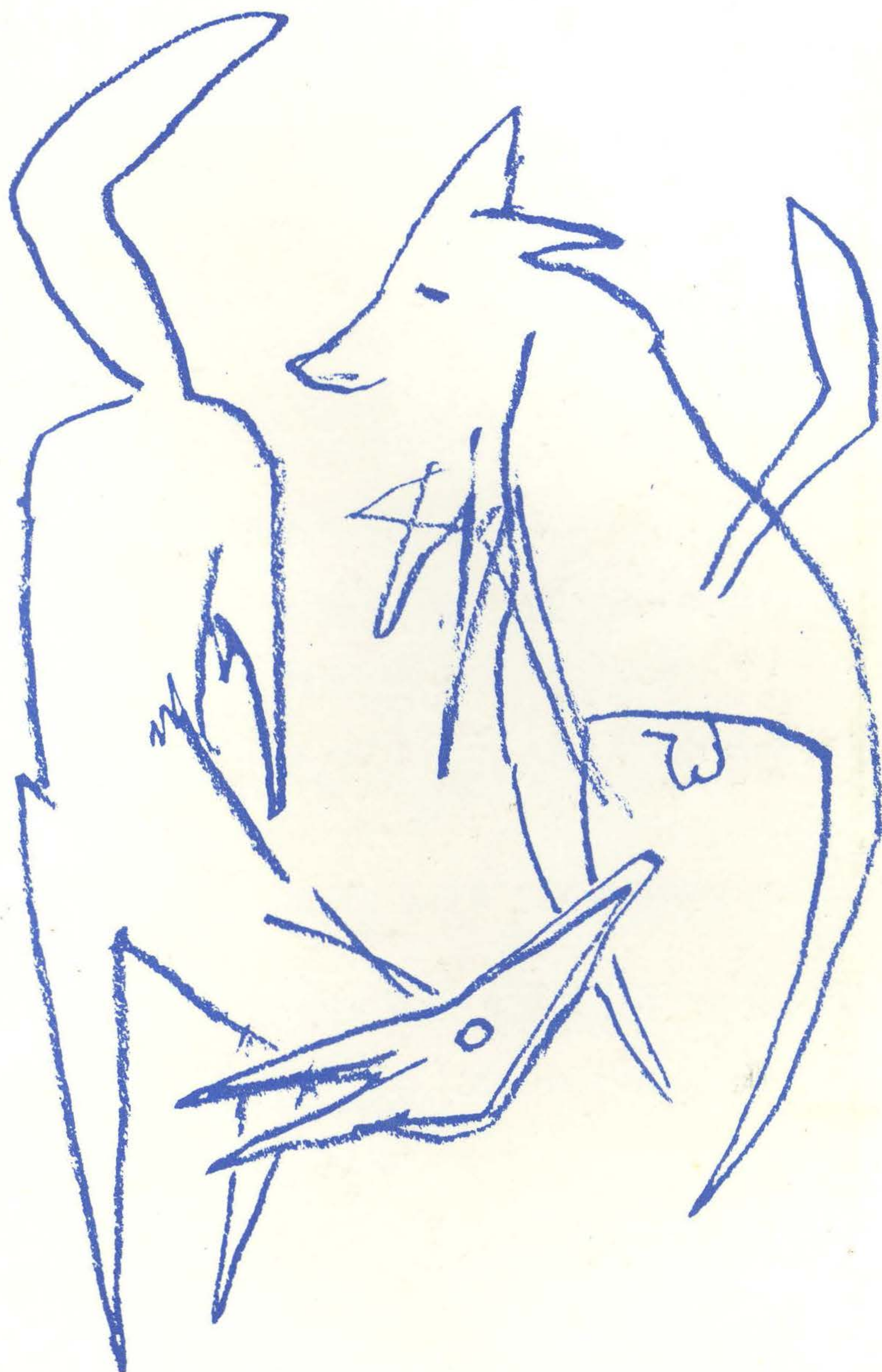

JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K"

/

#3, January 1985, \$5.00



JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K"

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This, too, is part of taking hands into our history.

—Charles Bernstein, "Part Quake"

"Mr. Wimsatt and I are not in disagreement."
Try to build an empire on that!

—Barrett Watten, "Artifacts"

One begins with the literal fact of the material—language. Any reading is accountable to that. The "I," reading or writing, does hold its place, but radically, a single-point subjectivity whose literal condition therefore is disjunctive:

1 + 1 + 1...

If a text is structured on the basis of an equally radical temporality (word to word, unit to unit), then the effect is an isolation of subjectivity away from its own memory potential. Losing its retentive leap, memory no longer obtains in the attempt to build consistency. Subjectivity is absolutely foregrounded, located wholly in the forward reach of each word's or unit's effect within the writing. The word as such is given simultaneously with (and within) an articulated plurality, such that time (prosody) is co-extensive with the word, words. What this writing negates is a static whole, a unity that in itself projects timelessness, or at least an absolute time, an unanswering time that annuls history. Against this, radical subjectivity, simultaneously scribing and reading, generates the ground on which the text finally and subsequently stands, that is, the words themselves. The "total sound of the poem" is the stress, the insistence, laid upon every word by every other word

2.

$$1 + 1' + 1'' + 1''' \dots$$

as it extends itself into a world. Thus, meaning is necessarily always circumstantial. Where Ron Padgett's "Sonnet" ("Nothing in that drawer") transfers the movement from one empty drawer to another 13 times, reducing form to static holding patterns, Charles Bernstein's "taking hands into our history" forces and leaves each word (drawer) open, studiously unclosed, left in suspended relation to itself and thus kinetically relative to the wandering viewpoint of the reader. (*) The effect in this line, as in so much of Bernstein's writing, is disruption, but disruption in which resumes, redactions, biographs, and office memos continue to bear their social origins.

This pluralist uprising is further underscored by the emphasis each word attracts to itself. This is so much the case that the reader momentarily pushes so far into the line and past whatever did or could precede it that "This, too" breaks off, referring (1) to itself, (2) to the remainder of the line, until finally (3) back to "a tremble for alertness," which physically precedes it. By then "This, too" has acquired a quality of tense, or at least stratified placement. The gesture momentarily averts collision, but not by the intervening of convention.

On the contrary, "hands" surprises the erroneous glance forward, which simultaneously spotlights cliché, trips the mind back onto its presumption, and then, that blank confronted and assessed, again throws the reading out and forward to locate the lost or misplaced "history," thereby validating the technique. Running throughout these events, the ear hears the grate of the physical fact "hands" against the categorical pallet prepared for "history." The sound carries itself rather than being wholly taken up, vertically, into the unitary cliché, "taking history into our hands."

In this context, the focal point (history) only gives us a convention, or perspective, from which the multiple character

(hands) of correction becomes apparent. The hammer of technique makes both cliché the material—by dislocating it—as well as the individual words drawn out of it. One reading of this is that reading is provisional. The line loses its reified status gradually, over time, as we read it. The cuts from editing still show. Yet despite the fact that we can count those cuts, their obviousness in no way denies the advantage gained: from being installed seamlessly within itself, cliché has surrendered its unitary and uninterrupted discourse, with its demand that we, the readers, assume to its history, and, transposed, now sets in evidence the terms (the material word "hands"—agency) by which the text knows itself and by which we assume to the history we construct. The actual temporal dimension lies off the page. No causal or temporal sequence is dictated by the line, or by the semantic domains it empowers the reader to articulate.

Conversely, in

"Mr. Wimsatt and I are not in disagreement." Try to build an empire on that!

there is an inversion of agency. By not being in disagreement, two events take place, setting up an oscillation, but pointedly dead-pan, of the form:

This is not a true statement.

which dispenses with the extraneous equipment given in:

The statement on the other side of this card is false. /

The statement on the other side of this card is true.

The mind, via the negative, or at least, blank agency of the text, rips free of pre-ordained meaning. By forcing the relation "not in dis-", "Wimsatt" and "I" are located on the same plane of reference. "Wimsatt" is objectified, and "I" is stripped of agency. "Wimsatt" as authoritative and "I" as authorial are denied, suppressed beneath the now more muscular structuring implicit in the physical conjugation of two complete sentences.

4.

Language drops its instrumental ploy. The thought is reductive, and empire is a joke.

But "Wimsatt" and "I" do not short-circuit. They are not exact contraries, because "I" as an "absence fills up the page," as likewise does "Mr. Wimsatt and I are not in disagreement," posed as it is in double negatives to obstruct reading. The reflex in "not...disagreement" absents itself from discourse and, as such, is not representational of an existent (or non-existent) gulf. It is the reversal of the statement's discursive line (the statement is in quotes), so that form, and not discourse, is the site for any reading. Each line can be read as stripping away the ground from the supposed narrative of the book's title (COMPLETE THOUGHT), not simply irony, but a demonstration of the joke.

The first sentence contains the thought. The second renders it a thing, driving quotes around it. Since it is assumed that a complete thought can be contained by a less than complete sentence, it's apt that, in this case, a more than complete sentence should impossibly contain a less than complete thought. Contacts with such a sentence self-generate. "Thoughts" "branch out." Or the sentence and a reader construct themselves as X is solved (successively) as "We (two hands) move in series (2 X 5) compiling experience as an Other (10)." The world remains the same (Wimsatt), but the reader is changed, as already the writer (I) has been. That is, a form of this might be:

$$5 + 5 = 10$$

but equally

$$5 + 5 + 0 = 10$$

That is, language (the universe) is bounded, but, equally, bounded and infinite. The lack of salience (**) is structured by the double negative as a refusal to decode the line, instead

intending all its details, insofar as the text supports them. By denying a categorical plot (what 'I' thinks), reading becomes an extended application of the work (and language) beyond itself. The imagination may be that 'O'.

* Wolfgang Iser, THE ACT OF READING (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 1978), p. 108

**Wallace L. Chafe, "The Recall And Verbalization of Past Experience," in CURRENT ISSUES IN LINGUISTIC THEORY, ed. Roger W. Cole (Bloomington, Indiana Univ., 1979), p. 240.

—Larry Price

JAILBAIT AND OTHER STORIES by Brad Gooch
(The Sea Horse Press, 1984, \$6. 95)

Gooch's characters are often described in detail in the beginning of his stories either while looking in a mirror or as if seen from the vantage point of a mirror. "His eyes are black, jet black. So is his hair, and the growth of beard coming out unevenly on his face. His hair is cut in patches and he has an old scar across his forehead." (MR. BROWN). Adjectives like jet black give the character a strong physical presence within the story. Another character has... "Kennedy looks, black hair pushed to the side on top of his head, good bones, plain Belgian blue eyes." (MOTEL). This matter-of-fact genetic intimacy reminds me of Network TV, in which the celebrities seem to be bred for a few good features, rather than a substantial whole. TV is the inverted mirror which makes the

viewer into its own image, the superficiality of the mirror, the projection of true or false identity, and the meaninglessness of all questions, the very unreality of compositional realism. The Dennis Cooper-like adjectives (Kennedy looks, good bones) tend to point toward a community-based stylistics—but this seems incidental to the political implications of Gooch's stories. I feel inarticulate in confronting types which forefront, in their "real life" appearance, the question whether they are true or false representations. Gooch removes the problematics of vocational differences from between his characters. It reemerges between writer and reader. He is the temporal authority of his compositions—yet there's no feeling of arrogance associated with that. It seems to come as a side product of more benevolent intentions, the leveling of class, the composition of an equivalence between lifestyles. Think of the totally declassed role of the TV audience. Gooch's types, often presented as sign functions of a particular vocation, are brought together within a presumably neutral text. No character seems detained from expressing his true nature in that his true nature is to be realized through a contrast which seems genetic in its inception. The temporal differences of class are fused with the moment of recognition and revelation of differing lifestyles. This recognition is more than simply a contrived reconciliation of class differences. It is the composition of a nature frozen in the heavenly contrasts of autonomous composition. The diversity of types, when *JAILBAIT AND OTHER STORIES* is considered as a whole, becomes suspiciously like a utilitarian division of qualities, qualities detailed with such a strong suggestion of accuracy that only from the distance provided by considering the book as a whole can a stylistic enclosure be felt. The limited horizon of possibilities contained in an overdetermined personality satisfies and even fills out the composite of which it is part. Within their separate compositions characters have an invested stylistic (like a career) which must be matured and then played out to whatever advantage it may provide. To represent types is inevitably to create a work within which this process of representation has a positive function. What is lacking may not be apparent in the reading of a story. I felt after having finished *JAILBAIT AND OTHER STORIES* an aftertaste of compositional exactness. Gooch's

stories forefront the connection between realism and drama and the authority of character development, which provides accessibility, but also severely limits the kind of access offered. Accessibility which is based upon the resolution of types creates the contradiction within which the more the work is accessible the less the reader has access to. What can be read into the work is specified. Precise simulation hides the author. This is from the title story, Jailbait: "If he is, say, describing what one of the older guys at work did or how the guy described his wife he tries very hard to picture the face and remember the words. This is Henry's brand of honesty." This is also Gooch's brand of honesty. It's interesting that this line is from one of two stories (SPRING being the other) which strongly deviate from that practice. The more successful this brand of honesty is, the closer the speaker comes to standing behind pure simulation. Accurate dialogue always suggests an original discourse. Part of the appeal of the fifties is the ability to imagine that at one time a fusion of sensibility to style actually existed—but it's only in work that this nearly happens and that's because the work situation is generally in itself a fictitious composition within which the simulacrum is also hidden; the violence of original authorship can never be located. Charles Bernstein, when he read at The Old Mole, said something to the effect that unusual combinations of words **are** fused within his work rather than juxtaposed. Here the sublime creation of original discourse happens with the inception of the work. And yet, as in Gooch's stories, fusion hides intentionality, which is then revealed within whatever decomposition takes place in the reading of the work. Any writing intended to be read is prepared to decay into receivable fragments. The story Jailbait feels more consciously structured than the others. It begins: "Henry gets out of the auto repair shop. Ruth gets out of the sewing factory. He meets her at the corner. It is a cold day in September. He is sweaty under his suede jacket from a long day at work. He works in a hot corner of the shop. He is sharp. It is not just a romantic idea that a really sharp man can make a living fixing cars. Why isn't he working in an office? Well, he is sharp but he doesn't care about many things. When he gets in one of his moods it is a mistake to think he is upset with you. He is just upset. Ruth is a hot

8.

woman, not in a thin way, or tall, she is very filled out and still a girl in lots of ways." Characteristics are less precise and uncontestable than in Gooch's other stories. In the second paragraph he switches to first person, and then switches back again to third person in the one that follows, initiating a conscious use of person within a single prose piece. Based upon a Fassbinder film, Jailbait is the story most removed from the possibility of simulating an original discourse and this may have allowed Gooch more flexibility in its construction. Yet even in Jailbait there's a feel of stylistic steadfastness which to some extent constructs the often beautiful simplicity.

—Michael Amnasan

"JAILBAIT" by Brad Gooch

Kinetic nature of the documentary condenses stillness of flat atmosphereless space into a cold geometry. Figures posed are prototypes (thus represent a more fundamental human experience). They are pressed up close giving them monumentality. Space is confined ("There are maybe ten guys in town between the ages of eighteen and thirty." p. 139). Sense of suspended animation, people waiting in limbo. People are isolated featureless anonymous figures whose disjuncture is their power. Equally estranged from themselves they roam between an unconscious landscape of nightmares and an exactly rendered physical world. Simple elegance erases complexities of difference. Denotes emptiness.

Time is collapsed and language is distancing cast out of itself. Words designate the infinitely distended outside replacing the

spoken words' intimacy.

"--That watch is brand new.

--It is not.

--Where did you get the money for a new watch." (p. 134)

Monochromatic vicarious sense defuses meaning which unexpectedly gives way to a powerful though eclipsed intensity.

It's like this. There was this guy and this girl. They grew up near each other and played chestnuts with each other. Then they got to be a certain age. The girl started posing, the guy became deep voiced and his shoulders pushed-back. They stood in awkward positions at a village party chatting. The girl's mother looks at her daughter and thinks, Oh relax honey, just relax. In that way it's like the story of the Garden of Eden. (p. 138)

Ruth is jailbait unhinged from meaning or signification. Jailbait is a signifier but it is elastic and as apt to bend away from as toward each thing signified (Henry, Ruth's father). Which is prophetic. Death is an experience of wonderful possibilities.

—Gail Sher

ROUGE TO BEAK / HAVING ME by Gail Sher (Moving Letters Press, 1984, \$5)

"Primitive means complex."

—Jerome Rothenberg

This is an exceedingly simple, and therefore difficult, book. Thirty-two pages, divided into three sections, of sheer words, and words only—the whole of them.

In an article recently published in SULFUR 6, Jerome Rothenberg proposes that a "reviewing of 'primitive' ideas of the 'sacred' represents an attempt—by poets and others—to preserve and enhance primary human values against a mindless mechanization that has run past any uses it may once have had." And he goes on to quote Robert Duncan: "In such a new 'totality', he writes, 'all the old excluded orders must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown; the criminal and failure—all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are. '"

Styes scanned

Were considers
total
colony

(p. 3)

The scanning, then, becomes an act both private and public, impossible or reflexive: seeing from the inside out, through one's own eye to the pain of the self, and world. The stye in the eye of the pig may be our own.

Our lot, I take it, is human. We make up the colony, and language defines the community of our considerations, and our selves. But we have seen how simplistic analagous thinking, typified by the Nazi thought of WWII, easily, and dangerously, turns our lot into that of the beasts and trees: whole worlds are destroyed without any thought (dialect) of the whole, the totality, that which determines for the most part "what we consider we are". It is perhaps our habitual exclusion of the animal and vegetative worlds that allow this type of thinking (language) to exist—by excluding these worlds, we are unwittingly excluding our own. The fact that we can even reason on these differences is enough to say that the "total colony" or the "symposium of the whole" does not exist.

If there is one thing this book asks of us, it is that we re-consider Nature: the nature of wor(l)ds (language), things, self and community—the nature of Nature and how we are inextricably (only) a part of it. But this is not another book in which the poet herself asks—which is why it is a work—; her words make up the book, and the book is the world in front of us.

The syntax is often difficult, shattered, "Swallow has / shrill (some)", which tends, in this case, to multiply, rather than define, the possible relations between objects in a geography mapped by recurring themes and strange couplings. DEATH: death; biers math; fey; purges; etc. 'NATURE' (plants & animals): river; cattle; Rushes... sprig/hare; deer; bud; fur; Mollusk; fruit... auks; corn; reeds; etc. FAMILY: Tribes; colony; family; ark; Sets; kinder; band; disciples; etc. One might also add words connoting CONTAINMENT: ark; girdles; straps; band; (bowl); (gloves); Sachel (obs. spelling); etc.

The distinction between verb and noun is often (con)-fused:

Sachels north spines
still

Adorable can

That beads so
death

(p. 4)

making the thing itself its own motivation to action. The usage of plural nouns, and verbs in the 3rd person singular, changes both number and process, allowing the reader to redefine the context(s) in which each change occurs.

Prepositions not only indicate relations between objects, but

begin to explore again their primal, directional significations—
 "During wane / were along / river".

The verbs have particular animate, animal, active, tendencies: munch; Chews cry; gasp; licks; etc. This, combined with the strangeness of syntax and surrounding, makes us more aware of the actually possible relations going on between things and beings of this world. Coupling occurs where we are most accustomed to distinctions and separation; the world as it is is generative; there is no need for a grammar based upon substitutive and combinational values. How we read what does take place is more interesting than the projected possibilities of what might.

The sacred is here as word (p. 21) and quality. It is part of a coupling—it takes part in the act of defining the nature of exchange, of actual relations:

Wings licks
 as

Tryst yet: dual

(p. 17)

Tryst, a place where lovers meet, or the agreement to go there, to take part in the exchange. It is perhaps in terms of this agreement that the possibilities of community, totality, colony, etc. are to be considered. To agree, it is imperative that each party accept the conventions of that which is being agreed to. But to formulate these conventions is beyond, in most cases, the individual's control—the world is as it is, as it were. Instead of despairing, then, one tests the conventions, and soon finds that not only do they allow more than first appears, but that there are many more of them that could be acceptable, were they only known.

This complexity of sign and signal, emitter and receiver, actor and act, etc. multiplies the functional capacities of the binary code. It need not be a mere single function, a conscious activity that can be executed (if one is quick enough to stop or start it), but rather a continual changing, transforming, or mutating, which when analysed does not die, but leaks or "spill(s)" onto (into) something else—which is also changing.

Peters (the) self
jails undress

The flee:
(either) sides
pulse

(p. 32)

—Joseph Simas

"A THOUSAND INCHLING AEONS GLIMMER ... " *

If I succeed you repeat yourself. Waking up this morning felt good, while the weather is nasty just outside and there's no sun. Couple weeks back you woke up with sore tendon which took some time, days, prolonged, to clear up. Things are mysterious at the end all right. How many surprises are in store. Enough of us want ease and comfort, to go along, but it's ok. More to writing this for example than reading it over a few times.

14.

Hardly anything is very dull. Some people it may be guessed who still get bored. Watch the wind and rain in front of the trees. You can play cards no matter what and take up arithmetic if not take count. Take an interest.

Woke me up in fact the bush at the corner window those arms of its moving around so much. Across the street she shines over her door her lightbulb all day for 24 hours each day except when it wears out then soon replaces it. Afraid of somebody or is cautious. So far to a fine effectiveness. Nearby burglar alarms sound off on occasion, these years. This seems always a test. Someplace. The power though failed at 9:15, to return as things came out a half hour or so later. Endless on TV. Good clinicians on radio. A whole continent that's always been big gone hungry. Not overnight. Not cooled off. Can a clock feel?

There are some dogs on the block you hear and see. Like all those houses that has a chimney. This one, above, is out of sight. It's distance makes the windows dark. Here they rattle —the storm has brewed. And keeps on. You can't find out what's there in the walls. Systems aimed at audiences. Merchandise, goods.

Carpet-cleaners.

Hail and farewell.

"A thousand inchling aeons glimmer Tyre."

—Hart Crane

—Larry Eigner

MARLANNE MOORE

OBSERVATIONS is a good title for Moore's work in general; she is the observor, the recorder of minute facts and phenomena made strange within a seemingly calm mode of narration. Yet the world itself as seen by Moore is not essentially strange, but rather quite mundane—she is not impressed by it—and thus in her fastidious manner she sets out to make it such by her odd sense of comparison and example.

Image and statement are to Moore examples within the argument of her poem. But no matter how odd these examples are, they are not in themselves what make her poems tick; it's the relation between these examples and what we would expect them to relate to that makes the poems work. So that the jerboa of the poem "The Jerboa" (desert rat) contributes a sense of strangeness coming into the poem about in the middle (as it does), a near non-sequitur; certainly; that such a tiny rat would carry the weight of the 'central metaphor' of the poem is what is important here; Moore's little rat is a gesture of mockery on her part; just as "the rose is obsolete" (Williams), so too are all 'central metaphors'; so 'let's not give them a rose, lets give them a jerboa.' With the two sub-titles "Too Much" and "Abundance" set in italics within "The Jerboa" she seems to suggest that poetry tends to the excessive, tends to take itself as self-important—to which she counters with an abundance of 'non-poetic' images and examples ("little paired playthings," "paddle / and raft, badger and camel," "tame fish, and small frogs"—all eventually centered by the non-grand "Sahara field-mouse": the jerboa). Not that the jerboa is arbitrary, for it can easily be read as a symbol for the poor—or rather the view the powerful have of the poor as 'happy' within their own means, with their "joy" at "boundless sand," "stupendous sand-spouts, and with "no water," a happiness at having "nothing" as opposed to those (the powerful, the "Princes" and "queens") who can not "be he" for they've "nothing but plenty." The jerboa: not arbitrary but seemingly so—pulled out of a hat to make a point.

The Steeple-Jack

A description of a small seaside town with endless examples of flora, fauna, etc. finally re-focuses back on the title, on a sign which reads "C. J. Poole, Steeple-Jack." This image comes toward the end of a long sentence of ten clauses broken by enjambment and stanza breaks. What is the importance of this sign? That it is "in black and white; and one in red / and white says / Danger." "Danger" does not equal danger here—no more than 'STOP' on a stop sign is literally taken to mean 'Arrest All Motion.' The danger sign does not read 'there is danger here' but rather 'there is a sign here that has the word "danger" on it.' Or, there is no significance beyond its existence as a sign: 'This is what it says; that's it.' The statement is followed by further description of a "church portico" which would be a "fit haven for / waifs, children, animals, prisoners, / and presidents who have repaid / sin-driven / senators by not thinking about them." Equally, Moore is repaying sin-driven presidents by not according them the weight of authority their position 'demands' of her. All are objects given equal weight as if dabs of oil in a "Dürer" painting. The logic (the semiology) of the town's various objects is challenged, made petty. "Hope," the last word in the poem, is equally an object:

It could not be dangerous to be living
 in a town like this, of simple people,
 who have a steeple-jack placing danger-signs by the church
 while he is gilding the solid-
 pointed star, which on a steeple
 stands for hope.

Not so much 'Good for them, they have their hope,' nor that these "simple people" cannot even assign "hope" its inherent relevance except by operating on its physical manifestation, the "pointed star," but that hope itself is called into question as being relevant at all. Yet, each member of the town is bound by the social contract which includes within it "hope"—even civic hope. Moore is in this sense, in her calm way, attacking the very foundations of the town, and by extension society itself—though more pointedly she is subverting the

word "hope" within her own, and our own, discourse. But it would be inaccurate to say that Moore is really 'attacking' these institutions; rather she is attacking our reaction to them, our sense of awe, of blind obedience to what seem to her such odd, funny (and even boring) phenomena.

Odd, funny, or boring, her goal is to re-orient the normal with a seemingly normal tone and semi-jarring content. Her tone is calm, careful, clipped-yet-rolling, but contains within it abnormal examples of her 'argument.' 'Where there is no hope, love won't grow,' one might say. Moore says:

Where the ground is sour; where there are
weeds of beanstalk height,
snakes' hypodermic teeth, or
the wind brings the "scarebabe voice"
from the neglected yew set with
the semi-precious cat's eyes of the owl—
awake, asleep, "raised ears extended to fine points," and so
on—love won't grow.

("The Herø" lines 2-9)

In other words, who cares whether or not love won't grow, it being a cliché within the conditions normally set for it. Likewise, we have for Moore "hope not being hope / until all ground for hope has / vanished." But we are never actually given in Moore's work an instance, an example wherein something such as this actually becomes the case, that then 'hope' may burst upon our senses, knocking us over. Rather, such a condition is referred to as a possibility; there is no specific "this" to her "not this" (cf: first sentence of Ron Silliman's TJANTING). Removal of that ground leaves instead a hole, a neutral hole.

Form

There is no apparent, direct correspondence between Moore's line breaks and her content, her emphasis; the two seem to

progress down the page along separate grids. The feeling is that of reading a botany text in prose: the content glides over the line breaks without any obvious correlation to said breaks. This causes a displacement in the mind of the reader, who asks why the lines break where they do, and furthermore why each line is counted syllabically, each stanza's total syllable count in some relation to the one previous, a pattern.

In "In the Days of Prismatic Color," for instance, each stanza begins and ends with roughly the same number of syllables in its first and last line, with the third line in each stanza having the fewest syllables in it. Why? Does the content have a relation here? Possibly, in this particular poem, for toward the end Moore says, "we have the classic / multitude of feet. To what purpose! Truth is no Apollo / Belvedere, no formal thing. The wave may go over it if it likes." Are these syllabic "feet"? Is the "wave" the content which may go over the form (the lines) "if it likes"? If so, this "wave" decided not to in the case of this line, for the line ends at an end-stop, significantly the only end-stop in the poem except for the last line. At any rate, why does she impose this formal constraint onto her work? Did her mother (her "best editor") have any say in the matter? Well, who knows.

Her titles, as cues to the reader, do not always point to the 'central image' or 'metaphor' of the poem so much as they point to an image for the sake of structural cohesion. So that 'the octopus' is not so much 'the point' of the poem "The Octopus," but is rather an axis upon which she can move freely to and from equally odd elements in the poem. It occurs to me that in this light had she not titled any of her poems, we might have been presented with a more radical, disoriented text, one wherein order would be considerably harder to establish.

Things that society puts in front of us to regard, live by and obey (institutions, marriage, stop-signs, churches, snake charmers) all seem a series of 'so whats' to Moore. Even poetry, her medium, is regarded as such, with the now famous sentiment "I, too, dislike it." The poem "Poetry" in the course of its history of publication successively shrunk from the 1921 version of 38 lines to the 1935 version of 13 lines to the 1967 version of 4 lines. This reduction is itself a comment on the art she "dislikes"; that, not unhumorously, she has less and less to say about it as the years go on. The actual poem "Poetry" is not the final version but all three, as well as the act of reductive editing. So what got left out between the first and last versions? A bat, hands, eyes, an elephant, a horse, a wolf, a critic, a baseball fan, a statistician, some half poets, autocrats, and the great line "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." But above all what disappears is her 'argument' concerning poetry which is classic in its similarity to the argument presented in "The Steeple-Jack" and other poems. In this 'argument,' the bat, the elephant, hands, etc. all become 'examples' of her 'point,' a point which borders on the paradoxical, if not non-sensical, that, in mock-sum "if you demand on one hand, in defiance of opinion— / the raw material of poetry in / all its rawness and / that which is, on the other hand, / genuine, then you are interested in poetry." Is a bat genuine? Are "Hands that can grasp" genuine? Is this even her point? Is she even arguing? No. But she would turn the tables on those who would argue with her modernist position and style—and she does so by telling them that the "derivative" writers are those who "become unintelligible" (a barb usually thrown at modernists) and that their derivative-ness is so overwhelming that we, as readers, can no longer "admire what / we cannot understand." At what point did she pull the rug out from under us? At the point where she is strongest: in her ability to seem to be saying one thing while actually saying another...and this effect is spread out, diffused over the entire ground of the poem, so that it's hard to trace. And it isn't a simple matter of negation and opposites; as Williams says, "Miss Moore undertakes in her work to separate the poetry from the subject entirely—like all the moderns!" ("Marianne Moore" from IMAGINATIONS). To the extent that this is true, the vehicle for such separation

is 'the eccentric,' the unusual, the out-of-context jerboa.

Sardonic Pessimism

Tone occupies a specific place in Moore's work, as the vessel for attitude, which is much harder to pin down. Her tone is constant, and so through it a reader must tune to finer and finer distinctions/derivations in it in order to register a difference; with each perceptible shift in tone the possibility of a shift in attitude. So—what is her exact stance toward the jerboa?

It's unclear, because her tonal delivery throughout the poem is relatively unchanging. It's her pre-Mutual-of-Omaha delivery of facts that's confusing—and quite intentionally. She would not be a "pedantic literalist," showing us in any clear manner how she regards the phenomena in her poetry—not in any simple way—now without doses of irony. So, the jerboa is a pitiful symbol, yet one which it is hard to feel pity towards.

Rather than sentimentality on Moore's part, we get an almost-joyous pessimism in her description of it: it can hop around fine, likes its environs, is kind of cute, a perfectly functional little creature, everything's fine...but it isn't. Because she's equated the jerboa with the poor, the Roman slaves, etc. So any optimism in her description flip-flops to pessimism; and both seem strung tightly in her tone, a nearly invisible tension in her delivery.

Her attitude in "The Jerboa" toward the "kings" and "queens" is much clearer. Or is it? She isn't actually addressing them, but rather the picky sort of identification of particular icons typical of any gloss over an historical period (i. e., Egypt equals mummies and pyramids). She is poking here, having fun: she puts the queen in "a king's undershirt...." Let's look at other instances where she depicts those in positions of authoritarian power:

"To Military Progress"	You use your mind like a millstone to grind chaff. What is there in being able
"Critics and Connoisseurs"	to say one has dominated the stream in an attitude of self-defense. Princes clad in queens' dresses, queens
"The Jerboa"	in a king's undershirt. I have seen this swan and I have seen you; I have
"Critics and Connoisseurs"	seen ambition without understanding in a variety of forms. They had their men tie hippopotami—
"The Jerboa"	toilet boxes marked with the contents.
"To Military Progress"	You polish it with an elegance—
"Silence"	Inns are not residences.

"Inns are not residences," she says in "Silence" to her father, with an absolutely deadpan face. Deadpan pessimism might be closer to what I mean. Her anger has a bite, but one that is contained nearly to the point of neutrality; and anger that is not readily perceived as such can be the most disconcerting of all. Yet, to re-introduce the out-of-context quotes above back into their original settings (poems) would bring about a diffusion of any anger here substantiated; and, note how smoothly they fit together, more evidence of Moore's constant tone.

Accidents Are Not Omissions

In some senses Moore (or the 'Moore' projected in the work) lives in a frieze where the 'inner being' of objects and people are frozen, and where their characteristics are the only visible signs of movement. Her subject (be it camels, camellias) is often known through its motion or gestures; there are no 'inner essences' to be discovered in them, but

characteristics to be described. Parallel to this, her writing avoids symbolic corollaries, universal statements and the like, and focuses instead on modes of description. There is no intrinsic bond portrayed in "Marriage" (the likening of it to innate needs shared by all species to seek a mate, the Christian ritual element of a 'union of souls,' etc.). Instead we get various mannerisms observed by Moore, and further removed from any 'essence'—related treatment, quotes from others concerning marriage, or more accurately quotes concerning other subjects entirely which are then placed around the subject of marriage. This is an art-stance, a modernist reaction to symbolist and other tendencies in poetry. She addresses (what could be read as) the reader in "The Octopus": "'They make a nice appearance, don't they,' / happy seeing nothing?"

"Omissions are not accidents," she says at the beginning of her COMPLETE POEMS, this being primarily a reference to her constant revisions from edition to edition. That accidents (what she runs across by chance, be they quotes from newspapers or actual pelicans) are not omitted is also central here; in fact such accidents come to override whatever they are paired with, the end result being that art is made around subject matter, and not about it. And that such 'accidental' phenomena (found art) is then arranged so meticulously is another constant with Moore. "Neatness of finish! Neatness of finish! / Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus / with its capacity for fact" ("The Octopus"). But these interests are not her main emphasis, they are her characteristics, her style. More importantly, as the arbiter of a sense of neutrality among strings of anti-phenomena, she is the tour guide of endless detours, continually addressing the reader: "Completing a circle, / you have been deceived into thinking that you have progressed" ("The Octopus").

—Steven Roberts

"ABANDON SKIRTS ANOTHER ANSWER"

RESISTANCE by Charles Bernstein (Awede, 1983, \$5.00)

Schools, conventionally enough, teach literature as though the poem were a congealed block of common sense. In such a context, the obfuscatory aspects of textuality assert themselves as a problem—an attitude that's hard to shake. Phrases that don't fit in get called ambiguous, a serviceable difficulty because it restores the poem to common sense—meaning becomes an either/or proposition. The text works this way, or it works that way. "No priority other than the vanished," writes Charles Bernstein, as if to say, keep thinking, try to remember more. No single thought can be our end result.

Teaching methods and student responses vary too greatly for me to give a full account of the forms of institutional indoctrination—so let the two following exceptions to my argument suffice. 1) When teachers maintain a connection between the poem and the texts which have until then dominated the student's reading, the poem is less and less vulnerable to definition as a problem. 2) When the poem finds its reality in the teacher's voice, rather than through interpretation, the student learns that literature can confer its authority on any reader. When the emphasis is on analysis, however, the poem becomes a riddle, the reader's master.

The teaching of literature determines, for ever after, how we use or don't use the poem. It doesn't matter if we think of texts as instruments of communication, or of discommunication—the opposition isn't our own.

...

I dislike the assumption, as common now as it ever was, that a successful poem is perfect—a perfection that defines the poem

as subservient to criticism, even as it places the poet beyond emulation. School puts it this way: a text is perfect when **every** word is there for a discernible reason—and these reasons, which are as external to the poem as any of the other things New Criticism forbids, become the poem's justification. What makes this especially destructive, as Jonathan Kozol has pointed out about school teaching in general, is that student's won't imagine themselves capable of emulating the perfect thing. It passes out of their lives.

Every word contributes to the meaning—this is true, but only in the most useless sense. Something like: matter can't be destroyed, so if a word is in the text it must affect the outcome of a reading/ But few poets (Jackson Mac Low and Robert Grenier come to mind) allow their vocabularies such an egalitarian reign in the sentence. In my experience, some words thwart meaning, others misdirect it, and only a few are signally important. Thus, despite the lavishness Bernstein's vocabulary claims for itself, it's the tones which contribute to meaning, and the words which distract.

Sometimes, the two work together. "Days, after / All, which heave at having had" might almost be Duncan's "We've our business to attend Day's duties, / bend back the bow in dreams as we may / til the end rimes in the taut string / with the sending." The similarity is hearable. The sound and fury of the poem signify something far more precise than we at first expect.

But circumvention is still more common in Bernstein's writing than circumlocution. "Shores that glide me, a / Tender for unkeeping, when fit with / Sticks embellish empty throw" could become, through various tricks of thought, something like crafty Odysseus casts the I Ching in the cyclops' cave. But though the word relations propose stories, tantalizingly, it's the sound that finally captures our attention. When "shores that glide me" can metamorphize into "slide of a glance," which is exactly what happens, the difference between sea and see becomes irrelevant.

On the other hand, each moment is specific and precious. "No / better than this is / shown." Clothing may be an embellishment, but it still covers our nakedness.

...

If the difference between "dysraphism" and "conjunction" is one of fusion—the latter depends on arbitrariness for its effect, whereas the former tries to reconcile arbitrary details—then maybe we should think about a medium that really depends on mis-seaming: cinema. (*) Film editing works to maintain a discourse that hides its own herky jerky improbability. RESISTANCE, too, constructs a discontinuous argument that nevertheless sways us. "Whirl / as whirl / can, a surrogate's / no place / for dismay"—a voice of conviction speaks out against misplaced anger, love, and conclusions, with an illogical passion that presupposes and overturns the poem's logical phrasing. According to cliché, recognizing a problem is the first step towards correcting it. In RESISTANCE, we speak, and thus haltingly contribute to our own condition. "What / chains these / conditions severs / semblance of..."—the cliché disintegrates. Having a problem becomes the first step towards formulating it. What we usually seek to solve, Bernstein says, is only the formulation.

In "Other Than Linear," a talk delivered at Cannessa Park in the Fall of 1984, Johanna Drucker noted that all sentences contain a gap that needs to be bridged, and wants to be ignored. Thus, the man went to the movies and then came home deflects us forward by alluding to a film and then consigning it to limbo—a "dysraphism" so conventional that it appears seamless. In a movie, the cuts declare that time, space, and action are consistent; and when the cuts connect inconsistent shots, a continuous soundtrack keeps us fixed on a single discourse. "The internal logic / of possession of / what can not be / known about..."—but Bernstein doesn't stop there. He names his unknown, and finds out that the named isn't the known.

So we ask ourselves: 1) Is Charles Bernstein trying to account for the "internal logic" of the gaps in discourse? 2) If RESISTANCE is this account, what is it we possess after reading the poems—the gaps, the discourse, or the "internal logic"?

Must we apprehend knowledge before we can possess it?

We see it, we name it, we think we have it down. "I came, I saw, I conquered."

...

Poetry requires the superfluous.

We possess the named, but not the known.

Lacan reminds us that the purpose of analysis isn't to explain an hysteric's silence, the point is to make her speak. Charles Bernstein's poetry, I believe, reaches for a similar conclusion. The writing confesses a complicated desire so as to break out of some encumbrance—"Misery's / enfoldment," or "that this / called / inevitability."

Which is how RESISTANCE begins: "Feelings that grant promises / alone am cured of." Reduced to a formula, this becomes: the greater the resistance, the more durable the reconciliation. "What most is barer tongued in trace"—we confront ourselves after the fact.

The book ends "further down / the road to which remove's absolved," which we shouldn't accept as an excuse for Bernstein's having not solved the problems that spurred him on. But think of

it as first thought, last thought (first thought, next thought?)
proved.

Reconciliation, not resistance. What we can't get past, we
have to deal with.

"The sun / never sets on the empire of the heart's / unease."

* "'Dysraphism' is actually a word in use by specialists in congenital diseases, to mean dysfunctional fusion of embryonic parts—a birth defect. Actually, the word is not in Dorland's, the standard U. S. medical dictionary; but I found it 'in use' by a Toronto doctor so it may be a commoner British medical usage or just something he came up with. 'Raph' of course means 'seam,' so for me disraphism is mis-seaming—a prosodic device! But it has the punch of being the same root of rhapsody (raph)—or in Skeats—one who strings (lit. stitches) songs together, a reciter of epic poetry, cf. ode etc. In any case, to be simple, Dorland's does define 'dysrhafia' (if not dysraphism) as 'incomplete closure the primary neural tube; status disraphicus'; this is just below 'dysprosody' (sic): 'disturbance of stress, pitch, and rhythm of speech.'

—Charles Bernstein, SULFUR 8.

During a talk at THE OLD MOLE in Berkeley, Bernstein used the word "dysraphism" to describe his compositional practice with reference to meaning as well as sound. In fact, a "mis-seaming" of "stress, pitch, and rhythm" would have to be a metaphoric evocation of a prosodic effect (i. e. stitched sound); a mis-seaming of images or phrases comes closer to being a literal fact.

—Benjamin Friedlander

28.

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The House of "K" recognizes the publication of Robert Duncan's
GROUND WORK: BEFORE THE WAR with the following seven
essays.

* * * *

THE FERTILE GROUND

GROUND WORK: BEFORE THE WAR by Robert Duncan
(New Directions, 1984, \$10.95)

The deaths of Charles Olson and Louis Zukofsky leave us Robert Duncan inheritor of the field: the Grand Old Man of Poetry. The French first termed this eminence grise, which in the case of Whitman got translated "The Good Grey Poet". Whatever Duncan can be titled, the word gray does not come to mind. His is the late style of a master, in full generous stride, as different from any poetry being written today as James' prose of THE GOLDEN BOWL was from its era. And golden it is.

Resolved to wait 15 years between published books, Duncan has now treated us to about half the work done in that period, in an exceptionally wide format book (a curious exception from the

uniform design of New Directions, though the publisher has kept to its usual black-and-white cover, with a collage by Jess, wondrous as the poems). This format allows reproduction of typescript, in enough space to reproduce the effect of Duncan typing it all out before us.

The facsimile is at first startling until you see lines as long as Whitman's, with no piled-up indentations to mar the music. Lines, with such delicate an ear for syllables, as would put rough Walt to shame.

Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams were the first to change their voice and ventilation, and thereby transmute the form of poems, by composing directly on a typewriter. Since then, these precise and democratic spacings have become both tool and palette for any poet so disposed. Some poets, such as Larry Eigner, would be unimaginable without. Type in this book means what it says, and is no idle idiosyncrasy.

Never simple, easily explained or even exclaimed, these lines summon a lifetime. They assume a repeated and steadily amplified myth, much as do those cast bronze Gates of Hell, recently mounted at Stanford, which Rodin made the lasting center of his studio. Consider, in that light, these lines from "Passages 35, Before the Judgement": "In this place the airy spirit / catching fire in its fall from flight / has started a burning of conscience / in the depths of earth and the primal waters, / and all of Creation rises to meet him..." Rodin indeed!

By not easily explained, I mean that in reading such a poem as "The Museum" a reader is expected to know he means us to see Muse in the word Museum—as if a place to house the Muses. If we are sharp we can notice him inflate the font of caryatids at the heart of Browning's SORDELLO (a poem also about a poet) only to have it topple like some House of Usher in a local,

personal earthquake. Sappho comes on stage, and the Minotaur. There is no safe way to read Duncan except to begin at the beginning.

GROUND WORK is thus a continuation of the 1960 OPENING OF THE FIELD, 1964's ROOTS AND BRANCHES, and BENDING THE BOW from 1968. All contain the ongoing series titled "Structures of Rime" and "Passages" and reflect the poet's major themes: the anima (usually in the guise of Muse), the hearth (or home), imagination vs. experience, love alongside war, and the notion that poetry is something that speaks through us rather than the other way around. More and more these books seem to take on the character of a corpus like LEAVES OF GRASS, meant to hold and gather all one poet has to say.

If the serious reader will want all these books on the shelf, most of the poems in this new work can be enjoyed squarely on their own, in the context the poet himself gives. This is particularly true of two brilliant long series titled "Seventeenth Century Suite in Homage to the Metaphysical Genius in English Poetry" and "Dante Etudes".

In the "Metaphysical Suite" the reader is presented first with each poem Duncan is using as a springboard for his own meditations. Shunning works of compressed conceit—that "box where sweets compacted lie"—usually counted metaphysical, Duncan goes for such white-hot gems as Southwell's "The Burning Babe" (surely the strangest Christmas poem of all time) or the mysterious symbols from a Ben Jonson masque. Definitely metaphysical, though, is the enduring question he poses of the great relations between spirit and senses. "So do I work my self into the sense / as if the only light there'll be" Duncan writes.

This Suite (along with the MOLY poems, based on Thom Gunn) is constructed around poetics formally based on end rhymes,

classic meters, set patterns—all things alien to Duncan's practice. Part of our pleasure here is just how he stretches these boundaries with hide-and-seek rhyme, in his distinctive and seductive sense of rhythms.

The "Dante Etudes," on the other hand, are mined out of Dante's prose: DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA, one of the earliest studies of language, DE MONARCHIA, in which sane politics are meditated, and IL CONVIVIO, which is a discussion of love and science.

Duncan indicates in a preface that these are "proposed in poetry as the etudes of Romantic composers were proposed in music, for I mean a music not a scholarly dissertation." And what music he makes in this long (40 pages) philosophical work. Beginning with language as a means of ordering the world, and as the world itself speaking through the poet, he goes on to investigate "The goal of the entire civilization of the human species" by way of the ordered household, neighborhood, city, nation, world. This sounds a heavy load, but Duncan ripples through it like Liszt. Beautiful as it is ambitious, this is surely one of Duncan's enduring major works.

One of the Etudes is titled "Our Art but to Articulate," a fitting phrase for the whole of GROUND WORK.

NOTE

This was written at the request of the San Francisco Chronicle, and was rejected, after rewriting to simplify even more, as "too dense and complex." Particularly rejected, from the first version, were comments on Duncan's sexual elegiacs on Thom Gunn's MOLY, and my question to him about the meaning of the subtitle "Before The War." Robert says this should be read like (or as in) "before a mirror"—a fit light in which

to read these later-day lamentations.

—Ronald Johnson, S. F. 1984

ROBERT DUNCAN'S GROUND WORK

The titles of Duncan's three previous collections all propose, in their various ways, the work as a beginning, an origin, and as a movement out beyond itself. *THE OPENING OF THE FIELD* is both the opening into the poetic field and the poetic field of poetry itself conceived as an opening through which there is passage. Similarly, *ROOTS AND BRANCHES*, where the image is rooted in the field and grows or extends beyond. With *BENDING THE BOW*, this simultaneity of origin and extension becomes a vortex (to use Pound's term) of image and possibility. The sense of origin is still present, both in the notion of the act of music (the bow bending across the strings of the violin) as a source of flight for the arrow. But the clear and present act of extension, the movement outward, becomes a potentiality in the second of these images: the arrow, not now flying, is forever about to leave the bow.

As a title, *GROUND WORK: BEFORE THE WAR* re-establishes this sense of origin and potentiality within the idea of the field. Coming 24 years after *THE OPENING OF THE FIELD* and 16 years after *BENDING THE BOW*, this volume presents itself as preliminary, as a preparation for its own work; in other words, the ground work is an opening of the field previous to an opening of the field. Just as the arrow is forever about to fly, the work in poetry (in the ground, to follow the image) is forever about to begin; it is a work about to be performed even as it is performed or performs itself.

For Duncan, this sense of origin as simultaneously previous and ongoing is something he finds both in his own work and in the language itself. Closing his "Some Notes on Notation" to begin GROUND WORK, he writes:

In PASSAGES verses may be articulated into phrases or tesserae of utterances and silences leading to a series of possible sentences. As PASSAGES themselves are but passages of a poem beyond that calls itself PASSAGES and that is manifest only in the course of the books in which it appears, even so phrases have both their own meaning and yet belong to the unfolding revelation of a Sentence beyond the work.

This insistence is nothing new in Duncan and can be extended in many directions. While a line (or a word) contains its own meaning, its own place in what has gone before, it leads also into a future, into an unknown meaning beyond itself. In ROOTS AND BRANCHES, this is elaborated as the "raised cup from a hand trembles, where sight itself is a brim of water surrounded by waters or what it does not see" ("Structure of Rime XIX").

Surrounded by a horizon beyond which is both what he doesn't know and his actual mother, the child in utero is another of Duncan's elaborations or origin and poetry. The "rimed, / sound-chambered child" ("Passages I") is the poet himself within the muse, the physical mother herself conceived by the poet without language as a sound of words prior to and beyond meaning. It is precisely this complex play of physical source and an origin which is both the actual birth into language and a retrospective construct by the mature poet which informs much of GROUND WORK, from "The Museum" (where the abstractions of "Grand architecture that the Muses command!" re-turns to the actual physiology of both the poet and the muse/mother) to the openings of the "Dante Etudes." The abstraction and universalization of the poet as Man and the muse as Woman are always specific both to Duncan's experience in language as a male poet and to the beginnings of a language learned from the mother. And, for Duncan, these specifics are always taken as universals or as imperatives within his own sense of origins.

In this work of origins, another complication arises in the insistence of derivations that so pervades GROUND WORK. Celan, Levertov, Pound, Rumi, Stevens, Gunn, Dante are all explicit sources. "A Seventeenth Century Suite in Homage to the Metaphysical Genius in English Poetry (1590-1690)" takes poems of Raleigh, Herbert, Jonson, etc. as the ground for a working of Duncan's own poetics. The poetics of derivation at stake here is implicated in and informed by precisely the complications of a ground work I outlined earlier. The work in writing is also an ongoing work in reading which is, in turn, a simultaneous work in writing. While reading is a grounding or preparation for the writing it is also the writing itself, an originating of the earlier poets' work in Duncan's own. A derivational poem is a reading/writing which insists upon itself as both a discovery and a creation of meaning in the source. In this interplay, both poems are able to find themselves beyond; an ongoing poetics of origin requires a notion of meaning which is always beyond what it would propose to understand in reading and what it would propose to mean in writing.

This ongoingness of reading and writing is also the basis for the sense throughout GROUND WORK that Duncan is continually re-playing his own themes, that this has all been seen before. Of course most of it has been seen before in magazines and chapbooks since BENDING THE BOW, but the crux here is that Duncan's own earlier work has become a source of derivation. Again, this is nothing new; Duncan's poetry has always insisted on its own priority, on its origin in itself. A poetry built out of continuing origins, deriving from previous origins and preparing for future origins must finally undo this very illusion of progress and establish itself on repetition. Continually "riming" on itself, Duncan's poetry moves towards a structure of departure and return. Coming to the horizon of what it knows, it moves beyond into what it does not know and establishes a new, known, horizon. The familiar images and meanings are continually renewed as they are extended into further elaborations of themselves.

In all of this recounting of poetics, I want primarily to point to my own readings of GROUND WORK, the first of which was

controlled by a dis-ease—the sense that Duncan is simply playing at being Duncan, repeating his own elaborations again and again. My second reading, however, is a permission (and I am following Duncan's own terms here)—I give myself over to the language or, just as accurately, find myself taken by the language of the book. In this second reading, I find that the work still works. I see GROUND WORK, then, as a working of Duncan's own established field, in which repetitions forever prepare themselves as articulations of meaning and possibility over time. And in this second reading I find a second, reciprocal permission to the reader who must attend to and participate in the unfoldings and extensions of meanings. It is in this double permission, finally, that Duncan still holds a place in the current scene. His work is an opening for those of us who follow him in time even if not always in our own practice.

—Gary Burnett

COLLAGE

(This piece juxtaposes quotations from Robert Duncan's prose and poetry. Page numbers refer to the Sumac edition of THE TRUTH AND LIFE OF MYTH, and to GROUND WORK.)

Many a young poet comes to his vocation today the product of a demythologized education. (27)

At the mill the wheel no longer turns.
The fields are in ruin. (81)

The separation of Church and State has been interpreted to mean that the lore of God is the matter of the private individual, and the myths of the Old and New Testament are no longer part of our common learning. (27)

Eat, eat this bread and be thankful
it does not yet run with blood (81)

Rationalizing scientists have conducted a war against fairytales and phantasies. (27)

Drink, drink, while there is water.
They move to destroy the sources of feeling.

Myth can be allowed as an element of personal expression in creative art, but myth as an inherited lore of the soul-way of Man has been put aside. (27)

Come back to the shores of what you are.
Come back to the crumbling shores. (3)

The seed of poetry itself sprang to life in the darkness of a ground of words heard and seen that were a congregation of sounds and figures previous to dictionary meanings. (13)

I do not know more than the sea tells me,
told me long ago, or I overheard Her
telling distant roar upon the sands,
waves of meaning in the cradle of whose
sounding and resounding power I
slept. (3)

The roots and depths of mature thought, its creative sources, lie in childhood or even "childish" things I have not put away

but taken as enduring realities of my being. (13)

All night
the mothering tides in which your
life first formd in the brooding
light have quencht the bloody
splendors of the sun

and, under the triumphant processions
of the moon, lay down
thunder upon thunder of an old
longing, the beat

of whose repeated spell
consumes you. (3)

Time and again, men have chickened out in the fear of what that hawk, the genius of Poetry, threatens, and surrendered their imaginations to the proprieties and rationalizations of new schools of criticism, grammarians, commonsense philosophers, and arbiters of educated best taste. (58)

Secondary is the grammar of
 constructions and uses, syntactic
 manipulations, floor-plans,

spellings and letterings of the word,
 progressions in writing, stanzas,
 conservations and disturbances in meaning (96)

The mothering and fathering voices about me conveyed a realm of pleasure and pain that I was to seek not to dismiss but to deepen. And there was a world too of wishful phantasy and the lore of generations in myth established in the serious appreciations of the adults about me. (14)

The poem that moves me when I write is an active presence in which I work. I am not concerned with whether it is a good or a bad likeness to some convention men hold; for the Word is for me living Flesh, and the body of my own thought and feeling, my own presence, becomes the vehicle for the process of genetic information. (23)

Ur-Father, Hairy Bull of the Waters
bellowing in Her, He the depth of Her sounding
arousing out of Her dream of Chaos
eggs of those forms that await the coming of Man

--Worlds, Seas, Tides of the Sun and the Moon,
Titanic storms of Being --Hells, then!

(This First Water may have been Fire)
enormous predications of the Gods
and, afterwards, Divine Powers --gods

daimons, presences of living things,

fountains, trees, great stones, hearth flames

--Heaven. (39)

The criticism of modernists like Eliot, Pound, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens is hedged about and directed by their sense of what respectable opinion is, the tolerance and intolerance of schoolmasters of English Literature and Philosophy the world over. And this tolerance and intolerance has been shaped in turn by the retraction of sympathies, particularly by the retraction of enthusiasm in reaction to the terrible experience the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries knew as men crazed by religious genius fought their civil wars. (58-59)

Go as in a dream
knowing in every scene deep uproilings
of earth beneath your feet,
slumbering a sullen redness grows;

wounds break open in the crusts above,
 pustulences upon the skin love wears;
 generations of despair mount up
 into a momentary swelling. (72)

In the tragedy of religious convictions, where men have
 tortured and killed to force others or themselves to come to
 the true faith, the depth and bitterness of this feeling of the
 truth of life or story or man to which life or story or man
 may play false is written in terrible acts. (23)

Let it go. Let it go.
Grief's its proper mode.

But O, How deep it's got to reach,
How high and wide
it's got to grow,
Before it come to sufficient grief... (80)

"If you have not entered the dance," the Christ says to John
 in the gnostic Gospel of John at Ephesus: "you misunderstand
 the event." But this dance is exactly the extremity out of
 which the ultimate cry of anguish comes.... The fullness of
 the creative imagination demands that rigor land painful
 knowledge by the condition of harmony; that death be the
 condition of eternal forms. (76)

—William Sylvester

OF MAPS, CASTELLI, WARPLANES, & DIVERS OTHER THINGS THAT COME "BEFORE THE WAR"

A single direct trajectory issues from Dante Alighieri to the contemporary literary moment. This is the authentic modernist period in literature as it also becomes, in retrospect, for history. Engels, lecturing to the Italian Socialists cited Dante as the first universal mind of our modern epoch.

This 700 year span is the historic "field" within which Robert Duncan's writing operates. Though literary detritus from previous periods — Hellenic Greece, Thoth's Egypt — informs the occasional poem, Duncan returns repeatedly to Dante's writing, writing his own way through the Florentine poet's work as though within it lies some principal key to what Poetry can become. THE DIVINE COMEDY anyhow inhabits a pivotal position in poetry, the outcome of a critical agitation within world history.

While Empire still dominated her neighbors to the north, Italy in the late 13th century had become the first European country to emerge from the so-called Christian middle ages. Her home territories were proving grounds for what would become the two decisive changes: an articulated experimental democracy, as it was fitfully attempting to establish itself in Dante's Florence; and a dream of unlimited mercantile expansion in which the port of Venice, opening eastwards onto a vaguely comprehended landmass, was wrestling for predominance.

THE DIVINE COMEDY stands as a summation of that last moment in which Europe could consider herself bound to a single conscience, in which she was a globe to herself and not simply the westernmost archipelago on a continent of overwhelming complexity and extent. The unified worldview of the middle ages is about to fracture; every seed in fact of the incipient rupture is slumbering in one or

another circle of Hell, or grotesquely germinating on the slopes of Purgatory. This is what makes Dante seem so modern. But for the moment, what lies beyond Europe's political and religious turbulence scarcely exists. West lies the uncharted ocean; not for two hundred years will Manchester fishermen begin to extract cod from waters off the Massachusetts coastline. "East" is the direction of Islam, which for six centuries has aggressively contained Europe, its armies pressing at critical moments to the gates of Venice and provoking the construction of walled cities—the fortified castelli which are burgeoning from isolated communes into powerful City-States.

Moslem military superiority—and contention written in blood over a titulary to the Holy Land—is the principal spur for European cognition of the orient.

But in 1204 AD the Fourth Crusade had established an outpost of the Latin empire at Constantinople. Venice, in reward for her rather unsavory role in the Crusade's success, received a direct colonial dominion on the Levant. Silk, spice, gemstones, as well as the more immaterial but more enduring goods that travel with such riches—story and legend—have begun to enter Venice's gates of commerce, travelling by caravan from an "East" or Asia that lies beyond Constantinople and which is only superficially Moslem. The allure, the sorcery, surrounding these exotic imports, proposes an other, a farther world than the European horizon might suggest. This other world gave rise, at the same time as Dante's, to another book—a book in its own way as significant as Dante's, if less symmetrical and more awkwardly codified. In English it is known as THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO, or "The True History of His Adventures in the Far East."

In one of those bizarre braids that history, like nature, prefers to produce than withhold, Dante and Marco Polo appear as shadow figures of one another. Children of the same geo-historical cradle, they lived during a period that saw the Holy Roman Empire crumbling to the north of Italy, and a once grand

Papacy attempting a last-ditch effort to secure its power in the south. Polo, born in 1254, eleven years before Dante, outlived the Florentine by three years and died in 1324. The critical event to which each would trace the defining lineament of his life occurred almost in tandem: in 1271 Marco Polo set off towards China, passing through the Gate of Gates, or Gate of Iron; or on the contested dream landscape of legend in which location shifts at the storyteller's prerogative, CAESAR'S GATE. This was just three years before Dante would set eyes on Beatrice, a mysteriously alluring girl slightly older than himself, and passing through an aperture of another devising set upon an adventure of similar scope.

Three decades later, when the century turned, Marco Polo had scoured a "far" east and a south Asian sub-continent that would shortly entice a European expansion so furious it would not desist until the globe had been utterly transfigured. Dante had meanwhile been making himself instrumental in the changing fortunes of Europe's first modern democracy. Political vicissitudes settled decisively on each man at that time. 1302 saw Dante condemned to terminal exile from his home city. Four years earlier Polo had been interned in a Genoese prison. After his return from Asia he had accepted the post of gentleman commander of a galley in the Venetian fleet. A struggle between Venice and Genoa arose over dominion of the eastern trade, and in a sea-battle in the Adriatic the Venetian fleet was soundly beaten. Marco Polo was probably captured during the rout and brought back to Genoa as a prisoner of war.

There, imprisoned for a year or two before being freed under amnesty, he recounted tales of his Eastern journey to a fellow prisoner, a Rustichello of Pisa. This Rustichello, a romance writer of modest talent is best known for his MELIADUS, a compendium of chivalric tales composed in the langue d'oïl. He set about recording the travels of his prison mate, interspersing Polo's spare, objective narrative with his own picturesque and formulaic accounts of battle, as if by some dream confluence of east and west the steppes of Asia had

become populated by knights of a European chivalry. This chimerical book is the TRAVELS. It is the only book of similar stature to Dante's to emerge from that Italy—an Italy in which civil war and intra-city rivalries were symptomatic of huge upheavals in political and geographical consciousness.

"The events of history...we took as events in a mystery that referred to Poetry," Duncan says in his 1972 preface to the reissue of CAESAR'S GATE. After his VENICE POEM of 1948, in which he had crowned himself and taken possession of a Europe whose history was the history of Empire, Duncan, like Polo, in another twisting of history upon itself, abandoned Venice for the "unreality of Asia."

Passage to Asia, in that such a terrain was "unreal," could only be had through the looking-glass of legend: that cleft in the mountains where Caesar Alexander, in certain manifestations of the story, had been repulsed by an indeterminate Asiatic army and constructed a huge Gate to seal himself off from the strange populated waste-regions beyond.

To abandon Europe in the 13th century was tantamount to abandoning reality. Marco Polo's contemporaries read his book with its detailed, unembellished accounts of Asia as a Book of Marvels. (Cartographers did not utilize his discoveries until more than 50 years after his death.) What Polo's book is however is a marvel of precise reportage. If Dante reads as a codified map of the European conscience—(and Duncan, discussing his own development, writes "my task in poetry is concerned with the conscience...")—the Venetian's book of Marvels is a map of what Europe had not encountered about herself, nor yet within her own boundaries: an unconscious or counter-conscience, a shapeless or mis-shapen region curiously immune from all those smaller biases that merge in the popular mind with the notion of piety, and generate what's conventionally called conscience.

When Duncan confuses two passages from the TRAVELS, and colors them with Richard Burton's terminal essay from THE THOUSAND NIGHTS AND ONE NIGHT, he uncovers a map of the sexual outlands of the occidental soul—a realm, so it seems, insidiously free from an American conscience. One need only recall John Crowe Ransom's hysterical response to Duncan's essay "The Homosexual in Society" to observe the vitriolic pieties provoked when one brings such Marvels home.

Dante's deliberate craft—which is also Duncan's, as poet—is one of rigorously conceived rhyme, of strict consideration given to the just weight and balance of each syllable in the work. No contemporary poet has shown himself more resolute than Duncan in the placement of each of the poem's elements. His frustration and ultimate sense of betrayal by publishers and printers who practice their craft of book design to the neglect of the poet's precise directives about spacing and layout have lead him to issue GROUNDWORK as a photocopy of his own typescript. No one can meddle with his organization of poetic space as it issues from his typewriter.

In a parallel sense, critics have suggested that Dante's stunningly precise terza rima was a measure the poet deliberately adopted to insure that no outsider could excise, alter, insert, or otherwise tamper with his personally and politically volatile COMEDY. Every word in the scheme displays its infallible rhyme and reason; any forgery or deletion would instantly offend both ear and intellect. Architectonically Dante's poem is as impregnable as the walled castelli that dominated the countryside of his day.

In contrast Marco Polo's book of TRAVELS betrays no "rhyme or reason." The narrative sprawls like continental Asia sprawls—east, north, south, west—dwarfing the "known world." Geographical problems persist in linking certain sections of the narrative to the (as it is now known) planet; but it was at its time a map of Creation such as had never been possible before. The boast occurs early on:

For I would have you know that from the time when our Lord God formed Adam our first parent with His hands down to this day there has been no man, Christian or Pagan, Tartar or Indian, or of any race whatsoever, who has known or explored so many of the various parts of the world and of its great wonders as this same Messer Marco Polo.

Diverse renditions of the TRAVELS survive in a variety of languages and dialects of the day—Latin, French, several Italian vulgates, the original almost certainly transcribed into that northern dialect of romance, the langue d'oïl. Each rescension pieces the narrative together differently. Regions described in one manuscript by Polo do not appear in another, while that manuscript may contain episodes a third lacks. Few internal devices are operating to reveal what is truth, what rumor; what authentic, what interpolated; what is real and what "made up."

Rumor, error, superstition. Despite Polo's keenly trained mercantile eye, and instances of ethnological precision that would ornament a contemporary fieldworker's notebook, these things seem endemic to the text. It is an accounting of both the seen and the unforeseen, the heard and the mis-heard. So the Europe of Polo's day read it: a Book of Marvels.

"...raising maps of poetry in my work," writes Duncan. And since Schliemann's excavations at Troy a raising of verifiable maps within poetry has been seriously assumed. The poet is a cartographer also. Olson made explicit certain modernist assumptions (again the term modernist must reach back to Dante, if not Homer) by binding the sheets of MAXIMUS in a map of Gloucester harbor. He issued his two successive volumes clad similarly, bound in maps of the terrain he meant them to somehow delineate. (U. C. 's release of the complete MAXIMUS has deflated what was a considered impact by embedding Olson's maps within the book, as if he meant them as pages of

visual text, equitably located among the poems. This they are not. That the cover of their edition sports a photograph of Olson, instead of a map of the poetry's terrain, displays with what profundity they misunderstood the man's work.)

The map Dante raised in his COMEDY reads vertically. The world he stood at the egress of—a middle ages founded on the Thomist cosmology—considered above and below the significant directions. The absolutist Christian ethos falls upon this vertical axis. Every element of consequence, every soul in Creation, finds its fit location along a rule that admits to no ambiguity. Just so the Florentine poet weighed each word and consigned it to its inalienable place in the orderliness of his Poem.

Marco Polo mapped another world altogether. His, in which the European intelligence has been "roundly" knocked off its axis, fans out horizontally; a tremendous levelling or democratizing has occurred. Polo's eye, feeding on diversity, cuttngly discriminates but can no longer judge according to the European ethos. He is the first and perhaps greatest ethnographer of modern times. What to a Christian must seem shocking ethical transgression—particularly the sexual practices Polo describes with concerned accuracy as he moves from region to region—become subsumed in a new perspective, one of cultural pluralism.

Duncan's contemporaries—Rexroth, Snyder, Corman—approached the orient across the Pacific Basin, attempting to locate a northwest passage to the domain Pound had brought back word of: "the rectification of names," or in the famous ideogram given as "sincerity," a place where one finds "a man standing by his word." Duncan however entered Asia along Marco Polo's route, travelling eastwards, and for him Asia becomes permission for the opposite: for error, for rumor, for superstition, to assume their rightful seats in the poetic discourse. His Asia, like Polo's, presumes a levelling of cultural and sexual customs—the inclusion of a sexual "variance" in which variance is shorn of its derived sense of perversion.

In the poetic discourse, pluralism is the admission of whatever appears outside the fold. Duncan's is the celebrated quote describing the modernist task:

...all the old excluded orders must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and vegetative; the unconscious and unknown; the criminal and failure—all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are.

* * *

The decade following Duncan's composition of CAESAR'S GATE saw, within the discourse of this country's poetry, many if not all the old excluded orders return. While anti-communist hysteria fueled the Cold War's deep-freeze machine, frenetically operating to insure the continued exclusion of the "old orders," the ascendant figures within poetry were drawn precisely from those orders.

Homosexuals, drug-users, communists, women, anarchists, Jews, blacks, Buddhists, Gnostics, alcoholics, thieves, the insane. Even a behemoth of a man, six foot four and intent on re-mapping world History, appeared, his shadow dropping with fierce benevolence across what must have looked to many Americans like the riotous spirits Marco Polo encountered on the waste-reaches of Lop Nor desert.

In international affairs the phantasms appeared less distractingly diverse, more sharply outlined; and perhaps, as those in power hoped, more readily dissolved. The White House's Bay of Pigs fiasco, practically "next door," was like one final effort at home-brewed exorcism, the sort you occasionally hear practiced by fundamentalist preachers on gospel radio night-stations.

The exorcism failed. In 1962 John F. Kennedy expanded his

deployment of military advisors to Saigon. For the next decade Asia, organized according to a new map colored "red," would mean something entirely different to American poetry.

' destroyd forests and fields
 and from the villages the putrid dead,
 phantasms of industrial enterprise
 swell fat upon the news of the daily body-count;

after the age of lead, the age of gas, fossil fuels
 oil slick on the water, petroleum spread,
 the stink of gasoline in the murky air,
 the smoking tankers crawl towards Asia--

"Passages 35, Before the Judgement," directs one how to read GROUNDWORK's subtitle: BEFORE THE WAR. In the apocalypse History enacts, before sheds its temporal implication.

"In this mirror," the Angel replies, "our Councils darken."

History—personal or public—and in fact there is no purely personal History within a theatre that includes napalm and white phosphorous, let alone a nuclear arsenal—History is itself Revelation. Charles Olson taught how to read the poems people are when he said, people do not change, they only stand more revealed. To Duncan, the "bloody verse" written over Vietnam by America's warpower during the sixties was a stripping bare of the American psyche.

With the Asia Marco Polo had first described now transfigured into Hell on Earth—and Polo did, certainly, sail the waters just offshore of present-day Vietnam—Duncan returned as he always has in crisis to Dante. And Dante leads him to Vergil, one who has been there 'before,' and might guide him through a viciousness of warfare the planet has never before seen. Terribly enough, the only emblem capable of securing such guidance is one's own sense of horror.

This pain you take

is the pain in which Truth turns like a key.

What makes Duncan's war poetry the best, or rather the most truthful witness of its day, is that in it he remains cognizant that no party goes unimplicated. The war is also, horribly, at home. Much of the anti-establishment verse written and recited during the period sounds childish by contrast, an us-against-them blindness towards how things stand, and which in retrospect clearly displays the manner in which the War at Home was quelled...and lost. Government instigators, agents provocateurs, and betrayers of any cause could operate with impunity in the ranks of the resisters because a devastating truth about language had not yet emerged: things do not necessarily correspond to their names.

The Hydra prepares in every domain, even in the revolution,
his offices.

His clowns come forward to entertain us.

* *

in every party partisans of the torment

Tyranny throws up from its populace a thousand tyrant faces, seethes and dies down, would-be administrators of the evil or challengers of the establishment seeking their share of the Power that eats us.

Malebolge's coiling complexity in this age of fossil fuels requires a shrewdness Poetry perhaps has not previously required. An adequately prepared witness cannot hope to map the contemporary terrain from any simplistically organized stance. (S)He must be constantly lurching and leaping: first to gather the multiple perspective that alone can disclose all heads of the Hydra; secondly to secure linguistic unpredictability for the poet, that the newspeak of the day not engulf poetic language and neutralize it. The poet learns to cut, the way a linebacker cuts, the way

a collage-artist cuts. "Passages 35" requires at least three languages including Dante's Italian and Hesiod's Greek in order to outwit the Hydra and keep abreast of "She whose breast is in language." And requires also Carlyle and Pound as dodges or texts for the poet to cut into. Vietnam exposed a brutality afoot in the world that prompted an unprecedented confrontation with the possibilities of language.

America's Indo-China war deposited a legacy in language which has become increasingly central to poetic discourse. It is an awareness of how easily "the powers of business and industry" and "War, the biggest business of all" can fundamentally usurp our common tongue, what Dante called our vulgar eloquence. Those who don't acknowledge the usurpation are dupes. Those who do, confront a difficult task ahead, in Poetry. It is a sad thing, after all the effort poets have expended in claiming the rhythms and vocabulary of colloquial American speech for poetry, that those things too can so readily be conscripted to the service of Evil.

And in a post-Watergate era, suspicion alights even on the notion of sincerity. Henry Kissinger after all is a "man who stands by his word."

Words are shifting integers. Syntax coils with equal ease through the heavens and hells. That the newsmedia, multinationals, armed forces, and governments on our planet have learnt this, to virulent effect, leaves writers—whether they acknowledge it or not—as the only viable oppositionary force. Responsible users of language, those who Robert Duncan says have maintained "the ability to respond," stand as never before "Before the War." Words in this Era of Information manifest themselves as monstrously efficient instruments of domination and deceit. The turf of language is one of dilating consequence. When the war "comes home" to brain and larynx, and to the space between all of us, Poetry—writing writ large or small—becomes a mapping of worlds in

which both world and map are inextricably at stake.

—Andrew Schelling

THE HOMOSEXUAL IN SOCIETY (1944, 1959)

(This revised and annotated edition of The Homosexual In Society was prepared for Seymour Krim's 1960 anthology of Beat writing. Krim never used it, however, perhaps because he discovered in the course of compiling his book that Robert Duncan is not a beatnik. The essay originally appeared in 1944 in Dwight MacDonald's N. Y. journal POLITICS. —Editors)

Introduction. Seymour Krim has urged me to reprint this early essay as "a pioneering piece," assuring me "that it stands and will stand on its own feet." At the time it was printed (POLITICS, August 1944) it had at least the pioneering gesture, as far as I know, of being the first discussion of homosexuality which included the frank avowal that the author was himself involved; but my view was that minority associations and identifications were an evil wherever they supercede allegiance to and share in the creation of a human community good—the recognition of fellow-manhood.

Blind lifelines—what Darwin illuminates as evolution—has its creative design, and in that process a man's sexuality is a natural factor in a biological economy larger and deeper than

his own human will. What we create as human beings is a picture of the meaning and revelation of life; we create perspectives of space and time or a universe; and we create ideas of "man" and of "person," of gods and attendant powers—a drama wherein what and who we are are manifest. And this creation governs our knowledge of good and evil.

For some, there is only the tribe and its covenant that is good, and all of mankind outside and their ways are evil; for many in America today good is progressive, their professional status determines their idea of "man" and to be genuinely respectable their highest concept of a good "person"—all other men are primitive, immature or uneducated. Neither of these perspectives were acceptable to me. I had been encouraged by my parents, by certain teachers in high school, by friends, through Socialist and Anarchist associations, and through the evidence of all those artists, philosophers and mystics who have sought to give the truth of their feeling and thought to mankind, to believe that there was an entity in the imagination "mankind", and that there was a community of thoughtful men and women concerned with the good of that totality to whom I was responsible. The magazine *POLITICS* represented for me during the second World War an arena where intellectuals of that community were concerned, and I came to question myself in the light of the good they served.

It was not an easy essay to write. As a form an essay is a field in which we try ideas. In this piece I try to bring forward ideas of "homosexual", "society", "human" and, disguised but evident, my own guilt; and their lack of definition is involved in my own troubled information. Our sense of terms is built up from a constant renewed definition through shared information, and one of the urgencies of my essay was just that there was so little help here where other writers had concealed their own experience and avoided discussion.

Then too, the writing of the essay was a personal agon. Where we bear public testimony we face not only the community of thoughtful men and women who are concerned with the good, but facing the open forum we face mean and stupid men too. The involved disturbed syntax that collects additional clauses and often fails to arrive at a full statement suggests that I felt in writing the essay that I must gather forces and weight to override some adversary; I have to push certain words from adverse meanings which as a social creature I share with the public to new meanings which might allow for an enlarged good. In the polemics of the essay it is not always possible to find the ground of accusation unless we recognize that I was trying to rid myself of one persona in order to give birth to another, and at the same time to communicate the process and relate it to what I called "society", a public responsibility. I was likely to find as little intellectual approval for the declaration of an idealistic morality as I was to find for the avowal of my homosexuality. The work often has value as evidence in itself of the conflict concerned and of the difficulty of statement then just where it is questionable as argument. I had a likeness to the public and shared its conflicts of attitude—an apprehension which shapes the course of the essay.

I feel today as I felt then that there is a service to the good in bringing even painful and garbled truth of the nature of our thought and feeling to the light of print, for what I only feel as an urgency and many men may condemn me for as an aberration, some man reading may render as an understanding and bring into the wholeness of human experience. Reading this essay some fifteen years later, I need courage to expose the unhappiness of my writing at that time, for I am not today without conflicting feelings and have the tendency still to play the adversary where I had meant only to explore ideas. In preparing the text then I have eliminated certain references that were topical at the time but would be obscure now and have cut where economy was possible without losing the character of the original; but I have not sought to rewrite or to remedy the effect.

Original footnotes are indicated by an asterisk. Where new footnotes have been added they are indicated by number.

The Text.

I propose to discuss a group whose only salvation is in the struggle of all humanity for freedom and individual integrity; who have suffered in modern society persecution, excommunication; and whose intellectuals, whose most articulate members, have been willing to desert that primary struggle, to beg, to gain at the price if need be of any sort of prostitution, privilege for themselves, however ephemeral; who have been willing rather than to struggle toward self-recognition, to sell their product, to convert their deepest feelings into marketable oddities and sentimentalities.

Although in private conversation, at every table, at every editorial board, one knows that a great body of modern art is cheated out by what amounts to a homosexual cult; although hostile critics have at times opened fire in attack as rabid as the attack of Southern senators upon "niggers"; critics who might possibly view the homosexual with a more humane eye seem agreed that it is better that nothing be said. (1) Pressed

(1) 1959. At a round table on Modern Art held in San Francisco in 1949 a discussion emerged between Frank Lloyd Wright and Marcel Duchamp where both showed the courage of forthright statement, bringing the issue publicly forward, which I lamented the lack of in 1944. Wright (who had been challenged on his reference to modern art as "degenerate"): "Would you say homosexuality was degenerate?" Duchamp: "No, it is not degenerate." Wright: "you would say that this movement which we call modern art and painting has been greatly or is greatly in debt to homosexuality?" Duchamp: "I admit it, but not in your terms... I believe that the homosexual public has shown more interest or curiosity for modern art than the heterosexual—so it happened, but it does not involve art itself."

What makes comment complicated here is that, while I would like to answer as Duchamp does because I believe with him that art itself is an expression of vitality, in part I recognize

to the point, they may either, as in the case of such an undeniable homosexual as Hart Crane, contend that he was great despite his "perversion"*——much as my mother used to say how much better a poet Poe would have been had he not taken dope; or where it is possible they have attempted to deny the role of the homosexual in modern art, defending the good repute of modern art against any evil repute of homosexuality.

But one cannot, in face of the approach taken to their own problem by homosexuals, place any weight of criticism upon the liberal body of critics for avoiding the issue. For there are Negroes who have joined openly in the struggle for human freedom, made articulate that their struggle against racial prejudice is part of the struggle for all; there are Jews who have sought no special privilege or recognition for themselves as Jews but have fought for human rights, but there is in the modern American scene no homosexual who has been willing to take in his own persecution a battlefront toward human freedom. Almost coincident with the first declarations for homosexual rights was the growth of a cult of homosexual superiority to heterosexual values; the cultivation of a secret language, the camp, a tone and a vocabulary that is loaded with contempt for the uninitiated.

the justice of Wright's distaste, for there is a homosexual clique which patronizes certain kinds of modern art and even creates because, like Wright, they believe both homosexuality and the art they patronize and create to be decadent and even fashionably degenerate.

* Critics of Crane, for instance, consider that his homosexuality is the cause of his inability to adjust to society. Another school feels that inability to adjust to society causes homosexuality. What seems fairly obvious is that Crane's effort to communicate his inner feelings, his duty as a poet, brought him into conflict with social opinion. He might well have adjusted his homosexual desires within society as many have done by "living a lie" and avoiding any unambiguous reference in his work.

Outside the ghetto the word "goy" disappears, wavers and dwindles in the Jew's vocabulary as he becomes a member of the larger community. But in what one would believe the most radical, the most enlightened "queer" circles, the word "jam" remains, designating all who are not wise to homosexual ways, filled with an unwavering hostility and fear, gathering an incredible force of exclusion and blindness. It is hard (for all the sympathy which I can bring to bear) to say that this cult plays any other than an evil role in society. (2)

(2) 1959. The alienation has not decreased but increased when the "Beat" cult projects its picture of themselves as saintly-junkies evoking an apocalyptic crisis in which behind the mask of liberal tolerance is revealed the face of the hated "square". Their intuition is true, that tolerance is no substitute for concern; but their belief that intolerance is more true, dramatizes their own share in the disorder. "Goy", "jam" and "square" are all terms of a minority adherence where the imagination has denied fellow-feeling with the rest of mankind. Where the community of human experience is not kept alive, the burden of meaning falls back upon individual abilities. But the imagination depends upon an increment of association.

Where being "queer" or a "junkie" means being a pariah (as it does in beat mythology), behavior may arise not from desire but from fear or even hatred of desire; dope-addiction may not be a search for an artificial paradise, an illusion of magical life, but an attack upon life, a poisoning of response; and sexual acts between men may not mean responses of love but violations of inner nature. Ginsberg (who believes the self is subject to society), Lamantia (who believes the self has authority from God), and McClure (who believes the self is an independant entity) have in common their paroxysms of self-loathing in which the measure of human failure and sickness is thought so true that the measure of human achievement and life is thought false.

But this attitude had already appeared in the work of urban sophisticates like Edmund Wilson and Mary McCarthy where

But names cannot be named. (3) There are critics whose cynical,

there was an observable meanness of feeling. Robert Lowell's "Tamed by Miltown, we lie on Mother's bed" expresses in the realism of neurotic inhibition what Allen Ginsberg's "Creation glistening backwards to the same grave, size of universe" expresses in the surrealism of psychotic exuberance. "Mother your master-bedroom / looked away from the ocean" and "O Mother...with your nose of bad lay with your nose of the smell of the pickles of Newark" dramatizes with the difference of class the common belief in oedipal grievance.

(3) 1959. That even serious socio-sexual studies are curbed is shown by the following letter written by an eminent poet when I wrote in 1945 asking if I could attempt an essay on his work in the light of my concept that his language had been diverted to conceal the nature of his sexual life and that because he could never write directly he had failed to come to grips with immediacies of feeling:

"...I am very sorry but I must ask you not to publish the essay you propose. I'm sure you will realize that the better the essay you write, the more it will be reviewed and talked about, and the more likelihood there would be of it being brought publicly to my attention in a way where to ignore it would be taken as an admission of guilt.

As you may know, I earn a good part of my livelihood by teaching, and in that profession one is particularly vulnerable. Further, both as a writer and as a human being, the occasion may always arise, particularly in these times, when it becomes one's duty to take a stand on the unpopular side of some issue. Should that ever occur, your essay would be a very convenient red-herring for one's opponents. (Think of what happened to Bertrand Russell in New York).

I hope you will believe me when I say that for myself personally I wish I could let you publish it, and that anyway I hope the other essays will be as good as you would like them

cont.

to be. "

My own conviction is that no public issue is more pressing than the one that would make a man guilty and endanger his livelihood for the open knowledge of his sexual nature; for the good of humanity lies in a common quest through shared experience toward the possibility of sexual love. Where we attend as best we can the volitions and fulfillments of the beloved in sexual acts we depend upon all those who in arts have portrayed openly the nature of love; and as we return ourselves through our writing to that commune of spirit we come close to ~~the~~ sharing in desire that underlies the dream of universal brotherhood. Undeclared desires and private sexuality feed the possibility of sexual lust which has many betrayals, empty cravings, violations, and wants to void the original desire.

That this eminent poet was not wrong in speaking of his professional vulnerability were his sexual nature openly avowed can be verified by the following passage from a letter of an eminent editor after reading The Homosexual In Society concerning my poem Toward An African Elegy which he had previously **admired** and accepted for publication:

"...I feel very sure we do not wish to print the poem, and I regret very much to decline it after an original acceptance. I must say for the record that the only right I feel in this action is that belatedly, and with your permission, I read the poem as an advertisement or a notice of overt homosexuality, and we are not in the market for literature of this type.

I cannot agree with you that we should publish it nevertheless in the name of freedom of speech; because I cannot agree with your position that homosexuality is not abnormal. It is biologically abnormal in the most obvious sense. I am not sure whether or not state and federal laws regard it so, but I think they do; I should not take the initiative in the matter, but if there are laws to this effect I concur in them entirely. There are

backbiting joke upon their audience is no other than this secret special reference; there are poets whose nostalgic picture of special worth in suffering, sensitivity and magical quality is no other than this intermediate "sixth sense"; there are new cult leaders whose special divinity, whose supernatural and visionary claim is no other than this mystery of sex. (4) The law has

certainly laws prohibiting incest and polygamy, with which I concur, though they are only abnormal conventionally and are not so damaging to a society biologically."

Both these men are leaders in just that community of thoughtful men and women I imagined; both have had and deserve highest honors as literary figures; and, while I believe one to be mistaken in his belief that sexual forthrightness is not a primary issue for the social good; and the other to be as misled by the unhappy conventions of his thought as by the atmosphere of guilty confession that he gathered from my essay; both, like I, are concerned not with the minority in question but rightly with what they consider the public good, an intimation of the human good. Much understanding is yet needed before men of good intentions can stand together.

(4) 1959. I find myself in this passage accusing certain "critics," "poets," and "new cult leaders" of what I might be suspected of in my poetry myself. "Suffering, sensitivity and magical quality" are constants of mood; divinities and cults, supernatural and visionary claims and sexual mystery are all elements in subject matter that give rise to poetic inspiration for me. In recent years I have had an increased affinity with imaginative reaches of religious thought, searching gnostic and cabalistic speculation for a more diverse order.

The Demon of Moral Virtue exacts his dues wherever he is evoked. Where we seek the Good he urges us to substitute what will be men's good opinion of us. I may have felt then that I might redeem my sexuality as righteous in the sight of certain critics, if I disavowed my heterodoxy in religious imagination as wicked or deluded.

declared homosexuality secret, inhuman, unnatural (and why not then supernatural?). The law itself sees in it a crime—not in the sense that murder, thievery, seduction of children or rape are seen as human crimes—but as a crime against the way of nature.* It has been lit up and given an awful and lurid attraction such as witchcraft was given in the 17th century. Like early witches, the homosexuals, far from seeking to undermine the popular superstition, have accepted and even anticipated the charge of demonism. Sensing the fear in society that is generated in ignorance of their nature, they have sought not understanding but to live in terms of that ignorance, to become witchdoctors in the modern chaos.

To go about this they have had to cover with mystery, to obscure the work of all those who have viewed homosexuality as but one of the many ways which human love may take and who have had primarily in mind as they wrote (as Melville, Proust or Crane had) mankind and its liberation. For these great early artists their humanity was the source, the sole source, of their work. Thus in REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST, Charlus is not seen as the special disintegration of a homosexual but as a human being in disintegration, the forces of pride, self-humiliation in love, jealousy, are not special forces but common to all men and women. Thus in Melville, though in BILLY BUDD it is clear that the conflict is homosexual, the forces that make for that conflict, the guilt in passion, the hostility rising from subconscious sources, and the sudden recognition of these forces as it comes to Vere in that story—these are forces which are universal, which rise in other contexts, which in Melville's work have risen in other contexts.

* "Just as certain judges assume and are more inclined to pardon murder in invertes and treason in Jews for reasons derived from original sin and racial predestination." Sodom and Gomorrah, Proust.

It is, however, the body of Crane that has been most ravaged by these modern ghouls and, once ravaged, stuck up cult-wise in the mystic light of their special cemetery literature. The live body of Crane is there, inviolate in the work; but in the window display of modern poetry, in so many special critics, and devotees' interest, is a painted mummy, deep sea green. One may tiptoe by, as the visitors to Lenin's tomb tiptoe by and, once outside, find themselves in a world in his name that has celebrated the defeat of all that he was devoted to. One need only point out in all the homosexual imagery of Crane, in the longing and vision of love, the absence of the private sensibility that colors so much of modern writing. Where the Zionists of homosexuality have laid claim to a Palestine of their own—asserting in their miseries their nationality; Crane's suffering, his rebellion and his love are sources of poetry for him, not because they are what makes him different from his fellow-men, but because he saw in them his link with mankind; he saw in them his share in universal human experience. (5)

(5) 1959. The principle point is that the creative genius of a writer lies in his communication of personal experience as communal experience. He brings us to realize our own inner being in a new light through the sense of human being he creates, or he creates in us as we read a new sense of our being. And in Melville, Crane and Proust I saw their genius awaken a common share in homosexual desire and love, in its suffering and hope, that worked to transform the communal image of man.

Professors of literature do not always have minds of the same inspiration as the minds of writers whose work they interpret and evaluate for consumption; and an age of criticism has grown up to keep great spirits cut down to size so as to be of use in the self-esteem of sophisticated pusillanimous men in a continual self-improvement course. Thus Freud's courageous analysis of his motives and psychic dis-ease has furnished material for popular analysts like Fromm to be struck by how normal their psyches are compared to Freud's, how much more capable of mature love they are.

cont.

What can one do in the face of this, both those critics and artists, not homosexual, who are, however, primarily concerned with dispelling all inhumanities, all forces of convention and law that impose a tyranny over man's nature, and those critics and artists who, as homosexuals, must face in their own lives both the hostility of society in that they are "queer" and the hostility of the homosexual elite in that they are merely human?

For the first group the starting point is clear, that they must recognize homosexuals as equals, and, as equals, allow them neither more nor less than can be allowed any human being. There are no special rights. For the second group the starting point is more difficult, the problem more treacherous.

In the face of the hostility of society which I risk in making even the acknowledgement explicit in this statement, in the face of the "crime" of my own feelings, in the past I publicized those feelings as private and made no stand for their recognition but tried to sell them as disguised, for instance, as conflicts

Homosexuality affords a ready point at which a respectable reader disassociates himself from the work of genius and seeks to avoid any sense of realizing his own inner being there. Some years after my essay, Leslie Fiedler whom I take to be heterosexual was able to gain some notoriety by writing about homosexual undercurrents in American literature, playing not without a sense of his advantage upon the cultural ambivalence between the appreciation of literature as a commodity of education and the depreciation of genius as it involves a new sense of being, and upon the sexual ambivalence in which the urbane American male can entertain the idea of homosexuality providing he is not responsible, providing he preserves his contempt for or his disavowal of sexual love between males.

arising from mystical sources. (6) I colored and perverted simple and direct emotions and realizations into a mysterious realm, a mysterious relation to society. Faced by the inhumanities of society I did not seek a solution in humanity but turned to a second outcast society as inhumane as the first. I joined those who, while they allowed for my sexual nature, allowed for so little of the moral, the sensible and creative direction which all of living should reflect. They offered a family, outrageous as it was, a community in which one was not condemned for one's homosexuality, but it was necessary there for one to desert one's humanity, for which one would be suspect, "out of key." In drawing rooms and in little magazines I celebrated the cult with a sense of sanctuary such as a medieval Jew must have found in the ghetto; my voice taking on the modulations which tell of the capitulation to snobbery and the removal from the "common sort"; my poetry exhibiting the objects made divine and tyrannical as the Catholic church has made bones of saints, and bread and wine tyrannical. (7)

(6) 1959. But there is no "explicit" statement here! What emerges is a "confession" (analyzed further below) instead of what I was unable to say out. While I had found a certain acceptance in special circles of homosexuals and opportunities for what Kinsey calls "contacts," this was a travesty of what the heart longed for. I could not say, "I am homosexual," because exactly this statement of minority identity was the lie. Our deepest sexuality is free and awakens toward both men and women where they are somehow akin to us. Perhaps the dawning realization that we are all exiles from paradise, and that somehow goods have their reality in that impossible dream where all men have come into their full nature, gave rise to and a thread of truth to the feeling of guilt that prompts this voice.

(7) 1959. I am reminded in the foregoing passage of those confessions of duplicity, malice and high treason made before the courts of the Inquisition or the Moscow trials.

cont.

"Society" appears as that merciless "hostile" judge; what I meant to avow—the profound good and even joyful life that might be realized in sexual love between men—becomes a confession that I had "disguised," "colored," "perverted," "celebrated the cult," and even in my work exhibited objects of alienation from the common law. Some remnant of Protestant adherence suggests there was Holy Roman wickedness, "divine and tyrannical as the Catholic church has made."

Might there be a type of social reaction to which "confessions" of "witches," "Trotskyites," and my confession as a "homosexual" conform? In the prototype there is first the volunteered list of crimes one has committed that anticipates the condemnation of church or party or society. Then there is the fact that what one confesses as a social "crime" has been held somewhere as a hope and an ideal, contrary to convention. The heretic is found guilty in his joy or his righteousness because he has both the conventional common mind and the imagination of a new common mind; he holds in his own heart the adversary that he sees in the actual prosecutor. Often there was torture to bring on the confession, but it enacted the inner torture of divided mind. "Names cannot be named," I exclaim in this essay, and perhaps akin to that felt necessity is the third phase in which "witches" and "Trotskyites" eventually named their accomplices in heresy, throwing up their last allegiance to their complicity in hope.

The Jungian revival of alchemy with its doctrine of the nigredo and the related surrealist cult of black humor or bile has complicated the contemporary sense with a belief that in some phase the psyche must descend against its nature into its adversary. It is an exciting idea just as a great destruction of the world by war is an exciting idea. Part of the force which "beat" poets have is the authority which we give after Freud and Jung to the potency of crime.

"Being a junkie in America today," Ginsberg writes, "is like being a Jew in Nazi Germany." This leads to humorous comment, like the parody of Marx, that "Marijuana is the opium of the people," or that "Opium is the religion of the new people." But

After an evening at one of those salons where the whole atmosphere was one of suggestion and celebration, I returned recently experiencing again the after-shock, the desolate feeling of wrongness, remembering in my own voice and gestures the rehearsal of unfeeling. Alone, not only I, but, I felt, the others who had appeared as I did so mocking, so superior in feeling, had known, still knew, those troubled emotions, the deep and integral longings that we as human beings feel, holding us from violate actions by the powerful sense of humanity that is their source, longings that lead us to love, to envision a creative life. "Towards something far," as Hart Crane wrote, "now farther away than ever."

Among those who should understand those emotions which society condemned, one found that the group language did not allow for any feeling at all other than this self-ridicule, this "gaiety" (it is significant that the homosexual's word for his own kind is "gay"), a wave surging forward, breaking into laughter and then receding, leaving a wake of disillusionment, a disbelief that extends to oneself, to life itself. What then, disowning this career, can one turn to?

What I think can be asserted as a starting point is that only one devotion can be held by a human being seeking a creative life and

the revelation of Ginsberg's formula is that in taking to junk he is trying to become like a Jew in Germany. He cannot realize in his Jewishness a sufficient extreme of persecution (even he cannot quite believe in racial guilt—the American idea of the melting pot as virtue is too strong). The "fuzz" cannot live up to the projection of wrath that might externalize inhibition as rank and unjust punishment and satisfy his guilt without calling his need to account. So he takes up "the angry fix." "Holy Burroughs" and Heroin addiction will surely test the frustrating tolerance of a liberal state and reveal beneath the "Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo."

expression, and that is a devotion to human freedom, toward the liberation of human love, human conflicts, human aspirations. To do this one must disown all the special groups (nations, churches, sexes, races) that would claim allegiance. To hold this devotion every written word, every action, every purpose must be examined and considered. The old fears, the old specialties will be there, mocking and tempting; the old protective associations will be there, offering for a surrender of one's humanity congratulations upon one's special nature and value. It must be always recognized that the others, those who have surrendered their humanity, are not less than oneself. It must be always remembered that one's own honesty, one's battle against the inhumanity of his own group (be it against patriotism, against bigotry, against—in this special case—the homosexual cult) is a battle that cannot be one in the immediate scene. The forces of inhumanity are overwhelming, but only one's continued opposition can make any other order possible, will give an added strength for all those who desire freedom and equality to break at last those fetters that seem now so unbreakable.

Reflections. 1959.

In the fifteen years since the writing of THE HOMOSEXUAL IN SOCIETY, my circumstances have much changed. Life and my work have brought me new friends, where the community of values is more openly defined, and even, in recent years, a companion who shares my concern for creative life. Distressed where I have been distressed and happy where I have been happy, their sympathy has rendered absurd whatever apprehension I had concerning the high moral resolve and radical reformation of character needed before I would secure recognition and understanding. It is a kinship of concern and a sharing of experience that draws us together.

The phantasmic idea of a "society" that was somehow hostile, the sinister affiliation offered by groups with whom I had no common ground other than the specialized sexuality, the anxiety concerning the good opinion of the community—all this sense of danger remains, for I am not a person of reserved nature;

and conventional morality, having its roots in judaic tribal law and not in philosophy, holds homosexual relations to be a crime. Love, art and thought are all social goods for me; and often I must come, where I would begin a friendship, to old moments of trial and doubt when I must deliver account of my sexual nature that there be no mistake in our trust.

But the inspiration of the essay was toward something else, a public trust, larger and more demanding than the respect of friends. To be respected as a member of the political community for what one knew in one's heart to be respectable! To insist, not upon tolerance for a divergent sexual practice but, upon concern for the virtues of a homosexual relationship! I was, I think, at the threshold of a critical concept: sexual love wherever it was taught and practiced was a single adventure, that troubadors sang in romance, that poets have kept as a traditional adherence, and that novelists have given scope. Love is dishonored where sexual love between those of the same sex is despised; and where love is dishonored there is no public trust.

It is my sense that the fulfillment of man's nature lies in the creation of that trust; and where the distrusting imagination sets up an image of "self" against the desire for unity and mutual sympathy, the state called "Hell" is created. There we find the visceral agonies, sexual aversions and possessions, excitations and depressions, the omnipresent "I" that bears true witness to its condition in HOWL or KADDISH, in McClure's HYMNS TO ST. GERYON or the depressive "realism" of Lowell's LIFE STUDIES. "We are come to the place," Virgil tells Dante as they enter Hell, "where I told thee thou shouldst see the wretched people, who have lost the good of the intellect." In Hell, the homosexuals go, as Dante rightly saw them, as they still go often in the streets of our cities, looking "as in the evening men are wont to look at one another under a new moon", running beneath the hail of a sharp torment, having wounds, recent and old, where the flames of experience have burned their bodies.

It is just here, when he sees his beloved teacher, Brunetto Latini, among the sodomites, that Dante has an inspired intuition that goes beyond the law of his church and reaches toward a higher ethic: "Were my desires all fulfilled," he says to Brunetto, "you had not yet been banished from human nature: for in my memory is fixed...the dear and kind, paternal image of you, when in the world, hour by hour, you taught me how man makes himself eternal..."

"Were my desires all fulfilled..." springs from the natural heart in the confidence of its feeling that has often been more generous than conventions and institutions. I picture that fulfillment of desire as a human state of mutual volition and aid, a shared life.

Not only in sexual love, but in work and in play, we suffer from the dominant competitive ethos which gives rise to the struggle of interests to gain recognition or control, and discourages the recognition of the needs and interests which we all know we have in common. Working for money (and then, why not stealing or cheating for money?) is the "realistic" norm, and working for the common good is the "idealistic" exception. "I have always earned my living at manual labor," an old friend writes. And his voice breaks through, like a shaft of sunlight through an industrial smog, the oppressive voices of junkies and pushers, petty thieves and remittance men of social security with their need and misery set adrift of itself. Oppressive, because these are sensitive young men and women I am thinking of, some of them the artists and poets of a new generation.

The sense of this essay rests then upon the concept that sexual love between those of the same sex is one with sexual love between men and women; and that this love is one of the conditions of the fulfillment of the heart's desire and the restoration of a man's free nature. Creative work for the common good is one of the conditions of that nature. And our hope lies still in

the creative imagination wherever it unifies what had been thought divided, wherever it transforms the personal experience into a communal good, "that Brunetto Latini had not been banished from human nature."

—Robert Duncan

THE AMERICAN POETRY WAX MUSEUM

There should be, on San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf—between the Ripley's Believe It Or Not and the Guinness World Record museums—a wax museum of American poetry, operated by the MLA and subsidized by creative writing workshops around the country, with further financial aid provided by THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE NEW YORKER, AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW, and comparable publications. In this museum we could see Pound, Frost, Eliot, Stevens, and the rest, posed in that peculiarly arrested stance only wax figures have. The wax figures would be accompanied by recordings of the poets' voices. There would be a lip-sync problem of course, but this sounds familiar to the academic world—even, by now, natural.

Do poets really want a waxen shrine, an air-conditioned immortality? Watching John Ashbery shadow-sparring with his numerous critical champions during the past decade has been one of the more exotic spectacles in the American scene. Ashbery is only one of a number of poets taken under the wing of the covering cherub who have good cause to write out of a profound terror: they share in the same creative panic that inspired Poe's story "The Premature Burial," and drove Albert Fearnaught to patent a Grave Signal Coffin in 1882 in order to ease the dread of waking up in a mausoleum.

Is the convenience of the Guided Tour worth the trouble? After all, there's no real official culture in the U. S. other than that proposed by a gadget, the Required Reading List. The culture-brokers artificially tone up the "tradition" by exposing literature to the critical equivalent of ultra-violet suntan lamps. There is, admittedly, something to be said for the apparition of the well-tanned muse; but the superimposed stencil of the bathing suit is distracting, a blatant reminder of superficial relations with Apollo. To pretend to a tradition, as such, is premature—a critical wet dream. Imagine: it's still under contention whether Pound and Williams and Stevens can all belong to the same tradition! This is to admit, really, that we have no tradition. At best, we might hope to sort out bad habits from original idioms, parasitic attachments from commendable aspirations. To invoke Tradition as an established consensus is to participate in the same obscurantism that prevails in the New Right's kidnapping of the word America. To prematurely insist on an established tradition is to foreclose on the creative energies that could establish a tradition. The native American strength remains what it always was: the ability (or need) to work in the open, to persist in (or despite) uncertainty.

To be fair, it's not as if the poets themselves haven't complied with the critical anxieties. Let's face the problem for what it is: not "too much published poetry" as the conventional wisdom has it, but a virtual groundswell of verbal toxic waste. And the Wax Museum is not an adequate substitute for a waste management policy. The Wax Museum, like the Reagan administration, thinks that simple cutbacks will do the job. The politics of masquerading as either the New America or the Great Tradition aren't a pretty sight. On the other hand, poets on the dole and claiming divine right to handouts aren't an appetizing prospect either.

The painful truth about recent decades of American verse is this: the lyric voice has contributed to a mode of subjectivity as distinctly American as self-help primers, tv game shows, and video arcades. Poets and critics alike are quick to bemoan the fact that poetry is in contention for leisure time. But assuming that poetry is at least

authentic leisure time activity (as opposed to radio, tv, etc.) side-steps the issue, which is the economy of attention, as such. Contemporary American poems tend to be written out of the same reflex that exposes a roll of film on impulse snapshots, written out of a confidence that poetry is good, per se. Such misplaced assurance does nothing but add a little more wax to the effigy in the Wax Museum.

The very notion of leisure time is bankrupt, along with the naivete of "good intentions." The national reluctance to confront the moral complicity of any occupation with the state of the world is mirrored by the hedonism of literacy, which takes the beauty of its image to be sufficient proof that the evil is done elsewhere. One needn't be the originator of evil to recognize one's place in the circuitry that transmits it. What can leisure time be when our political condition is Standby Alert? What is poetry doing by competing for leisure time, but vacating all ethical premises?

Robert Duncan has spent 20 years reminding us that the evil we see elsewhere is something that imaginative strengths permit us to see in ourselves. There is much to be grateful for in GROUND WORK, his first major collection in 16 years, not the least of which is the imposing reminder inherent in his choice of a subtitle—GROUND WORK: BEFORE THE WAR. I must admit to being sufficiently discouraged by the current milieu—both literary and political—to anticipate a cold reception for Duncan's essential statement. Custodians of the Wax Museum will not take kindly to his poetics of responsibility any more than the electorate recently took to what was denounced as the feel-guilty politics of Reagan's adversaries.

In a bizarre symbiosis of poet and critic, the accepted American poem has entered into a new phase of nostalgia—not a longing for the vanished past, but an ardor for the future to be past as well, so the Wax Museum can be complete, and each spawning talent relieved of the terrible need to live in order to have something to write about.

Is the fundamentalist hankering after a nuclear Armageddon
all that different?

—Jed Rasula

FROM THE SPICER CIRCLE

An Excerpt from Chapter 4: Territories

As the Magic Workshop got underway another event—lasting only a short time—happened in San Francisco poetry that touched the career of Jack Spicer in a manner perhaps as importantly as the course of the workshop itself. This was a visit by Charles Olson to the City for a reading and lecture sequence held under Poetry Center auspices. The reading occurred February 21, 1957, at the Museum of Modern Art; the lectures were a subscription series held at the Potrero Hill home of Robert Duncan and Jess Collins. The lectures presented Olson's "propositions of projection and composition by field in the light of Alfred North Whitehead's PROCESS AND REALITY"—Robert Duncan's description of the event.

Those attending the lectures were mostly new poets enjoying Duncan's confidence, and included many of the personalities which are remembered as representative of the 1950's and beyond in poetry: Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Jack Spicer, and Richard Duerden were among those present.

Precisely because the movements in poetry were then so new, the New Critical poetry establishment was so firmly in place,

and the relations of the poets themselves, senior and junior, were so untested, these meetings took on a special, undeclared purpose: the testing of wills and the staking of territories. Olson's visit resembled one of St. Paul's to an early, underground Primitive Church assembly....

...Robert Duncan spoke of the Olson seminars of 1957 in this way:

"It's in that period that I arrange the lectures for Olson to give and Jack Spicer was one of the subscribers and came to them. Jack wanted to be recognized; all of a sudden you did see Jack—the-student who wants the teacher to see who Jack is, and recognize his abilities—and Olson said next time he was going to talk about Tarot cards.

"Jack brought his Pamela Coleman Smith Tarot deck, and wanted to work magic, and to start laying it out. Well, I was already thinking, 'Oh, should I say something to Jack?'—but what could I say? Because I'd already been through this one with Olson at Black Mountain. But I had no way of anticipating the shock of it.

"Tom Field," a Black Mountain painter then moved to San Francisco, "was sitting next to me. Duerden was there. McClure was there. But sometimes they were themselves sort of in rebellion against Olson with his 'big things you ought to know'; but Jack loved knowing. So he started to lay out the Tarot cards and Olson—he got the works.

"I was just shocked. I mean there he was—he seized upon a moment of seeing to crush Jack totally. More than that; it would have been the equivalent of his own weight thrown on top of Jack's very crushable form."

Olson's lumbering size has often been remarked. Spicer was tall—six feet—but not robust in appearance. I asked Duncan, "What happened, really? It was a dencunciation of some kind?"

Duncan replied, "It was a denunciation of using this phony deck—and did I have the courage to say, 'That's the deck I use'? No, not at all.

"Yet I did know Olson was a fanatic about using the Marseilles deck; he would lift certain things in relation to me, but still view them as corruptions. So there was Spicer corrupt in every term."

I recapitulated, "Using the wrong deck and——"

"——and," Duncan asserted, "in an entirely subservient position."

I inquired, "Spicer observed that?"

"You don't sit at the feet of somebody who's 6'8," Duncan concluded.

"No, no!" I agreed.

"You've done more than submit. You've removed yourself from their territory."

——Lewis Ellingham

DECLINING POETICS

CODE OF SIGNALS / RECENT WRITINGS IN POETICS edited by Michael Palmer (North Atlantic Books, IO #30, 1983, \$12.95)

Virtually every editor of an anthology attempts the impossible and creates the improbable. Representation is impossible and the result of any effort towards it, improbable. Michael Palmer has avoided the impossible by eschewing it, and produced the improbable by accepting it. The title of this anthology admits of anything in the company of meaning, and the variety of its content admits of no greater unity than that made explicit in what the editor quotes from Zukofsky by way of epigram: "A poetics is informed and informs— / Just informs maybe—the rest a risk." (A - 12).

The title does, however, implicate each of the anthology's contents in a loose and etherial Bachelardian space. The word "of" is a lingual hinge. Its action is axial and it always motivates those terms which form its two sides (or backs) in the direction of each other, so that it harbors the vast majority of the ambient meanings within the acute among its two angles. By this energy, which is natural to that word, it claims a precious power for what it merely means to mean, and it does this by a taut but too often uninformed refusal of all else. The "of" in this particular title, CODE OF SIGNALS, flexes two terms which each mean to mean something which has to do with meaning. Together, about their hinge, they present a confused disunity the impression from which is at once one of ethos and of determination.

The title implicates meaning, and yet what does it itself mean? Rather than holding the answer to its own question this title holds only its dispersal. It emulates that dispersal, and perhaps

that has been the editor's intention, that the contents might catch and hold some of what the title has been empowered to emit.

This anthology is either about poetics or it is poetics. Its subtitle is RECENT WRITINGS IN POETICS (my emphasis). But much of the writing collected in it has to do with how a poem was made, not how it is, nor even how it will be, made. It is this latter possibility, the generative one, that is the proper if somewhat small province of what poetics will be if it is ever to be of any consequence to the poets themselves. And what is a serious reader of poetry if not a poet disguised by an inability?

The only overt recognition of this placement of the work of poetics in this anthology is in John Taggart's introduction to his text: "Perhaps, then, the central principal of any poetics is that it ought to result in poetry." This is a central principal and it is not so much modified as furthered by his next sentence, which is tangential to it: "If nothing else, this should moderate the production of poetics essays." He goes on, in his "Were you: Notes and a Poem for Michael Palmer", to do the writing that generates the poem. His notes are not a writing of the thinking that made the poem, they are the writing making the poem that will be. They are never, as is much of the rest of the writing in this anthology, a record of a lapsed reading but are instead, always the way whereby the poem is made. From them, anyone can learn almost everything about the making of a poem, because by them a poem is made.

Clark Coolidge, in a selection "From Notebooks (1976-1982)", writes "That there are forms in words for what is not known: the bases of a poetics." It is this generative spirit or search which motivates his notebook entries, and it is this that makes of them a concern for us of our own motivations, as we read them. Against this we would transfigure the far too latent tendency of poets to write about what they have read, written or thought. "It has always puzzled me when a poet, who must primarily expend so much energy transforming the common

language into an irreducible variation, then immediately wants to break down what he has made into the common tongue again."

We always wish for and work for a book in which the word-work(s) is (are) always used to mean writing(s). We want to be made to know by the writing how it is being made. That is the value of the selection of Clark Coolidge's entries. We always wish to encounter someone who actually knows as they're doing, in the midst of so many just doing it.

There are other things within this volume that recommend themselves to your attention. There are two interviews: one, between Claude Royet-Journoud and Emmanuel Hocquard, which is of particular interest only in relation to their texts; the other, an interview with John Ashbery, is of quintessential interest because of his lively interest in the interview itself. There are several more or less academic treatments: David Levi Strauss provides a critical companion to Louis Zukofsky's late book 80 FLOWERS, but gives little inkling of the resilient beauties of that book; Michael Davidson makes useful sense of Bakhtin's theories of the novel, and applies them to a modern poem; Bob Perelman talks about some of the motivations within and between various Greek classics; there is a section from Susan Howe's hermetic and personal approach to Emily Dickinson's poems and life, a text that in its entirety will rank with the best that we have of writer-on-writer critiques. There are three texts which maintain the critical terrain with their tautness: Bernadette Mayer's "The Obfuscated Poem", Gerritt Lansing's "La p(l)age poetique", and Steve McCaffery's "The Unreadable Text".

Writing poetics is writing words in action towards the text. The writings in CODE OF SIGNALS surround that definition when they do not hold it.

—Alan Davies

THE WHOLE IS THE STORY

Stories are neither good nor bad.

It is a moral
for night to fall.

(Lyn Hejinian, REDO)

"You cut it," says Abigail Child in FROM SOLIDS, i.e., 'with a knife', 'it' being the totality of the surround; you commit the itness, the art-objectness to its heavy occupation of space.

Hejinian and Child construct that particular and emotionally occupied space differently. Child packs and jams, (even stutters) prose statement, in every degree of completeness, urgently, creating a terrific noise along with

... a kind of stillness, force that surpasses motion.
Makes my eyes cool. Wherever I had to go darkness,
negotiating had to go on.

(Abigail Child, FROM SOLIDS)

Hejinian, while creating a very different surface, a quiet orderly phrasing, seems to describe Child's methods in the thought of REDO, especially where she speaks of "radical coverage," her own tersest statement of the scale of her project.

We all know the story. What Hejinian and Child fashion through selection of the facts and a manipulation of reason is art capable of negotiating some incredible allness—"all time," "all things." Desiring, not cataloging,

... The music the long line symbol of sound resound
disturb blast at last right up that tree and runs on
disarming your lips sapient extent Desire the fact that
desires.

(FROM SOLIDS)

The holes then come as no surprise; indeed, the hole in the logic is the desiring fact, like Hejinian's "anecdote / one is saving to tell with direct desire." In fact, we couldn't "understand" without the tradeoff between desire and lack, narrative and withheld narrative, the hot and cold which occasion the wind. Hejinian keeps reminding that discontinuity is a kind of "rushing out into the open," admissive, messy, generous, demonstrated by the tension between the tone of a statement ("Hysteria is thrilling," deadpan) and the result to which it leads (Santa Rita, Women's Writing). But

... The air condenses. Surplus speculatively doubling proof to our original purpose shifts... which fluttering numeral in the thick with its eye split into vines—
Think is cut. Line on that last.

(FROM SOLIDS)

Or the impulse to story is its own pull, through and over cut and chasm. Speculation likewise makes its own case.

REDO by Lyn Hejinian (Salt-Works Press, 1984, \$4)

FROM SOLIDS by Abigail Child (Segue, 1983, \$3)

—Jean Day

UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT by P. Inman (Jimmy's House of Knowledge, 1984, \$4.00)

UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT is a book with which Alice would not have been disappointed, despite its lack of pictures and conversations per se. Each word and phrase in this book is organized according to two principles: 1) The words and combinations are such that they produce friction and movement; they have conversations with themselves and with each other. 2) The words are graphically—pictorially, even—arranged; the mind and eye react to the visual images as well as to the meanings of the words.

One of the book's principle devices is the portmanteau:

"Well, 'slithy' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word."

—ALICE IN WONDERLAND

But where Humpty Dumpty's definition of a portmanteau compounds meanings, Inman's seems to splinter them off into glittering shards, like those mumbled just at the moment of waking or of falling off to sleep. From words like

criid or

quotb or

drir

we can squeeze familiar phonemes, but we cannot squeeze these words into solid shapes. To assume that the first example necessarily has to do with the past tense of cry, or the second to do with speaking, or the third to do with a synonym for dismal is to assume too much, is to impose a pat Humpty-Dumptyish definition upon the neologisms, who proclaim

their freedom with their half-indeterminacy.

But the sound memory of the familiar word does linger, playing into the created word, so that we witness uneven development on the basic level of the word ("lathonth," "qobes...ways lench"). Part of the familiar is given, and then abruptly twisted off at the end: "the real is the base." The presence of the familiar keeps this work (and all literary works?) out of the non-existent realm of "nonsense" or "pure sound"; we all know our alphabet.

The sense of the alphabet as the stuff of literary art is keen in this work. The alphabet reigns even over sound; some words are unpronounceable: "ledb," "dridb," "ctire." Letters are pictures, pages canvases, the typewriter a graphic instrument. Each page has typed across it at least one long horizontal line, which I read rather literally as a horizon, with the pages functioning as landscapes. Where there is more than one line on a page, I perceive them as advancing waves, or multiple horizons. Sections of the work are typed in diagonally—a challenge (although not a hostile one) to left-to-right reading habits. Diagonals, as visual artists know, add motion, interest, and conflicts to placid horizontal forms.

I've been told the work is organized according to a mathematical formula. That's the poet's business, a method of escaping the command "thou shalt have no other gods (forms) but me." The only danger I can see—and I do see it—is of the formula taking precedence over the form, which is finally what we attend to. Here I find myself sufficiently interested in the product to grapple with what strikes me as a stunted lyricism in a passage like this one, which, with the force of imagination, I can even read as a compact version of "Dover Beach":

i live	(th
her duned lean	(e grow look
whitewall	(ing out to
to doubt	

What (indeed) can be built with shards? Bowing to each other, they

produce their own—danceable—sense. White space gives the eye a long tether; brain and book provide a strong or feeble glue. Somewhere around the solar plexus everything combines.

—Gordon

THE ORDER OF POETRY

For Adorno and Zukofsky the "objective" aspect of order was never defined as being out of the world but as human nature emanating from it.

When LZ speaks—via a Poundian Confucius—of an order—like music—that "of itself can speak to all men" and "the poet's form is never an imposition of history (though it maintains in the face of impossible odds an autobiography) but the desirability of making order out of history as it is felt and conceived"—he is not merely begging the case. He knows at what he is doing. Noses at what he is up to. Somewhat gnostic—even when he reads his Bible agnostically. It isn't a mumbo-jumbo of cabalistic numbers—but a residual faith that you will be there—at the woodpile—long after he has made his way through the needle's needled needless eye—pronounced and deciphered as I.

As the man says:

Reality is and is
not commonage,
painting
is paint...

no word attaches
and never
loses.

Or at least that's the hope of perception so garnered as to pose the poem.

"That the tongue which may sing
be casual..."

Not the branches
half in shadow

But the length
of each branch

Half in shadow

As if it had snowed
on each upper half

You can see what he saw seeing it—but you can be—and must be—of the word he found and brought it to. So that the imposition occurs as we do. As one does. But not history. For the history is precisely us imposing. And the poetry another way—more endurably—insufferably (?)—kind. Not whooping it up—like a cough—hooping it up—or hoping or opening it up. But that "desirability" (a figment of Beckett's obligation—no less) feeling and conceiving oneself a part of what is going on and thinking to share the cake.

What we cannot have and eat. Despite that it remains the contagious American dream more and more materializing as the latest and most profitable illusion—the tricky ytickle up of philanthropism. Yours. Like the philanthropist:

Pissing in
the river
in the rain

(My patty cake out of his story.)

What is then that order so desired but an ardor retained/
retainable—the fee paid to keep the litigation going. To
keep the middlemen in the middle (the muddle) while we—
the poets—dangle at the end of the branch—like insidious
apples in desperate Hesperidean straits.

OK: attained then—to get out from under taint of. But it
is the life's work—making the altar—steering god through
his image—to make it make sense—or even inspired
nonsense—to make the trivial—which we are—stick.

The more perfect excrement: which is earth moon stars and
sun all the way out to the divine nothing which "created" us
from its own scrap. Boom!

Vachel Lindsay had read his Conrad and wallowed in it without
Eliot. Literary history. Horror. And the white lie.

The shape of it then is that sounding that forces pause. Until
the syllables—the very spell/spelling—of nonsense revokes
our license to speak until we have heard the breath in us
defect and articulate its case. So that every word is poem.
And every one so focussed at the word opening before him/her
or her/him realizes the flower-in-chief at whose behest she/he
lives.

Zukofsky—like Celan—and the ultimate Mallarme—close
in on the seed act—the total loss that everything one is is. So
that the word yield.

The wind knocks the bamboo curtain against my backroom screen

and I finally let it in. Slowly one arrives.

Utano

3 September 1984

—Cid Corman

INDUSTRY / ALLITERATION

(NOTES TO PART VIII OF THE CONSOLATION OF PROSE):

Of course, there's always a level at which jargon is exclusionary. Industrial precision has always depended on a closed world. "Quality control" & "Margin of error" both imply containment, an attempt to minimize deviants. "Standard" means not just a rule or unit for the basis of comparison and measurement, but also an emblem which symbolizes a boundaried nation or a military unit contained by discipline. And, naturally, among the activities of cottage industries and industrial factories, terms were appropriated and invented.

In 1450, weaving was a cottage industry in Europe. Letterpress printing started about then and was immediately the subject of a Mainz lawsuit between Gutenberg and his backers/partners, Fust & Schoeffer. By 1510, printing was as modern an industry as Aldus Manutius could imagine. The two have changed places now (said with the utmost respect to handweavers, but the point is that the passing of weft strings through warp does exist today as a huge industry whereas letterpress is almost only still alive as a cottage industry, a form it did not have at its inception).

The two were intimately connected for a time through the clothing and paper industries (explained later), but now paper is mostly made from wood. Because of the deafening sound of buzz-saws, a rudimentary system of hand sign language was developed in lumber mills.

The rhythms of setting type and weaving are similar (after a bunch of lines you empty the stick or beat the woof with a comb respectively).

While jargon defines not just objects & operations but identifies an initiated elite (as well as an initiated laboring class), there is a song to it. Terms appropriated & invented by people all in the same industry can be seen as that industry's diction. Even Webster's permits an industry's jargon to be called a dialect.

TYMPAN- a draw sheet which covers the PLATEN (the PLATEN holds the paper parallel to the printing surface at the moment of impression).

COMPOSE- placing type into a stick; in the case of hand composition, type is placed one piece at a time.

COMB- A set of teeth that are used to beat the woof down, close together.

HEDDLE- sometimes made of strings, used to lift up select warp strings under which the woof passes.

WOOF or WEFT- carried on a shuttle, this is the yarn which the handweaver passes between the warp threads lifted by the heddle strings & those left unlifted. The warp threads run parallel to the weaver's vision on table and floor looms. They are always perpendicular to the woof.

KERN- any part of the metal face of a piece of type which sticks

out over the edge of the shaft (body) on which the face rests.

CHASE- a metal frame in which type is held locked in place; so called because metal chasers made them.

QUOIN- (from French for corner) two wedges which widen to lock the type into the chase.

QUAD- any spacing material which fills out a line of type & is wider than that type's lower case "m".

SAVE RAGS- a widely used imperative in the days when people wore home-spun. Papermakers were accustomed to buy rags by the pound and to advertise both in newspapers and by crier using this slogan. Quiltmakers would call the pieces "scraps". With the rise of the textile industry, a reciprocal arrangement was developed between clothing manufacturers and papermakers. The papermakers thus became dependent on the clothing industry (as they now depend on a lumber industry which they have a great deal of control over). This dependence caused R. H. Clapperton to lament in 1934 that: "the more silk and artificial silk are worn in the form of clothing, the less cotton and linen will there be available to papermakers, in the form of rags. Ladies' fashions enormously affect the supply of the papermakers' raw material, and the scantier the clothing the scarcer the rags."

—David I. Sheidlower

A NOTE ON REALISM

Realism runs through my work up to a point, and that point is usually a comma or a period, and then another realism begins.

Recently I realized in typing up my latest (and longest) work, how much it was in fact little more than a study of the caesura, and most people would of course say well that is not realism at all. But the street is as full of caesurae as it is of people and language, and those breaks are there to be measured, or realized. So I am a realist by virtue of some expertise in commas and periods.

The exclamation point and the colon are not a realist's marks, but those of an enthusiast or a logician. For the real world is nothing to get excited about and it certainly doesn't make sense. The realist work is written precisely to allow for these two absences in the real world, which can be said to correspond to content and form.

If I do the real work well, as opposed to merely practicing perseveringly in some way, then the power of those other punctuation marks will come to be between me and the reader or audience. The one who hears will say yes, and the listener's mind will be the extension of my writing—for a second the two will be one. The realist work will, in its most excellent form, make then an ideal world.

Now, I would also I think be a fool if I did not admit to understanding how this could be read as mystical belief, or impossible physics. I am about the only poet I know around, whose interest in realism is mysterious, or mystical.

The earliest thing (the word that is the root of real) I can remember ever wanting to stand in front of work of mine was Wittgenstein: "The mind casts up of itself vague and redoubtable phantasies of the real." Hence, in another sense, only the mind is real, and anyone who can make a real work can be fairly said to be a realist.

—Stephen Rodefer

COMMUNICATION DIASPORA: THE POST-MODERN

Those who see a developmental impulse in human history are apt to take the epoch bracketed roughly by the Graeco-Roman alphabet on one side, and FORTRAN on the other, as a successive refining of our communicational means. Characterised as "the literate revolution," (1) this epoch, it has been noted, is western civilization itself. (2) Much has been made of this; writing superintends the entirety of human endeavor.

Perhaps, anxious to be done with (or at least to declare their reservations on) this epoch, certain 'contemporary thinkers' have begun to denote 'our' period as the "Post-Modern." (3) Unfortunately, the brevity of this article makes such a term more expedient than explicative. I am concerned here to sketch out a certain disposition of aesthetics (and poetics) subtended by their very "means of production"; that is, their reciprocity; and to show this to be characteristic of the "Post-Modern" as such.

Today, the overriding consideration of aesthetics revolves around the marketability of 'cultural output'. The arts are a veritable "service industry"; even 'minority practices' are subsumed here, and, ironically, for precisely the reason that they are 'minority'. Arising from Marxist sensibilities, this seems an old thematics. However, the rules of the game have shifted since "The Fetishism of Commodities and The Secret Thereof" (a section title from CAPITAL). This shift is indicated by the term "post-industrial" (Daniel Bell). Technological research, information systems, and their ilk, have superceded industrial production. Thus the term "use-value," operative in Marx in conjunction with the "material expressions of the human labor spent in their production" (4) must be extended to 'immaterial expressions' as well. This in turn should be familiar to readers of

Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno (as "the culture industry").

As with the role played by State Capitalism in the industrial era, so today in "late capitalism" it is "information" that is monopolized by the State, with the lateral domination of the multi-nationals. The distribution of "information" (language ghettoized, a-cultural) becomes a political manifestation. By extension, 'cultural expressions' of whatever stripe are regulated, directly or (seemingly) indirectly, by these same forces.

Two tendencies have been noted in this regard: 1) the sciences, and so all epistemological inquiry, proceeds by a cumulative strategy; the goal is no longer to encompass 'nature' as a totality, but to gain 'knowledge about knowledge'; to become self-reflective. (5) 2) With this comes a proliferation (an actual deluge) of "information" which serves to replace the "master-narratives" of the "hard sciences," (6) of religious monolithics, (7) and of the great 'isms' with "micro-narratives" and specialization. (8)

We are living in the aftermath, it would seem, of an ironic inversion: the very technos once at the service of knowledge-gathering has made knowledge its servant. And encompassing these developments is the "superstructural" guidance of the State.

What does this entail for contemporary aesthetics (and poetics)? Affiliations between the cultural order and the political order can easily be made explicit (as between the academic and the corporate). But privilege has its discretions; our 'culture industry' will not bite the hand that subsidizes it. Nor would this be an effective strategy, assuming, of course, that artists, writers, etc. find this subordination uncomfortable. Two tacks (equally fruitless, it seems) are run by the opposition today; the first can simply be called "surrender," that is,

capitulation to the dominant order, represented, in extremis, by the misapplied rage of urban youth (in Brixton, in Miami, and elsewhere), and by the truly desperate pronouncements of those who can see all too clearly their end (Guattari: "Since I'm in it up to my neck, let me present myself for the holocaust.>"). (10)

The second route is 'appropriation', taking over in this case the 'means of transmission'. The European "pirate radio," the "small press" network in America—each speak from the desire for communication liberation. Thus the vaunted "freedom of speech" in this country is actual insofar as one has the means to exercise it, the "repressive tolerance" (as Marcuse put it) of the State concealing the thorough control of communicational output.

From this certain tendencies come into play, marking out the Post-Modern territory we are attempting to assay here. Most notable is the lack of an 'aesthetic hegemony' in the arts (including writing). This is not to say that "pluralism" reigns (although certainly minority practices flourish). Rather, there is reference without citation, pastiche, parody, attenuated historicism, and often "puerility." (11)

This partisan analysis applies, admittedly, to only a small 'constituency', but one which, both by its self-historicizing aggrandizements and its 'connections in high places' (i. e. corporate patronage) has become the prevailing order. Here again, the seeming contradiction between minority practice and homogenized distribution resurfaces. Edward Said: "...as the McBride report has it, a tiny handful of large and powerful oligarchies control about ninety percent of the world's information and communicational flows." (12) Yet no one would deny that, in our society, there is a high degree of accessibility to the widest range (if still ultimately circumscribed) of cultural creation. Here a milder form of "surrender" than those mentioned earlier is shown: towards

"the means-end rationality of the marketplace," where the 'avant-garde' plays "broker between the culture industry and subcultures." (13) While the economic stakes tend to be negligible, in the area of 'avant-garde' writing the political stakes seem much higher. Language itself is the disputed terrain.

Without drawing up a platform, I would suggest simply a little reflection on an aesthetics (and poetics) developed in the shadow of those 'two baddies', State and capitalism. Without being dismissive, my preference is a willful ambivalence or "hyperactive pessimism" (The term is Foucault's) towards the interaction of technos and aisthetikos. This is the challenge underlying Paul Virilio's observation that "Classless society, social justice——no one believes in them anymore. We're in the age of micro-narratives, the art of the fragment." (14) Post-Modernism names our fragmentation, our diaspora.

NOTES

1. Eric Havelock THE LITERATE REVOLUTION IN GREECE AND ITS CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES (Princeton, '82).
2. C. f. Jacques Derrida, OF GRAMMATOLOGY (Johns Hopkins, '74).
3. The present article was spurred by Jean-Francois Lyotard's book THE POSTMODERN CONDITION (U. of Minnesota Press, '84).
4. THE MARX-ENGELS READER (Norton, '72) p. 218.

5. The 'self-reflectivity of knowledge' is also known as the 'Human Sciences' (c.f. Jürgen Habermas, KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN INTERESTS, Heinemann, '78).
6. See the writings of Felix Guattari (MOLECULAR REVOLUTION, Pelequin, '84), Paul Feyerabend (AGAINST METHOD, NLB '75), and Thomas Kuhn (THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS, U. of Chicago, '62).
7. One interesting example of this is V. S. Naipaul's impressionistic account of Islamic culture vs. western-style modernization in AMONG THE BELIEVERS (Knopf, '81).
8. These themes infuse current social thought so thoroughly that it seems flippant to direct the reader to only one essay: Edward Said's "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" (in CRITICAL INQUIRY, Vol. 9 #1, '82)—yet it covers most of these concerns admirably.
9. That the State traverses and even encourages the production of knowledge is what Michel Foucault suggests by the phrase "regime of truth" (in POWER/KNOWLEDGE, Parthenon, '80) and what J. -F. Lyotard, following Habermas, terms "narratives of legitimation" (see THE POSTMODERN CONDITION, p. 27-37).
10. Felix Guattari, "Sepulchre for an Oedipus Complex" in MOLECULAR REVOLUTION (p. 8). See also G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, ANTI-OEDIPUS (Viking, '77).
11. As Craig Owens describes the current East Village (N. Y.) art 'scene' in "Commentary: The Problem with Puerilism" (ART IN AMERICA, Summer '84).
12. E. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," p. 24.
13. C. Owens, "The Problem with Puerilism," p. 162.

14. From a book-length interview titled PURE WAR (Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, '83), p. 35.

—Michael Anderson, Sept. 1984

BOOK NOTES

1. LITERARY THEORY by Terry Eagleton (University of Minnesota Press, 1983)

If Eagleton has read any contemporary literature, you'd never know it—no doubt part and parcel of his glib yet banal assumption that "literature does not exist in the sense that insects do." Truly exemplary of the problem of theory without practice, the book can best be read for the hidden tale of Terry who sees F. R. Leavis under every rock—another shocking story of the bad effects of a British public school education and the guilt complexes of being a Cambridge don. May be useful for those who want a simplified trot of Major Ideas in contemporary literary theory—simplified and wrong: wrong, that is, because these often (though not always) "accurate" precis fail to engage their material, which is recorded motivationless and inert. Despite all this, many of his arguments against currently popular theoretical precepts are sound.

2. IN THE TRACKS OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM by Perry Anderson (University of Chicago Press, 1984)

More a supplement than a sequel to Anderson's highly

recommended CONCERNING WESTERN MARXISM (Verso Editions of NLB, 1979), this short book is about the best critique I've seen of the intellectual history of the past decade. From the point of view of his always cogently concerned Marxist perspective, Anderson launches a magnificent attack on the common fallacies of structuralism and poststructuralism (so called). More than this, he draws his lessons within the context of the political struggles and economic realities of the period: suggesting that the current problem is not a 'poverty of theory' but a 'poverty of strategy'.

—Charles Bernstein

LETTER TO THE EDITOR / FOOTNOTE TO AN ESSAY ON NARRATIVE

Definition "is a sentence that describes a word without giving its name." —Ben Friedlander, J + L'S HOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE 2, page 38. But it gives it another name. What I say is that the definition gives the word a display function and also tells explicitly of another (useful in active discourse) function which it posits as other. It makes a spectacle of the word. The word is the subject and the definition a predicate-object; suggestion of limited yet undetermined usages gives us the effect of a small (but promising) story. It prescribes a fatal relationship with scientific method that . . .

x means y (not " $x \approx y$ "). . .

The relationship depends on a shift of conceptualization like that of causation, suspended from causation as it is conceived

in language.

OR a kind of fictitious causation: if words at a left hand margin yield their 'correlates' which may be used imaginatively to complete their function in a perception of active practice.

—Steve Benson

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT (1932 - 1984)

Let everyone live his life as he chooses, so long as he's getting along. So what about the new wave? What about it? Pierre says something good about Georges who is mad about Julien's work; he supervises Popaul who coproduces with Marcel to whom Claude gave a rave review!

Never mind. Today I am going to sing the praises of Jean-Luc, who makes films just as I do, except he makes twice as many.

-1962

(printed in THE FILMS IN MY LIFE, p. 318)

VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY (1893 - 1984)

"In terms of verbal orchestration, the material is let out like helium from a balloon. Every statement is almost a device in its own right. This is close to Sterne; it is equally close to film. Event seen through technique here becomes a heroic form of sheer being. Even descriptive passages convey this:

Here I saw something unbelievable. A desert salt marsh. It was an enormous, smooth inland sea, clearly dead. Long jetties on piles extended into the water. Several good-sized black barges were being loaded with something or other.

But strangest of all, there were no houses along the shore, no people in sight.

Only the desert. And deserted warehouses. Goods lying about. Rolls of barbed wire. Several granaries. A dozen cars standing on the tracks. But the port was dead. This is the main port of Lake Urania, a place supposedly with a tremendous future.

The facts parallel estrangement, ostranenie. In fact, estrangement might be the only possibility here. It is almost like being on the moon."

—Barrett Watten, "Russian Formalism & the Present"

from TOTAL SYNTAX (Southern Illinois University Press, 1985, \$13.95)



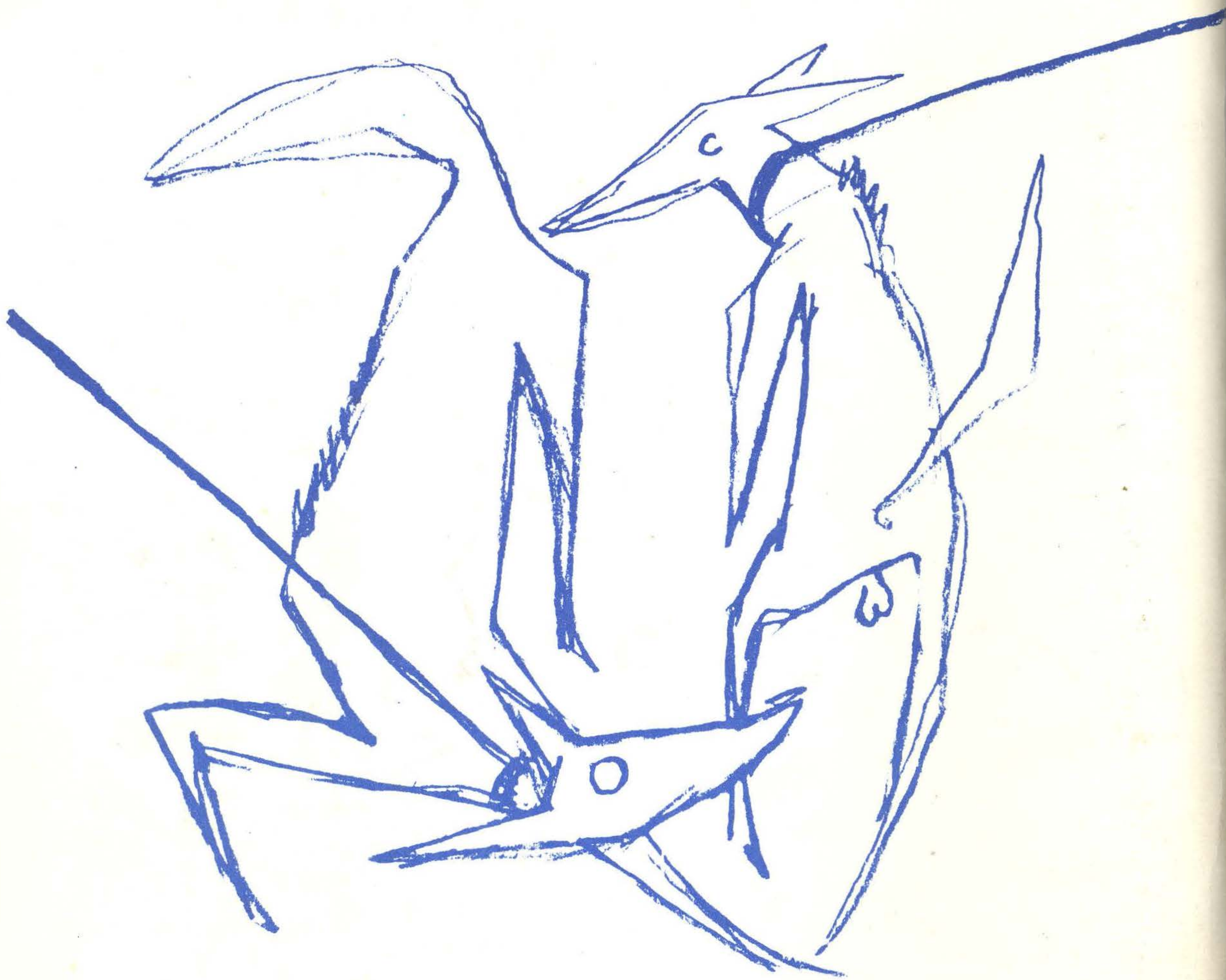
Issue #4 will feature an interview with David Melnick.

Issue #5 will be devoted to the Tuumba Press. We are interested in essays & reviews on any of the 50 books published by Lyn Hejinian from 1976-1984.

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Issue #1 (40 pages): Rodefer, Corder, Harryman, Anderson, Watten, & others. \$3.00 incl. postage.

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