile and involves "pathos, the poet's art before time's abyss" (RB, 67); it lies along the track of time's continuum. Were the passing moments stilled the process would disintegrate; since there is no one time where the process may be said to be completely present, to possess one moment (and,

thus, one only) is to abandon all other moments and, therefore, to abandon the process. "What is complete but rests in the momentary illusion" (*GWII*, 70). As the process can not be possessed, it is open-ended. This means the process can not be directed, for to direct it is to try to change the process into a model, to make the work say not what it will but what the author will: "This is not the story of what he thinks or wishes life to be, it is the story that *comes to him*" (*FC*, 1—Duncan's italics). The discipline of process involves, in part, a foregoing of authorial intention. (And what kind of craftsmanship can do that?) "I suddenly found I was not using language but used by language, not saying something I meant to say but being carried away to things I had not thought to say—amazed or ashamed of what I was saying" (*FC*, 126). The processual

poet does not begin with the idea and, by means of it, prepare to conquer the poem; he readies himself to receive the idea: "*Idea*, for me, is not something I have but something that comes to me or appears to me" (*FC*, 20—Duncan's italics).¹⁰

Therefore, a processual writing is definitely not self-expression; however, as it does not express a model, it may, by the process of elimination, be *thought* to; for, if not the restraint of craftsmanship, then what else can it be but the unrestrained expression of a self? "Writing is first a search in obedience" (*OF*, 12). The writer's self is part of the process, but a part only, and "the poet who exists close in on the vital universe then exists close on his Self" (*FC*, 191). But, because this self is not personal, he may find himself forced to write what is personally painful, or, even, what shames him, if he is to adequately express the process. This is an index of the discipline and responsibility of this method. If we still want to call this self-expression, we must enlarge our idea to include the expression of those areas of the self which society, history, morals, and practicality have striven to keep hidden. This self-expression is not self-entertainment: we may even be bored by what we are constrained to write. It is not self-aggrandizement, if we are forced to show ourselves even at our least lovable. So, while process is opposed to the model, it is not a free license to do as the individual pleases, for he must truly express what the process is and not prettify it or correct it. Indeed, the process may put at risk what the writer is most attached to, as it leads him "where the word no longer protects . . . but exposes me the more" (*FC*, 7). In this way, the process breaches boundaries, rives "the very shape of what we are," and makes it impossible for us to "remain true to what we are," to what we have always been (*FC*, 53). We must see the process, then, as jeopardizing the self, as much as it expresses it: "Hence I seek out and fortify even embarrassing sentiments—sentimentalities they can be seen to be by those critics who have put away childish things" (*FC*, 220).

For Duncan, the responsibility in expression is a responsibility *to* expression: we do not define our self, making it respectable by making it conform to the rules of

expression or conduct. "Neither our vices nor our virtues/ further the poem" (*OF*, 50). We enlarge our self, for

the basic structures underlying the mind's architecture arise along lines that provide for shifting and multiple roles. The play of first person, second person, third person, of masculine and feminine and of neuter, the "it" that plays a major role in recent work, is noticeably active in the multiphasic propositions, transpersonations and depersonalizations, again from the earliest levels of development in my language are always at play. (*FC*, 220).

This self-expression, then, leans on the "multiphasic propositions." As there are multi-phases, there are multi-images (and multi-boundaries, too). Instead of the representation of *an* image, there is "a plurality of boundaries [which] means a multiphasic image of What Is" (*FC*, 136). And that multiphasic image depends upon the motility of process itself.

We must, however, be clear that speaking of *the* process is both a mere convenience and an essential tool to understand what process is. It is a convenience because records

of various processes will differ. We must be careful not to allow the definitive article to smuggle in a concept of the model, however disguised that concept may be. Different processual poets will produce varying records of the processes they followed and the same poet may well produce varying records herself—especially over the course of a career. This means there is no one process the processual poet must follow. Similarly, past writing doesn't serve to map what the writer will henceforth clarify; the past writing bears on the present only insofar as it has made the poet more attentive to what is going on, not as a standard. Further, the fact that different records of process differ is all to the good. This does not mean one is the true record of process, the other false. It means, if we can consider all the records together (and this would have to include all the unwritten records as well as the written), that we could have a truer sense of process itself (of *the* process) than if we had only one record of process, however true it might be. So, there must be variety, there must be a range of expression, for the process ever to be known. Talk of *the* process is essential because all the various processes are really but one process. To take one example of the process is to risk cutting the process into a model, shrinking the scope of the procedure to a mere exercise, and invalidating its larger concern(s). In this way, it can be one process only if all the processes are involved (potentially, at least); for, anything less would not be process. But, then, there can be a plurality of processes (as opposed to a conglomeration of various artefacts) only if one process, one concept of process, underwrites the plurality.

And what do we know of this concept? It is never complete ("In nothing final, in everything// generate of finality" [*GW*, 142]), never directed to any goal

independent of the process ("a part not whole nowhere total, no 'where' to be fulfilled" (*GWII*, 59¹¹), never certain or objective. There can be no definitive understanding of it, for the process must (if it is to remain processual) keep alive the possibility of the arbitrary; there must always be the possibility of something unplanned happening: "In the field of the poem the unexpected/ must come" (*OF*, 35). And, so, process involves discovery, test, chance, change, and fate, for "fate strikes/ where we thot to escape" (*OF*, 31). In part, this means that when we speak of the process we open ourselves to error. Understanding, based on what has occurred, is continually at risk, for it is the very inadequacy (or incompleteness) of what the process has been that necessitates its continuing. The impossibility of its ever being complete (or completely expressed) makes it a process in the first place; for, if the process were ever to be completed, it would stop, and, once it stops, it can never be the process. The continuing, then, is a built-in feature of process and carries with it no objective judgment on the inadequacy of its content(s). The process must carry all contents along to a new moment which violates as much as transcends the integrity of each content, which uses each content to further itself *and* finds each content wanting. Like some legendary hunger, process can never be appeased.

In process, then, there is no final standpoint, no final standard, nor final perspective: "There are no/final orders" (*RB*, 26). Each moment in process is succeeded by

another. Yet, as each moment is incomplete, each moment must also be sufficient or meaning will be eternally delayed. So, "let image perish in image, // leave writer and reader // up in the air // to draw // momentous // inconclusions" (*BB*, 15). Where Duncan writes "inconclusions," we hear, not just that word, but the phrase "in conclusion." He gets both a feel of conclusion and the meaning of inconclusion. The "inconclusions" are "momentous" because our lives depend on them and inconclusive because our lives do not end with them. Thus, "the realized/ is dung of the ground that feeds us, rots,/ falls apart" (*OF*, 41). The "realized" (or the conclusion) is not an end. Duncan, then, was led to seek

a poetry that was not to come to a conclusion, a mankind that was in process not in progress, or let's say a picture of life—of the nature of life itself—in which no species would be an advance on another, [which] leads me on to a view of language, world and order, as being in process, as immediate happening, evolving and perishing, without any final goal—the goal being in the present moment alone. (*FC*, 114)

Knowing there will always be another moment undermines any final value, for all must be placed in question, put into motion—all, but process itself. And, yet, what final value can process itself have? It is a process only because it denies

(final) value to anything else, yet, because it has staked all on a perpetual succession of moments (and values), process is nothing but succession. Perhaps this should remind us of Emerson who said he was always a little insincere because he knew another mood was always on the way. Thus, even when the writer is being honest, an insincerity (not overpowering, but nonetheless present) attaches itself to the processual—at least, whenever the poet is being consciously processual. This insincerity does not simply mean the poet lies. It means the form of the processual mitigates against any definitive statement. Either the poet really means to be definitive yet, naively, fails to grasp the meaning of his form, or he wants to be definitive *and* processual, which means he must be a little insincere. Yet we can see that this insincerity would be keyed to an honesty larger than authorial intention; that is, an honesty is present in the recognition of this insincerity. What honesty, after all, would there be without a recognition of limits? In part, the "insincerity" is just this—a recognition of both the limits of our ability to be definitive and of the limits of our ability to remain provisional; for, we often need the definitive as a resting point, if nothing else. And, in part, this "insincerity" is no more than the recognition of the lack of ground. Thus, we shouldn't think the "insincerity" invalidates either the processual in general or Duncan in particular. After all, Duncan himself had drawn attention to the "trickery in the very nature of creation itself" (FC, 53). Or: "For the poet, *It*, the form he obeys in making form, the very revelation of Art, is not strictly so" (FC, 50—Duncan's italics). Thus, there shall be for us no point that is truly definitive: all the points we take to be definitive (and seek shelter with) shall prove, finally, to have been as provisional as everything else: "The one ground of Learning a life // to live // — the Word itself has no other // foundation" (GWII, 60). Thus, there shall be no ground to this process—just the process itself—and all the concepts that seem to anchor it are finally no more than

projections of(f) its mazy surface.¹² And there is but "one process, the coming in to the Real" (GWI, 115).

Process entails, then, a certain disinvestment—a disinvestment of concepts, at least to the point that concepts will not impede the flow of the process. This shall not cut down on the number of concepts in processual poetry. There is no quota; indeed, the more concepts there are the less any one concept itself will be thought of as the founding one. Thus, a diversification of concepts could be analogous to a disinvestment. Process allows, at best, a relative belief in a concept and not an ultimate one; for the ultimate belief has already been accorded to process itself. And, yet, process itself can be ultimate only in idea, only (as ironic as this may be for poetry) in an idea which can not achieve true expression, or, at least, whose true expression must always hold something back. So the true expression of

process would be incomplete: the process would carry one beyond the expression, beyond the poem, because process calls for completion, even though such completion can never be achieved, or can be achieved in idea only; but, the idea of process is, by itself, insufficient. So the idea of process always calls for expression and the expression, by being incomplete, demands the idea. This categorical leap (from idea to expression, and back) forms a kind of broken circuit, or synapse.

What does this mean apropos the poem? We value "the great poem of all poems" more highly than we do the individual poem itself:

Poems then are immediate presentations of the intention of the whole, the great poem of all poems, and in any two of its elements or parts appearing as a duality or mating, each part in every other having, if we could see it, its condition—its opposite or contender and its satisfaction or twin. Yet in the composite of all members we see no duality but the variety of the one. (YAC, x)

Thus the poem—"the work haunted by the Whole" (*OF*, 90)—presents something that cannot be represented (the whole). The whole consists of "the variety of the one," and yet that "variety" involves conflict ("opposite or contender"). So, from one perspective, anyway, there must be "the coordination of the whole" (*GWI*, 115). But there always seems more to "the Whole" than "the Whole" can contain: "Against which excess of what is felt/ the discrete poem contends" (*RB*, 119). No poem is final or complete; each poem demands, of itself, the body of poetry (of which it is but a cell) or the totality of poetry, for it is on (by and through) the totality that the individual poem would live. Cut off from poetry, the poem would atrophy. It would become cut-and-dried, an exhibit. So the poem lives only *within* poetry. And, so, the poem is dependent on what it doesn't (can not) say, for poetry will never be expressed totally. Each poem, then, risks completeness at the cost of being finished (off), risks death with rounding itself into a completed form. Thus, instead of completeness, incompleteness is valued; instead of craft, attention; instead of truth, the provisional; instead of knowledge, risk. This (process of) poetry places itself beyond the pale of control and, thus, at the edge of understanding.

The point of the process is not to avoid understanding, but to develop it. All prepackaged understandings must be placed to the side and all our attention brought to

bear on what is now happening in the poem as we read it. For what we think should happen, what we understand as integral to the process, what we expect, is but a hindrance. Thus, "I am but part of the whole of what I am and wherever I seek to understand I fail what I know" (*FC*, 79); or, "what I am is only a factor of what I am" (*RB*, 50).¹³ Wherever we seek to understand, we shrink the whole to a

part. Why? Because only the part is understandable; because understanding itself is but a part of the whole and, thus, cannot be identical with it.

We ourselves exceed understanding: this is the knowledge we fail when we seek to understand. Perhaps this is why the "whole grand idea of Self [is] a sublime Undoing" (FC, 234). The self is a usable, stable concept only when it is restricted by understanding. Opposed to such a concept is what we might call the general economy of the self, or the "whole grand idea." How does the restricted economy vary from the general? In the general economy, we can "[take] self in nature or cosmos"; in other words, self is no longer equivalent to the person: "There is no // good a man has in his own things except // it be in the community of every thing; // no nature he has // but in his nature hidden in the heart of the living" (BB, 79).¹⁴ And, as this self is no longer personal property, "taking self in nature or cosmos, enlarges the meaning of freedom" (FC, 121). Freedom is no longer a personal matter, no longer taken away from someone else to be kept for ourselves (a kind of freedom for the strongest). It is natural and/or cosmic. But such freedom means we can not rule out behaviors (or creatures) we do not approve of. This general economy means we can not rule out (oppose, eradicate, destroy, correct) even our own behavior, for to do so is to make understanding (and a narrow understanding, at that) the judge of what we are; or it means we have jumped from the general economy of the self to the restricted. We seek a totality, not improvement, and "totalism" means "*ensemblism*" (FC, 168—Duncan's italics); or, "every event, every thing, every being is *needed* for the realization of the WHOLE" (FC, 198—Duncan's italics). That "WHOLE" means nothing stands alone. Moreover, it means "every event, every thing, every being"—because it needs other events (or things or beings) and those yet others still, and because its integrity is pluralized as its boundaries are pluralized—is also an "Undoing."

But this "Undoing" isn't simply an undoing. As something is undone, something else is done. For instance, as a restricted sense of self is "undone," a general sense is created: "Here 'self' disappears and 'work' appears" (FC, 225). In Duncan's poetic—much like modern particle physics—there is no destruction, for the energy is never lost. But neither is anything simply created (or done). There is always an underside of resistance. Yet, if creation is to mean something, something more than a way of passing the time or purposefully leading one's thoughts astray (because there are things one can't bear to think of), it must be associated with the larger orders of life:

Creative order is identified with the ultimate order of Reality; only here, at last, does it have its "reason." Well, no wonder then that I have to break up orders, to loosen the bindings of my own conversions, for my art too constantly rationalizes

itself, seeking to perpetuate itself as a conventional society. I am trying to keep alive our awareness of the dangers of my convictions. (*FC*, 125).

But does the identification of "creative order" with "the ultimate order of Reality" make clear why Duncan must break his own artistic (and aesthetic) orders? As each is his, it is narrower than "the ultimate order" of creativity. (In place of Poetry, he comes to write "his poetry.") And, so, "were all in harmony to our ears we would dwell in dreadful smugness in which our more human rationality relegates what it cannot cope with to the 'irrational,' as if the totality of creation were with ratios. Praise then the interruption of our composure, the image that comes to fit we cannot account for, the juncture in the music that appears discordant" (*BB*, ix-x). To be true to that larger calling, then, he must pick at the pattern of his own work. Duncan had observed that "reason and the ideal are futile indeed if they have not admitted the full range of our human experience" (*FC*, 8). "Reason" must be more than reason "to defend a form that our very defense corrupts" (*BB*, i). If segregated from all that is "unreasonable," reason becomes futile because it is too sheltered to deal with life as we shall have to live it. Similarly, poetry that hasn't "admitted the full range of our human experience" is futile, too, and for the very same reasons.

Doubtless, despite the attempt to break one's own creative orders, one never quite succeeds—for the simple reasons Duncan names: conversions, rationalizations, perpetuations, and conventions. Or, because those broken orders shall yet become ours. But we shouldn't grieve overly: success would have been disastrous; for, if one could write *the* creative order, it would become precisely what we had most wanted to avoid—a fascism of the ego. Instead of "taking self in nature or cosmos" (*FC*, 121), nature or cosmos would have to take self in the One. The effect would be directly opposite what Duncan had in mind—not the enlarging of freedom, but its diminishment. What saves us from this catastrophe? The fact that "we have different worlds and different orders" (*FC*, 111). So, we do not have the "peace" of an unbounded coercion; we have strife: "Call attention to the tension/ in design" (*OF*, 14). (And here is where Duncan's Heraclitean tendency surfaces.)

Thus, "every order of poetry finds itself, defines itself, in strife with other orders. A new order is a contention in the heart of existing orders" (*FC*, 111). Moreover, "among the poets throughout the world or within any nation, men are at war, even deadly war, with each other concerning the nature and responsibility of poetry" (*FC*, 111). We must not react to this threat of "even deadly war" by trying to enforce unanimity on everyone, invoking a peace because we could not stand the war, for there is "the deeper unsatisfied war beneath/ and behind the declared war" (*GWI*, 4) and this war shall remain a war *because* we are different people (with "different

worlds and different orders"). Peace would be achieved by making all similar. So, peace is a model peace—a peace of the model; a peace in which all must be alike because all conform to the model. With the example of Pound before him, Duncan chose other than Pound had—for he knows that this peace is a deadly business, too. If he will not belittle the

stakes involved in this war, neither will he diminish the stakes involved in this peace. "Because of what we love we are increasingly at War" (GWI, 142). This "war" that Duncan designates is not winnable, given the "variety of the one" (YAC, x), nor can truth reside solely with one side. We may wish to vanquish our foes, but we shall not. We may wish to hide, but we must not. For, as long as we take our stand (on our own world and order), we shall not be overcome. And that's the point of this unwinnable war—to take a stand for the values that seem important to us. Thus, in contrast to Eliotic conservatism, Duncan is "liberal, radical, pluralistic, multiphasic my mind most/ a part not whole nowhere total, no 'where' to be fulfilled—" (GWII, 59). Duncan's end is consonant with this belief. His final book ends not with fulfillment, or a bang or a whimper; it ends with a fade-out; it ends with "an eternal arrest" (GWII, 90).

Notes

1. "Momentous Inconclusions" (BB, 15) indicates that something can be significant ("momentous") at the same time that it is incomplete or inconclusive. Or, in "Structure of Rime XXVIII: In Memoriam Wallace Stevens," Duncan writes, "I find what I have made there a Cave, a staking out of his art in Inconsequence" (GWI, 56). In Duncan we cannot get the conclusion without the inconclusion nor the consequence without the inconsequence.

2. I use the following abbreviations for Duncan's work:

BB—*Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968).

FC—*Fictive Certainties: Essays by Robert Duncan* (New York, New Directions, 1985).

GWI—*Ground Work I: Before the War* (New York: New Directions, 1984).

GWII—*Ground Work II: In The Dark* (New York: New Directions, 1987).

OF—*The Opening of the Field*, 2nd ed. (New York: New Directions, 1973). (Originally published in 1960 by Grove Press.)

RB—*Roots and Branches*, 2nd ed. (New York: New Directions, 1969). (Originally published in 1964 by Charles Scribner's Sons.)

YAC—*Years As Catches: First Poems (1939-1946)* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1966).

3. The permission involves the making of the real: "OFTEN I AM PERMITTED TO RETURN TO A MEADOW/ as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,/ that is not mine but is a made place// that is mine, it is so near the heart,/ an eternal

pasture folded in all thought" (*OF*, 7). The enfolding of real and made-up, of "mine" and "not-mine," is, of course, significant.

4. The verbal is not in contrast with the actual. According to the "Duncanian heresy," "the literal is so identified with the actual, and the linguistic with the universal" (*FC*, 146). Further,

To "see" is to re-form all speech. Significances are shiftings and transformings possible in the relationship of eye and brain. The reality of what is witnessed disciplines the speech, and it is only by poetry, by the making-up of the real through language (I mean by poetry here all the made-up things—language thus is as a man makes his way as well as as a man makes his speech, drawings, objects, governments, story) that one can witness. (*FC*, 71).

5. Duncan can never forget the opposite. For instance: "But there is no act that is not chained in its joy, Comedian, to the suffering of the world" (*GWII*, 57). Or: "There is no ecstasy of Beauty, in which I will not remember Man's misery" (*GWII*, 69). "Or are you so confident in pleasure that you forget the wholeness of experience?" (*OF*, 34). So, it's not just a question of opposites, but of the whole which is made up of opposites.

6. Or: "There has always been the One Art—the revelation" (*GWI*, 54).

7. There is not just the law of the sentence, there is an individual law:

"His own inner law, the Christ within" (*FC*, 172). We could be like Robin Hood, each basking in "the strength of his own lawfulness" (*RB*, 29). And, one cannot escape the law simply by breaking the law, either: "At every stage/ law abiding or breaking the law/ (disobedience is not careless)/ needs a code" (*RB*, 28). Duncan spoke of "beautiful compulsion" in "The Structure of Rime, II": "The Messenger in guise of a Lion roared: *Why does man retract his song from the impoverished air? He brings his young to the opening of the field. Does he so fear beautiful compulsion*" (*OF*, 13—Duncan's italics). Further, as "a lion without disguise said" "there is a melody within this surfeit of speech that is most man." "What of the Structure of Rime? I asked.// *An absolute scale of resemblance and disresemblance establishes measures that are music in the actual world.*// The Lion in the zodiac said:// *The actual stars moving are music in the real world. This is the meaning of the music of the spheres.*" By "beautiful compulsion," Duncan, I take it, is referring to the same thing Ornette Coleman had in mind when, listening to the playback of *Free Jazz*, he remarked that the freedom had become impersonal. "Beautiful compulsion" occurs when someone follows that inner law.

8. "These are poems of an irregularity. From the beginning I had sought not the poem as a discipline or paradigm of my thought and feeling but as a source of feeling and thought, following the movement of an inner impulse and tension rising in the flow of returning vowel sounds and in measuring stresses that formed

phrases of a music for me, having to do with mounting waves of feeling yet incorporating an inner opposition or reproof of such feeling" (YAC, i). Poetry, then, was "a lure for a more intense feeling" (OF, 46).

9. John Dewey addresses the change from model to process (evolution) in his "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy":

The conceptions that had reigned in the philosophy of nature and knowledge for two thousand years, the conceptions that had become the familiar furniture of the mind, rested on the assumption of the superiority of the fixed and final; they rested upon treating change and origin as signs of defect and unreality. In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection as originating and passing away, "The Origin of Species" introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion. (*The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott, 32).

Darwin, of course, is an important figure for Duncan, too.

10. Duncan, by the way, is quite serious about the visual implications of "appears": "*Eidos*, Idea,/ 'is something to which we gain access through sight.'/ This defines the borderlines of meaning" (RB, 31—Duncan's italics). All of his talk of "images" fits likewise in a visual frame. Duncan can also, however, write that "the actual world *speaks* to me" (FC, 125—my emphasis). He is capable of combining the two senses, too: "Everything speaks to me! In faith/ my sight is sound" (GWI, 100).

11. Actually this is a description of Duncan's mind: "My mind most/ a part not whole nowhere total, no 'where' to be fulfilled—" (GWII, 59).

12. Of course, Duncan speaks of a "ground." We have only to think of his last two books, *Ground Work I* and *Ground Work II*. "Poems come up from a ground so/ to illustrate the ground" (OF, 60). But doesn't this mean we know the ground only through an intermediary? We cannot then know how close the illustration is to the true ground. Duncan has recourse to the idea of a visual ground: "The ground is composed of negative and positive areas in which we see shapes defined" (BB, v). Yet that is not generally the ground we have in mind when we think of "grounding" a project. "If we have not set things to rights,/ the indwelling/ is not with us, there are no instructions" (OF, 36). There is an odd tension at times between Duncan's "liberal, radical, pluralistic, multiphasic" mind and his rigid, singular convictions. How do we know, for instance, that we have "set things to rights"? What "rights" have we used to set them by? What might have been an attempt to leave room for differences becomes vague and the vagueness threatens to be a smokescreen for

authorial intention. But even if there is an attempt to be pluralistic here, it is mitigated by a black-and-white attitude toward results—you've either got, or you haven't got, "the indwelling." But how do we know? Shall "the indwelling" manifest itself in the same way in each of us? At the very least, the ground is problematic:

We ourselves are literal, actual beings. This is the hardest ground for us to know, for we are *of* it—not outside, observing, but inside, experiencing. It is, finally, I believe, the only ground for us to know; it is Creation, it is the Divine Presentation, it is the language of experience whose words are immediate to our senses; from which our own creative life takes fire, *within which* our own creative life takes fire. This creative life is a drive towards the reality of Creation, producing an inner world, an emotional and intellectual fiction, in answer to our awareness of the creative reality of the whole. If the world does not speak to us, we cannot speak with it. If we view the literal as a matter of fact, as the positivist does, it is mute. But once we apprehend the literal as a language, once things about us reveal depths and heights of meaning, we are involved in the sense of Creation ourselves, and in our human terms, this is Poetry, Making, the inner Fiction of Consciousness. (FC, 145—Duncan's italics.)

Opposed to the grounded Duncan is an inconsequential Duncan, "staking . . . his art in Inconsequence" (GWI, 56). It is this Duncan who opines that "sortilege is all" (GWII, 58).

13. Or: "I was distracted from what I am" (FC, 58).

14. On the other hand, "there being no common good, no commune,/ no communion, outside the freedom of / / individual volition" (BB, 73).

"The Parchment of Negative Spaces"

Rachel Blau DuPlessis:

Wells

(New York: Montemora, 1980)

Tabula Rosa

(Elmwood, CT: Potes & Poets Press, 1987)

SURELY IT'S NOT AN ACCIDENT that, at a time when the transcendental dimension of poetry has been soundly criticized, women are exploring the issue of gender and writing; examining the relationship between a material condition (the writer's body, but, also, the social formation and context of the "body") and a poetic.¹ Thus, "We write our bodies" (TR, 87), as Rachel Blau DuPlessis has written. Of course, one could argue that the material dimension of poetry is accidental and, thus, beside the point of either an interpretation or a reading. For instance, one could equate art with inspiration, arguing that what the poet knows she knows through art, not craft, and that nothing known through art is truly known for it is

given by the gods in the form of inspiration. Roughly, this is the "Ionization" of the poet.² In this case, the gender of the poet would be meaningless—unless we infer that a god is more comfortable inspiring men, a goddess women. Even in this last case, however, what the poet knows is only casually related to her gender. For the poem (the true poem, anyway) is always out of reach of the meddling human mind. Where the poet is seen as a medium or channel, the poem can have only the slightest accidental relationship to the person(a) of the poet; and, as long as the (transcendental) dichotomy between person and poet inheres,³ we should not expect the issue of gender to be raised, for it is an issue which this dichotomy hides from view. For gender to matter, it will take more than a theory which values the person writing the poem, however. We could, after all, rig such a theory to pay off only if the person were male. (Pen = penis. But what does a computer stand for?) Still, to tie poetry to (material) people is a start; for, if people don't matter, gender probably won't matter either. And, if people do matter, we may come, in time, to see that, despite the claim of "all" implicit in this "people," not everyone really does matter—that some don't matter at all, or, at least, not equally with others (and to matter less is envied only by those who matter not at all); or that not everyone matters for the same things and those things do not matter equally (so, to be considered good at something which is negligible is perhaps no better than to be negligible at something which is important). We may, then, come to see that there is "a gender valence" which is no stranger to these issues and never was (" 'Whowe': An Essay on Writing By Susan Howe" [*Sulfur* #20, 159]).

There is, for instance, the issue of speaking—who gets to speak? about what? and to whom?⁴ "Live in words? // Whose?" (*TR*, 76). If one is denied the forum of speaking, one has no means of drawing attention to that suppression. "What cannot get said/ will get wept" (*TR*, 6). But is there really an issue of gender in speech? "Where I speak/ about Her/ or whether, being her, I can speak—/ given the range of 'speaking' in the first place" (*TR*, 14). Note that "in the first place," seemingly calm and even a little logical, acts to exclude "her": given the tradition and decorum which from "the first place" have narrowed speaking, how can she now come to speak of "Her"? And is this she a "her" or an "it" if "governed being? it? that?/ plunges into every object/ a word" (*TR*, 86). If the governed being (her, in this case) plunges into every object, then the governed being is, more or less, an object itself. Both governed being and object are of the same class. And, yet, she misses by the smallest of margins (at least in terms of grammar) from being a governor: "When even one telegraphic/ phoneme, one-half more syllable/ sibillant⁵ (s/he) you (little flirt you vixen)/ close-pulled feather,/ defines language and centers/ what me they is" (*TR*, 14-5). The difference, crucial in the way it affects us all, seems so slight ("one-half more syllable"), and yet it is on this slight

thing (| s |) that language has been defined and "they" have been centered. In terms of language, | s | divides us, dividing us into "shes" and "hes." But what "she" is this? "The she that makes her her/ The she that makes me SHE" (TR, 101)? And does the same "she" make one an object, the other a potential subject?⁶

To examine this issue of "she," she must attain (and maintain) a kind of bifocal vision—she must see what is there and she must see what should be, and, in each case, a critical edge will sharpen her vision. Therefore, as "her" "self" is patently a (sexual) object,⁷ to accept it is to find herself condensed into this self, to be nothing but a sexual object: "Woman like what? poem like what?/ complicit with the repertoire" (TR, 23).⁸ So, instead of assuming or accepting this self, instead of accepting the "rage of being/

the impossible self" (TR, 23), she must begin the work of criticizing "her" "self" and "the repertoire": "Is it/ Me/ As She/ or Her?// Or is me He?" (TR, 13-4). (Or: "My Lady Me Lady" [TR, 22].⁹) But criticism is not the end. "Self-/ unpicking atoms" (TR, 23), after all, would leave us where? "A cave of pain a howling mouth// It is/ dark/ the emptied self" (W, 42). So, the criticism must lead to creation. She must create a self, though she can not do so out of whole cloth: "Being/ what I/ woman am/ said (what else?) to be" (TR, 17). Indeed, what else could she be said to be? (It seems so obvious.) But, also, having been said to be that, how can she escape being it? (What choice does she have?) And, still more, since she has been said to be that, what else can she now be? (What role model does she have?) Her "self" must be created out of the myths and language that were objectionable (that objectified her) in the first place. This is the task which Rachel Blau DuPlessis has accepted, for "the singing hole has its reason" (TR, 22). Therefore, she announces that "I sing/ a simple wound of open flesh" (W, 4). But, "Is it a wound or a birth?" (W, 5).

In 1980, DuPlessis published her first book, *Wells*¹⁰; it is a first book in more than a chronological sense, for it begins (with) an investigation of (her) gender, which is to be the foundation of her subsequent work. (Which "which" is the foundation—investigation or gender?) We might say of *Wells* what DuPlessis says of the ode: it is "an exploration of the laden multiplicity of our interactive situation."¹¹ She will emphasize more thoroughly the "multiplicity" of "our interactive situation" in her second book, *Tabula Rosa*, but it is a consistent concern in *Wells*, too, which, we might say, is glimpsed "through the fog of asking/ again and again/ what I am severed from" (1) and can be seen as offering a kind of displaced, acentric narrative¹² about a writer finding her self within a masculine culture and language (including its myths and literature). Thus, she is simply, as she remarked of Susan Howe, "a female writer looking for a way to write" (*Sulfur* #20, 162). *Wells* is a first book full of first things, although those "first things" might better be viewed as

positions (or, even, rights) than as objects. A metaphysical firstness is not at issue; indeed, the prior existence of certain attitudes and concepts is very much the point. After all, before one comes to criticize the social norms, one has lived (within) them. We can not simply pretend those norms don't exist, for we already know they do, and, if they didn't, our opposition would be pointless. So there is "a self that had already been formed/ prior prior prior/ / opening the wounds" (*TR*, 80). But is that self one we must accept? If "she screams unassimilable first dream" (*TR*, 103), there is something she has access to that cannot be contained by that self. Shall we simply accept the fact that the dream is "unassimilable" or shall we try to make that self respond to the dream? We may try the latter and, even if that self doesn't assimilate or imitate the dream, we may count ourselves better off. This is just one reason why DuPlessis is led to remark, "How difficult it is to make this journey" (*W*, 29).

Wells begins with the effect of those norms—isolation, or, even, dissociation: "My body melting" (1). Why is her body melting? Perhaps because "nothing can enter an empty gulf" (1); that is, the severing ("what am I severed from") has created a gulf nothing can bridge. If "she" has truly been severed (and severed so completely she must ask what she was severed from), then there exists between her and it an empty, forbidding gulf. Like some black star, this gulf allows nothing to pass, and, so, she on one side and it (whatever it is) on the other, there is no connection, no understanding, possible between them. She is cut off. Since it is she who has been severed from something else (at least grammatically and, one guesses, psychologically), she experiences this as a kind of rejection: "My place/ I am the grief" (*W*, 1). "She" begins, then, as a cast-out—severed from what has been kept. (A certain equality would be helpful here: if "she" has been severed from "it," "it" has likewise been severed from "her." But "she" cannot yet see it this way. Later—at times—she shall.)

This severing has an effect on "him" too, of course. After all, "these paths into the self:/ perhaps they lead nowhere?/ in a circle? he came through the woods/ to a deep cut" (*W*, 4).¹³ Perhaps the self is nothing, or, perhaps, though something, it goes nowhere: as we trudge "over the gnarly ground of gnosis" (*TR*, 23), the value of the self is far from being assured. But, nonexistent or directionless, he continues to think in terms of the self. And what does he find in this journey into the self? "A deep cut." This cut may be the mark of a severing—arguably, birth—but the cut may stand for more than that; it may stand for what he has been severed from—the female (and in her generative role, too). Therefore, in journeying into the self, it may be that we are brought back to what we were severed from, to what we (still) lack. How is this lack met? For him, "she" remains an image; thus, "he held the meanings up," "showing which is object, which subject,/ the discourse/ faceting

her" (W, 38). Of course, if "he" is doing this "showing," "he" is invested with a power she (here, at least) lacks. In short, "he" is a subject and "she" an object bright.

But, more than simply an object, "she" has been "faceted," which we might say is a kind of knowing which segments (or facets) the object, thereby losing—or, better, destroying—the whole object. "Faceting," then, would be a kind of knowing in which the object is displaced. So what, then, is known through this faceting? If we take "faceting" as a form of knowing, the grasp finally settles not on the object but on the image overlaying the object, the image which prevented the object from truly being seen: "Intensity overlaying boredom" (TR, 59). And, thus, this "faceting" is merely a result of "fascination" and grasps no more than its own image, or, finally, its own boredom. Where she is "faceted," then, she remains unknown.¹⁴ After all, in a discourse in which "she" is merely a facet, a part dependent on the (masculine) whole for understanding, how can "she" be anything other than a third degree pronoun, a facet set in a foreign frame?

A perspectival basis is at work in this theory of language—what we could call the "face" in "facet." There is a physical dimension, then, to the failure to grasp the whole: we do not see the object in its entirety; we see only the side which faces us (or which we face). "Her face thru his orbs/ her phase thru his eye-/ balls" (W, 38). "Phase"

can be related to "facet," not just through "face," but because "phase" designates (like "facet") a part of something larger. "Facet" suggests something static; "phase" motile. But it could be neither a "phase" nor a "facet" if we took the "phase" or "facet" as unique or distinct from anything larger. The knowledge of that something larger, however, can be used to discredit the "phase" (at least to make it seem less than ultimately important), for the "phase" stands forth as mutable and that mutability is meaningless without something perdurable to be contrasted to. So, where that larger something can be appropriated, it can be used to trivialize the "phase"—as teenagers know so well from hearing that they're just going "through a phase." But what happens when that larger something can not be appropriated, can not even be understood? For the "faceting" overlays the object until there is no object to grasp—or, we could say, the subject ("he," remember) chooses which parts to keep through this "facetization." So, the "facetization" (which is, thus, a fetishization, too) can erase parts which the subject doesn't want to keep in the first place. The "faceting" is a kind of redefining and, in this way, becomes a double-marking, emphasizing the sexual parts of the object at the cost of any part which either consciously opposes the gratification (which, after all, is the goal of this "faceting") or physically resists it. The parts he "facets" on are the parts which displace the whole and threaten (if the whole be forgotten) to become all, as the part would come to stand in place of the whole. But, in this case, how do

we know we're dealing with a "phase" at all? How do we know there is anything larger which the part may reasonably be said to belong to? We cannot, unless we assume ourselves as type; that is, unless we assume that, in all respects other than the fetishized parts, we are the same. So we ourselves are the something larger. Thus, it would be a "phase" only by being a feminine deviation from a masculine norm. Otherwise, it would not be a "phase."

But if "he" is the type, the foundation of speech and (through language) of sight, then how can her "phase" be understood? What could it be a "phase" of, after all—an errancy taking her away from the type? If so, does this confirm her as a "thing" (and a mutable thing, as well)? "She is the thing he/ flickers with his light/ She sees it/ thru his eyes" (W, 38). If she "sees it thru his eyes," language has "immasculated"¹⁵ her, has slid itself between the physical and mental senses of herself, and she comes to literacy only by coming to a certain masculinization: "Everywhere/ I see/ inside me/ Man/ poised" (W, 39). The perspectivism inherent in "she sees thru his eyes" means "she" is always "out there," always seen (or read) as object even at the very moment that it is she (herself) who is looking: "There 'I am is it certain/ I am there?" (TR, 19). If the point of this, finally, is that she is a "thing," then the moral of this point is that, by being made a thing, she is being *used*: to be "faceted" is to be used. Thus knowledge has a sexual bend (or warp):

Her he can and as he can
 he ken and names the
 knowing:
 breaks her
 in
 to being ridden,
 over the half-spoken,
 over the forgotten. (W, 38-9)

He knows her, speaks (of) her. The pun on "can" (as in he knows her can—less what she can do than her ass) becomes "ken," and, so, it's as if the beginning of this chain of knowledge, of ability, lies in the image of her buttocks. Without the sexual spark this image provides, it may well be the entire chain, running from seeing to doing (as ability) to knowing to naming to writing ("ridden") to forgetting, would be unhinged. But she has more to do with the chain than simply starting it up; for this naming is also a kind of rape (forcible entry—"breaks") which is also a kind of training ("breaks her / / in"). She is taken passively in this (sublimated) sexual act ("being ridden") and then she is forgotten. These suggestions of rape, humiliation, and rejection are not ancillary to his "nam[ing] the knowing"; they are intrinsic to it. Throughout our history, then, he has spoken, she has been spoken.

But, if faceting means cutting her up, making her merely a pile of fragments and displacing her wholeness (to focus on her holeness), then she begins in a fragmented position: "When am I going to come into the room? // Come in, come in, I say to all the fragments" (W, 13). Her tone here seems happy, yet, given the equation of (female) "I" with fragmentation, a happy tone cannot last; the fragments will change; the tone will change. When DuPlessis writes, "All MherY duplicity of gesture" (TR, 21), we shouldn't overlook her "merry" pun.¹⁶ Does the merry tone hide something? For there is one thing about fragments—they do not present a coherent picture, and, for her, there is but "fragment upon fragment" (W, 23). Thus, there is no ground to her, no bedrock, no foundation; fragment slips upon fragment and nothing seems solid. When "she" is a facet, she is a fragment. Shall she always be a fragment, a facet in some man's eye, or can she be complete if allowed to find her own ground, instead of being transplanted into his? "And emptied of what I had found / was emptied of myself?" (TR, 33).

But what could be "her" ground? *Wells*, itself, points the way to an answer, with its natural image for the cunt; thus, if "she is the landscape" (TR, 13), nature shall be her ground, and she shall learn to read her self in images—or, perhaps, *through* images—in wells, fissures, pomegranates, oceans, etc. This metaphorical identification is, of course, not without disadvantages: it may dehumanize her as it makes her seem elemental and primordial. But, the identification may also be ennobling: instead of taking her self-image from society (as an underpaid employee), she might take it from nature. And this means, mostly, as a life-giver (a role, which, of course, can also become constrictive). Yet, an identification with the body (as nature) isn't enough, for she may, still, find herself sexually exploited: "She strings herself through fond believing lyre" (TR, 37). And the body itself can hardly be a solution if there is a mystery of women's bodies, which are "nowhere understood / every- / where told" (TR, 16).

She will lie naked
 where sea touches sand;
 her own body
 the border; the edge
 dividing ocean and land
 against itself; but of one body (W, 48)

She is "the border," "the edge."¹⁷ Thus, she is a part of this scene—one of the three terms (along with ocean and land) upon which unity has been bestowed by the number of the pronoun ("itself"). And, if the number didn't register sufficiently with us, the point is underscored: "Of one body." She is a part of nature. And he? "He is an island. The water surrounds him" (W, 27). His is perhaps an adversarial relationship; at any rate, there is a contrast, expressed here in terms of being

surrounded. It is possible, even, to say that as he was surrounded by his mother before birth (in the amniotic fluid—like a sea) a pattern of relating to a (female) otherness has been formed and continues.

It's not clear how far we might take the contrast, but it's clear a contrast does exist. Where society is, perhaps, his ground, nature is hers. What does this mean? In the closing movement of "Eurydice," "she" reaches the point where "she will take shape and sprout/ . . . / pushing outward, of her own power" (W, 57). She will, then, give birth to herself: "She will brood and be born/ girl of her own mother/ mother of the labyrinth/ daughter/ pushing the child herself outward" (W, 57). She plays at once all of these roles—daughter of the mother, mother of her mother, mother of herself, daughter of herself. (Self-daughtered?) And this self-birthing is at least as much mental (one meaning of "brood") as physical, as much spiritual as mental. "I carry her in my arms, my swaddled soul. / We stumble into every hole of earth" (W, 31). But where did this power to give birth to herself come from? Nature: "Great head, the cave large inside it/ great limbs of a giant woman/ great cunt, fragrant, opening// seeds of Eurydice" (W, 57). The natural cave ("Eurydice" has represented one woman's descent into nature) becomes not just "the great cunt," but "the cave" inside the head. This hints at a series of (self-)enfolding containers. The basis of the series is (again) a metaphoric identification: woman equals nature and head "great head." In this way, the cave inside the head (which should be the smallest container) holds the cave inside "the great head" (the earth—but, also the largest container). On one level, anyway, these containers seem able to contain what is larger than they are. How? Well, we shouldn't think that because a man is six foot now he was six foot at birth. But, too, a point is being made about the power of the mind. And mind, earth, or a "giant [gestating] woman" are all ideas; just as her own wholeness is an idea. It may be that, if allowed to stand on her own ground, she may transcend his faceting and become whole. After all, she finds "that I am a fresh pool" (W, 49). Through the natural images, she finds a link with something beyond her: due to that link, she is "a fresh pool," and that freshening means, in part, that she can now refresh society's image of her. Yet, in a sense, the "wholeness" must remain promissory. "She" cannot stop, close in upon herself, and become (or stay) complete, for that would break the link through which she has been freshened. Her "whole," then, is predicated on a certain openness. When DuPlessis remarks that, "I went into the fissure," "catching myself" (W, 53), she is, in part, still making use of that linguistic perspectivism, of being the one looking and the one being seen; for, she is both subject ("I") and object ("myself") and, through metaphoric identification, perhaps even the setting ("fissure") within which the looking and seeing take place. (Note the equation of "earth" and "fissure": "The earth/ rich/ fissure" [W, 2]; or "every

mound of woman/ a mound of earth" [TR, 19].) Her "fissure" sets up a sympathetic relation with the world: "Just the Universe again/ that voices from the Void" (W, 37). So "when solid Silence drops away/ and from a hole beyond/ the darkest Gush/ will geyser up/ as brilliant as the sun" (W, 37). This nature she is attuned to, then, has a sympathetic attachment to the transcendental ("from a hole beyond"), just as it has a sympathetic attachment to her own hole. But where does all this sympathetic vibrating (each way free) lead? To a being brilliant as the son—not simply a question of self-identity, but "also to spin a being from itself" (TR, 38).

In the poem "Pomegranate," which makes use of the Persephone myth, DuPlessis writes of finding in the "empty globes" "that parchment/ of negative spaces" (W, 23). What she sees in the image may well differ from what a (male) tradition of symbology has seen. But she (necessarily) is drawn to the same image. Yet, rather than an overdetermined sexual symbol, she sees the "negative spaces"; the "negative" may even take on a coloring reminiscent of Adorno's "negative dialectics"; that is, as representing an alterity which traditional systems have never appropriated. "Negative spaces," then, are negative specifically because they have not been expressed before. The use of "parchment" is interesting, suggesting a scriptability, a dependence of objects (images) on language (and, more specifically still, on writing) which emphasizes age (and, so, tradition) as well as value. This parchment may be written on but never despoiled because the writing can not touch the "negative spaces." Why? Because there is that in them which shall not be expressed, as well as that which, for the first time, will be: "How to be that which is unspoken how to speak that which is/ 'repressed' elusive anyway tangential different/ impending space different enough how to write that which/ is/is// unwritten" (TR, 72). So, we must discover for ourselves how to write what is unwritten. But why should we want to write what's been unwritten? Not just because it hasn't been written, but because we are different and it is precisely this difference which has been repressed, or, in other cases, which has proven elusive. (Just how are we different? Or how different are we?) Of course, gender is but one case of difference and does not exhaust it.¹⁸ So, because speech has inherently codified (social) relations, we must seek to speak beyond that which has made us inferior or different. But, for that very reason, we do not know quite how to speak it. Not knowing, however, can be a positive situation; for, if we knew "how to write that which is . . . unwritten," that "unwritten" would already be bound by writing, would already be codified as inferior.

This should not be taken, however, to mean that we approach the situation without knowing what's already been codified. "The unwritten" isn't an index of (our) ignorance. Further, a certain amount of knowledge (of what

the symbol is taken to mean, of how it relates to her, and of what it leaves unsaid), simply, must be attained in order to see within the split pomegranate the "parchment of negative spaces." Without such knowledge, she too will see herself in the image—and only a portion of herself—but take that portion as the essential part. What must such a seeing mean? Note what she sees when she looks at the pomegranate: "The whole enseeded/ fissure/ opens wide-eyed/ over her angelic body" (W, 23). This "over" hints at the "facetization" that has been done to "her" throughout time—the image of her genital overlays "her angelic body," so that the body becomes scarcely distinguishable from the image. And, therefore, without that knowledge (of what the symbol is taken to mean, of how it relates to her, and of what it leaves unsaid), she is in thrall to the image. Not to put too fine a point on it, without this knowledge, she's just a cunt. Which is also to say just an image. Thus, "young girls fell into open wells" (W, 3).

What do the "young girls" need to know if they are not to fall into "open wells"?¹⁹ Perhaps that "abyss is not absence/ though presence be destroyed" (W, 37); that is, not to identify themselves with absence and practice self-effacement. If "presence" is defined along the lines of a phallus, then the absence of the phallus means the absence of presence. But to think of herself in this way leads to the "estranged cunt, the cant or can't of cunt" (*Sulfur* #21, 153). To think of herself in this way means nothing is there for her (or in her) and she must, in some fashion or other, live through the male, acquiring presence as best she can, at second-hand.²⁰ It means her life can be nothing better than second-hand; she can do no better than live through her men (husband and/or sons), can hope for nothing more than to give birth to the true life. So, not absence, but not presence? What then? Grounding: "Propulsive echo-long/ howl from my own tunnel/ Resounding in the round tunnel/ I have unburied./ I wrench the root cord" (W, 46). Thus, "where in the space of some particularity one passes/ beyond ego" (TR, 91), and finds, instead of "ego," "plural seed-filled thought" (TR, 91); not the individual in charge of her utterance but "even the lever is gleaning/ 'Thou' art the fulcrum" (TR, 12). The "plural" thought rests upon that "thou."

And, yet, having reached a point of some success (of confidence or pride), she is not destined to stay there. There is a dialogue, at best, between society's image of her and a more positive image we might attribute to nature. Thus, "I cannot find my center/ I cannot find my path/ Now he can make me open, shut and open/ Now I have lost myself" (W, 50). Where she accepts her self as a form of absence, she has no idea who (or, perhaps, even, what) she is; where he takes her to be a sexual opening, he has one idea of who (or, perhaps, better, what) she is. There is a certain functionality in his idea ("make me open, shut and open") which she lacks and may even, at times, desire, a poor answer sometimes seeming better than

none. And let us not overlook the sexual nature of the center: "Line of unlimited riven pressure,/ which is the dark eye in the center/ which is the bone juncture of the center/ which is upthrust in the swirling center" (W, 22). So, there is a sexual dimension to her admission that "I cannot find my center," although it would be well not to make the center exclusively sexual; for, this one thing he makes her do is not enough to fulfill her purpose (or to fulfill the center?). So, she, by letting him control her opening, loses her self. In "make me open, shut and open" more than force ("make") is being registered; he has learned how to do a trick with her (or "on" her), and there is no meaning to what he does beyond his enjoyment of doing the trick (of *making* her open and shut at his whim). If she abdicates the task of knowing (or making) her self, she becomes, by this abdication, a sexual object and only a sexual object. Thus, instead of being a one-trick pony (opening and shutting, opening and shutting), "she desires never to be open" (W, 47). (After all, "I want and yearn/ but never be enough" [TR, 3].) She desires to be invulnerable. She desires to close in on her self: so, where "he wanted to bring me back to the light" (W, 55)—the light of a (masculine) knowledge—"I am going deeper/ into the living cave" (W, 55). She knows now he will not save her. So, instead of allowing herself to be known, spoken about, and "ridden," she descends deeper into the figuration of her self, into a "deeper and deeper well" (W, 48). But is there a purpose to this descent? "In the cave/ I am a rope held out to myself" (W, 56). Therefore, she can use the motif of the two selves. But, use it for what? There is a wisdom in that (subjective) "I" which just might save the self-reflexively objectified "myself."

The motif of the two selves rests upon a kind of dichotomy: "Two minds' desire:/ to be one, to be two" (TR, 3). There is, for instance, the self she must criticize and the self she must construct:

Practicing ferocity on your self (TR, 102).

her

This means that she must abjure herself to find herself: "She knows that to speak/ she must swallow herself" (W, 23).²¹ "Herself" is at once nutrition and obstacle; what she may live on—if it doesn't choke her—as well as what she must break down (enzymatically?) so that it no longer obstructs her: "The nourishment/ complex, like prophecy/ come true in another sense" (W, 4). Can the nourishment satisfy? When DuPlessis cites "the hunger that rises hunger for fullness" (TR, 38), is she suggesting that hunger and fullness can co-exist (doesn't fullness presuppose some kind of hunger?), or shall the hunger see its demise in the satiation fullness brings? Thus, hunger for fullness, instead of bringing us fullness, may increase the hunger beyond the capacity to be fulfilled, the "hunger for fullness," thus, coming

true in another sense. "And so we eat and read and watch/ our necessity" (W, 62). "How to toil and not/ / see Self" (TR, 46)?

There are, in *Wells*, two kinds of knowledge, "turning inward and outward onto myself" (W, 13). One we might call feminine. It is outward²²—and reflective. It makes use of mirror imagery, as in the "Mirror Poem" where DuPlessis remarks on her "desire to enter the knowledge of your changes" (W, 17), and is grounded in a lesbian situation (like to like): "We cannot make contact, yet we have created each other" (W, 18), she writes of her "dream of women" and, in "With Mary," "We are united,/ We make each other pregnant" (W, 19). (Or: "The desire for the one in the mirror" [TR, 16].²³) This is an important

step in the development of *Wells*, being a kind of intermediary between the isolation of "My place I am the grief" (1) and the self-confidence of "I am a fresh pool" (49). She finds, through the reflection on other women, that she is not alone, not isolated. Thus, she admonishes herself to "accept women; accept the love of women; accept loving women" (W, 18). If she cannot accept women, how could she accept herself? "It is impossible,/ love, to love/ and impossible to unlove/ / green shapes of fair women" (TR, 17). It is through the recognition of similarities that she comes to one kind of self-knowledge: "We shall know who we are" (W, 19).

The other knowledge is "inward." It is more solitary. We might call this a male knowledge: to the extent that the dichotomy splits the self (roughly into subject-self and object-self), to the extent that the self is fluid (fearful one moment, fearless another²⁴), and to the extent that truth (and the true self) is schematized as interior, or profound, it is no wonder that "her deepest desire was to pierce herself" (W, 52). This "pierce" means not just that—for her, too, knowing can be sexualized—but that it can be sexualized on a male pattern. Why? Because "the pubis [is] allusive; the eye penises thru a key lock" (TR, 98); that is, the eye *probes*.²⁵ Knowledge is thought of as cutting or probing an object to make its interior discernible, knowable. Where the truth is interior, to discover it, we must employ some method to inject ourselves into that interior or to open the interior for inspection. This choice follows simply from the profundity (or depth) of truth itself. "She," too, so long as she takes truth to be deep, can not avoid this choice. Therefore, to know herself would mean to act the male for her own self-knowledge, to penetrate (or pierce) "her" "self." Such a self-knowledge takes on a masturbatory context: the goal of this sexualized knowledge is to be and know herself. But this desire to pierce is not simply (or solely) a result of the profundity of truth, either. In part, it's a matter of how we understand that "self." For, if "her" "self" can be pierced, then it is an object; and, if what we desire most (the true self) is within, "her" "self" is, above all, a covering or shell. But is the self an object? Or does the desire to pierce "her self," most simply, arise from the fact that it is not? That is, isn't the desire to

"pierce herself" a desire to pin down that self, to find what the self really is—to make it act like an object by treating it like an object?

Perhaps, we could say, then, that *Wells* is a "hymeneal,/ to the emptiness of the threshold" (W, 61).²⁶ Note how tenuous—but also how substantial—all this is. (Maybe like that half-syllable, sibillent | s | ?) What, after all, is the threshold in itself? It's nothing, and yet, that nothing, like the opened door which causes the threshold to be visible in the first place, beckons us on. That threshold—so insignificant in itself—divides the inside from the out. And, yet, the threshold, though "empty," is worthy of praise. We shan't dispute that, but "hymeneal"? ("Hymeneal? And my hymeneal?") What is this a marriage of? The investigation of figures and identifications is always on the verge of being insubstantial. (The substantiality is largely a matter of belief.) Let's say it's a hymeneal of words and meaning.

But is this surprising? What could become fertile might not. "Bury/ unbury// life deciduous as the moon" (TR, 8). The chance to bring forth something new might lapse and the opportunity come to naught. For instance, *Wells* has presented a largely positive female image; yet we can't help recalling "the oil that rises every month" (W, 37) when we read "oily, wading into nothingness" (W, 61).²⁷ "Her" oil, earth's oil—either could be generative, but either can also be wasted. (And either, further, is limited.) The promise of something more and greater inheres but that promise is in close proximity to waste. In the same way, the figures of female identity glimpsed in nature, the identification of the female and nature (not an unproblematic identification: "Silly many my likenesses" [TR, 51]), might be wasted. It might be a figure with no ground, after all; merely shadows flickering on the trees or ceiling. So: "Where is there meaning" (W, 51)?

Well, the spot where all these paths (subject[s] and object[s]: significance and insignificance) cross is the "I": "I am the crossroad" (W, 44),²⁸ the place where things intersect (or interact), the threshold things cross in their travels to and fro (as they are interiorized and/or exteriorized). As a threshold, of course, the "I" has its own emptiness. But that doesn't mean the "I" is nonexistent: "Define the interacting of strongly acknowledged yet/ loosely defined materials with an 'I' who is the hidden subject and object of each of these verbs" (TR, 71).²⁹ But that "I" isn't solely a matter of identity. After all, "Who can say 'I' or 'I'd' it is all practically/ not-I/ another fusion/ cells annealed the nucleus of a Lady/ in some woman drags/ herself long thirsty/ and heavy-thighed/ up to the Fountain or any ego-ideal/ like that" (TR, 20). So, there is that "not-I" in the "I." Perhaps that's why the "I" is dispersed throughout language, equally on the sending and receiving end of "each of these verbs." "Meniscus filling past its lim-/ it breaking under selves' multiple/ leveled sinters" (TR, 24). What is more than the limit is also less: it verges on

disappearance. The self may even have achieved that disappearance: "Nothing/ stands between the self and its/ disappearance/ / It's already a star" (W, 66). In "star" is the suggestion, not just that the self has become a part of our actual constellation, but that to be a star is to lose yourself. (And, apropos intellectual currency, the idea of the disappearance of the self has become a guiding light.) But if nothing stands between the self and its disappearance, mustn't we, then, invest in this "nothing" in order to postpone the self's disappearance? So, only nihilism prevents the disappearance of the self? Yet, *Wells* isn't a nihilistic book, even if it does involve "dispersong" (TR, 24). Still, if an investigation is to be honest, the outcome mustn't be prejudged. *Wells*, investigating gender and a female self, must entertain the possibility that the self is nothing. Have we, then, been walking around in circles? "These paths into the self:/ perhaps they lead nowhere?/ in a circle?" (W, 4). The "circle" is a good place to rest, for it may be a symbol of "her," of purposelessness, of renewal—of all these and more. The circle is both full and empty, a meaningful symbol and a meaningless direction.³⁰

If it can be both, then intention has its limits. We may intend the "circle" in a meaningful way but we cannot exclude the other possibility. One goes with the other:

"The words// uninteruptible// machinery" (W, 8). In this way, there is borne along in all we say something else, something we didn't mean—"the shadow under-word" (TR, 100); or, "the undertow": "not not not/ myself/ is it myself?" (W, 2). That is, the undertow is "not not not myself"—either because the undertow is conceived as a kind of subconscious murmur which *says* "not not not myself" or because the undertow, like the unconscious, is not appropriable, and, so, being what it is, the undertow comes to *mean* "not not not myself." Do the triple negatives render a positive ("is it myself?") or do they reinforce the negative (it is thrice removed from being me)? Either way, the "undertow" has some rights to be called impersonal. "Sleep pleasure the open voice these it [i.e., the undertow] cannot bear" (W, 2).³¹ There is a limit, then, to self-growth; if we don't bump into "the other," we bump into "the impersonal." "The self" is limited; it cannot be the answer to all our problems. As *Tabula Rosa*, DuPlessis' second book of poems,³² has it: "It is no path/ it is the abyss" (32).³³ Indeed, where we try to force that personal self onto the world to make it soak all differences up into the structure of (a) sameness, "the self" is the problem, for this conception of self is gained at the cost of others. We need, then, to respect the limits of this "self" and not, monomaniacally, lose our balance. And we may lose that balance simply in relation to ourselves (we don't need scapegoats to be monsters), for, as the "self" is necessarily made up of some otherness, however small the amount may be, the "self" must either respect the otherness within itself or do bloody harm to itself in

seeking to purify or re-appraise itself. "So force is faced obscure" (W, 37). "It's judgment./ Otherness sidles over to around/ otherness/ outcrops/ / more or less" (TR, 71).

DuPlessis decides, in her next book, that "to reinvent 'attention' is narrow tho tempting" (TR, 89). She does not simply want to refocus attention; to write a feminine text upon the negative spaces; to perform "acts of attention/ *what an angle you make*/ on acts of inattention" (TR, 71—DuPlessis' italics).³⁴ Each act of attention is cast from its own angle and, therefore, each leaves something unattended. Rather, she must ask, "Production of language cribbed/ by (from) what decorum?" (TR, 15). For language-production is dependent on a decorum. She is not offering us a version of language without decorum(s), however. But, rather, she would multiply decorums, thereby unsettling the firm dependence of decorum and language. Such an unsettling will, if nothing else, make that dependence clear. And that dependence must be made clear for her to show the bias of language. After all, what is the decorum of otherness? (Could there be a single decorum of otherness?) DuPlessis' project involves

Writing from the center of, the centers of, otherness.

Making otherness central.

Taking myself as central, yet in all my otherness. Trying to
write Otherness when it is sometimes felt, or stated
repeatedly,

that otherness is the opposite of writing, although it may
inspire writing. (TR, 84).

The shifting of the first three lines is instructive of one of her methods. She shifts from the singular ("center") to the plural ("centers"); she places herself specifically where she had only been supposed to be (the move from the first two lines to the third); and she pluralizes—or quantifies—her own otherness ("in *all* my otherness"). This otherness would appear, therefore, to be hard to get a handle on, depending, as it does, on a "split subject:/ 'a living contradiction' " (TR, 77). Perhaps that's why "it is sometimes felt, or stated repeatedly that otherness is the opposite of writing." (Note the choice of "felt or stated" and the more advanced balancing of "sometimes" with "repeatedly.") Therefore the otherness in writing involves a passing of "syntax's single borders": "The word passes phatic or elegant/ passes bonded passes through/ grammar to get past syntax's single borders/ to funny half-seens, stumbles;/ all routes, all specks, all/ snarled in matted eager acts" (TR, 78). There is more than one thing going on in this writing: "Still,/ smudging these discourse cross-/ hatches terminii/ / the end (ends up) every/ where" (TR, 68). This otherness (which may, or may not, be antagonistic to writing) entails a concern for the flux: "But in writing?/ / Just one event among

flux,/ the many yet so/ foregrounded/ as fourth, maybe sixth/ tampax in writing?" (TR, 83). Writing is absorptive, then. But the writing is both "one event among the flux" and itself a fluid; and, so, the "tampax" may figure in the poem as an example of "one event" and, at the same time, as a figure of writing—a female writing, as well as a female's writing. This female's writing involves a respect for the "dailiness," even if it is "impossible maybe to write/ the techne of dailiness" (TR, 65). Still, what is written may touch upon that techne as well as foreshadowing the nature of writing itself.

.A wri-
 ting marks the
 patch of void
 foggy reflecting
 mist catches wet carlight
 that everything tests
 condenses
 refracted silence
 The cold rush up
 the dark trees
 Somnolent spots of travel
 Letters are canal-
 ized as white foams
 zagging, a fissure on the
 sheet,
 cock-eyed underbelly of
 plenitude of
 mark. (TR, 57)

Writing and sex are entangled here in a waltz across a precipice. Can we ignore the sexual dimension of "patch of void," "canalized [letters]," "fissure on the sheet," or "cock-eyed underbelly?" "A writing marks a patch of void" echoes critical theory with its election of absence as a major principle. But, given the presence throughout *Tabula Rosa* of the female body, another echo is discerned—one that would mark the female as the privileged site of writing. Following the vaginal implications of tunnel, etc., a female dimension to the "letters are canalized" is apparent; a dimension further borne out by "Letters: a read-

able staining" (TR, 67). (So, letters are menstrual? And, thus, writing is tampax?) Opposed to the letters is the "mark"—its "plenitude," which is masculine in connotation. There are two dimensions to writing—the mark which is geared to a plenitude (and, one surmises, a presence) and letters, geared to flux and a sloughing off (as of skin), to an absence. The distinction between the plenitude of

the mark and the flux of the letter should never be overlooked. If the flux is to be capable of meaning, then meaning must be a point (discrete) and not a line (continuous). There must be "a meaning's point" (*TR*, 87). It must be meaningful for what it is, not because it is a part of the plenitude. "The letters rise into a consuming which makes more" (*TR*, 95). But there can be no "more" to the plenitude; it stands complete.

Imbedding some extruding some the interplay between selection, imbedding, and loss. Some few words, chosen, and why; but are also chosen from, once the day was awash in pinpricks, a pull in the back muscle, overlay and no experience. No experience because all. Say. Saw. Operations. Addictions. And no shadow and it was dark within this icy one knows brightness all disappearing all intense writing what; does it save it? 'diaristic' in impulse, but unbargained, imponderable. Over written. Written then over written, over ridden, the selection is one thing, this (globula, the clot) another. Different plans and different pictures. (*TR*, 62)³⁵

This otherness-as-writing (if that's what we can say it is) contests the focus that we might expect from writing(-as-writing?). Otherness can't simply, exclusively, unproblematically, be other (the singular other). There are always othernesses. And, so, "there is otherness coming from/ otherness" (*TR*, 82). It is the central which operates on the basis of casting out all that is not the same. But "otherness" must include differences, not set up a competing hierarchy with another idea of, but criteria similar to, the central. Thus, in "otherness," there will be that which is still other and, if "otherness" were to exclude it, it would cease being other and begin being the central. "Otherness" can implement its own hierarchy only at the cost of its otherness. As otherness is inclusive, it can not be definitive—at least, not if it is to remain other. So, although DuPlessis' poetry is a poetry of otherness, it recognizes the otherness within otherness itself.

This accounts, I think, for the increased use of dual columns and marginalia (often with varying typefaces and, sometimes, even, in handwriting) in DuPlessis' second book, especially in Part II, "Drafts." DuPlessis calls this strategy the "bringing of marginalization into writing":

Understanding formal marginality. Marginalization. Setting the poem so there is a bringing of marginalization into writing. "No center" of a section alternates with small contained sections. Sections contained by other sections, over writing, writing over, or simultaneous with. So that one section does not have hegemony. So the reader does not know which to read first, or how to inter-read. (And one procedure, adjudicated for one particular section, will not carry over or be applicable to another section. So that one does not learn mechanically.) (*TR*, 84)

Thus, instead of creating a space in which her "otherness" may be exercised as if it were dominant, instead of creating a seamless lyric voice which might advance the paradise of her own primacy, she opens the space of her writing to the other, and not just herself as "*the* other." She breaks the totality of her poem to be true to her marginal vision. Note, however, that her vision isn't marginal because it's unimportant (which is how we're accustomed to using "marginal"); her vision is marginal because it is expressly in the margins that she looks for importance. This doesn't mean she then wants to take the importance she found in the margins and bring it back to the center—like a miner who wants to strike it rich only to live in luxury in the city—but to use that importance to break the spell of the center. As she had been moved to criticize the idea of "repertoire" (TR, 23), so she remains intent on showing ways of writing other than those "the history of poetry" would sanction.³⁶ To do so, she must risk seeming unimportant to those who skirt the margins and prowl the center. But this issue of importance cannot be easily settled, for it involves too many differences which would have to be settled before the issue of importance could even be raised. The effort seems unpromising; too often, in agreeing to settle the issue of importance, we are coerced into disavowing what we consider most important. (And, too often, fate is a part of this coercion, as we are told it was all only a matter of time before we had to submit.) So, in trying to be taken seriously, we end up making only fools of ourselves. That's why we must be true not just to ourselves, to our own idea of what is important, but true to the spirit of poetry, for "poetry/ is provisionally/ complicit resistance" (TR, 73).

We might say, then, that poetry (as complicit resistance) is at odds with its own history, resists the way(s) in which its history enforces unanimity upon remembered writers and forecloses the future. But, of course, "provisionally" undercuts the full sweep of this gesture; the resistance of poetry may be turned upon itself (fairly easily). Perhaps we should ask what poetry's resistance is complicit with. After all, it may well be that "provisionally" refers to the fact that poetry can easily be separated from its accomplice in resistance and, once separated, the resistance of poetry alone is too weak to withstand what it opposes. The full line reads: ".Some words much/ syntax or/ allusions thereto/ some invention, but/ if *the laws/ of language are/ socio-/ logical laws* then poetry/ is provisionally/ complicit resistance" (73—DuPlessis' italics). This seems more clearly to say what poetry is complicit against, not complicit with. It stands against an utterance formed with "the laws of language"; it stands against a sociological determination of language. It stands, then, for invention and against replication, no? But, does this mean it stands with the individual and her desire? Even this seemingly neat choice depends, however, on a history—a history of the borderline between the individual and society, between (individual) desires and (sociological)

laws. The dichotomy of the individual and society has itself become encoded in our society, where, once, half of it (the individual) clearly seemed to fall outside society. Yet, rather than establishing all the more strongly where the borderline between the individual and society is, we find the "*borderline takes many forms*" (TR, 68—DuPlessis' italics). As the borderline multiplies, the distinctions it would enforce blur.

Because the "*borderline takes many forms*," we are led to question what had once seemed obvious. After all, where is the margin now? (Given the plural of "forms," could there really be only one margin? And could something be clearly and forever—from whatever perspective we should stand on—marginal?) What we should probably look for is a more fluid, personal, and, perhaps, even changing, conception of centers and margins (and borderlines) than we are used to. Thus, it may be that the center is everywhere; and the margins are everywhere, too. (Our) Perspective would determine, more precisely, where we saw these things. But this is less a result of (personal) relativism than of form. How so? "*Marginalia without a center? No beginning, No. No/ ending? No, because form/ at all times is instilled. O noble/ that ongo-/ ingness that entrance into speaking*" (TR, 77—DuPlessis' italics). In other words, there can be "marginalia without a center" because form (including the form of both center and marginalia) is continuous ("ongoingness"); thus, form need not be defined by a beginning or end, but may be defined at any point in time—like meaning's point. Even "marginalia without a center" have form, can serve as a gateway to speaking. (Or should we emphasize the "trance" in "entrance?") "Entrance" suggests a certain structurality—but does this gateway open onto the "ongoingness" or onto the "speaking"? The continuity seems to be one measure which allows us to enter into speech, but the entrance is achieved because "form at all times is instilled." So, speaking is formed. And, it may be that the issue of form, of continuity, of speaking as an ongoing, transindividual activity, is a matter, in part, of the "trance."

But how can this form be "instilled"? By being spoken, which means being treated as a mark or being *marked*, but, also, by being believed. And what does the mark mean? When DuPlessis writes, "moves mark to mark and makes a crossing/ into boundless dance" (TR, 32), we are allowed to glimpse this boundless dance through the space opened by moving the "mark to mark." "Moves the mark to mark" introduces more than a noun-verb differential; it suggests that the use of a word may not be identical to its definition and, so, we move "the mark" (the definition of a word) to "mark" a meaning aslant from the dictionary's. It also suggests that the "plenitude of mark" was a false plenitude. The move, or push (for we do push the stationary noun to make it roll a bit to cover what we think to say), describes a space which would have never been apparent but for us (or someone

like us), but for our push. It takes someone—neither a code nor a dictionary—to move the mark to mark what hadn't (quite) been marked before, for "moves the mark to mark" depends upon a certain willpower to make the mark move. This willpower means that words and meanings never exist in some ideal, one-to-one relationship. In moving the mark, we refract the language, sometimes, most simply, because we try to glimpse what the language couldn't say. But, then, where did what we want to say come from? For instance, the boundlessness is not—and can not be—found within the mark, so there must be something else, something other than the mark. But to say what the something is would be to reduce it to a mark. The boundlessness, for instance, is glimpsed through the play of marks, through our desperation to make words say more, to make the words say what we feel. The mark (as a mark) is formed, but its movement, even though that movement be narrowly circumscribed, reflects something unformed (a feeling never before expressed) and reflects upon something boundless. We may use this moving-of-the-mark to reach toward the presence of what we felt, but we shall not succeed in reaching it. We shall (at best) mark where it used to be. Thus: "Mark where the space was; rebus its dread hole" (*TR*, 38). And, because of this "was," we (or others) shall have to move the mark yet again. But, in this way, the marks are made for others—not because the marks express something perfectly (which would leave us nothing further to communicate), but precisely because they do not: "Marks/ creating marks for 'others' (ellipses) . . ." (*TR*, 67). The "ellipses" gives us a place to respond, for, since the marks are not (and can not be) definitive, it is important that we all have a say.

But we need to see there's more to marks than meets a language: "Creating marks: pen, smudge, letters, things that make marks to take impressions (Baby wipes). Handwriting (inc. in text). Repression in mind. Writing to remember. Drawing distinctions. Things on the side, things in the center, blurring distinctions" (*TR*, 85). "Marks," then, covers a wide gamut—"things that make marks or take impressions," which means things that leave or take impressions, and, so, the difference is in the disposition of the mark. Marks is a matter of a tool (to make or leave the mark) or a surface to record the marks on (marks, principally, of our own bodies—in the form of fingerprints, lipstick smears—even the indentation in an upholstered chair). Marks are not simply things we create, either in writing or speaking; not simply a matter of communication. And, so, "Signz/ places" (*TR*, 6). Some of our marks are unintentional, but unavoidable nonetheless—as with fingerprints or pheromones, or scent (laying a trail a bloodhound could follow). Thus, "everything message, every randomness" (*TR*, 4). We can't help sending out messages, messages which are not reducible to intent. But the marks aren't reducible to humanity, either: "Written veins the stones' intrusions/

wander/ untranslated rocks" (*TR*, 6). Marks are all around, for "all is inscribed" (*TR*, 6). The chair leaves a mark on the carpet; the leaf a mark in the stone (as a fossil); the flood a watermark on the bark of a tree. But, intentional or not, in each case the mark recalls something that has happened. The mark is a sign for remembering: "Writing to remember." But this remembering isn't equal. All that is remembered is not equally important, for the marks, the writing, even the remembering itself, serve to draw distinctions. The marks serve to discriminate and, in that discrimination, the marks repress. They repress what is deemed unimportant; they repress what was forgotten and the fact that things are forgotten; they repress the boundlessness the marks can never convey; and they repress interpretation, seeking to make us believe the mark is self-evident. It is through this last repression that there is "repression in mind." For when we cast out interpretation, when we treat the marks as self-evident, then we are only what they saw we are. But DuPlessis' project began because there was a disparity between the marks and female self-identity in the first place. The forgetfulness and, worse, the repression of the marks

is precisely what she has been fighting against. To that end, she discloses the "things on the side, things in the center, blurring distinctions." But, doesn't language (and culture) depend on distinctions? If distinctions have been blurred, can we even read? Or shall some astigmatic glaze drip slowly down over everything? DuPlessis raises the question of readability:

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 Hollywood 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." (*TR*, 92).

So, though distinctions are drawn, distinctions are blurred. What does the "just" in "just language" or "just nature" mean? Is it simply a way to escape responsibility—by claiming that it isn't important ("just language") or that it is unavoidable ("just nature")? Language signifies through distinctions; that, after all, is the point of Saussure's theory of the sign which makes reference depend upon difference. But those distinctions must be subject to "a social momentum of switched referents," for DuPlessis is more intent on unsettling than on inculcating a correct

position. This doesn't mean her unsettling is without point and, if she is not above driving her point home, she is also willing to give the reader a larger share of freedom than many other poets. Doubtless this freedom has its roots in her feminism, though it isn't solely relegated to feminism. When she raises the possibility that there's no way to read her poetry, she is, I think, addressing less its readability than the concept of a definitive reading. When we don't even know where to start ("so that the reader does not know which to read first, or how to inter-read" [TR, 84]), how can we ever reach a definitive reading? If "the" is definitive, then "what is that/ the" (TR, 58)?

But why should we want a definitive reading? Isn't there something suspicious about such a desire—almost as if the definitive reading, sharing proprietorship with efficiency, would exhaust the text forevermore? "The plot was so big it/ encompassed all// statements" (TR, 60).³⁷ But is such a plot to be desired? If it "encompasses" all statements, shan't it be thought to "explain" them too? Once the plot is recognized we shall have gained the magic ability to understand everything—well, everything that's part of discourse, anyway. The obstacles DuPlessis places in a reader's way are not obscurantist. They arise from her desire to break the coercion of the plot. They arise from her trying to get as much as possible into the poem, as well as from her disdain for the seamless precepts of a type of writing. Her obstacles do not hide the truth from us; they bring into play our own propensities for freedom because there is no one right way to solve (or scale) the obstacles. We need not read them the way the poet did (or does—and she need not read them always the way she first did). This freedom is important, but not final. Through this freedom the text offers a companionship, one which is strengthened and ennobled by the freedom: "The reader is at large, as the poet is. We are strained companions" (TR, 84). "Strained" because we are different—a distinction we should not blur—though it may be that we are never "strainer" than when gender surfaces between us. This strain may even indicate the kind of companionship we need—not a companionship of strain, but one which can withstand the strain of independence (of disagreements and difference). The problem is how to honestly recognize the differences and yet not be trapped in them—neither to ignore them nor dwell in them: "All this has been 'the'/ just where I thought I began/ beyond" (TR, 65). To recall a phrase DuPlessis used to describe the work of Susan Howe, the task is to produce "a gendered writing beyond gender" (*Sulfur* #20, 160). But can we succeed in negotiating that last leap (to use gender to get beyond gender) or must we remain typically (en)gendered—as female poet/ male reader?³⁸

Notes

1. This should not be taken, however, to mean that DuPlessis herself ignores the transcendental dimension. DuPlessis is interested in a "beyond" which has inherent transcendental properties.

2. By "Ionization" I refer less to Varèse's music than Plato's dialogue and the traditional expectations that have come from it. cf. Michael Davidson's *Analogy of the Ion* (Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 1988). But, too, there are various theories. For some (transcendental though they may be) the individual's knowledge is important. For Jack Spicer, for instance, the individual's knowledge was like an alphabet which could be used by inspiration (or by his Martians, which were most simply inspirers): the Martians had to use the individual's knowledge to say something *through* the individual. They had to use what was already there in the individual; they couldn't simply import what they wanted to say. If we take it that the inspirers must use what's already in the individual, then gender can be important in a transcendental poetics. But, still, gender will be less important than what the inspirers say by means of gender.

3. It should not be assumed that this dichotomy between person and poet must be transcendental. There may be a material dichotomy, too, but the issues important to such a dichotomy (either in the form of issues raised or issues hidden) might differ completely from the issues that are important to a transcendental dichotomy. There is a sense that what DuPlessis wrote of Susan Howe is true of her as well: "All of Howe's writing does spiritual and metaphysical work, yet without prophetic claims" (*Sulfur* #20, 158). The need for this "spiritual and metaphysical work," further, is at the base of some of the reservations she makes about the Language poets in *Sulfur* #22: "What do they do about pleasure? what do they do about transcendence?"; or, "how do they negotiate feeling without romantic transcendence?" (190). The provisional dependence of feeling and transcendence probably tells us more about DuPlessis' poetics than it does about the Language poets' errors (of feeling). Perhaps (at least in part) it is due to this equation that DuPlessis asks, "What will save us from pleasure?" (W, 61).

4. In *Tabula Rosa*, DuPlessis will write: "it is the definition of speaking" (95), but "it is the/ 'it' characteristic of everything. Yes, read it!" (93). In between, she determines that "I/ want to be *in* it, but it is not for/ in it it/ / *is* it" (94—DuPlessis' italics). "It *is* it" provides a definition of identity speech will do well to copy.

5. Of course, in the "sibyllent" there might be a pun on the Sibyll. Furthermore, "Being the sibyllent secret stream inside fountain/ endless pulsing of fountains/ cool feathers/ / their cycles" (TR, 19).

6. We might feel, given the power of words to separate us (forevermore), that a basic unity has been betrayed by language. But has it? "*Language as betrayal?* / /

betrayal of what?// keep going" (TR, 73—DuPlessis' italics). DuPlessis suggests that a man enters "beyond

language" (with an emphasis on existence, "be") through a woman—an act which seems equal parts birth and sex. "Being or having been/ 'a' woman/ thru which a man en-/ tered 'be'/ yond lang/ wedge,/ edged the unutterable/ exactly that dance" (TR, 17-8). And what is beyond language? "The unutterable." At another point, however, DuPlessis suggests that there may be various orders of language: " 'Tis/ Poem:// that around/ its words// it's Words" (TR, 21). (We might note, by the way, that where he enters "the unutterable" through her, the "touch is his,/ outlining the edge of my dance" [W, 50]. So where "she" reverberates with the boundless, "he" is a creature of limits ["outlining the edge of my dance"]. This might, however, come rather close to turning both sexes into representative principles, neither of which (it might be) can we do without.)

7. The sex object assumes another subject; thus, "also consider for/ whom am I, say, being/ these eyes, these breasts?/ What pulse beat for the icons?" (TR, 14). And: "She is the landscape/ Fountain and Mirror// for whom?" (TR, 13).

8. Perhaps the spelling of "repetoire" (in place of the more familiar "repertoire") acts out this resistance to the "repetoire."

9. The passage reads: "A crowbar of trobar/ pow/ it/ tries/ desire,/ 'thou'/ the fulcrum// pries open the cellular troping/ nuclei and the ever/ drowning dark abyss// My Lady Me Lady" (TR, 22).

10. "Wells" raises the issue of the landscape as a female body, as in "she is the landscape" (TR, 13). More candidly, "The oil that rises every month/ as oracle of the moon/ slides sleekly from the strata wells—/ a panther in the bush" (W, 37; TR, 41). So, *Wells* is vaginal, and raises the issue of a woman's dealing with female images. Of course, in addition to being a noun, *Wells* might also recall the verb, as in "torsos well up, subside/ The door is open" (W, 28). The equation does not originate with DuPlessis. Surely the point, at least in part, is precisely that it isn't new, that it's an image she comes to herself through. Just to cite another example of the equation—bp Nichol's "well as cunt" (*The Martyrology, Books 3 and 4*, n.p.; but the line occurs within Book 3, in a section titled "INTERLUDE: Double Vision").

Wells is unpaginated. To facilitate reference, I have assigned page numbers, beginning with the first poem, "Undertow," (page one). Note, too, that "Oil" occurs in both *Wells* and *Tabula Rosa*.

11. " 'The Sisters' secret [interfering] child': some reflections on Clayton Eshleman," *Temblor* #6 (Fall, 1987), p. 94.

12. Tentatively, I would put the narrative of *Wells* thusly: Part I, "Undertow," is self-questioning; Part II, "Shell-Round Space" introduces the theme of accepting and loving women; Part III, "Wells," investigates nature and the feminine; and,

Part IV, "Falling into Earth," presents a kind of return, but a return which finds a voice "answering from no point," the "no point" perhaps being "not/ a place but crossings, distances" (65).

13. Or, "He stands dissecting himself" (W, 5).

14. For an example of "faceting," there is "Breasts":

In one man's eye a hand
severed at the wrist
His other eye winks shut.
One man's head incises
vulva
the hieroglyphic slits
of urinal drawings.
Another swings a briefcase
stuffed with women's legs
cut off.
And a man
lifts up
a woman's tongue
between thumb and finger.
From hand to hand
they pass a woman's breast,
finish,
and toss it down the gutter. (35)

15. "For she is first a he. All female readers are first 'immasculated' argues Judith Fetterly; all learn to 'read like men' " ("Sub Rosa," *Sulfur* #21 [Winter, 1988], p. 154).

16. Perhaps it is due to the "MherY duplicity" that there is "the duplicity of the female text" (*Sulfur* #20, 160).

17. Or: "Littoral, on the jot and title/ coast-/ line,/ plup,/ that the/ little tides/ catch the gravel, stars" (TR, 6). "Littoral," of course, harks back to boundary but also raises the pun of "literal."

18. For instance, in her "Writing on 'Writing,'" she notes, "As to subject: a first or second month of a baby who comes as otherness, as difference, which cannot necessarily be understood easily, but demands to, needs to be felt, understood" (TR, 84).

19. "Well" could be a rather empty exclamation. Perhaps it is partly to pun on such verbal emptiness that DuPlessis writes, "Well the rose/ is filled with/ roses,/ well the baby/ filled with people" (TR, 10). The added benefit to this pun is that it raises the possibility of filling the empty well.

20. In contrast to the cave, or "the great cunt," is "his penis . . . a long bone, like the spine/ of an animal whose flesh was picked clean" (27) and, from *Tabula Rosa*, "janus penis" (81). There is a playful androgyny in *Wells*: "He was pregnant"; "She had a phallus./ Lace for her foreskin:/ that feminine touch" (30).

21. The themes of woman as earth and (female) nourishment are entwined: "Every mound of woman/ a mound of earth/ clay/ she swallowed/ searching any nourishment/ from her unutterable hollows" (TR, 19).

22. The equation of the female and "outward" is maintained in *Tabula Rosa*: "Flying vagini under full sail/ twirl out" (81).

23. The full passage reads: "The desire for the one seen in the mirror/ the desire for the one who mirrors/ the desire for the mirror/ the desire for being the one who mirrors/ the revolt of the mirror/ the sestina" (TR, 16). It is interesting that this desire (which leads to revolt) ends in a poetic form (sestina).

24. For instance, "my voice the/ voice that no longer/ / fears (but does)/ (fear) the necessity to speak" (9). We may take the lines in parentheses as corrections or dissimulations, but "I" am both fearful and fearless, by turns, here.

25. DuPlessis returns to the equation of penis and eye, and, to complicate matters, throws in a homology: "I am she inside the outside dividing barrier, I am the penising eye, and the missing I" (*Sulfur* #21 [155]). The penis = eye equation underwrites the "cock-eyed" pun she occasionally uses.

26. There may be some ambiguity in the full line as to whether the hymeneal is a hymeneal *to* the emptiness of the threshold: "Peace gentle wood bird/ kinwing loose in the natter// now will you/ wet with dew and rumped// plummet, hymeneal,/ to the emptiness of the threshold" (61). The threshold—as "limen," or "threshold"—surfaces in several places: "pink limen of the doorway" (TR, 26), where "doorway" rhymes with the earlier "dawnway"; "I would kill myself/ to stand at the threshold// under the lintel" (TR, 26); "standing beyond the threshold of silence" (TR, 32); "Ah but the liminal sickness, t whup the blank moth/ heaves again its pallid self/ against the divisor, lightning splits the center brain" (TR, 36). As there is an interest in the beyond, so there is an interest in the boundary of the here and the beyond—in this case, the threshold.

27. Or: "Oily shadow gains an entry/ scrap" (TR, 55).

28. The crossroads entails a "territory of utterance": "What paths inside/ other/ territory of utterance/ hear me// smudge and hear me//

whiteness" (TR, 55). In a more recent poem, "Draft #3: Of" (*Sulfur* #20 [Fall, 1988]), DuPlessis writes further of the "I": "A there and a here (meditative/ derivative) calls/ 'I' pivot, middle,/ calls 'I's name,/ sends I winding on site through all that middle/ middle space so easily assize,/ assimilated viewer of unfermented ground" (24).

29. The full passage reads: "Writing (along the lines of research, of work into and along/ the lines of somethings together/ as long as it, as they interest each other, trace into/ and mark each other) summarizes and accomplishes intermittent/ yearning and proposals/ that define the intersecting of strongly acknowledged yet/ loosely defined materials with an 'I' who is the hidden/ subject and object of these verbs" (TR, 71).

30. In her recent "Draft #6: Midrush" (*Temblor* #7 [Spring, 1988]), she uses twin columns to address two ideas of "circle": "Circles, pustules, chick-thick/ baby pox, MD sez boring/ disease with flex enough to/ twang a sore lyre/ 'of days';" and, "circle, garden over looked/ dying deeper down, flat/ even, from the last com-/ promises/ 'of green' " (50).

31. Perhaps, if the undertow cannot stand pleasure, it is the undertow that shall "protect us from pleasure" (61).

32. *Tabula Rosa* (especially in part one) shares many of the same concerns with *Wells*. We should, for instance, note that where a *tabula rasa* would be a blank tablet, which neither heredity nor society had written on (or over), a *tabula rosa*, although inextricably referring to the "rasa," reverses it. *Tabula Rosa* is a red (or "rose") tablet, and "red is the trace or signal of otherness" (TR, 85). So, *Tabula Rosa* is a slate upon which otherness has been inscribed. The red, of course, is, at times, contextualized as menstrual: "It is all part of being/ part of me . . . just happening/ / period" (TR, 82). In "Writing on 'Writing' (notes made between 15 March and 4 April 1985)," DuPlessis observes, ": a menstrual cycle, the very core of female difference (they say. Sometimes we say) over centuries of our culture" (84).

33. It is not clear that "it is no path/ / it is the abyss" (TR, 32) refers to the self, although, when taken with "these paths into the self:/ perhaps they lead nowhere" (W, 4), the second path may well recall the first.

34. "Acts of intention/ . . . / on acts of inattention" is actually a paraphrase of Robert Duncan's project: "I evolve the form of the poem by an insistent attention to what happens in inattentions, a care for inaccuracies; for I strive in the poem not to make some imitation of a model experience, but to go deeper into the experience of the process itself" (*Fictive Certainties*, 34).

35. "Operations. Addictions. And no," "one knows," and "what" (of "write what") are all printed in bold letters.

36. Part I of *Tabula Rosa* is made up of poems "from *The 'History of Poetry.'* " When "Ode" (from that series) was published in *Sulfur* #3 (1982), DuPlessis appended a note: "One might say that the poetic tradition is made up of lyrical/ social objects which incorporate women in various ways. These objects stand as paradigms on which my poems comment, with a desire precisely not to reaffirm the conventions or narratives and therefore the ideologies which we already know.

As far as I can sum up here and now, my writing involves always trying to deform narratives, conventions and languages assumed to have magisterial status within our culture. One of the ways this occurs in *The 'History of Poetry'* is by the insertion of lines from and references to other texts, with an eye to dissolving the older text as a canonical object. . . . Deformation, as I have been concerned with it, . . . is a struggle with the stuff that makes a text into a text: adequate grammar, understandability, culturally resonant conventions, the charm of literary allusions, mandated sequences of events, sometimes even speech itself as opposed to aphasia, stutter, or the void. I might add that my poems have no desire or will (or power!) to stand as feminist-replacement-canonical-objects, but would by their presence criticize and resist that desire" (19).

37. To the right of "encompassed all// statements" there is the single word "abyss!" (60), as if a plot that encompassed all were nothing but an abyss.

38. Using gender to go beyond gender might also recall "where in the space of particularity one passes/ beyond ego" (*TR*, 91), the first "gender" referring to the particularity of identity. This would place the "beyond" as something reached *through* the particular, and not in ignorance of it.

"The Interweaving Planned"

Laura Moriarty:

*Duse*¹

(San Francisco: The Coincidence Press, 1987)

PRECEDING HER LATEST CHAPBOOK, Laura Moriarty published a small work, *Life on a Red Field* (distributed as a supplement to *Jimmy and Lucy's House of K* #4 [June 1985]). The "on" of that work had a weighty placement to it, the field recalling and extending the Black Mountain poetries of the '50s. We might, further, recall the red-read homonym mined by Gertrude Stein in *Tender Buttons*. Thus "a red field" is a "read field" is a text,² and a life on a red field is, from the first, a textual one; or, as she puts it in her new chapbook, "the familiar// script remaining// place" (10). If we use the genetic myth, we could say that, in this current chapbook, *Duse* ("as in Eleanor"), the field has become a stage. Here the underlying myth has changed—not life as a naturalist's (field) observations, but as a play. While this metaphor is hardly new, it does allow Moriarty to raise issues which were not germane to the field metaphor. Thus, *Duse* is concerned, not just with reference or the relation of the work to the world, but with theatricality (and a representation that seems to owe more to theater than to philosophy or politics). The theater, then, becomes the stage for the poem itself.

But we mustn't think the theater has a single, unified meaning: "To save the theater, the theater must be destroyed" (1).³ To save the theater a certain concept of the theater must be destroyed, so that it can move beyond the hammy intensity,

romanticism, emotionalism, and histrionics of its past (a past which, of course, is further removed from us than from Duse herself). Within the field of the theater (as in that of poetry, too), there is a disagreement over what the theater (or poetry) should be. *Duse* shall present a "prose theater" (2), then, one which is removed from the "poetic" or "theatrical." As Frances Winwar writes, "the basis of her [Duse's] art [is] in restraint, naturalness, and poetic imagination." Moriarty, too, clearly practices an art of restraint and poetic imagination. The naturalness is less clear, although I would be willing to add it to this list, however misleading it might, at first, appear; for Moriarty's syntax can hardly be said to be conventional. Still, just as we must break through the convention of the theater to find the naturalism of the theater, it may be argued that we need to break through the convention of poetry to find its naturalism, however prosaic that naturalism might, at times, seem. Indeed, for (Moriarty's) Duse the point is not to be a star and do the conventional star turns (or set pieces), but to bring her character to light—not to bow but to reveal: "It is said in my repertoire I have not created any / new personage. This I consider my best eulogy" (1).

But is this the only meaning for "to save the theater, the theater must be destroyed"? Mightn't it mean that any concept of the theater, any tradition and pragmatics of the theater must finally be destroyed—not because one concept is better than another (and, so, all concepts of the theater are at war) but because all concepts (and each in turn) become constrictive rather than constructive? Therefore, "to save the theater the theater must be destroyed, / the actors and actresses must all die of plague."⁴ This would mean not just that the star turn is to be avoided but we must not know too well what we do (and what we are going to do) for, when we do, we merely repeat what we have done. Instead of remaining true to "feelings," for instance (or true to "the moment"), we are true to the convention, and conventions soon become outmoded. Subsequent generations can appreciate the conventions, then, as historical oddities—until they learn to accept them as something transparent or "natural." But this trap of the convention is always with us; for we turn our knowledge of how to do something into a convention, and, so, this is not, finally, a question of how to do without conventions (for we shan't), but of learning how to go beyond the convention, instead of being content with remaining there. So, *Duse* begins with "loss as rest from meaning" (1).⁵

Meaning, then, is something we need to rest from, and *Duse* is a book whose equilibrium rests on the fissure of loss in a network of meaning(s): "In wrapped and later was found / to be a whole something gone / something else missing" (4). The act of grasping what it's all about ("in wrapped") proves to be misguided, at least if a future moment is given power to decide the issue ("later was found").

Later, we shall find, not that we grasped the meaning, but that we lost "a whole something," a something we had thought to grasp but, we have come to find, had lost. The "whole" is not what we take away in our hands or minds (minds which, at least metaphorically, are prehensile, given the etymological "grasp" in "comprehension"); it is "something else." It's not clear if the "whole something" is identical to this "something else" or if this "something else" is missing from the "whole something." (But, then, how whole would it be?) If we proceed in this manner, we atomize the whole, logically and painstakingly skinning it until we find there's nothing left. Perhaps the "whole something" isn't graspable as such, but the "something else" will remain, forever finally other ("else") and, so, out of reach. Possibly, due to the balancing of clauses, whatever is missing can seem to be whole—indeed, perhaps, *because* we miss it it seems whole. Using the "wrapped" of "in wrapped," we could even say that what we grasp is nothing but the wrapping of the package and, inside the package (once opened), there is nothing.⁶ (So, there is a sense of the whole only as long as we do not open the package? But, then, is "whole" simply the wrapping which we would destroy to see more closely what we do hold in our hands?⁷ This is almost like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle—we can have a general notion of the whole or a specific notion of the particular, of what we hold, although, of course, a whole with no particularity is as uninformative as a particular untenanted by a general concept.)

Wherever the "whole" is situated—as something we might really comprehend one day or as something which is, in its very nature, fantastical—the loss of the whole brings with it a realization; for when we recognize the disparity between our reach and our grasp, we recognize loss. Thus, it may be that this loss of the whole introduces us to "loss as rest from meaning." Loss arrests meaning. But the (ar)rest isn't permanent. When we take whatever we still hold to be meaningful, when we focus, not on the lost whole, but on the package itself, we chain ourselves again to meaning. We lose loss and, with it, its rest and take the point of thinking to be what we grasp, not what we miss.

But, if meaning is a strain and loss is a rest, what is the purpose of art? Should art break the spell of meaning or should it reinforce it? On the one hand, art is a blandishment—an intense wish-fulfillment. On the other, art is a recognition. In both cases, art is a kind of second nature, and the question is whether we want to move into that second nature (as in Boswell's quip that many had built castles in air but he alone had tried to move into his) or to use that second nature to gain insight into the first, "these this to explain her own" (20). Duse (and, of course, Moriarty) chose the second option, that of art as a recognition.⁸ If art is to be a recognition, it must seek, not for the truth in fantasy (wish-fulfillment), but for the truth in daily life. (And it's here that a naturalism should come into play.) How

does the actress seek and attain this recognition? She must, as much as possible, become the character she is playing, but never to the extent that she forgets she is playing a character: "By the curtain and the step/ there levels transparent only/ second nature by then I lived/ and breathed that almost that/ woman I was" (17). To become the character (undoubtedly a cliché, even if it is only rarely achieved) the conventions must become for us transparent: she cannot take refuge in the fact that it's not really happening to her, for the character's life on the stage is "life as if she'd had it" (6).⁹ Moreover, if "took a switch to her legs so/ that she entered she as/ early knowing that whenever/ the text permitted real cries" (7),¹⁰ then she must be willing to endure pain in order to identify with her character (so that her character, in turn, can illuminate her self): " 'I do you wrong—it's like dying' " (6). The "almost" is a mark of her seriousness: there is no winking here, so that we might be allowed to see at all times the star's face beneath the character's.¹¹ The "almost" is, as well, a boundary that marks and separates the two natures. For if that "almost" is lost we have but one nature, a hybrid which is neither the first nor the second nature and which might speak only of pathologies, of the confusion of natures and not their mutual recognition.

Let's be clear that it's not as if one nature alone truly belongs to us; they both do. It's not as if we should be only who we "really" are (as if we could know what that was). For there is no self-identity that is not, to a greater or lesser degree, problematic:

the form of

and said I Eleanora and then
more than ever I knew she was
not herself I think I fooled

when the play them I said remember that

I existed

pale they

you lifting

which place was not

for (15)

"Eleanora," too, becomes a role, a role which Moriarty herself can play ("said I Eleanora") and, by playing, discover that Eleanora Duse was herself "not herself." So when Moriarty writes, "I think I fooled them" she may be speaking for Eleanora (to the extent that people thought there was a Duse apart from the roles she played, she "fooled them") or for herself (people misjudged this "I," thinking either that that "I" was Eleanora or—sillier still—Moriarty herself, for the "I" is both as well as neither). But, then, Moriarty could become Duse as much as Duse herself could—"as much" but not necessarily as well. The fact that "I" may be Moriarty

The relationship between the two columns is not explained but, because they are juxtaposed on a page, the reader expects a relationship; yet she must discover what that relationship is and how it works. Thus, the "interweaving"¹⁴ may be "planned" (20), but "[L] we/ [R] can't" (20). Planned or not, these must seem to us words on the cusp of meaning, words which seem equally in league with meaning and with loss. (Or, at least, here the left-hand column does.) The meaning is not insistent; it is something which we as readers have a share in creating, and there are a number of patterns we could use in creating this meaning. We could treat one

column as a script and the other as elaboration, explanation, arbitrary addenda, or, even, the very consciousness of the actress "performing" the other column. Either column could be used as the script. And the meaning we create will differ according to the patterns we use, the connections we make.

We could even argue that the left column above makes mention of the problem of connections ("with").¹⁵ So, we could take the column to mean that, when the connections are excessive (that is, when too much is connected) the connections expire. Because too much has been connected, nothing seems connected. There is no connection anymore—a situation which is "unkind." But, furthermore, this is a situation which arose due to an unkindness (that is, to recall the pun of "kind" and "kin," a situation in which unlikes were related forcibly). In this last case, the column is circular—beginning and ending with unkindness. Clearly, we shall not wring from the piece all the meaning that is there; thus, the whole meaning of the piece exceeds our grasp (as well as our patience). But that does not mean the piece is meaningless. Far from it. Meaning has been pluralized (not pulverized) and can not be exhausted.

If meaning can not be exhausted, it is not simply, nor predominantly, denotative. There is more to meaning than a dictionary. Otherwise, to possess the dictionary would be to possess the language; to possess a script would be to possess the play itself, which would make any performance superfluous. In this way, all dramas essentially would be closet dramas, and no performance could truly be definitive, for no performance could be more than a replication of what had already gone before—the understanding, which must prove to have been exhaustive. All possibilities, then, would be exhausted beforehand. Yet, there is a range of other factors that play their part in creating meaning—gestures, facial expressions, tones, pauses—a *body* of meaning. Words are important, but they are important because they "serve to / / reenact / / have not spoken been / / / for" (17). They allow us to "reenact," but that reenactment involves something new ("not been spoken for"). That something new, then, has not been spoken, nor spoken for, nor has it existed (been) even if it has been spoken of—Moriarty's condensation allows for numerous, sometimes contradictory, meanings to be expressed. Words are a kind of blueprint, a blueprint which allows one to reenact something and yet, paradoxically, in that reenactment, to go beyond the blueprint. Words, then, can be liberating because they are not all.

But we cannot assume this liberation; it does not always occur. We do not always express more than the script (and, of course, "script" means more than a stageplay, certain psychological theories having used the word to de-

pict our dealings with others and how those dealings follow a pattern). True, sometimes, we wish to trace the words (and their power) back to a source; we wish

to get the genie back in the bottle, so to speak, and seek to reduce the words to their denotative function. But "it's useless to say were words used/ as and I'm in love with going (it/ was a play)" (11). To ask what words were "used as" is to emphasize their function, not their existence. "So wanting with to feel see/ not only this// remembering words" (14). Wanting to feel or see "with" the words (what we might call a "with" mode), we may come to lose the dimension beyond the words, which the "with" was supposed to provide us. And, then, we do not feel or see again; we remember words: we remember the formula for water, not its smell, taste, or feel. Sometimes, then, we wish to use the words as windows onto the past, yet, instead of transparent cues, the words sometimes turn opaque. When they do, we become concerned with the words themselves, not their affects. When the actress becomes concerned with the words themselves, what happens? The acting can not illumine: "The hotel emblematic which place/ was not as now the dead city but/ acting was exterior to" (5).¹⁶ When acting is "exterior to," the acting shows.

In "exterior," there is implied its opposite, "interior," and, in both we see once again the conceptual importance for Moriarty of the two natures. Indeed, they are crucial to her epistemology. The key to that epistemology is in the juncture between an internal world (sense) and an external (actuality, "present heavy with its fact of"):

for what becomes of a thing that
 present heavy with its fact of
 must be done something
 touch so that sense flares
 but actual the weight
 in your hands now entire
 that so long each act was in so
 the longest one time that standing
 what becomes my whole
 and broken not without
 no belief that among was gone
 when that kind speech
 come for only the only
 but is there is not rest but
 what becomes can we then we (12)

Here, for instance, the sense, once it has been ignited by touch, flares off and rounds into its own orbit, leaving the thing "now entire." The thing shall remain entire as long as sense takes to trace its reflex arc, or "so long each act was in so," the (equal) measuring of "so" and "so" being crucial. And yet the thing is "in your

hands now entire"; that is, we can grasp the object, in all its weight, only as long as "each act was in so," only as long as we concentrated entirely on that act. That's the only way for the thought to measure the act. We can destroy the entirety, or the whole, simply enough—by feeling we must do something to the things we see. "What becomes of a thing that/ present heavy with its fact of/ must be done something"? It becomes changed, used; its presence leached away. And what becomes of us when this is the way we relate to the world? "Life [is] divided so that the/ parts the parts you see" (20).

It would seem the purpose of division, then, is to give us the parts we crave. (And, in a poem about *Duse*, the pun on "parts" is unavoidable.) In part, this must mean that life is divided (into subjects and objects; stars and bit players, etc.) so that some get the benefit. But this needn't mean that life itself is divided. After all, there may well be an entirety to life; but, in order to see parts, we must see divisions—like that between you and me—and, so, life appears to be divided. (And science can play its role in this divisiveness, too.) But we don't have to relate this way. For "what becomes my whole"? Not "I," but "we": "But is there is not rest but/ what becomes can we then we." This "we" would be an index of the range of possibilities ("can we"). "We" is a matter of becoming, not being.

Similarly, just because *Duse* sounds fragmented doesn't mean it is. What, from one perspective, may seem to be "shreds" may, from another, seem infinitely more important and more complete. Thus,

was cloth
left them burnt
shreds as by
is the play (22)

And, perhaps, this is the last point to be drawn from the dual columns (and the two natures). On the one hand, *Duse* may be just scraps (or "drafts and fragments," for this problematic doesn't touch Moriarty alone); but, on the other, it may be complete. *Duse* isn't simply about objects placed on display. It's also about the field the objects are arranged on—in this case, the page itself—both glimpsed in the "is."

"Is" can be a continuum, but what we experience is a point in that continuum—a point which always "is," but never fixed. Is the past a part of this continuum? "My dear that we lived that was/ and faithful to couldn't know/ matter now" (19). As usual, more than one reading is possible, but a dual perspective on a dichotomy is evident. The dichotomy is that of past and present. The last line may mean that what we couldn't know in the past is no matter now (punning on "know" and "no"). Thus, what didn't matter then can't matter now. This meaning is directly opposed to another: the past ("that we lived that was") is dead and, yet, not entirely so; for, in living, we are faithful to something we can not know, yet this

something, unknown in the present moment, is accessible to a later. Thus, what we couldn't know becomes a "matter *now*," becomes an object capable of being known much like other objects. In this way, the past becomes matter for the present. The whole, then, is not an image frozen in time. It evolves by making matter of the past, which also makes the past matter. And *Duse* is not simply a historical sketch but an engagement with our present moment.

Notes

1. *Duse* is unpaginated. To facilitate reference I have assigned page numbers, beginning with the first poem, "Loss as rest from meaning" as page one. Furthermore, the breaks between lines are occasionally lengthy and so, in my quotes, I have had recourse to mark the longer breaks with three slashes, thus —"///." There is sometimes a difference of a half space between columns, a difference I have not been able here to duplicate. Where I quote from both the left- and right-hand columns on a page, I use "R" or "L" within

brackets to designate which column it is.

2. We could look at *Persia* (San Francisco: Chance Additions, 1983), which preceded *Life on a Red Field*, and find there "chromatic succession a list of reds" (8) and, perhaps more importantly, "A red world entirely / The void of life" (14). Thus, if we seek to link up books according to a genetic model, *Persia* ("never finally 'true to life' " [21]) leads to the red (or read?) void of *Life on a Red Field*.

3. For some, the sentence may reverberate, unavoidably, with the echoes of political conflicts of twenty years ago (i.e., "to save the country the village must be destroyed").

4. We could say that actors and actresses have caught a disease of the theatrical, so life itself becomes theatrical (instead of the theater becoming life-like). We could, of course, say this and yet not say that the line is "justified." We might, moreover, note that "plague," which might refer to a plague of theatricality, certainly does refer to the historical connection of plagues and theaters and, thus, marks a spot where theater has a social influence, "influence" itself having roots in epidemiology.

5. When Morarity begins with "Loss as rest from meaning" (1), she invites comparison with, among other works, Roland Barthes' *Empire of Signs*. Generally, we operate firmly within a dichotomy, one side of which is meaning and the other meaninglessness. "Meaningless" is a virtual slur; it designates something as being worthless. So, while "meaning" suggests, unavoidably, its opposite, the dichotomy for us is weighted entirely on the side of "meaning." Barthes tells how "meaningless" might be a form of praise. "This situation is the very one in which a certain disturbance of the person occurs, a subversion of earlier readings, a shock of meaning lacerated, extenuated to the point of its irreplaceable void, without the

object's ever ceasing to be significant, desirable. Writing is, after all, in its way, a *satori*: *satori* (the Zen occurrence) is a more or less powerful (though in no way formal) seism which causes knowledge, or the subject, to vacillate: it creates *an emptiness of language*. And it is also an emptiness of language which constitutes writing; it is from this emptiness that derive the features in which Zen, in the exemption from all meaning, writes gardens, gestures, houses, flower arrangements, faces, violence" (4—Barthes' italics). Thus: "All of Zen, of which the haiku is merely the literary branch, thus appears as an enormous praxis destined to *halt language*, to jam that kind of internal radiophony continually *sending* in us, even in our sleep (perhaps this is the reason the apprentices are sometimes kept from falling asleep), to empty out, to stupefy, to dry up the soul's incoercible babble; and perhaps what Zen calls *satori*, which Westerners can translate only by certain vaguely Christian words (*illuminate, revelation, intuition*), is no more than a panic suspension of language, the blank which erases in us the reign of Codes, the breach of the internal recitation which constitutes our person; and if this state of *a-language* is a liberation, it is because, for the Buddhist experiment, the proliferation of secondary thoughts (the thought of thought), or what might be called the infinite supplement of supernumerary signifieds—a circle of which language itself is the depository and model—appears as a jamming: it is on the contrary the *abolition* of secondary thought which breaks the vicious infinity of language" (74-5 —Barthes' italics). But, note, that Moriarty later writes, "There is not rest" (12), as if the loss that seems to be a rest from meaning is but rolled over into another meaning. So, not only is there no rest, there would be no loss.

6. Barthe's *Empire* makes a similar point vis a vis the package, though, of course, not couched in terms of "the Whole." "Thus the box acts as the sign: as envelope, screen, mask, it is *worth* what it conceals, protects, yet designates; it *puts off*, if we can take this expression in French—*donner le change*—in its double meaning monetary and psychological; but the very thing it encloses and signifies is for a very long time put off until later, as if the package's function were not to protect in space but to postpone in time; it is in the envelope that the labor of the confection (of the making) seems to be invested, but thereby the object loses its existence, becomes a mirage: from envelope to envelope, the signified flees, and when you finally have it (there is always *something* in the package), it appears insignificant, laughable, vile: the pleasure, field of the signifier, has been taken: the package is not empty, but emptied: to find the object which is in the package or the signified which is in the sign is to discard it: what the Japanese carry, with a formicant energy, are actually empty signs" (46—Barthes' italics).

7. Moriarty posits a natural, as well as an artificial, whole. "Things cherished a whole/ civilization artificially would/ have" (16). So, there is a natural whole

15. Or: "Covered the walls with my with/ something like my face" (19). "With" might, then, be a personal connection ("like my face"); so, too, like my face, perhaps these connections can be observed by me, not face-to-face, but only in reproduction.

16. "The dead city" had already made an appearance. On page two:

the dead city the prose theater
 elongated "smashed with a fist the inner
 mirror"
 inevitable weighted with
 or character when believed
 we

It's not clear from this whether "the dead city" and "the prose theater" are identical or, in some unspecified way, related.

"Bleached By Namelessness"

After Calculus

(Providence, RI: Burning Deck, 1988)

ONCE THERE WAS *DISCIPLINE*. Now there is *After Calculus* (1988). In *Discipline*, we learned that "from the thickness of number, knotted emerges the object against the object" (3).¹ Thus, a matrix was disclosed ("the thickness of number") from which objects emerged and to which the objects remained knotted. This matrix was a question of ratios: how thick is a number, anyway? We might expect this thickness to be the most abstract thing of all—or, even, the most confused, attempting, as it seems to, to insinuate a measure best used for material objects into a space of pure thought. (Is this solely a mathematical confusion, or could we as well talk about the thickness of a noun?) On the other hand, we might expect that, once sucked into the sphere of numbers, we would become acclimated to the subtle differences in ideas well enough to grasp "the thickness of number." But, if the numbers, as ratios, undergird the world of objects, then the numbers do have a thickness—a thickness manifested in the objects themselves. We might, then, say that it is due to the emerging object that the *thickness* of number becomes apparent. And, in this way, the matrix is exposed as mathematical—an analytical, but determining, factor in life.

But, if that's what we learn from *Discipline*, what do we learn from *After Calculus*? (And, does "after calculus" mean after [the] discipline [of calculus]?) Note how *After Calculus* begins: "Walk through door/ to face door/ / ajar, backlit/ and eclipsed" (13); that is, walk through the physical object of the door to be able to face the figure of the door, even though that figure is eclipsed by having been passed through. If *Discipline* discloses the matrix of numbers from which objects emerge, *After Calculus*, "surrounded by thicknesses of/ glaze and knot" (27), is a

return to the world before *Discipline*²; for, what do we find when we "walk through [the] door"? "Here the figure resumes/ shape and similitude/ / congealed from a/ displaced quiet" (13). "Resumes" indicates that we pick up this figure *in medias res*: something (we don't know what) has happened; in the wake of which, the figure returns to what it was before its "shape and similitude" were bent. Interestingly, it is this state, obliquely indicated by "resumes," which seems the most active. What came before it is the same as what comes after. So, "resumes" means that this third state is the same as the first. But what of the second? We know only that, in terms of the figure's shape and similitude, it differs from the first and third. Thus, the "displaced quiet" refers to the quiet of the first state, "displaced" by the second, and "resumed" in the third as the "shape and similitude" congeal. Actually, it may be that, if we link this passage to the earlier one from *Discipline* (taking "the figure" to refer to "the number"), we can glimpse something of this second state, after all. The second state, then, is where, in the emerging "object against object," the figure is bent out of shape; its similitude becoming dissimulation. And, so, this second state would be a state of unrest, of struggle (as the shape is mangled, the similitude cropped) during which "the figure" enters the world and becomes realized in objects. Thus, this second state is a state of reference, where the figure *refers* to an object. Only when it is returned to a categorical space (where it becomes preeminently a rhetorical or mathematical figure) does the figure regain its form and truth. After all, "the picture leaks" (45).

In this way, only after calculus can the figure become what it was before calculus. And what is it? We now find "an act which stands by/ in/ difference" (14). The "in/ difference" indicates the nature of the third stage, for the act both takes place in "difference," as it differentiates between thought and action, and is "indifferent" to what happens. Why? "Because the act has failed every other way" (57). When the act is realized, when, for example, we seek a definitive meaning for "in/ difference," the act is changed and, in that change is a failure: "Change hands/ what fits" (61). Similarly, the act is changed—we glide over the pause between "in" and "difference," uniting them in a holy, simplified meaning—to accord with what fits. The second state, then, seeks to find what fits. This "fitting," however, means we refer to the sense we had before we started reading in order to determine what the act should be. But what does fit? "A name fits" (49). Yet, what does a name fit, if a name would fit? "Solid volumes, coats of color, *true feelings*" (49—Watson's italics): or, shapes, hues, and emotions. There is "spirit [on] one side/ / and name the other" (0.10, 59). But, then, what do we do with what's in-between, which is neither spirit nor name? It is "figure"; therefore, this second state (which would seem to be a state of calculus) can be said to refer to the first state (which would seem to be of language). After all, they do share "figures"—even if "figure"

originally is rhetorical or perhaps metaphorical and secondarily analytical. In this "fitting" is a smuggling into this space between spirit and name things of the spirit and things of the name. What is this space between, however? "We try to focus on the space / / Between the dots. The present relieves us" (0.10, 58). The figure is not of the present; it is but "a guest of the present" (62), "stammering out of survive" (18). Nevertheless, we are "straining to receive a figure of here" (0.10, 51).

The third stage is one of paradox or pun, one in which there is "a second sense" (45) which questions, undermines, negates, or makes problematical the first sense. Therefore, this third state can not be fully realized: "Neither a point of impact / nor not *not* here" (66—Watson's emphasis); "neither here nor / once removed" (18); or, "but not what you say that you want and / / not what you *say* that" (26—Watson's italics).³ But, as it cannot be realized, it is relegated to intention. Thus, "piece from piece / you only *intend* to speak" (15).

As we found "resumes" hid within itself a history of two states other than the one resumed, so we now find a kind of basic numerology underwriting *After Calculus*: 0-1-2-3. But, let us take them out of this sequence and in the sequence which *After Calculus* recognizes: 1-2-3-0 (with the sequence then repeating, for 1 follows 0). One: "Things come first" (44). Of course, they do; after all, what emerged from "the thickness of number" was "object

against object." But is there, perhaps, something else that is also meant by "things come first"? With things comes "that thereness" (44). Therefore, "things are a life" (41), a life in their own right, without human intervention. More than just existing without human intervention, however, if things come first they can think us, instead of the other way round: "Things are a life / stand aside to let them think you" (41). Of course, in "stand aside" a conflict is registered: "The assault by / every object" (65). This "first" we've been discussing is a recovered first, for, while things may have come first, we are already here, second or not, and we are not used to taking a back seat to things. We are not used to considering ourselves as the mental projections of our furniture. We are not used to thinking that our powers of thought make us secondary to the chair with its primary "thereness." This firstness of things may be logical (as if things were the basic proposition all other laws—especially, natural—were derived from) or ethical (which would turn humanism inside out and hold that our manipulation of things were no more principled than our manipulation of aboriginal tribes). But, then, there is an edge of definition to "things," an edge which brings us to particularity: "This particular chair" (16).⁴ The particularity of things would seem to depend, in fact, on their coming first. Yet, "first" indicates that, for all this particularity or the grounding of natural laws, "things" are followed by something else, something which comes second, and, so, indeed, "things are a pause" (42).⁵ But doesn't this suggest that particularity is a

pause, too? An eroding bulwark against abstraction? Thus, things portend a different life from the one we know, a life in which "fate starves / / [because] things come first" (44); a life in which we "[decide] against the will which inhabits" (46); a life which is "home among vessels and objects" (16) because it is, most simply, an object itself, an object which need not be used to be valuable. This life of things is simply existence—without will or desire: "Cancel skin. / / defeat choice" (64), or "then the piecework light, / its descent to own skin in / blank sheets and thin shadows" (68), for "the one who has / a purpose, / a power / has that much less / to tell" (15). Therefore, where the "first person, / [is] revoked" (21), we shall have more—not less—to tell, but that more shall not be about an anthropomorphological us. Thus, "you first speak" (14).

If we think of "one" in terms of people, not things, the issue of particularity (perhaps, really, the hope of particularity) becomes cloudy: "You didn't have to believe / / / let anyone make you up: / please please be that, the *one*" (48). "*The one*" indicates that this "one" is special, as others are not. For, while it is true that you might be "the one," it is also true that "you could be anyone" (42).⁶ So it is not by being "one" that you become special. You must be "the [right] one." As "one" may, in fact, be the wrong one, there is "the membraneous night / / the still, the singular, the instead of" (61). Or, in other words, simply because we chose "one" doesn't mean we chose the right one. We might remember the choice best for the one we didn't choose; the one who got away. Thus, there is nothing in the number to insure that "one" shall be "the one" wanted. The proof of the definitive article shall have to be found elsewhere. But, given the task of judging the ones, haven't we already entered the realm of "two"? There is the figure, or image, or fantasy, of "the one" and there is the one we compare to the figure. So, "the one" assumes two (object and image) which shall become one—a perfect fit, like Cinderella's. However, if "each is less than the image judges" (48), it would seem this perfect fit shall remain a wish.

"Two," then, is the number of appearance and reality, of the mirror and the object.⁷ "Surrendered to and swallowed by / mirrors" (63). "Two" would seem to be an unstable number, for, if "swallowed by mirrors," what is left but the mirror? And, yet, if there is only the mirror, what is there? "Drawing the mirror closer: / contents spilled" (53). So, in the loss of the other pole in the appearance-reality dichotomy, the pole that remains (appearance) becomes empty. There is nothing for the mirror to reflect and, in this way, perhaps, "appearance is black" (54). "Two" is on the verge of collapsing into "one," a "one" which would seem meaningless with nothing to contrast it to. On the other hand, "silence is a sound camouflaged by mirrors" (15). Silence and sound, though not reducible to appearance and reality, nonetheless provide a duality; a duality which, as with the swallowing

mirrors, collapses one term ("silence") into the other ("sound"), suggesting that there is only sound. To hide this collapse of two into one, a third term, unrelated to the first two, is introduced. So, while "two" might go the way of unity ("one"), it might also go the way of profusion ("three").

And, from profusion, it is but a short step to confusion: "Why did it have to imagine itself/ to dream/ that wake is another life asleep?" (47). What is this asking anyway? In order to conceive of "dream" and "wake" in the same terms ("sleep"), why was it necessary for it to imagine itself? Dream and wake would remain self-evidently separate without self-consciousness. If the dream were only a dream and the wake only awake, we would never conceive of them similarly. But, in imagining itself, it is no longer repeating or reproducing itself: it no longer has to be the same, although, in the imagination of itself, a certain sameness or self-identity is posited; so it "would have been no different" (34). Or, perhaps, it is the same, only different. It may imagine itself the same as what it is, but with, say, one difference—this time it is awake (or asleep, or dreaming). But that difference means it is no longer identical to itself (which is the paradox of self-identity, anyway: "aside from/ within/ / / the true beacon/ / / the true beacon/ / / divided by/ / / the true beacon" [37]⁸). So, from the standpoint of dream, waking is "another life"—similar enough to dream to be recognized as "*another* life" and yet different enough that, as far as dream is concerned, to be awake is to be asleep, because waking is dumb to what constitutes life for the dream. A certain blindness is sketched in this perspectivism; for, if waking is "asleep" to the life of dream, dream is asleep to the life of being awake. The similarity which underwrites the use of "another" serves to show this other as inferior, though either constitutes the other as inferior. Numerically, one ("itself") leads to two ("imagine itself") and that second leads to an act ("dream") which involves its opposite ("wake") in the

creation of a third ("another life") which is characterized as preliminary or kin to the act itself ("asleep")—almost as if the process of dream were to begin again in that other life. Or, the imagination leads to a dream which leads to the conception of another life characterized as unrealized potential (a life asleep). So, while this life asleep is finally glimpsed through the dream it is not awakened or vitalized. This glimpsed life is but interest on the principle that, in a duality, it is the third term which matters most. The life asleep cannot be used or cashed in. It is a kind of fullness (of potential, at least) which is pitched on its head, for the other life reverses this one—even though, we might feel, they almost grow together. But that "almost" means this other life is a life we cannot reach, "ghosted by the sighs of objects" (0.10, 22).

But what is the third term in a duality? The third term is both the union of opposites and the line of demarcation between them; it is "another life asleep" *and*

it is the line between sleep and wakefulness. It is the earth and sky *and* it is the horizon: "And the horizon is still a line from side to side/ and the horizon is still a line from side to side" (57). Or, "the shadow conceals its enclosures/ and even darkness has its vanishing point" (46). The third term refers to the union (or enclosure) of the duality and to the necessary vanishing of duality and enclosure—necessary because, as the two parts are united, they are no longer two but revert to being one. And yet there is a moment, brief though it may be, when the union of opposites yields not "one," but "three": the two opposed halves and the line of demarcation between them. And the line, standing, as it does, between the two, is *within* the duality—unremarked but crucial, for without this "third" there can not be "two." And, yet, this "third within" corresponds with a "third without": the line (or circle) which seals the union, encloses (and closes up) the duality, and distinguishes this union of opposites as "one." What we find, through this process, is that "the margin *is* the core" (18). But, note that unless something else is implicitly set off from this "one," the exclusion of which is the founding gesture of "oneness," there shall be no "one," "or even if the isolation was complete to itself" (30)⁹; for, even if complete to itself, there is still something (outside) it is isolated from. So, it can be "one" only insofar as there is a not-one, which, structurally, means there must be two. "One," then, is still enmeshed in duality.

But how can this third term be both the sum of the two halves and the line that demarcated the two halves? That one, separating line occasions the duality, in the first place, and, when it is removed, is the means by which either side invades the other and both become one. Therefore, "you love a fine line where/ the differences melted" (50). And, as the differences melt, so shall this line, for the line had, after all, no purpose other than differentiation. We might as well say, then, "you love a fine line which melts as the differences melt." Or: "This is a dissolve" (41). So "three" becomes the outward limit to this counting. There shall be no "four" (although there are four sections to *After Calculus*¹⁰). But this third term as-union-of-opposites quickly reverts to the one term of identity once the union has been achieved. And, yet, the truly successful "one" of identity, the "one" of a pure identity in which all things, all opposites, share, is, because nothing can be poised against or contrasted to it, zero. The only "one" which escapes duality, then, is "zero."

Zero isn't a negative.¹¹ It is through zero that we are allowed to begin again: "The language in which there is no zero, // negative tens, one hundred one hundreds, // until unknown. The mind wants to begin // already full" (0.10, 61). Without zero, we must proceed by accumulation and we must continue to accumulate until we reach the "unknown"—perhaps this burden of continuing is like a computer program which cannot be cancelled. Thus, when Watson

complains that "you are bleached by namelessness/ as if zero never arrives" (46), he is not equating "namelessness" with "zero." Rather, zero saves us from namelessness. It is the point of departure. As long as the zero does arrive, as long as "one" yields "two" and "two" renders "three" and "three" reverts to "one" which may then become "two" but may also—and, more advantageously—become "zero," the only namelessness we achieve is subjunctive ("as if"). Zero, then, is our shelter, so we need fear no more the heat o' the sun. Yet, if so, namelessness must be like the sun, for it is namelessness which bleaches. And, in this sense, namelessness, too, becomes a kind of figure. After all, "two for one/ and /// the loss is/ the icon of loss" (29). So, meaning becomes a figure and "move you and/// against the figure// absorb" (28). Without "zero" the figure will absorb meaning until meaning is lost. "But zeros are naked, awakened// to choice and absorbed by obstacles// loosened from size and shape" (0.10, 11). Zero, then, introduces us to choice. And, how does it do that? Because zero also introduces us to the hole which cannot be filled. Thus, "the hole is your shape" (50), which is why "you're what it disappears" (52). (Or: "You invisible invisible, // and now from you excluded" [0.10, 47]). Your very shape is hollow—not, however, in order to be (ful)filled. If it were filled (in), it would no longer be a hole and, consequently, it would no longer be your shape. It is your shape only because it is a hole, only because it is incomplete, only because it circles an absence. So, "this is a dissolve/ this an absence" (41). The hole, because it cannot be filled in, is not experienced as an order, but as a choice; although, we might well ask if it is all worth it: "Worth what absence" (16). "New acts in a precise air// condensed from anonymity" (0.10, 11).

But what of namelessness? It harbors memory, funds expectations, and marks a present: "Memory is nameless, a trajectory of expectations brought to// presences" (0.10, 53). Opposed to "zero," then, is a namelessness which enfolds memory. We can not name our expectations; we only await them. And, in this way, the past seeks to claim the present: "Intention is the limit of history, doing what is already// done" (0.10, 53). This sense of expectation is empty, however: "Want order to be empty// And to do as if done" (0.10, 20). Thus, intention, history, expectation, and order—all are merely a plaited emptiness. And, yet, between the beginning of an expectation fulfilling itself (and itself alone) throughout time and the endlessness of namelessness, there is desire: "Between endlessness and origin, desire empties its arc, // disclosing a face in the lens" (0.10, 53). The purpose of desire is this disclosure, this recognition. Somehow, then, among zero and repeti-

tion, we are there. But where are we? "Marks bear// the surface closer, surrendered to a present uninhabited, exhausted.// Lives are copies and, as everything happened, the echo sounded. It// came from a different place, but here

it belonged" (0.10, 54).¹² We are in an uninhabited present. But if we are there, how can it be uninhabited? Because lives are copies, we are copies, too. Everything has already been done. That "done" echoes back to us until the echo which, as echo, must have originated elsewhere, nonetheless belongs here—just as our lives do. Our lives here in this echoing chamber of the present are comprised of equal parts absence ("uninhabited") and fatigue ("exhausted"). Thus, our present moment is vacant to the extent that it is an echo of some other (and, if vacant, all the better to echo with) and vacant to the extent that exhaustion makes us absent(-minded). But mightn't the past need something in this present so that the present weren't entirely the past? "Holding dimension to the present" (0.10, 24) suggests that the past is flat. The original needs the present moment to (again) be fully dimensional, to be more than a thought or image or figure. Thus, "a figure chalked by eclipse/ facsimile/ surrogate/ guest of the present" (62). For all that the present seems no more than a reflection of the past, it is a reflection, ironically, only on account of its greater depth or dimension.¹³ And, yet, even that depth is a figure: "You create a mouth:/ the space inside stone/ still a surface" (50). As "creation/ / [is] a continual mouth" (0.10, 13) and as the mouth shows us that, however deep we go, all our depths are surfaces, creation would seem to be a continual search for a surface, a surface which would seem deeper than any prior surface but which must still be a surface. Thus, "the intention finds surface" (*The Asks*, n.p.). On the one hand, then, our crucial use of zero is a "retreat to nothing exposed" (19),¹⁴ or to some depth. On the other hand, once we arrive at this "nothing exposed" we have, by our arrival, exposed it, turned it into a surface. Between these alternatives there is "a luminous mass/ offering murmurs to situations/ in the ghost of shapes" (49).

But how far shall we go toward this "nothing exposed"? "Stop at invisible" (54). This is a clear order. After all, it seems only reasonable. But is it? "So interrupted, dismembered/ / so divided, devoured/ / so invisible, impossible/ / there is no catharsis" (67). While the order is clear, its application to a condition which is already "so invisible" is disingenuous. What is the connection between the rational figure (map, law, meaning, etc.) and the irrational condition ("so interrupted, dismembered, so divided, devoured, so invisible, impossible")? We follow the order by ignoring the world. We pretend the world is what the figure(s) tell us it is. Only by closing our eyes can we use these orders to find our way. Ironically, only then does it make sense to "stop at invisible." Only by closing our eyes to the irrationality, impossibility, invisibility, interruptions, dismemberment, and divisions do we see a world which is rational, possible, visible, continuous, and whole. Thus, "the world is one place/ / And the mind another/ / / But we presided over the end of ourselves/ / In exchange for measure" (0.10, 22). It's not enough simply to recognize "the world is one place and the mind another"—sharing a kind

of separate but equal status—for we have "presided over the end of ourselves." This suicide-watch is part of an exchange: in return for ending ourselves, we gain "measure." Measure allows the two separate places to correspond. Through measure, the mind is allowed to overlay (quantify or map; in short, *to know*) that other place of the world. And, so, measure is above all a blurring of the separateness of the two places of mind and world. Arguably, it was this blurring that ended "ourselves," for we lose the separate status of the mind to gain the omnipotence of measure, although, if "the measure is the / / promise" (0.10, 13), it must be a withheld omnipotence, a sort of omnipotence *absconditus*. And what is the nature of this "omnipotence *absconditus*"? "And the names were to us / / the measure, / / something for something / / the scale created" (0.10, 35). The scale is the measure and language the measurer, for it created the scale. In this way, the figure is reduced to something rational, something scaled (down); something proportionate in a proportional world; at which time it absorbs the world. Opposed to a world in which figures can be manipulated to get what we want—to discharge anxiety or surcharge need—we find "there is no catharsis." Then: "the name shivered where the will touched it" (0.10, 31). But, if there is no catharsis, there is no after after calculus: "Thought is an end in itself" (0.10, 57).

After Calculus, then, represents an end, although "the end is not the end" (0.10, 62): "Turn away / turn around / turn away" (68). These are the very last lines of the book and suggest, in their way, that we have reached a limit. What limit is it? "But there's a limit / you don't know what" (43). At the end is something we can't face ("turn away"), someplace where we can not go ("turn around"). But how do we know there is a limit? Because there is no catharsis. That is, there is no further; there is only more and this more is, simply, "indifference" and "indifference" is its own limit: "Beauty is an order which / devours its monuments, / maintaining something (someone) / to let go of / / resuming indifference" (67). Beauty creates and then devours its monuments. When it is appeased, however, we return to or resume the first state—"indifference."

But how does Beauty arise from that first state of "indifference," anyway? There is interest: Beauty is drawn to the material, identifies with it, unites with it, penetrates the material in order to shape it into a monument to the order of Beauty. And Beauty is drawn to the material because "the material is desire" (0.10, 54). This is the strong form of identification. As it approaches an even stronger, the duality necessary for identification is lost and the singularity of incorporation found—"Beauty *devours* its monuments." Oddly, this incorporation occurs as a result of the decorporealizing of the monument; for the physical monument, by being devoured, is incorporated into the order of Beauty, which is manifestly an idea(l). But why is it necessary for Beauty to devour its own monuments? Because Beauty

is hunger. The same hunger which leads Beauty to create the monument leads it to devour it. Moreover, it is through this incorporation that Beauty survives: Beauty is parasitic upon its material forms. It lives on (and through) the material; it does not maintain it. The monument, the expression of beauty, is sacrificed that

Beauty be maintained. So interest topples indifference but interest shall devour itself unless it reaches (again) the point of indifference—the point where the monument can be sacrificed so that Beauty itself can survive. Actually, if there were no "indifference," there would be no Beauty.¹⁵

Both the indifference and devouring demand division: "Request reason./ demand promise. / / divide to conquer" (18). Thus, we see this interest was always, at base, self-interest and, because it can not allow itself to be devoured if it is self-interest, self-interest is but the pivot of indifference. After all, "denial is another form of coherence" (21), although "silence is coherence inverted" (0.10, 63). So, Beauty denies anything other than beauty and maintains thereby its own coherence. But at the cost of what? Beauty necessitates a sacrifice—not just of its monuments, but of history and humanity, for Beauty must be all. Let us draw this conclusion: an art whose primary value is beauty is an art of self-interest, an art of indifference, for, as it places Beauty uppermost, it necessarily places indifference uppermost, too. Beauty is brutal: the art of the beautiful means that everything other than beauty is merely a food-chain, fair game for the order which shall devour it.

But what do we get out of this sacrifice? It justifies our existence (and the existence of all that is not Beauty) by allowing us to be incorporated into Beauty. Thus, our praise of Beauty shows we've already given up: we want nothing more than to ignore a social order distinguished above all by its base self-interest; yet what we choose in place of that social order is, fundamentally, the very same order—(naked) self-interest.¹⁶

This may lead us to see once again what Pound had insisted on: art is not separate from life. When something is wrong in one sphere, it is wrong in the other. If our society is brutal, our art will be brutal, too. Furthermore, where the goal of society is indifference (so that we are truly socialized and controllable), the end of Beauty (as socially sanctioned art) must be indifference, too. Beauty isn't a haven from society; it's one more tool of socialization, one more form of sacrifice. But this sacrifice isn't the end, for not everything is sacrificed. Poised against sacrifice is a something that resists being sacrificed because it cannot be used: the namelessness. Where sacrifice posits an end (as a meaning), namelessness discloses that "the end is not the end" (0.10, 62), a disclosure which is not all to the good if it unleashes the bleaching power of namelessness. On the one hand, where end and meaning are held to be synonymous, we are dealing with a structure of

sacrifice. But, where "the end is not the end," we have reached a paradox, not a final meaning. The paradox allows us to go on, for through the endlessness of the end, we glimpse the uselessness of use. That is to say, use finally gets us nowhere. But the paradox is useful precisely because it cannot be used. What this has to do with art is simple. A paradoxical art (more especially, one informed by namelessness) serves notice that it can not be used. It shall neither anesthetize nor justify us. The paradox, finally, is this: just where the art of namelessness seems to concede its valuelessness, it claims a value greater than use, for, as Adorno wrote, "art becomes human only when it gives notice it will not play a serving role. . . . It is art's inhumanity alone that bespeaks its faith in mankind" (AT, 281).

Notes

1. *Discipline* is not paginated, so, to facilitate reference, I have assigned page numbers, beginning with "Night sunk. The utterer sleeps through his sound" as page one and ending with "*strike*" (Watson's italics) as page nine.
2. Knots and objects also surface in *0.10* (1986): "The eye undoes the knot. The object / / returns to its meaning" (61). Further, "so for you I belong as nothing to no one, or else alive and / / complete in circuits of knots" (47).
3. Or, perhaps, "the negative is not not here" (*0.10*, 62).
4. More fully, "always, this particular chair, this vase, this shade, / described and measured / / rubbed raw, alike, common" (16).
5. Or, in *0.10*, "property is sewn to / / fences, limit to limit, / / and separated by pause" (15). So there is property and ownership only due to the pauses.
6. More than *anyone*, you could be any you: "Watch for / the other you the next you the further you" (17). And, "in the afterthought one is as anyone, a definition, an opening / / in which the [?] has been emptied" (*0.10*, 51).
7. Or, in *0.10*, "nevertheless appearances / / remain suspended / / in transmission" (13).
8. Perhaps this internal splitting (the true beacon dividing itself from the true beacon) is one reason why "internal [seems] remote" (35).
9. More fully, "decreasing body / / / the immense table / / / or even if the isolation was complete to itself" (30).
10. For the record, the four sections are "Field of Extraction" (I), "Influency" (II), "Future Self" (III), and "Currency" (IV).
11. Indeed, we might recall that Watson's first book was titled, *Drawing A Blank* (Blue Bell, PA: Singing Horse Press, 1980).
12. The "uninhabited" present might recall "the hands of uninhabited reason" (*D*).

13. If the past needs the present so that its figure be fully dimensional, what does the present need? "So the present asks its figure to be relieved, or wet in / / perpetuity by objects" (0.10, 31).

14. The full line reads, "assault extremities, / / retreat to nothing exposed" (19).

15. Compare Adorno: "So beauty finds itself in the wrong against right, while yet being right against it. In beauty the frail future offers its sacrifice to the Moloch of the present: because, in the latter's realm, there can be no good, it makes itself bad, in order in its defeat to convict the judge" (*Minima Moralia*, 95). But, also, apropos the sacrifice of Beauty: "Art's ultimate function, then, is to grieve for the sacrifice it makes, which is the self-sacrifice of art in a state of helplessness. The beautiful not only speaks like a messenger of death, as Walkure does in Wagner's opera; it also assimilates itself to death conceived as a process" (*Aesthetic Theory*, 77-8).

16. As an example of self-interest perhaps we could cite the following lines: "Lies are not lies. / / you tell them" (14). And why aren't they lies? Perhaps "because a lie is the responsibility of the listener" (64). Thus, I can not lie to you; you can only lie to yourself (through me).

"A Little Untamed Solitude"

*Elsewhere*¹

(San Francisco: Acts Books, 1988)

I AM CAUGHT IN THE CROSS-FIRE—necessarily—given "the crisis of subjectivity in which the so-called Romantic self is under attack [and which] crosses purposes with the tyranny of gender located in the third person, giving my many selves consternation and causing panic in their vocabulary."² Fired upon from all sides, I might lose myself in nostalgic longing for a time when a self was a self (of course, of course). Or I might deed over my claims to being a self and flee the battle, content with small mercies. There is no crisis, however, for those who either ignore the attack or bristle on the defensive. Nor is there a crisis for the attackers themselves, battling in the name of a liberation. For those of us who cede merit to both the self and the attack, the crisis can be very real, indeed, affecting, as it does, the question of meaning. For example, do we understand "my many selves" as literal? figurative? (Is the figurative "merely" figurative or might it, too, have a "real" meaning?) We might say we are vexed by the nearness of meaning.

How close to hand is meaning? "The only matter is at hand" (*The Graces*, 38); or, "Here and now my own hand came to me" (*E*, 5). But are we given meaning itself or just the signs of meaning? And, if just the signs, do they promise a meaning that shall someday be delivered or do they simply taunt us for foolishly expecting what shall never be? "Became now before us where we assembled a figure of speech to haunt our desolate ears" (*TG*, 50); or, "I saw no signs destined to be gratified" (*E*, 8).

Like the old mind-body problem, either extreme enjoys the "blissful clarity of exaggeration." Some will hold to a materialism of meaning: it's all there (and that's all there is, folks). Some will hold to a transcendental meaning: meaning visits us but cannot be bound. And, again like the mind-body problem, common sense seeks the midpoint: something of meaning is physically given (the letters, or sounds) and something is not (the idea). This last we generally call "abstract"—as if it had been removed from something else, even though it generally determines (our idea of) the meaning of what is written. There is a give-and-take, then, in this question of meaning: "One step releases the world" (TG, 50).

In his 1983 book, *The Graces*, Aaron Shurin wrote, "I came upon a blank space/ and swooned/ / saying makes it so" (17).³ Note, first, the connection between the blank space and loss of consciousness. Nature may abhor a vacuum, but the blank, devoid of language, repels consciousness; thus, we have recourse to a tautology to define the blank (the blank space is blank), which does not define the blank as much as it sets a limit to consciousness (and language). While we might not at first recognize it, the definition of this blank is really that the blank exists outside our definitions. "Where/ was written has never yet become, so they become the Word . . ." (TG, 61—Shurin's ellipses).⁴ In place of that promised "where" and within the interval of awaiting it, we turn to language. Moreover, we turn into language—a religious language (where the transcendental signified gleams with [or from] the countenance of God). So, what comes after the blank? There is the imposition of language, the assertion that language makes reality (and truth), and the implication that reality itself is fabricated (or made): "Saying *makes* it so." The second thing to note is the uncertain reference of "it." To what does "it" refer? The last line may mean that saying the space is blank makes the space blank, or it could mean saying I swooned means that I swooned. (Where the first claim clearly involves a claim of reality, the second more clearly involves a claim of truth.) The two claims are not, after all, so very unlike, however, in their emphasis on *making*—saying makes whatever is said true. But can it really make the space blank or does it, by basting it with this adjective ("blank"), color the space ever so slightly, until we come to think what we never should if the space were truly blank: we think we know what this "blank space" means. In this latter case, saying makes it so (makes the space blank, that is) only by changing "it" and making it false. (It isn't really blank any longer: it's now "blank.") In the other case, the claim involves a backward glance; that is, only after the fact can we say "I swooned." So we make that past moment (when I swooned) true only by means of a later (when we say "I swooned"). And "I" can only be used in the present.⁵ So the truth here depends upon a false usage. In either case, we could say that the (one) blank space gives

way to the ambivalence of reference(s). The claim that "saying makes *it* so" depends upon the confusion of "it."

If this is an ambivalence of reference, if meaning depends upon a differential system (so that "blue" means blue, partly, because it doesn't mean "red" or "green"), meaning must involve more than what is physically present. And so it involves the question of "elsewhere," of "incremental space" (TG, 69). But to what purpose? "For *range* / / of mind" (TG, 71—Shurin's italics). We need space for this ranging (which, of course, might also be an arranging). In a similar fashion, the truth quotient of "makes it so" arises from "the realm of possibilities," and yet not all that is possible is actualized: "The realm of possibilities is only exercised / / . . . / / because it was written, because it was told" (TG, 15). (In a less aerobics-oriented age, "entertained" might have been the verb.) Writing "exercises" possibilities; it strengthens them. Writing makes the possibility real (as a possibility). It doesn't actualize it; the possibility is still only a possibility. Yet, without writing, there would be no possibility—no possibility of truth or of error. So, even if it doesn't make "it so," writing has its role to play.

"Speech" is not a synonym for "writing"—nor vice versa. We need to retain the conditional of this possibility (of writing), but we also need to see that writing isn't solely conditional. (What would it be conditional on?) While writing isn't reducible to achievement, there is achievement in writing. If "inside the book the river runs into itself again again" (TG, 29), then the "river" behaves like the river and noun "runs into" reference and a recognition is achieved. (A recognition which occurs on the level of language itself.) The "again again" shows us that there is another side to the recognition—forgetting. So the river

must run into itself time after time after time. (This figure seems perpetually in motion. But the "perpetuity" may be how the "river" replenishes itself.) Like an exhaustless resource, the achievement of writing is self-renewing, perhaps because, like the river running into itself again and again, its achievement is never final. It forms a cycle. Yet, there is more to writing than fits the cycle. There is—always and continuously—an "elsewhere."

Shurin's own *Elsewhere* is, even for a chapbook, rather small. It is a gathering of five poems—"Material's Daughter" (perhaps a pun on "Mistral's Daughter?"), "Sphere," "Foreground," "Reaching Particle," and "Elsewhere" (I-IV). (Or eight poems, if we count the four "Elsewhere"s as four poems.) The middle triad hints at an increasingly microscopic perspective—from "sphere" to "foreground" to "particle." But, then, the next title, "Elsewhere," would mean that, instead of becoming ever more specific and located, such a perspective passes beyond a material ground into something else. The material isn't a limit, then. It's a point on a circle—just as "elsewhere" is a point. But what does the first title, "Material's

Daughter," have to do with this circle? What is "Material's Daughter," anyway? She is the progeny of "material"—but what "material" are we speaking of here? Is this "material" matter, cloth, or data? We might say, all these materials are first cousins and bear a family resemblance as well as a family antagonism to the spiritual or transcendent. Indeed, the family similarity may well be more germane than the individual differences.

If we read the title as self-reflexive, the material would most likely mean the substance(s) of writing (the ink, paper, typefaces, etc.; the letters, words, ideas, etc.; the genres, styles, data, etc.). In this case (and taking "material" here as referring principally to writing), "Material's Daughter" is the product of writing. But do we mean she is the product of the materials of writing? If so, she is, thus, the "writing itself."⁶ But is "writing itself" as clear-cut as this self-identity pretends? "Writing itself," after all, may mean the marks on the paper or the concepts the marks give rise to. And yet, these two possibilities are diametrically opposed. (Perhaps Material's daughter is really twins.) If we opt for the possibility (the marks of writing), then "Material's Daughter" is herself material. If for the second (the concepts), then she is not. In any case, it is germane that the nature and full genealogy of "Material's Daughter" is missing. In this way, we are "snatched away from a very clear idea of Material's daughter" (1). But, why should we be? Because her nature is mysterious; because, as we suggested on the strength of the titles, material gives way to elsewhere; or because (as Shurin writes in "Reaching Particle") "he cannot explain his love of the unknown, drawn down from an actual fact" (5). "Material's Daughter" may be as unexplainable as "his love of the unknown," both stemming from the material or actual and yet neither being reducible to it. Before we posit too clear a distinction between an understanding which is material and a love (at least of the unknown) which is immaterial, let us recall that "this never happened, as we stood there, literally" (8).

If we can get our mysteries from the material world, why court "Material's Daughter"? Given the way in which "a clear idea" of her is "snatched away" from us, we can't really know who (or what) she is. So, why do we need her? Because there must be something more than the material to measure or judge things by: "Human things reached motives in her estimation" (2). If there is nothing more than the material, we are only "human things." Yet this something more must be related to the material. The material comes first, as the possessive in "Material's Daughter" indicates. We are judged by something that comes from the material, not by some transcendental free agent. Still, it is through "her" estimation that we succeed to the attributes Western civilization has characterized the person by. Without her, we simply follow the hum of biological orders and "orders aren't aware of what's going on" (3).

We have been pretending that material is constant. But is it? Might something be material one time (or from one perspective) and be immaterial later (from another)? When Shurin writes, "I wandered away from my early childhood, framed by her massive hair" (1), isn't he materializing something immaterial (childhood), something further materialized with the phrase "framed by her massive hair"? So the materiality (or immateriality) is not an essence which inheres, regardless of circumstance or perspective. Materiality is a question of how a thing is seen. We may treat what others consider immaterial or ephemeral as a material entity and, when we do so, it is material (within limits, of course). Early childhood becomes something we can wander away from. "There used to be a spot here; it has passed" (9).

But "I" did not wander away from my early childhood: "I dwelt on the unravelled past" (5). (Or, does "unravelling" distinguish one past from another, "early childhood" implicitly being a part of the unravelled past?) We might say that the pronouns (bewildering us as they float through the text) give us an ideal access to this problem of materiality. Who can this "her" be, owner of the "massive hair"? Or, what is the material dimension of "I"? How can it be material *and* fit everyone? (What a wonderfully elastic cloth this "I" must be made of!) We are used to identifying ourselves with this "I," used to thinking of this "I" as personal, and, yet, how personal can it be if everyone uses it? (Or does this say something about the illusion of the personal?) "I am in a pronomial funk," Shurin bravely announces in "A Thing Unto Myself."⁷ This "funk" is pronomial because, briefly, "I" am increasingly shrunk by linguists, more and more of what Shurin calls "the matter of self" being cast out from the "I." If cast from the "I" where does it go? It goes to "he" and "she"; it goes to "you," perhaps one reason why "abruptly you are insufferable" (3). What remains in (or of) the "I" after this reapportionment? "I read, I flung my arm, I too would go, I went in search, it was flaming, I hung on his lips, I was the speaker" (1). The "I" is an actor; it is known by what it does. And, apart from what it does, it is nothing, for it has no free-standing essence. So, "I" marks the same thing in each of us—a subjecthood, a role we may each play because we have been trained to. But aren't we led to think "I" means something more, something unique? Only I can say I and mean who I mean by it. All other "I"s, though they sound (or look) alike, are

different (and, if I do say so myself, worse). But this specificity—apparent only to me and yet not invariably apparent even then (particularly, when looking back through time, for it may be that I err in claiming an "I" for myself or in denying the claim)—is something added to the (material) mark of the "I." "I gave an assumed name but wouldn't deny my identity" (2). Thus, one can have an "assumed name" and yet keep one's own "identity," so the (assumed) name and the identity are at

odds. But is this so because we keep our true name when we give out the assumed one? If we forgot what our true name was, could we still keep our identity? If "his name does not matter" (11), then identity would seem to exist apart from names. (Shall we say that all names, then, are only more or less assumed?)

Husserl once remarked that "when we read this word 'I' without knowing who wrote it, it is perhaps not meaningless, but is at least estranged from its normal meaning."⁸ He assumed the "knowing [of] who wrote it" as the natural context of "I." Not knowing who that "I" is seemed to be a special case ("estranged from its *normal* meaning"). What had seemed special now seems normal. Who is this "I"? It is not clear in and of the "I" itself who this "I" is. If "I" is a name (what I call myself), is it assumed, too? But, then, "I did not say I was a fact, but I had personality" (5). There's a sense, not included in the mark but not excluded either—let us, then, say it's connected to the mark, born(e) by the mark. Similarly, we could say that the specific sense of identity is an offspring—yes, a daughter, if you like—of that material "I" mark. "I remember I am a small girl, 'a little stranger,' prematurely hiding under unrelated events, inferred, implicated, and blurred" (5). "I" am "Material's Daughter" and the "unrelated events" are material, too. As we should expect of one of whom a clear idea has been snatched away, "I" am "inferred, implicated, and blurred." But "I" am not alone in being "Material's Daughter"—so is "she" and so, even, "he" may be, given the polymorphous truth obscured by rigid sexual roles.⁹

Recall how "my early childhood" could be referred to as "her." Thus, assuming for the moment¹⁰ that "my" is used by a male, parts of his life may still be figured as female, "making cross-gender terminology akin to sympathetic magic" ("A Thing," 193). Parts of language, then, can be sexed. Witness: "I found an article, the avenger, began pouring to beat back his thrusts, purity should hear and carried on a ferocious campaign to action" (1), where "an article" (like "an" or "the"?) can take the masculine possessive pronoun ("his"); and where the sewing of the sentence obscures the actor (who "carried on a ferocious campaign to action"?). This sexing of language could be one reason why "our lives were busy in foreign languages" (1). (Perhaps, more specifically, romance languages.) In this sexing of language, "Material's Daughter" comes to the "Foreground" as "she":

She looked at the mass, kept a feeler straining till the color divined her. Staring and the staring white, everything semi-transparent. Then, commandingly, the whole thing changed shape. This passage between her flashed wing. Past that break in the burning clear the bodies of color swam. (4)

Yet this foregrounding doesn't simply privilege "her": "If only they knew she was being made to suffer for me" (1). But why is "she" made to suffer for "me"? If "Material's Daughter" can refer to "I" (as a sense borne by the material mark of

identity but not identical to it), then "she" (referring to this very self of [self-]identity as a third person) suffers for "me"—even when that third person ("she") is a subject and the first person ("me") is an object. For "she," even when allowed to act as the subject of a sentence, is still seen to do what "she" does by another (the true and "rightful" subject, we might say). So "she" can never fully succeed to the position grammatically promised her because another already holds it. But that doesn't mean she is simply a powerless pronomial if "through my brain she might throw shattered behavior to his fate" (5). "I" (or, more precisely, "my brain") may be the landscape "she" acts in, and here "she" is fateful. She discloses the fate within "shattered behavior." But, just why is the behavior "shattered" anyway? The question forced upon us by all these pronouns is whether they (can) refer to one self or must refer to many. Or what relation, then, do all these selves have to behavior? For example, is "me" the same as "I"? "I knocked and informed me for a long time, startled by my looks" (1-2). If "I" can "inform" "me," then a separation is posited; and a distinction. "I" does not equal "me" if information can be passed from one to another. They occupy two different positions in language and, either language is creating an illusory difficulty for us ("I," in other words, really is "me") or language is finally mirroring more accurately than before the differences in identity. But if "I" is not the same as "me," then self-identity is never identical, for self-identity is a game two must play, even if we must first split the "self" in order to play it. "Mine has been a life and we shall fall by the way" (6).

If such a split occurs, what, then, is (or remains of) the self? "The great space, instantly ourselves, was empty" (7). Is the "emptiness," perhaps, contingent on the "instantly"? Before we claimed the space, mustn't it have been empty to allow us "instantly" to fill it? For anything that wasn't empty would take time to claim (to clear and conquer) and would—at least initially—resist us. So the identification of "ourselves" with "the great space" depends on a prior emptiness. Most simply, if it hadn't been empty, it could not "instantly" be "ourselves." But doesn't this outline a (potential) emptiness in the concept of "ourselves," not simply in the identification? "Give strength to wander across blotted identity, burst in the past and melt echoing up the cliffs" (9). A "blotted identity" is not simply empty; it is removed, and, yet, not completely removed either, for it remains on the blotting pad (reversed, but sometimes legible in a mirror). Identity is not blotted by itself; it is blotted by means of something else, which retains a trace of what had been blotted. (So identity has been removed to some other surface?)

But, even if identity were completely blotted, the need to express ourselves would remain: "Upon each other we poured forth the tale, a little untamed solitude" (9-10).¹¹ Moreover, solitude remains. So, the identification of "ourselves"

might be empty from the outset, given this "untamed solitude," given the existence of something all

our communal nouns can neither rein in nor co-opt. And, yet, note how the "untamed solitude" arises in a communal setting. We tell each other a tale. It's not clear whether it's a tale of "untamed solitude" or telling the tale is an act of "untamed solitude," but, in either event, we believe that there is something in us which the group does not express—although, ironically, we all feel this. Would we argue, based on that, however, that there is no solitude? We may each feel alike and yet each be alone, each isolated in our rooms, apartments, or houses.

And yet that solitude does not obscure all else: "We saw the other side. 'That's it!' I groaned, crept, a wilderness of gathering fear" (10). We not only see the other side, we try to grasp it, although that cry of Eureka ("That's it!") seems to increase the fear, not lessen it. So much would seem to depend on this reach. What happens to it? "Clasping, I met my own hand, and hauled" (10). So, we reach for "the other side" and find our own "other side," as left hand grasps right. This self-clasping grounds the project of self, but, instead of enclosing the self, the clasp discloses the reflexive self: "A multiple self who is reflexive, who is both subject and object of her own discourse, brings relation into language in a new way, brings relativity forward as simultaneous perspectives on the event of discourse—the immediate constitution of identity speaking for the world" ("A Thing," 188). We need a multiple self, then, in order to express as fully as possible "the immediate constitution of identity speaking for the world." Any single-engined self speaks for the ego, not the world. Further, it reneges on the responsibility of discourse: instead of showing "the event of discourse," it involves the manipulation of discourse, the bringing of discourse down to personal expression.

Shurin's answer to this subjective crisis (if we might be so crass as to be clear for a moment) is to pluralize the self. We are brought back to ourselves through this pluralization, through advocating a "multi-subjectivity" and a "multi-objectivity." This move "back" could not occur if there were no pluralization, if the self remained fixed within its limits, balanced on a (ideal) 1:1 ratio of self to "self"—much as "saying makes it so" depended on the ambivalence of reference(s). The point is to open the gates of strict identity; to disclose that we are more than what we have been made to stand for (or represent); to teach us that "a world of multi-subjectivity and multi-objectivity waits somewhere" ("A Thing," 194). Or, perhaps, it awaits us *Elsewhere*, for, as Shurin's motto (from *Coriolanus*) has it, "there is a world elsewhere" (12). But, note, this *Elsewhere* isn't some kind of travelogue, as if we would be happy if we were just "elsewhere." There always being an (other) elsewhere wherever we are, we will be powerless to find and live in "Elsewhere." Rather, "elsewhere" involves a recognition of what we are all too willing to forget

when we start to behave like logical positivists on parade. There is not only more to life than logic (or knowing); the best parts of life are unexplainable. As Whitman put it, "the actual living light is always curiously from elsewhere."¹² And elsewhere, always being "elsewhere," is always other than we think it is.

Notes

1. *Elsewhere* is unpaginated. For facility of reference, I have assigned page notes: page one is the first page of "Material's Daughter," page eleven the last page of "Elsewhere," IV.

2. "A Thing Unto Myself: The unRomantic Self and Gender in the Third Person," in *Code of Signals*, ed. Michael Palmer (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1983), p. 185.

3. In *Elsewhere*, we find "the music had been replaced by blank page. Apparently the state is lying around everywhere" (3). Whether the state has something to do with the blank page is left up to the reader.

4. While hardly customary to note line breaks for a prose poem, in this case the break after "Where" (perhaps because it is almost as if the subject of the sentence had here been dropped) seemed telling.

5. In his essay "A Thing Unto Myself," Shurin observes that " 'I' can be used only in the present, and can refer only to the person speaking" and goes on to quote the linguist Emile Benveniste's comment that "I" is "the individual who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance of 'I' " (187).

6. There is another realm in addition to the material and transcendent realms of writing: "Without words a benevolent lethargy" (4).

7. More fully, "I am in a pronomial funk, where the crisis of subjectivity in which the so-called Romantic self is under attack crosses purposes with the tyranny of gender located in the third person, giving my many selves consternation and causing a panic in their vocabulary" (185). Shurin quotes Benveniste: "It is by identifying myself as a unique person pronouncing *I* that each speaker sets himself up in turn as the 'subject' " (Benveniste's italics). Shurin continues: "The shifting nature of the first person trades this authority back and forth in discourse (or writing/reading) between the I and Thou, for, as Barthes notes, 'The *I* of the one who writes is not the same as the *I* which is read by *thou*' [Barthes' italics]. According to Benveniste, the third person, because it (she/he) exists outside of this immediate discourse involving subjectivity, is actually not in the realm of the person" (187). Yet, "as linguists reduce the province of 'I' to a narrower and narrower present moment of discourse, a vast amount of the matter of self gets rerouted to the status of third person, the exclusive domain—in English—of gender, so that the liberation of person, of consciousness in the form of 'person', is threatened at its second remove" (185). To put these two points together, we might

claim that gender "is actually not in the realm of the person," or (to paraphrase Rimbaud) gender is other. This is part of the threat "at second remove."

8. The Husserl quote (originally from the *Logical Investigations*) is quoted by Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena* (1).

9. "At the merest level of reportage, gender signification has an overbearing and potentially warping power—as any homosexual writer knows who has had to brave, or cow to, social opprobrium against same sex love. The switching of pronouns to fit social erotic convention is powerfully indicative of both awareness of the tyranny of gender and the mutability of identity" ("A Thing," 190). "The pronouns of gender are tyrannical. Because they exemplify the social, cultural, and economic factors embedded in gender-role modification of behavior, they animate the supposedly non-personal realm of the third person with their own constitutive energies. I would suggest, then, that gender signification distributes person onto the axis of the non-person, substituting cultural gender-determination for identity" (193-4)

10. And, of course, the uncertainty of "I" means a woman might be talking of her early childhood. It is just as meaningful that "her" life could be sexed as female as it is that "his" could.

11. There may be another group, in addition to the tale-tellers, for "those who waited could tell no tales, but had power over things" (8). If two groups, one tells and one "has power over things"; one is impatient and talks, the other waits and wills.

12. Quoted by Robert Duncan in *Fictive Certainties*, 202.

"A Man Unjust or a Man Divine"

Michael Davidson:

Analogy of the Ion

(Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 1988)

T. S. ELIOT HAD POINTED TO THE SOURCE of his originality by saying that if you went back far enough in time you were bound to seem new. Michael Davidson, in his current chapbook, takes a step back but his goal is not originality as much as it is to get a purchase on some of the topics circulating in current discourse—perhaps, foremost, the relation of theory to practice; or, in short, is it possible for a poet to know what he's doing? Can poetry inform? Can it be a source (or structure, even) of knowledge, or must it always be, at most, a form of pleasure, an emotional release?¹ "It means the same thing this writing so why write?" (22). Indeed, if the meaning of writing must be "the same thing," what can the point of writing be? Unless writing is to be a private game, this is a question we must face: "Why write?" But, then, we might also ask, "Write what?" Does the (answer to the question of) what matter to the (answer to the question of) why?

"Ion thinks that to know *how* to read is to know *what* one reads when in fact he is unread by his own assertions" (18—Davidson's italics); that is, the *how* is a methodology, not a content, and one may master many methods and, yet, no content. Should the emphasis on the *how* exceed that on the *what*, the content (the *what*) is replaceable, and the point of the art is entirely *how* it is said. Any *what* that fits the *how* is good enough for me. This is an aestheticism which means one thing: poetry can have nothing to tell us. Every time it tries to tell us something it fails its nature—it becomes didactic, dogmatic, amateurish, uncontrolled; it becomes opinion, not art.

Davidson's use of *The Ion* is instructive in this regard;² that is, (Plato's) *Ion* becomes the structure within which contents can be changed—like a display window—without changing the assumptions, predilections, or values of the structure (*The Ion*). Thus, if *The Ion*'s issues have remained for us issues, we might suppose that Western culture has been haunted by recurrent questions—of priority, inspiration, (poetic) knowledge, (cultural) authority, etc. But could these questions have retained the same meaning through all the centuries of change(s)? Further, if our culture has been formed by these questions, can we (ever) be original or must we all be (as Robert Duncan called himself) "derivative" (*Fictive Certainties*, 199)? Sokrates (as refracted through Plato—and, now, Davidson) observes that "it's not by art [the poet] sings of arms and men but by that chain he shares with one that sang him once that song he'd heard somewhere before" (14). Where Sokrates intended inspiration by this chain, Davidson's reworking makes us think of influence, for "poetry is a simulacrum of everything everyone has said already" (18). Further, "some of these would be replaced by others after all it was a replaceable culture and so long as you avoided reference to the structure anything could be said" (10).³ (Note that the reference of "these," because it's unclear, follows the law of replaceability which the sentence is "about"—"these" could be anything.) Given the replaceability of words within the (unremarked) structure, "anything could be said" because "anything" you say would be as meaningful as (the) "anything" I could say. The role of the poet would be a part of that structure; so, we can say anything we want; for it really doesn't matter *what* is said, so long as it is said; so long as "these" keeps getting replaced. Poetry is maintenance, not creation.

If originality is destroyed as a goal, what can we have? After all, what does inspiration designate? The sense that another speaks through us or guides our hand, that we are beside ourselves in doing what we do. (*The Ion*'s unremitting emphasis on inspiration, by the way, accounts for its importance to the Romantics.) "Inspiration," then, is a word for the surplus or overcharge; it designates the achievement of what we couldn't think to achieve on our own. But, we might surmise, as long as we are beside ourselves, we can not be too fastidious about

who is doing what. So, instead of being responsible for the work, responsibility (to use a definition of Duncan's) "is to keep/ the ability to respond" (*The Opening of the Field*, 10). And the truth of inspiration is (simply) in losing oneself, for, in losing oneself, one becomes the perfect conduit of inspiration, with no personal contents or reticences to impede the flow of the other. Thus, the best poet is the one who has no idea what he says, because (ideally) he isn't there when he says it.⁴ And, thus, given the importance of inspiration for art, it must be that "to propose that poetry involves knowledge is rank folly" (18).

The rest of the sentence, however, discloses a lack of disinterest in the judgment, for, if "poets should leave theory to those with academic positions or at least a federal grant" (18), then this dispute becomes less one over truth than one over territory and recalls Davidson's comments that criticism of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets is more often territorial than objective. Attributed to Sokrates (as a part of his soliloquy, which follows Davidson's condensation of *The Ion* itself), the sentence questions severely the role of truth in philosophy, or, at the very least, in aesthetics. In *The Truth in Painting*, Jacques Derrida noted that "every time philosophy determines art, masters it, and encloses it in the history of meaning or in the ontological encyclopedia, it assigns it a job as medium" (34). Thus, when art is determined by philosophy, it is made to carry philosophy's books; its truth can be decided only by philosophy—like a minor in need of a guardian. If, as Davidson says, "poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar" (25),⁵ the unveiling (as a truth-function, like the Heideggerian *alethia*) can be accomplished only on the basis of one requirement—that the poet does not know what he does. For, when the poet does know what he does, he ceases to be inspired; which is to say, his product ceases, by definition, to be poetry.

There is, then, a firm distinction between poetry (or art) and philosophy, but it is the kind of distinction which can be *used*: "It is worth upholding the distinction between art and literature because in so doing you get to buy shares in both. Which is precisely why, although I secretly love to stand behind the arras and listen to Ion do his rendition of Penelope at the well, I must publicly renounce the watery words he uses" (19). Davidson's Sokrates has a vested in-

terest in this split, for it facilitates his keeping a double set of books: he can speak in the name of truth and, at the same time, "secretly love" the things he must renounce. Further, it is analogy, rather than the soberer uses of language, which allows Sokrates to keep these double books. After all, "to analogize . . . is to have your Ion and your dialogue, too" (18). (Or Derrida: "The abyss calls for analogy" [*TP*, 36].) But is this use of analogy an art or a craft? The analogy, traditionally, is

thought to be employed intuitively; but that would mean analogies do not follow the rules of a craft. Then, what's the philosopher doing with analogies?

We might want to say the philosopher's use of analogy is accidental and, in no way, affects his argument.⁶ But, can we patiently extract the true uses of language from the false, extricate the true line of reasoning from the mistaken? Derrida, in "The White Mythology," an essay "on" metaphor in philosophy, noted that "thought stumbles upon metaphor, or metaphor falls to thought at the moment when meaning attempts to emerge from itself in order to be stated, enunciated, brought to the light of language. And yet—such is our problem—the theory of metaphor remains a theory of *meaning* and posits a certain original *naturality* of this figure" (*The Margins of Philosophy*, 233—Derrida's italics). Thus, when philosophy seeks to make meaning clear, it seeks to make meaning "emerge from itself" and, when it seeks to make meaning emerge from itself, it does so through metaphor.⁷ We could say that, when it comes to metaphor, philosophy can't help itself, especially if "there is no access to the usure of a linguistic phenomenon without giving it some figurative representation" (*MP*, 209).⁸ Philosophy, then, can not do without metaphor, unless it will also do without language, and, howevermuch it may wish to do so and to conceive its truths as transcending language, it can not give up language without also giving up any claims to truth and meaning. (And what would be left of philosophy, then?) Sokrates, too, speaks within language (that, after all, is the meaning of "speaks"), but he does so to speak beyond language—toward the Idea.

Sokrates' position, thus, depends on a certain deception and that deception on a dichotomy—the dichotomy between professional (and financial) standing and personal enjoyment. Sokrates can be the first philosopher of the West only at the cost of this enjoyment; or, to phrase it a little differently, Sokrates can be the first philosopher only because he is the first bureaucrat of truth. Is it an accident that this Sokrates would seem to bear a resemblance to Salieri, who, in *Amadeus*, saw to it that Mozart's *Don Giovanni* had a short run but, at the same time, attended (and loved) every performance? (Perhaps we shall soon be treated to a movie of *The Ion*, starring Tom Hulce as the misunderstood rhapsode and F. Murray Abraham as Sokrates himself.) Any resemblance, however, needn't mean that Sokrates is the philosophical equivalent of the musical Salieri; for one may be gifted in the arts and still be untrustworthy, vain, or reprehensible. Isn't this what Sokrates himself insists on?

Thus, to the extent that Sokrates practices an art, he, too, is not to be trusted. But what art does Sokrates practice? If we're not willing to call philosophy itself an art—and this is an issue Derrida has explored for, say, thirty-some years—we would still say that Sokrates practices the art of persuasion. Thus, the moment Sokrates

wants to persuade us of something, he begins practicing an art, and the minute he begins practicing an art, he is just a suspect as Ion is. Or, as (Davidson's) Sokrates says, "To quote a later linguist, language is all superstructure; it can't do anything of its own, which is why I have made such a profession of professing nothing. At least in this way, when the Revolution comes, I won't be stuck with hemlock as my only recourse. Who knows, I might be made Secretary of Defense for my aptitude at manipulating a press conference" (19). On one level, we might say this Sokrates is honest: language can do nothing by itself—thus, his profession that he professes nothing. But when he "professes nothing," he does so for effect, to establish his modesty, and neither we nor he really believe his profession, we're both so dazzled by his ingenuity. His ingenuity, however, is disingenuous.

And, yet, he can be more disingenuous than this. When he asks Ion, "How will you be called by us a man unjust or a man divine?" (17), Sokrates (on behalf of philosophy) gives the artist a choice: to be a man puffed up with his own importance, to think that he possesses knowledge and talents, and to speak in his own right as an authority when in fact he knows nothing—to be unjust; or, to accept the fact that he knows nothing, that he is nothing, in his own right, and attribute all his talents and successes to some other force (God)—to be divine. But in the "be" of "to be divine" he must lose himself entirely and be man no longer. Thus, if he wishes to be honest, the poet must deny himself; if he cannot, he is unjust. For, wherever it is the poet who speaks to us, it is an unjust man we hear, one who is busy placing himself above his station. Wherever God(s) speak through the poet, we hear "a man divine." And, yet, can we really say we hear the man in the divinity? The poet can be true only if he ceases being human at all.

For, what would a "man divine" be? As the question rests on the issue of inspiration ("divine") and as man cannot inspire himself (the man who tried would simply be, in Wallace Stevens' phrase, "too much himself"), a "man divine" is a kind of amphibian. For "a man marked man/ is inconclusive" (12). And, so, man must be marked as something else, as divinity, or the divine man; he must become something else to escape from his contingent, inconclusive state. The choice Sokrates forces upon the poet is a double bind—to break the laws of men (by being unjust) or to deny what one is (by abdicating oneself for the emoluments of divinity). And how can Sokrates avoid coming up against the same choice? Only by hiding his own artfulness, by speaking, at the same time, in the names of both man and truth. But he can speak on behalf of them both only by taking man to be, in his essence, rational and the purpose of rationality the discovery of truth.

The poet, however, is not rational; therefore, he already differs from the essential man, as well as from the ideal man (the philosopher). His end is not truth;

although he may speak truth. Since he doesn't know truth, he, ultimately, knows nothing. And, so, Sokrates asks pointedly,

"What does a rhapsode know?" (16).⁹ Since the question of knowledge in poetry is taken to refer to the content of the poem, not its structure, and since an expert in the field is considered to know more about that field than does the poet (or rhapsode) who knows only the verses, the poet is exposed as a loony simpleton, "divine in simple mindedness" (17). A rhapsode knows nothing and is better off that way. After all, how much rap could a rhapsode rap if a rhapsode could rhapsode? He needs the divinity to inspire him. But the divine happens only when the poet isn't at home, so he lives as a rhapsode for rapture and craves this dispossession, longing to lose himself in rapture and rap sure (as Blondie's hit of some years back had punned). He willingly becomes a vehicle for the divine. But, as its vehicle, he is really nothing but a walking analogy, intrinsically less important than what he represents. This, finally, is the analogy "of" *The Ion* (which is the analogy of Ion himself.)

And yet, isn't part of Davidson's point that, in an atheistic age which nonetheless continues to view art in this Sokratic manner, the poet is bankrupt from the start? For, as there is no God, no divinity to inspire him, he is constrained to fail even within the confines of his hemmed-in vocation. So, the poet accepts a role (and a set of topics belonging to that role), but the role depends on factors which are no longer true for society. (One might as well try today to get appointed Secretary of Latin, for both seem to be positions which are no longer funded.) But we shall not see this as long as we purposely avoid remarking on the structure and spend our days filling it with replaceable contents. Further, as philosophy (after Sokrates) has gathered unto itself reason and argument, poetry would seem left with no way out of its impasse¹⁰—short, that is, of breaking the image of poetry and arguing against the (Sokratic) transcendental trust once set up for it but since bankrupt. For, in accepting that trust, poetry put aside all its weapons; now, it must sue for divorce. But this the poet can not do if he remains afraid of appearing "unjust." In other words, the poet must break out of this (Sokratic) prison, which is a prison equally of appearances and morals. Once the poet breaks out of this prison or breaks with this image, he need no longer be only a poet looking for inspiration like a junkie for a fix; he may be as complete (and incomplete) a human being as (precisely) anybody else.

This possibility is a radical reversal; instead of fleeing the human condition by transcending it, the poet must now embrace it. Instead of being the mouthpiece of god and buying a plot of immortality (which was but the other, inextricable side of losing himself in rapture), he must speak out of contingent mortality. For, as Charles Olson reminded us, "Limits/ are what any of us/ are inside of" ("Letter 5,"

Maximus, 21 [page 17 in the first edition of volume one]). In accepting these limits, the poet must be willing to forego a source of poetic authority. For in the place of (eternal, all-knowing) divinity, his humanity will be the sole support of his poetic authority; thus, the poet shall speak—not in the voice of God(s), or truth; not as all-seeing or all-knowing—but in the voice of man. And this means within the (physical) limits of his (human) voice, for that is where (poetic) knowledge shall now be found. As Adorno reminded us, "As soon as works of art fetishize their hope for duration, they suffer from sickness unto death" (*AT*, 42). Thus, when the poet's authority rests on mortality, art (poetry, anyway) accepts its own duration, along with the fact that "death is a condition not a promise" (25)¹¹—nor, for that matter, a punishment.

Notes

1. In contrast to the Sokratic position (which holds that the poet is good only to the extent that he is ignorant), Theodor Adorno had seen the necessity for the poet to be knowledgeable. "Some people say that artists do not know what a work of art is. In doing so they ignore the fact that today reflexivity is indispensable to art, which cannot be conceived except as a result of conscious processes in the artist. Ignorance often becomes a blemish on the *oeuvre* of important artists, particularly in countries where art is still more or less respected. Ignorance in the form, say, or lack of taste becomes an immanent deficiency. Now the mathematical point of indifference between ignorance and necessary reflection is technique, which not only is compatible with reflection but actually requires it. Reflection on technique stops short of destroying the fertile tenebrity of the art by resorting to abstract concepts" (*Aesthetic Theory*, 399-400). Adorno's shrinking ignorance down to "lack of taste," however, is problematic, for "taste," generally, serves to preserve our ignorant inclinations from critical reflection.

2. Davidson is not the only one to "go back" to Greek philosophy. There is, also, Charles Bernstein's *The Sophist* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1987), after all. The sophist would be a third role, in addition to the two Davidson's poem is mostly concerned with—the poet and the philosopher; or, at least, the sophist would be third, as Jacques Derrida schematizes the three: "Each time the polysemia is irreducible, when no unity of meaning is even promised to it, one is outside language. And consequently, outside humanity. What is proper to man is doubtless the capacity to make metaphors, but in order to mean some thing, and only one. In this sense, the philosopher, who ever has but one thing to say, is the man of man. Whoever does not subject equivocalness to this law is already a bit less than a man: a sophist, who in sum says nothing, nothing that can be reduced to a meaning.* At the limit of this 'meaning-nothing,' one is hardly an animal, but rather a plant, a reed, and not a thinking one." At the asterisk (above), there is a

footnote: "The poet stands between the two. He is the man of metaphor. While the philosopher is interested only in the truth of meaning, beyond even signs and names; and the sophist manipulates empty signs and draws effects from the contingency of signifiers (whence his taste for equivocality, and primarily homonymy, the deceptive identity of signifiers), the poet plays on the multiplicity of signifieds, but in order to return to the identity of meaning" (*MP*, 248). Only the sophist, then, is concerned with irreducible polysemia and "consequently," only the sophist is "outside humanity." But, if "metaphor, when well trained, must work in the service of truth" (*MP*, 238) and the poet is "the man of metaphor," then doesn't this mean the poet must work in the service (perhaps, the livery) of the philosopher? And, if "metaphor . . . is what is proper to man" (*MP*, 246), will that propriety keep it in line, pointing toward some truth, or will it become something in-itself?

3. Davidson has dealt with "replaceability" before. In his earlier chapbook, *Grillwork*, Davidson had written: "What's absent demands/ another word for it/ and then another" ("Factor IX," n.p.). Most of the poems from *Grillwork* later appeared in *The Prose of Fact*; this, however, was not one of those. Or, more recently, we could cite: "What You Carry Can Be Replaced/ Others Have Died In Its Creation" ("Words Without History," *o•blek* #3, 34). Perhaps this replaceable content within unremarked structure accounts for a favored L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E device—that of punning through substitution—a device, by the way, they share with numerous Vaudeville and Borscht-belt comics.

4. Although it sounds a little like it, this should not be confused with Barrett Watten's "the subject's removal from the work. . . . is the necessity for the very conditions of communication" (*Conduit*, 11).

In the (Sokratic) strategy of inspiration, the subject's removal merely facilitates a clearer signal and, thus, strengthens the conduit of communication to send along a purer package of meaning. For Watten, on the other hand, this "removal" does not purify the meaning(s); it brings the reader into play in determining what those meanings are.

5. I should clarify, perhaps, that I do not take Davidson's statement about the unveiling of familiar objects being the goal of poetry as the keynote of his poetic. The lines occur in his poem; that doesn't mean the poem was written to illustrate them. They are hardly an unfamiliar poetic, however, and it is on that basis that they are useful.

6. Derrida: "Metaphor seems to involve the usage of philosophical language in its entirety, nothing less than the usage of so-called natural language *in* philosophical discourse, that is, the usage of natural language *as* philosophical language" (*MP*, 209—Derrida's italics).

7. Or, as Derrida notes: "The primitive meaning, the original, and always sensory and material, figure . . . is not exactly a metaphor. It is a kind of transparent figure, equivalent to a literal meaning. It becomes a metaphor when philosophical discourse puts it into circulation. Simultaneously the first meaning and the first displacement are then forgotten. The metaphor is no longer noticed, and it is taken for the proper meaning. A double effacement. Philosophy would be this process of metaphorization which gets carried away in and of itself. Constitutionally, philosophical culture will always have been an obliterating one" (*MP*, 211).

8. The translator explains his use of "usure": "*Usure* in French means both usury, the acquisition of too much interest, and using up, deterioration through usage" (*MP*, 209—tr.'s italics). "Usure" would be tied up in an economy of use, part of which could not be used and, thus, recalls Georges Bataille's "general economy."

9. However, in his earlier poem, "Plato's Cave," Davidson had written: "Ah, these orators know what they are remembering, he thought, and know what they know as well" (*Prose of Fact*, 14).

10. In "Plato's Cave," Davidson had dealt with poetry's inability to argue, thusly: "'Thought' . . . meant filling the pen prior to writing and then 'sowing' his seeds with words which cannot defend themselves by argument and cannot teach the truth effectively" (*PF*, 14).

11. This could be a point of difference with Duncan, for whom "death be the condition of eternal forms" (*FC*, 58). "Eternal forms" would seem questionable, here.

"The Opposite Is What I Intend"

Barrett Watten:

Conduit

(San Francisco: GAZ, 1988)¹

WE HAVE LIVED FOR A LONG TIME with the ideal of art as communication, a communication which, ideally, would be for all. But art can communicate with everyone only if everyone is the same and this same must be equivalent with art: "The common denominator is art" (21). Such a democratizing of art, then, is a powerful social tool; for art is good manners: it keeps us in our place(s). Any work which failed this ideal—through negligence, incompetence, or principle—was sure to be judged elitist, dysfunctional, and/or useless. And yet, Barrett Watten reminds us that "in celebrating its own uselessness, art demands a greater scale" (*Total Syntax*, 76)²—a scale greater than mere usefulness or productiveness. The useless work of art can do a little more: it can rouse anger. That anger, in claiming to be roused by elitism or uselessness, however, hides some of the by-products of the ideal of communication.

Communication was not a selfless passing on of information and wisdom; instead, "the urge to communicate itself is hostile" (18). Witness Watten's sly placement of "itself" which both intensifies "the urge to communicate" and places "itself" as the object of communication. Thus, I want to communicate myself: I want to make myself appear in you. And greater love hath no man than to be a terminal in a communications system. Communication is never (self-)disinterested; it wants something and we, through it, want something, too. We desire to be made present through its offices. This presence would, further, be a kind of immortality, which would necessitate a further communication of the contents identified as "us." But our presence would come at the expense of another, for, in direct proportion as the listener absorbs what we communicate, the listener disappears.³ Thus, our presence entails the absence of the listener.

Barrett Watten's new book is a powerful displacement of this ideal.⁴ Instead of the listener's absence, "the subject's removal from the work. . . is the necessity of the very conditions of communication" (11). So, instead of being smothered in authorial intention, meaning is to be found in response, which necessitates distance.⁵ As meaning opens beyond the stricture of intent or the structure of the page, it is exposed as various, immediate, and provisional; any guarantee of meaning, therefore, is fraudulent. This insight belongs to our own time as "the forms of contemporary writing are entering into an acknowledgment of this structure—that the work is completed, apart from the writer's intention, in a response" (9). This means the writer doesn't control the work (copyright aside); the work does not follow "the logic of the machine" (33); there is no one way to use it, if "*use* is a word only meaning unites" (29). Furthermore, the work is never all there (or all there is): "We make something out of what's missing by filling in the blanks, giving our meaning to what has been negated" (12).

But, it's not just what's missing that draws us to the text and stakes our claim to work; it's what is negated—not just ignored or unseen, but what is actively erased or overcome. Thus, we do not take our place in a heritage of common effort, as if all wanted the same things and could achieve them without doing so at the expense of others. We must take issue with the work (with the author, with a tradition, etc.), and not swallow it whole. Thus, "this new medium is the *resistance* between writer and reader, speaker and hearer" (9—my italics). If this were not the case, all we could do would be to second, reinforce, and reify what has already been done. No doubt this latter position would be preferable for some to that of disclosing the struggle between various groups. Yet, if we are to take seriously the necessity of change, we must bring back what was discarded, dis(ap)proved, dismissed and risk being dismissed ourselves. But we must not bring it back simply because it was dismissed, for that would be to practice "the anarchy of

production" (42; 57)—burying the possibilities for change under the sheer volume of production and succoring one's self on the alienating pleasure(s) of continuance, which makes of continuing an end in itself. No, we must

be aware of the reasons why it was negated and recall it because it leads to "the creative," which "is the necessity of a new order of understanding" (*TS*, xii). Thus, we must recall what has been negated in order to get beyond the point of negation, to get beyond the understanding which led to the negation.⁶ If we don't, we are frozen in the past.

This project of recalling what has been negated must break through the past, must break with a past which may seem to be only another word for logic. Thus, if "any message is an imponderable, even where/ life and death are expressed" (32), the message is as likely to stop action (to make us sit and meditate) as it is to provoke it. But, if the message is imponderable, what do we communicate? Imponderabilities? And are mine the same as yours? Surely not. So, communication expresses incommensurable imponderabilities. Furthermore, where "any message is an imponderable," the way we read has been forever changed because, if imponderable, the work is not to be decoded into a set of messages. Even were we to do so, we would be no nearer understanding the text for the messages we translated the text into would be as imponderable as (presumably) we found the text to be and, so, would represent no improvement over what we couldn't read in the first place.

The message is always partial—a part of an inexistent whole and biased, to boot. In *Progress*, Watten had equated "a statement" with "an interpretation" (113) and noted what he called "a transparent illusion"; that is, that a "statement stands by itself" (116). Thus, a statement is never neutral. It comes complete, with the goading of someone else's ox and hiding its bias behind a veneer of objectivity. The statement never admits to being partial (in either sense). So, where Watten's statements call attention to themselves it is to soap up the windows of this "transparent illusion"; to call attention to what we have for too long been willing to accept at face value. Further, "Levelling any message to be I/ As equivalent to state" (*P*, 64) indicates an equivalence of "I" and stating; the "I" becomes the generic producer of generic statements which, in turn, rest upon the "I" as something universal, so, the statements become universal, too. Also, it indicates the prerequisite for stating—one needs to be an "I" who could be anyone. And it is on the basis of that prerequisite, of universal (or generic) responsibility, that one makes statements (and is listened to).

The statement is not a truth-function; it is exposed as empty; and the author of such statements is not an authority: "Any 'statement' is blanked, negated, made into the form of an encompassing void—from the perspective of the reader, it

indicates only the limits of the writer's form, as incoherent and various as that might be" (9-10).⁷ So, Watten makes statements, but he doesn't guarantee them: "Suppose each spectator wanders alone across a field: if nothing goes wrong, all markers will reinforce the empty assumptions of this claim" (52). Thus, more than not merely guaranteeing them, Watten shall unsettle the statement to break the chain of "empty assumptions." And a statement, above all, is a form, not a neutral conduit, or full content. Watten makes use of the statement-form—not to make statements (although this is unavoidable) as much as to investigate the forms, uses, and deployment of statements. Given this prospectus, we must move from reading content (statements) to reading form.

When we do so what do we learn about statements? A "statement causes a change of state" (*TS*, 65). But there is also "a built-in instability of assertion" (*TS*, 205); so that a statement, insofar as it asserts, is a decaying element. Like a subatomic element, it leaves its track or trace; it breaks down. But it doesn't simply break down; it changes "a state."⁸ Still, the changed state itself is not perdurable. There is, then, a continuing change of state affected by a series of statements. As such, a statement is a force, though its force resides not in what it says so much as in what it does. As statements decay, we forget where we heard something, we lose the handle of responsibility—the statement becomes a part of common knowledge or common sense. And we soon lose the means of questioning it, although the existence of the statement had depended on its being queried, for "reference builds structure into statement by virtue of a querying of its essential purposes" (*TS*, 99).

So, in the beginning there was structure; then there was reference. Reference seeks to determine the purpose of structure by making the structure mean something; which is to say, by making it refer to something. This means that, due to reference, a structure can mean nothing in itself, can have no purpose other than the purpose reference finds for it. The "querying" is important because it suggests that no purpose is final. And yet a settled reference system would seem to do just this—treat the questioning as final, the answer as obvious. What good is it to return, through statements, to structure, if all we want is to read ourselves there? "*Structure/ Only to read oneself into/ Structure that already exists . . .*" (*P*, 49—Watten's ellipses). Yet there must be more than a reversal, as easy as a reversal might be: "Anything can be contained/ By inversion" (*P*, 54).⁹ Inversion doesn't change the system; it changes people's places in the system. It doesn't change the problem of reference; it changes the reference itself, but the structure is still referred into a statement and, thus, referred to a meaning outside itself.

What follows from this estrangement of reference? "The world is structured on its own displacement" (9). Further, this displacement means that language can not

directly lead us to the actual; for where "the world is structured on its own displacement," we can not go straight from the text to the world. Given the emphasis on displacement (the displacement of the subject, the displacement of the world), "only a rigorous avoidance will tell us anything (will tell us 'it is like *that*')" (12). It's as if we had to go, not in the direction the words pointed, but in the opposite direction, in order to reach the actual. This, certainly, violates our accustomed idea of reference and the world. But what follows from these principles?

First "the world is everything that is *not* the case" (12),¹⁰ which reverses Wittgenstein; second "the opposite is what I intend" (57). We might say of the first that it could be seen as an instance of bringing back what had been negated, although complicated by the fact that, grammatically, it had been phrased in the positive ("The world is everything that is the case"¹¹). Still, positively or

negatively put, the statement excludes and, as the statement excludes, there is a negative thrust to meet its positive coloring. What does the statement exclude? Like Joe Friday, the young Wittgenstein wants nothing but the facts (as the rest of the entries under number one show). This exclusion of all but the facts is not accidental; it preserves the coherence of the statement.

But at what cost? Most simply, at the cost of all that is not factual, but, as Charles Olson would remind us, through his dream poems, if through nothing else, the imaginary (or the dream) exists in the world. So, to exclude the imaginary is to shrink the world down to size, to determine beforehand what the world should consist of (at the cost, let us stress, of parts of the world), and, even, where desire brings us visions of utopias (à la Ernst Bloch, or even—though less forcefully—Theodor Adorno), to deny a source of change. To say, then, that "the world is everything that is *not* the case" is to posit a distinction between world and case (which is also a distinction between world and "world") and to insist on the primacy of the world over the concept. Thus, "the world is everything that is not the case" changes the concept of world and lays the groundwork for recalling all that had been excluded. But what have we changed if we have merely changed definitions? Part of the problem is how a definition can be used to delegitimize parts of a concept. If we define "world" to exclude the imaginary, then a part of the world has been declared supernumerary. But how can we use "everything that is not the case" as a tool of exclusion? Bringing the negative in prevents the closure of definition. In exactly the same way, "the opposite is what I intend" (57) can not be used to focus the world into a repository of intentions.

So, through the use of the negative ("not the case") or the paradox ("the opposite is what I intend"), we slip from the grasp of statements at the same time that we're making statements. But just how far does the opposite take us? It means we will

not be governed by the facts of "the case" (which are never neutral—somebody's always paying for them). It means we will not be governed by "the case" itself, for "the case" is always used to rule something out-of-bounds, as illegitimate. It means we will not be governed by the past: "the case" is but another way for the past to determine the present and forbid various instruments for change; it insures the continuity of the past until the world becomes, not the world, but "facts in logical space" (*Tractatus*, 1.13). To say "the world is everything that is *not* the case" is also to say the world is not this ensemble of facts in logical space; it is something else—not an idea of a world but the world itself. And what does this "itself" mean? It is what it is: it is *this*.

But what does this "this" mean for writing? Well, if writing is not the encoding of messages within socially prescribed lines (and if reading is not a decoding of these signs into other signs [both signs implicitly being imponderable]), writing is, most simply, a testing of the medium of language. "This" means (as Watten commented of his "criterion of interest" in editing *This*) that "a given work comes to an identity with a particular technique. How it comes into being is the same as what it is" (*TS*, 1).¹² This would lead to an aestheticism without conscience were it not for one thing: "All the possibilities of language are contiguous with *all* the structures of the world" (*TS*, 108). The possibilities of language are not just possibilities of language, not necessarily or solely ineffectual or illusory. If they are contiguous with "*all* the structures of the world," then language in its own right is a cognitive tool, not to be dependent on reference for its value. This frees language from having to follow one model to be considered legitimate, but it also places a heavy responsibility on all the forms of language because all the forms can tell us something we need to know. Further, if we are to learn about "*all* the structures of the world" we simply have to have writing that explores *all* the possibilities of language; if we don't, too much of the world is kept from us. When the writing "comes to an identity with its particular technique," when it tells us of the structure(s) of the world, all we have to do to test the medium and fulfill the function of writing is simply (but also, complexly) one thing. We must sound what it is: "To test the medium say this" (63).

Notes

1. Distributed by Small Press Distribution, Inc., 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702 and by Segue Distribution, 300 Bowery, New York, NY 10009.

2. We might, also, recall Adorno on the afunctionality of art: "When all is said and done, it is still better for art to fall silent and stop in its tracks than to run over to the enemy, promoting the trend towards assimilation to the all-powerful status quo. What is wrong with the proclamation by intellectuals concerning the end of art is that they nevertheless go on presupposing the existence of a role for art

which might legitimate art here and now, in this practical world. In actuality, art's role in a totally functional world is precisely its afunctionality. It is sheer wishful thinking to assume that art might have any impact, either directly or indirectly, on the course society is taking. To instrumentalize art is to undercut the opposition art mounts against instrumentalism. The only way in which art can unmask the irrationality of instrumental reason is by warding off attacks on its immanence. . . . Even when art pretends it is free because it has the ability to protest, it is actually unfree, for its protest is being co-opted" (*Aesthetic Theory*, 442). There is a tendency in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry to instrumentalize, to make writing good for something, but it is also true that Adorno's afunctionality has a function, which in no way invalidates Adorno's point.

3. "In direct proportion," but, of course, no listener completely becomes another, for what the listener hears is interpreted according to what the listener has seen and known; so what is communicated ("us"), even in this model, will become increasingly diluted with each transmission. There will be no pure identity of the speaker—at any time.

4. In their book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson comment on "What Michael Reddy has called 'the conduit metaphor': Reddy observes that our language about language is structured roughly by the following complex metaphor:

IDEAS (OR MEANINGS) ARE OBJECTS.

LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS.

COMMUNICATION IS SENDING.

The speaker puts ideas (objects) into words (containers) and sends them (along a conduit) to a hearer who takes the idea/objects out of the word/containers' " (10). It is such a conception that Watten has in mind in titling his book *Conduit* or one of the seven poems therein "To the Package," or, possibly, another, "Direct Address."

5. The need for response is surely one reason why Watten sees in Kit Robinson's "In the American Tree" that "distance, rather than absorption, is the intended effect" (*TS*, 64). There must be distance for response. (On the other hand, Charles Bernstein, in his recent *The Artifice of Absorption*, has admitted that he desires, through all his use

of resistant materials, a more powerful absorption than generally achieved. This should not be construed to mean that Bernstein would deny the importance of responses, however.) Furthermore, Watten's comment does not mean that the work is all in the response. There is also the author's technique, for "we do not believe our senses; the level of automatism we have to deal with is of an order the

Formalists would have not believed. The necessity for technique is absolute in the face of this fact" (TS, 15).

6. We might recall here Watten's gloss on a remark by Shklovsky: "There are no new materials, only new techniques" (TS, 12). Thus, we return to the negated in order to fashion new techniques.

7. In *Progress*, Watten had characterized the author (himself, but also the author-function) in the following manner: "The system BW is the connection/ Of these ideas with words" (P, 118).

8. Recall Watten's "Rather than the thesis, antithesis, synthesis of Surrealism, the movement [in Robert Smithson's works] is: antithesis, thesis, antithesis, which then, like a 'free radical' in chemistry, can look around for some synthesis to prey on—perhaps that of Clement Greenberg" (TS, 76).

9. But let us cite, on this problem of inversions or reversals, Jacques Derrida: "I strongly and repeatedly insist on the necessity of the phase of reversal, which people have perhaps too swiftly attempted to discredit . . . To neglect this phase of reversal is to forget that the structure of the opposition is one of conflict and subordination and thus to pass too swiftly, without gaining any purchase against the former opposition, to a *neutralization* which in practice leaves things in their former state and deprives one of any way of *intervening* effectively" (*Positions*—Derrida's italics. [Note I quote this from Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (pages 165-6) because the first line here was omitted in the Alan Bass translation of *Positions*].) It would seem that Culler's ellipses indicate the omission of the following line: "To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment" (41). Then, from the end of the Culler quote, Derrida goes on: "We know what always have been the *practical* (particularly *political*) effects of *immediately* jumping *beyond* oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of *neither this nor that*" (*Positions*, 41). Unfortunately, as the two translations vary, grafting them is a little awkward.

10. Interestingly, Ron Silliman echoes Watten's criticism in his "Hidden": "The world is all (the word is all)/ that is the case (this is false)" (in *o•blek* #3, p. 74).

11. This proposition is number 1 in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which first appeared in German in 1921. As translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, the rest of the entries under one:

1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

1.11 The world is determined by the facts, not by their being *all* the facts.

1.12 For the totality of facts determines what is the case, and also what is not the case.

1.13 The facts in logical space are the world.

1.2 The world divides into facts.

1.21 Each item can be the case or not while everything else remains the same.

12. Or: "To quote one of the Formalists, Eichenbaum: 'We had to oppose the subjective aesthetic principles espoused by the Symbolists with an objective consideration of the facts'—the facts being the writing itself" (*TS*, 1).

"Not Rastafarian, Rodeferian"

Stephen Rodefer:

Emergency Measures

(Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 1987)

WHEN FRANK O'HARA OPINED THAT "You just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout 'Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep'" ("Personism: A Manifesto"), he situated poetry as a response to a threat. What mattered, then, was not the form (although there are, of course, formal aspects to O'Hara's work), but success; and that success was to be judged analogous to the question of who had run faster, you or your pursuer? Or: did you get away with it (again)? It's laughably easy to see the critic as this mugger, pursuing the innocent poet hither and yon, through the streets of New York. And it's easy to see the mark of success as one of avoidance—of pain, as well as of comprehension.

Crucial to this strategy is a specificity of time. The threat must be dealt with when it arises and our past achievements have no bearing on what happens (unless they affect our pursuer's determination). Regardless of what we've done in the past, we have to do it again. But, too, we are not competing with what we did in the past. It doesn't matter that two years ago we ran faster—as long as we are still fast enough. Such an emphasis, if taken literally, cuts most critics out of the picture anyway; for, they follow so far behind the poets that the poets are often dead before the critics crack open their books. Thus, due to what Pound called "the time lag," the poem occupies a specific time free equally from urban ruffians (hired by a literary establishment) and from future generations. Freed from these dual worries, the poem becomes an oasis for you and me.

To move from these comments on O'Hara to a consideration of Stephen Rodefer's *Emergency Measures* indicates that our state of affairs has worsened considerably in the last thirty years. The threat, for instance, seems pervasive and continuous, paranoia a socially encoded response made hip by wall posters. Where writing might have been seen as a shelter, where we could, at the least, write what we wanted, free in our autonomy from social constraints, succoring ourselves on the (real) (inner) life, writing is now seen in complicity with the words of others, with social determinations and control. (Perhaps, post-AIDS, this parallels what has happened to sex, too; for, as the warning cliché of our time now has it, you don't engage in sex simply with one person but with all of that person's

past partners. With such a crowded bed, it's hard for sex to be an escape, let alone the answer it was for O'Hara.) Thus, we are preyed on now by the implications of the answers of thirty years ago. As Rodefer and Benjamin Friedlander put it in their *Oriflamme Day*: "Intention is strictly / homicidal" (n.p.).²

Thought, then, shall not save us—at least, not of itself and left to itself. "Certainly it was chuckleheaded, let us admit, not to strip from thought its predatory intent" (11). Where writing depends on thought, such a view means writing is less a shelter than a lock-up—and we locked-up

with a ravenous beast. If a kind of place, poems are not a place where we stay: "A poem does not become / but anyway it comes / and you leave it" (15). So we leave the poems behind. But isn't there always another one on the way?

If writing were our means of escape and, at the best, we must leave it, or, at the worst, it unleashes predatory thought, where shall our escape be now? The question serves to raise the issue of writing and escape, an issue there are many forms of (realism and the transparent signifier, fantasy and the alienated signifier, etc.). But escape isn't the outside of the system; it's in complicity with the system that made us want to bail out in the first place and gave us no (real) place to go. So, the desire to escape is a dead-end, however strategic it may be in keeping us located and pacified. "For nothing / happens but everything that comes / to nothing. Medication supposes / correction stupefying" (25).

Writing is more than an analgesic, however, and it can do more than encourage the desire to, or illusion of, escape. It can, for one thing, reveal our condition: "Nothing foreign will be foreign finally" (21). On the one hand, "For want of language should they lose / their life" (41-2). On the other, "Grammar showed us what to do / and we did it" (38). To recognize that we are taking orders from grammar is the first step to refusing to obey—a first step, but not one which necessarily follows from the recognition, nor one which must always be followed. Grammar controls us. It is an order and "order means program and imposes it" (33). So, grammar is part of a larger program of social controls: "Entrap the mind with correct behavior, self / sufficiency, self service, ankle bracelet, angle fish" (45). (The end of Rodefer's line, here, transgresses the correct behavior valorized in the opening.) So the reward for correct behavior is self-sufficiency. But what is self-sufficiency? Note the masturbatory context of "self service." Self-sufficiency—on the one hand, illusory; on the other, alienated—might be more a punishment than a reward.

But, too, if "every rule is *made* to falter" (39), correct behavior must be more concerned with being seen to be correct than with obeying the rules. For, as the rules change, so must the behavior, and there would be nothing worse than to follow outmoded rules. Shall we continue our allegiance to the rules even past

their demise—as if we were to become sole monuments of an order long gone? And isn't this simply another form of escape? So what kind of answer is there if every answer, for all the promise it offers, threatens to resurrect the same old system? For every answer threatens a settlement (as well as threatening to become settled), just as every new order threatens to duplicate the old in its controls, if in nothing else: "Theories poised as person/ rebuilding the code" (19). To use theories in place of person will come to change nothing, for all there may have been a momentary feeling of liberation (or, for others, of threat) when the change of terms was initiated. A writing which does not aim at escape must practice a critical method and this critical method must be pursued continually and must not be allowed to solidify into *one* answer. So we need the recognition posited in *Oriflamme Day*: "Probably even these premises collapse" (n.p.).

What are the premises of *Emergency Measures*? Recalling O'Hara's radical emphasis on the present, they are that it is "now time to immortalize a little of the immediate they have been shoving at us. Thumb your noses at the conduit by cutting out the content. Embarrass the whole arrangement by staying what has no duration" (12). Or, in short, to provide "a kind of speech to fire impertinence" (21). This will be an impertinence which knows logic well enough not to be quelled by it, for logic is a part of the program of control. But to be illogical does not, of itself, solve the problem of control, although one way to practice incorrect behavior is to jam the logical system: "Logically there can not be a mistake ever. But when a mistake occurs, illogically, there it is" (27). In part, this equates the "is" with the illogical, with what was either unpredictable or contradictory. "Is" has, then, an ability to unsettle the definitive article or the monological subject: "*The is it*" (45). "Is" gains emphasis as it takes it away from "the" and "it." Or: "Is is the likely deed" (OD, n.p.).

"Is" is also a form of equivalence, but equivalence, due to its universalizing thrust, has got to go, too. So, "If *a* cannot equal *b*, no way can it *a* equal either" (28). There is no identity without equivalence (no self without an intersubjective realm), and, if equivalence is made to fit all things, equivalence ceases to mean anything. If "Metalanguage flees/ over the olympic birth of the horizon" (20), then all there are are local languages. Thus, in place of knowing the self (emphasis on the definitive article), we are left "knowing/ who we were, where we had coagulated" (41).

The "is" is not free, however; for, within the "is" there is a struggle with "the other, always hell and answer" (26); that is, within the "is" there is always "the other," so the "is" has a social dimension. The other is not equivalent to the self. We are not the same. "The other remains, finished, lying there in order/ to take down this world's training in its fact" (39). "Finished" is a preparation for facts, a determinism that has no place in it for action (or writing). This is the most potent

control of all—the declaration that all has been decided and we can do nothing to change it. We might even think the system needs our unhappiness, that it feeds off, and is strengthened by, our misery. Thus, "Misfortune flairs her boundaries,/ to name and remain us all" (17).

We might remind ourselves it doesn't have to be this way. We don't have to be correct. And we don't have to be logical—or illogical. We don't have to follow what's true (or fashionable, or decent). If "there is no way to tell true or false when all cases happen partially" (29) (and, of course, if all cases happen partially), we should not base our actions on truth. We should be suspicious of all forms of entrapment (including truth) and say, with Rodefer, "*We hate poetry that has a palpable design on us*" (55; italics in original).

Where reading is a stimulus response and criticism a galvanometer, we are but rats put through our mazy paces. We need a poetry that will let us breathe, one in which we might find our own place, not a place someone else has determined for us. But it's a difficult issue, for this,

too, can be an entrapment. Where "existence disproved thought" (41), we stand at the forking of their ways; thus, both existence and thought demand a critical perspective. As Emerson once said, "People wish to be settled: only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them" ("Circles"). For our (current) state of affairs this hope demands emergency measures: "Autopsy beyond the end,/ withdraw those signs and/ make us carcasses" (57).

Notes

1. Ron Silliman, *Lit* (Elmwood, CT: Potes and Poets Press, 1987), p. 55.

2. Stephen Rodefer and Benjamin Friedlander, *Oriflamme Day* (n.p.: Phraseology, 1987). In *Emergency Measures*, we find, "God works by armies. Day by oriflamme" (37).

"As Permeable Constructedness"

Lyn Hejinian:

My Life

(Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1987)

ROMAN JACOBSON GAVE US THE TERM "SHIFTERS" to describe those words—"I," "you," "me"—whose meaning shifts with each speaker.¹ It may seem an unappetizing characterization of a superb book, but one could call Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* an autobiography of a shifter. Some would expect a book that could, however remotely, warrant such a characterization to be inhuman, inhumane, or devious. It is not. Hejinian shows us, not an inhuman life, but how a life must depend on language in order to be human. *My Life* (my life, too) is enmeshed in the order of language and is raised, in part, on the foundation of recurrence and variation.

My Life, itself, conforms to this rule of recurrence and variation, having been originally issued in 1980 by Burning Deck in an edition that comprised thirty-seven sections with thirty-seven sentences each. The new edition is also an addition, having forty-five sections of forty-five sentences each. (In each case, one for each year of her life.) Given the construction of the book and its number-rationale, the possibility of a new edition was inherent in its procedures (and it still is). So, Hejinian is "rewriting in an unstable text" (113). The possibility of there being more to the book (and here it's important that this "more" isn't only tacked onto the end of the book but is found throughout the new edition—the new sentences in the old sections do not occur invariably—or, even, usually—at the end of the sections) means the book can never be finished, that no section is complete.

The "more" of this incompleteness points both forward and back. There is both more life to live and more life to recall. But, as "many facts about a life should be left out, they are easily replaced" (75), there can be no truck in *My Life* with any program for a complete rendering. It would be pointless, were it practicable. So we shall never have all of *My Life*. And this means that, while new editions are possible (and may be eagerly anticipated), they can scarcely be necessary.

Still, the second edition gives Hejinian the opportunity to take issue with her critics and to underscore points made in the earlier edition but, apparently, not made strongly enough. "They accuse it of theory, they say it lacks feeling" (99). But, "of course, this is a poem, that model of inquiry" (105)—not, notice, a model of feeling. *My Life* is an inquiry into my life, how it is constituted and understood, not a recapitulation of that life. Furthermore, theory shouldn't be understood as an answer, which the work is then written to illustrate (as it is usually understood), but as "a principle of presentation" (111); that is, as a way to present one's questions, or to engage in the inquiry of the poem.

In the terms of this inquiry and in the context of "my life," we must recognize that Hejinian's book cleaves to the generosity of "my," not its appropriation. We might ask, however, whether we truly want such generosity. As Jacques Attali writes in *Noise*, "when [John Cage] sits motionless at the piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, letting the audience grow impatient and make noises, he is giving back the right to speak to people who do not want to have it" (136); or, as Hejinian remarks of herself, "You are so generous, they told me, allowing everything its place, but what we wanted to hear was a story" (37). Implicit in these comments, clearly, is the idea that we do not want such generosity. After all, where might such generosity have led? "I had begun to learn, from the experience of passionate generosity, about love" (38). So, "allowing everything its place" might be seen as an index of love—but, unfortunately, we wanted a story.

Love might, also, make us content with the story we do get, might lead us to say that "to some extent, each sentence must be the whole story" (67); that is, if generosity gives everything its place, love might make each thing complete "to some extent." Yet, why *must* each sentence "to some extent" be the whole story? Because we shall get no "whole story," if by that "whole" is meant the knowledge of everything pertaining to the story; we will get only parts of the story. The understanding that all truths are partial she shares with Ron Silliman,² among others. There is also a liberation in this strategy of each-sentence-a-whole-story, for "the whole" often deforms pieces to fit its pattern, so, if we might phrase it this way, the wholeness of each sentence is displaced that it may conform to the pattern of the whole. But we must be careful here to abide by the "to some extent." For each sentence, cut off from all the other sentences in the world, would be akin to being the sole surviving speaker of a language no one else could fathom. Such a wholeness would be intimately dependent on its incomprehensibility.

We need more than the particular, more than the one sentence, but we also need not to lose the individual in the group. Hejinian seems ambivalent on this score. On the one hand, "I am a shard, signifying isolation" (52); on the other, "only fragments are accurate" (55). Does this mean isolation is accuracy? That shards are different from fragments? (But, if they are, what are their determining characteristics and what makes them different from fragments? Why would fragments be privileged over shards?) Does it mean that signification is isolating, while ontology is accu-

racy? In part, these are questions about emphases: do we emphasize "I," "am," "a," "shard," "signifying," or "isolation"? Where does the weight of meaning fall? Or, as Hejinian asks on several occasions, "What was the meaning hung from that depend?" (21).

Since the text faces us with this question, mightn't we suspect we're being asked to determine the answer? Doesn't the text crave our input at this point when it asks (us) what it's all about? But note, too, how "depend" wraps back upon itself. This "depend" is a "perpend" and a "suspend" and what depends on that? So, it's not just a question of what was that meaning, but what did that meaning depend on: "If one can't see a connection one must assume a decision" (92). The question of a dependence takes us further and further back into a patchwork of significations.

Hejinian, however, supports the claims of the singular when she notes that "a fragment is not a fraction but a whole piece" (82). As it can be seen (or read) in and of itself, it is accurate precisely because it needn't fit into any schema. "I," we could claim, is what it is precisely due to such a schema, and so "I" is (a) never alone and (b) already schematized and, thus, already inaccurate. One thrust of *My Life* is to trace the almost Brownian movements of the "I": "I was eventually to become one

person" (25), but "I suppose I had always hoped that, through an act of the will and the effort of practice I might be someone else, might alter my personality and even my appearance, that I might in fact create myself, but instead I found myself trapped in the very character which made such a thought possible and such a wish mine" (47-8), until, that is, "there is no 'I' as such" (93).

Surely, if there's one thing we believe in still, it is the "I." How can Hejinian claim there is no "I" as such? There is no "I" as such because the "I" pretends to a priority, a purity, that cannot be granted if there is a "permanent constructedness" (94), for that constructedness means the "I" has been constructed, too, that it is constructed with, and through, "my life," and not that it is free to construct without being (and having been) itself constructed. There is no essential or transcendental leverage in this "I." It is a by-product of construction. "I" is not a mark of consciousness, as much as it is a "situation": "It was hard to know this as politics, because it plays like the work of one person, but nothing is isolated in history—certain humans are situations" (10). For writing this means the "I" is situated in writing, constructed through the writing itself and not (as we generally conceive it) the other way round.

This concern with ego and book is phrased from the standpoint of the writer. What about the reader? Hejinian points out that "one would not read the book unless one already understood it" (43). Further, "we will only understand what we have already understood" (53). Implicitly, then, one doesn't read what one doesn't understand and one understands only what one has understood. In this way, the past may be seen to control understanding. The past is a kind of filter and what gets filtered out is anything new. As Nietzsche, taking aim on causality, wrote, in *Twilight of the Idols*, "Thus one searches not only for some kind of explanation to serve as a cause, but for a particularly selected and preferred kind of explanation—that which has most quickly and most frequently abolished the feeling of the strange, new, and hitherto unexperienced: the *most habitual* explanations" (*Portable Nietzsche*, p. 497—italics in original).

But that means all understanding is past understanding, merely reinforcing the already-known in an effort to escape the unfamiliar. To change this, we must change our utilitarian habits, for, if we are to read anything new (if, indeed, there is anything new), we must read past understanding, past explanations. To this end, we want the construction to be, not of solid boundaries, but of permeable ones: "My life is as permeable constructedness" (93). In this way the writing is not a ratification of the already-known, however much it may use the known. And, in this way, *My Life* is not a book of meanings as much as it is a book of events, a book that "collaborate[s] with the occasion" (29); for, "I was beginning to look for some meaning when I should have been satisfied with events" (50).

Notes

1. "Such units are called 'shifters' and in English this refers to words such as 'I,' 'you,' 'me,' and so on. The actual *person* these words *mean* is of course entirely dependent on the particular message which contains them. They are totally context-sensitive . . . What 'shifters' indicate, of course, is the extent to which *all* meaning is context-sensitive, and the limited access to so-called 'General Meaning' that any communication can have" (Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977], p. 84—italics in original).

2. "Partial truths are all we get" (Ron Silliman, *Lit* [Elmwood, CT: Potes & Poets Press, 1987], 67).

Robert Crosson

Egypt from Field Notes

Egypt

(A First Recital) from Field Notes

To Lily

I am in sand walking by a cardboard palm tree
on a flat high desert. A round, stubby Airplane
has brought me here . . . It was Daddy Warbucks' plane
(with a propeller) before Father bought it from him.

Daddy Warbucks and Punjab are always fighting.

My father and I do not quarrel. He is kind.

We never argue.

• • •

There are three of us.

I'm the eldest: the other two are Twins, a boy & a girl.

They are here; but I rarely see them . . . I sometimes
feel they are Father's true children and I am a guest;
but this is never spoken of and won't be. Father
smiles at me . . . when I catch him looking sideways
at the little boy & girl I know he doesn't mind
that I've adopted him. I am welcome to be there.

We are always well dressed.

*

We go everywhere together: we Travel a Good Deal,
as my grandmother would say. Money is no problem
with Father, it is never spoken of . . . sometimes we
fly in the stubby airplane, sometimes we ride on a
boat, a Steamer, with no people around.

The twins are always happy and smiling.

They never go to school.

*

Now we are in Egypt.
I know I'm there because of the sand.
Also the colors . . . last year I was Jack-in-the-
Beanstalk, climbing up and down into heaven.
The colors there were sunshine & green leaves
with big orange and yellow flowers—blue sky
everywhere, and pink & purple hollyhocks
when you got down.

In the desert there is this Camel standing
by a palm tree. It is not a real camel.
It is a picture of a camel. The palm tree is not
a real Palm-tree either . . . they are beautiful.
They are not cut-outs: not like the punch-out
Circus you make stand up, with flaps . . . the Camel
and the palm tree are painted together with no
rough edges. They have a good smell: like pages,
like ink, or chalk.

The sand is painted too . . . the Sky is midnight,
with a round yellow moon at the top . . . all of it
so pretty I can't believe it.

They are Water Colors, Miss Kirkpatrick says.
I have never seen water colors before . . . when
I look at them my throat gets tight, I make
squealy noises. My eyes twitch, my legs jiggle:
I want to go Outside, down to the Tank-Bottom,
and run . . . or piss.

I tell nobody about the Water Colors, how much
I like them—except Miss Kirkpatrick.
There is nobody else to tell anyway.

• • •

The Sand is bone-clean, and even.
In places there are Dunes . . . the color
of the sand runs together, in waves.
Inside the pictures are no lines,
the colors spill out the sides.
There are no borders.

Boarders, I started to say; but that would be wrong.
A boarder is Siggi Schmidt, my aunt Vinnie's friend
who lives with us—a person who pays to live and
take meals in a house with somebody . . . A Border
can mean a State Line or the Outside edges of a
picture, or the last line of trim
crocheted on a Doiley.

The blue Sky is midnight—a deep blue I have seen
Nights as a little kid, carried in and out of the Car:
with white dots in it.

*

I have never ridden The Toonerville Trolley.
I don't want to, there are too many people on it.
Sundays I read it in the funnies, it makes me laugh.
Vinnie reads Maggie & Jiggs. I read The Katzenjammer
Kids, Prince Valiant and The Little King: the one
with the Crown on and the fur coat, hitchhiking.
I read Orphan Annie because I hate it.

I like Sandy her dog and Punjab, the Magician: be-
cause he's so big (brown-skinned as Vinnie's friend,
Homer: with whom I recently had my picture taken); but
I don't much like Daddy Warbucks—that Diamond pin
flashing on his necktie. Orphan Annie is always com-
plaining; she's always running away from Somebody.
I don't like her eyes.

The only thing I like is when she's scared
and her hair stands on end.

• • • •

Egypt is only one of the places we go. We went
to Africa once. I want to go everywhere with them.
Father is nice, he doesn't talk much. He has a
first name but I don't remember it . . . his last
Name must be Bobbsy, because of the Twins. I can't
remember if they call him Father or Daddy.
They are always smiling.

I'm jealous, their having a father like that;
but I don't care. When I'm with them it's because
I want to be. They are different from me. They
are Nice Kids. They do not swear, they don't
get mad at each other or with their Father.
I am bigger than they are, I am glad to be with
them: They do not know what I do.

That doesn't matter—

How could they? . . . with Father's money, they don't
have to. I don't let myself think about that.

The same way when I was Jack In The Beanstalk: There
was never any talk . . . you don't have to talk any-
way. It's better to keep your mouth shut.

In school, in Miss Kirkpatrick's third-grade music
Class, there are two girls: in my same class since
the First-Grade . . . pretty, always washed, freshly
dressed. They are the first in line for lice-checks.

Every year they sing the same song—
A Duet:

O my dear Playmate, come out and play with me,
And bring your Dolly (three): climb up my
Apple tree; slide down my rain barrel, slide
Down my cellar door, and We'll be jolly
Friends forevermore . . .

She couldn't come out to play, it was a rainy
Day. With tearful eye (our sad reply), I
could hear her say: I'm sorry, Playmates,
I cannot play with you: my Dolly has the flu—
Boo-Hoo-Hoo, Who-Hoo-Hoo . . . Aint got no Rain
Barrel, aint got no Cellar Door; but we'll be
Jolly Friends, forevermore.

They do Gestures.

Some music periods we go out on the Playground.

Miss Kirkpatrick takes her Victrola out and plays it.
We are supposed to do Exercises to the music.
I don't.

There's this dead dog in the gutter outside the Fence.
Every day I look at it . . . one day just stiff.
The next day with flies on it.
It just lays there.

Issue No. 9 · Contributors

O Books has recently published TODD BARON's *Return of the World*. His other works include *Partial*s (e.g. press) and *dark as a hat* (Potes and Poets Press) . . . TOM BECKETT edits *The Difficulties*. His work has appeared in *In the American Tree*, *Boundary 2*, *Moving Letters*, *Writing*, *Splash* and other anthologies and journals. *Separations*, a book of poetry with an introduction by Bruce Andrews, was published last year by Generator Press. He lives in Kent, Ohio . . . CHARLES BERNSTEIN, who is Research Director at the Center for the Study of Dysgraphic Phenomena, was recently removed from his ministry at The First Church, Poetic Licence. Recent books include *These Oars Don't Move Me* (Ain't There Books), *The Light Is Turning Red* (Artificial Excess Books), and *Lowering Expectations: Collected Essays 1948-1965* (Dromedary Press); forthcoming—*How Fools Fool* (Fellows Against Phallocracy Press) and *Rough Trades* (Sun & Moon Press) . . . GERALD BURNS's collected prose *A Thing About Language* is out soon from Southern Illinois University Press. Shorter poems appear in *Writing*, *Ironwood* and *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle*. *The Passions of Being's* first 84 lines appeared in *Sulfur* (Winter '88) . . . BRUCE CAMPBELL has essays forthcoming in *Sagetrieb* (on Spicer), and *Poetics Journal* (on Artaud and Barthes) . . . ROBERT CREELEY's *Collected Essays* have just been published by the University of California Press. He is presently poet laureate of the state of New York . . . ROBERT CROSSON is the author of *Geographies* and co-author, with Paul Vangelisti and John Thomas, of *Abandoned Latitudes* (Red Hill Press). His most recent book is *Calliope* (1988: Illuminati). He works in and around Los Angeles as a film actor, painter and carpenter . . . ALAN DAVIES is the author of *Name* (poems) and *Signage* (essays) from Roof Books . . . KATHLEEN FRASER's most recent books are *Notes Preceding Trust* and *boundayr* (poem text in collaboration with aquatints by the painter Sam Francis), both from Lapis Press, 1988. She is the editor of *HOW(ever)*, a journal for poets and scholars interested in modernist/innovative directions in women's poetry. Her essay "Line. On the Line. Lining up. Lined with. Between the Lines. Bottom Line." was included in the recently published collection *The Line in Postmodern Poetry*, University of Illinois Press. An essay on Barbara Guest's fiction will soon appear in *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, Princeton University Press . . . DAVID C.D. GANSZ is Senior Contributing Editor of *NOTUS*. His books of poetry are *Animadversions* (Logres, 1986) and *Sin Tactics* (Woodbine Press, 1988), and his letters and reviews have appeared in *Sulfur*, *The New York Times Book Review* and elsewhere . . . BENJAMIN HOLLANDER is the editor of *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France* (ACTS 8/9, 1988) and is associate editor of *ACTS: A Journal of New Writing*. His poetry and criticism have appeared in various places, including *Sulfur*, *Conjunctions*, *The American Book Review*, *Temblor* and *O One/an* anthology. He is currently writing a series of critical works for a book to be entitled *analytic lyric: critical music* . . . SUSAN HOWE lives in Guilford, CT. Sun & Moon will publish *The Europe of Trusts* shortly. This summer Paradigm Press will publish *The Bibliography of the King's Book; or, Eikon Basilike*. In 1990, Wesleyan University Press will publish a book of her poems. The forthcoming issue of *The Difficulties* will be devoted to her writing . . . MARTHA LIFSON will have her first book of poems

published soon by University of Georgia Press . . . TOM MANDEL lives in San Francisco and is the author of *EncY* (Tuumba, 1978), *EraT* (Burning Deck, 1981), *Ready to Go* (Ithaca House, 1981), *Central Europe* (Coincidence Press, 1986) and *Some Appearances* (Jimmy's House of Knowledge, 1987). Recently, his work was featured in *The Best American Poetry*, edited by John Ashbery . . . DOUGLAS MESSERLI published his poems *Maxims from my Mother's Milk/Hymns to Him* under his own Sun & Moon imprint. His poems and an interview were featured in a recent issue of *Aerial* . . . LAURA MORIARTY's most recent work is *Duse* (Coincidence Press, 1987). *like roads* and *Rondeaux* may come out in 1989. She manages the American Poetry Archives for the Poetry Center in San Francisco . . . NICK PIOMBINO recently published a 7-part poem collaboration with artist Tom Simon in the Fall 1988 issue of *Central Park*. His book of essays, *The Boundary of Blur*, is due from Sun & Moon Press . . . DAVID SEARCY's "Things Before History" will appear in the first resurrection of Jim Haining's *Salt Lick* magazine. Otherwise, "all I do is *Trip to the Sun*, an essay on the geographical basis of knowledge, which I started in 1980 and hope to finish before the millennium." . . . AARON SHURIN's new book is *A's Dream* (O Books, 1989), which includes the chapbook *Elsewhere*. His essay about language and AIDS, "Notes from Under," appears in *ACTS* 10. He lives and teaches in San Francisco, where he has just curated a series of talks for Small Press Distribution called "Derivations: Robert Duncan and the Poetics of Influence" . . . In a recent issue of *The Nation*, Stuart Klawans likened the experience of RON SILLIMAN's poetry to "dragging your naked body through a bed of hot coals and broken glass." . . . JOSEPH SIMAS writes that Paradigm Press will be publishing *Kinderparts* this year. Recently, *The Raddle Moon* (#6) published his text collaboration with photographer Tim Trompeter, *The Glass House*. His translation of Anne-Marie Albiach's *Mezza Voce* is available from Post Apollo Press, and his work, including translations, is included in Hollander's *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France* . . . DAVID LEVI STRAUSS is a poet and critic working in San Francisco. His cultural criticism and writings on photography, film and painting have appeared in *Art in America*, *Arts*, *Afterimage*, *Artweek*, *Cinematograph*, *Propaganda Review*, *Research*, and other magazines. He won the Logan Grant for New Writing on Photography from the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University and the Artspace Grant for New Writing in Art Criticism from Artspace in San Francisco in 1986. He studied Photography at Goddard College and at Visual Studies Workshop, concentrating on "the third image," the area between words and images. From 1980-83, he studied poetics in the Poetics Program at New College. His poetry and writings in poetics have appeared in numerous literary journals in the last five years. In 1982 he founded *ACTS: A Journal of New Writing*, and continues as its editor and publisher . . . PAUL VANGELISTI lives in Los Angeles. In 1988 he received a NEA Poetry Fellowship. He has published numerous books of poetry and translations. Two recent book-length poems, *Villa*, an epistolary novel in verse, and *Nemo*, continue to circulate . . . KEITH WALDROP's most recent book is *Water Marks* (Underwhich Editions). Forthcoming from Station Hill is his prose collection, *Hegel's Family*, and from Awede his translation of Anne-Marie Albiach's poem *ETAT* . . . ROSMARIE WALDROP's recent books of poems are *The Reproduction of Profiles* (New Directions) and *Shorter American Memory* (Paradigm Press). Her novel, *The Hanky of Pippin's Daughter*, is available from Station Hill . . . CRAIG

WATSON's most recent book is *After Calculus* (Burning Deck, 1987). New poems are forthcoming from *Paper Air*, *Room* and *O.ARS*.

At the left of the advertisement, a reproduction of the ACTS 8/9 paperback cover, printing the italic title *Translating Tradition / Paul Celan in France*, Celan's handwritten signature "paul Celan," the line "Edited by Benjamin Hollander," the tab "ACTS 8/9," and a black-and-white photograph of Paul Celan seated in shirtsleeves and jacket before a wall of bookshelves.

NEW FROM ACTS

TRANSLATING TRADITION:

PAUL CELAN IN FRANCE

Paul Celan, one of the most important poets in modern German and European literature, was an equally brilliant translator who lived in exile in Paris between 1948 and 1970.

Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France, edited by Benjamin Hollander, is the first book-length treatment in English to focus on Celan's translations and their relatively unknown influence on his work as a poet. This limited edition also offers a rare look at Celan's associations with and significant impact on French poetry and poetics.

Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France, features writings and translations by, among others, Maurice Blanchot, Yves Bonnefoy, E.M. Cioran, Jean Daive, Edmond Jabès, Robert Duncan, Roger Laporte, John Felstiner, Leonard Olschner, Norma Cole, Joseph Simas, Joel Golb, Michael Palmer, Bernhard Böschenstein, André Du Bouchet, Cid Corman, Pierre Joris, Joachim Neugroschel, Marc Wortman, James Phillips, and Tom Mandel, as well as photographs, drawings and other material.

230 pages, paperback \$15.95, released Fall 1988.

ORDER DIRECT FROM: ACTS: A JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING

David Levi Strauss, Editor

514 Guerrero St. • San Francisco, CA 94110

**(Foreign Payment add \$4.00 postal payment only in International Money Order or U.S. Bank Check.)*

Below the book listings, a small line drawing of a hand printing press with a curling sheet of paper rising from its bed, set beside the Burning Deck imprint and address.

Burning Deck

JOHN HAWKES

Island Fire

A short-short story with Hawkes's characteristic charge of intensity and compressed balance.

14 pages, handset letterpress, 2 colors, saddlestitched, \$5

Innocence in extremis. "Vintage Hawkes —obsessive, hilarious, scary, and simply beautiful" — Russell Banks. 100 pages, LP, cloth \$17.50, paper, sewn \$8

HARRY MATHEWS

Out of Bounds

A poem by the author of *Cigarettes* and *The Sinking of the Odradek Stadium*. "An important poet" — *Booklist*. "His poetry is both bizarre and deeply moving" — John Ashberry.

28 pages, LP, 2 colors, wrappers \$5; signed deluxe, \$25

Country Cooking & Other Stories. "A comic masterpiece" — *New York Times Book Review*. 88 pages, LP, paper \$4.

JENA OSMAN

Twelve Parts of Her

Word groups in angular configurations, characters stressed together into a puppet show, a portrait without mug shots.

24 pages, LP, 2 colors, wrappers, \$4

LISSA MCLAUGHLIN

Troubled by His Complexion

"It almost seems she not so much composes her stories, but like a spirit medium, discovers them from another place. It's kind of shadowy and distracted, almost just being formed as the reader enters them. This is a quality that makes writing enchanted." — Russell Edson.

128 pages, LP, sewn, paper \$8

Seeing the Multitudes Delayed. 76 pages, offset, signed cloth \$15, paper \$4

Approached by Fur. 28 pages, LP, handmade paper, signed, with a drawing by the author \$20

DALLAS WIEBE

Going to the Mountain

"Wiebe has always written with classical simplicity and power. His new stories are smart, tough, elegant, and unsettlingly original: each holds your heart and mind in an unrelenting if compassionate grip. What are you waiting for?" — Harry Mathews

160 pages, LP, sewn, signed paperback \$20, paper \$10

BURNING DECK

71 Elmgrove Ave. #1E,

Providence, RI 02906

Burning Deck has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, the Fund for Poetry and the Taft Subvention Committee.

The back cover: a plain, unprinted expanse of scuffed red card stock, bearing no text or device.

TEMBLOR: contemporary poets

Issue Number 9 · 1989

ISSN 0883-1599

Edited by Leland Hickman

Arthaus Studio: Design

Typeset at Wood & Jones Type Works, Pasadena, California

Copyright © 1989 Temblor

4624 Cahuenga Blvd. #307

North Hollywood, California 91602