

THE

DIFFICULTIES

"...like I tried to say, about leaving the difficulties, not removing them, by buying the improvements so readily available at the corner. You buy something all right, but what gets forgotten is, that you sell, in that moment of buying -- you sell a whole disposition of self..." --Charles Olson

The three poems by Larry Eigner printed herein have appeared previously in Orogrande.

Clayton Eshleman's piece is from HADES IN MANGANESE which Black Sparrow will publish Fall 1980.

I used "Are Babies Afraid of Short Sounds" first in a performance in Paris. It was distributed to the audience about half way through a forty-five minute talk I gave with simultaneous (extemporaneous) translation. When I have the chance I would like to perform it for video taping with subtitles. --R.A.

All materials gathered here issue as response to the following query. --the editors--

We are starting a new journal of the arts which is to be devoted to process-oriented, language-centered work.

The name of this magazine will be "The Difficulties". The title derives from an observation Charles Olson made at Cortland, New York.

You know, we live in a time which is very easy itself. That's been increasingly conspicuous for the last ten years...

It is our opinion the condition spoken to then prevails more than ever today.

We would like to provide for the 80's the kind of kick that Olson and magazines like "Origin" gave to the 50's and 60's. What it swings on is that level of provocation which keeps the difficulties in.

It is to this end that the first issue of "The Difficulties" proposes a symposium on 'language environment'.

Is it meaningful to you to speak of locating yourself in your work in terms of a 'language environment'? If so, please respond to what constitutes a 'language environment' and what you consider the relationship between you and it to be. If not, what sense of language would you oppose to this and why?

You number among some fifty persons who have been selected to address the issues raised by this question.

It is our belief that out of the dialogue which arises from this magazine a new context for the creation of art in this century will emerge.

Tom Beckett

Earel Neikirk

1/ It's hard to say anything
and nothing's impossible.
Which leaves me hanging here...I

think it's better to stop now
while I'm still ahead - if that's
what this could be said to be.

2/ Never
comes to
much

But
sometimes
something

seems to
mean
something.

Douglas Messerli

Statement

My poetry is very much located in a "language environment." That's an easy claim to make, for obviously, all poetry is (or at least should be) centered around language. Like several of my contemporaries, however, (people like Clark Coolidge, Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Ray DiPalma, Ron Silliman, Bob Perelman, Barret Watten and others) I am interested in words less as symbols of a preexistent reality, than as signifiers or signs of a whole new reality, a reality which the words (even the syllables and the letters themselves) create. In other words, in my poetry I attempt to make (to let the words make) a reality rather than to reflect one. In my work (and it seems to me, in the work of several of the "language" poets) words, words spoken to paper, create their own context, their own reference which may or may not have much contiguity with one's everyday experience in the world. The poem is organized by its own semiotic or linguistic logic, the way river is related to rivet more than to barge.

In the past, my own poetry has been more contiguous to experienced reality than are some of these poets' works. And, in that sense, my work has seemed to be more referential. I say "seemed" because, although there is some purposeful reference in my poems (language can never be completely non-referential; and to try to make it so seems to delimit the possibilities of poetry), my work is generally not organized around associations, but around the ear. It's rhythm and sound that dominate. The experience that the poem creates for me often has little to do with the meaning of the words, but rather with what they sound like they mean in relation to each other, and how they flow together in a rhythm or pattern of breath. I have moved increasingly away from image and narrative oriented work to a poetry that, without completely abandoning the visual, is grounded in an oral impulse. Even my diagrammatic poems, which appear to rely almost completely on their placement on the page, are organized according to sound, to the sounds of many simultaneously speaking voices. Were I not interested in an audience, I would perhaps move into transrational poetry; and in fact, in my newest work I have come very close to that, especially in The Red Poems.

Ironically, I have done few readings. I can't really explain that fact, except that perhaps when I have read my voice (far too dramatic for my work) has dominated the poems, and accordingly has helped to make them sound more narratively organized than they really are. In any event, I haven't been entirely pleased with the readings.

However, I'm now experimenting with taperecorded performances with other voices reading along with my own, the way Hannah Weiner has performed her Clairvoyant Journal. And in the writing process I've been increasingly resisting the temptation to fall back on what is already known, letting the words take me into their own context. Although I often work by deleting or by pulling language out of its ordinary context, the whole process stands against a minimalist sensibility in that the new contexts, the new worlds which this noncontextual language creates appear to be limitless, as if one were standing at the edge of some vast expanse in which anything and everything can/must happen. In such an environment language suddenly reveals itself as something of boundless potentiality, a potentiality in which it expresses us rather than us expressing it.

Fielding Dawson

Dear Guys -

Meaningful?

That's a kinda
heavy polemic,
no?

Well, we'll
see.

--luck

Fielding Dawson

Theodore Enslin

In answer to your initial question, 'Is it meaningful to you to speak of locating yourself in your work in terms of a 'language environment'?' I'd have to say that no question of that sort seems to me one that can be answered simply. (Perhaps it is better simply to ask the question with no thought of an answer. There are many such.) Certainly I do not deliberately think of a language environment. I use what is at hand. I am aware always of the contemporary, and when it is exact to my purpose, the colloquial. WCW made a few sage remarks in this direction. But my concern with language is very often broken down into its components---words, and words which have lives of their own beyond mere meaning or approved current usage. I do not try to 'use' at this point, but allow myself to be used. I have often said that I would prefer to be known as a composer who happens to use words rather than more conventional tones (though words are tones---and colors, too.) I am not overly concerned at this point with my particular time in history. I avoid the politics, and attempt to avoid semantic jargon in much the same way, and for the same reasons. To restore force to language that may have been abused through overuse or loose approximation does concern me. It seems to me that the cart may have been hitched tailside to at this point. If I were to worry about such things as a language environment, I would very possibly feel stifled in much the same ways that I do when I am told that I must take an interest in politics. (I do, of course, but hopefully always according to my own lights. I have never liked bandwagons.)

The notion of "language environment" touches upon only one of poetry's objectives. Granted that, in a sense, Mallarme was right: all of reality exists to end up between the covers of a book. Granted that, as Williams said, "a poem is a machine made out of words." True, true, true--but that isn't the half of it, or only half. The words we possess or must find grind themselves out of and against our life-experience. A life-experience that takes language alone as its main objective strikes me as insufficient. If that sounds paradoxical, look at the work of the poets who concern themselves solely with verbal texture and the strategies of evasion are plainly evident. Every new book of poems leaves me wondering why the poets leave so much out, where their life has gone; why the things they have done, people known, places seen, emotions generated in them by specific occurrences find little or no expression. That is, most of the poetry I see strikes me as emotionally dead. This fact is not peculiar to poetry, and the poets are to be blamed only in that they have chosen (unconsciously) to mirror the condition of our society, or, more particularly, of their poetic group. No one has expended much effort scratching the surfaces of the various "Schools" to discover the ideologies which motivate them.

I have lived in three cities in the course of my life, all of them having a distinctive linguistic flavor, from New York City subway graffiti to Texas twang to the nun at my grammar school in Connecticut who told us that Connecticuters spoke the purest English in the U.S.A., whatever that meant. Add to this lumps of other cultures' languages--jazz argot, black talk, the Spanish the doormen speak and you hear in the streets everywhere, the broken English and native-language chatter of immigrants on the bus, a couple of months in Paris, etc., not to mention the languages of the university, the high school, the grammar school, and one could do nothing else but record, if language was the only thing that mattered. What matters more to me--what language carries and proceeds from--is human exchange: the life of the feelings and the thought one expends on understanding them. I write in the hope of understanding what something meant to me and to the others involved in the event. I write to know that I felt, and what I felt. To recapture my feelings and to analyze them, if you will. Meaning, that unfashionable word, is part and parcel

of my work. I am not a tape-recorder.

I think it vain to base one's writing on the notion that t-r-e-e has no relationship to that big blowy thing across the street in the park dropping its leaves. Perhaps there are those who are convinced of this dichotomy on an intellectual level, but on the practical it falls to pieces. Sit down in a restaurant and order a tree and see what happens. Writing is an act of faith in the communicative power of the word and in one's own experience of the world. More and more I want to connect words to the objects and events in that world which I think breathed them into life. Others likewise may believe in Auden's dopey statement that "poetry makes nothing happen." I know that literature has changed my ways of feeling and thinking about reality, that it has led me to act, and I can point to the specific poems, stories, and novels that have wrought these changes. Perhaps your notion of "language environment" includes these ideas, but as rendered in your query it seems sterile. I repeat, language is only one objective of the poem.

The Jealous Country: Language Environment And The Poetry of
The Great Plains

Language environment is the form of a poem that surrounds the poet, just as the circumference of the horizon surrounds on the Great Plains. The poet works within the circle of the poem, and the ego or Self is no more or less important than any object in this environment. Within this magic ring of words the distinction between poet and poem dissolves. On the Great Plains, however, the senses are contained within the physical ring of the horizon, and a schism develops between the circle of the world (physical environment) and the circle of the poem (language environment). That these two circles are not concentric gets to the very heart of Great Plains poetry.

When I received the request to respond to "language environment", I initially thought most poets seriously engaged in the craft could accept this concept--at least metaphorically. The poet walking among words tangible as stones. The feet pacing the line of movement, the syntax of direction. The hands grasping and shaping the environment. The breath and heartbeat regulating with the physical demands and difficulties of the land. The eye alive to the contours, textures and colors of images it admits. The ear for balance: both the poet's equilibrium in this environment (stance as the backbone's vertical axis) and the balance of sounds and their relationships that make them cohere as a whole (coherence). The tongue and mouth taking the words into oneself in the most basic sense to savor their elemental properties and eventually gain energy from the digestion of them. The nose sniffing around to act as instinctive judge, no scent being arbitrary. And the mind mapping it all, or losing it, on the way home (end of poem). But then I began to consider how many poets actually express their work in terms of an environment to topographically explore, and how many believe a poem is a vehicle to get from point A (poet) straight to point B (reader).

With a few exceptions, the Great Plains region seems to be inhabited by poets whose work either willfully or unwillfully does not encompass the concept of language environment. (Of

course, it would be obtuse to say that these poets do not possess some sense of the language which considers something beyond the mere message, so to speak.) The analogy has been made repeatedly of the Great Plains poet's style and the lay of the land: flat, bland, stark. "The key to the style of Midwestern writers is a simplicity of focused language. On the American prairie the style often arises out of the land. Often it is level, some would say flat, and unadorned by magnificence; the prairie knows no mountains."¹ Also frequently mentioned in this context is the undercurrent of power looming beneath the simplicity of the place. Following this line then, we see a poet overwhelmed by the vastness of a landscape where he is forced to assume a humble stance. Dwarfed by the great distances, this poet is imposed upon by the unique sense of place. Both idea and archetype remain latent while the physical immediacy of the senses dominate the poem. An article recently appeared in a local newspaper about the South Dakota poet Dennis Sampson: "Midwestern poets prefer to use simple images, like an old man sitting on the porch chewing tobacco, said Sampson. 'They are more modest, have more modest aims. They tend to be good small poets rather than overblown big poets, to write well and clearly.'"² To the degree that the inland presses inward, the poet's senses must press outward to counterbalance. On another continent Conrad's Marlow likewise experiences the heartland: "When you attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality--the reality, I tell you---fades. The inner truth is hidden---luckily, luckily."³ If one at the center of the continent allows himself to be driven to the interior of his being, he (like Kurtz) risks losing his life. Historically on the Great Plains, these inner truths had to be subliminal if one was to survive at all. This tradition survives as well. In the realm of poetry this means that the language environment will be restricted. Another way out, however, might be for the poet to allow himself to be driven to the exterior of the continent, as Edward Dorn suggests in THE STRIPPING OF THE RIVER (an earlier version called THE MIDDLE WEST)⁴:

But the spiritual genius is so apt
To be cloven from this plain of our green heart
And migrate to the neutralized
And individualizing conditions of the coasts
That this center of our true richness
Also goes there to aberrant rest

The poet not working within a language environment uses the poem as a map of the physical environment, as a highly personal means to find his way. The poet who works within a language environment uses the physical environment as a map to the poem. In the latter case the land becomes referential to the poem, which is a made thing that carries its weight in the world of objects. In this context the well-known dictum "No ideas but in things." could be extended: No poems but in places. (Of course, place or space can be large or small, geographic or confined to the top of your desk, but has historically been a prime factor in the conception of America.) Walter Sutton clarifies this object/poem relationship in his chapter on William Carlos Williams: ". . . the primary object was the poem itself, the thing of words which the poet creates or 'invents' in a manner determined by the nature of his perception. His chief commitment, accordingly, is to the reality and integrity of the poetic object rather than to the physical reality of its 'subject' even though this physical reality is important to him both in itself and as a stimulus or inspiration to his work."⁵

This Objectivist position of the early part of the century was carried forward and expanded most notably by Charles Olson's "composition by field" theory and in his major work The Maximus Poems. In the poems an actual physical place (Gloucester) informs the language environment with a quality and precision that is map-like. We don't get as strong a sense of that place as we do an idea of that place, though Olson frequently emphasizes the importance of perception and vision ("polis is/eyes"⁶). Olson's Gloucester is not described as clearly as say Robert Bly's Minnesota of his early work, or, to cite a more recent example, Ted Kooser's Nebraska. What is most real for us in Olson's work is the enactment of language environment: it is in the poems themselves, and not the town via the poems, where the sense of place is most palpable. According to Olson the poetical process occurs when the universe at large (the physical environment) enters the "human universe" (the poet), is synthesized (fr.Gr. syn- a putting together--plus tithenai to place) and projected back as a poem (in the form of a language environment) with no energy loss anywhere along the path of the circuit.⁷ Thus the language environment of a poem is a synthesis of both poet and place (however large or small), and is more than the sum of either of these. In the work of the other poets mentioned as well as Great Plains poetry in general, the conspicuous absence of the complexities and contingencies that characterize a language environment would attempt to be justified by the simplicity of style found in this region, to which I have already referred.

The language environment theory is not only practiced by those influenced by Olson and the Black Mountain School. Another poet whose

work exemplifies this is Gary Snyder. (My purpose is not a thorough overview of any poet's work but merely a discussion of language/environment.) Although the literary and philosophical influences are quite different from Olson's, this West Coast poet also enacts an unique, personal world of the poem rather than trying to describe or "capture" a perceptual environment. At the same time the universal aspects of archetype and mythos are evident in Snyder's poetry. In the introduction to the 1978 edition of Myths & Texts, originally published in 1960, he says: "North America, North Pacific, the Far East are more seen as connected; Chinese, Amerindian, Japanese lore is more translated. The references to gods, peoples, and places sound less exotic, which is right; the Buddha, Seami, the Great Bear are not exotica but part of our whole planetary heritage."⁸ As with Olson's poetry, the sense of place is most immediate in the language environment of the poem rather than a landscape described in the poem. In Snyder's poetry, there is a fragmentation of images from many cultural traditions and mythologies similar to the ideogrammic method initiated into American poetry by Ezra Pound. "There are two things. One is, say, a fragmented text which appears fragmented and which is fragmented and which leads nowhere. Another is ideogrammic method, a fragmented text which appears fragmented but actually leads you somewhere because the relationships that are established between the fragments express a deeper level of connectedness, which becomes clear to the reader's mind if he is able to follow it."⁹ These fragments are the elements that comprise Snyder's language environment, which at their best form an interconnected web that is, unlike T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land, as unified a gestalt as the generative womb of the natural world.

To center once again on the Great Plains, the paucity of language environment poetry in this region may have been partly a result (certainly less profound) of literary influences, styles and schools: the distance from both Black Mountain College to the east and the San Francisco Beat scene to the west, as well as the major cosmopolitan centers of culture. The Iowa Writers Workshop also has had in general the effect of producing a type of poetry that is either adverse or ignorant of the language environment concept, as described here. I tend to think, however, that the matter goes beyond theories of form, prosody or any other poetics. The particular physical environment makes specific demands of anyone, whether or not poesy is important for one's existence. The farther a Great Plains poet goes toward the heart of a language environment, the more vulnerable he or she is to the adversities of the physical environment. The harsh immensity of the heartland requires that the poem map the place instead of the other way around. The inland, where the sense of place is so pervasive, does not allow the poet to work within any circle but that which the

horizon circumscribes. To do so would be tantamount to idolatry. This omnipotent ring of the treeless Great Plains makes the poet its subject, and will not be subject (or subjected) to any poem/object. It is only under the rule of this jealous country may the poet cast his spell, however small in comparison.

Notes

1. Killoren, Robert, editor, Late Harvest: Plains and Prairie Poets, BkMk Press, Kansas City, Mo., 1977, p. 7.
2. Weisbeck, Marguerite, "Poetry is much more than Sampson imagined", the Rapid City Journal, Tuesday, November 13, 1979, p. 17.
3. Conrad, Joseph, Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer, The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1963, p. 103.
4. Dorn, Edward, The Collected Poems, 1956-1974, Four Seasons Foundation, Bolinas, CA., 1975, p. 267.
5. Sutton, Walter, American Free Verse: The Modern Revolution in Poetry, New Directions Books, New York, N.Y., 1973, p. 120.
6. Olson, Charles, Selected Writings, New Directions Books, New York, N.Y., 1966, p. 234.
7. Olson, Charles, ibid, p. 62.
8. Snyder, Gary, Myths & Texts, New Directions Books, New York, N.Y., 1978, p. vii.
9. Faas, Ekbert, editor, Towards A New American Poetics: Essays & Interviews, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Barbara, CA., 1978, p.133-4.

Narration Hanging from the Cusp of the Eighties

The desire for time to speed up, so as to get more quickly to the next peak, fills me with ash but also turns me volcano. I am fixed here. The peak I await is fixed there. Must be some way out of this, Jung thought to include the valley as part of the peaks, let it join us, be our greater sharing, so that the distance, felt as air, is shaped by a kind of extended letter "u," peak-valley-peak, or to put it another way, there is a pinhead staring out my eyes, and he goes down through me, losing me through the ground but continuing until he comes up in you.

I imagine that if you grant his existence, you do not feel that his feet are tangled in your head. You will say: "his head is in my head--his feet are tangled in your head." I feel the same way. The divine man may connect us, may contain our "collective" experience, but since he is reversed in all of us, we do not see eye to eye. Perhaps it is up to me to allow you to have his head in your head and to accept his feet in my own, to let his heels stare from my eyes, offering you the feeling that begins in you and ends in me. Which may have its advantages for me too, for if I have to drag his knees about in my chest and constantly feel his ankles when I swallow, I may also be less compulsive about getting to the next peak. I may even learn a contentment to peak here, in the flat. Since I reach nowhere, how try to erase with my shadow the valley that one might say contains my greater part, chipped pebbles two million years old, before the pinhead, before even the flinthead. Something human in saying to the giant: "I won't hurt you..." Same thing in a peak, in the desire to pinhead up, to ego to a point, especially when, in looking down, I find that I am language-gnarled, porous to the moisture the etymological tendrils induct.

Can these peaks be grasped, as if made of springs, and the sound of the pinhead ego released as they are worked back and forth? This taking hold, this working anything back and forth, penis or Fascist, is excitedly, and sadly, Aurignacian, for strings of river, sentences, are so many tangled paths through the valley, in or outside a cave. The mental thing I do with my body is to seize an adder handful, hold it mockheroically, for a moment, like lightning, then watch it grasshopper off in forty directions at once to reassemble here in a grid that looks suspiciously square, orderful, as if the beginning had increased, like psilocybin sprouting from a Yorkshire cowpie, and the end had been dragged in, as an ape might

grab a child's lollipop through steel. Eating what springs from my turd accordion, I feel a bit more decent about the baldness of my pinhead, his leech-gatherer eyes, the herpes covering his lips. The rotted man, inside animal, is a cactus weathered marrowless but still upright, even though the root connection dried up seasons ago.

The roadscape in the review mirror is a postcard framed by the onrushing though more still sky, under which we seem to be slipping, as if we were being tucked, feet first, at seventy, in the miles per years of Saint Anthony, the first of a Grunewaldian monster the propeller in his white hair. There was a wilderness for him to enter, a story to contain what possibly only occurred in a didactics to control the static, in which wisps of him are left. The scene on the postcard momentarily reassures me: two Racey Helps bunnies have entered the tree theater for a "Case of the Missing Carrot" matinee. Neither animal nor human, they were conceived to defuse the dark of the childhood bedroom, with the consequence that it doesn't matter what we do to animals if we originally related to them as cartoons. As the covers of what is being drawn up reach our chins, we understand that the meaningfulness of framing a space where a bit of misericordia might be created and dallied with will always be truffled with the shrapnel of systems.

The rotted man inside, who used to seem archetypal, is biological and his "language environment" is amniotic and porous to heroin. He is the new wilderness announcement that there no longer is a wilderness which has not been mixed with nonwilderness. As an American, I sense the bit of sandpaper working at our floodgate pimple which, if rubbed open, would let flow million of corpses and they would drift in the anxiety that America must be destroyed, that we are one of the six in the lifeboat and eating half the food.

So I understand the arachnoid texture of the air I breathe. On my corpus callosum I hear the Buddha, a tapeworm wrapped in saffron, stepping in place, murmuring: "I was at the spot in the Persian Gulf yesterday where the water was, for fifteen seconds, the temperature of the sun. After that, it is hard for me to believe in anything you write."

Death alone, they say, gives life its meaning. And it must be true, for each of us exists briefly inside an eternity of nonexistence about which we can know nothing because knowing ends too. There are hundreds of explanations and reprieves, but they belong to life not death. Perhaps our karma follows us, perhaps some aspect of the mind not memory, perhaps the spirit remembers this in a way which explains why it is the spirit, though not to us, not while we are alive. Perhaps life is eternal, and death a mirage, so we live this same life over a billion billion times, each time experiencing different parts of it, like this one, until consciousness is entire and there are no boundaries.

All this may do us good someday, but we are tiny, fragile, hungry, and afraid of the unknown, afraid of not living. We resist the smaller changes; how could we not resist the change of everything we hope and know. The animals teach us that life does not die easily, even if it dies willingly. Or perhaps we do not live easily either, and death is the only resolution. We complicate our lives until they are hopeless. Then we say: at least we will not live forever, so there is no need to straighten all this out. Death allows us our waste, our cruelty, our agony of disappointment in who we are, for it will eventually swallow it, and then all the people who were alive at that time, and then all the people and races on that planet, and then all the graveyards and even the planet itself. So why do we care? Why do we even try to set it right? As bad a mess as we have made of things, or some claim we have, we have also created an order of things, a way of being, and even an honor, in a transitory country in an unknown place. Within life, we have made nations and languages and laws, and though none of these will survive, we have made them as well as they can be made here. We have somehow served that renegade within night who arranged for our brief flash of consciousness, and we have left him with something as final as death for his pains.

"What is life like? the lawman asked the rustler in The Missouri Breaks.

"It's like nothing else I've ever seen."

"Against his will he dieth that hath not learned to die. Learn to die and thou shalt learn to live, for there shall none learn to live that hath not learned to die." Quoted from The Book of the Craft of Dying by the translator of the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Is it the unlived in us that cries out to the creator for its chance to come into the world, even as the unborn, in our imagination of them must cry to be born or else why would they risk so much for so little when in the end they must be worse than unborn, they will be dead?

On the eve of his execution the outlaw sings: "I wouldn't mind the dying, but laying in the grave so long, poor boy. I've been all around this world." And that about sums it up, misnomer that it is.

We come into being in a way we cannot really account for. Memory does not follow us back to the first words and then before, until the precipice. Language is more complicated than that right from the beginning. By the time we know anything, it too goes back to the beginning. We forget not knowing. It makes itself immortal. Experiments in hypnotism that disclose a prior life when the subject is asked to go back before his birth, the housewife who remembered as herself Bridey Murphy in another country and century, prove something totally different, something we already suspect. Life is shaped from within as Einstein shaped the universe, a flux of energies creating their own boundaries outside of which nothing can exist. Come to any point on the wall and it will very articulately throw you back to a space inside that wall, whether in the language of your own breathing, the precise equations of physics, or the dialects of some ancient people. Push English to the limits of consciousness, and Old English will replace it, or French, or German; it could even be Tibetan or Apache. But it will keep on talking about the formation of all these things from within, even as a language comes from within, and from within earlier languages, and then protean speech itself.

We cannot exist outside life. We go back to the beginning, and language has already made us. We imagine those who lived before us; we even read their writings. But that does not carry us back to a time before we were; it merely deepens our sense of who we have become in being. Charles Olson proved that. As intimately as he brought his Phoenicians and Minoans and Old Algonquins into being, they did not make us alive back then, they gave space and shape to how we are alive now. Others may have made metaphors and lessons of them; he said -- they are precisely anterior; their artifacts require us as the protoplasm in the jellyfish describes consciousness by preceding it.

Not only can we not get outside, we cannot even touch the outside from the inside. It is a space that continues to emerge from its own

properties only.

We cannot go beyond thought even though we precede thought in every way.

We are new discrete beings, but the mechanism of our becoming flesh is a chain going back to the beginning of living matter, and before that, to the beginning of the universe. Apparently we know nothing of this, not even in dreams or archetypes; we simply are it.

Matter is a chain which enfolds itself again and again, turning inside-out at unexpected moments--moments which, to our hindsight, require transformation--deriving from its own interstices shapes that did not seem to be there before. How else molecules from atoms? How else living tissue from mineral waters stretching unto eternity? How else living tissue free itself from the waters of its genesis and contain them within its new materiality? By what other wizardry could eggs be fashioned from frogs and turtles, and feathers and blood from their own undisclosed shape, and mind itself from the mammal beast of forest? How else but as forest too crept from the slime atop oceans, and oceans formed in the cavities of rock, and wind issued from gravity, and gravity from space itself? We are frogs. It is the same for suns and galaxies as it is for eggs and buds and germs. A current proceeds, connected only to the beginning of itself, dependent on what it is to become what it is not. Somewhere in the chain of life, which goes on beyond us to the end of time, we come into being. We grow to consciousness as life grew once from matter, and the many cells grow and differentiate from single sperm and egg. Nothing can make us any less discrete or unique, but nothing can bring us into being without the universe having to compile the material necessary from its own beginning in something else.

When we die, all this will change. The blue vellum of the sky, the green parchment of the fields will be peeled away. The night of stars and galaxies, though it is as undiminished and hollow as death, will be peeled away also.

Death does not allow an easy way out. We may think: this is the nature of things. I did not ask to be born, and yet I am here. I do not ask to die, but that is the destiny of all living things. We can offer ourselves to death by our reason, but we contain far too much energy to make peace with death. All those eggs within eggs and languages within languages are no pretension. All the memories and memoryless tissue formed within us are the lattice of meaning. From

a distance they may crumble in the grace of old age or yield to some other death agony, but they are not quenched.

Shore up the fort as we may, at odd times we must know it--we are a hurricane of light and nerves and space. Water rushes through us, more than the whole ocean, more than the oceanic mass of planets; it surges within us, deafening, dizzying, so ripe with meaning that meaning itself vanishes. There are terrible storms in the universe, light years long, light years thick. There are equally violent storms inside of the universe. We are those, in the center of it, each one of us, in our own center. Such a storm cannot be snuffed out by the end of life as simply as an ant is crushed and forgotten. Those in the storm must swallow it in and take it to eternity, with them if they go on and to eternity anyway if life is the end of life itself.

After all, none of these kingdoms could exist without us, not as they do now. Death likewise.

It is only our purpose that is at odds with death. All this has another purpose too. Death demands that, and does not allow us to rest or settle anywhere because creation born of itself must be always the voice of darkness.

LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT

A well-known American poet recently took a friend of mine aside, asking him, "Who is this Metcalf? What sort of things does he write?" My friend got out some of the books, the poet riffled through them. "Oh, yes," he said, "I know this sort. You want to be careful of him - he's just a vocabulary poet."

I know what the poet means by the term (although I would quarrel with his application of it): the weaving of spells with words, the clash that occurs, or the chemical reaction, with novel verbal juxtapositions. Words that otherwise are without substance, that stand for nothing but their own interaction.

"Language environment." It is a question, it seems to me - to use a metaphor I enjoy - of the relative positioning of cart and horse. You got this load of stuff - at least, we presume you do - that you want to move from here to there: the creative act, if you will. So you get this cart, and put all the stuff in it. Then you get a horse, see, 'cause the cart ain't gonna move by itself. Now, just at this point, the question of language environment enters. (If it arrives earlier, then you're merely a "vocabulary poet.") Where do you put the horse, so best to move the cart? And do you have the right harness? And how and for what reasons does the whole process and phenomenon become beautiful? How and why do we come to enjoy that function of energy and motion, horses legs to harness to cart wheels? There are questions of sources: horse's breeding, and design of cart, size of cart wheels relative to load conveyed, etc. And there is the warm feeling, as you sit there holding the reins, of a worthwhile, in fact imperative mission, in process of functional and graceful accomplishment.

A writer may be remiss on one of two scores. Either he has little to convey - the cart is essentially empty - in which case he may dazzle us with "language environment", but little else will happen; or there may be a substantial burden, but the horse is a hack, the cart broken down, the nag trying to push it with his head, and the collection barely staggers forward. (If our author is remiss on both counts, he is probably enrolled in a Creative Writing Class).

Where the poet is a creature of substance; where he is able to place that substance in motion through dynamics he brings to bear on it (the horse!); and where he takes the trouble, by whatever method matters not a damn, to learn his craft (the practised or instinctive eye that breeds the horse, designs the cart, selects the harness) - then we have poetry, Olson is probably right when he says that we live

in a time which is very easy itself. But with all the plethora of "easy poetry", the above combination of circumstances seems to arrive with difficulty.

One personal note. In my own work, the horse, harness and cart are as apt to be begged, borrowed or stolen, as my own. Why not? If I can steal somebody else's rig, more powerful and beautiful than my own, why not do so? One caution, however: what substance there be - the burden I place in that cart - that is my own.

WHAT IS BEING LANGUAGE-CENTERED?

Sure I'm interested in a "language environment," but then what poet isn't? Had the question been raised, say, in the thirteenth century, it might have been phrased in terms of the efficacy of using the vulgate; had it been raised in the seventeenth century, it probably would have concerned rhetoric. The question of the writer's domain is an old one--about as old as Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history in terms of their relative degrees of truth value. I think that what has happened during the past twenty years, however, has been a shift in attention from the idea of language as diction to a conception of language as system--as that which allows for and prohibits certain kinds of operations. And at the same time, poets have found it necessary to expose what might be called the fetish quality of language as a sign-producing system by foregrounding its linguistic operations.

Why was this change necessary? Perhaps it was because, in the pursuit of a more authentic representation (image, objective correlative, etc.) we stopped experiencing the pure materiality of poetry--the sounds, movements, anticipations, spaces and humor that a poetry entirely at the service of the image forgets. When language is evoked in order to erase itself before the blandishments of experience, both language and experience suffer--the former because it is supposed to become transparent, the latter because it is supposed to stand still. What is left out of such a formulation (and it is the reigning aesthetic of the great "Middle Border" poem, stretching from Iowa to Fresno) is the experience of language itself, complex, impure, volatile, difficult, indeterminate, funny.

Now any discussion of "language itself" is bound to come under attack from semanticists, linguists and social theorists, and rightly so; language is irrevocably tied to the world--it may very well be what we call the world--and part of our need to re and de-contextualize is to interrogate this interrelationship. "Words are what sticks to the real," Jack Spicer says; they don't picture it. They are inscribed in it and serve to mediate what we like to think has a kind of theological distinctness. The means of production are always in the hands of those for whom it is profitable to maintain a separate reality, and whether it is God or The National Will or General Motors, the Logos is not supposed to dirty its hands while fraternizing with

its overworked scriveners.

The "language environment" that most interests me is the one that, by a series of inversionary strategies and interruptions, exposes those forms of mediation by which poetry is cut off from experience. By allowing the full implications of any given constellation of events to suggest themselves, by making room for breakages, distractions, slips of tongue and typewriter, felt equivalences (yes, this includes rhyme, metrical regularity, alliteration, etc.) and discontinuities, the writer performs an essential step on the way to a truly engaged poetry. But to do this with the full consciousness of the linguistic activities at work means that no expressive act can occur without some form of feedback--what used to be called "ear" and what is elsewhere confused as "craft." This feedback is the continual testing of language for its intensity and interest at any given moment. No longer do we need to speak in terms of an "appropriate" image which summons forth submerged feelings. We need, instead, to speak of the conditions which make certain language situations possible. If those situations tend to produce images, to what extent are those images the product of a particular context of associations, whether socially or linguistically generated. And equally, if those situations seem fraught with problems of location (prepositional phrases, pronominal shifting, heavily subordinated syntax), what are the conditions that make such operations necessary in a given piece of writing. In other words, we have to pay attention to what is going on.

Finally, a question: "what is being language-centered"? The question is intentionally confusing to indicate the difficulty of locating the center. Does the question ask what kinds of things are being subjected to a poetry of linguistic operationalism or does it ask what does it mean to be "language centered"? The first is analytic; the second is existential. Both parts indicate what is at stake: an attitude toward language as material fact and at the same time a problem of the being that exists self-consciously in language. A useful answer would respond to both parts of course, but an adequate answer to the question as phrased can't be given. The problem with a polemic surrounding "language centered" poetry is that, in the interests of de-centering a certain privileged referential paradigm, it reinstitutes another center and this exposes the basic idealism which haunts it--idealism because it proceeds on the assumption that the world is how you write it. The most interesting work in this mode remains happily in the interstices of questions like the above, feeling that the quality of indecision at least illustrates the problem. I think we have to be wary of losing our sense of humor in the midst of our need to take on the "analytic-referential-episteme"

(to use the kind of cant which so easily comes to the surface of any discourse on the subject). If we can't do something as interesting as "They Flee from Me" or Tale of a Tub or Tender Buttons, we might consider how useful yet another manifesto on the "Imperialism of the Signified" (or "The Defiles of the Signifier") might be. I mention this at the end of something that threatens to be exactly what it warns against only to indicate that, as Caesar said, "High events as these / Strike those that make them" and to suggest how easily a "language environment" becomes a roller rink or race track or other similar circular structure.

An environment is any space we inhabit. Its dimensions are defined by what can be seen or imagined as limit from where we stand. Presumably, the longer we remain in a space, the more we come to know about it. And if there long enough, it may be considered a home. There can be a number of spaces and perhaps as large a number of homes. Language is the total possible space; it contains all the homes. Contrary to the French poet Francis Ponge, language--and not "the silent world"--is our only homeland. Nevertheless, we live in only a few homes if that many and our habitation in any one of them excludes us from all others at that moment. Language, through metaphor process and its ends, image and vision, allows us knowledge of the total possible space, the total possible universe. Without it, we would be condemned to unalterable aloneness and to silence. We would be forced to deny our nature as interiors who call out through an exterior to other interiors. There would be no presence, only silent space. There would be no chance for any response. But: we must be its conscious, active users; we must be its avid researchers. And we must be prepared to combat those who would attempt to enforce any single usage, any single as official vision.

Enough and few enough words from how many: To be democratic enough (involved and concerned with others, and yourself too, i.e.) none might speak more than two fractions of a syllable? There's enough language around (me) so listening gets harder and harder and then impossible, quite a barrier to being adequate. Yet it flows on like a river of nice clean air. Does it? Never mind pushing terrific questions over much - its ok to have them, a lot more than nothing to kick about. A warm bath is settling. Forces less and less to happen. Thanks for ears, eyes, touch and tongues, flights of pages. There's considerable heard clearly on (National Public) Radio too...

Really mysterious days and nights,

"The earth may glide diaphanous to death
But ...

...
Distinctly praise the years, whose volatile
Blamed bleeding hands extend and
thresh the height

The imagination spins beyond
despair,
Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer." -Hart Crane

"The spring will come and flowers will bloom
and man must chatter of his doom." -W.C. Williams

"...ruin for myself
and all that I hold dear, ...see
also

...
...the power
to free myself
and speak of it..." -W.C. Williams

maybe
words and things among us go
together enough
wherever your end is

dans la nuit

voices
nothing
life
death

suddenly too
much meaning

how ineffective an ad

thank goodness
it's some waste
it's business

Yeats gathered mummy wheat in the mad abstract dark.
Williams said "There's no dancing save in the head's dark."
Steven's grief was that his mother should feed on him - wickedly
in her dead light - himself, and what he saw.
Mute at the dark beginning who was Word. Who is mothered.
Essence cedes
and the Encyclopaedists - great, the Great, and GREAT
discover A.D. in a Land of Pages. Lodged in the ebbing actual
women in the flight of time stand framed.
Usurption unleashed in these surroundings.
In these meanderings laughter are marking at a bound run.
Out of blanks and dead spots (despots) in history
sprawling abyss of naked kings, mute and ignorant of their own won
meaning. Pascal said somewhere ~~hmmmmmmmmmm~~
my location -
writing -
(quest for the absolute, metaphor of the seive, 'You shiver Carcass-'
immanent Cause -)
Forbears and heirs stretch out their arms to me. Saints
with two-edged swords in their mouths.

(Enter PROSPERO in his magic robes.)
(Waves.)

I carry a baby in my head all leaps in the dark.

(Dare.)

My poems are in danger. My children are in danger. a RIDDLE
is a mis-leading. a CRY is not a description.
Deprive things of their names -

POETA ae L.(m.) poet. Hence POESY v.intr, to speak
or write poetically - Keats.

Serial work spealed to me first. Then I digested it a wrote a
book. Bread crumbs dropped by Hansel marked his way backward -
home. And words are food. (letter, letter-shape, sound, sign,
space, picture, silent, spoken = words) They trace a circuituous
path - weave a wake - behind a writer whose Name was - and will be
never dreamed. And crucial words outside the book, those words are
bullets.

Do those dots mean that a speaker lapsed into silence.
Pascal said somewhere -

FINE DEEDS

"- light spoils everything, for the finest thing about them
was the attempt to keep them secret."

Away from the campfire things fall off.

if I could see my foe
if I could see my foe

"I will not cease from Mental Flight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:"

(BLAKE
from MILTON a poem in 2 Books.)

names creeping out everywhere
names creeping out everywhere

(Enter LEAR
fantastically dressed with wildflowers.)

Ancestors sleep in our souls
their heads are covered with honey and gold.
Anointed we drink their warm oaths
- Vigor, Austerity, Cunning.
Behind them, the totems
Behind totems, animals.

Enchantment

the animals speak
whose spirit lives in exile in these poems whose invisible support
they are
their lost meaning
their wild cries

Gerrit Lansing

LANGUAGE AND BIOHOLOGRAM

Thank you the difficulties
are genuine in the easy sliding time,
time of the Spectacle.

locating in time is always the first step:
the first error is separating "environment" from its
going-on-in: "The very act of
"and the intention behind
"observing
"disturbs the observed."*

supraliminal language-field is body-field is feeling
electromagnetic and food:

body and psyche two-and/but-one,
wavicle.

Schrödinger's cat is out of its box
lying in wait for the mouse in the cellar :
what is unbeknownst to us is somewhere beknownst :
Swedenborg stoops to stroke Schrödinger's cat.

so I am always finding in feeling
locating in changing
the terms that compose me,
the rhetorical cinnabar lode

whose clavicle 's wavicle 's key .

* Lawrence M. Beynam, "Quantum Physics and Paranormal Events" in
Future Science, edited by John White and Stanley Krippner, New York, 1978

Thank you for your invitation to contribute to The Difficulties. I have looked at a map and I know where Cortland is now. When Charles Olson said there (I am quoting you and thus I assume him, although you misspelled my name) "You know, we live in a time which is very easy itself. That's been increasingly conspicuous for the last ten years..." he spoke perhaps too easily as an American writer, but as a veteran American writer offering a warning to those he saw following. His life had been far more various than theirs--he knew more of the world than they, and knew that such knowledge has little to do with mere travel initiated by foundations and allied sponsors of readings and writings. He knew this too: life can not be read only; past life can be read only; to read only, above all to read the present only, is to be read empty. Only a handful of presentday American writers have worked more than a year or two, if that, outside academe or some related superstructure. When they have allowed themselves to be drafted into the armed services, that has too often satisfied their lifetime quota of experience. Where then can they find sustenance? In memories of childhood and adolescence, sexual daydreams, intradepartmental affairs, long-distance telephone calls, verbal flirtations, polite applause, favorable reviews traded? The blood thins, the words entangle, the magazine defuses. The truth that the environment of language is life itself has been all but forgotten. Perhaps some writers of the 80's will find themselves among the workers again, with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Melville, Hawthorne, Clemens, Wallace, Williams. If that's not possible, there will stand alternatives such as chosen by Emily Dickinson and Henry David Thoreau, who also found this world wondrous and fell in love with it.

Criteria for of the Difficulties

Boy, are we poets. Will we show 'em...no, I'll show 'em. My work will out-smart, out-original, out-nervousness, out-sensitive, out-politic, out-theoretical, out-concern, out-real, out-technique, out-real, out-punch everybody else.

Primitives and erudites of the past can't corroborate my position. This is a different thing, a different meaning. The scholar will only defeat us if we allow him ascendancy. Old poets must be their own proof. My work equally independent at the moment, not proven by a continuum. I know myself by my gestures, thoughts and acts, my own.

Poetry does not begin with Ashberry or Ginsberg or Mallarme or Baudelaire or Blake or Shakespeare; it is a continuum. I am the total of my precursors. No assumption is sufficient to hold me. I revel in the extra complex. No reification (Ipso facto language does not reify experience.).

The glowering poets glower at their impotence and rage at each other, because there is nothing at stake. (Literally, but literal is out of bounds.) When the rewards are personal, the worries will be personal. The question of person is implicit. There is no room for poets to be successful. There is no question of success.

I walk into a room. All the important poets in NY are there. America's important poets are at the White House. Which is what they must mean by there being only one poet. In Petronius characters carry pockets full of small stones, pebbles to throw at the poets. I throw out my books and turn philosopher. I quit my job to become a socialist.

Every subject is rendered ridiculous by poets--friendship by Whitman, reason by Donne, imagination by Coleridge, technique (or is it posture) by contemporaries. But poet's behavior seems strange only by standards of rationality and the return of poetry's attention to philosophy will also, because of the intensity with which poets will pursue that return in the name of language. Or the return to activism in the name of righteousness.

I think of poets as players, dancers even, vibrating strings who respond to the call of all of the languages within the world ... of mountain ranges, wagon wheels, itinerant fiddlers ... even as such a call, truly heard, takes us through the world, beyond the world, into the timeless realms of eternal art and myth.

The Kabbala insists on both the spirit and the letter of the law; modern physics on both energy and structure. Language clusters? Energy Structures. Creeley once heard the inner penetrations, the radical reversals, the life-giving and life-sustaining ambiguities. And now we must flesh it all out again. Not 'language' then, that dry abstraction, but 'speech', in all of its districts, dialects, street corner colours. Being/Alive. Opening always to this, and this, and this ... Right there on the beat.

THE DIFFICULTIES (A Meditation In Sentences)

His tongue is moving in his head as he speaks embracing space.

One leaves.
Another enters.

Gradually it becomes apparent that a window is a deletion.

A room is a word.
A house is a sentence.
A man is a verb.

The city of language.

Texticles.

Bird.

Gate

The world is contained and expanding. It won't go away.

The persistence of memory. Story.

Decay.

Shit.

Larvae.

Sexed.

The active consideration of possibilities undetermined by previous thought.

Working to work in the gaps.

Why not write a couplet in 3 lines, Doug?

Why not?

Why not. Doug.

Heroics.

Sentences are emotional?

No, they are not.

Joke. What's heavier? 100 pounds of words or
100 pounds of feathers.

His grandmother pronounces the word 'poetry'
like the word 'poultry'.

She lives in a simple structure.

Are paragraphs emotional?

Yes.

Circumstances.

Environment.

A part.

Skirts to enter.

Content meant.

Driving around the city to think.

A rigorous symmetry enveloping figures of
speech.

Come what may.

I don't know what to think.

It follows that.

I think that a "language environment" can only be a meaningful concept to me if "language" is taken in its Saussurian, linguistic sense of a "langue," a sort of landscape of the work and/or the life, and in which the individual aspects of the work or of the life then constitute the individual "words" or "paroles."

After all, I read with my ear; I read the sounds and the shapes of the text, idea, song or smell-- and, in response, I make love with my tongue.

Poetry should be experience, not profession or speciality. Anything else is too fragmented,-- good for the tenured sissies in English Departments to write papers about, good for the pro's and the pudgies, but goddawful for anyone who wants to bring a whole life and experience along to witness an art process of any kind.

And this is not some simple, technical synesthesia. It is rather what the active consciousness does anyway. The mind is a muscle and it needs flexing if it is to function properly,-- on a diet of any one thing it develops nutritional deficiencies. As a creative artist my mind is not on myself but on its experience and in sharing this whole experience with any witness to my work. I assume witnesses, not mere readers or listeners. Only in this way can my eyes be used by any witness. Only then can he or she hear with my ears.

Empire of Ears segment:

1.

A tusk in every pot, no matter how tiny the pot
bandoliers of ears, a fungus of ears on every fallen trunk
& the wet pulsing vault sunk in deepening blue
what's eloquent here heaves here
with ludicrous hydraulic intent
in the midst of overwhelming echo & resound
flash-eyed avenues clamor away anyway
this work another only ardor of evening
stained & winking with pained
& hilarious deadbeat dry chronicles of
raucous vernacular melodrama, of many races
quite by accident we find ourselves, our tongues
taming time's panic, here, in jungle sonic city

2.

Memory being base of these designs
& elephant poets reigning eccentrics
in an empire of ears. There are people
in this empire who will tell you
there are laws. They lie.
The eccentricities of empire being
another old story, the gleam
& pant of design being
ever the tether
that comes later, bland & pervasive.

3.

When the ear is empty the eye squints
thru smoky clouds. The vault of ear
shrinks & clings. Wet hacker, the phlegm
of storm. When the ear is empty, limbs
mime the nonsense smoke of sink or swim.
Smile. The ear is empty. How candid, how
filmy & obscure. Scare your mouth apart.
Never having known birds, radio, or sounds
of engine; never having known
pitches, of sale, of diamond & opera.
Who did you say rules your empire?

4.

Let's to the dining room table now & then
spread the maps of empire where we can see them
spread our palms upon them & lean our weight there
staring down the basin lobes & veined drums of it

being thirty, big cities are an only alternative
another might be never to have arrived here
their trumpeting ways & blanketing ears
I knew what I was getting into, you knew too

remembering elephants gracefully toting
gifted faggots of tongue down Wolf Creek Pass;
their remembering tusks inner ears of heartland where
hard bearings of word light the engulfing night;
their remembering trunks of bath waterspouts of
stormy word & sunk tanker phrase & dead
fish belly-up sentence & interrogation.

5.

I knew what I was getting into.
Walking headaches of Zukofsky & Oppen.
Migraine creep of Duncan & Spicer.
Tincan banana pump of this one,
civilized stroll & drollery of that other,
& there, at the end of the bar,
the Alexander Pope of coke.
& you knew too.

in whose kitbags how many gifted confusions
here, in the empire of ears . . .

cleats & extraordinarily broad shoulders
short pants & extraordinarily tall American men
padded gloves big as lampshades, as
clouds out a window

crack shouters & dead-eye boomers
here, in the empire of ears . . .

physical specimens toting those gifted faggots
the crack shouters cleating hard sell shellgame narcotique
here, where the kitbags are piled in perfect pyramids of

green mineral meatloaf & gum

little cats' clawed balls of word pushed in a rush
to unravel at the big square feet of the elephant poets
who've come here to end
here, in the empire of ears . . .

6.

Lean back in your chair till the top of your head
touches the large window & your eyes
stretch upward thru the glass to clear sky
remember that green is the color of stretch

Soon enough sun utterly unhinges sight
the unheard solar blaze, come unto or be damned
oh the lessons of the sun! how no mortal eye
can bear what births the color of stretch

Sunk in deepening blue at an awkward tilt
still, there is a balance we may indeed be empty
yet that light bequeathes our balance & lends
charm to these our odd angles so simply achieved

We know our rulers by their speech.
Our sun blazes & unhinges & we are green.
Caught, we cock & squint. Mourning.
Catfish tobacco tongue. Green is our color.

7.

oh, the slowness to come of them
the remembering elephants
their monumental brows & trumpeting ways
they come slowly & end as suddenly

their trumpeting ways & blanketing ears
here, in an empire of ears where
the elephant poets come

come

come to

come to die, here

in an empire of ears.

*

Rosmarie Waldrop

"The Tongue Around The Mouth"

For Claude Royet-Journoud

Would that my mother
tongue

space by inflections
degrees of warning, weathering

revelation: the body disappears
along with its dialect
I should be grateful
that it occurred
and seemed breathless toward conversation

now to repeat my theory:
what use
the categories of attribute and head

block
egg
knuckle
copper

not the same
not for us who want
a silent slate or
to compose in voltage

baffling stems
short breath
syllables

she, the bogus mother,
hefts her soul
(parochial species, native skin)

at any rate: the law of pattern
the local customs
the variations of

larynx through excesses of grammatical finesse
between the movements of the

never
never on my own I roll
the phonemes in my mouth
twice
to make sure

from HABITUDINEM

the voice behind
or to the side

angel

circumincessio

tho shopkeeper
speak profani
ty

Christus
Beata virgo Maria
beata Virgo
mater Dei

ad rem scitam

One who looks
looks because
light from sight
sights the light

sight the light
from above

--given sicut et aliis beatiss,
and secundum intelligentiae
rationem by participation, i.e.,
that which is theirs by participabilium,
ut res must be theirs simpliciter,
and not secundum quid as ut
usus is

If topology were the place the word came from,

nouns would stand horizontal, verbs stiff and vertical in vertically
falling reason.

The confidence of the work, its competence, is then, its having been
there.

Every word is our word, each pollution.
The plethora of gesture, not even understood as such, pollutes. Theorized
writing clears, non-programmatically, the controllable soft air, the air
of durable words.

A more disturbable appearance is apparent if the time of the place
changes underneath the word, arguing without proof that its feet've
moved.

Have this language for which to in; there is no thing other with which to
decorate it, no other reply. "Echo is the nominal origin of echo (verbal),"
this being something we say only much later, 'later' defined as a little
prior to our definition of this latter word.

The work exists to end in a world.
This demands de-pollutive character of all work, which must gratify the
necessity, justify position, in the garbage state of language.

The world is simply this plenitude. The language is simply that plenitude.

The notion that words come out of the mouth is counterproductive. It
makes people do it.
Language gets all thrown into the world; instead, of being made (to be)
or there.

Language bores the words.
Either these two weights are waited for or then lost.
Language bores the world.

Fortunately the hand is slow and can be further stilled.

A radial attentiveness can shut up the world.

I.e. i.e.

"The Difficulties"

well there was the end of the table
really it was a line
but eye saw it as horizontal because
& it was exactly level
not above it
eye to one side
& parallel to the floor so
anybody thinking slightly abstractly
but eye could see that
so you'd say, thinking horizontal
it cut across the lines of the radiator
& it did

it did cut
from where eye was sitting, lines
not across all the well, you know
one of those big ol' with sections
iron or whatever radiators, anyway lines
but across about half of the "what" eye saw
& that's, you say, what

well big deal, yeah, except
every day...accustomed...open room
eye into...around, moving...sure
because...not to move around...

no, not just "remember to set"
also to the facts, that eye
to face decisions, to evolve
made these, these facts
revolve around the line
so eye could understand a straight line
a bent & going there

so anyway accustomed to where eye saw the table
& 20 ft. from knowing what to do &
never a hint, sometimes not
& wanting, wanting but
sometimes it could be anything a
cornice a bamboo curtain a
wall -- in this case a bookcase a
table to cue off
a "wait"

but a mistake

but then there was a mistake exactly
not a short cut
but a short, yes, circuit
or a short day, because eye
you see, having moved...
moving, having already moved around...
having in fact finished with nothing
& being presented with "...Difficulties..."
nothing but "The"

wait for it

there's nothing to do for it
nothing 'any media'
despite 'difficulties'
despite 'jump the way you're gonna'
there's no 'way'
'getitonthe page,' no dancing please
it's just not dancing
it's not language either but...
it's you, eye'd say it's you
think about it, you
you do it, yeah, you, but...
talk about 'impossible' (6)
ok calm down

so know it
we all impossible
& that's that, or it
or it's it, anyway &
we know that, so
we can relax...&
we do
we relax this line

Are Babies Afraid Of Short Sounds?

Are babies afraid of short sounds ? First principle : if sounds are short enough, they slip right through the screen of our attentions, they pass straight through the screen of our attention, whatever that is. They seem to exist only in memory.

en admettant que nous en ayons un. Ils semblent n'exister que dans notre mémoire.

This is one of the main problems -- if not the only problem -- in learning to play the piano. Some people never learn to synchronize their attentions with their actions. Il y a des gens qui n'arrivent jamais à synchroniser leur attention -- même approximativement -- avec leurs actions.

It is impossible for them to hear the sounds they are making. People who play the piano well have made a fundamental sacrifice ; that is why they are invariably suspicious and innocent seeming at once. So, what seems to be a problem of loud sounds is really a problem of loud, short sounds.

Ils sont incapables d'entendre les sons qu'ils produisent. Les gens qui jouent bien du piano ont fait un sacrifice au départ ; c'est pourquoi invariablement ils ont l'air à la fois susceptible et innocents. Ainsi, ce qui semble être un problème de sons forts, est en fait un problème de sons forts et brefs.

Or simply, short sounds. We know that the human psyche is disturbed by loud sounds, especially if they are sustained. If only we knew the boundary between a quick succession of short-loud sounds and a "sustained" sound,

[illegible]

la limite entre une succession rapide de sons forts et brefs et un son "prolongé", we would know something. If, for instance, a series of short sounds nous saurions déjà quelque chose. Si, par exemple, une série de sons brefs is not ordered enough in time (regular enough), those short sounds, ne se succèdent pas dans un certain ordre (assez régulièrement), ces sons brefs too, slip past, however loud. Their identity is as blurred as the memory échappent également à notre attention, quelle que soit leur intensité. Leur of the car crash. If one could analyze the sound of the car crash identité est aussi confuse que le souvenir d'une collision de voitures. Si l'on and superpose the collective elements -- having taken as the criterion pouvait décomposer le son de la collision et en superposer les différents of the analysis that no element should be longer than the total (natural) éléments -- ayant fixé la durée de chacun de ces éléments à la durée totale duration of a gunshot -- would the result sound like a gunshot ? (naturelle) d'un coup de fusil -- est-ce que le son ainsi obtenu ressemblerait If one could analyze the car crash and rearrange the separate elements à un coup de fusil ? Si l'on pouvait décomposer le son de la collision et in time (e.g., first before the last, etc.), would the result still sound réarranger l'ordre des différents éléments (le premier avant le dernier, etc.), like a car crash ? Could one not 1) synthesize n number of short sounds and est-ce que le son obtenu ressemblerait toujours à une collision ? Ne pourrait-on 2) by o number of orderings in time create no number of new "sounds" pas 1) synthétiser un nombre n de sons brefs et 2) par un nombre s de successions différentes créer un nombre ns de "sons" nouveaux (identités) dans la Would this new inventory be beneficial to humankind in any way ? catégorie "collision" ou "coup de fusil" ? Est-ce que ce nouvel inventaire Is the instinctive fear of loud sounds in babies a fear of intensity pourrait être d'un intérêt quelconque pour l'humanité ? Est-ce que la peur or a fear of the situation that produces loud sounds ? instinctive des sons forts chez les bébés est due à l'intensité du son ou à

(If I read Velikovsky correctly, our understanding of the physical (cosmic) la situation qui a produit le son ? (Si j'ai bien lu Velikovsky, notre compréhension world is confused by the fear of (repressed racial memory of) catastrophic nension du monde physique (cosmique) est troublée par la peur (souvenir racial events that we "remember" -- specifically, in the example of "Worlds in Collision", refoulé) d'événements catastrophiques dont nous nous "souvenons" -- notamment, the memory of the deadly catastrophes of only 3500 and 2700 years ago -- dans l'exemple de "Worlds in Collision", le souvenir de catastrophes mortelles a few generations.) How shall we approach this fear, if not through an d'il y a quelques 3500 ou 2700 années -- quelques générations.) Comment aborder understanding of (control of ourselves in the experience with) the physical cette peur, sinon par la compréhension (contrôle de soi pendant l'expérience facts that cause the fear to manifest itself ? This is not to suggest that vécue) des faits physiques qui la déclenchent ? Je ne prétends pas que a new inventory of new synthesized, "loud sounds" would be in any way ce nouvel inventaire de "sons forts" synthétisés pourrait être thérapeutique, therapeutic, but that if the instinctive fear of loud sounds in babies mais que, si la peur instinctive des sons forts chez les bébés (et en supposant (and assuming that we do not "outgrow" this instinct) is irrational (not an que cet instinct ne nous passera pas "avec l'âge") est irrationnelle (et non accessible, protective mechanism), then why not have the new inventory ? pas un mécanisme de défense parfaitement abordable), alors pourquoi ne pas The ear closes, briefly, to protect itself from a short, loud sound. se procurer ce nouvel inventaire ? L'oreille se ferme, momentanément, pour se I believe, as I believe that thoughts are recorded on magnetic tape (along protéger d'un son fort et bref. Je crois, de même que je crois que les pensées with, but heretofore unrecognized, whatever else we have recorded on the sont enregistrées sur bande magnétique (quoiqu'ignorées jusqu'ici, elles y tape --e.g., "sounds"), that "it" closes briefly at a short sound of any sont enregistrées avec le reste -- comme, par exemple, les "sons"), que "cela" intensity, but that the apparent, physical ("ear") mechanism, to be protective,

se ferme momentanément aux sons brefs, quelle que soit leur intensité, mais has distinguished between loud and "not-loud", and that beyond that mechanism, que le mécanisme physique ("l'oreille") apparent, pour se défendre, a fait la we shall discover the more comprehensive protective response -- memory distinction entre les sons forts et "pas forts", et qu'au-delà de ce mécanisme, analysis. That is, nothing is understood (analyzed) in real-time. Nothing nous allons découvrir une réaction de défense plus générale, -- analyse des has meaning in real-time. This, then, explains (finally) our fascination souvenirs. En d'autres termes, rien n'est compris (analysé) en temps réel. with and devotion to the past. Rien n'a de signification en temps réel. Ce qui explique (finalement) la fascination et la dévotion que suscite en nous le passé.

Loose Alphabet (an excerpt)

Received

- Avis, Michael Gizzi (Burning Deck, 71 Elmgrove, Providence, R.I. 02906)
- Nox, Ron Silliman (Burning Deck)
- The Garden of Effort, Keith Waldrop (Burning Deck)
- Monkey Opera, Ralph La Charity (Bench Press, San Francisco)
- untitled collage propaganda tract (Maw Maw, Brady Lake, Ohio)
- The Road is Everywhere Or Stop This Body (Open Places, Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri)
- The Netzahualcoyotl News, Vol.1, No.1., Turtle Island
- Part Songs, James Sherry (Roof Books, 300 Bowery, NYC 10012)
- Sun and Moon #8, ed. Messerli and Fox (4330 Hartwick Rd., College Park, Maryland 20740)
- Dinner on the Lawn, Douglas Messerli (Sun and Moon)
- Strumpet Pumper & Co's Country, Gary David (One Nightstand Press, 411½ Columbus St., Rapid City, S.D. 57701)

"The Difficulties #2" will be a general issue and include poetry, prose, artwork, reviews and theoretical texts.

Relevant manuscripts are welcome. Address all mail to Beckett/Neikirk.

Issue #3 will focus on the work of an individual. More information will be forthcoming.

Tom Beckett's 3 for John Cage is available for .75¢.

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