JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K" / #1, May 1984, $2.00

Thanks to BLUE WIND PRESS for permission to reprint "Words for Love" from Ted Berrigan's SO GOING AROUND CITIES ($7. 95, Blue Wind Press, P. O. Box 7175, Berkeley, Ca. 94707—also available through SMALL PRESS DISTRIBUTION).

JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K" #1 May 1984

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HOW STRANGE TO BE GONE IN A MINUTE

At any rate Ted Berrigan will be remembered by those who knew him and did not for what he did, and more importantly, what he wrote and conceived of doing.

Once at a party at the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965 (at Dave Hazlewood's I think) it seemed both wonderful and astonishing that he accepted absolutely without a blink a copy of Frank O'Hara's LUNCH POEMS, only just published, handed wryly across a circle of hands and glasses with the bright request (from Victor Coleman) would Ted sign it. And unflinchingly, immediately he did, much obliged. And no one quite could take it in at once, but that was part of it. It was a very terrific and funny moment, prolonged. So the movement carried you on, laughing, looking for the upstairs.

And a few years later when "Tambourine Life" hit the stands it really did seem that one of the major drafts always in the offing had arrived. The freedom of information act you could never rescind, from one of the best minds of the next generation, with the chops to fix it up again.

And every time I open MANY HAPPY RETURNS or NOTHING FOR YOU (Ted Berrigan's titles were always careful and brilliant, without seeming to be either) I'm stumped again and again by what fine love poems are always there. Read again, for instance, "Words for Love," the first poem in MANY HAPPY RETURNS.

So so what if sometimes he was rather bent or blue or out or off, or even at times was an absolute terrorist of dyspepsied opinion and self-indulgence. It would be stupid and self-righteous to criticize the year or condition in which his life ended either as intentional or unconscious suicide, or as a forewarned move on literary history. He did what he did, and there was no gain without say——for he was amused and alive; and all those vital or fatal humors were generally intelligent to a disarming degree, even when you didn't get it. You might have been delighted, if you hadn't been so stupified. And to be incensed was really too bad, or just dumb, next day, after he had gone.

The year before last, at a Langton Street residency in San Francisco, no matter how he groused or pricked the vauntingly guarded crowd ("80 Language Street" as Michael Palmer was calling it) who could discount an evening of Berrigan's inimical blitzkrieg discourse, always more thought-out than you thought——"I am a national treasure"——especially when it was followed by a reading of all the Sonnets straight through. It was an "historic" event, even when you thought such things were no longer possible. And it was a national (certainly) and absolutely as well (who could not hear?) treasure of a work. The deep-flung hook had snagged a big one, and most people in the audience had known it from the word go. The mad, gay, young Manhattan just before it flopped. But the mind had struck, with the prepossessing attention to take art and life to be matters of pleasure not judgement.

Once recently in San Francisco, after having called Bob Harris's dentist for something or other, Berrigan asked whoever was driving to pull over and he'd run in that bar to take a leak ('we were late'). Ten minutes later, the motor running, getting in, he recounts something the bartender has said, then after a pause, scratching his left elbow, adds that he always took it to be honorable to buy a beer after using an establishment's john. It was part of the virtue a person should maintain on entering any premises.

Just yesterday I bought SO GOING AROUND CITIES in Lenox, Mass., signed "Ted Berrigan——on the premises." And so he was, and will be I imagine for a long time, just as he deserved.

-Stephen Rodefer
7/10/83

WORDS FOR LOVE

for Sandy

Winter crisp and the brittleness of snow
as like make me tired as not. I go my
myriad ways blundering, bombastic, dragged
by a self that can never be still, pushed
by my surging blood, my reasoning mind.

I am in love with poetry. Every way I turn
this, my weakness, smites me. A glass
of chocolate milk, head of lettuce, dark-
ness of clouds at one o'clock obsess me.
I weep for all of these or laugh.

By day I sleep, an obscurantist, lost
in dreams of lists, compiled by my self
for reassurance. Jackson Pollock Rene
Rilke Benedict Arnold I watch
my psyche, smile, dream wet dreams, and sigh.

At night, awake, high on poems, or pills
or simple awe that loveliness exists, my lists
flow differently. Of words bright red
and black, and blue. Bosky. Oubliette. Dis-
severed. And O, alas

Time disturbs me. Always minute detail
fills me up. It is 12:10 in New York. In Houston
it is 2 p.m. It is time to steal books. It's
time to go mad. It is the day of the apocalypse
the year of parrot fever! What am I saying?

Only this. My poems do contain
wilde beestes. I write for my Lady
of the Lake. My god is immense, and lonely
but uncowed. I trust my sanity, and I am proud. If
I sometimes grow weary, and seem still, nevertheless

my heart still loves, will break.

-Ted Berrigan

EIGNER'S STYLE

WATERS/PLACES/A TIME by Larry Eigner, edited by Robert Grenier (Black Sparrow Press, 1983, $7.50)

Larry Eigner is perhaps the most stylized poet of the past 25 years, yet his consistency never becomes self-parodic. Eigner's language never corrupts the sophisticated workings of his senses. It's the world's incoherance ("a car horn//briefly//how far//does//the power//failure// go what//flashed/back") and, alternately, coherance ("how much could they//flicker//pull down//the shades on them//the lights burning//night// distance") that gives voice to the various words and sentences. The books are almost exclusively transcriptions of a world dominated by the senses, but because the brunt of the work is the world, and not the man dependent on it, the reader never gets bored. Eigner's writing has, of course, undergone development: the storying, almost chatty pieces that made up ANOTHER TIME IN FRAGMENTS (1967) are noticeably different from the more list-like poems in THE WORLD AND ITS STREETS, PLACES (1977). In ten years, the poetry becomes less and less social, more and more interested with the interpenetrations of thought and description. "A poem can be assay(s) of things come upon, can be a stretch of thinking," he tells us.

The look, sound, and content of Larry Eigner's writing remains constant, but these three things are formal attributes, and thus do not interfere with or limit either the poet's inquisitiveness or the reader's enjoyment. An Eigner essay in L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E reminds us that limitations are relative anyway. Even when confined to "your neighborhood and how much of the world otherwise," the possibilities of poetic invention are great, especially since "walking down the street noticing things a poem would extend itself"—in both length and conception. This conceit of his, this idea that poetry goes out into the world and there replenishes itself, defines observation as the basic component of writing, and thus draws our attention away from Eigner's compositional skill. He is compulsively local (a trait Eigner shares with fellow New Englanders Thoreau and Olson) but the writing itself is always direct, economical, and rhythmically sure.

Eigner's methods are varied and complex, but a quick list can delineate

his main strategies:

1) There is an abrupt intonation of thought, the apparent source of the writing's staccato rhythm.

2) The sway of the words to the bottom-right side of the page, like the suddenness of the line breaks, gives the writing an emphatically physical presence. Each separate Eigner poem is visually identifiable as the work of a single writer, much as the various poses of a body recognizably belong to a single person.

3) The dependence on a particular vocabulary, and on the external details of the world, provides the writing with a reassuringly factual basis. In "c e r t a i n m o n t h s f o r y e a r s," for instance, he resolves an aphoristic thought about perseverance ("here you live//a massed game// every week//organization//it takes spirit/a//wholesome thing") with a description that evokes both the changeless Earth, and Eigner's huge, implacably consistent oeuvre ("stars//come out//the sun//the streets dim rain//the trees as if bared/to light/and dark space.") Stars, sun, streets, rain, trees, light, and space are a vocabulary that grounds us in the real world even as it recalls the thousand Eigner poems which preceeded this one.

The effect of a whole book of these poems is startling, for while a single instance of sight, song, and anecdote might create a vivid impression, a hundred such configurations becomes absolutely kaleidoscopic.

The new book, WATERS/PLACES/A TIME (edited by Robert Grenier), is a fine place to begin reading Eigner, for it ranges farther than most of his books in tone and subject, and includes work from more than one moment in his career. In addition, the book contains an almost endless number of memorable images ("broken cement//all through town"), perceptions ("how many trees//motions gathering//imperceptible"), and phrasings ("the sea gathers//a little further//sound//the glint in water.") There are also several subtly and overtly autobiographical lines, phrases that particularize the environment or suddenly summon up a Larry. The uncharacteristically long line, "Do you think you might ever walk again," some stranger's question, makes direct reference to Eigner's cerebral palsy. In other poems, it's the astute phrasing which evokes a physical condition, and not the words themselves. Thus, in "how you/stand//for your/self//one quarter/the muscles/the face//mouth//changes," it's the effort of bodily movement

which the scrutiny of these lines brings out.

My favorite poem in the book has an urgency that makes it both despairing and optimistic. Ostensibly about news of war and death, it is resoundingly personal:

churchbells

years ago

minutes

while storms of men, say,

last night, some

freshness of tack,

not to believe,

nothing but war

is war, ex-

haustive death, a wind

rain, starlight's gone

blue, nothing alone, birds sing

Even as the objects of night surround him with their pathetic fallacy, his insistently idiomatic retelling of world news outmaneuvers sentimentality. Elsewhere in the book, he tries (unsuccessfully) to shrug off emotion, and again becomes attentive to the neighborhood: "so muggy//in the thread// sound//night//siren//and way back//away//when."

-Benjamin Friedlander

NEVER WITHOUT ONE

NEVER WITHOUT ONE by Diane Ward (Roof, 1984, $5)

Ward's tone picks up the scratch of mind as it is turned on, played low and daily.

> no choice follows choice etcetera
>
> ("Thinking of Nothing")

The eye of her art is privileged, compassionate, educable, psychological.

> you get to look at everything as objects
> the points of chaos are vulnerable
> meaning moments of movement
> existing alone and complicated
>
> ("Thinking of Nothing")

Object senses motivate action.

> An enthusiastic gummed flap, awaiting.
>
> ("The Habit of Energy")

Then the universal dry-ice of thought animates the senses.

> ...Something cloudy in the head the imitation of situation
> in a passive voice the pleasure-journalism of this is making
> a salve of pleasure and each breath is to characterize pleasure
> excessive and elusive...
>
> ("The Habit of Energy")

The "moment" constructed by this gush of undelimited prose stays the spread of energy, challenges its own boundaries, formalizes a mood into a music. In the best of these works the degree of constraint or slack in the formal reins is what gives the meaning its weight or dew. The "pleasure" of the "journalism" is both its excess, a drive toward ever-increasing variety of experience, and its passivity, a nearly opposite stillness allowing presence to saturate in waves.

There is an indeterminacy in all of these works, heightened in the longer pieces by time. It is an eager wanderlust skimming the surface of internal personal events mainly achieved through enjambed syntax,

internal personal events mainly achieved through enjambed syntax, subjects taken up and dropped mid-phrase or sentence, accretive logic. Sometimes this is not disturbing enough, rendering the surface a little too flat to really move or give off a simulacrum to inhabit. But in many, the "habit of energy" as she calls it, the tension created by that clash of excess and passivity charges the reader to accept or reject, get or not get each chunk of event and idea while at the same time demanding that she exist within the gestalt of each work as a whole.

> Your indetermination is your well-intentioned stamina.
> (Independent Screws")

Both blatant and aspecific emotional content place the reader in the mood while forcing her to construct relational meaning out of colliding planes of thought.

> Speak as longing minutes counted, conceal what belief
> desires, comment and you become casually covered with mentality, would you survive such saturation bombing, care to. Would you become a body.
> ("Independent Screws")

Ward's answer to her own question is that the body is the holder of the writer, a relational form.

> A car idles like my sound...
> I fit better, I bite, my aim is grounded in utterance.
> ("Tender Arc")

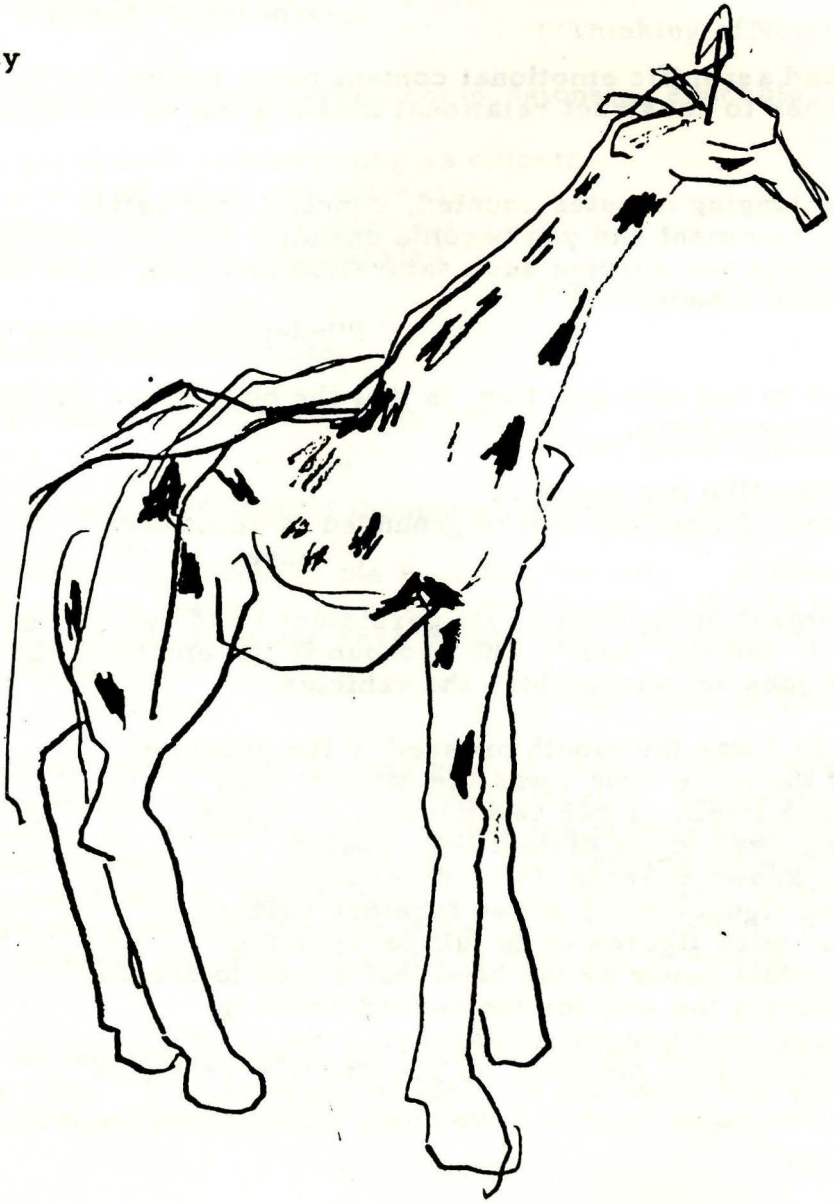
And the excitement of the body is its persistent I and eye. Even the "you" is the "I" and the "one." The pronoun is the emotional headquarters, writing up the jobs and dispatching the vehicles.

> Last night I was the mouth pressed to the shoulder
> blade at the same time I was the hardest edge
> of the bone itself. I was two figures, no three,
> shrinking away to the distant line labeled
> horizon, known to trade its place with you.
> The three figures were drawn together twice:
> First, as stick figures or in full perspective
> on white paper by the hand that's free to dream,
> clearing the way for the second drawing,
> the moment that imagination always knew could
> include you, me, and the spectrum of pronouns

conducting a conversation as background to
the ragged line of isolated bodies moving as
one, voluntarily bunched together then released.
("Nine Tenths of Our Body")

It's the coverage of the pronoun which distinguishes this work from simple personal or confessional writing. The specificity of the language is located in the human, including wildly divergent impulses of gender, and rendering brilliant the facets of subjectivity.

-Jean Day



ROTHENBERG'S LATEST

SYMPOSIUM OF THE WHOLE by Jerome and Diane Rothenberg (University of California Press, 1983)

One of the formidable tenets to emerge in post-war American poetry is Robert Creeley's statement that "form is never more than an extension of content." Applied to the craft of book design this should read something like, format is never more than an extension of contents. Hand in hand with the decentralization of poetry in the sixties and seventies came a decentralization of printing houses. Hundreds have sprung up, lived their day like the "morning mushroom," and gone back to compost. Some have survived, resiliently; some have died and scattered their spores, vigorously, epidemically; and certain larger, more commercial publishing enterprises have learnt valuable lessons from these little presses. Just as writ-to-order potboilers come prepackaged in readily consumable and disposable mass-market pocketbooks, serious and audacious poetry has been matched by book designers eager to flesh it out with due justice. University of California in recent years appears almost unique among academic presses both for its willingness to bring (or bring back) into print a significant selection of post-war poetry, and for its designs that cleave closely to the flavor of the book. A recent evident success is their release of MAXIMUS, as assertive, unweildy, and elegant as the poem itself.

So it's with some disappointment that I came upon their SYMPOSIUM OF THE WHOLE, the anthology compiled by Jerome and Diane Rothenberg. True, the cover is strikingly well laid out, featuring a Wallace Berman collage. But success ends there. I work in a used bookstore in Berkeley; every day I am offered hundreds, sometimes thousands of books to buy. One of the first discriminations you learn in the "trade" is that which holds between textbooks and—what can I say, but—real books. Textbooks possess a look, a feel to them that one learns quickly. It is a reflection of their contents: academically canonical, filled with bite-size morsels for sophomoric minds to grasp, such that a vocabulary capable of talking around a "subject" is easily aquired without the necessity of actually learning (you could say "entering") the field. Though they date rapidly, and are therefore revised annually, textbooks emit a smug confidence that their portrayal is the current word on the matter. SYMPOSIUM OF THE WHOLE looks like just such a textbook. Firstly its unnecessarily awkward and unmanagable size places it smack among Prentice-Hall and McGraw-Hill designs. It

won't rest in your hands but demands a table beneath it. It falls flimsily from your grip, eliminating any possibility of your toting it about with you, which ought to be the purpose of a good anthology: that it is a portable library of sorts.

Internally it hews to the ugly, substandard appearance of a textbook. Each selection is prefaced by a bold heading and a toneless italicized explanation of its significance. Unsightly divider lines between title, author, commentary, and entry are a mainstay; footnotes have been reduced in size. All that is lacking is a set of exercise questions at the end of each section.

So much for the format. Now what does that have to do with what the book contains? It does offer a banquet, comprised of a large number of important modernist and ethnopoetic texts, culled from twentieth century poets and ethnographers. Rothenberg has already produced four anthologies that I would hail as masterpieces of the genre. Part of what made these so striking —I am thinking of REVOLUTION OF THE WORD, TECHNICIANS OF THE SACRED, SHAKING THE PUMPKIN, and AMERICA A PROPHECY—was their initial audacity in presenting alternative readings to what professional spheres regarded as poetry and ethnography—two "fields" moreover which at the time had not merged in common concensus. Their success derived largely from a fluidity of content coupled with imaginative cross-referencings —an admission that what the books offered were only alternative readings, not only non-canonical, but preliminary excursions urging the reader onto other paths of inquiry. There was no sense that the anthologized selections served mainly to illustrate the truth of the commentary, as textbook methadology has it.

Yet I am afraid this latter sense is the overwhelming effect I discover in SYMPOSIUM. The discoveries have been made, the field is chalked off into a discipline. And now an accredited authority is presenting the definitive reading. Do I sniff here a tacit desire on the part of U. C. Press to produce what will become the qualified textbook for future classes on ethnopoetics?

But more important, Rothenberg's anthologies of the late sixties/early seventies did offer what were then significantly alternative readings of American and primitive poetry. However, the audience for poetry— especially non-academic audiences—has in intervening years to some

extent caught up. Huge crowds listen with rapt attention to Gary Snyder and Robert Duncan. Among people who read seriously, Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Whorf, and Jung are best-sellers. And now SYMPOSIUM offers a neat arrangement of the statements of many intellectually chic poets and thinkers in just such bite-size pieces as we 've all sampled in textbooks. Barthes, Artaud, Tristan Tzara, Robert Graves, all are represented. But in new readings? No. In small extracts that fit the Rothenbergs' fairly linear purpose of presentation. The complex interplay between writers so evident in the earlier anthologies is gone. It is all very, very digestible. And most of it is material that is readily available elsewhere—the only thing new is that here you can get bits and pieces all laid out end to end, a sort of smorgasbord. We do not receive any large corpus of material that the average reader couldn't locate in a library (as we did in TECHNICIANS, SHAKING, and REVOLUTION) nor do we get any new reading that offers some radically alternate view of where our poetry has come from and where it is going (as in AMERICA). Instead we have a scrumptious potpourri. It is tempting primarily for its steady accessibility to authors elsewhere perhaps quite thorny, but here sedately extracted for palatability. In a few hours thumbing these pages one could quite adequately acquire the jargon.

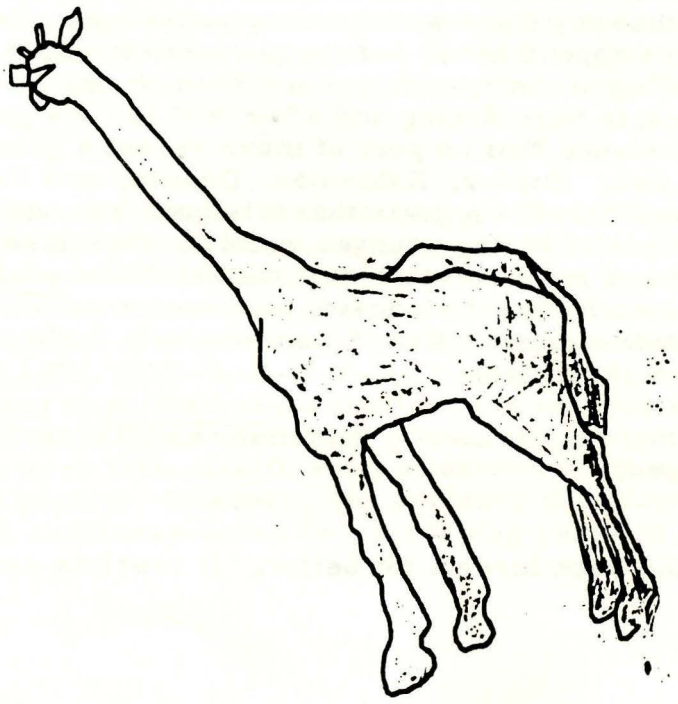
Also disturbing is this book's semblence of authority. Like all sinister moves towards the concretization of authority, whether political or otherwise, it calls a firm halt to innovation at some point in the past. I would say for SYMPOSIUM that point was about twenty years ago. Certainly more recently written articles appear here, but the presentation does not include its promised reading of the "poetic present" which ought by definition to include the work of people born during and after WW II. We get little new material. It is odd for instance that no poet of more recent a generation appears than Rothenberg's own. Snyder, Eshleman, Duncan, and Rothenberg himself draw the line for poetics. It suggests that this book has not been able to recognize a compatible "push" among younger writers, though certainly a lot of material is available. And it is just such new material that could use a good sifting, and a careful arrangement alongside statements culled from the past. It would be a genuine contribution if someone with Rothenberg's editorial capabilities would lift from L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E, HILLS, THIS—not to speak of more fugitive publications—something to put into alignment here. Or do Silliman, Palmer, Hejinian, and Rasula have nothing to add to these matters?

In ethnology the book fares a bit better. It reprints essays by Darrel Hymes,

Stanley Diamond, and others. It is edifying to see them gathered up, but again it is not particularly urgent. Most of the statements are readily available elsewhere, in other more satisfying contexts. And the sort of revolutionary principles that guide Diamond's journal DIALECTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY are quietly downplayed. These principles——formulated as a critique of Marxism, and which would turn ethnology into a tool of revolution——comprise some of the more irresistable issues in current anthropological thought. But the rebellious freewheeling spark so evident in Rothenberg's previous collections scarcely occurs here.

Norman O. Brown once taught at U. C. Santa Cruz an introductory course on poetry and assigned two textbooks to the class. They were TECHNICIANS OF THE SACRED and AMERICA A PROPHECY. This was in 1974. I cannot think of——for the time——a better curriculum if one wanted to be "introduced" to poetry. I still return to those books and find them marvelous for their openness, their vigilant suggestiveness, and their affectionately cavalier attitude. You never knew who might walk onto the page. SYMPOSIUM seems like a large closed door by comparison. What's behind the door? I'm afraid all the proper guests are at the banquet table, but after repeating themselves aimlessly, have each of them fallen rather heavily asleep.

-Andrew Schelling



"THE GENIUS IN MY BOTTLE"

ALSACE-LORRAINE by Fanny Howe (Telephone, 1982, $4)

Opening ALSACE-LORRAINE for the first time I found:

> On the ramp before the bridge, and over,
> lights were singing, multicolored,
>
> and the genius in my bottle
> took time to view Manhattan,
> bathing in pale light.

Drawn in by this voice (and reminded of Emily Dickinson—"My life had stood—a loaded gun—"—a similar image of confined potency) I went on and found an evasive narrative—subjects vanished on the verge of an action, objects endowed with sight. Woven into the long poems that make up ALSACE-LORRAINE I recognized the dynamics of Simone Weil's mysticism ("gravity" and "grace" as opposing forces on the human spirit); economics of oppression (South African diamond mines); domestic struggles (artistic and passionate); and the struggle with centeredness, with the roving self of a mother, artist, lover.

The transcript of her 1979 talk "Justice" allows a way into her complex poetics. Here I found her interest in a justice that shows up in every dimension of language, from a balance in the "harmony of syllable and sound" to a balance of viewpoints in a line of poetry, to justice in the most straightforward political terms. The idea of viewpoints intrigued me. According to Howe a language "which takes into account with a yes and a no, two or four powerful views" accomplishes justice. I found this concept of different views one way to approach the slippery subject/object relationship in ALSACE-LORRAINE:

> The dark world
> called me "home"
> & I called it by the same name, running—

Is she going home, or has the dark world found its home in her—and she her home in the dark world—is she running to or from it, or running with it within her? Here there are two voices, two views, both hers and the

"dark world"'s, making the subject/object relationship move in two directions at once. The image is likely an image of justice because it is viewed "both from the angle of one viewing it and back again into that viewer's eye from the picture itself." That is, the "dark world" is not a static image——it looks back at the poet and calls, as she calls to it.

These lines are characteristic of Fanny Howe, she acts, but is concurrently being acted upon by the object of her attention. One result is a self that wanders, and wonders if things are a part of "me" or "you":

> La, a center can march away.
> For thump went the part of you, going
>
> under, one of three, second of three,
> or one third of me.

The lines describe, possibly, the ambiguities that follow birth——is a child a "you" or is it a portion (one of three children) of its mother? Is distinction really possible between the mother or lover and what she loves:

> Now, mourning at morning, the absent u
>
> has taken that third of me too.
> No one's gone without someone along,
>
> though I did let you.

The quotes are from "Hot Glass" in ALSACE-LORRAINE; and from "Justice" in HILLS 6/7.

-Patricia Reed

WATTEN'S COMPLETE THOUGHT

COMPLETE THOUGHT by Barrett Watten (Tuumba 38, 1982, $3)

Watten's "couplets" fairly burst from their form. The content barely fits the form and so tension is created at a strangely calm level, like watching multiple minute explosions inside an unbreakable glass box resting in your hand, like piranha in an aquarium, feeding:

XLVI
Howls fit in to a perspective.
Photos of relics cover the earth.

Therefore Allen Ginsberg is a relic whose photos crop up around the world in Time magazine, etc. "Howl" fits into a perspective, which is one of its problems. I have the freedom to plug Ginsberg into Complete Thought's equation; the reverse is not true: "Howl" doesn't allow me to find Watten in one of those boxcars.

I
The world is complete.
Books demand limits.

A president is saying this: he stands behind his podium, looks slightly to his left, squints his eyes, and says, "The world is complete"; then turns to face the camara head-on: "Books demand limits" (meaning we should place limits on books). Or, the scene can be one such that a land survey team is measuring property and refers to its manual. The first worker addresses the second in reference to the millionaire's property. They are measuring it for the purpose of determining if the man's fence extends into his poorer neighbor's yard. The worker says, "You know, Lucy, the world is complete, but"——pointing to their manual——"books demand limits." Here, limits aren't placed on books, but books demand limits. Do books demand limits? Should books demand limits? Although the statements are in the declarative, the reader is left with the decision of interpretation. Usually, the direct declarative is not open to interpretation; but rather, to acceptance or refutation. ("Yes, I agree, books do demand limits" or "No, that's false, books do not demand limits.") By placing a form usually reserved for argument into the realm of art, a realm teeming with chances for interpretation, Watten brings the language to a critical audience——an

audience who will pay attention to the medium as well as the message (insofar as they are separable). The dense nature of these apparent "facts," these sentence-couplets, in their brevity and simultaneous scope, leads the reader who pays attention into an abrupt encounter with doubt. The reader must question both her assumptions about poetry, and the use of a declarative sentence in "ordinary" speech.

XXXIII

A boot steps into an example.
Conviction is selected from space.

The reader connects the two statements, for they are isolated, coupled together and headed by a Roman numeral, no. 33 in a series of fifty of these "couplets." Each statement is a complete thought, but when paired do they form a complete thought? Or do all fifty pairs form a complete thought? Not necessarily in the "logical" sense——one is more likely to get several thoughts simultaneously——but they do allow the reader to come up with a complete thought about Watten's form, the declarative statement. Each line is presented as "fact" through tone and declarative form. Doubt stands behind each fact (slight crack in the slanted beam supporting the High Noon storefront).

IV

Crumbling supports undermine houses.
Connoisseurs locate stress.

If one were to pound Complete Thought into a small pill, the inscription on it would read "Things Happen." X did A to Y, or whatever; meaning is the grappling with thought as such, and how made tangible in/as form.

-Steven Roberts

MIMING THE PHRASE

(AS) ON THINGS WHICH/(HEADPIECE) TOUCHES/THE MOSLEM by Gail Sher (Square Zero Editions, 1982, $5)

Gail Sher places an incredible weight in each phrase of this book. They are phrases mostly, the discreet & seemingly incomplete units which make up this short book. I find the weight in the phrases, not on them; they are not burdened, rather each has its own volume & density, can attract the phrases around them or be inert and integral. Take the phrase: "Tubers & iron/ even to prepare/this." From their natural state, both the vegetable & the mineral are prepared by heat, in that sense they're even (or: equal). Very dense consistencies also. Then the "this" which, locating only itself (i. e. not subordinate as in "this thing here") pulls down on the three words above it. & the question is not "even to prepare this what?", but can the middle phrase double itself? Rather than one incomplete phrase, there are two phrases here, with "even" meaning "as well" and "equal" simultaneously.

A line by itself reads: "Mime is first"; and yes the words are, at first reading, gestures of phrases. Like a mime (on a still, empty stage) pretending to be thrown forward by the short stop of a bus he's not riding on, these phrases imitate the motion of phrases in a context, but are surrounded by white space & make their own sense: "Dawns or/parson."

The next line is "Or go god." That's a real choice in this poem which invites speculation on whether or not religious characters (specific & general: "monk", "god", "nun", "Christ", "the Moslem"), religious actions (vowing, chanting, renunciating, gracing) & religious imagery ('the/shepherd", "The wooly flesh") can maintain their religious meanings in such undevotional as well as non-moralistic phrases. And of course they can if you let them.

The poem is not didactic, offers choices. Hence, the only punctuation is a handful of parenthesis at the beginning which sets the mood for the optional: "Saw (too) to/cling here"; take or leave either "to" or "too" or both. Some phrases end with "this" or begin with "As," attracting surrounding phrases

(but there is no syllogistic sense which definitely connects any two phrases and hence the connections are optional). The poem offers the choice between action and being: "A rung or/yelling," "The grit or/hear"; but wonderfully & conscientiously blurs the distinction between the two "As hover from the/ elbows is something/growing." And so the distinctions between mime and the actual are blurred.

-David I. Sheidlower

HEAVY BREATHING

HEAVY BREATHING by Philip Whalen (Four Seasons, 1983, $10)

It is a primary stipulation in the hall of meditation that one breathe lightly and with minimal commotion. Courtesy demands it. In deference to one's fellows you simply do not indulge in HEAVY BREATHING. But historical circumstance occasionally requires a reconsideration of the rules. After lengthy contemplation in June of 1963, Vietnamese monks transgressed the stricture against suicide, to bring as human torches their message to a media-blitzed world.

> can this be straight description or observation
> without intending to embarrass or attack anybody,
> without waving my arms and yelling

Zen acknowledges a dual parentage. On the maternal side, a fleshy, creaturely Taoism that seems to have evolved next to waterfalls and "studied at the feet of mountains." The paternal lineage is Buddhism, severe, disciplined, and constantly wrestling in a dialectic with itself. Our own civilization, balancing at the edge of ecological and military catastrophe, bitterly repressive, and rife with institutionalized bigotry, persists in its course, maneuvering an ever more deadly evasion of its own contradictions. If Zen is about nothing else, it is about grappling barehanded with one's own contradictions. Philip Whalen sets himself down, a portly, wise, funny, unhappy, Buddha-to-be, in his own path; it turns out that this is the path that world culture is also rapidly careening down. And HEAVY BREATHING can be heard in the central hall of Western Civilization.

> If Socrates and Plato and Diotima
> And all the rest of the folk at that party
> Had simply eaten lots of food and wine and dope
> And spent the entire weekend in bed together
> Perhaps Western Civilization
> Wouldn't have been such a failure?

Jack Kerouac gave the briefest accurate description of Taoism I know: avoid the authorities. Couple that with the political and social responsibility that's implicit in Buddhist thought, and you have the possibility of a truly effective guerilla warfare. Confront the usurping powers at their weak-points

—intelligence and humor—then quickly melt Tao-like into the countryside. There you enjoy the support of a "popular front" which consists of those who read the writing that is scribbling itself "on the wall."

Edgar Allen Poe saw the walls of Plato's Cave
Slowly moving inwards to crush us

Pound opened a garbage-can of worms. Now every poet must have a go at the long poem. Including history. What dashed Pound's efforts—and undermined some of his noted emulators to one degree or another—was a stunning lack of self-insight, and a crushing scorn for ψ (psyche) as personal event. One's take on history, however, inevitably recapitulates the development of one's perceptual apparatus. If you want to read what's written on the wall, you've got to know how your specs operate.

'Let your sister ride the bike a while;
Don't be so damned selfish!'

How can Victorian American Lady
Explain to her son that his cock
Doesn't belong exclusively to himself
But also to certain future women?

HEAVY BREATHING collects 14 years of poetry, the first Whalen retrospective since ON BEAR'S HEAD. It pivots, if I'm not mistaken, on "Scenes of Life at the Capital," Whalen's longest poem, his most bitterly wise and poigntedly funny. It is a considered attack on the institutions of Western Civilization, not a full-out frontal assault (which would only confirm their paranoia) but a protracted series of skirmishes fought on numerous fronts. Why will this poem never be taught in the academy? It is the antidote to the Poundian and post-Poundian epics which are so consistently self-inflated that they have a whole generation of scholars looking at the world upside down. I mean, with all due respect, you don't undertake a study of world-wide social institutions in order to figure out what a single poem is saying! Yet University of Maine at Orano, which sports an unblemished record of support for modernist poets, is publishing costly editions of John Adams, K'ang Hsi, and Alexander Del Mar, and promoting them firstly as indispensible to a reading of the Cantos, and only secondarily as important historical documents.

With "Scenes of Life at the Capital," you study the poem in order to figure out what the institutions are saying.

Let me repeat:

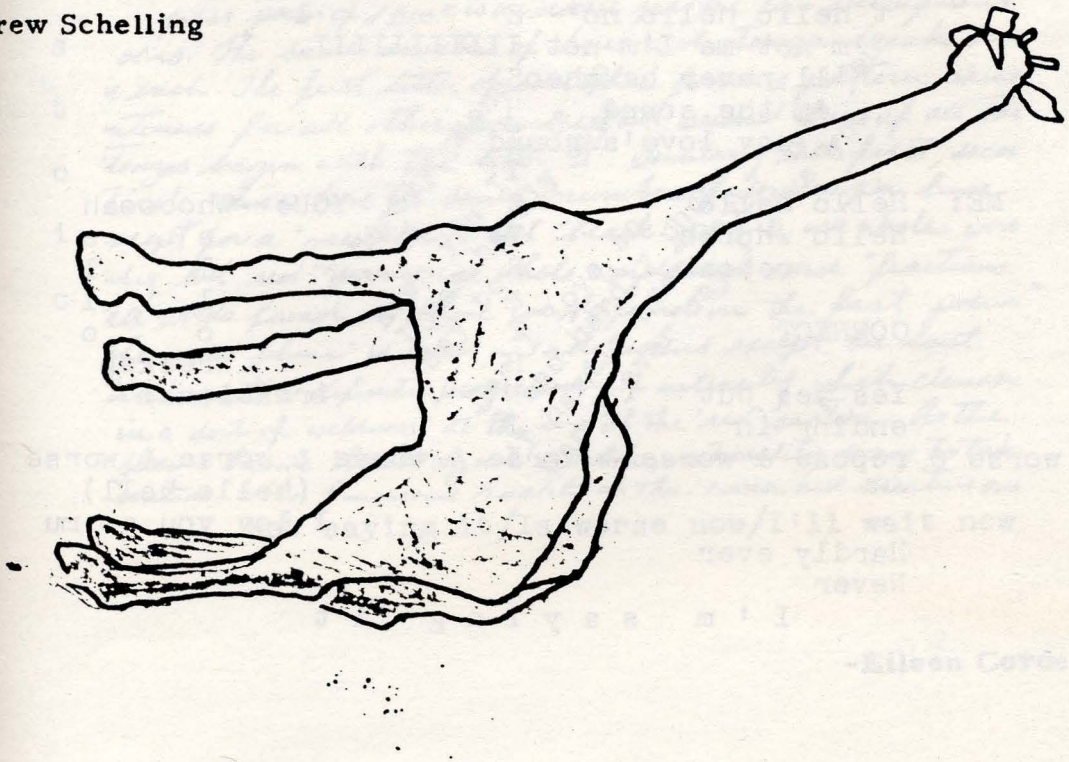
can this be straight description or observation
without intending to embarrass or attack anybody,
without waving my arms and yelling

This poem will not be found in the grip of the casualties. It is a handbook for survivors of our current apocalypse.

A fun-loving discourtesy becomes the key tactic here, maybe better comprehended politically under some term like non-cooperation. The time like never before is arrived on our planet for some HEAVY BREATHING. Especially if it shakes things up a bit in our World-as-Zendo, without fueling popular culture's faddish cynicism.

We complain of Tiberius in the White House
But consider: Caligula
Waits fretfully in some provincial capital

-Andrew Schelling



A CODE OF BEHAVIOR

PHONE: A POEM & 10 VARIATIONS by Jackson Mac Low (Printed Editions/Kontexts Publications, 1979, $4)

Whenever I answer the phone

000000000011111111110¢ please456789012345678 dime dime down down

"I love you so much"

IIIIIIIIIIcome right over
t hello hello no
'm not me I'm not
'll never be when
'm the sound
say love's sound

ME: Hello hello
Hello whoosh
repeat

CORRECT

Yes yes but
ending in

W E S H
II I I
E l
IIIIIIIIII
S
H
I
C
Y
S
&
T
H
N
I

YOU: Whoooosh
e e
l l
l l
o o
Wreckep
irrational

worse & repose & worse & worse & worse & worse & worse

(hello hell)
I lov you so mu

Hardly ever
Never

I ' m s a y i n g i t

F
R
ACTION: Friends come in
all amounts

1, 2, 3, 4, 5:
We are whole
1,222,33,44555:55,
WWHHOOODDDLEEEEEE

The answer's
I So hard to say
phone

I hate the sound of

I t
I h
I e Mouth: I say hello
I Toy: ay ay
L p Mouth: It is hard
O S h Toy: t's hardl
V SO o Mouth: My lips won't move
SOU u T: ips to the lef
SOUN e T: ips to the rig
OUND o Mouth: Where are you
UND o T O Y: Yes yes yes wher
ND o Mouth: Take hate
D o Toy: Take hat

o
s
t
o
i
c

first poem of Stone is a model for the six subsequent poems. The same number of lines and stanza breaks occur in each. The first letter of each line forms a pattern which continues for all other poems, e.g. all second lines of all the stanzas begin with the letter "I". Similarly all first, second, third... lines have the same number of spaces per line except for a "mistake". All "black" poems use whole words only. All "red" poems use whole words and word "fractions". All words found in these works are found in the first poem. The word "phone" is used in all poems except the last. There exists a definite progression of intensity which climaxes in a sort of "wildness" at the end of the "red" section. As the poems become "black" again — whole, rationality seems to take control. The [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible]

Not saying it/Is worse now/I'll wait now

-Eileen Corder

COLLAGED IN, BUT RAPIDLY EXPLAINING

STANZAS FOR IRIS LEZAK by Jackson Mac Low (Something Else Press, 1972)

I like to think of Jackson Mac Low as something out of FROST AT MIDNIGHT ——a solitary and domestic figure whose "abstruser musings" (as Coleridge put it) are indeed abstruse. I imagine him working in his kitchen at night, radio turned down low and family asleep, table strewn with library books, papers, dice, a copy of the I CHING, a list of adverbs or something——Bronx neighborhood noises drift up from street level, the refrigerator hums, life goes on. One line, "sufficient origin most everything difficult 'awakening' 'yes'," summons up an image of Mac Low studiously calm, carefully extracting words from THE CATHOLIC WORKER. The fact that the first letters of each word in this phrase spell out someday seems especially lucky——its lyricism can be talismanic as well as autobiographical.

It was from STANZAS FOR IRIS LEZAK, that least "personal" of books, that I formed this admittedly sentimental picture of Mac Low. The STANZAS, as their author matter-of-factly explains in the book's afterword, are collages of sorts; composed with the help of systems rather than scissors and glue, but nevertheless dependent on other texts for their language. Here, as an example, is the first of "6 Gitanjali for Iris":

My you
Gain is rainy life
See
The Here end
Gain rainy end again the end see the
Feet. Utter. Cry know
Is now
The outside when Now

(18 seconds of silence)

IS
Life outside void end
The Outside
Feet. Utter. Cry know

My you
Gain is rainy life

Dating from the Spring of 1960, and drawn from a translation of Tagore's prose poems, the Gitanjali ("song"/"offerings") are acrostics, each one a methodical spelling out of the phrase "my girl's the greatest fuck in town, I love to fuck my girl." Yet far from dissolving my pleasure in the poem, the crudeness of its encoded message substantiates interest in the writing itself. Most poetry refers the reader back to an intention. Mac Low's work, beginning trivially, returns us to the poem.

Or does it? The laws of probability manipulate the world as formidably as any person——STANZAS FOR IRIS LEZAK proves that——but when chance opens up a gap between cause and effect, something (the self?) rushes in to assert its presence. And as Mac Low himself tells us, "systematic-chance" writing is far from meaningless:

> Whenever I use a word——even when I do not 'intend' its meaning in that it's brought in aleatorically——the word's intrinsic, 'lexical' meaning is as important to me as the sound of it. (PAPER AIR, 2:1, p. 22)

The point is this: even when words do not "intend" to explain the world, it's possible to find an explanation in them. If Mac Low reads out his work from whatever books or articles he has at hand, then the reader is likewise entitled to "read in" a meaning.

-Benjamin Friedlander

SELECTED BALZAC

—Well, I have been asked to, have been intending to talk about Balzac for a long time. I would like to write something out in an improvisational mode, in the spirit of say Steve Benson, who would probably never address a subject in the way I have in mind, but with him in mind since he introduced me to Balzac in 1973 when we were living in Santa Barbara with nothing to do. Of course the Balzac reading has all been done in translation, which is something Benson would appreciate, "It's when reading them, I just have to imagine the excited writing of the one author and its openness (streams, thickets, wrestling dogs)..." Or, "...One admires the vain effort none makes to make it all the same," etc. (1)

When Colette, who began reading Balzac during childhood, was someplace between the age of 50 and 67, she wrote a little tribute to Balzac. At this time she had mauled through and/or lost two full editions of Balzac and was on her third.

> I know longer read Balzac for the therapeutic qualities I used to find in him when I was young. Nowadays I am daring enough to be bored in his company. I can forgive him now that taste he had for italics, that ingenious way he had of underlining the things he liked. I prefer twenty lines describing a street that has lost its 'reputation' to the portrait of Armand de Montriveau. Today, I am an old lover who fondles and kisses, in memory, the ugly little birthmark a beautiful mistress once used to hide beneath a lock of hair. I correct the errosion committed by passionate Balzac lovers... 'What a memory!' people exclaim. I have only one reply to that always the same: 'No, but one has to start very young.' (2)

The fact of the matter is that Colette's is a phenomenal memory, and her descriptions of people, places, objects, her attention to minute detail attest to that—this characteristic of voluminous writers. Her good memory comes from the habit of familiarity; she believes totally in intimacy, and her writing is an act of this faith. Balzac, on the other hand, assumes intimacy with towns and women he has seen but once, and remembers everything about them. Albert Savarus' life is determined in all its detail "on the strength of a single glance at the upper window of a house," in which a woman's head is briefly framed: Albert catches this glimpse of his future

while passing under the house in a boat on a Swiss lake. For Balzac this instantaneous determination of experience was totally possible...

Balzac did not limit his imagination to actuality. He loved a mood:

> I was deep in one of those day dreams which overtake even the shallowest of men, in the midst of the most tumultuous parties. Midnight had just sounded from the clock of the Elysee-Bourbon. Seated in a window recess and hidden behind the sinuous folds of a silk curtain, I could contemplate at my leisure the garden of the mansion where I was spending the evening. The tree, partially covered with snow, stood out dimly against grayish background of a cloudy sky, barely whitened by the moon. Seen amid these fantastic surroundings, they vaguely resembled ghosts half out of their shrouds, a gigantic representation of the famous Dance of the Dead. Then turning in the other direction, I could see the Dance of the Living! (3)

He magnified subleties:

> If Lambert had no other title to fame than the fact of his having formulated, in his 16th year, such a psychological dictum as this —— 'The events which bear witness to the action of the human race, and are the outcome of its intellect, have causes by which they are preconceived, as our actions are accomplished in our minds before they are reproduced by the outer man; presentiments or predictions are in perception of these causes'—— I think we may deplore in him a genius equal to Pascal, Lavousier, or Laplace... ' (4)

Balzac, the realist mystic, and mad inventor of ultimate conclusions:

> She left Besacon in 1841, intending, it was said, to get married: but the real reason of this expedition is still unknown, for she returned home in a state which forbad her ever appearing in society again. By one of those chances of which the Abbe de Grancey had spoken, she happened to be on the Loire in a steamboat of which the boiler burst. Mlle. de Watteville was so severely injured that she lost her right arm and her left leg; her face is marked with fearful scars, which have bereft her of her beauty; her health, cruelly upset, leaves her few days free from suffering. In short, she now never leaves the Chartreuse of Les Rouxey, where she leads a life wholly devoted to religious practices. (5)

I am talking to a French poet in a restaurant in Paris, and he is telling me "Balzac is not a Realist, he is an Idealist!" Certainly Balzac had planted the script from which we spoke, in each of us as we were speaking it, for the conversation was too good to be true. It was preordained that the intention of my friend would be to open this door for the spectres of harlots dandies, misers, and madmen of Balzac to zoom through.

Balzac is a master of multiple endings.

Flaubert, in some letter, mentions Balzac's greatness and in the same breath says, "But I am a better writer": a great tribute to Balzac's unsurpassed crudeness, for the better writer is not admitting, could not admit to being the greater artist.

For they both act possibility out to extremes.

In Balzac, dualities seek each other out. The logical extension and the arbitrary conclusion go hand in hand. Any one with literary values could test them against Balzac, and be defied.

Colette says:

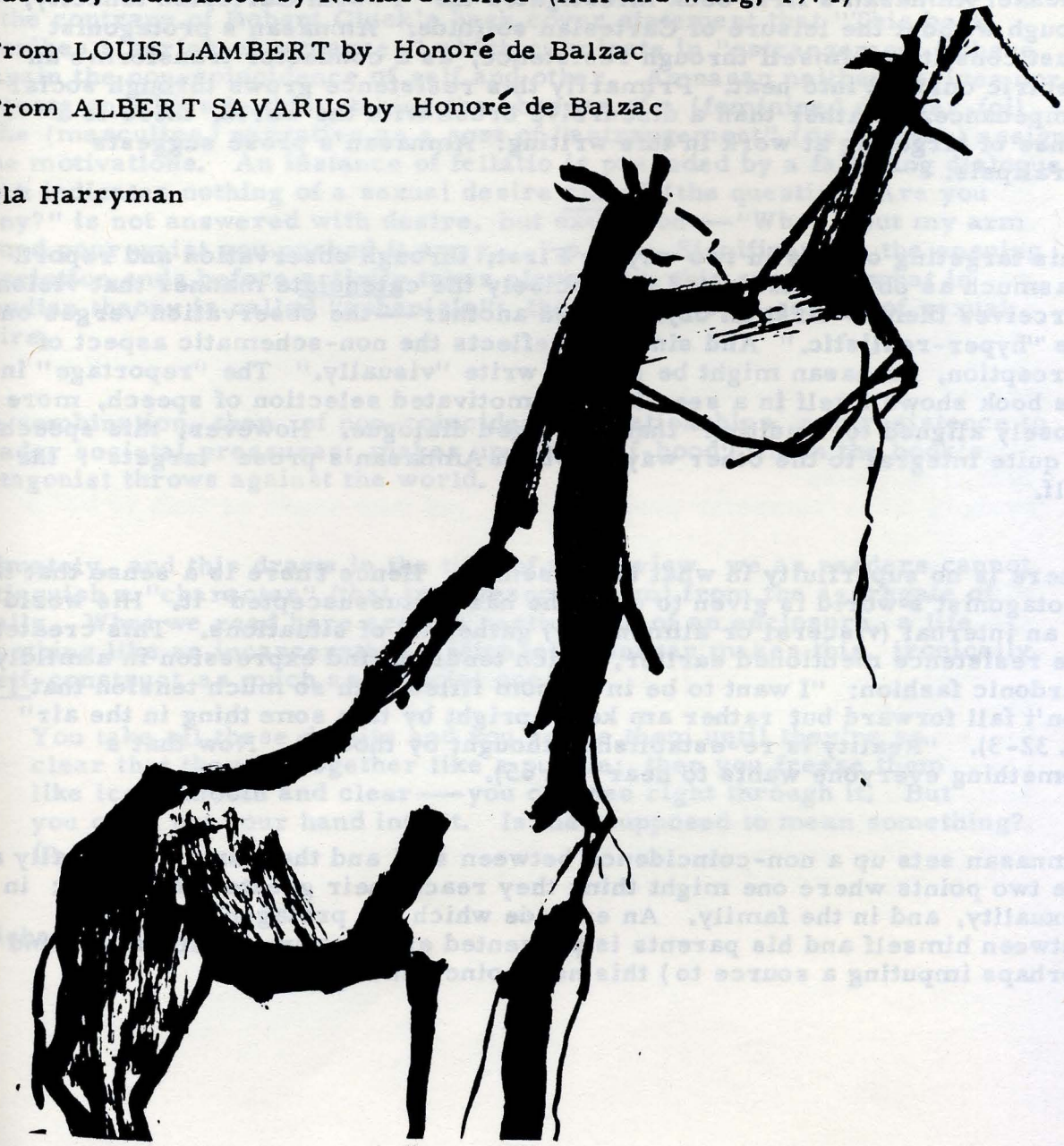
> On my first bounce, I run smack into what is for me one of his greate attractions: the admiration he lavishes on the individual human being whether it be loaded down with crimes, or, by his grace, innocent of them all.

For me, Balzac is "one of the others." He takes me out of my own sensibilities, and it will probably always be a shock to read Balzac, to recognize in all his variousness a kind of total opposite from myself, the storyteller I can pretend to imitate whenever the fancy strikes me.

Spring 1982

1. See "Translations" in AS IS by Steve Benson (Figures, 1978)
2. From "Honoré de Balzac" in EARTHLY PARADISE by Colette, edited by Robert Phelps (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1966)
3. From "Sarrasine" by Honoré de Balzac, ed., S/Z AN ESSAY by Roland Barthes, translated by Richard Miller (Hill and Wang, 1974)
4. From LOUIS LAMBERT by Honoré de Balzac
5. From ALBERT SAVARUS by Honoré de Balzac

-Carla Harryman



I CAN'T DISTINGUISH AMNASANS

I CAN'T DISTINGUISH OPPOSITES by Michael Amnasan (Hoddypoll Press, 1983, $4)

Michael Amnasan's first book investigates the "I" with Cartesian tenacity, though without the leisure of Cartesian solitude. Amnasan's protagonist must constitute himself through resistence, as a conductor transforms an electric current into heat. Primarily this resistence grows through social "impedance." Rather than a discursive brush with the world, there is a sense of targeting at work in this writing: Amnasan's prose suggests paralipsis.

This targeting occurs in two ways. First, through observation and report. Inasmuch as objects are cited in precisely the catenulate manner that vision perceives them——first an object, then another——the observation verges on the "hyper-realistic." And since he reflects the non-schematic aspect of perception, Amnasan might be said to write "visually." The "reportage" in his book shows itself in a seemingly unmotivated selection of speech, more closely aligned to "audition" than to staged dialogue. However, this speech is quite integral to the other way in which Amnasan's prose "targets": the self.

There is no superfluity in what is presented. Hence there is a sense that the protagonist's world is given to us as he has "intussuscepted" it. His world is an internal (visceral or alimentary) gathering of situations. This creates the resistence mentioned earlier, which tends to find expression in a mildly sardonic fashion: "I want to be in a room filled with so much tension that I don't fall forward but rather am kept upright by this some thing in the air" (p. 32-3). "Reality is re-established thought by thought. Now that's something everyone wants to hear" (p. 65).

Amnasan sets up a non-coincidence between self and the world, especially at the two points where one might think they reach their greatest tangency: in sexuality, and in the family. An episode which the protagonist recalls between himself and his parents is presented elliptically, highlighting (and perhaps imputing a source to) this non-coincidence:

> Finally the man calls me over to tell me that the living room is off-grounds to me. I'm never to enter it without permission. I shrug my shoulders. 'Your mother's crying. Did you know that?' he asks. I glance at him. 'Huh! did you know that!'" (p. 52)

The treatment of sexuality is much more diffuse and problematic in the work. To the contrary of Robert Gluck's back cover statement that "This book describes a series of romances" which culminate in "estrangement," there is again the non-coincidence of self and other. Amnasan neither derives nor suggests an ethics in this: taking the absense of a (feminine) counter-foil to the (masculine) narration as a sort of "estrangement" (or sexism) assign false motivations. An instance of fellatio is preceded by a faltering dialogue, which indicates nothing of a sexual desire stated (the question "Are you horny?" is not answered with desire, but exclusion—"When I put my arm around your waist you pushed it away..." p. 23). Significantly, the ensuing description ends before activity takes place. All this suggests what in Freudian theory is called "aphanisis": the lack (in both sexes) of sexual desire.

The combination, then, of non-coincidental relationships, and resistence to broader societal pressures, makes up the "self-hood" which the book's protagonist throws against the world.

Ultimately, and this draws in the title of my review, we as readers cannot distinguish a "character" (that troublesome term) from the aggregate of details. What we read here are the particulars of an enclosure, a life something like an incarceration. Michael Amnasan makes this, ironically, a self-construct as much as a social one:

> You take all these details and you refine them until they're so clear that they fit together like a puzzle: then you freeze them like ice, smooth and clear——you can see right through it. But you can't put your hand into it. Is that supposed to mean something? (p. 64)

-Michael Anderson

MILITARY SLANG, c. 1983

deck ape/seaman
snipe/fireman
airdale/flyer
jarhead, grunt, dog-face, gyrene/marine
ground pounder, cannon cocker/infantry man
spook/spy
squid/sailor
bubble head/submarine sailor
egg beaters/helicopter
tin can/destroyer
bird farm/carrier
shell-back/sailor who has crossed the equator
wog, pollywog/sailor who hasn't yet crossed the equator
wog day/day of torture for pollywogs when a ship crosses the equator
zeros/officers
gats/guns
HT's/hardly trainables
pecker checker/corpsman
rock, boot/recruit
bilge rat/latrine cleaner
spark/radioman
twidget, nuke/computer programmer, guy who works at desk

chone/pussy
willy, spooter shooter/cock
spooty movie/peep show
corn holing, hershey highway, turd burglar, duke chute, poontang, "get some brown eye"/buttfuck, etc.
fuzz bumper/lesbian
benny boy/gay man
blounded/smashed, wrecked, wasted, etc.
hooter/joint
cheebs, spliff/marijuana
boot-jacking, slamming/shooting smack, speed, etc.
fribulating/blounded on hard-ass shit

SHIP NAMES

S. S. Danger, Shitty Kitty, Constipation, Fire Stall

RACIST TERMS HEARD IN THE ARMED FORCES

dink, flange-face, geech, monkey chaser, ring tail, fish-head, gar, garette, groid, woolly booger, bone head, nignog...

COMMON SENTENCES

"Shit stream of suppressant fire."

"Doggin' my P. L hook."

"Hey shit-bird, get a haircut!"

"He's in the sack beating pud."

"Got some money? Let's book."

-compiled by George Hess

THE XYZ OF READING: NEGATIVITY (& DIANE WARD)

The world is structured on its own displacement. "We don't believe our senses. The level of automatism we have to deal with..." is functionally precise. There is a continual need for new forms through which this distance might be converted into an immediate formulation of the present. "What's missing from this picture" means that you might be the one to fill it in. For if the world were only what it is, there would be no place for us.

> Conversions into disconnected words
> backwards opposite pages of pictures
> bleed into the margins. (p. 20) *

The forms of contemporary writing are entering into an acknowledgement of this stricture—that the work is only completed, apart from the writer's intentions, in a response. As a medium, writing will continue to be sounded and tested, but the medium is no longer simply in the writer or on the page. A new series of literary values is taking on an independent existence, apart from the "object status" of the work. The writer is faced with adjusting herself to what accurately is the medium, a missing person that is the space for projections, the ground for what wants to be perceived.

> ...the space left isn't
> empty, just momentarily unoccupied.
>
> A row of pitfalls manages to avoid its own jolt.
> There's an intimidated man feeling the stranger he is
> himself reflected in the faces around him. There's
> a long distance call for you. (p. 45)

This new medium is the resistance between writer and reader, speaker and hearer. "It is widely acknowledged that competances of hearers are greater than those of speakers...," but when the speaker or writer takes on the complexity of association that occurs in the listening ear (or to the reading eye), the hearer or reader frustrates this attack on her territory by simplifying the response. Where the speaker or writer says more to anticipate any possible reading, the hearer or reader selects a distance,

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* Quotes from Diane Ward, NEVER WITHOUT ONE (Roof, 1984, $5)

removing first of all any absolute claims for a "statement" being made by the work. Any "statement" is blanked, negated, made into the form of an encompassing void——from the perspective of the reader, it indicates only the limits of the writer's form, as incoherant and various as that might be. It is not by any means what she is "saying." Nothing can be compelled from the site of the speaker except the outlines of her form. This new resistance of the medium, then, demands from the speaker an intuitive mastery of negations and blanks.

A tall order
that wasn't ever dreamed or duplicated,
traced in perfect peeks
beneath frantic gestures. (p. 48)

The speaker no longer hears only herself; she must also hear what the absence of herself would mean to another. While the lyricism here is sentimental, the structural analysis is exact. A display of social, temporal existence is dramatic and problematic even under ordinary lighting, simply because at any moment the lights could be turned off. But it is beyond the speaker to assert any problem of "existence"; denied an initiatory role, the speaker can never be wholly responsible for the conditions of her speech. A crises is indicated; if "existence" rather than any of its components is the site of a representation that can never be stated directly, "existence" itself must be acknowledged to be on the verge of collapse. There is a residue of faith that another will appear to revive it. But "another" still represents a lack of power over oneself——a classic proposition in which the death fantasy becomes the effaced speaker's accomodation to the audience.

The words "I love you" are received by the left ventricle.
You've aimed but can't point there.
Half of the noise is caused by the floor's existence, the other half
by mine. (p. 2)

Romanticize manipulation as an occupation. Specific comments
become drone, faded until tenuous speech is
specialized.
Comment indistinct. Rhapsody obscure says something with heat
a microscopic loveliness cross-referenced.
(p. 13)

So, you play the trumpet in Queens. I'll never hear that.
So we're in a depression, Chile will be the next El Salvador
El Salvador the latest Viet Nam and personally...
(p. 34)

Romantic negativity, the avoidance of any conditions that compromise the subject leading to the subject's lyrical denial of itself, is too easily symptomatic. It's easy enough to feel victimized by the daily news, for example, and that may be what is intended. Lyrical horror is our "participation in democracy" at the level of violence of compulsory voting in El Salvador. Taken as an assertion, then, such lyricism no longer works even as a form of bondage between writers. But at the same time that the strategy is exhausted, the hearer/reader has gone beyond it, no longer listening to what it is that the speaker/writer asserts. The failure of the initial premise creates an empty form for the reader's projection of... whatever. So it is that such self-involvement is accepted. The drama of existence is now in quotes, mutable, ready for reinvention—"the drama of existence 'in quotes.'" This is precisely the point at which the exemplary rejection structures the reader's involvement in the work. But the meaning of the work has now changed; beginning by deflating its own self-sufficiency, it ends in a form, the limits of a kind of activity that is identified only at a distance, by another. The rejection is detached from its original site and is continually applied to new circumstances. It has almost become a lesson in survival.

Many shes and hes, like yours, stanzas of dailiness
constructing the rhythm of flailing pasted down in
memory without pretention waiting for worth. (p. 61)

In contemporary writing the medial space between the work and the world is the aesthetic object or act—in order to perceive the work this object or act must be made instantly concrete; there is no other choice. The work is therefore understood at a level considerably more general than that of the writer. In consideration of her craft, the writer must learn to transcend the writer's mind at work; a thorough and uncompromising "editorial" imagination is needed, alongside whatever dissociation participates in the original act. The detachment necessary for a valid work can be anticipated only on the level of form; DeKooning's "I keep painting until I've painted myself out of the picture..." indicates both the conditions of the work and its social fact. This is in no way a recognition of a mythic order, that is, an already existing set of relations, however gross and magnified, or metaphorical and derived. It is not any collective "death of the subject" that accounts for the subject's removal from the work. Rather, it is the

necessity of the very conditions of communication, without which reading or hearing cannot take place. The reader is implicated in the structure of the writer's displacement, and the effaced intentions of the work are the reader being taken into account.

> Reach around continuity, transcend activity
> sit there with one hundred thousand kitchen matches
> no striking surface, props of begging looks. (p. 20)

The form of a riddle travels through space and time. We question a question in order to fill in its form. Its meaning is the questioning act. If "existence" is calling itself into question, we can easily supply the answer because in that case we know; the question has become ourselves. If "existnce" is the question, writing will be perceived in so far as that is the question it asks. Here there can be no objects of thought but only an extension of the temporal that effaces any motives. Then the world is only this kind of instantaneous act? Its history falls like an oily rain. Only a rigorous avoidance will tell us anything (will tell us "it is like that"). Fashion models twist and turn in front of a camara as the shutter clicks. The public reads Sartre (not TJANTING) on busses. We make something out of what's missing by filling in the blanks, giving our meaning to what has been negated. Such are the limits of art.

> Bunched together, forming groups that spread apart
> with light and eye collaborating to create illusions
> you naively clutch rush on toward the opposite, a deep
> light both dramatic contrast and soft... (p. 62)

The world is everything that is not the case.

-Barrett Watten

HOLLIS FRAMPTON, 1936-1984

First week of film school, I'll never forget it. They gather all the hot-shot cocky freshmen, me included, most of us proudly carrying our High Hollywood notions of how it's done; and they lock us in a small smoky screening room, beer and bourbon get broken out, the lights dim, the show begins. The program for the evening: a rights of passage viewing, the seminal jewels of the world of Independant Film. First film; ZORNS LEMMA, by Hollis Frampton. I remember thinking, "This is incredible, it's what you'd get if you served Alphabet Soup to James Joyce, Edward Hopper, and Pythagoras." They showed a few more of Frampton's films that night, and they were all so profoundly playful and astonishing, I'm sure there wasn't one of us who hadn't quickly moved our movie dreams from some back lot to our own back pocket. A place infinitely closer, cheaper, and much more interesting.

Hollis Frampton died last month. I found myself feeling a loss, yet I hardly knew him. Over the years I saw a few more of his films. They were unique and magical in a way that made you believe he could have made a million films, and still you'd have questions. I'll miss him like the ride you remember when you first hit the road, and someone picks you up and takes you a long way toward where you think you want to go.

-Barry Lane

from NOSTALGIA (1971) by Hollis Frampton

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