FRICTION

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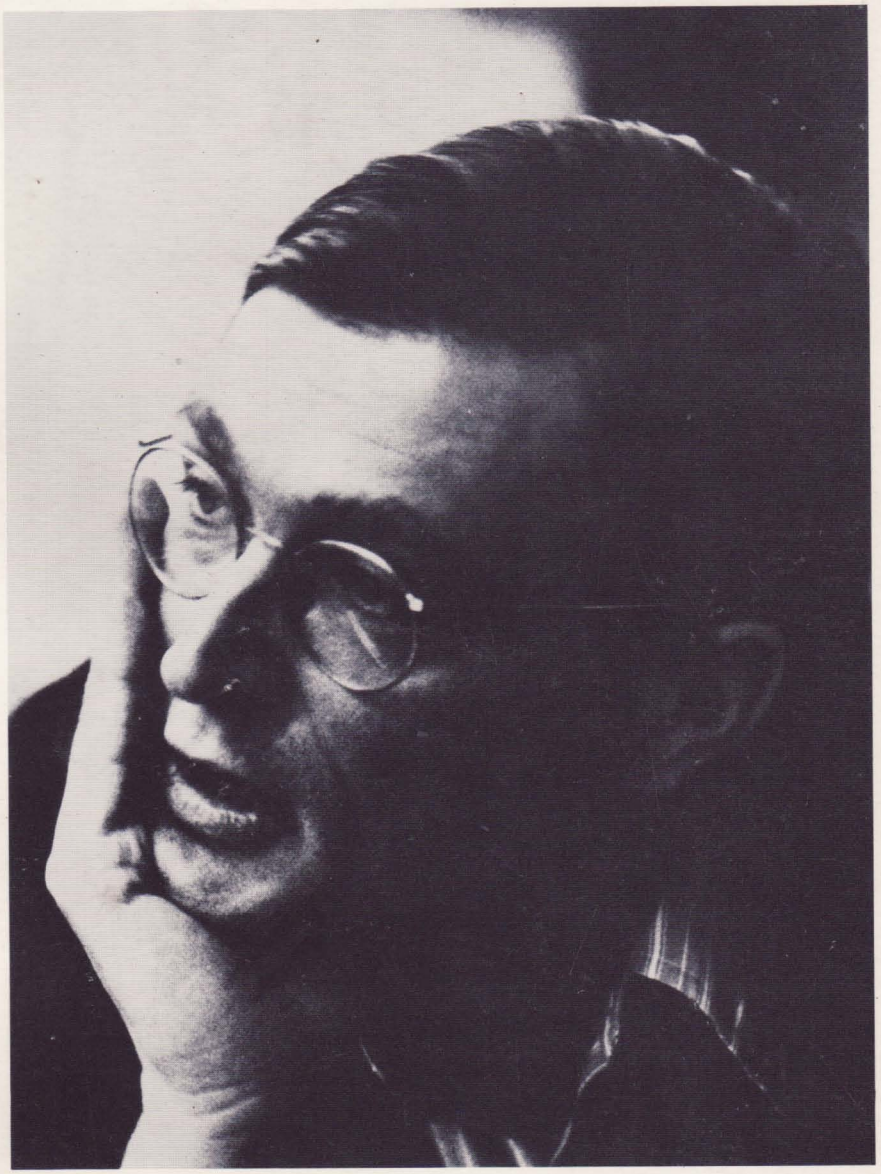

Clark Coolidge

F R I C T I O N 7

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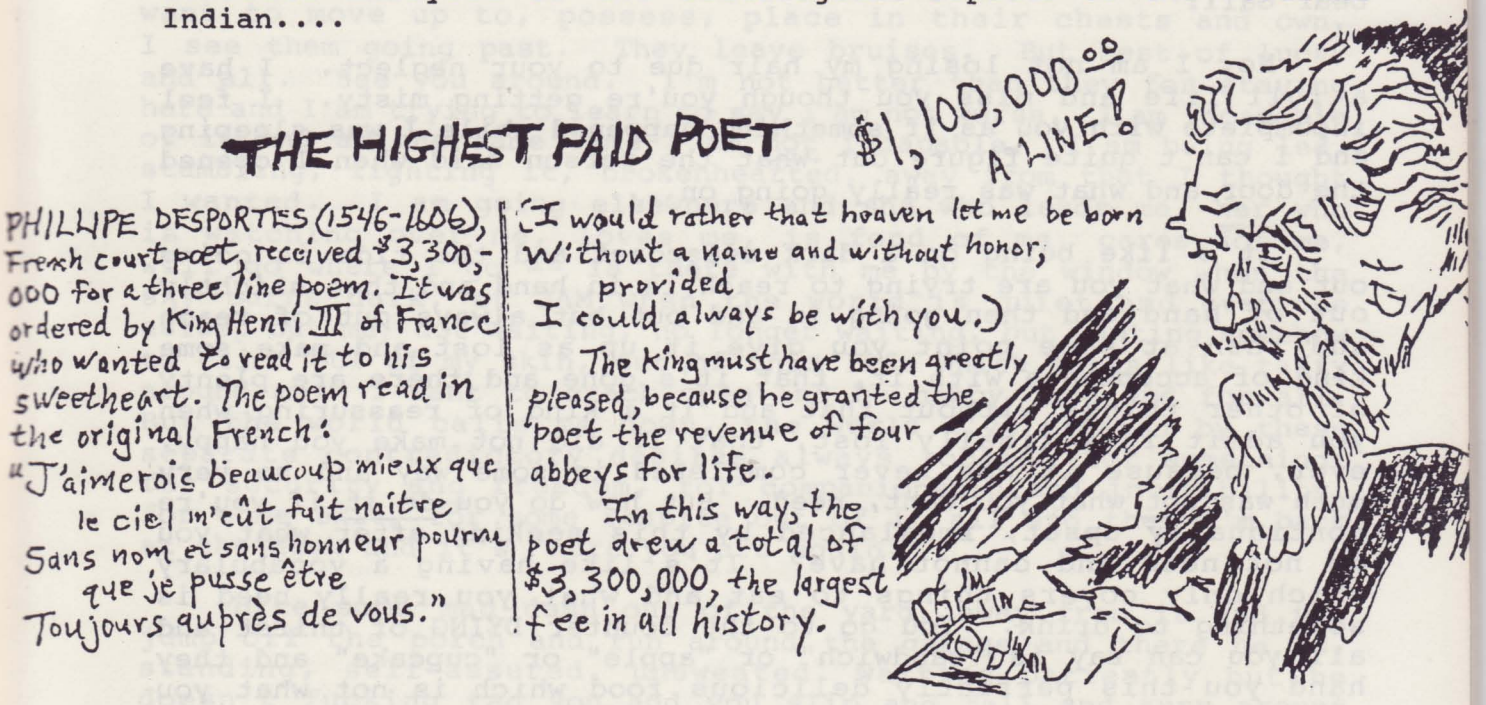
LETTERS, ETCETERA:

Dear Randy,

Just a note to let you know I just discovered a terrible error in my Shitting Meditation in FRICTION. P. 15, first stanza -- the line "This is a treaty ending taboos surrounding extinction." "extinction" should be "excretion"!!!!! Wonder if you wouldn't mind crossing out extinction and writing in excretion for me. I'll pay you $5.00 if you would. Seems the sense of the unfoldment of the stanza is haywired otherwise....

By the way, the scatological dimension in my poetry comes more from an eschatological perspective than a copsophagiacal one. The Chypewa/Ojibway mythology of the Great Lakes Bioregion is rich in the humor, mystery and profundity of what Norman O. Brown called "The Excremental Vision." Much of this element in my poetry comes from my anthropological background. In no way, however, is it the dominant emphasis of my work. It plays its part. See Victor Barnow's Culture and Personality for a detailed analysis of the scatological aspects of the Woodland Indian....



p.s. Give my regards to the ruby-throated hummmmmingbirds.

From the Inland Ocean,

Antler

* * *

Dear Randy,

Allen insisted that I write to tell you about two misprints in Solomon Takes A Bath. One line should read ...Zakhar, more kvass. Another line should read ....Solomon-Charlus. You know from the Baron Charlus in Proust's novel.

I really liked the job you did with the material I sent, but Allen seemed to be striving for perfection, something I have never yet found in the world of beat mags.

Pleasedly,

Carl Solomon

* * *

7.17.84 2PM

Dear Gail:

No, I am not losing my hair due to your neglect. I have a full life and miss you though you're getting misty. I feel incomplete with you as if something happened while I was sleeping and I can't quite figure out what the person said when I opened the door and what was really going on....

It's like being on a dark seascoast and the tide is going out and what you are trying to reach is in hand and then slightly out of hand and then going in and out but always out of reach and then at some point you give it up as lost and make some kind of acceptance with it, that it's gone and there are plenty of other things without that and it's kind of reassuring when you admit it's finally lost, that it did not make you happy, ever, because it was never completed in some way and so very much was not what you want, need. But how do you do it if you're continually upset, imbalanced by this seeking after what you do not need and cannot have? It's like having a vocabulary which only covers things to eat and what you really need is something to drink. You go to the counter DYING of thirst and all you can say is "sandwich" or "apple" or "cupcake" and they hand you this perfectly delicious food which is not what you need and you can't ask for what you DO need and you know it's on the shelf. Or a town filled with pastry shops and what you want is a daily diet of bread and soup and you try the pastries, try pastry after pastry thinking this one might satisfy your hunger.

Never able to leave. Always at the door. Long after the conversation has been completed, it's time for them to close the door, it's late and you're still there. Elvin Jones said, "My drum solos are long because I can't find the door out, I'm waiting to find the correct way OUT. And sometimes you see it going past and have to wait again, waiting for it to come

around again." So what way OUT?

Things are never quiet enough. I feel as if my body is slumped in a chair and I can feel my mind slip through my eyes and glance down the forearm of a young girl; the pale blond hair there, the slim wrist.

I've been having this mirage the last couple of days when I watch someone smoking a cigarette it's almost as if they're sucking on a breast. The way their face looks, their lips and cheeks all ENGAGED. Some softness there. I can imagine it, looking at it, making the cigarette disappear and congering up an imaginable breast appearing, tipping into their mouths.

You see, my strength is in my weakness, in not being able to manage it. It's in the not doing, in the familiarity with the giving up. So I've sat here long enough that I've seen younger cars, faster cars, sleeker cars go past and wonder, when will I be going? When will it take off for me? And I see it won't, it will never, it can't and I'll remain here and in my weakness is strength. Those boats, those fine yachts that plow over the pale faces are forever denied me. And best of luck to one and all who see something somewhere which they want to move up to, possess, place in their chests and own. I see them going past. They leave bruises. But best of luck, and all. See you around. I'm not better than they for staying here and I am trying to learn to say I am not worse. I am incapable of it and at the same time I am not incapable. I am being led, stumbling, fighting it, brokenhearted, away from that I thought I wanted. I am going elsewhere and she who leads me, her who is watching over me, loves me, is fond of me, cares for me, will go where I go -- is there with me by the window when the sky turns dark, at 3AM when the world is quiet and everyone asleep but me; not waiting, no longer waiting, but wanting somehow to climb OUT of my skin, out of this life which feels like taffy around me. I want to crack open and be happy once and for all. But the world calls me down, the world I've created by these separate contradictory desires always looking for something: for security and freedom, for companionship and invisibility, for some exit, for some respite out of it all and then I'm back at the desk and it's "here you are again."

Like some mad dash out of the yard, away from it and you jump off the porch and run around the garage and there he is, standing, self-assured, unsweated, waiting patiently but he doesn't fucking tag you and you slip and fall and turn around and run the way you came but then up the alley and around the back and there he is again and again and again and again. And you finally collapse and say, not looking up, "Tag me, goddammit, get it over with and tag me." But he's gone. And finally you realize you're looking for him, you're not running away from him. So you lean against the building and the birds are still singing, though you hadn't noticed them, and a squirrel is running up the oak tree unaware of you and the clouds are still white and still in the sky and still moving somewhere and the cars drive by and the sun is hot and it's so QUIET. And you've nowhere to go and no one knows you're here and it doesn't MATTER. You get incredibly giddy sitting there, watching the ants disappear

into the hole and at the same time others emerging, tiny legs pulling the body out and then becoming instantly "ANT" instead of this ant or that ant.

And they walk to school. And they look out for themselves. And they're constantly planning, maneuvering, looking for that one chance OUT OF THE HOLE -- a mad connection of chinese boxes and then meeting someone who violates the rules, who just APPEARS and they don't fit into the scheme. And you don't know if it's your vision or the reality or the person or IS IT REAL AT ALL? Do you see them or are you drawn to them, offering a hand and it DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE and it's all a mess and it's not leading out but leading in and you're the last person you'd ask for directions.

B.T.

* * *

For Anne Waldman, A. Ginsberg & Randy Roark

I'm tired of sitting around roasting, in the same old coffeehouse, drinking unavailable coffee ... you know the type: the girls all in tights, glamour vamoose -- I just can't meditate against the rap, there's so much, and much much more, to relate to those who harbor musical tunes. This one's a dancer, the other is a politician. Another holds seances, like I say, a bunch of incredibly hip people, here is the junction, they are the offspring of intellectuals. I'm not, I mean art books on the coffeetable, that melancholic effervescence in professors who take off their glasses and squint, wow, are my kids just reckless bohemians? (it's the sad truth.)
But no, not me. I will not sit around hearing opinions, they pretty much passive, cynical, I am allowed to dance, and I dance right the hell out of there, right the fucking hell into the street.
No but I have changed from these rebuffs, the cynically prosperous, mockery: I've gone out, with a motion taken from a mirror, how do I perfect that gaze, less warrant for me. As a matter of fact, I drink coffee in the street, in a little diner. In my tie and polyester slacks, I feel fine, like setting an example for youth, youth, example? yes it's harder on to seal the troops you function with, scorned. I'll take my chances with the masses, never giving an inch to an elite who shuns, from all corners, me. There is no percentage on it. (The man spilled coffee on his new white shirt. Isn't it always that you get dressed sort of and stain your clothes? The waitress smiled ... how much it would take to turn her ... but I'm older now, first real job I've ever got. Coffee is coffee, and if you want to drink it, you want Columbia, Brazil, all those notions turn into festive countries with the ring halo aura caffeine.
Thanx for your help and consideration in letting me make my own mistakes and point me.

Michael Igoe

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLARK COOLIDGE

Editor's note: The following conversation was recorded in Boulder, Colorado July 3rd 1980 while Clark was teaching at Naropa Institute. Jim Cohn and Laurie Price, the interviewers, subsequently graduated and now live on opposite coasts. Jim presently publishes **ACTION**, a literary magazine in Rochester NY and Laurie Price is a visual artist and writer operating out of San Francisco, sometimes performing under the name of Teodora Vorka. The conversation begins discussing a performance by John Cage at Naropa Institute.

Clark Coolidge: It must have been 1976 or something. He read some of his Mureau thing, words and letters taken from Thoreau's Journal, wails and singing and chants. He did it with his back to the audience, I don't quite know why. Of course it insulted the hell out of everybody. I guess things were a little hotter movement-wise, "elite" and "the people" and all that kind of simple division. And they started screaming. They thought it meant anything goes, so they started farting and doing really sophomoric-type shit. He finished; he didn't allow himself to be interrupted. It took about two hours. He turned around afterward and just really gave it to them. It's the only time I've ever heard John not quite losing his temper but saying "you're wrong to do this, I don't mean that you could just fuck around, you just make it impossible for anybody to have this experience, especially yourselves." Really sternly gave 'em a talk. Usually he doesn't do that, he's more indirect. If you've ever seen him answer questions from an audience, he's the best at that I've ever seen. Given incredible hostility, he'll just turn it around very gently and throw the question back, and sometimes even make the person think ... be funny but with a point, with an edge always. Really an amazingly consistent and ethical person.

Jim Cohn: The thing about Cage that I came up with was his idea of prepared piano and using interdeterminacy -- how to apply that to poetry. I haven't really been able to apply what Cage was doing in these ways. The whole concept as aesthetics, how to get at it through poetry.

CC: That's interesting because I tried to do that myself for a long time and I couldn't really. It leads to a kind of chance operation. But, and I think I'm right in this, it dawned on me that you can't really treat language that way. I don't mean that you damage it or some moral ... I mean, you do, but ... it's interesting to see what he finally did when he got to using just words. He treated it as totally consistent with his aesthetic. He treated it as material, just pure material, even though it's Thoreau he evidently loves more than anything. He's read those giant journals endlessly. He would, by an incredible random number sequence or throwing the I Ching, pick often single letters out of the text and make something totally other

out of it which he performs beautifully, but it becomes a kind of music. That's why I can "consistent" because it's like his music. It doesn't have terribly to do, I feel, with language, with a language energy.

Laurie Price: He changes forms, you mean?

CC: Yeah, he changes it. He's taken language and changed it into a kind of music. You could argue that what he does isn't exactly music either. But it is definitely something. Whatever it is, it's his work and it's very definitely an estimable thing that's happening. I'm not sure there is a name for it.

JC: Well, maybe it's phanopoeia? sounds, music?

CC: Well, no, it'd be melopoeia would be the music, yeah.

JC: But it's an overdose, overkill almost.

CC: It's like dividing language into its tiniest particles. Individual letters could be considered the tiniest parts that you would recognize as parts of language. Or punctuation, which he uses too.

JC: Disembodied. Periods and commas.

CC: Yeah. You've seen Empty Words, the latest book. He visually made a constellation of the punctuation out of Thoreau. But I don't know, it might just be a difference in people between me and him or something. But I followed him, I mean he was a great inspiration for me, and I met him and got to know him fairly well and he's just wonderful. God, have you met him, ever talked to him? He's just some other kind of human being, which is very valuable. I can't imagine this last thirty years without him. I remember the first time I saw the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and he was travelling with them. That was in the days, I guess it was the late 50's -- early 60's, when they were travelling with Rauschenberg and Rauschenberg was doing ... I mean, this whole thing made such great sense. They were doing these field dances where the dancers had options to do different things with chance time brackets and things, and Rauschenberg would come and he would make a set out of whatever material was in the hall at the time or in the street outside. Make this beautiful collage out of boards and street signs. That would be there, and then Cage and Tudor would be there. I remember John did this wonderful music for one dance. It was a hall in college that had those rubber strips down the aisles, serrated rubber, and there was a middle aisle and two side aisles and he took one of those window sticks that they have in school with the metal tip and he just dragged it very slowly across the corrugated rubber and made this zzzzz noise, and he did that very slowly down one aisle and around the back and that was the music for that piece. And then Tudor

would hold down the lowest note on the pipe organ. You can't hear it, you know, it's just a vibration. And this for twenty minutes. It was just mind-blowing that this could happen. And there was tremendous resistance among the academic community of course: "What is this? It isn't music. It isn't dance." But great possibilities.

JC: In relation to Stein, Cage talked about good art as irritating. And, in a sense, resistance too. Also in your "Arrangement" talk, what you've gleaned from the whole thing, it seems, is a sense of invention. That quality of invention, working against the resistance of people.

CC: Or material. Or matter. I really think that if there isn't a resistance between your will and the material you're using, then there's really not any spark of art happening. The great abstract expressionist paintings were full of that resistance, that the paint wouldn't quite do it. And the people just said, "What the hell is going on?" and wanted to smash them. Three or four years ago I went to Harvard and John was doing a piece called "Lecture on the Weather" and I figured by this time he's become sort of a culture hero. I mean, people go to see him and I kind of thought disappointedly that maybe that resistance was over, that he's sort of canonized. And in fact the audience was a lot of undergraduate dates sitting there with their books on art. I thought, well, this is just going to be lame, they're going to sit there and they're going to say, "Cage, I saw Cage." And yet he still managed to infuriate everybody. He was fabulous. What he did was he had picked twelve students and they were on stage in a line -- they had music stands and they each had a text and it was all from Thoreau but different pieces and they were all reading simultaneously so you really couldn't hear anything. And he had these slides of the drawings from Thoreau's Journals but made into negatives, so that there were black fields with a little white line or something, and he would flash those on, and then he had this incredible tape, like a quad tape or something, of a thunderstorm which was almost more present than any thunderstorm I've ever heard. It just shook the whole building. People started to catcall and finally this thunderstorm started coming on and it just blew everybody out of the building. I mean people actually fled. Some of the ones that were most virulent against him split, they just couldn't take it. I thought, that's great, he's still able to cause this resistance and prevail. He's amazing. He's found ways to keep that alive. But as far as transposing from his things to words, it's fascinating, and I've never really been able ... I mean, I did a lot of things like using random number sequences to generate words out of texts, and I even used imperfections on paper and laid them over. In fact, I bought some of his scores at one point, the transparencies, which are fascinating, many layers that have dots and circles and some kind of lines. There's one called "The Fontana Mix" which he used to make tape

collages. I desperately tried to figure some way to make words happen through this and it never really satisfied me, and I began to decide that the physics of language is more mysterious. You would get something that would be like a collage, but there wouldn't necessarily be enough energy between the words. It would all fall apart unless you were going to get yourself into a total zen state where you're just focusing on anything that happens, which is a part of his aesthetic in a way. That's the part where his will isn't involved. He is a willful person. In fact, a friend of mine who has known John and Merce Cunningham very well for a lot of years said, "You know why they took to zen buddhism? Because they have incredible egos and they realized this and they needed something to counter that." And when you think of it, John must have, to endure and to prevail over all those years of horrible incomprehension, raise money and go on, keep putting on concerts and live. So, anyway, you might get a bunch of words on the page and it would be interesting if you're meditating on it, but it was very hard to think of it as a work with related energies. It didn't really work that way.

JC: But then when it got to the point of Indeterminancy in the stories, I thought, well, here's finally something that I can glean something from. But I still can't quite find daylight. I know rhythm is the essence of the form, his sense of form and rhythm, that each story is a minute long and it will happen in that minute, each story.

CC: Which means he has to read slower or faster. Have you ever seen him do it?

JC: No.

CC: You know, there's this piece that they've done with the Cunningham Company for years called "How To Pass Kick Fall and Run," and it's also like the exercises of athletes, they all come out and do something, singly and with each other, but individual things going on at the same time. And he's out in front at a table, usually, with a bottle of champagne or something. There's a kind of formality to it. He used to smoke cigarettes with a cigarette holder: there'd be an elaborate business of fitting it and lighting it. In fact, I saw him do it once in Berkeley and he opened the champagne and the cork went all the way to the ceiling of this huge hall. In a way it was sort of a distraction. I almost felt that this piece had become so well known the people in the audience were almost mouthing the words of the stories. So it was a bit obviated. Oh, actually in that one he had another guy with him and they would sometimes read simultaneously. They each had their own indeterminate time structures and sometimes it would come out that they would read different stories at the same time. He was trying to keep it fresh, because he used to just read it by himself. Those stories are like one-liner jokes, great zen jokes or something. They become repeatable,

people know them, they're just great repeatable things. Did that make you want to write that sort of story, or were you just taking instruction from the content? Probably both?

JC: No. It made me want to write ... it gave me this idea to collect jokes, collect a uniform, collect one type of thing. The sense of time as a timeless form was the instruction I gleaned. Have you done anything, getting away from the idea of constellations and working in that sense of his language, have you worked at all with Indeterminacy in terms of words in time?

CC: What happened was, you know those little constellation poems in Space? To me those come very close to the feeling of the kind of indeter ... I can't say indeterminacy because they weren't made at all that way, but I mean they have the charge of things that don't go together somehow going together.

LP: So, at the same time that you're getting resistance you're also embodying the whole....?

CC: Yeah. But those were very carefully composed in the sense of having really looked at all those words and sounded them and thought about them and put them in proximity -- seeing what happened, laboriously but fascinatedly, over about a six month period trying to do that. I was thinking all the time that I wanted things that don't go together, I wanted to completely unhinge the language and then see if I could put it, if that would make an energy that would then hook up in some other way, like a magnet, like resistance -- poles pushing and coming together. And I think I did pretty much what I wanted to do with those finally. Then that was that. I couldn't do any more than I did with it.

LP: Were you thinking up structures with them? Were you thinking about structures in which to play with them?

CC: You mean like speaking them or performing?

LP: In terms of how they go together on the page, and where they were.

CC: There wasn't any system of structures. The space between words became very important. How close together they were. When I was working at Mills College, they had ... you know what loop-players are? You make a loop of tape and there are these tape machines that have one play-back head and a single drive-wheel and you can put a loop on it and it has a rheostat knob so you can change the speed. I was doing these experiments more than pieces, although I did play them on the radio one time. I put a couple of words, or even one word at first, one each on two loops and put them both on, and I'd vary the times. And I swear that

I could see ... in fact, I wish that someone would scientifically follow this up, it was interesting. Let's say that you had "of this", -- you had "of" on one tape and "this" on another, and you would change the times until they came closer together in time and farther away, and I swear that you could get down to the millisecond the point at which they join and become a phrase, and one millisecond on either side of that they don't, they're disembodied, and I got fascinated with that. I had this thing, I made a tape out of it, where they went in and out of phase with each other for a half hour period so you could follow this, and I thought, well, hey, that's interesting.

JC: Sort of magnetized.

CC: Yeah. You really began to feel there was a magnetic force in language.

LP: Did that have something to do with why you picked pronouns and adverbs and connectives?

CC: Yeah, because they have a presence but they're not specific in terms of "chair" or "red" or something that seems to lead you into trying to picture something. Visual or idea. I wanted to have a bare bones situation to try, make it as simple as possible so you could see what was acting. Pronouns are fascinating anyway. What are they? They're disembodied until you identify them. And it seems to me that prepositions have a desire to, if you want to humanize it some, attach to a noun. It's like electrons looking for protons, they want to be in proximity or in orbit with something.

JC: So maybe they're the most human aspect of language.

CC: That may be. They move around, and they're waiting and they're lurking.

LP: That reminds me of what Stein says about language in her lectures "Composition as Explanation." She goes into all the parts of speech and talks about words wanting to attach to other words, and that you can use this when you diagram a sentence, and you can figure out the entire English grammar system from learning how to diagram a sentence.

CC: I always thought it was great that she, as a kid evidently, loved diagramming sentences. I hated it, and everybody I knew did. She got into it in some great way, early by herself. Maybe I said something the other day about this. I begin to think of it more as a molecular model rather than a sentence diagram. More three-dimensional, at least that kind of feeling. I think I was talking to you after the reading last night about some of my lines, where if I accent them differently you get another sense. And I think of that as a way of making a simultaneity in the language, without two actual lines interfering with each

other. One reading of it is only one dimension of it, there are really several dimensions that are locked into that one line. You can get into this state when you're reading it by yourself, if you hear as well as see while you're reading. I've discovered that all people don't do this natively, some people don't hear language. Whenever I see a word on a page I hear it, I can't help it, it's just that way. There were about sixty people in my class here in 1977 and I asked them, how many of you hear a word when you read it and how many of you don't? And it was divided in half, which interested me. I talked to Burroughs about it and he doesn't, he's totally visual. He says, "I see the words in the air."

JC: He sees typewritten pages.

CC: Right. So I thought, wow, that's interesting because that means the whole concept of audience is defined by a physio-psyche situation where they cannot natively follow one aspect of it, or they're not as able. So you're really fighting that in a way. Some people, they hear everything. Others don't hear anything and see it. People who can spell very well have that visual thing. I can't spell well because I hear, and then I can't remember how many l's there are or something. I have to look up words constantly when I'm typing up a clean manuscript. Also from staring for a long time at words until they look strange, you know what I mean? Sometimes it doesn't seem possible that this is right, and you have to look it up. I remember when I was a kid riding along in a car and I looked out and I saw the word "p-i-n-t" and I said "pint" (short i). It was a dairy bar, and I asked my father what the hell is a "pint"? and it was like "Oh, you idiot!" But for a whole moment that's what it was. English is great like that, it's full of that.

LP: Was that some of what you were thinking about with Quartz Hearts? First of all the title, and then the way certain sections seem to be the inside of a rock cut open and you get the quartz crystal in there, and there's so many dimensions to that. What do you think about metaphor?

CC: Well, metaphor ... I don't feel comfortable with those terms. I was having a big argument with ... well, it became an argument, with Bill Berkson in letters a while ago, about irony. He had more of a classical literary education than I did and that became a natural thing that you talk about. I said I realized that that was one of those words people like professors of English tell you is a quality but I don't feel that it's a native quality of the language. It's a way we find of talking about it. I remember Olson used to say, "I can't stand the word 'irony' because I don't understand the iron in it." It's not part of the root but as it exists in English you see iron in it. He didn't feel that there was any iron and it confused him. Poets do this. What's there they see. It doesn't matter

what somebody taught or what is accepted as literary paraphernalia. We all know what irony is but when you're working it doesn't enter into it, for me.

JC: It goes back to what you were saying about recognition. Sense of sound. A chop between the hemispheres. If you can break down the recognition in that way.

CC: Right. There is a kind of derangement going on. Rimbaud was right.

JC: You play with "pint", you get four pages of "pints" and then all of a sudden you come back to the dairy.

CC: I think that's how you discover language and how you possess it yourself as a single intelligence. You realize that. There's nobody around to tell you immediately you're wrong. You go through your change and, like you say, you come to the dairy bar but you've been somewhere. It's almost like Buddhism or something. You go away, everything is empty, and then you come back to town and get drunk. You don't just go away. If you just went away, well, there's no problem, there's no wife, there's just one side.

LP: We were joking this morning about whether you were writing certain pieces before you had coffee in the morning. You're kind of halfway in one place and halfway in the other place.

CC: I finally found that I was able to do that. For years I was a night person. Especially if you live in New York, as I did several times, you're up all night. It's just a fact. Mornings don't exist. And then I moved to the country and it began to dawn on me there was this whole great time that I never see and it's absurd to be living in the country if you don't see the morning light. Plus the family structure was that Susan was getting up and going to work, and Celia was going to school, and there was breakfast being made. Why not all get up? You know, it works better with the family if you're all in some kind of exactness of period. So I found that I could get up. And, you know, you'll be in that incredible state where you're sort of half.... Maybe you just had a dream. And I used to do that, I did that discipline for about a year where you keep a notebook and you write down the dream before you're awake, which is fabulous. It's hard to do at first but you can, and then you write things, you don't know what you're doing. Like Kerouac did, Book of Dreams, that's exactly his practice. So I have been able to do that recently and it's great. The other thing I found out is writing when you feel shitty, really down and nothing's going to happen, forget it, and just push yourself that little inch and start, and sometimes amazing things happen. An hour later you find you've written something that you couldn't have.... You think, well, what if I hadn't, what if I'd just accepted the down and said, forget it I'll do it tomorrow -- you wouldn't have written this thing.

LP: That opens up an accessibility to some other language or vocabulary?

CC: Yeah, or different feelings, or an area of half-awakeness, or rage. I think you should be able to write in any state. It's a little ideal-sounding, but go toward that. Not be a person that thinks I can only write if I feel a certain way, or I gotta get stoned, or I gotta get the chemicals exact. I know people do that and it seems that they get hung in one layer. Everything begins to be that. TV, dope, rock&roll type vibrations. And that's fine, but it's one level. There are other things. There's a lot of connections to be made outside that.

JC: Ted (Berrigan) said something that put Stein and Cage in one place for me. He would say in his class, "The time of the composition is the time of the composition." I think I've thought about that for about 100 hours, and I've asked Ted about a million times and I still really don't know what it's all about.

CC: One thing it suggests is what they call "real-time experience," that something takes the time it takes. It's been a fascinating idea to me that you might write something in the time it takes to read it. Just start it and end it, that would be real time composition. What he means also is, I think, that what you get is what you get. If a piece by Cage is going on in a room, that absolutely defines your reality for that space. And with John it's absolutely in seconds, down to a certain second. And with Stein, I guess there's a feeling because there doesn't seem to be some other project going on, some other reason for doing it. Evidently she said she wrote two hours a day, she would do it religiously and then Alice would type it up. If you do that you get a sense of the time it takes and the opposite of that, the thing taking the time.

JC: As a percussionist you must bring that sense of time to language, in that sense, see? Every poet more or less uses the language as if it were a prepared piano.

CC: Prepares it ... beforehand?

JC: But you seem to do it in this way best. Maybe it's what you bring to it but I don't really know what you do bring to it as a percussionist.

CC: I'd have to talk about playing bebop, that's my mainstream. That kind of time, that kind of definition of time, which I think of as the most sophisticated, in the best sense, shaping of time that I've ever heard. It's so fluid -- any kind of accent can seemingly fall in at any place. If you hear classic Max Roach and Charlie Parker, the accents Max is playing, the time is going along on the top cymbal and it's like the eternal moment. It's absolutely charged,

it has a kind of eerie evenness, it just sets up the room. That's the time, the background time, of what's going to be done and everything's floating on that. Great horn players always say they love to hear that, that's the thing they relate to, that thing is never going to stop, it's always going to be there, it's always going to be the energy, the constant energy that's going on. It allows you to pop up and accent and jump and play phrases. And you've got a drummer and a horn maybe another horn and a pianist and bass and they're all putting in and shaping the time as they go. I think of writing that way. I like to start and go and write a whole thing. Since I wrote Space I haven't done that sort of thing, really taking one word. That was 1966. Since then I like to write a whole page and keep going and then look at it maybe the next day and if it isn't any good throw it away. But if it worked it worked. I might change a few things but basically it had to get a certain momentum going in order to happen, which I relate to playing the cymbals. It had to have that momentum and energy to get up and have anything happen within it, which is a kind of shaping of the time. Because, as I say, I hear the phrases, I hear everything, I might hear something a little bit ahead, you know, what's coming.

JC: When you're performing it's inevitable that you place accents, but how do you put accents onto the page for the reader? Is that built in, do you think?

CC: Well, a lot of times it isn't. I guess Polaroid is the work that has the most of that in it, particularly in the last section, very dense pages of long lines. Almost all of those lines have at least two possible emphases. I really wrote that work to read, to perform. Ideally it's heard and read, both. There's a tape available of it.

LP: When I was reading it I had the feeling of percussion, where there's a lot more space and sound in space. In the middle section of that book there's a lot more space in between the words and you have one word on one line and two words on one line. There was nothing I could do but read it out loud at that point because it was already there.

CC: But also in those dense parts, the accents are placed in such a way that if you start the first line with a certain accent, that's going to pretty much determine how you're going to then accent later lines. It's like starting on 1 instead of 2 in a 4/4 bar. You're then going to be thrown into that kind of phrasing. I find myself helplessly doing that for the page, and then maybe the next page will be different. Or sometimes it will change in the middle and I'll go to the other one. It's very hard to read by yourself, but once you've found out that possibility about it and maybe start reading it out loud yourself you might be able to get into it, and also if you've heard the tape. I wanted the tape and the book to come out simultaneously. It was

a business impossibility, but it should ideally exist simultaneously in both states.

LP: Where is the tape?

CC: Michael Koehler from Munich, who's going to be here, has a tape business called S Press Editions, and many American poets.... Unfortunately they're a little expensive. I mean fifteen bucks or something. But if you find somebody that has one and copy it, that's what I hope happens. I don't want anybody to have to pay (that much). With tape being so easily available now, and every reading is taped, even if you wanted to control it there's no way you could, so I decided that it should be encouraged that people copy and use. I wish there was a service. I tried to suggest this to the National Endowment, that if they really wanted to help writers they should have a mail order house for tapes and you would pay just for the tape and maybe a little more for labor and there would be a list and you could have any tape, any reading. Because they're scattered all over the country and you have to track down the guys who have them. That would be terrific. They might even get it computerized eventually and it'd be very quick. But they didn't think that was, you know, they were into some other whole shot.

LP: Did they respond?

CC: No. I had two ideas. One was that and one was free xerox machines all over the country. I really think that should happen, because I live in a small town and it's about fifteen cents a page. That's insane because you've got hundreds of pages when you go in, and you don't want to pay. I had this 500-page prose work copied in San Francisco last Fall -- four copies and it cost me $100! And that was the cheapest rate. I mean that was about five cents a page. But that's terrible.

LP: Is that the work you read at 80 Langton Street?

CC: That I read at Langton, yeah.

LP: I was really curious about what happened in between these word isolations and then these sentences, what the transition was.

CC: Okay. Let me think. Well, a lot happened. I'm not sure I can put it into the right chronological....

LP: Well, you were talking a little bit in the class the other day about vocabularies suggesting other vocabularies, and I was just wondering if that had something to do with.... Well, I look at Polaroid and I see these word isolations, each word is almost a separate moment. You could string them or you could not string them. And then there are these prose sentences.

CC: Well, let me run it down a little bit. Before that was a work called The Maintains. I don't know if you've seen that; This Press, Barry Watten's. Now that was written totally from a dictionary. I love to read the dictionary anyway. You look up one thing and you see something else. It's great what's related on a page just because it's the same spelling or chronological in terms of alphabet. I just looked at it a lot, and I discovered ... I was gonna just try to ... well, it was the impulse to widen my vocabulary, right? I've always gotten to points where I felt as if I was stuck with certain words. In fact, that was one of the impulses to get involved in a Cagean kind of thing, because I hated the way poets were helplessly stuck in their own vocabularies. Like your sense of your own personality which is always much more limited, because you realize other people have other senses of your personality than you do. It's much bigger than you think. So I would try to feed in chance words and try to.... At various points I've done that, and this was a big point of doing that. I literally took the dictionary and opened it and it took me a year to write it. I discovered to my amazement that there's a kind of syntax in the dictionary, too. It says "see cat" or "in the case of" or "as said as." Those kinds of phrases. That got to be a kind of glue, a kind of syntax in that work. It's a lot of nouns, you know, it's very heavy on that, it's kind of an overload. I used to take that around, I would go to a college and get a class and pick ten people and everybody would read ten pages. In fact, I did that here in 1977. And I would not let them see it beforehand. And they would be worried. They would look at it and say, "I have to study this." I'd say, "No, no, it has to be cold. I don't care if you mispronounce," because there are some technical words that I didn't even know before I did it. "Don't worry about stumbling, just read on." In fact, a guy turned up here the other day who had done that in a class I did at Franconia College in New Hampshire, ten years ago or something, and he remembered it and it was great. I found that what happens then is that the person who might have been in the audience but was actually reading is now implicated in a great way, and he can no longer say, "Oh, I can't dig that" or something, he's already spoken it. A lot of them would say, "Hey, you know, I mean, yeah, there's something...." So it became almost a teaching device in some way. After that I thought, well, I've had such an overload of nouns, I'll really strip down. I'll just use pronouns and prepositions and whichs and thats. I typed down a set of words like that, and I said I'm just going to use these. I'm going to permute these and I'm going to make a composition of these. There's a structure of that work where one of the armatures that it's on.... There are three sections. The first section is all in one column like poetry. The second section sort of opens up and there are almost two columns. The last section is very dense long lines. Each one of these had the structure of starting with the third person or "i"

and then as it went along adding "you" and finally adding "I" or "we." Then the "I" drops out and then the "you" and then you're back to "it." And each section does that, so it's like a pyramid. That was kind of a structure. It was like coming out of an alien non-human world into the ego and sinking down. And it does that three times. But, as I said before, that began to want to accrete other words to it. And then, as I said in the class, I had the decision, do I want this? Well, I could reject it but I said, no, it would be more interesting not to, and so it became a richer work in that way. In other words, it wasn't what I intended but it was better, it was more interesting. And that took me another year. That's a wild thing to perform. It's an athletic piece, you really have to prepare for it.

JC: What's amazing in that, more or less, is how you would grapple with the ego on the surface. It's really a surface process where for most writers it's internalized, it's an abstraction, a long synthesis. You surfacized the whole process in this amazing way.

CC: Using I's.

JC: Yeah, just the pronouns.

CC: Sure, because the I wants to rave and scream. The I desires, the I wills something.

But to continue, the next work that's been published is Quartz Hearts, and that begins to use the sentence more. I mean, cap, period, as a kind of armature to relate everything to, even though it might be two words, the chord changes of that are the sentence. Then I started a long prose work which is a little complicated to talk about. It's easier to chart out, but essentially there are sections which deal with, or take their material from, subjects that have been meaningful to me like geology, music, painting, and movies. Everybody has something like that. The polar opposite of that is the section using authors who have meant a lot to me: Beckett, Melville. In between them there are transitions where these two parts are blended in some way. There's a fourth section which blends the previous three with the next three so it's always kind of a rider that eventually accumulates. When I finish it there'll be a big section that'll essentially have sprung from everything that preceded it. So that's what that is.

LP: So you're choosing the vocabulary from each section to carry over to the next section?

CC: Yeah.

LP: The night that I heard you, during the Fall in San Francisco, the images I was getting off the language were so amazing

and twisting around into these amazing ... words I was familiar with were turning into pictures of things. I remember you kept repeating "Pennsylvania" as a series of pencils and I got completely absorbed into it. And the syntax, the whole structure of what was going on, became such an internal language that I felt as if I understood completely, I was experiencing completely what was being read without having the slightest idea of how to attach that to a rational linear reality. But this "Pennsylvania" thing kept coming back to me and I thought about that for days. "Pennsylvania" became a series of pencils. It was so amazing.

CC: Well, I have this idea too, somewhat from Cage, that ... would it be possible to really immerse an audience in such length, such density of development, that then something else begins to happen? Which sounds like what happened to you. Your defenses.... I mean, you either have to split or you have to submit to this. And if you do, then something's going to happen because it's going to be a long time. You can't put it in your pocket in any way. It's like one of Cage's "Variations": everything's going on in the room; somebody's cooking, some incredible sounds, and somebody's walking around. That's what it is. You can't escape it. You can leave, sure, there's always a door, but.... I thought, I've never seen anybody do that with language. And poetry readings are so staid, I hate them really in a way. You sit and you look at the person and you sort of fall out, and you come in and out. And people talk a lot, like Ted tends to do. I love Ted, but I mean his way of reading is opposite to mine. He'll read for two hours and read six poems and talk the rest of the time. Because he feels the poet is everything he does that you're getting. "Here I am, I'm a big poet." But I'm always made nervous by that. The first readings I ever went to were real academic readings and the guy would do a version of that, but much more boring than Ted. Ted tells great stories and keeps you entertained at least. These guys.... First of all, a lot of them were awful performers. There's almost a negative sense of how you're not supposed to be a performer if you're a poet. The fact that you <u>wrote</u> them is the thing. And if you don't read so hot, <u>well</u>, what the hell. They don't really care. They mutter along about how "When I was in Rome I saw this statue and I thought of Venus listening to Eliot...." You go to sleep. And then he reads this really tight little poem, and you're sort of thinking about what he said rather than the poem, and maybe you're wondering how it relates or you don't care anymore. But I really think that it <u>is</u> a performance and you really should.... I mean, you <u>don</u>'t have to wear funny clothes, but....

JC: But, why not?

CC: Yeah, maybe somebody could do that. But at least pay attention to the fact that you're the focus and your voice is the

focus and you should really put it out there as best you can.

LP: Make it three-dimensional.

CC: The thing is, a lot of poets really don't have much of a musical sense, of instruments performing or voice singing. Well, maybe more now do actually than once, but....

JC: It seems to get to the point where you have to be able to improvise. You've got to be able to invent immediately. It's almost as if our training doesn't really.... Even here, where performance is a more important aspect than most other places. The quality of musical improvisation, Keith Jarrett, or.... We don't work at it enough.

CC: I think improvisation is one of the keys, really. I don't know how you teach it. In terms of jazz in the past twenty years, say, there's been a tremendous increase in schools like Berklee in Boston which turn out incredible technical musicians.

JC: Great arrangers.

CC: Great arrangers, yeah. In a way it's fitting into the culture, it's right. You've got to have a job when you get out, and if you can arrange you can do jingles or whatever. They're not just in an artistic sphere in space where once you're off it you're nowhere. I can understand that. But on the other hand, when you see Woody Herman's band or Kenton's band (Well, Kenton's dead), it's full of these young kids and they can play their asses off technically. They can play 16th runs and everything in key and they've got great embouchures and they sound good, but they can't really improvise and that's the problem. How to teach improvisation. The only way I know of is how Lee Konitz does private teaching. He gets it from Tristano who was his teacher. What Tristano would do, was to take a solo, say, by Lester Young or Louis Armstrong, really going back to the roots, and make the person, no matter what they play, sing it and memorize it and sing that solo perfectly before they even touch their horn. So that at least you get into the bones of, the muscle of, an actual improvisation. It's probably based on "I Got Rhythm" or blues or some known changes so that you do know how it relates. But he just keep doing that over and over again, studying out all these great solos. And not the arrangements, not any other part of it but just where the guy really started to wing it. And that's as close as I can see to.... Sorta like those Indian musicians, how they teach tabla. They do it with their mouth and their teeth for years before they even touch a drum. That's it, I think. It's great.

LP: You can hear varied stresses, like the stresses that are in between.

CC: Yeah. You can feel it in your body, because drums is hitting. The tremendous part of drums at first is it's this kinetic experience like bashing the shit out of something, a great release.

JC: Teenage nervous breakdown.

CC: Exactly. But that's not really what it is when you get sophisticated in music. You've got to get your body into these objects you're hitting. You can't just be back here and connected by these sticks. You have to at least have a feeling.... Like Charlie (Haden) was saying the other day. He's opposed to electronic music and says, "I'm an acoustic musician." There's an argument for the other side, too. But I think when you're starting, and he was presuming to talk to students, if you don't get a feeling of your body and the instrument as one or as very close, you're not going to have a sound, you're not going to sound like you. He asked, "How many people have heard Charlie Parker?" and quite a few had. So he said, "When somebody puts on a few notes by him you know it's him. You put on some electric guitar player, chances are you can't identify him until you hear him play a phrase or something you recognize as his. You guys are playing amplifiers, it's really what you're doing." It's an exaggeration, but it's harder to have a voice when you're playing an amplifier than it is .... And he plays bass which is not a blown instrument, but the way he plays it it does breathe. It's incredible, it's like the wood and the strings are part of his breath.

JC: You lose touch with your axe. If you play keyboards and you go electronic, there's no touch.

CC: Yeah. He made some snide remark about Fender Rhodes. Everybody sounds the same. Those guys who play electric guitars and turn them way up so they get a sustained ... the first time you do that it blows you away, you think you've got power. But that's not the way to start with music. I've heard guys do amazing things with that too. I could argue so Charlie would agree, but....

JC: You have primal screaming too, with the voice, you can do it. I haven't seen too many poetry readings where they incorporate primal screaming recently.

CC: Maybe John Lennon is going to come back as a poet. I don't know.

I played in a band in Frisco which David Meltzer had. He wanted to get in on that incredible scene, thousands of bands, in 1967. That was pretty wild. There were things happening there in terms of people playing way beyond their abilities which is really interesting. Even people who couldn't play would start. The original Kesey Acid Tests that had happened before were like that. There were microphones and instruments and things available for anybody who walked

in. And of course the fact that almost everybody was stoned on acid, many for the first time maybe, had something to do with it. A lot of people opened up. I wasn't there but I've heard a lot about it and evidently that was incredible. Very strange things happened. People got together in ways and started making sounds that went together that you couldn't have planned and that they could never have done. Well, that got watered down right away. It became light shows and it became very standardized. But, talking about feedback with guitars, we had a guy in our band who played very very quiet feedback, like at room temperature. And he could play little melodies. It was really out of sight, I've never seen anybody else do it. A guy named Bob Cuff. I think he quit music. I think he went into art, painting. He had been in a band called the Mystery Trend, which was one of the early Frisco bands. I think they put out a 45 on Verve and disappeared. He had his own little thing and it was great. Our band became sort of a free jazz band after a while because David and I like jazz. And then we got some horn players. The irony is that if we had continued, we would have been popular ten years later. But we couldn't stay together, because the rock thing was how people were making money and we couldn't really come up to the Airplane or Quicksilver; the dance bands that were essentially what was happening.

I just have to tell you this one great scene. We used to rehearse at this heliport in Sausalito. The guy had a lot of empty hangar space and he rented it out to bands, because it got to be a big hassle in Frisco, you couldn't turn up or they'd call the cops, so a lot of bands would be there. There were little partitions in between. If this one night could have gotten on tape it would have been amazing, but I'm not sure tape could have taken it. It was us, Moby Grape, Quicksilver, Bloomfield who was organizing his Electric Flag band with Buddy Miles, and an all-girl band called Ace of Cups. We were all turned up to the top at once, all playing. At one point our band took a break and we went out (it was like an L-shaped building with a runway in the middle) and stood there and listened. You had to be there. I've never heard or imagined such a sound. It was like solid air. And then the fuses blew. Everything went black, and people were crawling around going "Hey, man, who are you?" But, you know, for about ten minutes it was amazing. Just amazing. So that was an exciting time for a while. But then the big money came and the big companies and people got giant advances and it went the way of all popular music. Very fast, too.

JC: Somehow poetry stood still and let that storm pass over, and here we can now start experimenting or trying. I don't know if it's an anachronistic way or not but poets are trying to perform in some live way. It's still a problem. But you approach it as a musician.

CC: I'm just lucky enough to have come out of that background. That's what I did first, before I thought of being a writer. Ah, weird, life, you know? I thought I was going to be a geologist. I was playing music at the same time but I thought that was going to be my job, be a geologist. But when I got to college I found out that it wasn't at all what I thought. I had a real naive romantic view that I'd be out in the desert with a pick or something. Now you're going to be in a lab or something. And the professors were a real drag. They had real contained kinds of minds that had no input except their own little specialization. Science was getting very specialized, very cubical, cubby holed. This was in the late Fifties. Geology was right then making the transition from being what they used to call a "natural science", essentially descriptive, to a "real" science involving physics, a lot of mathematics and theoretical fiddling around. Which of course they were very pleased with, because they were finally entering the big time.

JC: Now it's big business. Geological business.

CC: Geophysics. Oh yeah. A lot of guys I knew there went into oil companies where the bucks were. But at the same time I was trying to go to those classes I was playing in a dixieland band. It was in the last year, or two years, of dixieland. When my father went to college in the Twenties all the fraternity houses had dixie bands and I was at the very last of that era, if you call it an era, around 1957. The next year all of the rock&roll kids came out of highschool and there were no more dixie bands. But there used to be that insane drunken frathouse ... playing "The Saints Go Marching In" faster than anybody in the band could make it. Totally drunk out of your mind, smashing things, guys punching out their dates. I mean, "Animal House" is nothing like it really was. In fact, we used to call them "animal houses." Guys would haul their piano out into the yard and set fire to it, chop it up with axes. I saw that happen at the DKE house at Brown. That was the real jock house and these guys were crazy. I mean, dumb crazy. A beautiful Steinway grand and they just did it up. And I wasn't really approving. I was already a modern jazz nut and I was doing this looking askance. Finally I quit, and then I screwed myself out of a trip to Europe for aesthetic reasons because I couldn't stand the leader who was a horrible trumpet player. He wasn't really a musician and I couldn't stand him. Then they went to Europe. My oldest friend was the pianist in that band, a composer named Alvin Curran, and that's how he got to Europe. He's been living in Rome for the past fifteen years. I wonder what would have happened to me if I had gone that road instead of this one. Funny to realize that an aesthetic disagreement could determine your life. Alvin's not well known here but he's known in Europe where there's a lot more possibility for new music. Millions of festivals and he's constantly traveling. He was one of the ones

who formed a group called Musica Elettronica Viva which pioneered a certain kind of totally improvised electronic music. I have some tapes: amazing. And they would get the audience involved. They had a piece called "The Sound Pool", which was the last piece and everybody would come up and grab something. It might go on all night. They got involved with the Living Theatre people. That was that weird incredible stage. Now all the members of that group have become single performers. He does this incredible thing where he tapes a lot of natural sounds and blends it live with improvisation and electronics and piano and singing in a way that I'm amazed by it, because it seemed it would be so hard. I used to try to think of doing that with a poetry reading but I never wanted to be stuck with a single tape in the back of it always repeating the same way. I tried to figure out how to throw a chance factor into that or something. At the time I was doing it the technology wasn't there. I think now possibly it might be. But it's gotten beyond me because I haven't fiddled with those machines in a long time. I just haven't had access to them. But it seemingly would be great if you could get some kind of layers going.

JC: Maybe that could be the prepared aspect of it.

CC: Yeah. But then you have to watch out that it doesn't get standardized totally, that you're not always riffing off the same tape. Alvin does it by turning it up and down and making it almost subliminal and letting the piano take over and then when you've forgotten about the tape he'll cut it back in. It's totally improvisational genius, doing it hundreds of millions of times until you figure it out. That's where I would argue with Charlie because I think after long practice you can use synthesizers and electronics in a very subtle, gentle or whatever way, so that it's really hooked into you. But it takes a lot. For a guy who came up on bass it would probably be very hard to imagine that. But somebody who dived into it and said, "I'm going to make this circuit work somehow," and then ten years later managed to personify that circuit.... But mostly synthesizers sound like synthesizers. That's the problem. I remember they used to say, before they came out, "This will make any sound and even lots that we've never heard." Well, it turned out to be like an organ. When you hear a Moog, you know it's a Moog.

LP: Are you familiar with Brian Eno's Ambient Records?

CC: A little bit, yeah. I have one of his other records. Before Science? After Science? Whatever.

LP: Have you heard any of the other things he's done for, I think it's a new label, Ambient? "Music For Airports"?

CC: I saw that record but I haven't heard it. I understand it's trying to work with a kind of background music, or making Musak more interesting.

LP: Kind of, yes. He's working towards an ambience. That's what he says on the inside jacket.

JC: What is ambience?

LP: Well, creating an environment with the music that's not an obtrusive environment. In fact, that's a record that I listen to a lot, when I'm writing or whatever. It's there but it's only there once in a while.

CC: You mean it really does disappear?

LP: It completely disappears. I think he works a little bit with looping. Well, I know he has in the past, a lot of looping.

CC: Fripp too, those things they did together with loops. Well, actually Cage had an idea in the Fifties very much like that. He wanted to program Muzak in elevators with millions of different tapes so that the bodies, through some kind of sensors, would change the music. Or walking through one of those big impersonal hallways in those giant buildings, your body would be ticking off little sounds. Which a guy named Max Neuhaus actually has done in a lot of ways. Have you heard about him? He was one of the greatest percussionists of all time. An incredible classical percussionist. He played Stockhausen and Cage pieces. There was a piece by Stockhausen called "Zyklus" that he played, which was a circle of instruments. Every percussion and mallet instrument, and gongs and African logs and cymbals and the usual. And the piece was circular, a looseleaf book where you would start anywhere and go around, and it followed the pattern of the way you set up your instruments. It was an incredible dance because a lot of it was very fast and you had to change from mallets to sticks to brushes very quick. So you really had to have your whole athletic gesture down or you'd blow it. He toured Europe and everywhere with it in the early Sixties, and it was like a dancer making sound, unbelievable. But he quit it all because it became too much of a hassle. He was touring Europe with eighteen giant boxes of percussion all by himself and trying to get them on trains. He came home and he said fuck it. He was getting interested in electronics and he just got rid of all of his percussion. It was a terrible shame in a way. But on the other hand, he found another thing to do. He put some kind of a sound underneath a subway grating in Times Square. I don't know if you heard about it, it got some publicity about a year ago. And it somehow responds to the bodies and the temperature of the air, so it's always changing but it's an almost subliminal vibration. So he goes around and he does a kind of interior decoration in a really high way. He's

a great guy. I sort of like that. Cage said, "If we've got to have Muzak, why not make it really various and changeable?" But those people wouldn't allow that. I guess Muzak is really an incredible incorporation. Of course, I have a problem: I can't really write with music on, unless I deliberately do it. I've done some things where I wanted to write to a particular solo or something, try that. I think because I've been a musician it's very hard for me. I can't imagine all those people who study in the dorms with the radio on. I can't read, I start listening. No matter what it is I'm drawn to it. Some horrible shit, that's what's happening and I can't concentrate. I guess music to me is just as present as anything else in art, so I can't really do that. Larry Fagin and I always argue about it. He has certain records which he puts on when he washes the floor or he sweeps. He says, "This is great for a carpetsweeper" -- a Terry Riley piece or something he uses in that way. Serial permutational pieces like LaMonte Young. But that makes sense, I guess, because that's sort of what those guys want to do. Certainly LaMonte Young wants this tone going on all the time, and he says when it's not that's just an interruption in the piece.

JC: It seems to be the whole question of whether you're going to try and block out your natural surroundings and create your own in which you'll write, or let that environment, whether it's passing cars, in. As a writer you confront it too.

CC: Actually I see it as a limitation in a way. I wish I was able to do that because I do it with cars passing by, that kind of thing. But if it's something that seems to be a work of art, I feel I should pay attention to it and take that guy's trip and do that. I hate that feeling of being half out of a work where you're not really getting what he's doing. You're thinking about it, you're worrying about something. It often happens at a concert. It's uncomfortable somehow. You think, ah, I'm here to do this but I can't. Or movies. I love movies and I hate movie theatres, because someone's always doing something that distracts me, or the thing's out of focus.

JC: That would be the Cagean element, that living with distraction. His whole socialism: If we can't all be brothers then there should be no art. It's really hard to deal with, for me, once you get to this realistic point.

CC: Cage said, "Waiting in line is a good chance to practice patience." He has an almost beatific air. I've seen him do this. You know that great work of his we were talking about, what the Cunningham company eats on the road? I forget the name. It's in one of his books. It's in paragraphs. He describes stopping at hamburger places, and then other things get into it. But the armature is what dancers eat, because they used to travel around in a VW bus together, real tough times before they all became famous.

There was a real kind of cameraderie and an us-against-them feeling. Dancers have to eat certain things at certain times and relax and exercise, it's very very structured. To do that in this incredible environment where you just pull into a gas station and all they've got is a peanut butter sandwich that's two weeks old, how do you deal with it? This piece is how to remain calm or productive in the midst of this mess.

JC: Doing T'ai Chi in a gas station.

CC: Yeah. There's some great remark where the gas guy said "What are you?" and someone said, "We're dancers" and the guy said, "Oh, I thought you were from New York." John picks up on those. It seems as if he's got a corner on the market of that stuff. I remember this piece he did at the University of California in Davis. He had a 24-hour event on this huge campus, with many different things going on at different locations at the same time or overlapping, called "MEWANTEMOOSEICDAY" which I think he got from Thoreau. In one little basement he had a team of pianists playing Satie's "Vexations", which takes how many hours. It's this one piece that repeats 8000 times or something. Then you'd walk out and there'd be something happening over here, some of his pieces, maybe some movies. It was great, you walked around. This guy and I went around with a camera and a tape recorder and walked in, you'd hear the music start to come and you'd open the door, it was fabulous. One piece he had was in this big gym. In the foyer he had a band, it was like the college undergraduate band, playing Satie's "Furniture Music", which is repeated themes and crazy fanfares that lead to nothing. You had to literally walk through these players, get through that and then go through the doors and you got inside and what was inside was just tables loaded with portable record players and giant stacks of records, LPs that he'd gotten really cheap from somewhere. Ancient Perry Como records or something but a real variety of schlock records. And that piece was called "33 1/3". And eventually people put them on and finally this incredible sound. It was his concept of starting an event, just providing the impulse and the materials and then whatever happens happens. At one point he just walked through. He just walked from one end of the hall to the other, smiling in this incredible way he has, which is almost alien, and there's this incredible chaos going on. These guys are playing at the wrong speeds, somebody's smashing something, people got pissed off at each other for playing at the wrong speed and fights broke out. It was insanity. And he walked through as if this is the most beatific thing that could happen. When you see that, you kind of dig where he is. You think maybe you're not anywhere near there. It's unreal.

JC: He's projecting your whole mind -- the best of what you would hope for inside. He somehow projects it out there in these happenings.

CC: But it's very much necessary. Beckett said a great thing about this in the early Sixties. Somebody asked him the question, "What is the task of the artist in our time?" He said, "The task of the artist now is to find a form to accommodate the mess." The mess. You can't avoid it anymore. It's inside. It's everywhere. And you can't just say, "This is what I do, everything has to go according to my rules." Well, it's a mysterious statement. You don't know quite what it means, practically. But it's an admonition in that direction, to figure it out.

JC: It's as if society stops trying to control the mess.

CC: Well, it does seem kind of out of hand. So much information, all the time, every second. Everything seems available. And nothing, in a way, because everything interferes.

JC: Tandy Corporation says if your child doesn't have a home computer by 1990 he'll be illiterate.

CC: Did you dig that TV ad they had where this authoritarian-looking mother is saying, "We decided that we weren't going to allow our kids to go without this computer." Like, "You assholes better get with it, you're really ruining your kids." The old encyclopedia salesmen used to run a con just like that. They would really insult you and say, "You mean you don't care about your kids' education?" and try to sell you this giant book. It's a good example.

JC: Ted Berrigan's kids came to my house and one of them, Edmund, poured into the Encyclopedia of Baseball, and he can repeat it verbatim. The information, but it's how we process it, work it through. As a question of stance, do you look at yourself as an artist as filter? What's your take on that?

CC: It's a combination because you don't do anything at all unless you have a lot of will, will to make something happen. In other words, if you want to call that ego, or whatever, it might be a part of ego, depending on what you're doing with it. I think there's that, and then there's the other. There's the outside, which becomes inside. It's a combination of the two. I don't think you just sit there and let it happen. You have to initiate something. You have to pull a thread out of the heap somewhere and follow it, see what happens when it falls down, at least. But I do think that Beckett has been prophetic. He said the time's gonna come, if not already, when you are going to have to deal with this incredible chaos. You better figure out a way to live with it or in it or using it for something. Art can no longer be just what they teach you. The thing that's haunting me though is that I get a timeless feeling about art all the way back to the original cave guys. That really there hasn't been any sense of progress at all. That's a big thing that's been laid on us here in this country especially, and this country's been laying it on the world.

JC: It's still a question of whether you move the rock or you don't.

CC: Yeah. You put the first mark and then what do you do? You know? You have to start somewhere. None of the so-called problems have really been solved. Plus that idea fits in with this information glut. All past art is also present. It's all here. It's all up for grabs again. Olson used to insist on that.

JC: How did he put it?

CC: He used to talk about 4th century B.C. "I couldn't urge you more to go back and read Hesiod and beyond." Trying to find out what the original Indo-European language was that produced supposedly everything, from which all languages came. He thought he could see it in a few ancient Greek things. In the Maximus Poems it's as if ancient Greece is right slam up against Gloucester, it's like Gondwanaland is still attached.

JC: Global tectonics.

CC: Global tectonics, exactly. The plates are still rubbing over each other. And they are. We're beginning to know how that physics works. Did you ever see him? Ah, what an inspiration that guy was! On the one hand, it's too bad what's happened since the academics picked up on him because he made so many references and he was so erudite in his way. But it was a crazy way, it was an artist's way. He read all these things but he read them for use, for his own crazy wisdom head. His classes were blitzkriegs of inspiration. You couldn't believe this guy. He would stand up there and talk about something and somebody would say something, it could be the most banal sounding thing, and his eyes would pop out and he would say, "What?!" That would set him off on some incredible trip and you realized that, wow, this is the living example of mind absolutely exteriorized: just sensitive, everything is impinging and he's making something out of everything. You got exhausted, and then you got up and said, "Yeah! Right!" I mean, this is it! I never saw a human being exteriorize their thought in their life so much as he did, always. I think what he did was open a book and read a page. He didn't think you had to start at the beginning, he didn't have the kind of consecutive knowledge the academic now thinks he did, because they're all searching through the poems to find references. He took for use, he took from everything. Anything was possible, anything would set him off. I'm sorry that, well, first of all that he's not alive because the live man was the thing that got me, the presence of him in action. The poems begin to seem a little bit interpretable or something, analyzable to that sort of mind that's always waiting for more material for these or whatever. He hated that shit, he couldn't

stand it that somebody would get so bogged down in one aspect, or think they had a hold on things. I mean, he was so kinetic, so physical.

LP: To bring that to an almost different place, I was wondering if you'd read a lot of Laura Riding?

CC: No, because I could never get hold of her. It's very hard. I have that little Selected Poems and it's very interesting. But she wrote a lot and you can't get it.

LP: It's coming out actually. There should be a large collected volume out this month. It might be Norton because I know that they handle the Five Sets. And Larry actually has a copy of A Progress of Stories, and I think he also has The Telling.

CC: Oh, that's that incredible book where she says it's impossible to write or something?

LP: Well, last night while listening to your reading and then also when I heard you read in New York, I got this feeling about syntax and what's going on that's so internal in this language. I don't know if you can even really talk about it because it's already talking about it all by itself. And I got that same feeling when I looked at her works. People who have looked at her works, their first take on it has been, well, she's just playing with words but it doesn't mean anything. When, in fact, for me it means a lot more beyond what you could possibly say in our vocabulary and our structure as we know it. And I've been thinking about relationships I find in your work with people like Creeley in terms of these word isolations. One word next to one word next to one word. And the moving on into Stein, which is like questioning the whole structure of the way the language is given to us and such. And then Laura Riding, where I feel there's a strong relationship between what I hear of what you're reading right now and the way her structures are so internal, where every line could be taken with three or four different emphases on it.

CC: I really do have to read her more. I really hope to. I was intrigued by that little book.

LP: You know that poem, "The Rugged Black of Anger has an Uncertain Smile Border"? I really like that one line in that poem. It loops like this, and comes around.

CC: You can put your finger on a couple of important people: Creeley, Stein, not so much Riding just because I haven't read it. Creeley, I went through all kinds of changes with him. The first things I read were the early poems and the love poems, The Island. And then I met him at Vancouver in 1963, and that was the big blast: Olson, Creeley, Ginsberg, Whalen and Duncan. I was this kid and met all my heroes at once, which is great. Creeley says,

"Always meet your heroes, no matter what happens." I made this naive identification with him. I'd just been married, before, I was married once before. A young married guy with all the problems of that beginning to open up, and I identified with Creeley. A lot of people, a lot of guys did that in that time and it made it impossible for him. He'd go into these rages of frustration because he couldn't handle the social situation. And all these young marrieds were coming up to him saying, "Oh, you say just what I think," almost expecting him to be some kind of marriage counselor. I remember I went home and read The Island, The Island came out after that, and I wrote him an incredible letter full of this stuff, and he just wrote back a postcard saying, "Aw, come on!" And it woke me up. I realized that's not what's supposed to happen. You can't do this to people. He's somewhere else anyway. Read the works, find out what's really happening. So then I got interested in him. And then I got into that buggy area where, "How do you end a line?" That was a whole issue. It was almost like the action painters' "How do you know if the painting's finished?" Because the Black Mountain thing became "where do you break the line?" -- balancing things. Which eventually became a non-problem. Eventually your frustration builds and you just write: One day you just write a long line or you write prose. You just have to bust out of that. Which he did too. He broke it down into Pieces, that sort of thing, realized that he could do anything. There's that famous statement where Allen told him at Vancouver, "Look, you're Robert Creeley, you've written perfect poems, you can do whatever you want, you don't have to keep on doing this, you can write bad poems." And that sort of broke.... Bob is a Yankee like me. Things have to be a certain way: You're responsible to your work; work before play. That stuff is really in there. He thought he had to stand by a certain thing: He couldn't get groovy and get loose, he couldn't dance. But finally he did, through Allen and a couple of people telling him, "Hey, come on, man, the world is an illusion, you can get down, you can do whatever you want." So he was able to change, somewhat. Creeley and Phil Whalen were the people I loved more than anyone. Have you ever met Phil? I understand he's very tough on his students here. He can be very cranky. But, gee, overall he's such a presence, such a wonderful kicky kind of guy. As if everything is an illusion and you can do wonderful things. You're allowed to, you know. His poems, his way of leaving spaces and having blocks and having intrusions of what he calls "Native Folk Speech."

JC: Like box scores.

CC: Yeah. He gave a great reading at Vancouver and everybody put him down. It was awful. Olson was after him, "You don't know how to read your poems." They really did a number on him, made him feel bad. But I thought it was great reading. It was like a guy standing up there musing over his own work in this great way. Not gibbering on

about it. Just his way of standing and looking, kind of going "hmmmmm," and that tone entering the actual reading of the poems. Like a guy saying, "Hey, you know, I wrote this!" And it really communicated. It was wonderful. You could almost see him writing it. It was very close to the act.

LP: Somebody else might look at it and say it's these random shots like on a filmstrip or something, but yet taken together it completes the picture.

CC: It <u>is</u> kind of like film.

LP: Yeah, I have an urge to density. That's just how I'm different from Phil. Although there are these what Larry calls "pockets" in Phil's work, where there's all these minerals and gems and stuff jammed together. As if he has to go to <u>that</u> place once in a while, and then spread out and leave a space. His work is so multiple that way. That's one of the things I love about it. He can say some seemingly dumb thing and then jam it all together, and then it explodes, and then there's a silence. He loves music, too. He has a real connection. And he likes jazz. He tries to play Bach on a little pump organ. He has very wide musical interests.

JC: To go into Allen for a minute, I've noticed that during the time I've been here he's gone through a change where he's cut out a lot of fat and really went to the gems himself, because of some doubt about the long line, and that brought on the heavy interest in form.

CC: Song, too.

JC: He went to song, yeah.

CC: That's what did it, I think, yeah. Starting years ago with those Blake songs, putting music to Blake. Without really having any musical ability. It's amazing, he just shot into it. It took him weeks to learn that "C" is here. In fact, I had a lot of fun here in 1977 when he had a band he was getting ready for a reading. He was going to do a song in the middle of it ... what was the poem? "The Contest of Bards". He had all these musicians of various ability. There were students and some of them were really very professional, and some weren't. I got to talking to him about meters and stuff and so he said, "All right, you come and direct the band." So I found myself over there in one of those rooms with a stick, a twig, in my hand, which he'd taken off a tree and given to me for a baton, trying to get everybody to come in. And Allen has a real loose sense of meter, and in a way it's right, because he wants the quantity to go where it is, not be restricted. But if you're going to have a back-up band, those guys gotta know where you are. I remember there was this one, like the archetype trumpet player,

jazz trumpet man, a real cat, and he knew, he could blow anything, like "give me the key. What's it in? 4 or 3? Whatever...." and he was totally mystified. He said, "What? I thought I knew where I was, but next time he came around it was somewhere else." And I'm trying to co-ordinate all these people and get Allen to "and one," but he would say, "No, stop, you're making me nervous!" So what it eventually became, I guess, is he got this one guitar player that's been with him for a long time. In fact, I remember telling him that you really need a kind of ESP situation, where somebody plays with you so much that they can feel where you're going. But he had twenty pieces or something; totally insane. Country rock piano player, jazz trumpet player, some girl playing a flute, I don't know where she was at, some guy with a guitar, Peter with a banjo ... Oh man, what a ragtag bunch! It was really funny. And Allen being totally serious and wanting to know, you know, "Explain it to me again," and it was amazing. But yeah, the song got him back to more compression. I mean, the long line was from Kerouac, right?

JC: But now it's from a different place. Now it's from Sappho. Hendecasyllabics.

CC: He was talking to me the other night about hendecasyllabics, telling me how it goes all the way through English prosody.

JC: 700 B.C. to the present.

CC: Yeah. Boy, he really studied it out. The way he gets onto something and just takes it, it's wonderful. He's got everybody writing hendecasyllabics, he said. That's great. I love that, when somebody discovers, really makes present something that's presumably ancient. You realize it really is for use, it's not dead at all, it's really here, let's do it! Possibilities, endless generation.

JC: Do you ever find roots of constellation-type poetry?

CC: Way back? Not really.

JC: Fragments, I guess you'd have to....

CC: There's Sappho's fragments, speaking of Sappho. Do you know that Guy Davenport book where he literally translated every little thing that was visible on the parchment? A wild sort of chance-looking thing. No, I think I get that more from music and painting.

JC: And totally contemporary.

CC: I guess mostly 20th Century, although you can find things in Renaissance painting that have that feeling. Even though it's totally painted, there are things going on, or clusters -- light or something. I always think of Piero della Francesca, Uccello, those guys. They seem really contemporary to

me, that stuff. As if it was done in some kind of non-time. Some works seem to just exist eternally in the same time. And when you're with them you're in that time, it doesn't matter what else is going on.

JC: Do you get a feeling they're in the mess, too?

CC: Yeah. Oh, for sure. You can turn a corner and there's a Piero. I wish it were true physically. Yeah, Webern. Cage got a lot from him. That's real constellational composition, and small enough and short enough so you can see it. Of course, he thought it was all symbolic of spirits. As I was saying the other day, he was a Swedenborg nut. He thought it was all the unseen, it stood for the unseen, which may be true. It's a nice idea. In fact I think so. I thought of something a while ago apropos of something you said, something about using language to say things that haven't been said, or grossly that. I remember having the feeling that maybe you could even describe things that didn't exist. Not in terms of fantasy, but by using words in a certain way you could cause to exist in the mind things that didn't. And I mean real things. Totally reversing the process. Which is something to grab for. You can't. You never really do it, but it's a generative impulse.

LP: Do you really mean it in terms of something that doesn't exist?

CC: Yeah. Or a feeling or a mood or a color or an angle or a place which would be almost like a dream place, I guess, if it was a very strange dream place -- not one of those things that's like a building made up of three buildings. That's from your memories; that kind of dream where you go through a door and you're in something 3,000 miles away, but it's all back in your memories. You can identify it, you can take it apart and put it back. But things that build landscapes or rooms that never ... like a dream where a room exists that's just so weird that you never were there and you can't think that it was made out of real things. It probably was, but through some incredible process of the unconscious that's so complex you couldn't take it apart and say, "This part came from Junior High, and this came from my Aunt's house." It wouldn't be possible. It would be so transformed. Complete metamorphosis.

LP: That's something I've given an awful lot of thought to, especially in the last month, just in terms of what I'm writing. And then feeling this, that that's exactly what I see with you, with the present work anyway. Even though it's a bad word, metaphor, it's as if everything becomes a metaphor for everything else. That there's all these things that can be recalled through selection or ways of putting things together that you didn't know was even there to start with, and then you've got it on paper and you've created this thing that's already there but it has not been in the language context.

CC: I can see that Tony (Towle) laid all this on me. He gave a lecture on metaphor, didn't he?

LP: Did you hear it?

CC: No, but I've been hearing about it enormously since. Evidently it must have been a great talk.

LP: Well, it finally revived the word "metaphor" for me, which is a word that I've avoided using. There was a new way to look at metaphor without it having all the old trappings of metaphor and simile.

CC: Well, it was always the metaphor, right? Instead of a series of them going out, extended. Extended metaphor might be a great thing. Well, it is.

JC: But it says that "y" doesn't necessarily explain "x" or anything. "Y" is just as chaotic and artistic and complete in its own way. It's bizarro world number 4. It's just not that much better or anything.

CC: It gets into a kind of Wittgensteinian bind, where he says something like, "We don't know one plus one equals two until we know what plus is." We think we do. Do you read Wittgenstein? It's real poetry. They're like poems. All those books of little fragments, and paragraphs and lines think about things. At the bottom of it is a feeling that it's really impossible to say anything in language. It's one of those philosopher's Babels. Once you start looking deeply into how words work, you see so many multiple doubts and possibilities that you can't say, "Well, it just works, it just does what we want." It does a lot of other things, which for an artist is great because then it opens up the field.

JC: You said the other day that doubt is the main motivating force in art.

CC: I was just thinking that right now, too. Guston really made me see that, because I could see how it worked in his work. We had a big talk one time, drunk, and it ended with him saying, "What's the matter with feeling bad?! When I painted that I was in the blackest mood, I was totally out of it, I hated everything."

LP: There's a real edge on that, though. When people look at things or read a poem and they see it as this incredible sadness coming out. And I look at it, let's say having written it, and to me it's like this incredible beauty that sits on the edge of being perfect and then toppling over. Falling forward always.

CC: Of course that's weird too because Bernadette Mayer was saying the other day, when somebody comes up to her, like after she's read a poem or they read a poem of hers, and

says, "Boy, you're really so sad" or "You're really so happy" or something, and that weird disjuncture where you say, "No, because that's a place that existed during the writing. It was a place I was at or I wanted to be at. I tried to make it exist." And then you get into talking about removals and distance and masks and that whole fascinating area, which in these terms is downed by people all talking about the truth in a plain saying. In fact, maybe that's impossible. You have to come around to it, or you have to think you're doing something that you end up not doing. I mean, that's a great thing, too. I sometimes even consciously give myself projects knowing that I won't really be able to do them, but it will make me do something else, if you see where you're going. Then you find yourself doing something that you probably are ... not that I want to talk about fate, but in a way it feels like you're sort of intended to be there. And you had to give yourself all these lines and things to con yourself into even being there at all. It's not just saying, "That's a good idea, I'll do it." Sometimes you can do that. But oftentimes you find yourself somewhere else and it feels better, it feels right.

JC: I asked you about this in the first Shakespeare class. I'm writing a masque right now. Remember you talked about masques? Real briefly in relation to Shakespeare. You just skimmed it when I asked you. Do you mean it in the sense of classical, of Ben Jonson/Shakespeare masques, in terms of confessions of a mask?

CC: We were talking about Shakespeare, so there were certain obvious examples in Shakespeare. I must have been thinking about painting. Well, even about erasures, about hidden things, about things in back of what you do. You know it's there and nobody else does. Nevertheless there's a bit of it there and it's a transformation. Or even just a kind of persona. A figure, like Guston's heads, becomes a mask for a lot of his thought: worries and fears and terrors and hopes. He has to have that solid thing there in order to operate at all. He can't just say, "I hate this," or "I want this." It has to take concrete existence, and then you've got that thing acting; hopefully sort of on it's own. It's not really, but it's that thing.... I was talking with Michael Brownstein the other day about writing novels, which fascinates me now. I'd like to be able to do that -- I'm trying to figure out how to do that. And it's the old saw, about the novelist saying, "At this point this character wanted to do something different from what I wanted him to do." That somehow the thing does come alive and it does have its own person and exerts force once you get it going and up enough. That's totally mystifying to me.

JC: In the "Arrangement" piece you said you finally get the work to a place where at the end of the piece you say it's giving you ideas.

CC: Right. Hopefully. I'm not sure I remember exactly that quote. I have trouble at the end of that piece because it ended up in questions, and then it was edited.

LP: I was surprised that in a couple of poems I heard words like "truth" and "knowledge". I was wondering if they found themselves there or if that was an intention.

CC: I think it forced me. I was forced to use them. I don't think it was really intentional. I'm sure that it wasn't. I wouldn't presume to say that "truth is this." But those words have been coming up more recently. "Truth" and "knowledge", "love" and "fear". Maybe the great words took this long to become presences to me. I was saying to someone the other day, after the Guston class, we got a little bit into talking about these "Language" guys, Barry Watten and Ron Silliman, and I was sort of putting them down, but this person said, "Well, you really are responsible for that, and how can you say this?" And I was saying, "Well, look, dig it, I'm trying to deal with this right now." I don't have a solid way, one way or the other. I'm sort of bewildered by it, too. And it's unfortunate that any poet or artist or whatever that becomes public lives out their changes in public -- like Eldridge Cleaver or those guys making horrible mistakes or rock people killing themselves. We all know, we all go through it with them if we sympathize or empathize. And therefore it gets harder to make a clean progression and say, "Well, you did this, why don't you dig this?" Because you can actually point to works by me fifteen years ago that were an influence on someone like Bruce Andrews, if you've seen his work. He's evidently, I hope, taking it somewhere else even I don't really empathize with much. But that's ... okay.

LP: That's a funny thing, because I went to a talk by Barrett Watten and I couldn't ... I just sat there and thought, "Oh, please, no, please no." He was trying to isolate these segments of what you had done.

CC: Oh, was that that talk about me and Smithson?

LP: Yeah. He had these xeroxes and he was trying to isolate things and explain them in terms of encyclopedia explanation, or diagramming: taking a frog and dissecting it and pointing out each organ. And I just thought, "No, that's not what it is at all." It just got so cerebral. And then all of their comments, I could pick out who was who just in terms of what they were talking about. It's as if they'd barnacled onto your work and they were trying to ... it's almost like they were killing it.

CC: It's a very strange thing to be a forefather of something and you're still alive and you're still working and they're working, and yet you're supposed to be some kind of stone that doesn't move. You can't be.

LP: And they're trying to trace all your little patterns.

CC: And they're trying to figure it out even beyond what I tried to figure out in a way, because they are taking it in other directions. They have a different view of it and that's fine if you want to work. But to make it into a theory, that's where it really gets sticky, hard for me to develop, to connect, because I'm no longer that person. I have my process, and it is a process. I can't stand up and say, "Okay, this is how I did this and this is what I intended and therefore you guys ought to dig it that way." I can say you're wrong or I don't feel this way about these works, but it's how I feel about them now. I can't even really rightly remember everything about how I felt about them then. It's really hard, you know.

LP: I think they got sidetracked from the experience and they're going into this other.... It's like turning into hard science almost.

CC: Barry is very scientifically based. I think he was in mathematics in college. You weren't at that question and answer thing at Langton? It was on Sunday afternoon.

LP: No.

CC: It turned out to be the tenth anniversary of Kerouac's death, which I didn't even know, and I was talking about him some. But Barry asked a question ... it wasn't really a question, it was a statement, but I couldn't follow it. I could dig that the room didn't either. Everybody was falling out and there were other people waiting to ask, and I finally just had to cut him off and say, "Barry, you really have to do this later because there are other people here who want my attention and if you want to talk to me later, okay, but that's ... I don't see this as a question. If it is, get to it." And he wasn't. In a way, I guess, it's sort of admirable, because what he's trying to do is think on the spot, put himself into a funny position and try to get out of it, think in real time. But it gets really draggy for people, because if you don't know exactly what his references are, and very often they're very abstruse, you just get lost right away and then it's boring because you can't follow it. And even if it does end up in a question, you don't know what it is. It's like putting a question mark at the end of something, anything, and saying "What?" and "What do you think?" And yet with him and me it's always like, "How does this relate to your work?" And if I don't understand what he said, how can I even think in terms of that? But it's fascinating and terrifying to see. I'm very curious what will become of some of these people. If they are right and there is a place to take this that I don't see, then more power to them. But I can't really sympathize because I don't see it. I'm somewhere else, I see other things. A lot of their work seems to me very tentative, not really fully

formed, and lacks the urge to speak or to write, the urge to say, which I more and more think is basic in the language. I almost feel like it's there, there's a quality ... and I mean language in the brain, the whole complex.

JC: I found this, it seems almost apropos. Page 157 of Talking Poetics where you say, "Write a work and you work on it a long time and it seems to be finished, but there's something wrong. You like it well enough so you don't throw it away, and months later you read it and it's all there. It's right, it's congealed, it's a whole. All those diverse elements have come together correctly. In other words, they give you something to think about."

CC: That's really one of those keys. I got that little bit from Joyce. There's a great statement from Joyce, which I guess I didn't quote.

LP: It's right in here. "James Joyce, in a letter: 'The elements needed will fuse only after a prolonged existence together.'"

CC: That's a beautiful shot. That's true. It's a true thing about writing. I've many times had that experience. In fact, it's almost part of my procedure now, that I put the thing away for a day or so because I know it's going to look different. I know that. It would be so weird if it looked exactly the same. That's a good way to thinking about distance, because you get a little bit of it and then it becomes something else that feeds back to you. You did it, I mean, you know you did it, but it has changed aspect enough so it gives you something to go on with. There it is. Phil Whalen always says the first rule of writing is to put it on paper. It sounds so stupid, but it's absolutely it. Don't leave it in your head. Something else is going to happen. It's a transformation. The minute you put a thing down it's different from what you intended. It's in that direction, it's gonna go in that direction and you'll never know what it is, you'll never get anywhere unless you actually do it. It's amazing how many people don't seem to know that. Or they think they know it, but they don't really know what the practice is, or they don't write enough to get the point. I know how much I've had to write to get any of it. And I consider myself, from a kid, a basically lazy person. This is a Yankee hassle. I've got to work, I've gotta do it. I spent a lot of years as a teenager just dreaming about doing things, I guess as everybody does, never really writing much down, reading a lot of books, having my parents see me as this total bum. You know, like "You'll never do anything." But then I realized how necessary that is at some point to do that. But then you have to pick up and start putting it down. And really work and learn that you can do it when you feel bad. That was the hardest thing to learn.

JC: So, have you ever been to a point where you've been blocked for twelve years?

CC: No. In fact, I can't even imagine it. Writer's block ... it's odd.

JC: For a musician music is such a discipline, more so than writing. If you bring that into it you don't get trapped that way.

CC: I think you might have put your finger on it there.

JC: Because all that time spent by yourself, feeding on whatever your instrument is -- the sense of practice you get from there. It seems like it helps.

CC: It becomes a daily practice; it becomes part of your life. It doesn't become somebody standing over you with a stick, "Play the piano!" It starts out that way. But if you can ever get to the point where it's just daily life, very much a part of your daily life as work.

JC: This thing that gives you a little joy.

CC: Sure. Delight, Phil Whalen's word. I always think of writer's block as being a novelist's problem, largely. It seems that a lot of the guys I've heard that have had that problem have been novelists. I've tried to write a novel many times and I never have. I don't consider that I understand that physics, but it must be more a property of that kind of imagination. Maybe they don't see far enough ahead, or they get hung up on a plot, or they can't see what this character is gonna do, and it just won't work. A failure of the imagination might happen, if it's disembodied. That's what I mean about getting it down on paper. I wonder how many of those guys truthfully start out and don't know what's gonna happen. Which would seem to me the great way to write a novel. You just start and you see what this guy is gonna do, or you make him do something.

JC: Do you have an intuitive feeling about how Melville worked?

CC: I'm sure that with Moby Dick he ... because he wrote it once as what was expected of him as this guy who went to the South Seas and wrote sort of travelogue books. He wrote a version which was the story of a whaling voyage, and it didn't have Ahab and it didn't have Moby Dick. And then he seems to have reached this point where he said, "Fuck it, I'm just going to go for broke." And that's the go-for-broke book. It's the go-for-broke book of all time in English. And he did it and then he was beaten down. People didn't dig it. There's a book of reviews of his works in his lifetime which is fascinating, horribly depressing. You read the contemporary book reviews of all of his books, and Moby Dick? Forget it. It was too long and they couldn't understand why it was interrupted with these cetology chapters and they thought he was crazy, that Ahab was an absolutely impossible human being, nobody could ever be like that, therefore it was boring. You

can imagine. And then he wrote Pierre, which is fascinating because he immediately wrote Pierre and that's exactly the story of writing Moby Dick and after. There are great descriptions when he goes into his room and writes. He says, "Pierre had destroyed the natural day," or some incredible doomy things that occur to writers. Terrific book. Then he pretty much, except for The Confidence Man, disappeared in the last thirty years of his life. He got a job in the customs house and even the New York literary scene didn't know he was in the city anymore. Guys would come from Europe and say, because his books were kept in print over there, "Where's Melville?" And somebody'd say, "I don't know, I don't know if he's dead or alive." He was there, but he was off the set. He was secretly writing poetry but had totally given up the idea of having a career as a writer. That had totally fallen apart. He had written his great breakthrough book and he knew he had. I'm sure he knew it was a great, great work. And the door had been slammed. And Hawthorne, his best friend, had fled. And the reviews were all bad, the book didn't sell. I mean, try to imagine that. Talk about blocks! I mean, he went and wrote Clarel, which is pretty amazing if you can make it through. I don't think of him as a novelist like today, like ... I was going to say Mailer, but Mailer changed, too. Mailer when he was young, when he had the success, the classic first novel success which is supposed to blow you up, and it did but he found a way of dealing with it. So many novelists seem to be, as Michael was saying the other day, cynical to begin with. Cynical about the whole process. Not even to the extent of hoping Hollywood buys it, although that's very much part of it now. Not believing that language has the potential to be doing more than recount or move people in and out of rooms or something. There's an awful lot of that and it seems like a certain limited level of writers. Sometimes I think that some of that might be necessary. If you spend too much time looking at words, you might never get the guy out of the room.

LP: I want to ask you about when you started to look at Stein's material, and what you thought about that in relationship to this.

CC: I think I told in Talking Poetics about how my father brought home Blood on the Dining Room Floor and I somehow was impressed that that was real stuff. I was what? Ten or twelve? And then there was a long period where I didn't know about her. Somehow I got a copy of Bee Time Vine. That was the book. All those Yale books were remaindered at one point. It's insane to think of because now you can't get them and they're rare books. Why Yale has been so stupid as not to keep them in print I can't imagine. They should have been in paperback endlessly. Then somebody stole it from me, or I lent it to someone and never got it back. And then years later Phil Whalen was leaving for Japan and he gave me his set, the whole set. And it's great because he wrote in the front of them the places where

he bought each one. It says, "Philip Whalen, Hollywood 1953," and there are some markings. It's terrific. He's one of the few that really read that, he really read Stein, he's read all of Stein. He said he took a long train trip once and read the whole Making of Americans in one shot. I don't know anybody else that's done that, it's pretty hard to do. I mean, you can go to these readings in New York. Have you ever heard about that? There's a group that has been reading that as a team; one guy will fag out and somebody else will take it up, raise the banner, and it takes twenty-four hours or something. There was a great Stein marathon at St. Marks Church some years ago that I took part in. Hundreds of people. It was great; twenty-four hours non-stop reading, all kinds of works. I think I read "Patriarchal Poetry". Great things like "Stanzas in Meditation". Allen gave this great reading at about four in the morning, just at the point where it's starting to sag. It had started at eleven in the morning and went around to eleven, and about four a.m. he came in and just lifted the whole thing by reading the last ten pages of The Making of Americans like some incredible mantra, just wailing. It was nothing like she would have ever countenanced, but it was great. It was this great version, like improvisation on Stein. The exact words but absolutely read in his way; as if "Howl" had been written by Gertrude. And that picked everyone up. And then it would rise and dip, different energies, some people would get up and stumble. Anne Waldman's mother was the greatest reader. She almost was Gertrude Stein. It was amazingly close to the record. Even though she didn't tutor herself to do it her voice was right. She just read beautifully, fluidly. It was a great idea. It was on some anniversary of her life. I wish it would be done again. In fact, now that Bernadette is head of the Poetry Project maybe I should suggest that to her, to do it again, keep it alive. Stein had a sort of bulge a few years ago because of the Women's Movement. They got a lot of book reprinted. But then it kind of died out again before they got to the things that I wanted, like Useful Knowledge which hasn't been reprinted.

LP: Was that in the Yale series?

CC: No. That was a Plain Editions book that Alice did. They did do How to Write, which is an amazing book.

LP: Isn't it amazing?!

CC: Astounding!

LP: You've got to read one sentence at a time and then close the book and think about it for about half an hour. I've got that book and I've been making my way through it very slowly, like maybe four sentences a week or something.

CC: It's all charged, everything's so charged, you can't imagine how she did it. I guess it was that two hours a day. I think she even had a time of day, didn't she?, when she wrote.

LP: I thought she wrote at night and then Alice typed up her manuscripts in the morning.

CC: While she slept.

LP: Right. What a wonderful arrangement.

CC: Yeah. The perfect chemistry, like the Beatles or something. It happens very rarely. Who would put up with Gertrude? I guess Alice really allowed her to be Gertrude Stein. She needed someone to do that, to make her feel she was a genius, and to take care of the house, type up the manuscripts.

LP: Take care of the boring visitors.

CC: The boring wives of the interesting artists.

LP: Exactly.

WORDS

Words, what to say about these things. Not things exactly, but what. As a subject? But am I not the subject of all things. You start with a tangle, put any head at all on it, it runs. About, in words. What to say. They obsess me? That they want out? They light and sculpt their own particular spaces. Such spaces that Gogol can have a man lose his nose and the nose walks about in the streets without feet of explanation; Beckett can watch himself giving himself the words, a special anxiety and delight inherited from our age of thought. Whole edifices of philosophy rising and falling on the momentary basis of what one has said. Word space, a marvelous and terrible and most friable condition. What I mean to say, pointed indications of an unconscious. Which, as Duncan says, we can never contact, whatever in mind already conscious. Transformation. How it all changes from what you thought to anymore think. Moby Dick, a distressing mess--the essentials of madness in a structure of whales?! Months of tracking the Pacific scratching on paper in a northlit room of Berkshire hills. Who is in there now. Lies, how. A space in which Guy Davenport can dispense with the painter Van Gogh, point for point an invention of Lautrec, Gaugin and brother Theo. Beckett begins Molloy's second section: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows." and end it: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain in beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining." Alright, obvious gaps, and naturally finally of time also. Otherwise how go any words. Sometimes it feels like Wittgenstein has written the armature of this century in his quicksand notebooks. Melville having already given us too much size. His pyramid of a whale still the vastest scale thing in any book. And Beckett pulled back to so few things that there is no end to the words arriving. The mind seizing on whatever, the motor then seized. Writing as a process of the freeze and thaw. Rules? There are none. But forms, movements, flashes and residua. What is a cat. Say, what? And having said that, how do you like your cat now? Cat placed in such a situation is no longer a question. A cat what is. What cat is a. The word is always initial. Zukofsky inhabiting the first position for a lifetime, finds he must add all the other letters quickly at the other end, to make an end. "For it is the end gives the meaning to words"--Beckett. But my work will never be completed. And habitually thinking of the title after the work, I realize too late there will never be a title to this one, this lifetime. "Frequently there must be a beverage"--Woody Allen. Rule, from the Latin: "model" and "to direct". To direct a model? Sounds like photography. Plenty of instruction, turn your head, again, just a little that way, but no certainty. Muybridge's stop-frames of a naked man on the run (1880's). Then how come anyone could have mistaken "Breathless" (1959). It seems relativity means it. Melville on himself writing Moby Dick: "He has assassinated the natural day". Nothing if not the slamming together of times and their spaces. Condensations and deformations of the book "like a vast lumbering planet, revolves in his aching head. And all the outside coming upon that becomes in it squeezed and transformed into the final ir-

reducible unrecognizability."--Pierre. Or is it all but that rock on the window ledge, glowing in the grey light of this particular spot of day? The words don't say. Though at least they move on. Move on what. What I in the midst of this am trying to say. Yes, the midst, that of this am trying. Then what I in this midst? The I picks up again, I was waiting for it?, at this am that's trying to say. To say back again to the initial what. The what not circular, but demanding yet another completion. In what I am trying to say of this midst. For "everything comes to him from the middle of his field"--Wallace Stevens. In New Haven where all evenings are ordinary (they move in succession): "The eye's plain version of a thing apart... Of this, a few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet--as part of the neverending meditation... these houses, these difficult objects, dilapidate appearances of what appearances, words, lines, not meaning, not communications, dark things without a double, after all..." and on and on for thirty pages. Thus, the commonplace. A mountain covered with cats. "The catalogue is too commodious." So much for Whitman, Williams so much wanted to take the measure of. And now the well-known plethora, our land with its car stops. The "mess"--Beckett. And the accompanying desire to have it all, but particularly (Uccello's battles). Can it be the language now contains more words than there are things. Thus precipitates additional things out of solution back into the universe. What a revolting development that is. Human mind on the move (running scared?). "There seemed to be an endless stream of things"--Dashiell Hammett, The Tenth Clew. Surrounded and breathing. In my own words, what do they want out of me. And I only own them in the very act of releasing them. More than I know. "More than I could"-Beckett. And there's another one, a little known form of peanut? But, looking closer, it's an agate. "Indeed the whole visible world is perhaps nothing other than a motivation of man's wish to rest for a moment"--Franz Kafka, a writer of few satisfactions. But perhaps the reason one can never do what one feels oneself able to do is that one's ability is actually limitless?

Bring it all back down and in to the singular, the specific, the one. The unique, as one feels oneself to be in any strong act of focus. From the many the one. And then the next one. Not quite still, but as if just moved or about the move. And the absolutely still? Too impossibly mysterious, as every thing seems in motion, if only at the edge. Stillness of that order, perhaps a node peculiar to the mind alone. "To restore stillness is the role of objects"--Beckett. His desire? But for any radiance there must be motion. The pyramids in a noon sun. As Pound mis-had it from Confucius (and later Zukofksy in the annals of the Objective), the precise definition of the word sincerity: "pictorially the sun's lance coming to rest on the precise spot verbally." Some conundrum. To Zukofsky there is the motion of incompleteness in this sincerity ("which does not attain rested totality"). Next to this he places Objectification (rested totality): "distinct from print which records action and existence and incites the mind to further suggestion, there exists, though it may not be harbored as solidity in the crook of an elbow, writing (audibility in two-dimensional print) which is an object or affects the mind as such." This conglomerate stillness, the highest order

to a man who lived his life in a house of music. Who later kept a regular count of the words in his lines, the barest possible ground for his variables? We merely count.

It is a field now. And the figures (of one possible figure) are oppositely Olson and Cage. Follow your nose, and follow your no's. Olson wants to possess it all, to will it all into definition ("I compel Gloucester/to yield, to/change"--Letter #27), Cage to get out of its way. What they leave us with is The Field. And pictures of possible activity. To Go, or To Let Go. All, or Nothing At All. One wants to Have, the other to Receive (Leave). Olson loved Melville because he was full, took on the largest things, and quantity became the prime term; Cage Zen because it holds everything as empty, no weight and not waiting. Both men of large ego, different techniques to divert or still them. Olson to heap up his will on things to make form, Cage to counter his will to allow forms he would otherwise have missed. They make a curious figure for art in our time. They seem mirrored opposites, but can be seen also to mix. Olson often to hazard a guess. Cage to will his indeterminacies into workable existence. Both inclined toward the pedagogic and the quest for social solutions. They only seem to have come together once, at Black Mountain, Olson reading from a stepladder, Cage arranging all other matters so that he could not be heard. They do seem to present an interference figure, but only if one follows them as dogmas. Instead, see the matter they are pointing out: The Field, of things and forces and absences. And the uses that can be made (trnsformations/syntheses) of their separate stands. As, one example, Godard's "The immediate is chance. At the same time it is definitive. What I want is the definitive by chance."

Olson's much-quoted statement, via Creeley (Form is never more than an extension of content), reposes the old scholastic separation, though seeking to close the gap by a more active mechanism. But there is no separation. Things are. No avoidance. And no scholarly equational rhymes (To be content with form one must form the content, etc.). To the working artist there is no such state as Form. or Content. Only forms. (Zukofsky's "we are words, horses, manes, words"--end of A-7) Olson knows this in his quoting of Melville ("By visible truth we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things"). But rather than accenting the necessary plural, he seems to come down harder on the absolute there (an unpublished Maximus, the single word: "Absoluteness"). One might say, we live intruded by a world of absolute plurals. The plethoran mode. Varying like and dis-likenessess. The heavy every, the noted nothing. Olson, Cage.

Put it all together, it spells "other", the "m" having been lost in the fray. I find myself very close in spirit and work to the Yes,But dialectics of the painter Philip Guston. You never have one thing but you have another, and they are never alike. They push, and recede, and blend, and advance, and refuse. But never stand long, except in the flash of a pause, having just moved, and/or being about to move once again. This seems the kinetics of thought/action: growth, destruction, transformation. An endless working of matters and forms. And it reveals

doubt as active, if it forces on to move. As the scientists say, a negative result is after all also a result. What is it? Where is it? And what's next?

I have the sensation that the most honest man in the world is the artist when he is saying I don't know. At such moments he knows that, to the questions that truly interest him, only the work will give answers, which usually turn out further questions. This should be an instruction to any possible audience. I am reminded by this memory picture: a guy in my highschool class of such quick imaginative wit he could transform any happening into what it had not been a second before, thus making us all laugh, one day called on in physics class to answer a question stood up and gazing fiercely into space yelled "I DON'T KNOW!" Amazing. Obdurate as hell. And sametime a most apt correction of all his surroundings.

Cage: We're not going to go on playing games, even if the rules are downright fascinating. We require a situation more like it really is--no rules at all. Only when we make them do it in our labs do crystals win our games. Do they then? I wonder.

--Text read at Naropa
July, 1977

BEING BEHIND SOMETHING

The light and lie that films stop. The wish in the lie of lighting. The light and the longing that films stop. The breath. The injuries in the locking of the load of track the street. The dismissal in banal. The quiet and catastrophic pin in the sheet that wishes to speed but slows our plan. The our in our plan. The an which might be another our. That films stop. The time. To be considered in a switch of haziness. The broken bone through the skin of a shock reverie. Hauls back to the beginning and then snap. The hotel. The parsnips on hand for the missing plate. The day of the week and its litmus heaving in a heaven of our rife disposal. Lights are on in the night and I take you to that moon. That shine in the desert, the waste of bland nickel parts that films stop. I wish to hand you the heart on a card of the road. And I do not try to talk, I whistle. The pictures do not stop the late talk in cars for which we spend the right. The corner of the spider in the frame of the owl spending. As the poems of any grasp hold no rights in our land of slipping from all snapped opportunities. He will tell me that the lotion is a cow, the landfill an armed tent, and every article a potential possessive. I did not wish to stay too late in the night upright to talk of certain thing, but I did as the films stop. That details fill. The verb pass its junction at wheat speed. What does this mean and pass on. What does this buy at dream speed. The only nation is an historical casting of lapsed passion. It stays goodbye and does not carry the violet into the vanilla. Things are always tried as they have not been said. I pass the front on a car to enter my storm with beer, the storm with the glass front flexible to air. Yes, egg too are possessive. They fill with details. And the detail, you say to me of a sunday, is a honk of speed. Later the speed contained the sky, the bicycle then, the woman leaving all. To their blanks of a horn, to their negative rate of sealing meat. I do not know you, I feel you hunt me back. And I tried not to sop in the talk with them. He is a man in the main, a watcher on the land. He places his feet to their double moves as inevitable and shaken loose as liars. The sky turned up the clock that is wanted but we won't get it. We find it, then leave it to lie as the blood runs from the cut. There the woman in the dark smiles bright in the negative chair. Are we prepared for the death of the long hair? I say to you something and I have no mention. What is it called that I think what is it called. Bright rose in bruise scope screen. Amazing couples are emitting bruisers, they stand to the smile of the death that won't let it stop. They have brains so long as the chairs they have prepared. The stop that is long enough for them to say what they want, wistful danger. Lace oil, start clicking sheets. Cows that loll from the billboard shot to the mouth of the sea. Dark chairs that show no endings but prepare cramped tillers. They bet in the shop, then leap to the stalled hunt. I will get them back their undersides of knees in plain detail. The sun is loose this morning the movies are fixing. Give me a smile of a basking negative, lend me a hand up. Certainly not, and the girl serves her smile. Words have no time for us. We place them and are used. The billboard as dwell as a stark chair. Never to forget that I will spend you through mention. I have as half a moon as you are good in this world. And we will meet at the

stake of the girl on the bent height. This is as better sent as smiling in the dark, a dark that peels at the friction of a mention. The car bent at a color of the certain voice. An avenue as special as the forgotten syllable. The secret to the lock of the gate? You speak to me at friction. Words are work as well as you serve your smile. She knocks over the chair on her way to intention and promptly mates. Think it through. I speak as well as my dwell here. I speak in the humiliation of a soda bound to be sent me. These are the words that in the walled-in place turn but do not repeat. An invention is always out. We are sorrier at the loss than a hitch in our solutions. The thighs go by but the whole train is not your life nor sad. The arrival of a lingo the ability of a widener, but you are darned if you will broaden the station. Life is high enough without the special something of an abrading forgetting. I am as sure of the girl as I am of a fractional driven past. I live to lure the leaving flames to darken me. The card caught on his sleeve the spot of a spilled beer. And clear as soap her smiles away. Now she has written up to the knee. Nature imperfect and her distortion of language in a move to the window, its frame to the outside. In the arc of her words saying, Whose arc? As she reached the end of her walk, a mere halt on any way, I saw her think. I saw the cow open and time come out. Mouths move and words come back. The afternoon was coming down short an attendant sheet. But could it be true of the eyes they are windings? An extended wonderment is to cup the sky. As a child I was thought to reach in and pull out the light. I waited always for the cup to be put down so the light go out. Thought's hurry for things to home on same. Do you feel the wind in that film. The greatest light would be clear as a flesh of no tidings. There is a house full of windows full of horses motioning to the sea. It sure <u>feels</u> dark. It must be winter by a pool by the sea or a house not totally forgotten. The lights came on in the funnel of the brackish car. What do people think me capable of, careful thoughts of them. But there is no will in dream. We all walked by the stones, too dark to read the writing there. And the sun came out of the ceiling of the car. The signpost clear as soap was to women's ideas. There I saw you hurry at the rate of a cancer, your bones clear of mica, the opposite sex of a different salvage. The dream as a kind of balk. Perhaps I will turn my back and talk about the film that would not stop. It was stupid as a car the answer. People were collecting as a hassle on the speck. He was being questioned and couldn't be led away from his depiction of his pictures of the pickerels. The mind awry at repetition but the eye? Then the voices came by, all as wheat as they could clear in a sent lump. Then he told us, the part in store will be the portion recalled. And those sentences heated in the house hailed from the windows. Night full of the other sort of talk filled life. That we could see from the echo there was a fence. The woman at last to walk and the cow to talk. But I wouldn't imagine that you could talk any further than your start to look. Cap away the urban verbs, barely bicycle. Written now up beyond her thigh. The stop to start. The start to seem. The shout to the problem of return to zero. The scream to seeing.

-- after Jean-Luc Godard's
"Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)"
8V81

FROM THE BOOK OF BOP

The precise arrangement of the lights is never
finished involved. We make bread
in the cabin of a stark market.
And bends at the hands of friends.
Laughing looser than meter, 'least
the trend is fonder. Lights in the way up
night stem trees to their ingot chording.
Brightness a note back as secret as a thought.
The moon is on the sun.

Streams of bop, antennas no landing.
Stripes on a gasp of marveling. The no note
end bone that collides standing lapses.
Do you own? Where is the which that will
click the fur? Is any on? Whose skull
no one's home? A fist full of larval dates
will do. The horn in a mist of burst impressions.
Darts that ate the tongue.

Ash bars on a collapse of lime cars.
I've avoided you 'cause you're so to me.
I've thought of you and then started you
listening. I write in the night and somewhere
my old and other cars switch. Listening is
eventualizing. Lips to lip it up into
doubts that sound. The cars that go by
the bars, lights to the other side. Durenamel
neons and smiler beveled confab. I can't write
in a ring when my hand stays. Taps on my brain,
blues to an orphaned hocked. The slant school
was true, under suns and solos. Twig bracket radio
leveling dug eyes.

--6XI81

AFTER MORANDI

1.

Scratch of lines, on a vast hill or prone tomb.
Nothing buckles from them, no sneezed move.
In which hair is rich but silences. Breathed
across no more it is had. And you sit up
to twitch and pencil nothing.

If I could add anything it would here be
a carbarn, out of stitch but framed
as a find of jars, pumiced in to swear by.

2.

How stiff perhaps. But not more than reach.
The tin shelf aligned with wax modes.
We are careful but snap. A camphor.
There is a moon. There is a long time.
The elbow bends at the neck of an alp.
Hovers weigh, as much as shades the table.
Out of the house comes a man and in his hat.
The smiles have been gone through. Now the rubble.

3.

Careful as mind, the dowel rolls.
The hurry is damped in thin and line.
Out of the stout a pretense of coral.
No sky off, even one time.
I reach. I set. I plumb the dutiful.
The blinds are useful, and the dumb.
The morose a garden of stands.

4.

Ordinal as a pivot of wicks, the strum.
Cartweights of apple, a theme and a spare.
The decimal throttles the beam of a barrel.
Two loose names in jostle, a beacon.
And rare the one that stems a row.

5.

The cigarette standing. Say.

6.

Sitting on a fit bowl, expect the picks,
a whole comes lean. I remember my name.
There are stops to the trick, pencils.
Things bought in bins, and far slow.
I include my duplicates.

7.

I am in a hall, slope dome, full
catch of rains. A shying of the light
to a plaster fast if doweled slow.
And there is a note the lemon wouldn't.
Here is a clad doom.

8.

Mired in appetite, lost a limb.
How do I imagine to smile the hollows in mind.
How does amazement stop and then in turn of a strain shine.
Where does the battle hide.

9.

Ice is flicked through on a numb and a dare.
Soft does it show in the raise of numeral.
Combined in a flatten the dulls mark their heights.
The day is made over, shadowed under.

10.

A long life of this. Tongues demitted.

--6XI81

SOUTH BEACH

Big gangs cheering over crests in lumpy rafts.
Crisis of waters and backtalk of Mel Blanc.
How can it be, he showed, and made for the lip.
Mad braggings in diminishment of skies
seas apothesize. Showings-off of the dump below.
Tippings-over of the stun earth.
Strings repeating (depicting) one idiot diminishing phrase.
Paddle game, circular plywood paddles and hard
smallball in mid air, increasing the Hulot aspect.
And their floppy white caps, so hermit and keen,
propriety reflect. Sandy flaxed
Europeanized type wants to try his
yell in the tidals, and could you "toe the surf"?
While readers of scandal sheets claim
"Boy, there's been a hell of a lot of erosion?"
Bright slippers winking further out.
"Sun Tan will loaf you, all right?" (He's a
Kirk Widmark Sander) And fatsos
there is no hope for, saving sand stains for
old age treatments. "Buy yourself a
sexual diamond."

An unknown beefier member of the Quaid
Family beats his feet on his Millers and
transistors his potty friend. He drowses and
reminds of Curls of Backboard. This is
some Dream California of the Far Rollers
(Afternoon, always an afternoon definition of
afternoon). "And where are the clowns",
Judy Collins of the clearly shut frequencies,
"Isn't it clear". No, you put a
camera full of sun lotion down your front.
Beach full of jiggling limbs ("the Giggling Lings"!)
on air mattresses. A seventeen year old girl
reads "Seventeenth Summer" with evident
wonder. What do they tell her, and she's
probably actually only fourteen anyway (?)
Slanted writing to avoid the wind.

Figure that walks but sticks to his talks.
Summer is as daft as winter. Dafter, 'cause
more is out. Everybody launching up and down
in thought and bunch grass.
Isinglass turrets by the sea. "Something where
you can call the shots." The man called
Berry Older. "If I made more money I'd
have a brain."
Sand is the grass of the sea sphere.

Green tends to yellow
in the blue & tan of beach.
Kid with black guitar case, pack and frame dog
not trotting but straightening along
brings himself up at the primer tempo
as beach allows things.
A shake-up of Barely, no notion in a cube
but it's all complete, every second, sighting
the woman that just stands
at a certain angle to the all
the day. Miles of spray and groin chunks along.
I don't see the satisfies in this stall array.
Don't bring a man talk in a box at this beach.
Lie on a cloth flap in a paper cap and hunch
that this blue'll continue through till Fall.
(Against the Fall of Night: of what and by whom?)

Dentists in gold glass rims and no chest hair are here.
Teens choose up for suits and comparisons.
Guy brushes back oil hair with a fudgicle
and umbrellas make hollow sand tube shifting sounds.
Groups of hair stand around in groups of suit.
Breeze Reveries of the Goal of the Seawall.
Can you remember your uncle here?
They're making kites of cellophane again and so hiss.
This beach has gone a reach of snakes.
They snatch.
They're coming back with the food.

--9VIII80

The Place of Dead Roads by William S. Burroughs, reviewed by Michael White.

The Place of Dead Roads is a sequel to the last William S. Burroughs novel, Cities of the Red Night. It is not a sequel in the usual sense; neither the characters nor the historical setting are carried over. What makes it a sequel is the theme. Burroughs described the theme of Cities of the Red Night as, "the limitation imposed through biologic structure and the potential for transcending this through biologic change." This theme is expressed even more explicitly in The Place of Dead Roads.

The novel is set primarily in the old west of the 1880's. The main character is Kim Carson, a young outsider from St. Louis society. Kim leaves St. Louis and travels through the west where he establishes an outlaw band called the Johnson family. The Johnson family code of ethics is based on minding your own business, honoring your commitments and helping out when help is needed. Another part of the code involves death: The Johnsons have no fear or repulsion about death; they affirm it and accept it, they edge up close to death and are fascinated by it, it is an exotic form of entertainment, as satisfying as a good meal.

In The Place of Dead Roads Burroughs writes without resorting to traditional novelistic devices: there is no plot or strict temporal continuity. The novel begins and ends at the same gunfight moving through a series of scenes built around the central character and theme. The scenes relate to one another like the sequence of events in a long and detailed dream. The main character turns out to be the hero of a pulp western written by William Seward Hall, a New York editor who also appears as a central character. Kim is himself a writer and occasionally his hallucinatory fantasies and journal notes are incorporated

into the text. At one point Kim is cloned so there are at least ten Kim Carsons and the remaining scenes depict any of these clones. The story is also a movie with occasional intrusions by the scriptwriter and director. And behind it all is William Seward Burroughs, in his seventieth year, thin and delicate, bent over his typewriter projecting his visions. The only American comparable to the great European stylists -- Celine, Genet and Beckett.

The moral principle that motivates Kim and his band of homo-erotic outlaws is clearly spelled out in the last words of Hassan i Sabbab, the old man of the mountain: "Nothing is true, everything is permitted." Kim studies everything he can find about Hassan and models the Johnsons on Hassan's Ishmaelite cult. Hassan led a band of assassins who infiltrated and struck down their enemies. Hassan and his followers had gained access to a garden of paradise. Hassan had studied in Egypt where he learned a technique, assumed to involve the ritual use of hashish, for entering this garden of paradise. This paradise was a dreamlike out of the body state, as subtle and varied as the imagination. Like waking up, wide awake, but being in a dream or suddenly finding yourself astral-projected in a non-material vehicle of consciousness.

Opposed to the Johnsons are those people Burroughs classifies as "shits." These are the ten to twenty percent of the population who can't or won't mind their own business. They have to be right and are dogmatically self-righteous. They are responsible for making laws against victimless crimes and for persecuting those who do not agree with them. They are arch-conservative supporters of traditional authority. They continue their pyschic regime by virtue of language control: The inner voice, the superego or conscience, is passed on, via language, through the generations. They cannot support or stand up against intelligent objective assessment. Their basic rule is "as it was in the beginnning, is now, and ever shall be." They cannot abide the thought of death and hold rigidly to their orthodoxy, an affront to time and a hindrance to the course of evolution. Burroughs outrageously satirizes everything held sacred or correct and the righteousness that accompanies it. The targets are mom and apple pie, the whole traditional ball of wax, but especially the church and the cops. These institutions of society are the problem and Burroughs attacks them with a dark humorous satire.

Burroughs uses the model of the virus to explain the dominance of the traditional forms of authority. A virus is capable of moving into an organism and reproducing identical models of itself one after another. Patterns of thought and behavior have this viral quality. The so-called "Right" virus is a pattern which is established and passed along by association and identification. These habituated patterns of thought and behavior are inculcated and reproduced in any receptive organism.

The fascination and acceptance of death marks a major shift in the psychic orientation toward time. The acceptance of death is the acceptance of change, the affirmative recognition of the flow of time and the process of continual becoming. The

traditional attitude goes against time by seeking to establish an unchanging authority. The idea of god or truth or any form of ultimate authority is a mistake, an illusion, an attempt to subvert time. These attempts to hold back time, to petrify some aspect of thought or behavior, are, for Burroughs, open to scathing ridicule. Death, the ultimate sign of change, is the main character of the novel, motivating if not present on every page of the text.

Kim has a collection of the last words of famous people. These have a special importance to him: They are spoken directly in the teeth of death, with the realization of death finally and inescapably in the awareness of the person speaking. At one point in the book Kim goes to Paris and lives for three years. During this time he writes a western novel titled, Quien Est? These words, "who is it?", are the last words of Billy the Kid. Billy steps into a darkened room. Pat Garrett sits behind him in a corner, gun in hand. Billy asks, "Quien est?" and the answer comes with a resounding thud. It is death, the main character, the big star of the show.

To Kim life is an experiment and the only rule is change. He wants to go into the mind and confront the "Right" virus at the site of the infection. The antidote to the virus involves finding thoughts, feelings and behavior patterns which are not imprinted or prerecorded. These examples of unprogrammed, unrecorded, presuppositionless thoughts, acts and feelings are the openings to a new dimension. They constitute the first biologic tendencies toward the future, rips in the fabric of reality, leaks. They are the ammunition Burroughs is using to shoot a hole in time and space. Kim is tampering with the presuppositions and undermining the foundations of conceptualized thinking. "Everything we have been taught, all the conventional feelings, do not apply."

We, as a species, have reached a stage of arrested evolution: We have been neotentized. Nonetheless, the inevitability of change points ahead, we are here to go. Like the fish about to move from the water to the air ("Millions died in the mud flats, only one blasted through to lungs." -- Naked Lunch), so we must move, through biologic alterations, from our three-dimensional temporal materiality to a new structure of consciousness. It is outside the presuppositions of time and space where movement is as quick as thought and ranges through all modalities of time and space.

Burroughs delivers a devastating devaluation of traditional values and then offers an alternative, a revalution, which is not only moral and epistemic but also biologic. This new book, on the surface a cinematic hallucinatory fiction of homo-erotic outlaw delights, conceals and reveals a more esoteric knowledge. A knowledge Burroughs intends only for members of the Johnson family, for the Travelers and the Scribes.

We have reached the place of dead roads. The roads no longer lead on, the terrain has been explored and mapped. We can stagnate or we can blast on through, overcome our limitations and be on the way.

F R I C T I O N

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