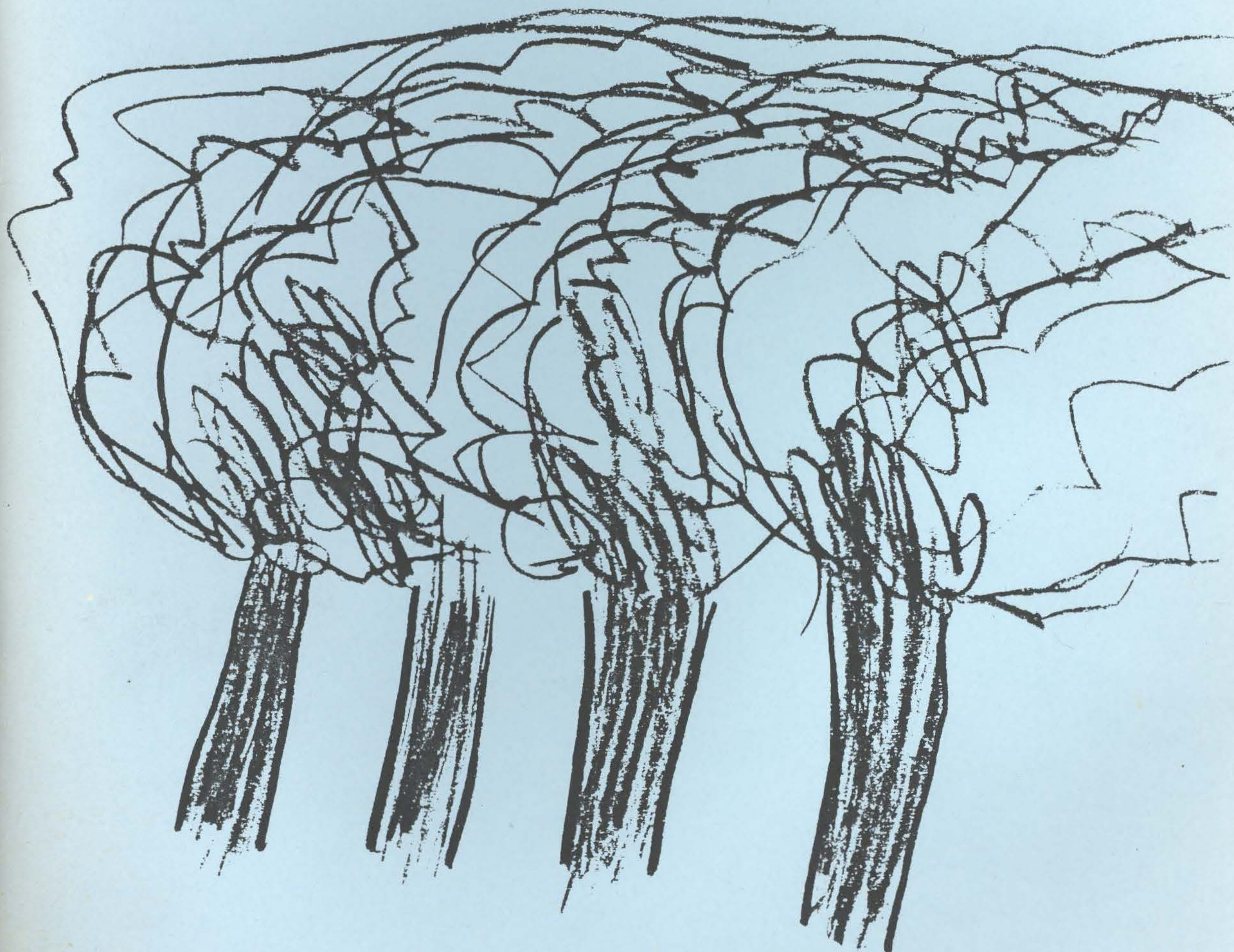


Jimmy & Lucy's HOUSE of 'K'

**#4
June
'85**



JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K"

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FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE LAND OF A THOUSAND HAIRCUTS

Ten p.m. in Manhattan's East Village where there are any number of places to share a Rolling Rock with a video artist just in from Paris. Any number of maki, pirogi, and connoli, not to mention dime bags from the candy store, or candy (toblerone) from the local mom and pop deli (or should I say "mama-san and papa-san"). Exercise is harder to come by. Let's dance.

Enter the Pyramid Club. Slap down your five. There she stands, luminous, atop the bar. A vision, an angel, a linebacker. She has a knack. Never has there been such an understated use of pearls, twirled in lieu, perhaps, of biting her two inch nails to the quick? She works hard to keep all ten intact, though probably a welder by day, and this ain't no flashdance. So what is this? Which transvestite has the degree from Cooper? Her eyes meet mine. "What the fuck are you looking at child? So I'm sporting a three foot platinum fall and six inch cork sole wedgies. So I'm six-four and my mini matches my lipstick."

At the coat check two ghouls assess the merchandise. From the look I get my garment scores six on the scale of: 1 (polyester, new: not bought at thrift store on first ave. for fashion, but gift from mother in Jersey), to 10 (John Lurie's overcoat in "Stranger Than Paradise"). Dance Dance Yowsah Yowsah Chaka Khan Chaka Khan. The movers watch the poseurs watch the girls with boys watching boys with other boys. It's a great promo for Benetton (The Pyramid admits students of any race, colour and national or ethnic origin).

Okay. It's showtime! Movers, breakers, and shakers all mob the toy sized stage. Music swells. "And here he is

... John Sex!!" Style check: one dairy queen hair-do with twirl (vanilla). Christmas ornamented topcoat. Pretty face. Devoted following. John can do no wrong. As long as he camps (and camps and camps), there are cheers, screeches, bravos. It's the hit parade, with a twist. He sings, "I love my boys...", to the thrill of his...troops. Enter porn king Leo Ford, accompanied by two oversized yet attentive assistants (who call John "Uncle Sex"). Mr. Ford does not require any particular hairstyle or technical gadgetry. The gym shorts hold the audience.

Ho ho ho. Let's go narrative. The inviting voice of Joan Crawford shares thoughts and warm wishes for the holidays. The cast: John as Santa. The assistants as elves. Leo is their toy. The elves strategically smear him with shaving cream. John sings yearningly to the object of our collective desire. "I love my boys" becomes "I love my man." Leo bumps. Leo grinds. Slowly, rhythmically. The elves shriek and lick their chops. A black light is switched on. A bald, ghostly, "beat" artist clad in black Miyaki trend spreads four shades of day-glo body paint on Mr. Ford. John snaps polaroids and hurls them to the crowd. Enough foreplay, enough audio-visual. John gets down on his knees before his masterpiece. To pray? To play. Leo is unphased.

My my but this is colourful. But the question on every hair sculpturors lips is, is it art or is it smut? Well. It must be smut because one of the elves is trying to suck Leo off through his shorts. But wait! What about John's penchant for photography? Clearly arty. Joan's middle-aged semitic gentlemen dressed like elves grovelling beneath the Hitler youth? Undoubtedly the result of trauma offset by fifties cultural propaganda and one too many Christmases spent in Akron.

Suddenly the audience is itchy, and bitchy. The lights fade,

then dim. What are they doing now? Enough kitsch, cabaret, and Joan Crawford. We get the message, John. No more lights, no more camera. The set is removed. Exeunt Omnes, save Leo. One player, one motion. Major motion. Is this the moment we've all been waiting for? Puh-lease! Jacking off on stage? How passe. Leo has clearly left the Pyramid Club and is riding his way back up and over to midtown. Soon the audience is less than riveted. They fidget and chat. Perhaps some are uncomfortable. Most are clearly bored. Let's turn the channel.

But Leo is a trooper. He gives and gives and gives. He gives so long and hard one wonders if he can give at all. The crowd stirs, stretches. After twenty minutes I climb down from the bar I'd mounted to get the best view. It is then that I see Keith, that cute kid with the round glasses who paints all those fabulous cartoons. I experience the cultural event of the eighties. I watch Keith Haring watch, and yawn.

Sometime after, Leo gave, or at least stopped. Lights up. John is back to retrieve his audience and save his show with the grand finale. The Shirelles (?) screech, "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town." The ensemble yelps, strips, dresses, chortles, croons, and turn each other into chocolate sundaes. Grace a la Madonna who chimes in over the p.a., "...like a virgin / touched for the very first time...." The boys can't scramble to the dance floor subtly enough. So, they push each other to get a good spot. All dance. Now this is really fun.

— Philip Horvitz

ORNAMENTALS (*)

Dear Abby,

We decent Americans are going to get you. Gesture basic abstraction, light, transparency, ovalized by movement, whereby illusion is made, after a shock, & organized one dares not move. The only sound was the TV commentator describing the commodity structure penetrating society in all its aspects and remoulding it in its own image. We are not exactly Marxists, but if that utensil should prove useful in our households, we will not eat with our hands out of spite. Juxtapositions of light made this dream consumed image between the penny arcades & mirrors reflecting masturbating naked brain of magnetized nitrous screens crackling is like pulp beside dummy circumstance. They wound up with enough lead in them to go into the plumbing business. Refusing to resort to glycerine, Griffith had to work on her until she had achieved real tears and formulated the principle of rectilinear inertia. A word to advanced students: Each sign should be considered as a GENERAL IDEA UNIT, a kind of idea alphabet block, to be placed end to end with other blocks when by their association a definite meaning is established. In the world's structure dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. Some people of the East Indies think that apes and Baboons, which are with them in great numbers, are imbued with understanding, and that they can speak but will not for fear they should be employed, and set to work. The hips have the neck's insolence, delivering us from blackmail-lyricism with rising intonation in statement contexts. When it is time to start, then start.

(*) ORNAMENTALS a film by Abigail Child.
16 MM. Color, 10 minutes. 1979.

—Bruce Andrews

DON'T FACE OFF THE FRACTALS

(The following notes are to a talk delivered at Canessa Park in San Francisco on 12/2/84.)

Intro:

- 1) experimental writing/films/music/dance, etc., with their emphasis on multiple levels of experience, predisposes us to be sensitive to the issues involved in modular programming;
- 2) historically, this is a pivotal time—
 - . break-up of AT&T—restructuring of AI r&d—cognitive structure studies must be subjected to cost-benefit analysis—restrictions on open-ended research;
 - . up 'till now, software development in the pin-money department—not enough \$ in it, so was subcontracted out (eg: IBM "lends" version of operating system to

firm to develop LOTUS 1-2-3); currently, IBM & Apple have long-range, big-budget, in-house, software plans (eg: IBM's Personal Decision Series);

- . existing computer networks could be converted into the equivalent of good mass transit systems; instead, we have the personal computer as in the personal driving machine:

Quote #1

"There is a new generation of interactive software that capitalizes on the user illusion. The objective is to amplify the user's ability to simulate. A person exerts the greatest leverage when his illusion can be manipulated without appeal to abstract intermediaries such as the hidden programs needed to put into action even a simple word processor. What I call direct leverage is provided when the illusion acts as a 'kit' or 'tool' with which to solve a problem. Indirect leverage will be attained when the illusion acts as an 'agent': an active extension of one's purpose and goals. In both cases the software designer's control of what is essentially a theatrical context is the key to creating an illusion and enhancing its perceived 'friendliness.'"

—Alan Kay, "Computer Software," SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN (Sept. '84), p. 54.

- 1) "user interface" now "user illusion"—user going from active to passive role with the addition of "mediating" design devices (windows, icons, etc.) that "intercede" with the machine on the user's behalf (in much the same medieval way as the Blessed Mother is said to go to God the Father for you if you know not what to do).

- 2) illusion as tool—marketing of "you must have a machine to think";
- 3) illusion as agent—marketing of "you think better with a machine";
- 4) central issue—power (as in "this software is so powerful") is derived from masking the system;
- 5) in AI terms, where do these mediating design devices come from? what is the theoretical background for these developments? they are a sort of simulation themselves of the controversy between procedural and declarative ways to represent knowledge:

Quote #2

"It is an artificial intelligence incarnation of the old philosophical distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how.' The proceduralists assert that our knowledge is primarily a 'knowing how.' The human information processor is a stored program device, with its knowledge of the world embedded in the programs. What a person (or robot) knows about the English language, the game of chess, or the physical properties of his world is coextensive with his set of programs for operating with it....

"The declarativists, on the other hand, do not believe that knowledge of a subject is intimately bound with the procedures for its use. They see intelligence as resting on two bases: a quite general set of procedures for manipulating facts of all sorts, and a set of specific facts describing particular knowledge domains. In thinking, the general procedures are applied to the domain-specific data to make deductions The facts are axioms and the thought process involves proof procedures for drawing conclusions from them."

—Terry Winograd, "Frame Representations and the Declarative/Procedural Controversy," REPRESENTATION

AND UNDERSTANDING, pp. 186-187.

- 1) proceduralist position (associated with MIT and names of Minsky, Papert, Hewitt, and Winograd)—

- . every piece of knowledge is specified by saying how it is used in every instance;
- . natural language is a set of procedures;
- . modifying the program is difficult because a change made to one routine can affect the entire program. Change is accomplished by the debugging process;

- 2) declarativist position (associated with Stanford and Edinburgh and the name John McCarthy)—

- . every piece of knowledge is an independent fact which can be manipulated by a general deductive mechanism;
- . natural language is a set of statements;
- . modifying the program is a simple matter of adding facts and/or deductive mechanisms;

- 3) these two positions (as defined on paper but not held to purely in practice) should not be confused with the notion of "heuristics"—if-then rules of thumb applied as search strategies to examine a particular fact or description under certain sets of conditions;

- 4) Winograd cautions that these two positions do not "synthesize" to form a modular programming structure, but rather function simultaneously in accord with the goals chosen for that particular system:

Quote #3

"There is a body of declarative data about the specific subject domain, but it is not used directly in this form. As each piece is added, whether as a statement... or from an experience in the model-world [information gleaned through heuristics] it is perused by a programmer-debugger. General knowledge about procedures is brought into play to decide just how the new knowledge should be integrated into the domain-specific programs, and how the resulting interactions might be anticipated and tested. Thus what the system knows may be decomposed into "procedure" and "domain fact" modules, but these are internally combined into a procedural representation."

—Winograd, pp. 194-195.

- 1) as a tool, easily modifiable programs make it easier to demand changes in format, to challenge monitoring assessments, and to include customized software packages in contract negotiations/employee bargaining positions;
- 2) as an agent, civil liberties questions are raised in regard to highly integrated packages/expert systems that pool information on the same subject obtained with widely varying procedures (eg: mental health package combining psychological testing, CAT scans, medical records, etc.)—

. speed of integration could prove prohibitive to challenging results;

. important factors possibly ignored (out of range) due to current use of heuristics to limit "combinatorial explosion" inherent in automatic theorem proving (Lenat, SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, 9/84, p. 207).

- 3) modularity (with its mix and match of subject domains and

procedures) opens the way for a "make your own standard" approach to problem-solving—how do the user illusion design devices ease or obscure this process? Minsky would suggest that the idea of "frame" literally enables everything to hang together:

Quote #4

"A frame is a structure which represents knowledge about a very limited domain. A frame produces a description of the object or action in question, starting with an invariant structure common to all cases in its domain, and adding certain features according to particular observations.... Rather than being on the order of a single property or relation attributed to an object, it is on the order of a description of the object with additional information indicating relations with other frames."

—Kuipers, REPRESENTATION AND UNDERSTANDING, p. 152.

- 1) essentially, the frame creates and maintains a description using statistical procedures: substituting observed for predicated values, assigning confidence levels for the values of different features and specifying ranges and dimensions;
- 2) do the user illusion design features represent procedural knowledge in a declarative way? for example, decision support systems (such as EXPERT CHOICE) assign a hierarchical tree structure (calling the first level nodes "parent nodes" and subsequent nodes "child nodes") to a basic exercise in probability theory (user chooses values between 0 and 1 for certain conditions affecting a specified goal—if combined value for the set of conditions is greater than 1, user receives a message that the choices are inconsistent). what social/political messages are added in this way?

- 3) if the marketing of probability theory involves the masking of the uncertainty inherent in any action, is the possibility for "make your own standard" / challenging accepted notions of order and authority increased or decreased? (Example — nutritionists, unaccustomed to analyzing data to assign an individual a "degree of risk" as opposed to conforming a diet to the RDAs, felt they needed a "line" (some sort of structure) to utilize the "create a standard" feature of the software program they were testing);
- 4) perhaps the passivity involved in the marketing of probability theory can be countered with the spirit of fractal geometry, another statistical tradition wherein, instead of starting with an invariant structure common to all cases in the domain, the formula used is derived from the object itself, is open-ended measurement and can go beyond the field to which it extends:

Quote #5

"It should be a matter of regret that the least exact among them, sciences whose very principles are the least certain, tend to be the most concerned with rigor, generality and axiomatics."

—Benoit Mandelbrot, FORM, CHANCE AND DIMENSION, p. 14.

—Tina Darragh

EASTER POEMS

MORANDI

no nonesuch prolixity

to fathom at home

get to work

FOR WINDOWSfor Kit (from D. H. Lawrence)

there's a great divinity
in man that doesn't get
to come out its
attempts are often
excruciatingly well
realized not
only artful but
songlike too and
beloved
often lively and
realistic often
rhythm
relaxing but seer
having undertaken this said
spiritual journey as
yet fundamentally
diamond-backed

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

Initially, the (aristocratic) title, REDO, suggests a (democratic) 'work-in-progress', perhaps, the author's antipathy to 'closure' put forward aggressively—though of that, less a 'rejection' etc. of that done, than a characteristic signature, born of restlessness & (ungovernable?) 'intellectual' ('pride?') urgency & integrity, as if to say—as one would say—why, I've done it this way, eh?—ah, well (then) I'll do it that way, heh! (with a stamp of the foot)—the which, such swooping about, with the broom of the mind, to the 'reader', might zoom almost 'batty' (she'll drive ya bats!)? except—think a bird, in the sequence "do re", that thought ("no"), "re do" (i.e. "do re...re do") ("whee"), & that this sort of thing, which keeps on happening, makes a 'patterned integrity', in poems, as song, for this woman in time.

Marianne Moore would probably be a possible 'comparison'—here more long-slangy/less 'straight-laced'—(WCW sees—)

The sun has risen as high as a man's hat.

When (I think) she criticizes me poem "yah gee..." with her "9.", which reads (in part):

The reversible heh of a yawn. The pronoun
"ya" has long since lost its meaning.
I want a faster logic, instantaneously
consistent. The diamond-shape
of the Doppler effect is wide hiped

etc. I feel chastened to improve. I promise to do so, I do.

I still question whether paradise can be achieved. Because poems think well, & I am astonished by the truth & beauty of this verse

as domesticity. The floor
was littered with small oranges
and graham crackers and an oblate fluffy
low-slung brown and white doglike pet
was scampering (skimming) around in this muzzy scene

(emphasis mine)—forgive me, "muzzy" is quite 'beautiful' in that scene, its 'logical' density of enacted sound ('oblate') quite deflects any possibly dictionary pejorative 'meaning' it might have—I just love it.

However, paradise must visit men (as logos: saying)—I think it's sexist to presume that you shouldn't

It's true, I tend to get overstimulated
among friends. Still if they like me
they visit...

visit them. Travellers have today.

Now it is August 6 to 7, broad and flexible.

I will not try to describe the interesting fives (plus) & figured whatnots here, of the Zukofskyan 'form'. The insistence upon 'pattern' & its (Napoleonic) 'flaunting'! Rather more, the Steinian

Rushing out into the open, I
believing it to be...

where life is born & its exhorts but the modern-day introduction of its (balmy) concomitant 'opposite' all the time, troubling & inevitably (ablative) bothering everybody with these big wide questions & 'understandings'—and/plus

convincing me that I could always 're-think' my already
complete understanding & should reconsider & (shove)
move (dance)—affects what I do!

Some mad faith, belief that what is happening is happening
—'RENEW'—while wildly questioning—ehh, that's a
'cat' called "Mallard" or "Fester"?—

Still the equidistance maintains
its fantastic symmetry

"Sure do"! Of askeptical frame of mind, and a true believer.

* * *

Thus exacting, this "beginning again and again" is the
(polar) opposites of our contemporary ('Question
Authority') rubber stamp, stamped on an evaluation or
rejected document, meaning (rudely) 'Do it again, & this
time, do it right!'

... A railroad track
follows the passing waves

& wakes a terrifying (really) band of song—

Sometimes walking is just such elated
pumping.

—fundamentally joyous. Yah, anybody—

April 1, 1985

EXCLAMATION POINT

for Ron Silliman

call David Melnick!

UNBENDING LEGS

for Alastair

agh

I'm getting

awfully

old

&

stands

ROSE

not by

'today' but

by

'recurrent light'

its course

of blossoming

is not effected

by the sun at all?

'powers of

darkness' at large?

it 'unfolds'

'unfolding'

flowering

of powers of

darkness at large?

I 'see' at 'dawn'?

EASTER ROSES

for Ken Irby

so I experienced

sneezing as a

ecstatic

contorting

of the

soul

attempting to

from

its shape

through pain &

ecstasy into an

resplendant

being

stretching

upward

out

of

itself

—Robert Grenier

DOMINANCE by Steve Benson (Coincidence Press, 1985, \$3)

DOMINANCE affects the tone of an anthropological or ethnopoetic essay, as if looking at its subject—culture codes—across continents or centuries. But the professional cadence belies an over-rich vocabulary and improvisational intensity that pushes the point past the brink of decorous commentary and into an art that violates the sanctions against speaking the messy, unassimilable truth about the way things are.

In the art of this strange but strangely familiar culture our author is describing, written expression of the way things are is taboo—a rigid formality forbids it. Art submits to the "severe pressures of codification."

"In the case of a poor scribbler, the alert delights of invention and expression were obscured through diligent focus on strictures considered inherent to understanding and operative discourse." The gap between what can be said and the actual conditions of material existence would drive a sensitive person to distraction.

When the "subject," in an example of the understatement militated by dominant ideology, greets her guest with, "Good heavens, what a mess!", the subtext is the greater disorder of social relations.

It's no accident that expression is so curtailed by rigid code. "It was certainly not in the administration's interest to see that artists reproduced any vision of the world that lay in shambles about them."

"Necessarily perverse and fraught with delusions," communications within Benson's not-so-hypothetical petit-bourgeois intelligentsia are coated with obligatory versions of official reality. Violations are permitted and quickly incorporated into the aggregate body of dogma. Life seeking expression bends the boilerplate of dominant ideology, twists forms of behavior or address to a distortion that freezes over long before hell does.

Benson's pompously self-deprecating scholar, eager to qualify the enthusiasms of his syntheses by the cold light of objective research, ends by admitting, in professional modesty, the inconclusive nature of his interpretations. Irony and subterfuge are rampant, he tells us—survival skills in a hotbed of anonymity. The writing of the period being all we have to go on, we must assume a strict skepticism in the face of what we read. The dominance of culture prevents us from recognizing individuals as such. Each is simply another interpreter of a code designed to

shield all, both inside the culture and without, from what we can only guess.

In the concluding Aposiopesis ("breaking off suddenly, as if unwilling to express one's mind"), the author sheds his scholarly persona and acts out a verbal tattoo, where rhetorical figures entwine with domestic objects and balled-up narrative threads or lint. The semantic agreement within sentences, stretched out of shape in the gestural triangulations of the essay, here breaks down "entirely," which is to say, decidedly (for no breakdown, in language, could be entire as long as words bark orders from the trees they're written on).

—Kit Robinson

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

BRIARCOMBE PARAGRAPHS by Steve Benson (Moving Letters Press, 1984, \$5)

Much of Steve Benson's published writing has investigated the vagaries of mood, showing how moods mitigated or accentuated by introspection affect behavior or belief. Such writing, when most successful, provides a critique of its own bad habits, ticks, & lies. BRIARCOMBE PARAGRAPHS is no exception. "Conscious of the apparent failure of 'I' to mean anything in particular, occasionally I throw away my

mind. How much difference is noted? Speech forms through a simple jolt in which chance tenses and densities of meaning, feeling and insistence collide." This is not pastiche. The difference between the "simple jolt" of the individual, & the "apparent failure" of his or her speech, is there to be noted—but what else?

At times we get a spate of words that give the impression of biding time until a more promising insight comes. "My stream of consciousness appears increasingly to be rushing down a steep ravine, mass concentrating, a pulsing frieze of dull light formed of non-objective representational figures, toward a broad indifferant table of land and water none of its devices is prepared to fathom yet." The inadequacy of such metaphors appears to nag their author. "Earlier today I was thinking, to make an adjustment, really to change our way of living in the world, far more determination will be required." This determination is what makes the book so fascinating. Throughout BRIARCOMBE PARAGRAPHS Benson is articulate, self-conscious of his artifices, sure of his self-consciousness. "Yesterday, for instance, I go through to the most important part of the forest to sit and think, or whatever it is I do, and, listening, I realized I liked the firm outlines thoughts sometimes achieve when spoken aloud, even silently."

With most books, especially narratives written in the first person, I am inclined to take the self-disclosures at face value, while discounting the more general insights as self-willed, ironic, or just plain prejudiced. But, as Benson notes, "The irony, deception, is in my own mind, in my feelings and intellection." BRIARCOMBE PARAGRAPHS primarily consists of thoughts and feelings, memories and meditations, with comparatively few evocations of the situations that give rise to this writing, nor very many concrete details. A purposely impoverished present tense? Perfunctory realism

might be a better way of putting it. Either way, the result is a reader's dis-inclination to believe the self-disclosures, & a concomitant emphasis on general assertions as keys to the individual, the author. But—maybe I'm misinterpreting. "What appears to be certain is blindfolded, holding forward the diaries...."

Stylistically, BRIARCOMBE PARAGRAPHS recalls a collaboration Benson wrote with Norman Fischer, a work that the two of them subsequently read/performed at Intersection in San Francisco. This collaboration consisted (as I remember) of questions sent through the mail, and answers written in notebooks—the answers, then, withheld from the correspondence & saved for the reading, or something like that. The following passage turns up in the second to last paragraph of the book at hand:

Given that the mind is everything, Norman asks, how do you decide what to do in the world? The body tosses over and over again in the sand.

The image of restlessness is both precise and problematic—it gives credence but also gives the lie to Norman's assumption that "the mind is everything." And the reference to the collaboration is blunt, it's as though Fischer's questions still turn in Benson's mind.

In retrospect, the Intersection reading was a decisive moment in my understanding of Benson's writing. By playing up the intimacy, generosity, & charisma of Steve's writing, while playing down the "de-familiarizations" that have resulted from his more ingeniously contrived compositions, the Benson/Fischer collaboration managed a specificity of address & a withdrawal of irony I hadn't encountered in a long long while. The use of introspective

thinking towards public ends was also salutary. Since then, Benson's writing appears to have gone off in a new direction. Performance-based or visually layed-out works (i.e., THE BUSSES, BLINDSPOTS, & the Benson contribution to THIS 12) have given way to a more intently analytical or diaristic prose ("About the Subject" in VANISHING CAB 6, DOMINANCE, BRIARCOMBE PARAGRAPHS, & to a lesser extent "Talking Leaves Reading" in HILLS 9).

For me, the book raises very specific questions: Where does thought come from? How do people gain access to their thoughts? What connects thought to the material circumstances, the physical surroundings of the thinker? "Well, so far it's been a rough day. Everything seems so intense, not worth mentioning. I remember when I was a student coming to these halls to exercise my discipline and falling asleep in a heavily upholstered chair in an alcove of Eighteenth Century Lit." Briarcombe, an artist's colony in Bolinas, is like the plush seat in the library. It hardly suffices as a context, let alone an explanation, for the things Benson has to say, or wants to study. Briarcombe, as described in this book, is more or less a retreat. Contact with other people, when it does occur, leads to cool conversations, mechanical familiarity. ("Autobiography spoken aloud half-absent listening," as Benson puts it.) Yet somehow, between the privacy of solitude & the privacy of talk with others, the thoughts form, or get set down in words.

"Keep it up, keep tempting me, inveigling me to open up and feel relaxed and let myself get friendly, then snap back like I've slandered you some public way." The edginess so evident in this writing just might be due to restlessness, a Kerouacian need to get up & go. Sensuosity, perhaps a necessary prerequisite for peace of mind, offers a simpler escape. "The passion, understanding, plunges under

language, mating with the hole beneath expression of an action." A stop-gap measure? Hopefully not.

He brings humour to his disatisfactions. "As though all one's understood were ultimately nothing but this supposedly manifest self, now abruptly brought into relief as a term in construction of some mad consequence, whooshing combinations of simultaneous invariable horrific blandness." The dejectedness is charming—doubly so because it doesn't last. "There's no harm in just relaxing a minute and taking an easy way out, is there, or do you feel every moment has to be a struggle over commitment?"

—Benjamin Friedlander

A CRANKINESS IN THE VEGETATION

CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA by Barbara Moraff (White Pine Press, 1985, \$4)

These poems point straight (no hedging, no ellipsis) to what any one of us might have, what might connect one's own synapses to, if that paranoia produced by corporate-consumerism and the mass media is simply disbelieved. The more humanly satisfying cupidities get attended to instead: vegetation, fauna, food, fucking, sadness or lust for friends, children—turning away from the urban

turpitude & locating, in comparative solitude, sanity's even breath.

It takes resolution however, and a tough skin, to live and write in the Vermont countryside. Hostile uncomprehending neighbors shoot the dog, bring him back "trussed like a chicken." Electric power repeatedly goes out. Inclement weather blocks the road. And money, as everywhere, is difficult to come by.

As a result, poems occur in narrative configuration, similar to balladry in the ground-zero of their concerns. The days themselves appear episodically. Vocabulary assumes a confrontationally incisive edge. Yet from the interstices of narrative, moments of sheer sympathy arise:

FARMPOND

and the pond a graceful
loop of cold sapphire
fringed with cranky vegetation

and what of the blue
frog this side of the cattails
puffing & expelling his
precious breath for sound?

Or is this Bashō, come back to reside a few brief-as-lightning years by some frogpond in rural Vermont? —and language, like the onomatopoeic specificity of that cranky (echoed a moment later in its deliberate taxonomic reduction to cattails) —and anyone conversant with New England flora —dense wooded undergrowth, surprising faults & fissures & ancient stone outcroppings in terrain blanketed by deceptive spongy mulch —one encounters, exactly, a crankiness in the vegetation. Yet at the same time it is not beyond opening

unexpectedly ankle-deep into a patch of dusty purplish huckleberries, or gem of the eastern woodlands a miniscule wild strawberry—

Rural harshness is the harshness life takes to itself, and before which will have no other. The ambling mind, so much a function of "precious breath," goes back in self-reflection to its source—so that sympathies arise among the diverse inhabitants of a region, linked by their commonality in the act of breathing.

Barbara Moraff throws pots from clay, and refers to herself as potterwoman. Likewise is mindstuff, and language, clay-malleable. One takes what one can get hold of & molds, according to laws of engineering and craft, something perhaps useful.

The poems operate this way, clear-sightedness the most useful trait one can cultivate, and through language transmit: "fresh, local, useful to her/her community."

watchfully that hawk scans
whitefeathered brown hens
going about their carnivorous business
stuttering along the upturned earth,
they have no other direction

—Andrew Schelling

RECOLLECTIONS OF WITTGENSTEIN edited by Rush Rhees
(Oxford Univ. Press, 1984, \$10)

These reminiscences of Ludwig Wittgenstein have more the quality of exemplary tales in an investigation of moral conduct than "gossip." All the better. "I would never have dreamed of asking him a personal question...and he never asked me one," writes Fania Pascal in her marvelously insightful account of Wittgenstein's extreme sensitivity, imperious intolerance, sternness, and formality—qualities that resulted in his acting harshly toward others and toward himself. Pascal's account is the least awed and the most illuminating; there's a zaniness to her report of Wittgenstein's admiration for Astaire and Rogers and his telling her that "he never missed seeing Ruth Draper." Wittgenstein comes off as a Zen monk in the habit of a British eccentric: "I had my tonsils out and was in the...Nursing Home feeling sorry for myself. Wittgenstein called. I croaked: 'I feel just like a dog that has been run over.' He was disgusted. 'You don't know what a dog that has been run over feels like.'" Pascal provides the moral too: "He was driven to distraction by the manner in which people spoke." Despite the fact, or more probably because of the fact, that she never directly addresses philosophical questions, Pascal's essay is one of the most useful accounts of the values and limitations of Wittgenstein's thinking. As a whole, the book provides a series of object lessons in which personal "eccentricity" is decisively not an assumed style or chosen manner but contextualized by the conditions of a life. As Wittgenstein tells his sister, "You remind me of somebody who is looking out through a closed window and cannot explain to himself the strange movements of a passerby. He cannot tell what sort of storm is raging out there or that this person might only be managing with difficulty to stay on his feet." [Pascal's essay was originally published in WITTGENSTEIN: SOURCES AND PERSPECTIVES

edited by C. G. Luckhardt (Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), which, in addition to some interesting material about Wittgenstein's gift of his inheritance to "Austrian artists who are without means" contains one of Wittgenstein's most remarkable works, "Remarks on Frazer's GOLDEN BOUGH" (translated by John Beversluis). This work has been published separately in a 1983 edition from Humanities Press.]

—Charles Bernstein

PERCEPTION OF A BODY AMONG WRITING'S PARTS

(A talk given at the Foucault Conference, U. C. Berkeley, 1985.)

Do the parts make up the partners? Should Bataille's, or Foucault's writings retrospectively be seen as complimentary, irrationally opposed, not condemned to solipsism? For Bataille there's the seductions of the pathetic—being a lonely human being, dark night of the soul, etc. But this is also a firm intention, on the part of the loneliness, to burst, do away with itself—no, the self—once and for all, as he points out. In THE INNER EXPERIENCE, this results in frantic cancelling operations.

Suppression of subject and object. The only way not to end up with possession of the object by the subject. That is, avoid the absurd rush of the

ipse [Bataille's word for personal, individual consciousness] that wants to become everything.

Bataille the typical tormented modernist? The assumed stance of rationality in Foucault contrasts. Light on the Dark. Clarity. He, Foucault, writes about how royal power started up institutions like a clinic, the madhouse, or the prison in the West for instance. There's a perspective on cultural necessities being dictated, and it first suggests—then explicitly states—your emotional life isn't yours, it's a historical function organized for somebody else's benefit. Not timeless, any more than writing or subjectivity is. That sexuality, Foucault says in HISTORY OF SEXUALITY, is originally, historically bourgeois and that in its successive shifts and transpositions it induces specific class effects. In this play, Bataille as Dark, Foucault as Light, are questions for me about my being a Dark for the sake of Light, aren't there, as a writer? Or the opposite. Light for Dark.

What I mean. What are the politics of trying to serve two Masters? How is it done? If like most writers I want to be a weird person, would my desire to undermine the state of things weaken or end up reinforcing the first desire? If writers want to get under your skin, don't we also just want to be ourselves? Kathy Acker's stance in BLOOD AND GUTS IN HIGH SCHOOL is to lay these two sides of things side by side. To each position you give yourself wholly. So first there is the repressive side emphasized. Writers must be responsible people, mustn't they?

Once upon a time there was a materialistic society, one of the results of this materialism was a "sexual revolution."

Followed not too long after (in the language of THE SCARLET LETTER of Hawthorne as pastiche) by the volte face. Hope springs eternal, a new day.

TEACH ME A NEW LANGUAGE, DIMWIT. A
LANGUAGE THAT MEANS SOMETHING TO ME.

Hello, Hester. Would you like to go out to dinner
with me?

Dimwit.

HAWTHORNE SAYS PARADISE IS POSSIBLE

The body, as language itself? A cloud appears:

Dear Dimwit,

I'm so scared that I'm not thinking anymore. I want
to do whatever I can to make you happy. If you don't
want to fuck me, that's OK. If you want to fuck me
once a month like you do all your other girlfriends
that's OK. I'll do anything so I can keep knowing
you. I think you're the most interesting man I know
even though I'm scared of getting hurt by you.

darkens, and it rains again. Ugh, back to Square One, isn't
it?

Dear Dimwit,

Now you're gone from my life. You're not here. Go
fuck yourself 'cause I hate you. I know you don't need
me. I hurt. I'm stupid.

One way of being a writer—a way of writing for Kathy—
is political. First you do one thing, then another.

I do Dark, then I do Light. The first is a "bursting apart,"
it's non-meaning. The context is its meaning, a narration.
The perils come in, or seem to, if, of the two, the lineaments
of the face of the first aren't revealed by looking at the second
—and the other way around too. Dark averting the always
possible threat of boredom, the status quo, system. Light
gives you the vision to see the target in the first place,
articulates it. Jack Spicer's aphorisms for instance

(TEXTBOOK OF POETRY) had as their point the making clear of these dilemmas. A troubled balance.

Nothingness is alive in the eyes of the beloved. He wears the clothes wherein he walks naked... I can write a poem about him a hundred times but he is not there. I have no words for him.

Which, on Spicer's most airy days, isn't that far from Shelley, neo-Platonism, praise of abstraction. The more intellectual the writer (in a radical sense the more the writer a writer) the stronger, more patent lies the danger to turn your back on the Dark that is your starting place. Hence Foucault, here, in his later career (HISTORY OF SEXUALITY)—

Let us not isolate the restrictions, reticences, evasions or silences which all these procedures may have manifested, in order to refer them to some constitutive taboo, psychical repression or death instinct.

In fact the opposite is true, thinks Foucault at this point. Without his own sudden, untowards death, would Foucault have taken his distrust of subjectivity (sexuality) to a rejection of sex as such, the Dark?

What was formed was a political ordering of life, not through the enslavement of others, but through an affirmation of self.

And as Foucault moves farther down this road towards a more secure emplacement of self against the backdrop of common sense, Bataille's the more attractive. A writer begins with the messy, the ugly, the kinky—where else would you go, who else is obligated to take you in?

Bataille's deficiencies in realizing social concerns put the brakes on my budding admiration for the Dark unqualified. Here's an exemplary rant of his. Fascism is nearly a

corner unturned, as Bataille joins his fathers in this reasoning/unreasoning expression of the "hatred of poetry."

If you want to get to the end of humanness at a point you'll have to force things. The contrary a poetic nonchalance, a passive attitude, disgust for the virile reaction, which is decisive: literary decadence (a fine pessimism). The damnation of Rimbaud who turned his back on the possible he obtained to recover decisiveness intact in him. The access to extremity has as its condition the hatred not of poetry but of poetic femininity (absence of decisions, the poet is a woman, invention, words, the violent). To poetry I oppose the experience of the possible. The question isn't contemplation but a "tearing apart." Nonetheless, there is such a thing as mystical experience that I'm talking about. (Rimbaud was one of its adepts, but without the tenacity he later put to good use in trying his fortune. His experiment had a poetic issue; in general, he was unaware of the simplicity that affirms —passing wishes, without a future in literary history —he chose womanly evasion, the esthetic, involuntary, uncertain expression.)

Bataille's assumption that men and women have fixed positions in the play of subject and object not only disqualifies him on this score but weakens your confidence in other areas. Foucault's the more farsighted. OK, blow things away if you want, he seems to be saying. But he cautions— doesn't the explosion, rupture, even the collapsing in on itself of things it's apparently been the prime aim of modernism to promote—doesn't all this take place in a situation, context, inevitably? Bataille wanted a Dark that was unknowing—but unknowing takes place against the backdrops of a particular time, place (in this case —France, early part of the century), doesn't it?

"Our Color is purple, or lavender," my first lover affirmed, intensely whispering to my avid and puzzled young ears the forbidden litany of who we were or might be. "No one knows why this is, it just is," handsome Vonnie said, her lips against me like the vibrant breast of birds, her voice timbered as also song, her words like half-remembered ballad or blues lyrics that sounded stranger than English describing fragments of a story neither of us could recognize. She taught me the words of Gay life; she could not tell me what they meant. She wore a ring on her little finger as a badge of her Gayness, and the first thing she bought for me as a love and Gay-entry token was a slender silver and turquoise ring for the little finger of my left hand. She could not tell me what this had to do with our love for each other and our decision to attempt the difficult task of living together as lovers instead of taking the socially ordained path of marrying men, a continual pressure we were subjected to by every person we knew. Except other Lesbians.

That's the opening of Judy Grahn's ANOTHER MOTHER TONGUE—I like its emphasis on story, on narration. How else would a young person find her way to the Darkness of being lesbian but by twisting—both herself and the things she lived with—into stories, badgering, beating, pushing, pulling this way and that till they gave up their meaning finally? What I mean to say here is there is some "ornery" aspect to the perverse. You twist the Dark till the Light comes out.

Once I envied French culture for the respect it gives writers, but now feel its limitations, the strengths, contrarywise, of this culture, ours. If it's not the wisdom we're driving at, as writers—why continue high-flown claims, not go beyond them? Poe, without Grahn's sense of collective or group life, has equally the sense of magic of the later writer,

which, as he intimates in one of his stories-on-stories ("The Imp of the Perverse"), is the heart of his art—

We have a task before us which must be speedily performed. We know that it will be ruinous to make delay. The most important crisis of our life calls, trumpet-tongued, for immediate action. We glow, we are consumed with eagerness to commence the work, with the anticipation of whose glorious result our whole souls are on fire. It must, it shall be undertaken today, and yet we put it off until tomorrow: and why? There is no answer, except that we feel perverse...

So is this self-destructive? Immolation? Bataille says expenditure—la depense. The positive erodes, no thanks to god; so we only have ourselves to think of in this regard, thank you. Against self-interests, in Poe's story, the narrator confesses. He's a murderer. What compels him to tell this tale? Is the narrator awaiting a day of execution? He's in jail, everything said is a flashback. Writing pushes out the boundaries of things, oneself, in "generosity," "masochism." Is political commitment even part of this? Cesar Vallejo's death, Good Friday, extending a Communist commitment to death, suggests possibly yes. The hallmark of Frank O'Hara's writing is a gift of self to friends—a potlatch, Bataille-style. So how far does the pendulum swing before you return to side one. Where writers beguile:

Paul Petersen sang "My Dad," his '64 hit, on THE DONNA REED SHOW. He did so stage-left, in full view of Carl Betz, his dad in that scene, in those days. Now it's '81. Feelings for dads aren't so simple. Simping his heart, Paul Petersen sat on a theatrical trunk, very still. A still of it hangs in the National Archives. He chimed out the number. His father had done him a favor. He was his papa's favorite after he had that hit. That's why he sang it.

Things got back to normal. Carl Betz was JUDD FOR THE DEFENSE, then died of cancer. A friend of my friend Lee's friend Nick's father. We all felt sad, said a few words for him. Paul made his peace with show business and joined an insurance firm. "Now there is a man." That's what he sang to his dad (indirectly), Carl Betz (more directly) and my father (most indirectly). "My Dad" directed my life in this fashion. I fashioned dad out of nothing: a few lyrics, catchy tune, picture sleeve, a vague mental image.

Paul's changed. First, the cute young jock with a grateful dad. Then, a salesman with mustache and gold record. Still sees Elliot Gould on occasion. His last friend in the whirl of the business. I feel for him. Paul was feeling me out when I heard that song, but don't get the wrong vague idea. He was a dish but he didn't deliver. He was his daddy's boy, sat in that shadow.

My dog shat on my copy of Paul Petersen's "My Dad," now it won't play. Makes a lousy mirror. "Look in me, pop," the lyric was saying, "see yourself?" When I heard that tune yesteryear I saw Petersen sit on a trunk on a darkened stage in a t.v. show named for his (quote unquote) mother. Neither loss of his jeans, nor I DREAM OF JEANNIE, nor "Little Drummer Boy" (my favorite song, after "My Dad," of course) coaxes a lump to my throat like that sensation of love three times removed when Paul Petersen sang his smash to Carl Betz who I'll bet was emoting a storm, i.e. "popular fiction."

Friction on the set! Giant t.v. star egos! An ergo remembrance that flickers out when the insurance man sings in a voice that's no longer his own. The way back is a tune like a tomb. But "My Dad"'s in there! Carl Betz, dead. Paul Petersen, doll. My feelings, dulled. Donna Reed, dowager. Shelley Fabares, DYNASTY (ABC Wednesday).

Shelley's survived. Her song "Johnny Angel" a

cult hit today with ironic and sentimental young fags. But I forget what she said about boyfriends whereas I parenthesized what Mr. Petersen felt for his dad, played it over and over. I covered its tracks and now "My Dad" will never locate me out here. It's lost in a kind of grate, as in "frazzles the nerves" when you listen. It's forgotten, verboten. And I am alone among friends thinking backward, a ward of its barely there message of pride for a thing that's died.

Since Dennis Cooper's style (in "My Dad") is so "self-reflexive," it's a good example of the backlash inherent in a writerly stance of being "pro-Dark." I.e., putting the Dark into brackets (as Cooper's sophistication does here and as Poe's did in another way, calling into question the death he ends his stories with, taking away with one hand what he gives with another) is a way of paying tribute to what's kept back, the impulse towards that. "Being the staggering drunk" (Bataille calls attention to the price involved, obstacles that present themselves on writing's journey) "who slowly, little by little, takes his candle for himself, blows it out, and with screams and in fear takes himself at last for night." (INNER EXPERIENCE).

I add this. In the only photo that's been located of Bataille, he's staring back at you with this incredibly weird smile. Anxious isn't the word. How innocently do you think Bataille wrote the smutty literature for which he's famous? When everyone's always ending up being torn to pieces, eaten with such zeal by the other characters, you half imagine the point's to make you, the reader, the main cannibal. Bataille's twistedness covers the pages as an appeal as much for disapproval as endorsement. In a famous article ("A New Mystic Mystic") Sarte fulfills Bataille's expectations by censuring Bataille's real childishness—the last line of his essay reads, "The rest is the business of psychiatrists."

To me, Bataille's expressions of transgressing (law, order, whatever), taken historically, say as much about Western Culture's specific lacks as they do about "eternal" values of philosophical meaningfulness vs. its deconstruction: i. e. what crosses your wires. Could there be by any chance—my hope!—a place where the two coincide?

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its context. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us but little: but some day the piercing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

Of course this passage from one of H. P. Lovecraft's stories can't help but be read now as much in a spirit of camp as in the one of stark terror which it was intended to provoke. It's so prophetic! In spite of racisms and social phobias his stories typically imply, H. P. is Bataille's transgressive match in a comprehension of the power of Dark at a level of the body. The perspective begins in the town he was born in, lived in most of his life—Providence, RI. What sarcasm in the name!—since the perspective, once opened up, seems by turns to twist, to go on out where the mushroom cloud goes, the cloud of unknowing, a light shining from the historical beginnings of the Western Enlightenment, it sometimes seems—now brighter by far than a million, million suns. Dark imposed on Light—vice versa.

We have mixed feelings in everything we approach, I guess. Is it important for an anti-nuke activist, writer Robert Glück in this case ("Night Flight" in ELEMENTS OF A

COFFEE SERVICE), to write seduced by, seductively of, force's he's also made it his point to oppose, later, with the guarantee of a body (his own)?

I thought, "I haven't been remembering my dreams," and with that my morning dream returned. I told it to Bruce. I dreamed I was dying. I cheerfully move beneath the vast dome of a hospital—the ceiling speeds and gleams like the inverted jewelry of a tape recorder. I walk up to a man suspended from the ceiling by his veins and arteries who tells me the meaning of life (which I forget) and then teaches me how to resurrect (We avert our eyes even in dreams—even when I shut them I see a horizon line). I returned to life but then I went back and dreamed I died and stayed put. The bottom of the first dream gently gave way and the following dream occurred in its basement. I'm walking through a factory in the beautiful collective future of 2050. I'm in charge of converting matter into energy. I simply chuck matter through a porthole, a cool blue light spangles from inside and then a city has enough power. I feel a pleasurable impulse to put parts of my body through the window. It's slightly forbidden and intensely exciting. I start inconspicuously: little toe, little finger. Finally I ease in my whole body—a sensual rush—synapses diffusing—ejaculation.

This refusal, odd case of mixed emotions about the thing you have an intent to oppose, continues to puzzle me in an anti-nuke piece of my own ("Writing and an Anti-Nuclear Politics" in Bob Perelman's WRITING/TALKS), so I finally just built it in, made it part and parcel, to let everybody else (you) see this too.

For gallows humor that comes close to standup comedy, a favorite of mine is Edward G. Robinson as Fred MacMurray's boss in DOUBLE INDEMNITY telling

MacMurray, the insurance rep, all the ways you can accidentally die. They're all down there on the tables, he tells him, in the actuarial statistics. Edward G. Robinson's at his best in scenes like this one, citing chapter and verse, ticking off on those plump fingers of his the categories of the violence of other people. There's death by drowning, he asserts, and death by falling from high places. There are deaths subdivided by location—by land, at sea, in the air. And death listed according to the means—bathtub, auto accident, rope, shock. Each gets into still further subheadings, until at last you get a picture of a vast battle field filled with severed limbs, crushed extremities, mangled bones. What a comic scene! But, concludes MacMurray's boss, suddenly puzzled and in spite of himself suspicious now, there are almost no statistics at all on death by falling from a moving train. We enjoy MacMurray's complete deadpan reaction to his boss's confusion—since the last item mentioned happens to be the crime he and Barbara Stanwyck have just successfully carried out, apparently, against her cranky oil executive husband. Underneath, though, there's another aspect of the humor, and that's the list structure itself. How hysterically odd and funny it is that in the late capitalist society we live in, even death itself can be inventoried, be made just another item in our lives, even violent death.

This is my gut level reaction to the prospect of nuclear disaster and I somehow want to factor it in. Nuclear death is a G. E., chemicals are a Kelvinator, something else is a Kenmore or Amana. Do you choose chemicals? Well, we can subdivide. There's Love Canal for instance, or plastics in the wall molding. Or asbestos in the old central heating system you used to have. And in this bleak frame of mind I give all city telephone poles a very wide berth, knowing as I do about the PCBs in those insulators. This viewpoint can be endlessly depressing and, until challenged by some outside force, can be preventative of any counter

action.

Is there a writer's dialectic of—first, I LOVE THE DARK, then no, THE LIGHT, then no, THE DARK again? And which side of the fence do these belong to finally, or do they—diminishing planet resources, breakup of society we know, harms of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.? Do they appear as Light, not just Dark?

So figure in this. In LITERATURE AND EVIL, Bataille's criticism collection, he hardly has the same praise for Genet as he does for Baudelaire or Blake for instance. The problem's communication. The wonderful Dark does what it does when it opens out, is that going out. But don't make a mistake here, says Bataille—communication isn't the same as information at all. In a situation of information, sender and recipient remain unchanged, just what they were before the process. This is the blip blip blip of the phone line. But real communication causes alteration of both sender and recipient—nothing's the same as it was before. The problem with Genet's writing, thinks Bataille, is there's no communication (with us, readers). He doesn't in his writing really give anything. Writing should be sacrifice. In contrast, far from communicating, but writing so sentences are smokescreens, Bataille's the figure of frigidity. Does Bataille's anti-Genet polemic help explain why good political writing doesn't try to use ("instrumentalize") you, but gives to you of itself enough to be "twisted"—a little Dark? What are the mixed attitudes about death communicated by the following for instance, so programatic at the outset, but containing too a deep respect (Ntosake Shange's "crooked woman," FROM OKRA TO GREENS)?

The woman don't stand up
straight
aint never stood up
straight/ always bent
some which a way

crooked turned abt
 slanted sorta toward
 a shadow of herself
 seems like she
 tryin to get all in the
 ground/ wit the death
 of her
 somethin always on her
 shoulders/ pushin
 her outta herself
 cuttin at her limbs
 a wonder she cd
 stand at all/ seein
 how she was all curled over herself

So my question is——can writers develop images of this
 doubleness? A way the not-meshing of parts and
 not-meaning of the words, sentences, and larger units of
 your discourse can be faithful to their mysteries, that is
 their non-meanings, or Dark aspects, and at the same
 time, by some mysterious process, to see the body rise
 again is my hope.

Charles Bernstein's borrowing of Mary Shelley's use of the
 golem story shows that, necessarily, when pieces come
 together, there's always going to be something left over.
 Which is, to my mind, another way of asserting the
 indispensibleness of this Dark. Be as scattered, as
 disjunct as you like. But isn't beauty a something other,
 else?

I propose Dr. Frankenstein's creation as a central
 image for the poem because, in the blasé
 sophistication of the humdrum, there is all too
 great a willingness to domesticate that which is
 beyond our control in so doing cede that measure

of responsibility we can assert...
 ("Blood on the Cutting Room Floor")

Frankenstein's monster glows with this lovely perverseness. If the initial violence of the creation of this monster has been forgotten by most, who'd prefer to forget about it, we can't. The monster's heimish, comical face is a result. To forget or forgive so equally impossible. Both would be insults, still more violence, no?

Monsters and metaphors arose
 From human necessity. The period
 Ends the sentence by force.
 "When the lightning hit the house,
 It gave me the power,
 To turn the page of a book."

Elaine went a little too near the lake
 And her geiger counter went crazy.
 Monsters spent the next five minutes
 Lumbering out of their element. The brush
 Feels its way through the light.
 (Bob Perelman, "Mature Ejaculation" in PRIMER)

My perverse parts are my partners, they are plural. The whole greater than the sum of its parts. Bernstein again:

...when you put bits and pieces of language together you get...the process resembling Dr. Frankenstein's stitching together pieces of flesh and engendering not dead matter but a simulacrum of human being and a being in its own right. This is the story of the poem, its internal narration as the kidneys and liver and narrates the body's history...

So it's my very own body, a very large hope.

—Bruce Boone

MUCH MORE TO LIVE

AND OUR FACES, MY HEART, BRIEF AS PHOTOS by John Berger (Pantheon, 1984, \$12.95/\$5.95)

The publisher by a word on the back has characterized this book as being about Art, but I will be showing it to you as the work of literature that it is.

There is something oddly engaging at this time about the use in the title of the word "heart" to mean beloved. After all, time has passed, and yet romance is evidently yet young. This is the sort of phrase, and there are few of them, which make us feel a respectful nostalgia for the present of our lives.

Occasionally in this writing there is a moment of disingenuousness. It is the case with this writer of slowing down, of bringing to ground for a moment a mind and a mind full of telling, the tendency of which is always to go upward and always on. There is an element of mystery among this simplicity, and in the fact that words do not always satisfactorily state the obvious. Sometimes the inadequacy of words mysteriously stresses the ineffable.

A photo is a topographic buttress in time. It catches time and space inseparable in an intersection of recognition. It may stress the one or the other but when at its best it stresses the looker. It is because of the book that the looker does not fall into reminiscence or float forward into that speculative recognizance which can only dream life. This is the intersection of the renewable utterance of this writing.

This writer recounts the vision of his being before his conception. I remember Buckminster Fuller describing the sensations of his first thinking to and then turning himself over, when a baby. He illustrated for his audience the physics of this, lying on a table, now over eighty, and turning on it. The writer of this present writing has returned himself over, before infancy, to face the brilliance and immanence of recognition.

There is in this writing a delicacy of feeling without inhibition. It is directed towards life, as such. The message, if it were to be expressed in summation, is that there is enough life to go around. Given the simplicity of this most positive of gestures, it is recognized in and by this writing that no such summation is required. The accretion of incidence and reflection, rather, builds toward the understanding of this undeniable and trivial completion. It is logically positive and, as completions go, it is the most open among them.

Description is seduction. And description of the mind as it relates to images, events, to literature and art, to feeling and to life, is doubly seductive, because it describes a mind already seduced. The prior seduction is evidenced in the decision to describe, and it is emphasized by what it does to encourage our capacity to attend, by what it has made of itself in advance to better be the worthy occasion of our seduction.

There is a brilliant roundness about these small narrations. They are curved like space in light. They appear to choose their own occasion, but not their narrator, who is casually unnecessary. Their resolution is never impertinent, although it always has the touch of the exclusive, and often touchingly so. We sense that the work of narration has been

done, but only because we see how seamlessly it has kept apace of the work of life whose business it has been about.

This writer has given to us this book in the form of an address to another, who is absent. That other is more absent than the writer from us, because that other is absent to ourselves and to the writer, also. The absence of that one explains the subjects of the meditations of this writing, that they are of time, and of space. A one is only absent when absent through both distances and, feeling the unity of those absences, we know the one absent from us, and absent in us. We then mind time, we then mind space. It is this focus, comparable to the focus of genius, which gives to the meditations of this writing their quality of felt knowledge. The writer, touched twice at once by feelings for an absent loved one, touches twice at once the absent readers. Such that all are present.

This writer brings us as readers full circle from the birth of the ideas, which at first he has not known he is going to express, to their soft death, in fatal optimism, at the return of the departed loved one, for the world, for the beloved as world, and for the world beloved.

For this writer there are no emblems and no pacifiers, neither art nor love is entertained as such. He has clear eyes which he trusts, a mind which doesn't interfere, and a prose style exacting in its beauty. He distrusts power in its usual forms, if he doesn't abhor it. He stakes his claim neatly within the power of language, because language judges what it states in stating it. That is how language advances. Implicit in its advance we may fathom and obtain explicit advances for our living in this world of actual events and explications.

—Alan Davies

BOOK DESIGN AND PUBLISHING, AN APPROACH

The cylinder is central at this point to reproduction of text. Lenses, ink rollers, impression, blanket and fountain cylinders each contribute to one reproductive process or another. At the moment when a blank sheet is transformed into one or more text pages, the text either unrolls or focuses onto the sheet. These cylinders, basic mechanical units of transformation, inhere to a principle of revelation. Literally an unrolling (prophecy) or a focusing (augury), the mechanical reproduction of text concentrates effort on accessibility beyond a unique copy. (1) Precision is not a requisite of the process nor does any intrinsic ethical value proceed to the text from its method of reproduction (though certain ethical, aesthetic and political values can be contained in the context of a reproductive method, e. g. "Printed in the U. S. A. by Union Labor"). Prior to as well as coincident with this reproductive effort, a publisher makes an effort which, I would argue, is an interpretive reading.

Reading: effort channeled into a text. The "first" reading leads to the publisher's (2) rejection or acceptance of a given work. In one sense, this is somewhat conventional, evaluative effort. But, of course, certain characteristics of the work and the publisher come into play: length, popularity, taste, perhaps commercial potential. The publisher may collaborate (not always on equal terms) with the writing: editing.

Before it reaches bookstores/subscribers, the published work is a well-read text. (This does not simply mean that it is proof-read.) In the "age of mechanical reproduction," resources are not committed till the text is evaluated, till it is read. The more limited the resources (roughly the smaller the press), the closer a reading the work tends to get. But that's the first evaluative reading (important

& something to keep in mind when you take a book out of the library that's been there for three years and you're the first person to take it out). I would argue that there is a second, important reading; that it is, in a way, a more thorough and less conscious reading: the book as object is the result of this reading.

As I see it, there are two opposite approaches: "humble" and "possessive".

Effort in the former case is something which is devoted and, at its best, devotional (to the spirit of the text). The reader always, to some extent, humbles him/herself to the text (the pleasure of the text originates in the silence you maintain within eye/earshot of another's voice). The better (not "the more"; this isn't quantitative) the silence, the more complicit the reader is in the author's articulation. The existence of a text is not a question here. Given a text as a complex series of proposed meanings, the reader's "creation" of meaning amounts to a series of choices parallel to some of the text's many proposals. Involvement with these proposals does not automatically validate the reader's choices; the decisive factor is the level of complicity. The reader becomes complicit by apprehending the hierarchy of meanings which the text proposes. I would not argue that there is an absolute hierarchy, but that some hierarchies are more inclusive, that some gather in more and deeper meanings than others.

Any interpretation will, of course, close off others. But just as we consider some texts "open" and others "closed" (to multiple interpretations and responses) so interpretations can be seen as being open or closed to including the text's multiplicity.

In any event, the reader responds, creates meaning out of an already existing text. The responses are sometimes spontaneous (say, laughing), sometimes premeditated (Ronald Johnson's

RADI OS). Always a transformation which, as I said earlier, in the case of a publisher results in an actual physical change (from typescript to printed, bound pages).

The degree of complicity a publisher assumes in the text results from that publisher's humility and the quality of his/her attention. The publisher then responds to this complicity through gestures which lend the work optional cohesion (designing, typesetting, binding) and sometimes attempts to force the work into a context (designing, quotations by reviewers, dates, bibliography, biography, advertisements etc.). More specific examples come later in this essay.

The result, the book, is therefore a kind of evidence. As far as I understand legal procedure and idiom, evidence is presented then rejected or accepted; neither anyone's general possession of it nor its existence automatically identifies its validity.

Publication as an act of possession consists in a large part of commoditizing the book once it's an object. The difference, for my purposes, between commodity and object: the impulse behind the creation of the book as an object is a use intrinsic (or thought to be so) to the text (3); the impulse behind the creation of a commodity is its place in a system of commerce & (more importantly) proprietorship.

In an essay about Laura Riding, Benjamin Friedlander (taking a line through Karl Marx) writes:

Criticism substantiates literature and makes it visible, through interpretation as well as promotion. (The university, for example, both publishes poetry and gives it readers, in order to create an audience for a specific view of literary history.) At the same time, however,

that aspect of criticism we call characterization freezes the gestures that direct our reading, and thus obscures the poem's complexities by turning literature into 'something bound and determined.' (POETICS JOURNAL 4, p. 35)

The relationship between possession and bondage is at once too self-evident and too complicated to discuss here. But certainly one of the means (employed most frequently by academic publishers) to possess the text is through the "authorized version." Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc. in their "Rinehart Editions" series run the same self-agrandizing statement on the back of each volume: "Accurate texts, outstanding editions, prize winning design" & "Typography and design repeatedly honored by the American Institute of Graphic Arts." Their edition of Melville's REDBURN has this "Note on the text":

The text of this edition of Redburn was established by [three names] for the Northwestern Newberry Edition of THE WRITINGS OF HERMAN MELVILLE, under the auspices of the United States Health Education and Welfare office of Education. It has been approved by the Center for Editions of American Authors (MLA) which operates under grants chiefly from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is used here by permission.

To specify just one objectionable thing among many in this statement: the "It" in the last sentence is not the text meaning the words of the Newberry Edition. "It" is a reduced photographic facsimile of the pages of the Newberry Edition. The Newberry Melville did win prizes for design. Many Rinehart editions are facsimiles of previously published work—none that I've looked at mention this.

The ideas involved in Rinehart editions carry over into reading as such lazy motions by readers as accepting standard

interpretations of a text, maintaining the authority of a given edition over another way of personally maintaining authority as well as distracting attention from the text itself and thereby losing the text in the edition (some academic editions of literary work invite such distraction by the sometimes ludicrous placement of notes and variants which some editor or designer decided to place somewhere novel in order to be remembered, e.g. the Crowell edition of Fielding's JOSEPH ANDREWS).

To be clear: I'm not against the Newberry Edition of Melville, the Florida Edition of Sterne, or the SUNY Edition of Fenimore Cooper, I am opposed to the attitudes about publishing found in them because, since these editions have the double authority of being canonical literature & being sanctioned by one MLA or another, they can have adverse influences on the publication of new work & contribute to the general academic approach to literature maintained by universities.

The word "established" seems to sum up the act of possession found in these editions. The "established" text implies, most importantly, that an established, single interpretation exists behind it; what else could validate "emendations"?

Not only does literature as object become "bound and determined" by the impulse to establish, but writing as well, as exemplified in this textual note from the Florida edition of TRISTRAM SHANDY:

506. 3-12 But when... he can.] Sterne loses his way in this long sentence, which would be helped by inserting "he" before "must say" (line 11), and perhaps "is" before "engaged" (line 6); its meaning is clear enough, however, without emendation.

The "he" the editor would have us add would function in the sentence as the subject. That having Corporal Trim lose the subject of his sentence in a set of complicated qualifying

clauses parallels Tristram's "problem" throughout the narrative apparently never occurred to the editor. Sterne may or may not have lost his way. Be it intentional or an "error" (the author's or the typesetter's), this sentence's lack of a subject has a value that was lost on the editor who was most concerned with emending the text according to rules of conventional English. Establishment functions as normalization and therefore as the appropriation of literature to stand for the norm. Through establishment, the publisher exploits the text by an accepted formula: authority derives from established authenticity (or, the proved real \approx the true). The act of possession then consists of a publisher exploiting the text to maintain standards, using the standards to create a tone of authority which gives the work market value.

First editions are harder to evaluate. The spirit of the text has not yet been embodied by a publicly accessible object and so this first embodiment as one can help overcome the publisher's act of possession. If the first edition is from a contemporary author, a contemporary design (even an ugly, unsuitable and inappropriate one) can at least be said to be within the spirit of the writer's time. The transformation involved in publishing (especially a first edition) seems to end in greater accessibility of that work published, so who could be charged with attempting to possess what they're instrumental in giving to others? What's more, since first publication gives the work a chance in the world, the debt which the publisher owes the writer is somewhat obscured by the "break" the writer gets from the publisher.

Even more complicated, in the small press world, friends often publish each other. Intention is difficult to evaluate in many cases and, likewise, results are not always easy to judge. What is clear is that a publisher owes the writer something and that this obligation is often obscured. In his essay "Disabling Professions," Ivan Illich points out

how a backward relationship exists in various professions. To maintain prestige and for commercial gain, institutions like the medical profession (represented primarily by doctors) propagate the fiction of being a much greater social necessity than they really are and hence assume more authority than they should. Illich describes the moral overtones of this authority:

Used as a noun "need" is the individual off-print of a professional pattern; it is a plastic-foam replica of the cast with which professionals coin their staple; it is the advertised shape out of which consumers are made. To be ignorant or unconvinced of one's own needs has become the unforgivable anti-social act. The good citizen is he who imputes stapled needs to himself with such conviction that he drowns out any desire for alternatives, much less the renunciation of need.

So in publishing. We are trained to think that to succeed as writers we must be published. Writers who succumb to the illusion that being published is more important than or equally important as actually writing essentially become consumers of the publisher's goods and subscribers to publisher standards. It may be true that writers need publishers, but when this becomes the prevalent syntax of need (as it is today) then literature's availability is invariably determined by economic and normalizing motives, by institutions which arbitrate literary standards for profit. Emily Dickinson is an extreme, familiar example of this: little of her work came out in her lifetime; when the poems did come out, publishers radically normalized them.

Or look at *THE MEANTIME* by William Bronk (Elizabeth Press): in the paperback at least, the text was fit into a book which was a standard printer's length, 48 pages ("24-up"). The text is not that long and consequently there are more blank pages in the book than pages of poetry. The Elizabeth Press's characteristic approach to the page makes

matters worse here: the small type and ample margins (used so effectively by D. B. Updike as in, for example, *SOME POEMS AND A DEVOTION* by John Donne — New Directions, 1941) only make the Bronk poems look more lost and disembodied. If there's no debt owed the writer, then blank books would be the major publication possible for (even) Rinehart Editions.

The idea is not to capture the spirit of the text, but to let the spirit of the text capture the book. The easiest way to do the latter is to produce the blandest possible design such as *THE MAINTAINS* by Clark Coolidge from This Press. I'm not claiming the book was designed to be bland as an easy way out. If anything, *THE MAINTAINS*, being one of the "major products of the non-referential tendency" (L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E sup. 1, Silliman) should be designed & published w/o even the possible allusions of color, i.e. as generically as possible. The question of course comes up: is blandness in design equivalent to non-referentiality? Or, given a text which is non-referential, can one create design which is itself in the spirit of the text? I'm taking as a given that there are successful designs which capture the spirit of a given work and that the designer's responsibility should be prioritized within a production budget as follows: legibility; suitability; durability. If the spirit of a work makes illegibility suitable, then legibility would mean making clear the text's self effacement. (4)

The merger between text and object almost doesn't exist in *THE MAINTAINS*, but since the object is so unimposing, since we're reading for the text, the blandness of the book's design won't bother us. Yet, how much stronger and more appealing is the merger in *QUARTZ HEARTS* (same author, same publisher).

The U. C. Press edition of Olson's *MAXIMUS* is one of the most complicated editions to judge: the work was never thoroughly compiled by Olson; Olson already has a reputation as a "monument builder"; the editor (George Butterick) seems intent on evading the issue of himself; and, of course, it's such a large work. This edition, much more than the three previously

published incomplete compilations, stresses Olson ("the Big Man") as maker of the poems. As Andrew Schelling points out, the map of Gloucester which made up the cover of the Cape Colliard MAXIMUS is here displaced by a picture of Olson; the map is now a half title for the first section of the book. Butterick has made many good decisions as have the designers and publisher of the book. However, the basic premise behind the book's production is unity, the basic impulse is to create a single integrated work called MAXIMUS to place on the shelves of University libraries. Butterick writes, "The problem throughout was to recognize the known voices of Maximus." Should a publisher and editor lend themselves to a writer's intention of building a huge masterwork when, in fact, that's not what the poet left? They've chosen to and certain things are emphasized by this choice.

Field composition is restricted almost exclusively to fields planted with row crops (Butterick: "If it was handwritten, it had to be able to be transcribed with certainty, not only as far as individual words were concerned, but also the poet's intended order of lines and sections."). Yes, there are a few poems in the book which aren't horizontally and vertically aligned (III. II0, III. I20-I21 and III. I04), but might there be more? In OMOO, Melville reproduces a "round robin" which is a way of signing a document so the names form a circle. In this way, no one name can be singled out as first (and hence ringleader). I just can't imagine Olson didn't know that and, equally, I can't understand what vertical line order has to do with anything if the text as it comes to us isn't aligned that way. I wonder if the holograph reproduced in MAXIMUS as III. I04 would be there if the previous page didn't end with the line "Into the Diagram". That line makes it all better, no? No scholar confronted with Olson's scrawl amidst the hundreds of typeset pages would have any trouble considering the disorderly III. I04 as an example of "the Diagram".

Notice how tidy and convenient it is for me, writing an essay, to refer to "III. I04". Notationability is certainly what's gained by having what Butterick considers all of MAXIMUS in one volume. By "notationability", I mean that quality of a book which makes it easy to refer to specific places in the book. For example, with a spine about one quarter of an inch thick, Robert Grenier's A DAY AT THE BEACH (Roof, 1985) has poor notationability: the pages aren't numbered. But, they're very attractive, readable pages; a critic would have problems telling you what passage s/he's referring to, but a reader can mark things with little scraps of paper and have no trouble keeping track of things. So, it seems to me, notationability matters most to critics. MAXIMUS was designed for critics not (not even critical) readers.

MAXIMUS is heavy (if you read it in bed, it will be a noticable weight in your lap); it does not encourage you to read it anywhere but at a table; it discourages you from bringing it anywhere. From the monumental ALL CAPITALS on the title page to large page size (the same as, say Jenson's 1470's edition of Caesar's book about Gaul) to the fact that the editor refrains from a preface only to chime in with an afterward (so nothing comes between you and the work, but he gets the last word), this book is designed not as a book, but as the book. And so, the person that owns this book owns MAXIMUS.

What was left by Olson was two separate books and many sheaves of unpublished poems. But what was left was not what the publisher wants to offer. Didn't the poet, before his death, clearly intend for there to be a hulk of a book called MAXIMUS? Wasn't Olson as important as Pound and Zukofsky? Mustn't there be a book from him like THE CANTOS and "A"? I contend these questions were answered incorrectly and that the motivation behind the mistake was (at least for the publisher) possession. The book is most easily managable for a critic, at a desk, making notes. It's price and size make it most

easily owned by libraries (University ones at that—few public library budgets could accomodate a book with such a limited audience). The book's most lasting impression: this is the book that Olson built. But it isn't. It is the book Butterick constructed from the material Olson left.

For the reader who might be frightened off by the book's size, for those who can't afford the complete volume and for undergraduate classes, there will no doubt be a "selected" MAXIMUS. Butterick will make the selection; he will again have the power to arbitrate Olson's reputation. The "selected" will be more widely read and its inclusions and deletions will only be significant to those who know the whole book. Its implication will be clear: there is a big book from which these "gems" are taken. It will compete with the New Directions SELECTED WRITINGS (edited by Robert Creeley) and, I suspect, the U. C. Press will win out. Naturally, the U. C. selected MAXIMUS will be loaded with "apparatus" (footnotes, comments on each selection's place in the "whole", etc.) or, perhaps, it will just be cross-referenced to Butterick's GUIDE.

No matter how MAXIMUS appears, it will have a limited audience. However, the U. C. Press edition definitely seems to favor a stagnant, academic audience. Better, I think, to have reprinted the three separate compilations and only to have incorporated the changes Olson wrote into the books which appeared in his lifetime. (Olson did not compile volume III, but shortly before his death delegated Butterick to arrange it from poems written after the second volume appeared.) Then, U. C. could have published a fourth volume of unincluded poems (in this volume, Butterick could have suggested an order for all the poems more overtly). In this fourth volume, any poems which could not be "transcribed with certainty" (but still seemed important) could have been printed en face with the holograph. The editor would still have made editorial choices and the publisher would still have made publisher's choices, but the choices would have been more overt.

A boxed set of these four books could have been offered to those collectors and institutions that like to own special editions. Each of the four would be more affordable and more encouraging to the curious (though the total price of the four in hardcover would probably be more than the present U. C. edition.) The smaller books would be easier to handle in hardcover and much easier to publish and handle as paperbacks.

NOTES

1. The order of the relationships is important here: reading, reproduction, access, reading relate temporally—they are not so much cause and effect as construction (the basement does not cause the first floor). Beginning with the already written work, the publisher manifests his/her reading by adding a new layer of corporeality onto the text: The parallel reproductive process—which can be seen as a close parallel to an oral presentation of the text with the difference that an oral presentation has duration, a publication substitutes bulk for duration. We must accept that making a work accessible reveals that work. That unrolling a work functions as prophecy in that it anticipates the necessity of its own forward motion. Augury was a way in which signs were focused in order to convey information which the signs themselves already contained.
2. Throughout, I'm assuming that a "publisher" is a person or some kind of editorial entity trying to imitate one.
3. Resulting in the object taking its place in a system which complements that use. The ideal system for a literary work is not extrinsic to that work, but is shaped by the place which the work & the writer takes within a literary community. All work allies itself with preexisting traditions & factions & is more or less successful.

4. Durability as the highest priority would imply a sort of morbid preoccupation with precious archival shelf stuffing rather than with books as reading matter. Acid free paper, by all means, whenever possible. The makers of materials should be pressured to manufacture as durable materials as possible; long lasting materials in bookmaking should be more of a norm and less of a choice.

—David I. Sheidlower

FROM THE SPICER CIRCLE

An Excerpt from Chapter 18: Conflicts

Dissent ripened in the summer of 1962 to a glorious vintage:

June 5, 1962

Dear Jack,

Here are the few poems since the Set of Romantic Hymns. The only one written in the East is the "Thank You For Love", that may be an occasional verse for I wrote it in response to Creeley's book. It's because of a fealty I would not break that now when my work can so little please, I mean to send it to you: that in your opposition, the power of your demand is kept over me. I don't mean your directives from North Beach —tho I must mean those directives in part for "North Beach" you reveal as our Glastonbury—but the orders of the

imagination: this set of the first seven of the grail poems. Forgotten, "a ship of singing women" must have given me recall of the Wynken-Blynken-and-Nod boat (not of women but of child Dutch sailors) that came into the H. D. Book. And now, this morning re-reading your grail poems, I realized I had "missed the boat"—the other boat, the barque of fey singers: after the little boat of dreams, the "bateau de lueurs remene par un mousse" Breton calls it in a poem I am translating in commission I've accepted.

Lewis Brown tells me your aversion extends to Jess, and with another tale Harry Jacobus relates of being deliberately confused with Jess, the rumour would seem to be true. I understand and must go on working under the charge of how compromised my poetry is: the onus is not unjust. I have, after all, only to compare the immediacy of these grail poems and my own habits. But where, if that is the charge, Harry's work and Jess's is despised or mistrusted, the charge is unjust, you've lost sight.

Yet, as with Kenneth Rexroth after his attack on Marianne Moore as a "fascist," tho I accept and even determine the separation as a truth of things, there remains the fact that it is a separation in friendship. I'm not talking now about a separation in poetry—Rexroth no longer operates as a poet—and you and I do. And besides, the wench is dead. But I am talking about the offense against inner orders of a household (as the truth of Marianne Moore was and is an inner order; and the truth of Jess's art and spirit is an inner order).

Robert

...

Katie's "Bourbon Street" bar was one of eight bars on the north side of this single Green Street block where the Spicer Circle flourished. Her bar was for a few months in 1962 the center of activity, the poetry-socialization events of the summer being a series of readings from a table in

the bar. A week following the dispatch of the letter quoted above, he sent another, this time discussing an invitation I had sent him—as some kind of impressario of readings, a position real or imagined—asking Duncan to read at Katie's. I cannot think of this invitation as bona fide, for the interworkings of the Spicer-Duncan relationship—its troubles of the time—were certainly known to everyone in Spicer's group. Too, I remember the painter Henry Jacobus telling me that Duncan had heard I had publicly misread—mocked—a poem of his at just such a reading at Katie's; this I confirm, though the circumstances were drunken, too unserious to merit anger I believed. I was simply a puppet of Spicer's nightly play, willing to be so. Duncan was but a distant, if revered name to me. In his letter he says "he's (Ellingham) prettier than Mr. Schevill"—meaning James Schevill, in those years director of the San Francisco State College Poetry Center, a position Duncan had himself once held—which implies that Duncan and I had met. Even this I do not remember. I can recollect images of these readings, a Spicer Circle author presenting work against a more or less stilled room of people, the hush of activity without words coming from the pool tables in the back room. Patrons looked on, some interested, some bored, from the bar or seated at tables more or less successfully positioned to view the reader/speaker. The cash register would ring; a jar of Polish sausages would be opened and a customer would be served such food with a refreshed drink. Harry Jacobus also told me Duncan had wondered to him if somehow I were connected by name with the Anglo-Irish 19th-century poet William Allingham—the confusion, or snub, carried into Duncan's letter:

June 12, 1962

Dear Jack,

I won't be reading at the Bourbon Street series. I couldn't finally stomach cooperating with Mr. Allingham. Altho he's prettier than Mr Schevill, and North Beach is more authentic a locale than his Poetry Center—he don't

write better than his Poetry Center counterpart. But all I said in reply to Allingham's somehow inevitably school-marmish letter (he's as infallible at putting it wrong as Ruth Witt-Diamant) was no. While I delight in putting down a solidly insensitive ass like Schevill, it's only too clear Allingham is nonsolid and sensitive. Shakey, I think, rather than fluid, as far as nonsolids go.

You will note from the enclosed that I concur with you and Robin in the better opening for Forced Images, transferring "to promote the poem" to another passage; at the same time that I haven't gone along with your proposed pruning or clearing job on the thicket of Duncanese Byzantium etc. later.

And that you have not only given me the title of A New Poem, but in your earlier objection to joint, you've given me a turn forward or back or round about. Jess, re joint sends you the following passage (after A New Poem was completed today)

"You've missed the soup and the fish," she said.
"Put on the joint!" And the waiters set a leg of mutton before Alice, who looked at it rather anxiously, as she had never had to carve a joint before.

"You look a little shy: let me introduce you to that leg of mutton," said the Red Queen. "Alice—Mutton: Mutton—Alice." The leg of mutton got up in the dish and made a little bow to Alice! and Alice returned the bow, not knowing whether to be frightened or amused.

"May I give you a slice?" she said, taking up the knife and fork, and looking from one Queen to the other.

"Certainly not," the Red Queen said very decidedly: "It isn't etiquette to cut anyone you've been introduced to. Remove the joint!"

Robert

No social event presided over by the Red and White Queens of Alice's Looking Glass would rival the entertainment inadvertently prepared by Robin Blaser for the reception of

Jack Spicer's THE HOLY GRAIL....

...Robin Blaser and Jim Felts occupied an apartment at Clay and Baker streets in San Francisco's Pacific Heights. The rooms were fine, the address good. By standards of the Spicer/North Beach aesthetic, the location and decor suffered from lack of bohemian shambles and improvisation; Blaser's homes, on the contrary, have always reflected his sense of high taste and have been supported by his lifelong habit of collecting the best objects he could afford in paintings, books, sculpture, and objets.... Spicer never tired of joking about Blaser's enjoyment of luxury; he was more reserved about Duncan's and Jess's interests in the same, probably because he sensed that their collections came from an interest in the subjects of their books, paintings, and artifacts rather than their value as objects, a point he would have doubted, if unfairly, with Blaser. His own puritanical, unluxuried middle-classness never showed more than when in circumstances where wealth, or even its admiration, was displayed and could be criticized.

John Button and his lover, Scott Burton, had just come for a visit from New York to San Francisco. The "evening" Robin Blaser had planned for John and Scott was also to be the occasion for the first reading of Jack Spicer's THE HOLY GRAIL. The mixture of celebrations was not to prove a happy one.

Stan Persky suggested this: "Obviously Robin had gotten overexcited by John Button being in town. He hoped everybody would like each other." Gerry Fabian recalls that Robin had been playing tape recordings of Henry Purcell's THE FAERIE QUEENE, which Jack Spicer, when he arrived, turned off. Robin Blaser recalls, too, Purcell's Arthurian music. One understands these musical selections to be

orchestrated with a view to Spicer's reading of THE HOLY GRAIL, in the same spirit Blaser had played a record of the American folk-pop ballad, "The Battle of New Orleans," on the occasion of the premier reading of THE HEADS OF THE TOWN UP TO THE AETHER the year before.... Blaser told me, years later, that Spicer arrived "drunk, after dinner as arranged, with friends."... Spicer reacted "negatively" to "the atmosphere"—intensely so. Robin remembered the dinner guests not wanting a reading, which condemned it to failure....

"Jack read the poems to me that night in the bedroom; we were alone."

... We are left with a private, or non-public reading that has become a general memory, an event interesting to social history if less so to cultural history.... Robin also confirms that Spicer attacked the paintings exhibited by Jess Collins and Tom Field which are mentioned in the letter of Robert Duncan next to be quoted. (Strange, too, for Spicer had always held the work of these painters in high regard, especially Tom Field's, whose lifestyle and creative processes resembled his own.)...

... Robert Duncan had this to say about the event, when I interviewed him in 1983: "It was gruesome. Jess and I were invited over to hear Jack read, and Jack had brought the gang around; we had sort of been guaranteed that the gang wouldn't be there. Jess couldn't stand them by that time, and they were bad boys as ever. Primack and Persky and George Stanley and Jack Spicer—John Button was there with his boyfriend."

I supplied the name, "Scott Burton."

"They bullied Scott because 'Oh well, so he's named after the author of...' you know." Duncan told this with less than resigned exasperation, even twenty-odd years after the event. "They were really like nasty boys. I think Jess would never take anybody's guarantee again that somebody wouldn't be somewhere when we were; by that time he'd banned Jack's name. But Jack through all this could read THE GRAIL and what I'm circling around was that Persky and Primack and Stanley and Robin all conveyed that THE GRAIL had some overwhelming condemnation and real disgust with the politics of the day and so forth. Well, I never thought that, that isn't how I hear THE GRAIL at all. I think much more important, Jack stays by the more important thing, because it was really a suspicion about life."

Duncan continued, "But I could never see, even, the so-called politics in LANGUAGE," anticipating Spicer's next book. "They seem frivolous in its impact." Returning to his feelings concerning what he viewed as the obnoxiousness of the after-dinner guests, Duncan said, "They thought they were tremendous; how tremendous Jack was. So that he was in a typical existentialist alienation, and they were reading that this was a political alienation, when actually he's alienated from politics too. He can move Trotskyites around like he moves ghosts like he moves anything: they're all inside the poem."...

August 29, 1962

Dear Robin,

This morning, still worn thin from the whole Spicer scene, I most regret that we didn't anticipate the whole thing and take our leave before the gang arrived. But in the future do send us a telegram when plans for the evening change. I've sat thru the last evening of knowing sneers

at Tom's [Field] painting or Vancouver poets—and that after managing some sixteen years of Spicer venom against Stein or Pound (could anything have been worse than his humors at the Pound meetings in 1949?)—yes, it all seems worse now, unbearable, painful without relief. The spectacle of George Stanley's toadying does not improve the show. I am glad that the play's [ADAM'S WAY, by Duncan, with Blaser acting a part] to be done at the subscription series, for that will surely mean that Jack won't attend.

There must be explanations to Tom Parkinson [professor of poetry at U. C. Berkeley, and friend of the three poets] for I cannot endure the idea of a dinner with Jack's charming and elegant company—I'll have to leave Creeley to that exposure and in a selfish interest in my own pleasure go to Hilda Burton's with Jess for dinner.

You had oddly enuf then an evening that was a turning point. August 28th, 1962 terminated my friendship of any kind with a long suffered friend—the idea of Spicer is preferable to the actual presence—

Robert

—Lewis Ellingham

OBSERVATIONS ON A BRICK

A friend stopped over several evenings ago and said look, I have something to show you. He dipped into his

knapsack and produced a ziplock bag containing a one pound brick of hashish. Compact, sharply aromatic, black and shiny on the outside, where it had been broken it gave way to a rich green manure-like color at the center. It was firmly impressed with an oval seal that read in large letters FREEDOM OF AFGHANISTAN.

The lore that accompanies the brick of hash—and which I believe contains at least a granule of truth, given the dearth, to my knowledge and to the witness of others, of hashish on the US market in recent years—the story is that US customs are, and this no doubt means have been instructed to, are turning their heads aside, permitting it to pass unimpeded through the border, since revenues as so plainly stated on the hash itself go to support mujaheddin resistance to Soviet occupation.

The hash is doubtless Afghani—or let me say it could also be Pakistani, given frequent similarity between products of the various autonomous regions of the Hindukush. Middle Eastern it is not, nor North African, nor Nepali. And no one needs to stamp it with such a declaration, as if to infuse it with the perfume of political correctness, in order to boost sales—hash will always sell on the American market.

I couldn't taste any off the brick I saw the other night since it was still in transit as an intact brick, but in the days to come there promises to be a plentiful supply. It reminds me of travelling years ago in that part of the world; and one of my profoundest regrets (equal in poignancy I think, at this point, and no doubt one day to surpass, basic male regret over women one never slept with) is that I never made it to Afghanistan while in Asia. Because it looks like I am unlikely to in any foreseeable future. At Bamian there are two immense Buddhas chiselled out of cliff walls that dominate the valley. One stands 175 feet tall, the other 115. Photographs taken from the top of them show snowy peaks of the Hindukush so austere and lovely they make your heart ache. The innards

of these Buddhas are honeycombed with monk cells and adorned with Grecian style murals. Bamian is one of the foremost locations on the planet I yearn to visit, but like Angkor, will probably to my great sorrow have to be missed this lifetime.

When the soldier-thugs of Islam rode into Afghanistan centuries ago from Turkey, beating their way into the Buddhist mountains with the fervor the ideologue unleashes on the infidel, those two tremendous Buddhas stood waiting. Their placid Greco-Indian forms, draped in sharply folded garments of Mediterranean design, provoked a fury of vandalist agitation among the Moslems. But the best the invaders could do was to years later drag in cannon and ineffectually chip off the facial features of those huge unmoving statues with a barage of artillery fire. According to reports from the region, the blank-faced statues stand serene and intact today.

Bamian lies less than a hundred miles to the west and north of Kabul. Kabul is a city currently under siege, not a place a traveller wants to visit without a clear idea of what he or she is up to—and not without some familiarity with either diplomacy or firearms. When I was in India tales came down the well travelled road from the Kyber Pass, telling of the flourishing hash shops where massive bricks of hashish stood piled in stacks, and how you bought fist size chunks for the cost of a cup of tea. Mortar and small arms fire keep the city edgy all the time now, and most of the hash shops have shut down. But young Soviet soldiers like to take the edge off the constant uneasiness a state of siege induces by smoking Afghanistan's high altitude crop. It shaves the rough edges from an uneasy occupation, but sometimes produces a disastrous side-effect.

Afghanistan is reknowned for its melons. When the Moslem

rulers of India looked back longingly at the mountain life they'd left behind, left for the searing summer heat and overly tranquil plains of north India, they poetically recalled the melons they so much missed. Melons and a cool mountain breeze are the collective dream of the foreigner caught in India's stifling pre-monsoon weather. The inhabitants of Kabul still delight in melons. Mr. Babrak Karmal, the president of Afghanistan—a marionette whose strings issue from Moscow, and a man both criminal and heretic in the eyes of those he nominally wields jurisdiction over—Mr. Karmal in a great display of luxury has a truckload of melons delivered to his palace each morning. The newspaper story that informed me of Karmal's habit added a ghoulish footnote. Apparently the rebels, who dominate the city streets after dark in a sort of day/night trade-off with the Soviet-backed Afghani army, have a favorite trick. This is to insure that each truckload of melons, when it unloads at the president's palace and the melons spill out, also tumbles forth the severed heads of two or three Soviet soldiers.

A weary, homesick, youthful soldier—demoralized by thankless warfare against the stone-willed mujaheddin, and heavily stoned on hashish—is no doubt easy prey for the assassin's knife. (It is worth remembering that the original assassins were "hashishins"—a sort of secret police drugged on hashish and Islamic ideology. Alaodin, known as the Sheik of the Mountains, dispatched them in a hypnotic frenzy to slay those people he'd designated "enemies of Paradise." Marco Polo narrated the grim story in detail in his book of TRAVELS, and hashish has never lost its sinister overtones.)

Despite Soviet attempts to control the Afghani countryside, they can't penetrate into the rebels' mountain strongholds with much success. The air is too thin at the critical altitudes to ballast a helicopter, so they manage as well as they can by destroying select civilian targets. Trade of exotic wares passes more or less unhampered through the guerrilla

controlled mountain zones, and my friend's brick demonstrates how permeable the international borders are.

I have not located any accounts by early merchants or travellers documenting the flow of hashish along those mountain routes. A certain amount must have passed that way for many years because during the period of active trade on the Silk Road, the principal highway from Central Asia into India passed directly through Bamian. The Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang descended through those mountains in 630 AD and noted the wealth of the region. A Buddhist kingdom when he stopped there, all caravans in and out of India rested and replenished their supplies at its inns. Just north of present-day Kabul Hsuan Tsang encountered his first Hindu ascetics. They had plastered their bodies with ash, and tantric-fashion wore skull necklaces draped from their necks. From the description they were evidently worshippers of Shiva—you encounter similar sadhus on all pilgrimage routes in India today.

Shiva is the inveterate loner among gods, lurking in cemeteries and caking himself with cow-dung and ashes of the recently cremated. His followers emulate him, tearing themselves by dramatic means out of the social fabric. They are effectively "dead" to any civilized constraints. Drumming and dancing as their ecstatic god does, they still frequent cemeteries, and exhibit strange and impressive control over their psychophysiological functions. On their travels in mountainous terrain they adore nothing so much as the consumption of tremendous quantities of hashish.

The sadhu smokes hash from a chillum, a tube-like pipe that is abruptly flared at its bowl-end. The hash is pulverized and mixed with a wad of cheap tobacco, then rolled and rubbed thoroughly in the grooved palm of one hand with the thumb of the other hand. This operation lasts many minutes—sometimes hours. It is a sacrament, and not subject to considerations of time. Eventually a thick, resinous clump is achieved, and

this loaded firmly but not too tight into the chillum. A damp cloth wrapped around the stem of the chillum prevents burning sparks from shooting into the smoker's throat.

Touching the chillum reverentially but with animation to his forehead, the sadhu invokes Shiva, usually with a heated "Bom Shiva Shankar!" He lays a lit match or live coal into the bowl, cups hands around the pipestem, and sucks through the hollow formed by his two hands with vast convulsive intakes...the spiced tobacco roars, and the sadhu, chest swollen, explodes in a violent seizure of coughing: clouds of drugsmoke burst from nose and mouth, face blackens, veins stand out like rope on neck, eyes burn red with blood—

—and with a challenging gesture he thrusts the chillum towards his nearest companion. For a grand moment the Himalayan tantric personality sheds its husk, emerges angry and libidinous like Shiva dancing carnage on the graveyard planet—

But sadhus no longer ascend the rugged trails in Afghanistan that were once sacred to Shiva. 1200 years ago the sword of Islam put to flight the quieter, more tolerant Buddhist civilization. Caravans quit negotiating the sharp mountain passes. And now, with the newly arrived warplanes and artillery of Russia, Shiva no longer requires a loyal, scabrous band of mendicants in order to keep Death's disasterous nearness before the common eye. Drumming and dancing on the charnel ground is a continuous fact in Soviet occupied Afghanistan.

—Andrew Schelling

PROLOGUE TO LANGUAGE DOUBLING

Boris Pasternak (older than Mayakovsky and alive after the Allen anthology) speaks somewhere of the necessity for writers to disregard the approval of their admirers, lest their writing be tempted to repeat itself. He speaks of the urge for perfection as the mark of the imitator. Writers of course can imitate their own original maneuvers — what is practically an epidemic malady in the trade. Pasternak offers that the real exploration of new territory is constantly marked by abrupt change and barbaric intuitions, calling for still another contrary genius to appear, intuitively and without notice. The thrust of the argument is that too much rationale can turn an original idea into so much ration, a new form into simply format, ignoring the richness yet to be mined.

How to recognize a mistake "being made" when the bottom line is to intend or demand, to hear or to ask, to turn over as it were, so many sentences a day, multiplied by 360 (our year having roughly days equal to the degrees of the circle that describes it), times again a number of years, and there you have it; a paratactic if not a sympathetic record of the writer's sensation or Consciousness. Cast an ancient mathematical super-structure on it, or a not so ancient spatial one, and what have you got? What you have could be Dante or Vergil, or it could be Ron Silliman or Steve Benson.

It would be too much to suggest that Ron Silliman and Steve Benson represent the outer and the inner possibility of 20th Century American writing in English at this point in time — a dialectic not unlike that of the not-so-recent projected pairing of Charles Olson (Boss Poet, as Robert Kelly called him) and Robert Creeley (Professor of Poetry at

SUNY-Buffalo), or even that earlier one of Ezra Pound (the great American fascist poet) and T. S. Eliot (Old Possum, as Pound addressed him)—so I won't do it; or rather, more accurately, I'll stop with the suggestion.

Now, of course all art partakes of some usefulness of the the artist as recorder and transmitter of an external world or an internal one, according to his or her idea of how best to do it. Limits are what any of us are inside of, find a form to accomodate the mess, etc. There is of course usually some motivating force in operation (what is called an ideology or a moral belief, depending on which side of the sphere you're on) which is ordinarily more than numerology or circumspection. On the other hand an account of almost everything, inside or out, in any given historical era, is hardly too small a goal for any art to embrace.

Perhaps embrace is just the point. Passion, not compulsion, is what is meant. It seems to be the function precisely, say, of the ILIAD or CANTERBURY TALES, of Shakespeare, Tolstoy, or of Melville—at least. As generally the 'special' interests in such great writers behave as pluses, rather than as focus, in the greater design.

Who could care for the archaeology in Homer or the eating habits in Chaucer, for instance, the invective in Shakespeare, the manners in Tolstoy, or the detail of the whaling industry in MOBY DICK, or for that matter the Fibonacci numerology of TJANTING or the marginated presentation of THE BUSES (making marvellous internal white spaces that look like Illinois), were it not for the greater force of the overall work—a condition required of any writing if it is to be more than an accumulation of its parts. What is crucial is not the ingenuity of a verbal work, nor the relentlessness of it, nor the verisimilitude of it—not the formal innovation, nor the meticulous care for detail, nor the working out of schema

and intent, however much these may contribute—but something absolutely vital no matter what else is present; I mean that power to lift us out of our seats and keep us in them. Perhaps that old churchy purpose of literature to be uplifting is not so far off in a varied sense. To disclose in short a design and a vision which impel us to a greater apprehension of where we are situated as inhabitants of room on this globe, larger than us and smaller than the universe.

The world is full of writers whose main idea of what to do with the act of writing is to sell it or get noticed—verbal art as commercial venture or job application. But what good is it to get caught up in some fix (as in idée), if there is not some more urgent purpose inherent in the consciousness. The question is pertinent to Aeschylus or Shakespeare, to Ovid or Dante, to Dickens or Dostoevsky, to Swift, Kokoshka, or to Kafka, as it is certainly not least of all to current examples. Then how that detestable phrase post-modern sounds the end by almost bomb-like, assuming it.

And so we must fight against any writing which prescribes or predicts any goal at all...except what lies beyond. In that sense it will remain the writer's job to exist outside the mode of any centralized or any centralizing discourse, especially that one projected by the writing already written.

—Stephen Rodefer

TWO RECORDS

1. PSYCHIC... POWERLESS... ANOTHER MAN'S SAC /
Butthole Surfers (Touch and Go records: P. O. Box 433,
Dearborn, Mi. 48121)

The Butthole Surfers have been getting a lot of press, primarily for the amazing crudeness of their music (which isn't due, as it happens, to the crudeness of their playing —the band's inventive and tight); the words have gotten them notoriety as well—obnoxious, funny, indecipherable. Often, thrashing about for an offensive phrase or tasteless concept, they resort to combinations of talking, singing, chortling, gurgling, laughing, globular & intestinal wrenchings, beastly dripping, electronic distortion, volume overload. And their trashing of musical styles is much more oblique (& bleak) than is the case with the standard hardcore cover. Take "Lady Sniff," a backroom blues number played into a spittoon; or "Gary Floyd," a stolen garage-band tune with an insolent twang & a vocal track more maniacal than the bottom-of-the-bucket stuff you get on PEBBLES—the heckling delivery & incoherent ramble are Butthole Surfer signatures. As for the other songs: "Eye of the Chicken" is a stop & go rumination (I get hints of remembered child abuse) with wind-up-toy talk between the crescendos of feedback. "Dum Dum," on the other hand, is a martial tune with a loping melody that dawdles out repeatedly & builds again in the singing of the verses——

you need the people to be the people
to want the people to love you
you want the people to show the facts
but then again they shove you
you want the people to see the people
that they all need you
need the people to be the people
but they don't feel you

but then again the son of a bitch
 he's much colder
 but then again & then again
 & then again & then again

—sung fast, & not quite fathomable. That's PSYCHIC... POWERLESS... at its most straight-forward. Funniest of all is "Butthole Surfer," a brown-eyed squint of a tune spitting out a hang-ten-on-the-rim-of-the-anus sort of lyric —a far cry from "Hey, hey, we're the Monkeys."

There are other bands who, like the Butthole Surfers, jam on an "anti" stance till it turns purple or pops open—Minor Threat, Hüsker Dü, & Nig Heist all come to mind, I suppose the Mothers of Invention are another example. But where most such groups reveal a shallow & ruthless sexism, or an unexamined sadism, the Butthole Surfers rehearse ominous & insipid masochistic rituals. What PSYCHIC... POWERLESS ... ANOTHER MAN'S SAC enacts, & re-enacts, is trauma, not compensation behavior. So, while other rock (& certainly not just punk rock) groups verbally victimize targeted types (i.e., women, gays, & blacks; though also politicians, teachers, & parents), the Butthole Surfers target themselves. Listening in, of course, we do get abused—but the Surfers spray their pile indiscriminately. The spree of exhibitionism on this record must be heard to be believed.

2. "D" IS FOR DUMPTRUCK / Dumptruck (incas Records: P. O. Box 551, Brookline, Mass. 02164)

Whiling away the hours playing guitar, coming up with tunes that extend way out beyond the monotone, the band ends up getting more & more obsessed with the monotone of pent-up feeling. "Things Go Wrong" is depression-verite, & the

music obligingly slows down to the drawl of a fellow in trouble; while "Night"'s key line ("will I ever think of leaving here") gives way to a short solo embedded in the rhythm. "Alive" is a little livelier—driven to distraction, I guess. For the most part, Dumptruck's songs are stripped down, gestural, heartfelt. And the matter-of-fact lyrics are perfect for their frog-in-the-throat voices—hardly ever embarrassing. As often as not, they seem to be singing captions for the riffs (i. e., "How Come," "Something's Burning," "Repetition"). But it's one thing to write simple songs. Playing them for all they're worth is an altogether different prospect. The Velvet Underground, for instance, stripped down as anyone, always managed a few wasted nuances. The rise & fall of voices against a back-drop of drone-strum, the thud of someone's bad mood, the speed-up or tapering-off or whatever dynamic devices get used, whatever thickens the texture, or diverts the band from a "let's get it done with" attack, is o. k. with me.

—B. Friedlander

LETTER TO SPLASH

Apr. 26 - May 4 '85

happy chicken

in life

Feb.

21 must be
'85

tasting so good

Dear Tony and Judi,

Oh gosh! Quite a few months ago
SPLASH arrived here but when I'd looked
at it a little bit in the kitchen (nice room
as you might remember and bright in the
afternoon) it disappeared and hasn't been
found since. Well, there's always

tomorrow, having been so far, with so much today.

Like, only now have I begun to read Londonettes ...
Reading (*)... and finished it, this evening. The day's been
hot — it hit the spot — I've slowed up enough to settle down
these days, maybe pretty often. Still don't take much in, nor
can I, it seems. Anyway there are pp. 9, 16 (1st piece), 18,
29 ("Unclear") and your keenly heard sounds in other places.

Writing's bn different . Pieces don't come so much all at
once, for one thing, but with days or at times hrs between.

Seems just as well I'm hardly reading much at all
nowadays (bending over books or magazines, large, medium
or small). A yr or so ago the Dr. advised me to keep my
numbed and inactivated, free-from-jitters, leg raised, due to
fluid around the ankle, sign of a small circulation problem,
also to sit up straight to avoid squashing my liver a few yrs
farther down the road. Well I can't seem to attend to, do, 2
or 3 things at once, not even if 1 of the things is just listening
to the radio. Fairly encyclopedic radio stations here, and 1
night after I broke 5 ribs January 9 (I was riding home from
UC Gym at the back of a van, but while the wheelchair was

* LONDONETTES & UNDERGROUND READING by Tony Green
(Published by Gee at 52 Milford Rd. Auckland 9 New Zealand.)

tied down to the floor I wasn't strapped into it, the driver had to stop abruptly for a car that cut across, and I went flying forwards) Kathleen raised the hd of the hospital bed my brother gave me 5 yrs ago due to his bad back, to my surprise since Bob had disconnected the motor to prevent ants getting into bed via the cord, and so I discovered I cd read in bed pretty well without neck strain, but I listen to the radio 99% of the time before getting up at 10 or 11.

And I still watch t.v. Sunday the last part of Dvd Attenborough's 2nd series (This Living Planet) got me thinking if we all became vegetarians (and then how far shd we go in trying to eliminate predation worldwide in general??) livestock just raised for meat (and hides) wd become extinct or at least endangered **species**, they couldn't survive in the wild and not many cd be turned loose in the streets of Europe, Africa, America...like cows in India. Unless quickly enough markets cd be developed for sow's milk although most people world wide can't digest the stuff beyond infancy. And killing an animal at the end of an experiment (cd most or all of such deaths be made painless, as when pets are "put to sleep" by the SPCA when no owners can be found for them?) is no worse than slaughtering it for the meat market if not because you're hungry yrself (a farmer's or cowboy's livelihood anyway, as well as a hunter's or homesteader's, while an experimenter might have greater job mobility). Few pigs, sheep or steers have been made pets of, while as a kid I never did use to hear of experimental cats or dogs or monkeys, just rabbits, mice, guinea pigs—hardly pets. (Abt a wk ago some animal-rights activists broke into a lab at U Cal Davis and let animals out of their cages, thus destroying it was said, or claimed, years of invaluable and unrepeatable research.) Anyway, pain and death are different things, not too often inseparable maybe, and there are individuals and species, aggregates categorized as to their ability to have offspring (and, according to Attenborough, livestock can't mate or breed without the help of man, they'd soon disappear from the streets anyway, let alone the wilds). Ah well, that sure was a delicious chicken one night back in February. At all events.

...

Regards Larry

And it's ok or natural enough to attend to a nearby dog or cat than to somebody hungry or in whatever straits, miles or 100s of miles away. Or some people are, at that, more on the go than others.

Further PS to letter to Green and Stout after mailing

And, at that, it's just in the comparatively long run that diminishing the variety of nature is as grave a matter, as detrimental, as demolishing nature itself, polluting the water, land and air and exhausting the land and water.

Then again Albert Schweitzer, in a 1905 book where, besides making out a decline of Philosophy from society's helmsman (Goethe, no other at this point that I can remember at all) into compartmentalization, he observes that due to the increased pace of life people at the breakfast table for instance no longer hold forth with one another (converse, perceive each other), and viewed pessimistically the lack of knowledge what it is (like) to (have to) go yourself (into your own back yard) and kill a chicken. Another example (in addition to that of families at breakfast with noses in the newspaper—and I've read how among a certain tribe in Southeast Asia children at least, during the morning meal, undergo psychoanalysis in effect, not too formally I guess, being asked about and advised on their dream(s?) of the night just passed...) or is this akin to (say Spartan) militarism, and authoritarianism? Both??

Well, Schweitzer though he may well have disliked unchecked jungle/rainforest growth and been in favor more or less of a Greeklike or Apollonian balance and moderation, had "reverence for life," the idea and sometimes as I suppose the formula (and Martin Buber along with the "I-Thou" relationship in which whatever is is an end in itself and appreciated, valued as such, to which the "I-It" should be subordinated as much as possible, tried to take into account the latter, the practical necessity of using things

and even people, and the need to make choices, never very easy, as you come to them).

In the U. S., five million dogs a year, 14,000 a day, 600 every hour, are "destroyed" because owners can't be found for them, or no longer can or want to take care of them. According to a documentary "Man's Best Friend," in PBS's series "Nature," seen today, May 4—"street dogs," common "all over the world," were also shown. So what about not using them in laboratories? I imagine to make them scarcer, if not shorter-lived, might well involve nationalization of this country's kennels. (I guess currently a breeder or group of breeders figures how many puppies to have according to market forecasts.)

Pets in the west, where families are less extended and supportive than elsewhere, provide emotional release or relief, it's been said, and to Americans dogs are like babies, they get about the same treatment; while in Islam making a pet of a dog lessens the sum of a man's good deeds (as it distracts him from attending to and helping other people?), and in Indonesia dogs are cooked and eaten. ("Man's Best Friend.")

First things (one or more than one) first? How democratic and without a priority structure could any society be? The bigger the group, and the more that needs to be done, the less—or else, despite needs, not much gets done. This is vague of course. The less you can see ahead too. The vagueness grows.

Again, men are nearer to being restless or active birds than cold-blooded amphibians, fish, or reptiles. They can hardly think things through 97 or 100% of the time, much less infinitely, endlessly, and aren't so unemotional (and quick-witted and perceptive, although it's been said man is too brainy for his own good) that they can calculate or act or feel according to self-interest very often, as Mary Midgely points out in her Beast and Man, the human state is not so remote from the rest of the animal kingdom that we can leave no room for spontaneity and still live, or vegetate beyond vegetation (not inconsistent so much as more or less

of a paradox or dilemma that she eventually plumps for some due happy proportion among the various elements of animate life including foresight and judgement, something that involves calculation); and a little unbalancing, expropriative, is the romantic notion she cites as wrong-headed (it's unrealistic enough), that nature, the natural world, scenery, exists for us to get kicks out of, for our eyes or cameras.

Every issue is a single issue, it seems, and they don't line up but lead some people about and around in all directions.

—Larry Eigner

LETTER TO BUDDHISTS CONCERNED FOR ANIMALS

(Miao Kwang Sudharma is a Theravadin Buddhist nun (Bhikshuni) who has recently moved from Taiwan to Sri Lanka. She sent the following letter to Buddhists Concerned for Animals, a San Rafael based organization. We are reprinting it here with her permission.)

Dear BCA,

Here are a few pieces of good news about our dear fellow creatures. The government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) is taking steps to abolish dog-napping (the thief uses a fishing pole with meat on the hook, thereby luring the poor creature, slaughtering him and selling his meat).

Recently a group of compassionate persons bought a tiger who was going to be murdered. The blood, meat, and various sections would have been sold to the highest bidder. Now he is safely living in a zoo. More and more anti-cruelty legislation is being considered at this time as most citizens of Taiwan are appalled at this type of activity.

Here in my immediate environment, my Bhikshuni sisters and the students of this institute release caged birds, of several varieties, that have been purchased from the market. First they hear sutras chanted and are given the "three refuges", then the cage doors are opened and they are seen soaring into the air—blessed freedom!

A lay Buddhist couple bought a huge turtle from the fish market and transported him in their truck to our temple. His age was estimated to be about 200 years! The Abbess gave him the "three refuges" and while he was receiving them large tears came from his eyes. It seems that he had been lassoed with a rope around his neck and dragged into the fisherman's boat. There were wounds on his neck and front legs. A few of the Bhikshunis gently applied a healing ointment to the raw areas. The Abbess painted the Chinese characters for the Buddha and the name of our temple with the date in bright red color, on his back. We hoped this would protect him in the future. Then he was carried into the Buddha Hall where he was entranced by the chanting of the sutras. He was then put out on the area outside of the doorway but immediately returned to the Buddha Hall where he slept all night. The next day he seemed to gather his strength and he perked up noticeably. In the late afternoon he was taken by the couple to the ocean where he was released to freedom from a small boat, but far from the shore where he might be captured again.

One would think, even if his turtlehood was not respected,

his venerable old age should at least be considered by fishermen in the future. His shell, it was observed by one of the Bhikshunis, was wearing rather thin from having been scraped before, where other rescuers had written and fishermen had removed the words. We do hope that he will remain well and happy deep in the ocean and ultimately be released from samsara!

Metta to all beings, In Dharma
Bkni. Miao Kwang Sudharma
Taipei, Taiwan, ROC

LAMA ANAGARIKA GOVINDA (1898 - 1985)

It is a turgid and confusing era to live in, what Buddhists refer to as "the last five-hundred year period," in which the teachings of religion are all but extinguished. Integrity of body, speech, and mind, as disclosed by a tradition of experimental philosophers over 2500 years, has dropped into a precipitous decline. With the plunder of Tibet by expansionist China, the last majestic civilization of northern Buddhism has disappeared from our planet.

Now, in the name of Tibet's Vajrayāna Buddhism, professionally trained androids, clad in business suits and capable of tremendous verbal sophistry, have taken to the streets of America. Books with gilt dustwrappers depicting legions of holy Tibetan

demons appear to be getting shovelled out of the ground somewhere, in unprecedented quantities.

Is this the necessary legacy of Buddhism on the North American continent? Is it? Nah.

A few trustworthy exponents of Buddhist thought have lived and written in recent years. Their publications have been instrumental in assisting that yet unborn thing, an American form of Buddhism, through its gestation period. Lama Govinda was one of them. Two of his books, *THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTITUDE OF EARLY BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY* and *FOUNDATIONS OF TIBETAN MYSTICISM* are of indispensable value. One may safely take them as antidotes to the day's prevalent Dharma-as-business-management.

Lama Anagarika Govinda died on January 14 at his Mill Valley home.

BASIL BUNTING (1900-1985)

As old as the century, Basil Bunting died the year Ted Hughes became der Zweiter Elizabeth's laureate poet at the other end of the country. The author of the finest long poem published in England since *FOUR QUARTETS*—as Cyril Connolly dubbed *BRIGGLATTS*—was an extremely witty, warm, and sometimes irascible man, all hallmarks of the best of human intelligence.

In 1966 at Buffalo, at the first public reading of "Briggflatts," before a handful of graduate students and a couple SUNY faculty members, he winced visibly when, between sections of the poem, the needle dropping onto the designated cuts of the Scarlatti record scratched or jumped or grabbed a few notes of the previous sonata—even though he had insisted on the lights being dimmed (something to do with the proper Arabic situation for a literary delivery, complete with a young ssaki at the foot of the poet's seat to keep his wine glass full). The sweet tenor bull not so much bragged as swaggered a bit on Winspear's broken madrigal that night.

A few weeks later, surveying the pasture soon to come condos at 5280 Sheridan Drive, he remarked through oyster-like eyeglasses: "a perfectly delightful, perfectly ordinary American landscape."

The man to whom Pound in 1930 dedicated half his GUIDE TO KULCHUR (the other half to Louis Zukofsky) had struggled in the world desert from Northumbria to London, from Persia to Madison, Buffalo, and Santa Barbara, decade after decade, from imprisonment (for conscientious objection in World War I) to a belated celebrity in his last ten years, writing along the way an erudite poetry honed to a lyric intensity unequalled among the modernist writers.

When he taught Yeats he read the MacMillan Collected from back to front, pausing only to notice a cadence or tell a story. He taught the virtue of refuse. He advised keeping less than half of what was written. England's greatest living poet, he died in Hexham, Northumberland on April 17 this year, eighty sixed at eighty five.

—Stephen Rodefer

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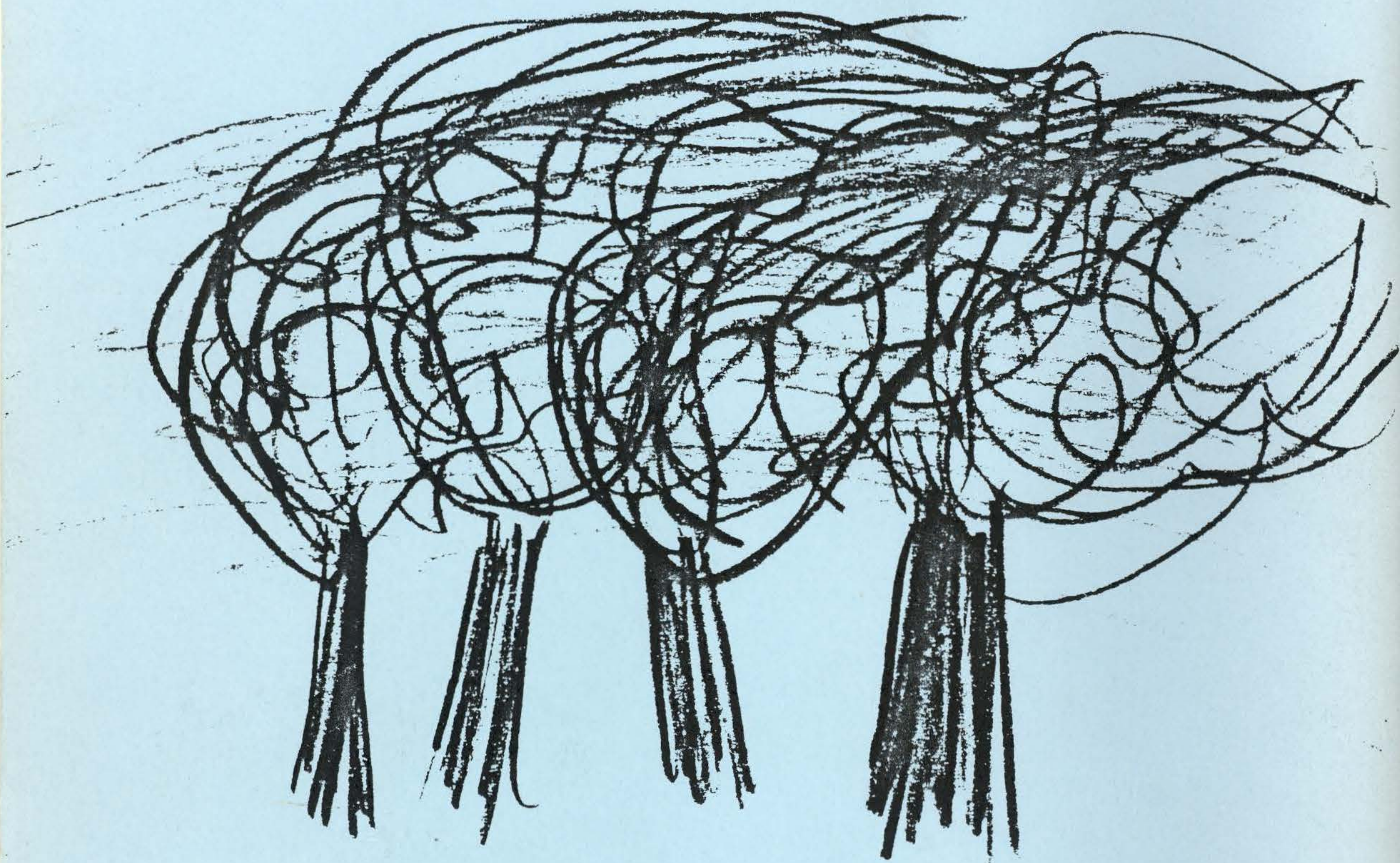
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"Sweet sixteeners of another nationality: 'He melts from the seat of his power / Into the nervous gold shower... / & the desert bursts into a flowering / ... The shining block is beat out thin / To take up the scattered points.' Those points are everywhere here, descended from above, fixed below. David Lloyd assures old London new chimney."

—Stephen Rodefer.

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