JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K"

#6 MAY, 1986

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Andrew Schelling & Benjamin Friedlander, editors.
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HOUSE OF "K"
3816 Piedmont #6
Oakland, Ca. 94611

Issue #7 will feature a survey on the question: what are the most encouraging developments in contemporary culture and politics? Please keep responses to one typewritten page.

LYN HEJINIAN/ ANDREW SCHELLING: AN EXCHANGE

(Though the two of us live only two blocks apart, the following exchange took place by mail over a period of four months—my initial approach is dated 26 November '85 and Lyn's final response has April 28, 1986 on the letterhead. We agreed that conducting an exchange by mail might on the one hand permit more room for reflection than a face-to-face interview, and on the other hand would probably encourage a greater range of material to enter our discussion as social and poetic climates altered over the passing months. Rather than reprint the letters untampered, I have cut most of the pleasantries, some small talk centered on the rather spectacular weather patterns northern California encountered in early '86, and a little material that seemed irrelevant to the gradual focusing of our principal interests. One letter has been entirely buried and will hopefully not return to haunt us. —AS)

AS: It's a staggering moment in poetry when you come upon Ezra Pound saying—in my copy of the Cantos it occurs on the final page—"I have tried to write Paradise." There's this grievous resignation, and an admission of failure that seems to implicate the whole history of the twentieth century. A lot of scholars haven't gotten past that moment, and are busy trying to salvage some fragment of Paradise from that big immodest book.

Meanwhile you've published, at two month intervals, fifty pieces of writing by people who seem united in their efforts to discover just what can and what can't get done by writing. The whole procedure of composition is getting looked at here, and since Tuumba titles came out as a serial project rather than as isolated books, they tend to get read in the context of one another. In a curious way they form an eight-years Cantos, written not by one individual but by a cohesive group of writers.

The project closes with your own book, The Guard. It's last line, which is the final line to this eight-year output, seems a direct response to Pound: "this/ is the difference between language and 'paradise'."

Is this a deliberate gesture, to bring things back round to Pound? Embedding 'paradise' in quotation marks emphasizes its noun-ness, as well as its tragic lack of significance for the contemporary world.

LH: It is absurd, I think, to want to write 'paradise'—absurd of me or of Ezra Pound—and that, really, is what the quotation marks enclosing the word were meant to indicate. The terms 'language' and 'paradise' are mutually exclusive, and so to some extent your characterization of Pound's statement may be applicable to my own "This" (i.e. my poem, or if not the poem, then the descriptive (imitative) language just preceeding) "is the difference between language & 'paradise'." It does hint at resignation and failure of a sort. But I certainly would not want to romanticize my position by pretending to have finished the Tuumba project with a tragic flourish, or to suggest that the difference between 'language' and 'paradise' is demoralizing or debilitating.

There was no intentional or conscious reference to Pound or his Cantos here or elsewhere in The Guard. Nor to Kerouac, the last lines of whose Mexico City Blues are:

Stop the murder and the suicide!
All's well!
I am the Guard

I think it might be possible, in retrospect, to do a reading of The Guard in terms that parallel, or could be projected onto, the Tuumba series taken as a whole. In the most general way, The

Guard is 'about' poetic language, and especially about poetic language as a site of consciousness. It assumes a 'real' world—I recognize the value judgment implicit in this—and then explores the interaction between the world and our consciousness of it and the language in which this is located. (One of the discoveries is that language is social and temporal, whereas 'paradise' is private and spatial; that is a difference, and you can see that identifying this particular difference is not necessarily equivalent to admitting a failure.)

In a sense, the Tuumba project was concerned with the same issues, and it was expressive of values that are implicit in The Guard. As a writer, my principal interest when I began publishing Tuumba, though I might not have identified it in these terms in 1976, was in attempting aesthetic discoveries, with an intuition equivalent to belief that such discoveries are important to people. I thought of publishing as an extension of my writing and thinking about writing, as an expansion of the ground for aesthetic discovery. And I thought of it, too, as an extension of aesthetic responsibility. I had the sense that my poetics included other writing than my own, by definition. Part of the method was to include it.

In part, of course, my decision to begin publishing a series of books was determined by my living in an extremely isolated situation in northern California; it was rather as if I had decided to be a newspaper reporter in order to hear the news.

Certainly I never doubted that poetic language was where there is news.

And I think I may have learned that from Pound. His coming on as a statesman, articulating culture and presenting poetry as policy, and his assumption that everyone knows that poetry is intrinsic to the real political world and must be taken as such made a useful initial context for me, though it is funny to think of it as that.

Pound's notion of the poet is both nerve-wracking and generous, and that interests me; but his politics were deplorable, and I don't have any reason to bring things back around to Pound. And, really, I think it was Gertrude Stein who was the linguist and aesthetician of a grammar for 'paradise'.

AS: Your title The Guard is provocative—it leaves an ambivalence about who the Guard is, or who or what might need to be guarded. It also sounds more than a bit sinister. So I was surprised to open the book and discover its governing moods to be cheerful, sort of openly curious and meticulous about detail, a lot of good-natured care taken with the elements you live among. You're always making pretty straightforward statements—they may be humorous but they have to be taken at face-value. Like the line "Men and women of thought & study/ are voluptuaries." It reminds me of Blake—one of his maxims from Hell—it's that clear and unguarded, though pretty much free of the bitterness and fury that animated Blake. Cynicism seems absent from The Guard, though the poetry negotiates a world rife with cynicism. Even irony gets downplayed, and this connects with the directness of statement I referred to. Do you regard the book's optimism as a question of personal temperament, or is it a poetic stance—in some manner a poetics?

LH: I have never been confident that I have entirely understood Zukofsky in his use of the word 'sincerity' in his essay "An Objective": "In sincerity shapes appear concommitants of word combinations, precursors of (if there is continuance) completed sound or structure, melody or form. Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody.... This rested totality may be called objectification... its character may be simply described as the arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity.... Granted that the word combination 'minor unit of sincerity' is an ironic index of the degradation of the power of the individual word in a culture which seems hardly to know that each word in itself is an arrangement...."

If one's intention is to write poetry "which is the detail, not mirage," then the relationship between words and things is sufficiently problematic, that 'sincerity' must replace both 'accuracy' and 'honesty' in the ethics of an aesthetics of perception (and, ultimately, consciousness). (By 'things' I mean events, objects, ideas, creatures, conditions, and so on——anything that might be singled out for articulate address.) The Guard is about this problem. "Each sentence replaces an hallucination."

As for irony, I think it is present in my work, but in my case the tone is more often comical than enraged. It is, to answer your question, a matter of temperament, however, and not of theory. I am not a bitter person, but in part because I am not an optimistic one.

The very desire to be 'accurate' (to the external world) and 'honest' (to the interior one) is for me partially and inevitably comical——quixotic in the original sense. An element of the comedy is irony, to the extent that irony arises from comparison, and language is an arrangement of comparisons. (I'm not one to be seduced by the machismo of evoked etymologies, but in thinking about this question I did look up irony in an etymological dictionary and it seems relevant to my point that the word comes from the Greek word eiron, one who in speaking dissembles, which in turn comes from eiro, I say.) Any comparison of a thing said with a thing existing is going to include the possibility of irony.

> Can one take captives by writing——
> "Humans repeat themselves"

But putting aside, for only a moment, the problematic relationship between language and consciousness, there remains my fascination with the extraordinary profusion of the effects of things——invisible but not imperceptible. Set, for example, against the fluctuations of things observed and changes in particular objects, a single statement loses the force of comparison. Things have a definite character but also an indefinite character, and many statements in the context of the latter are almost never

ironic. Irony is a kind of tension, and the tension is diffused.

My writing tends more to use condensation than irony as a strategy for creating tension.

You ask who or what is the Guard. I did not intend anything notably sinister. Of course there are prison guards and museum guards. Visually I imagined mountains rather than monuments, although there is a quite remarkable monument in Riga called The Red Guard which is, furthermore, regarded there with considerable irony.

But the guard of my title has not so much identity as character, which is at once both protective and prohibitive. Rock debris, as from a landslide, blocking progress, or set in a cairn, to indicate a route; a guide, such as Virgil was to Dante; perception, which gives us access to much of the world and is inadequate to so much of the rest; language itself, and especially poetic language, which determines that The Guard could never be complete.

AS: Part of the difficulty with Zukofsky's definition of sincerity is that there isn't a good language with which to speak about language. He gets snagged in his efforts somewhere between 'seeing' on the one hand and 'hearing' on the other. I mean here he is discussing how you get to the detail of seeing, and suddenly the arrangement resembles melody. Language, even if you think of it as a tool of perception, is problematic in a way sight or hearing are not. In fact, it isn't a sense in the way the five conventional senses are, which all seem fairly irreducible. We seem to hallucinate a lot more readily through language. It's prey to this almost psychedelic synaesthesia, continuously contaminating things like sight and sound.

I'm reminded of the Sanskrit poetic tradition, with which I've

worked quite a bit. The critics (who are generally the poets themselves) perform elaborate investigations into metrics and articulations, pursue questions of trope and figure with endless scrupulousness, drawing up long lists and categories in their concern with this question of detail and mirage. Then, abruptly, after all this effort to itemize the operations of sight and sound and how the diverse aspects of language "fit" against the world, they end up declaring, mysteriously, that the effect of poetry can only be likened to the sense of taste. It's that simple, and also that complex... but somehow that elusive as well. There's no way, given the categories of taste—bitter, salt, sweet, sour, hot—you can come up with how a peach tastes to you. Let alone a casserole.

Anyhow, the part of Zukofsky's thought you followed in your last letter is the one concerning the "detail and not the mirage" of seeing. I'm curious about the other limb, the melody. I've heard —though only apocryphally—and maybe we should get this down since I assume a number of people have wondered about it—— that a 'tuumba' is a musical instrument. Maybe African? I'm curious to know how you named the press. But beyond that I'd like to know what interrelationship you perceive between poetry—— yours or anyone else's—and music. You've written a book, Gesualdo, that invokes, or maybe adopts as a presiding spirit, a composer. And for years your press was situated at the same address as a record label, curiously enough called Metalanguage. Which again suggests this strange transvestite quality between music and writing.

LH: If one allows for variable spellings, tuumba apparently means a number of things. I too have heard that it is a musical instrument. It is, I think, an African drum, the middle drum in a set of three, which includes also the larger conga, or 'father', drum, and a smaller 'baby' drum. The tuumba is the 'mother' drum, made from the skin of a cow; the conga is made from a bull's skin, and the 'baby' drum from the skin of a calf. So I've heard. Much could be made of this, but only by someone who finds coincidences numinous. Tuumba is also a kind of alcoholic drink, made, I

think, in Nepal from fermented millet. And there is an Israeli children's game which involves dancing in a circle to a song whose chorus consists of the word tuumba repeated several times. In Spanish, it means 'tomb'.

But I discovered it in a context independent of these meanings, where it wasn't a word as such at all. My husband, who is a musician, was 'reading' it from a score in a practice book on polyrhythms. He was beating out four different rhythms with each of his two feet and two hands, and the fifth rhythm was established vocally; he was chanting various syllables, presumably 'nonsense' syllables, including tuumba, tuumba.

Thus the connotation of the word, for me, does involve music, I guess, but not melody. At the same time, when Larry was saying it over and over amidst the other rhythms, it sounded progressive—like a crowd, or a horse, walking.

But in responding to your much larger question about the relationship between poetry and music, or about musical values in poetry, I want to make certain that we are not confounding the 'musical' in poetry with aestheticized surfaces, or with 'beauty'. The word 'musical' applied to writing is as often misused as the word 'poetic' is to other arts, and in much the same way. Let's not mean that.

Music in poetry is completely different from music in music. A poetry, for example, that does with language what Charles Ives or Anthony Braxton have done with sound would not necessarily and obviously be noted for its musicality. Nor would Barrett Watten's poetry, although his poetic forms are forcibly determined by sound values in the language. And when someone tells me that they don't understand what my poem (say, for example, The Guard) means, I can respond by saying, Well, what does any one of Bach's Brandenburg Concerti or Bartok's string quartets mean, and this may give that someone a momentary insight into reading,

but it does not mean that my poem is by definition musical.

The point is that sound values in poetry are intrinsically linguistic, not musical. The structure and implications of meaning in language are very different from the structure and implications of meaning in music. One can understand the situation better, perhaps, by comparing what is measured in a musical phrase with what is measured in a linguistic phrase, or in a line of poetry.

The line is obviously a kind of measure—but of what? Not of the breath. One can say, and I have, of attention—but whose? I would like to discover a line that is scored for meaning but independent of my own physique or psychology, and perhaps eventually such a line will be best determined by sound values.

But those won't be music.

There is so much more of the temporal than the spatial in writing, that the real musical event in poetry occurs when the temporal is displaced, clumped, turned back, or spread out—which was exactly the point that Gertrude Stein was making in her 'landscape' works from the mid 1920's to the early 30's, when she disposes a moment across a vista, in part to arrest the nervousness and anxiety that are an inevitable response to the press of time upon inquiry and statement. "The sense of time is a phenomena of nature," she says in "Natural Phenomena." "It is what adds complexity to composition. There can be past and present and future which succeed and rejoin, this makes romantic realistic and sentimental and then really the three in one and not romantic and not realistic and not sentimental. The three in one makes a time sense that adds complexity to composition.... Let us begin over and over again. Let us begin again and again and again."

Music is a compositional method, a form of argument, and one possible investigative shape. This for me is its relevance to poetry.

Just in passing, I remember a comment that the Russian poet Arkadii Dragomoschenko made; he said that he thought most writers are afraid of music, because it swamps the senses and obliterates perception. To listen to music too closely resembles drowning. Clearly I don't feel that way, but it does point up one of the differences between poetry and music.

AS: You and I share an evident love for distant places—the people, landscapes, cities, customs, the food and drinks... and the languages. Just recently Sulfur magazine published a sustained translation of poetry you did out of the Russian of Arkadii Dragomoschenko. In fact the length of the poem, and its overall cohesiveness, immediately suggested a Tuumba press title to me, as though had you still been printing you might have issued it as one. Yet what strikes me when I glance over the list of writers you published in the Tuumba series—and here I'm referring specifically to the thirty or thirty-five chapbooks where you concentrated on writers who are in some profound ways identified as a group, the so-called "language poets"—I notice that very few of them have made translation a part of their method of composition. I don't want to generalize too heavily here, but this does seem pretty significant. So many poets of the twentieth century have made translation central to their poetic practice. You almost couldn't imagine what our poetry might look like without these emergent models from the Chinese and Japanese, the European tongues, even Hopi and Ainu.

Is translation likely to become increasingly central to your own work? Or, and this is a connected question, do you see contact with writers who operate in other languages than english as something directly necessary for your future work?

LH: It is only very recently that I began translating, and I was tempted to it for a number of reasons which certainly included curiosity about its possible effect on my own work. Predictably the effect—and there is one—comes both from the process of translation itself (and my speculations about that process) and from the work that I have been translating—the group of poems

by Arkadii Dragomoschenko in Sulfur 14, a group of "Elegies" from the Summa of his booklength work called The Corresponding Sky, and now that book itself. I too am working on a poem called "The Corresponding Sky"—the two works, Dragomoschenko's and mine, were originally meant to be a collaboration, but Arkadii is far more prolific than I am; I have his complete work to translate long before he will have mine.

Meanwhile my work of that title is translation of a different sort, though I am extending the meaning of the word slightly in saying so.

Another Russian poet, Aleksei Parshchikov, has said that my work is similar to Dragomoschenko's, but I think that is inaccurate. My interest in translating his work, however, resulted from an intuition (and it was no more than that, certainly) that there was some contiguity between his 'reasons' for writing—the originating impulse for any given poem—and mine. His solutions to questions raised by an interest in perception, perspective, and description are very different from mine, but we seem to agree that a poem is a relevant and appropriate site of inquiry. A scene of science.

My version of "The Corresponding Sky" is, or I should say will be, my scientific work. It exists at present in notebook form; I add to it slowly, while working on my current primary project, the poem called "The Person." "The Corresponding Sky" is a study of perception, or more specifically the perception of sound (the sounds I hear, in city and country, winter and summer, all times of day, etc.) and hence of descriptive language. In some respects, the descriptions are 'translations', at least when I am trying to imitate in language, however neologistically, the non-verbal sounds around me: typewriter clatter, refrigerator hum, dog bark, traffic, crickets, water—especially rain. It is impossible to spell most of these sounds; one can only refer to them.

And sometimes I feel that this is precisely the case when I attempt to translate a poetry as densely articulated as Dragomoschenko's

Russian poems. In his work, both sound patterns and semantic patterns are extremely complex—and relevant. To lose them is to lose a lot. But any translator will complain similarly.

In Russia, by the way—or, rather, in Russian—things and animals are heard to 'say' different things than they do in English. The brief section of The Guard beginning, "Better I tell you that cats 'say' mya-ew, mya-ew" is actually from one of Arkadii Dragomoschenko's letters, his response to my questions about the sounds of non-human things and creatures.

> Better I tell you that cats "say" mya-ew, mya-ew
> dogs gav-gav, trains sheex-sheex-sheekh
> (while whistling ta-tooo), roosters cry
> coo-caw-reh-coo, frogs croak kva-kva, birds
> in a flock sing fyou-eet, except ravens
>
> which prefer karr-karrs, and the ducks quack kra
> bells ring bom-bommm, and pigs grunt hryou-hryou

But to answer your question about poetries from other languages in a more general sense: I have been looking at the new edition of Jerome Rothenberg's wonderful anthology Technicians of the Sacred, and it strikes me that it is a strangely comforting book. In one sense, the universality of motives that the book reveals is quite wonderful. But in another sense it makes me nervous.

Of course I hope to run across work from other languages—and hence other cultures—and I anticipate learning from these encounters. But I am wary of the impulse to assimilate, or to imitate with implication, without being implicated. I have been thinking about this recently, in the context of Poetics Journal, since Barrett Watten and I are planning to edit the 8th issue of the Journal on the topic of the "poetics of elsewhere." Our emphasis will be on differences rather than on similarities. What is exciting to me is the radical difference between poetry (and the life of the poet) in Berkeley from that in Burma, say, or Nairobi, or Paris, Berlin, or New York. Meaning is local and very

complex, not immutable but also not always relative. Time and place are part of the precise detail that is what I like about almost anything.

AS: I've also been, coincidentally, browsing back through Technicians of the Sacred. No doubt about it, the anthology is steeped in optimism. It suggests a lot of unexplored possibilities opening up for poetry, which I think reflects the overall social and artistic enthusiasm of the 1960's. Mostly Rothenberg conveys it by his emphasis, exactly, on a "universality of motives," which runs through literate and pre-literate cultures alike.

For enthusiasts of poetry this is doubly comforting. Not only does it provide immediate tools for a widening of poetic range, but it becomes clear in the tribal poetries Rothenberg's presenting that poetry isn't just looked on as a cranky or subversive pursuit for alienated intellectuals. He gives a healthier model for the whole context than Europe of the last two centuries has managed to offer. In a comprehensive sense, poetry belongs to the larger population. By framing things this way, Rothenberg shifts the question from "who needs it?" to "what do they use it for?"

Even when particular exchanges of the verbal art get practiced under secretive and exclusionary circumstances—spells, initiations, and so on—poetry in most pre-literate contexts serves a widely acknowledged social function.

But there are two somewhat opposing directions contemporary anthropology has to account for—the first is this recognition of parallel thought-processes, converging motives and aspirations among diverse groups of people. The other, though, is an unnerving realization just how diverse, and at times seemingly antagonistic, the actual cultural products turn out to be. How local, in other words, to time and place. What ethnopoetics, as well as popular intercultural mongering, has run head on against in recent years, is this diversity, which refuses to get readily

boiled down. A lot of political questions which had not really become clear in the 60's (when Technicians first came out) have emerged. There's the whole issue of appropriation of third and fourth world cultures, for instance, by privileged intellectuals—not to mention tourism and the trade in tribal and exotic art—which has cast ethnopoetics into a much more complicated position.

I've been reading Clifford Geertz's Local Knowledge, where he tries to dispel some mystique of "empathy" or "communion" which it's been popular to ascribe to scholars and writers working in cultures very different from their own. It's not some capacity for immersion in universal humanity that lets us comprehend others. Instead, in Geertz's phrase, the thing is to see "ourselves among others," which keeps the differences directly in front of us. He regards cultural systems as symbolic products of the imagination, which you can learn to read—like a poem, he says, exactly as you learn to read a poem. At least he's arguing for the process of apprehension being parallel in the two cases.

To my mind this makes your "poetics of elsewhere" issue seem timely, in a political sense. It's not simply that writers in—as you say, Burma or New York—somehow do what "we" do. The question is, since they end up with something pretty different—at times virtually unrecognizable—how do we read what it is they're doing.

The Tuumba project was, for you and the (pre-eminently local) writers you've published, a locating of yourselves, seeing—making—yourself local to some time and place. The "poetics of elsewhere" looks like a deliberate extension of the dialogue, to other people. To me a serious issue's involved here, what I perceive as an increasing American cultural isolation. Recent political events, like the bombing of Tripoli by US planes, makes this frighteningly clear. Neither US politicians, nor ambassadors, nor the tourists that spill overseas, are doing a particularly convincing job of seeing "ourselves among others." It would be tragic to end up in a situation like the Soviet people have had to

endure, being extensively cut off from the planet as a whole. Can writers forge an alternative foreign policy? Go underground or something? I wonder. Or is this expecting too much?

I suppose I'm trying to circumvent the prevalent and nagging question of audience as it tends to get posed these days—who reads what poets and how it got that way—and instead look at writing as a distinct cultural system, local to a given people. Others can read ours; we can read theirs; it's part of the definition. Presumably there will always be interested practitioners.

LH: It is mid-morning and after I had rolled this piece of paper into the typewriter I found myself listening to the traffic outdoors, and specifically to the cars and delivery trucks that turn intentionally or inadvertently into the deadend cul de sac where our house faces a parking lot in which every slot is taken. Not just the indignant honking horns but the strident traffic hum itself sounds self-righteous. The idling engine of a large green truck, double-parked while its driver is drinking coffee at the drugstore lunch counter, sounds self-satisfied, justified. The whole neighborhood is smug in the sunshine.

The standard (and standardizing) U. S. version of "ourselves among others," culturally as well as politically, has simply called out attitudes which are simultaneously imperialistic and provincial, aggressive and resistant, proprietary and blocked. As the atmosphere becomes oppressive, part of the challenge of the artistic project for the artist—part of his or her method—has to be to discover his or her belief in it, to discover its value, its relevance, its efficacy, the position of its meaning in the world (which last is what is meant by "seeking an audience").

Of course I want my work, both as a publisher and as a writer, to improve the construction of the world, just as I want the things in the world to be real. Otherwise my efforts are misdirected.

One can speculate long and hard on the poetics of the former desire and the metaphysics of the latter.

I have always felt, though at first only intuitively, that poetic language was an appropriate site for aesthetic discoveries and that such discoveries are not abstract. But it is hard to speak precisely or definitively about the generative range of poetry, its beneficial praxis. Zukofsky attempts to do so in Bottom, and also in "A". "The basis for written characters, for words, must be the physiological fact of love, arising from sight, accruing to it and the other senses, and entering the intellect (which, not Time's fool, does not make the eye untrue), for the art of the poet must be to inform and delight with Love's strength ...." Certainly in the very rigorousness and energy that propels it, writing may be in itself intellectually and emotionally generous.

As for the Tuumba project, I don't really feel that it was an attempt to establish a time and place of the writing or the writers involved, and certainly not to localize them. In fact, dislocation has a more positive value for me. Much of the writing posits meaning in new places in the syntax of the sentence and the line; the whole semantics of placement in historical time and in the time of the page is being re-thought.

When I said that "meaning is local" I meant that meaning is not universal——or eternal. I am suspicious of the inclination to universalize the local. I reject the kinds of claims for place that Olson was making, for example, as deep noun, or etymologically nostalgic root, and the implicit sense of "a man's time" is alien to me.

The Tuumba project was, rather, I think, an attempt to develop and establish values——and I don't want to qualify them as solely or merely literary or aesthetic values.

Part way through the work I've been writing this last year and a half, "The Person," are two poems which form a kind of pair. One begins with the line, "Let's get isolated," and the other with the line, "Altruism in poetry." That we are already isolated mocks the impulse behind the invitation, although it was sincerely offered. And ultimately I have to take the other line for my standard, though that too is funny. When I began the poem, or poems, called "The Person," one of my impulses was to write a work which would be to language what a person is to society. That is, I proposed this to myself discretely without having the faintest idea what such a formulation might mean, nor what the different terms meant in its context. One area of tension, I suppose, might be exemplified by the difference between editing and publishing, which is socially constitutive and supportive, and writing, which may be socially subversive. In any case, without indulging in ridiculous and uninteresting metaphysics, such a formulation does make the person's ethical position in the world relevant to aesthetic activity without proposing that only 'good' people can do good art and without proposing the opposite, that it doesn't matter that a poet is, for example, viciously anti-semitic. And just as one frequently can't know what will evolve in the process of writing a work—can't entirely anticipate the ideas that will emerge, as if out of the ink—so one can't entirely anticipate what will develop out of the method that is the activity of one's social ethics, or ethical sociability.

One of the poems from "The Person" begins,

> When I get angry I get accessible
> Sociable
> Waste prose

and ends,

> Honor among radicals—are we not radicals!
> "Buy me a wondrous wonder, a marvelous marvel!"
> Let my culture do!

THREE BOOKS BY LYN HEJINIAN

A THOUGHT IS THE BRIDE OF WHAT THINKING (Tuumba #1, 1976), GESUALDO (Tuumba #15, 1978), THE GUARD (Tuumba #50, 1984).

A Thought is made up of 3 works, mainly in prose paragraphs. Like Montaigne's essais, writing oriented to consider how one's knowledge in a given issue may be realized through words. The issue here is less supposedly tractable to a name, to treatment from without. How the mind's experience of its activity is altered, compromised, constituted through its alliance with language——not the riddle as to what or who is thinking so much as, in effect, how thought questions its understanding of that thinking——is the subject.

"Thought" may be thought of as considered (or, reconsidered) thinking. Thought settles a dynamic, uncapturable activity into a state of latency and factuality. The return of thought through thinking into investigating afresh its formulation elicits a wide spray of reactive, promiscuous, intermittently lyrical and expository traces, particularly in the book's first and longest work, "Variations: A Return of Words." A formal pretext of serialism, informal in the observance, offers ample elbow-room to many trials of expression. The undertows of rhythmic elegance, of slippery association or neo-nonsensicalism, and of would-be precept are compromised and turned to assess imaginative performance, in which process and product, production and utility, utterance and reflection face off in wrestling pivots.

> Now, here is the jolly noon. There is a lilt in telling it. The vision climbs, the response is in retreat. The circle becomes careless as one becomes weary. There

is a qua! qua! of fleeing geese, while thought is a form of lingering.

Evasive of the "absurdity" that "analysis risks," "intent upon confusing all the issues" and taking "anything into account,... reciprocal with the world," the ineluctably overstated observations thought assumes in its peripatetic rehearsals of its relationship with thinking lack plan, specific limits, tests for proof. The work of self-examination makes itself most plainly, if ironically, evident in self-explanation, among a fine array of specimens.

Feelings have no potential, they can never be anything but what they are. Ideals and thoughts, however, are full of potential. That is to say, love or melancholy only become more or less as they develop as feelings. Yet the idea of love or melancholy ramifies indefinitely and can lead off in an infinity of directions.

This is not to belittle feelings——anymore than one would belittle the lungs, or the intestines.

*

(A characteristic of the morbid intelligence, in its manner of thinking, is to think backwards from a given thought, to search behind even the most trivial and commonplace thought, for its motives (and one's own, in thinking it), and then, to reach again behind that, and again behind that, into the unclear brine of the mind itself. It is a cheerless search.)

Devastation, or, the wreck again. There have been heavy frosts this spring, and the blossoms on the fruit trees have been blackened. The blossoms are black as saints. The ants writhe in the sugar box.

Distortion, or, error. To err is to wander, or to turn, probably in an unanticipated direction, inadvertently. The mistake is not necessarily without advantage, however,

nor, if such should be necessary, irrevocable.

Ink, or, the guitar. Returning from the middle distances, to the same points, repeatedly, from whatever direction, one homes, like a migrant bird or fish. Perhaps that is a function of thought, homing. In any case, one doesn't, perhaps can't, escape one's concerns. That is what constitutes a personal style.

The will to objectivity, and the censorship that proposes, along with the license to the obvious and exhibitionism, speculation and open-endedness, are persistent factors in Hejinian's work. Attachment is censored, in the artwork, even as it is allowed and even patronized in the person; feelings and concerns are constitutional, whereas thought processes (thinking and its discipline into objectification as thought) are constructive. In lieu of the author's or reader's attachment to the contents of the poetry, her approach—and her distancing—argue (for) an erring alertness to and deferential entertainment of those bondings, alignments and reactions remarked in the contents (manifest traces of thoughts, figuring like the dynamics of dream or the interstitial effluvia that animate meditation). In this regard, her chronic ideas, so valued and parodied, are fronted less as driving forces than as recurrent circumstances. Argument in her work is over-all, in the method, and particular, in the artifact: statement, however, is always up for consideration once again.

Certainty is given to the simple minded. To know what one thinks under all circumstances, to have definite and final opinions, is a challenge to the ethical intellect. (It is different with decisions, which often enough the intelligent man makes easily, if arbitrarily.) The delicate intellect, in seeing all sides of the questions, is apt to forget which side is his own.

While the first long piece scatters shot across the ground of its investigations, the latter two cultivate more continuous and larger blocks of discourse. The first piece is crowded with

"first gestures" and deflections; in the latter two, the moment of excitation is absorbed in the total reactive energy of each passage. Among them, one makes out conceptual blank spaces in which to compare their values to each other and think through. Each work rallies in a penultimate passage a proclamation of artistic license, responsibility and good faith; these overarching epiphanies accomodate themselves to the texts by characterizing the method from which their dicta crop up.

> The poet plays with order, makes order of disorder, and disorder of order, intent upon confusing all the issues. He is unwilling to distinguish reality from veracity, and veracity from tale, and sees what he thinks to see.
>
> His is a positive though a pessimistic view of life. Much is amusing as much is disgusting, but he says he's not afraid.

> The artistic act has integrity to the extent that it is a generally inclusive reckoning, which takes anything into account, the diverse and the disparate. The artist, thereby, displays a vast tolerance, and his work exerts the moral force of combination. He must be both responsive and responsible, for his work reflects an intensity of response, reciprocal with the world.

The brash yet stolid authority with which such resolutions are uttered is belied by the supple, vigorous body of the work. Principles may be stated, but the state of this art is, if solvent, in a permanent flux.

What language is called upon to present, it can only represent. What language is here called on to present, the passage, process, how any experience is realized in language and how language realizes it's doing that, can only be represented in fragments, like the stop-motion of a photographic film, the sense of event drastically adjusted by technology and point-of-view. A Thought serves up a smorgasbord of the lab's findings. In Gesualdo, however, is contrived a closer

fusion of elements. Its first paragraphic cell of complexly recognizable molecules, straddled by the syntactically skewed rubric, "Gesualdo to an introduction," reads:

> Gesualdo d rests his life faithful, his, in pieces, are discontinuous and harm the use, who did not lack intensity. c and highly individual the murder which was married between instances of workmanship and reduction. Their dramatic exclamations push the basic scale a time of the more true. b whose fame rests on her lover and between. The first vocal in the first four in the last two are discontinuous and harmonic to an introduction.

Is something, someone, being introduced here? Or is an introduction being represented (brought back from the dead-and-done-with)? Is someone, something, introducing "Gesualdo to an introduction"? Is "Gesualdo" a person, a legend, reading matter, or the present work? The elastically resistant and ambivalent facticity of reference in this work is that of life, thought and art in their creative state—all is burning and everything matters, every word counts.

Verbal materials presumably culled from reading, notes, and inscribed reflections, are fragmented, rearranged and fused again. Typographical, grammatical and rhetorical redistributions displace conventions from the typical without invalidating their instrumentality. The typical or predictable analyzed into conventions; these redistributed, fat falling away in the heat of concentration, into coordinations that work through uncircumscribed principles; the forces of rhetoric and intent keyed up; the result baked hard. The need to mean something decisively, to forge determinants in the smithy of shifting and persisting passions and ideals, demands the discombobulation of known practices and effects, transmuted into frontal, if hieratic assertion.

Biography of the 16th-century madrigalist, various notes and

ponderings undergo said catastrophe and are re-realized as the life, the text. An identity (as work in progress) appears to be spelled out. Gesualdo is an incantatory manifesto of the modernist sublime. The implications (not the reasons why) are the subjects of the numerous non-narrative paragraphical episodes. The reader's impression of each composite rhetoric or mode of address is by each such field figured into question, yet the authority of textual inscription stays aloof rather like a necessary god.

> Gesualdo earths the charm unbroken. It would be imprudent that all music argues, follows, continues. A name is not synonymous and lingers, longer well, under way. A name is not to announce intention. We can correctly speak thereby and gesture, highly pointing, directly feeling, legs brought down, to step and stand on them. You are alone, inherent to form. You are recognizable in form of sight. The quiet agitation repeats, is restless, also a quality of spirit.

The first sentence suggests a tendentiously revised narrative. You or I, I imagine, might likely break an unearthed charm, but Gesualdo does something altogether more solemn, magisterial, dumbfoundingly other. No sooner has one chosen a technic for puzzling an ambiguous reading out than a perfectly lucid sentence, missing a few words perhaps, steps in to remark on the rationale behind the break that it seems itself to have chosen to effect. Thus the initially opaque, suggestive figuration dissolves into abstract argument, which then seems contradicted by the pragmatics "we" engage in; then that solidarity seems abruptly thrown off context by the stark, sober characterization of the atomic second person——the reader——or the self in the mirror——Everyman?——or just the artificial figure of a "person"?

The marginally-hinged title for this section, "a connection repeats," may be exploited to point, for example, to certain words or assertions, if and as we choose to construe them in its light, but is unwieldy in limbing any gloss to the mercilessly

pithy and idiosyncratically determinate assertions of this paragraph. We can try though: The earth may be unbroken, possibly by the grace of snake-charmerly harmonic ministrations, but music may be discontinuous, its tendency less than scrutable. Nor will naming afford reliably consistent association, though its persistence, like a smell, does stick around. Name and the reason for a name cannot be assumed connected. So where's a connectedness that can be counted on in address, by which "we can correctly speak"——or is that fifth sentence a tongue-in-cheek howler, given the severe groundwork for negative capability asserted so far? In fact, I wind up inferring that only inasmuch as others (including I as an other) read into me do even I myself repeat as a connection with my passing thought. It is this "quiet agitation," the restless spastic leap across the synapse, ineffable and irreducible, that repeats.

So the rubrics offered flush left as though to gloss each section are neither summary nor didactic, but unpredictably, diversely oblique enough to activate a fault along which meaning, intention, attention, slides, tenses, caves in or abruptly heaves up. The rubric alongside the following passage, "you are akin," refers me to the Gesualdo-Hejinian link, or that between their works, or their methods——but, as the previous passage happens to note, "We cannot reduce it": all lines are linked, like the force lines Leonardo saw permeating his image of experience of the world, abstract while physical, the other inherently kin to the self-same, indeed perhaps distinguishable only by observance of taboos.

> This style has both a rational and an irrational ambiguity. This is not an accident. The spark for this or key drifting is marked. There is only tentative stability and yet the fascination of his mind is bright by a density of this seeming irreverence in a cosmos.

The compact sealed (between Hejinian and Gesualdo, between the life and the work) and interrogated (for the exact,

discriminate, splintering tenor of its accord and impact) is overwhelmingly personal to the author and the subject, and assumes no bond or struggle with the reader. Although the text consistently refracts beyond them, the spectacle of the artist's and the art's project tends to render the reader, however warmly sympathetic or exalted, coolly analytic or dismayed, appreciative receptor to this demonstrative display, processing significantly a workshop in which to make something of it.

Compared to Gesualdo, the music of The Guard's less fiery and severe, more lambent, the conceptual tones, harmonies, rhythms and dynamics more fluently engaged with the sonic. There's a sensitive resonance too in the syncopated, lilting overtones and undertones set off by both cerebral and sensual melodic lines, in those imaginatively resonant sound experiences evoked by the play of citation and phonics manifest in the words themselves, and in the fluent and variously sensible play of concepts, situations and feelings suggested by associations triggered through direct and elliptical reference. The long 8-part poem, in stanzas of 3 to 10 lines, briskly establishes the literal and grammatical liberty of each line, while always entertaining connotative, contrapuntal interference between them. The jumps or breaks between lines, physical as well as intellectual, can be both thought and heard, as here in the first few:

> Can one take captives by writing—
> "Humans repeat themselves."
> The full moon falls upon the first. I
> "whatever interrupts." Weather and air
> drawn to us. The open mouths of people

So, when, towards the bottom of page 3, a long sentence ambles linearly, a reader's likely to proceed one step at a time, watchful for ice, dogshit or the odd root, mindful of what may stir between the camouflage of the 'natural.' That stanza reflects on the crucial interfaces of action and event,

on the one hand, and perception and conception, on the other:

which by appearing endless seem inevitable.
The flag droops straight down. The horse
in dry sand walks with a chirping noise
from friction of the particles
and counter arguments like pack-ice
puff in the waves there, blowing fountains
of pearl. The ground.

I'd say at any moment the poem is about sensory, cognitive, nervous apprehension——the taking in or taking on of things that it entails. The transit of this transitory act is seen in perspective of that problematical block, that thing of time and space, then: the flag's is a gesture off in time, and/or in space, remote from writing, negotiated through frames and counters that are themselves clichés; language the prosthetic apparatus of imagination. A cartoon of an abstract painter pointing out s/he can draw 'from nature'; elaborately set-up panning shot abruptly shifting focus; a humor in the tension between the generic and the specific, the continuous and the choice. Echoes and reverb of words, sounds, thoughts, ideas through merger, dovetailing, distinction, open the work to the act of/active patterning known as 'reality' (reality in the sense of a world in which one could live, principles of order accessible to discovery never assuming or resolving themselves).

the pleasure of that pressure... over
and supports my head. Every other place
is latent from here. It's
as if I were seeing myself
propped on my hand, with...
putting something loud in the mouth...
an egg, an arena

That stanza seems a meditation on or mulling over the site of reception and of notice ("Whose musical optimism takes time").

As such, it also considers the censorship of the any-old-or--fresh-thing the poet's mind would want to reckon with, the isolation (in fact, requirement of solitude) of the individual privileged over the (random? recurrent? insistent) plethora of the possible, by the imperative to survival of that person's discrete metabolic whole. The sensuous biological is indistinguishable, for our purposes, from conscious life; in the text, particularly, both are materialized through words, doubling on themselves even as they dub over that other, more pre-conscious track. Self-consciousness here is not just a key to play in or a key to strike, but, more thoroughly, and more discretely, the key by which the whole work turns. The hilarious and confused conundrums of self-characterization both riddle the buoyant languors and relieve the fitful suspenses of these pages. If the self censors what's to be known, it, the world, censors and convulses the self too, while each restlessly monkeys with itself as well.

> What the throat thinks, we drink... I am a thing
> ... and I, pencil turning, heard my heart
> against the diminished nocturnal buzz, as one hears
> peaches hit the ground... the mind rings: allow
> men!"... convulsively. The birds
> at dawn that repeat "ready ready ready" pronounce
> (anticipate) nothing more than a precise awareness
> of the commonplace (when they pound
> those sounds of content) for which my conscience
> is still not ready. I thought all day

Theme and statement are all-over in any Hejinian work. Specific articulations of principles or ideas are trials thereof. The proof is in the pudding, though: rhetorical, nominative force yields to the comprehensive effects of interchange between all particulars in evidence. Arguments, when stated, stand blatantly in relation of figure to field; they are there as much because of an ethic of wholistic inclusiveness as due to any compulsion towards self-expression or being right (though these are, of course, included too). While chronic ideas and feelings aren't allowed to run ragged, the method in the writing tries to find a place of apt authority for these as for the mundane

and the fleeting, the contingent and the imaginary, the typical and the outlandish cite-able outcroppings of the conditions of a life or mind.

Elements are valued in the bright spark of recognition's leap and in relation to each other. Such relations' comprehension is less a matter of recognition than of inconclusive negotiation, open always to the impact of the following term on what's been so far understood. So Hejinian eschews the pressure to flesh out, make personal, historicize or make literal the widely various subject materials she refers to. When a passage does extend the sway of any given matter's impulse, there is something ironically self-amused or mischievous about its presumption to provisional hegemony and coherence. Any assumption of the essential, the natural, the true, the correct, or even of the sensible or the meaningful, in the terms of any one construct or system, is untenable when naming and metonymy are always being held up to the light in aesthetic wonder and reflective scrutiny. The subject matter might be construed as 'fragmentary' in its representation, but only in the same way it is when we present that of our own lives to our minds: our perceptions and realizations only offer a spasmodic, glancing formulation of impressions that continually slither and jiggle into others: the verbal objectifies as it transposes and congeals the inherently unresolved, contingent, fitful experience of cognition. Reference affords an articulate proxy for the active forces in our universe; the authority of reference is ersatz, implicit and perhaps inherent product of our mutual consent. Hejinian's reverence is reserved for those dynamics of consent and revulsion, contact and solitude, which make up the universe itself, as every crisis we happen across within it.

—Steve Benson

THE WESTERN BORDERS by Susan Howe (Tuumba #2, 1976)

There is a history of longing and displacement in these inland poems. The longing is to be somewhere else, to exist in a context of language relevant to one's experience. In this book, as in her work as a whole, Susan Howe writes toward making such a world. She invokes myths of exile and return in relation here to an Irish geography which, as it takes shape in words, becomes the emblematic topography of her thinking. Her use of history and geography is not a new idea in poetry and this is not a poetry of new ideas but of oldest ideas. History is reimagined, its territories reclaimed, renamed:

> name my cottage Merlin
> shutter it in trees
> Merlin of the Dark Gate
> deep calling into Sleep

Names of a person, a location, an historical figure, an activity are made to equal each other. Lines appear in an unpredictable almost chimerical way (chimera coming from a word meaning fire-breathing she-monster). There is found language and language written to have the feeling of being found. It seems both new and old. It is arranged and asserted in a way that subtly replaces, recomposes the old stories.

> The flight into Egypt by Jan de Cock
> then down the hill to the larder
> wherein that strange Thee of Thine sat snug
> and we paddled in forgotten places
> and fingered the slant of your skirt
>
> Demosthenes came striding by the seashore too
> solitary at midnight and his laughter crackled like fire

The context becomes the blank space of the page which surrounds

these island-like pieces——a state which reflects the writer's feeling about her situation ("the sea means the wide world"). Each piece has the sense of being cut away, while retaining a structural integrity. The words are often left as lone, isolated events in nature

somewhere
a
star
explodes

or are formed arbitrarily into symmetrical units in a sort of visual grammar. The page then becomes a balanced architecture which suggests an archaic order of things——an heraldic shield, a manuscript page illuminated at a time when the world itself was thought of as a perfectly planned book.

There are two important elements here. The obsessive, reordering historicity and the nature of what is chosen to both present and represent this obsession. Borders, islands, houses, boats, cities, plains, caves——territories seen as enclosing and closed yet permeable constantly appear. The language is allusive and mythic. There are queens, kings, saints, magicians; dusty bric-a-brac from the oldest poetries presented in all their dirt.

LIFT BACK THE HATCH OF THE ARK
AND LOOK OUT

This is a fierce, feminist writing which examines and resists the activities of the various founding fathers it names (from THE PLAINS OF ABRAHAM):

They found no treasure and wandered perpetually
from place to place
As if fury could explain away the unexplored interior

This resistance takes upon itself the task of seeing and retelling

characteristic events and ordering them into her new history (from FALLEN JERUSALEM ISLAND):

> Still the brazen prophets reach down and threaten
> Some remote arrant Divinity
> "Stretch forth thy hand"
> Such cries——As if an army shouted at once.
>
> Does everyone stand for the Blessing
> What is served for dessert?
>
> You are lying.
> I am not lying.

"Brazen" (as in loud but false, metallic)—"Some remote arrant" ("Some" as among the same usual; "remote arrant" wrong, distant, wandering, filled with error, but still "Divinity" authority enough to be capitalized) "'Stretch forth thy hand'" (in a book dense with found language the use of quotes emphasizes the lack of attribution, the fact of taking, making biblical language, authoritative language) "Such cries—As if an army shouted at once" (the voice of Divinity as the voice of the organization, the might of men) "Does everyone stand when the Blessing is asked?" (What if you don't salute? Are you blessed anyway? Who asked you?) "What is served for dessert?" (and who is serving it?) "You are lying. / I am not lying." (Not for you. Not any more.)

THE WESTERN BORDERS are the ones which face into the unknown. The edge where America tears away from Europe ——"AT DEADLY WAR WITH NEIGHBORS TO THE EAST"—— it is the frontier, the brunt of the traditional progress of American empire, as well as the destination of the many utopians, including this one, who are dreaming a new order.

> the american strand
>
> rare in the world, and all the perills
> of pyrats lashed to a sinking

strand, out of Tempests and Wicked
dalliance we clashed
over Cause, and Effect
ate out the kernel.
but stone sloops still fly light in Dreams
and drowsie Haunts are deep

—Laura Moriarty

ARCHIPELAGO by Kenneth Irby (Tuumba #4, 1976)

Ostensibly, any archipelago insists on a paradox: that islands which are discrete bodies of land separated from each other by water (a separation which traditionally goes back to the 3rd day of creation), that these discrete bodies are somehow related. An "audience" is somewhat like that, separate yet a group; so are stanzas on a page or a selection of poems which appeared first in various magazines (such as this book). But there's more in Irby's book than just a topographic similarity to an archipelago. The epigraph by Walter de la Mere reads: "All that we are is in our love. It is an archipelago, and its islands may be visited each in turn." Nothing can be a group unless we perceive it as one. Islands form an archipelago by means of our perception of their nearness to one another. Here, proximity isn't geographic; the self is seen as being loving and all that it loves as proximate. Nothing can be thoroughly trivial given such a metaphor because nothing is distinct from anything else; things stand in relation to these sites at which the self loves. The very idea of triviality is dismissed in the lines "...without 'No, I'm not mad, I only / get mad at something important and nothing a human being can do / is that important'." Everything a human being does is important and everything connects

emotively. In a different poem, Irby only uses one stanza to name a boundaried nation, refer to its monarchs, and then to an indefinite amount of fluid "spent":

> Sweden, the crowns
> or how much come I spent
> fucking you in the ass.

Historical references, place names and broad, almost prophetic statements (e. g. "the Wife of the House breaking the pattern of the spirit") combine with the minutia of life and love ("tight / situps against the winter / by night / your face by day"). My impression is that any idea of a focus to these poems would be bogus, a convenient but unnecessary technique for those who've learned to look up from their reading and notice a change rather than a connection.

Irby ends a page of 4 staggered couplets with the single line, "the intellect of the heart has no memory." I. e., anything or anyone known through the heart (loved) is in the present ("place certainly not recollection"); the line does not mean that beloved things are forgotten. If Irby meant the latter, then certainly one of Archipelago's poems ("(for C. O. S. 18 July 1975)") would not have been included (would not perhaps have been written).

Carl Otwin Sauer died on July 18, 1975. Closer to O'Hara's poem for Billie Holliday than to Whitman's for Lincoln, the only thing tying this poem to the day Sauer died is the date itself in the title. Death is never mentioned. In fact, the poem begins with procreation: "to fuck, always / and to live with God, way." The poem is a terse tribute to the country's foremost proponent of Human Geography. It's a shorthand listing of either moments Irby shared with Sauer or qualities Irby saw in him. It's hard to tell. Lines like "father's intelligence" could be both. A person's name is clearly only mentioned once ("over Sharon") and given the preoposition, Sharon could be some town they flew over (how well did Irby

know Sauer?). By making the tribute and references ambiguous, Irby keeps them from seeming hyperbolic. The clearest statement seems grand, but having at least two meanings and no clear referent prevents it from sounding overblown: "love, more than the Earth." As an imperative, it would imply a limitation of the person it's addressed to; as a description, it delineates Sauer's priorities. Of course it could also be something Sauer himself wrote or said. There's no way to know and no reason to believe the line isn't describing Sauer's expansive love. A point being: throughout the book, qualities, objects, events, and people are all treated equally. No statements are subordinate to others.

These alternations (of what is commonly called scale) from simple description ("breakfast cereal grain") to declarations of emotional states ("How easily I have forever talked to you") enables the common place, descriptive passages to seem like they might be metaphors. But they aren't, strictly speaking, poetic metaphors. Instead they represent themselves in the context of a world where nothing is irrelevant. They feel like they might contain some metaphorical significance though and this contributes to (is caused by?) the poetry's sentimentality.

Oddly, most of these poems are not love poems. They all however have a tone to them that would fit love poetry. The tone is best described by the line "strictly sentimental, and insistent." Sentimentality functions as a support for what's left unsaid. There's an insistence in leaving off just before naming and Irby uses it often (e. g. "but the rise of," "no getting used to," "also the," "to let in"--these are all ends of stanzas or poems).* The poems insist there's more to say.

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* Sterne's A Sentimental Journey ends with a similar ellipsis.

The sentimental tone combines with the poetry's many specifics to maintain a belief that the unsaid is just as specific as what is there on the page. Some sense of craft or some limitation of our language keeps the lines from being completed.

——David I. Sheidlower

"THE AURA OF ITS WITHHOLDING"

MAGRITTE SERIES by Kathleen Fraser (Tuumba #6, 1977)

Magritte Series is a group of poems involving a woman's forays into the realm of the half-conscious. The poems take their titles from Rene Magritte's paintings. The poems also take from the paintings a semiotic, a method of representation. Like Magritte's paintings, Fraser's poems are "surreal"; they confound perception and imagination. But they are not surrealistic. They do not shock or confuse the reader; they employ metaphor but not symbolism or trompe l'oeil (l'orielle).

> Their sentences climbed together, if there had been stairs,
> but everything was flat, it was summer and spacious on the
> [outside,
> though the corridors always had bodies in them and the
> [urgency
> towards motion, predicting a scene already played out.
> ("L'Eloge de la Dialectique")

The book's epigraph (from A. M. Hammacher's Magritte) names a hemisphere charted by the poems and paintings: "the realm of the half-conscious," brittle states of lucidity," and "(inventive

play with) imaginary spaces." The "brittle states of lucidity" explored by Magritte are linked to sleep by Hammacher. Fraser is familiar with such states, but she also knows those which are not surrounded by sleep, such as daydreaming, tooth-brushing, childhood fantasy, or occasions of solitude when she stops to "recapture some set of moments" ("La Vie Secrete").

> The things I hear
>
> are going out my left ear
> and moving
> toward the lights
>
> Like a woman wearing a red sweater.
> Wearing a red sweater,
> I am attracted
>
> by the view behind her,
> out the window
> at the civilized periphery.
> ("La Baigneuse du Clair au Sombre")

Only one of the poems nears actual description of the painting from which it takes its title ("Les Jours Gigantesques"). Other poems take up images in the paintings which are their namesakes —a color, an object, a setting——and/or the poems begin with a scene where the painting left off ("La Reproduction Interdite"), or take a scene up to where the painting begins it ("L'Assassin Menace" and "L'Invention Collective"). Whether or not there are specific imagistic or thematic connections between paintings and poems, the poems always use the paintings, and Magritte's ouevre or semiotic or syntax, as a frame, an outside, against which they play and with which they entangle.

> I am interested in the logic of secrets, how it has always moved me, in particular, to be invited by a face into the aura of its withholding, as though we were designed to bring forward two opposing sets of facts and bathe ourselves in the resulting struggle, as in watching a tightrope walker

> move from one point in space to another, each foot brought precisely from behind and placed in front of the other, but without the delicious possibility of falling, were it not for the rope stretched tautly beneath him, cutting the air with its odor of hemp.
> ("La Reproduction Interdite")

Image or theme extends the entanglement, but it is a process initiated by the titles taken from Magritte, untranslated to emphasize their alienation/adoption from/to the poems. Left in French for the English reader, the titles are a foreign element (perhaps half-understood), frames which are not part of the poems or part of the paintings.

> What do you notice, awake? I notice I'm afraid to break in on the fluidity. My dreams ask questions,
> the ones I've thought about
> but can't speak.
> ("La Revolution")

Fraser uses her fear of interrupting a fluidity and the articulation of her dreams to arrive at a third position. In this place she speaks in tones comprised by the silence of consciousness and the sounds of half-consciousness——a middle voice.

*

The poems do not explicate Magritte's paintings; what's significant isn't a one-to-one correspondence between contents of poems and paintings. Fraser's poems use Magritte's semiotic as a ground for visions and narratives dreamt "to a self / awake in the world" ("Les Jours Gigantesques"). To demonstrate this, I'll explicate both the painting and poem titled "La Reproduction Interdite" ("Not To Be Reproduced").

THE PAINTING: depicts a man with his back turned looking in a mirror: the image he sees is of himself with his back turned.

Just his bust, the back of the head and shoulders, wearing a hat. The mirror reproduces what we see as viewers of the painting and not what the man should see if he were looking into a "real" mirror. But, a book on the shelf in front of the mirror provides a naturalistic foil to the man's double image: reflected in the mirror, it demonstrates that the mirror is real and not a painting inside a painting. So, to read this metaphorically, it means that the man sees himself only as others see him? One should distrust one's self-image? One cannot reproduce one's self-image even in a mirror? You cannot see yourself as others see you——if you are alive: as soon as you see yourself as others see you, you are dead?

THE POEM: (in prose). The narrative: the narrator's father invited her into a dream where "he was making preparations to die." He appears completely healthy to her——she frees him from his sense of imminent death by telling him her opinion (view) of him. The poem ends with a statement that her father died ten years before she had the dream. The poem sets itself up as an investigation of "the logic of secrets," especially secrets between men and women. It compares secrets to watching a tightrope walker. (This is suggested by the line "...invited as I was by that closed-off expression to become the rope upon which he demonstrated his journey.") A metaphorical correspondence of secret/person to rope/rope walker lures a reader into identifying the rope with the secret and the secret keeper with the rope walker. This identification isn't stated explicitly in the poem, but it is implied by two consecutive metaphorical clauses.

Fraser doesn't take her tightrope walker image from Magritte. She doesn't use his image of a man looking in a mirror. She does take his title and its suggestion of something secret, something which it is forbidden to reproduce or retell. She does take his male figure, but not an anonymous one, and she includes female figures (the narrator and her mother), while Magritte doesn't.

Magritte explores a male half-consciousness visually, in which women are not quite human——they are dead, or half fish or shadow. Fraser explores a female half-consciousness verbally, in which men are not quite human——they are dead, half shadow or bruise, dream characters or mostly ideology. But it is not a matter of getting even with Magritte. It's a matter of getting inside/outside a female (feminine) half-consciousness.

——Andrea Hollowell

ENCY by Tom Mandel (Tuumba #16, 1978)

> Periodical the constructive ideal, all bookish dust
> dribble and sputter.

EncY might obliquely refer to encyclopedia and thereby define, if indirectly, certain arbitrary parameters of this work. Misspellings, fragmented words and facts, foreign words, and obscure details are elaborated within a general framework which is impossible to understand in its entirety.

> llow the u/sa ge ferds niais...
>
> simican litference speleign...
>
> el fries? zutshurdt...

The reader is thus faced with a monument of marginalia whose details are defined by the incomprehensibility of any single whole. The details themselves may appear incomprehensible, but if you don't knock yourself out trying to understand them,

they start bouncing around the inside of your head like a basketball.

The lyrical drone and fast shifting rhythms in EncY stop this book from being a purely arbitrary collection of weird objects, or merely a politically rooted prosody of propositions and presumed facts.

each such become her
ringed on the diction
plan matters to be
appropriate. Third
single occurs in
alphabetical
order of hearing.

This lyric is the avalanche of a music of the overcrowded mind whose main concern would appear to be order, or at least the faithful transcription of disorder. The agreement the author has made with his subject matter(s) is to accept an arbitrary framework that is not necessarily related to the matters' value as such. Hence, a kind of rush in which value is determined by the tenacity of a specific subject to exist.

"The convenience in arrangement conveys in such detail points of execution sustaining analogous work by main principle." > "Losing or dividing is the treatment." Throughout the book we find ourselves filling in the gaps, reading errors into sense and vice versa, while the names (the French nom) challenge our notion of what it means to name something or somebody, and what that then implies. The arrangement allows the author to avoid accumulative predication whose purpose is usually to attribute more and more qualities to any given name. Here, the name is enough and the accumulation is of relationships established between what the work and author call into existence.

The increase in relationships grows rapidly and the reader is

consequently forced into erringly reading the text in order to keep up. Attention is analogous to the modes of transcription. There are frames in which a certain kind of relationship might make sense, though these are largely general areas in social, political, and poetic discourse that do not lead to conclusive propositions: "one / or two black cats / don't make the night." The ambiguity in either subject or predicate make the reader run around somewhat blindly between the two until there is a recognition of what you are doing——conveyed more by your own sense of direction than by where you are at.

Finally, in the end, there is nothing to hold on to for very long. Names and facts have become the agents in a somewhat disturbing and at times desperate search for meaning and location, the control over which, the author admits, has always been out of his hands. "In the whole architecture was a serious flak. On the whole, conditions imposed upon them a serious flak. In the new situation was considering the materials." It is this insistence upon the materials that makes EncY worth every bit of what it resists.

——Joseph Simas

TOTALIZING

In an interview in an issue of Flash Art Jean-Francois Lyotard expressed that we (those who might have been expected to offer solutions to oppression, poverty, etc. ?) no longer feel guilty. We have seen technological advances come to pass without any of the dreams of emancipation from poverty and oppression having been fulfilled.

The following is from The Question Man / by Conti, S. F. Chronicle 3/3/86: What's Hot Today? Nancy Sher 23 answers, "Being full of life, and on the go. Working at a job you like. Spending the day doing what you want." Other things that are hot are "a sophisticated, very high style," "aerobics," "moving up in your career, dressing right, having the right car," "bold colors." People questioned, suddenly given a chance to take a stab at today's question, are all at once trivially empowered. The more stupid the answer the more likely that on reading it I'll read it a second time out loud to a friend.

> Post Script Of The Regulator: I would like to sound a word of warning——to speak is to lie——To live is to collaborate ——Anybody is a coward when faced by the nova ovens—— There are degrees of lying collaboration and cowardice—— That is to say degrees of intoxication——It is precisely a question of regulation——
> (William Burroughs, Nova Express)

I would like to think of myself as having values that the Question Man could not regulate, values which in confronting the Question Man would become suspended before the limitations of what could actually be expressed, rather than feeling versatile enough to circumvent those limitations. In other words I would disparage my own impulse to be clever, and feel the violence of the gesture being extended to me.

When hearing Bruce Andrews read I often feel a certain amount of guilt, a degree of emotional paralysis, because my disposition is not flexible enough to avoid feeling constrained by the work that I'm being bombarded with. I feel targeted; whoever holds to normative practices will feel them rigidify. In the movie Terminator a futuristic tank moves along crunching a field of human skulls while firing deadly rays at the last of the humans. The overloaded scenario of death and doom is more funny than frightening, the further exaggeration of a familiar movie genre. The Question Man might be considered a genre——but placed within the context of news, it also conveys responses, minus the machinations of news reportage. In the talk he gave at Canessa Park, "Total Equals What," Andrews stated that

"Meaning does not precede method." If the Question Man had asked, "What do you most value?" he would have been charting a whole different course through the social body.

> The umpire is corrupt, what then?——scare tactics: baby has more candy at home, all this so called 'shit' (Geschichtenschiessenschlopff), drug me—— negligible sinking ships, squashed things, why don't you abuse it?—— (Bruce Andrews, Confidence Trick)

This sounds a little like the flip-side of The Question Man. Quick responses removed from any particular context can feel oceanic in their proportions. A half dozen people questioned in the financial district or Fisherman's Wharf seem to reflect the state of the world because they're a random sampling, and this in itself conveys the present, a horizontal spread, skimmed of any historical baggage that may lie beneath the surface.

The following is from "NO 107" of Love Songs:

deserve.
swords.
heart.
victor.
ventured.
things.
fainter,
something.
absence.
pen.
silence.
good.
belong.
gained.

Everything does not come to her
who waits.

Idleness is not evil's mother.

Well done is not better than well
said.

A word to the wise is not sufficient.

All's not well that end's well.

Curiosity (obsolete. Fastidiousness)
did not deprive the cat of life.

"NO 107" posits the boundaries of contagious experience in order to sweep them away. Each statement is the negation of an old adage, an undermining of those 30 second evaluations that the Question Man generates: public knowledge set adrift as an

equivalence of opinion; we have the verticality of the premature evaluation spread out, as a random sampling, toward the contextual horizon of what today is.

> X-ray miscueing repeatedly & yapping, electric pity; second order, lick land lick limbo——Robin Hood's tiny desk unit politics——She is not above drooling on evidence—— inflation had not yet touched it?——Clap your hands, does it have any second coming?; it has a little dictionary in it, give me some more monitors——
> (Bruce Andrews, Confidence Trick)

Documentary films like Seventeen, 28 Up, and Streetwise show the subtleties of being contextualized within a class whose dominant values are incompatible with other categorically seprate ways of knowing society. Narrative, concerned with representing class differences, is formed from distributing qualities within a single composition, qualities which are compatible by virtue of their non-repetition, their oppositional fit, and their shared temporal contingencies. The challenge of being poor may appear even greater, more dynamic, within this styled ambience of values in stasis than that of an interesting career. If we could operate outside any social context perhaps it would be. Representational narrative does not democratize social experience, but the context within which that experience will be depicted. In this respect the concern for making narrative accessible to a broad public involves creating a third context through which society is reconstituted as an ambience that all ways of knowing society could be compatible with. In a sense Andrews' method generates a disparaged contextualization as opposed to the ideally transparent ambience through which ideology entropies into a notion of declassed accessibility. Composed accessibility eclipses that meaning which is painfully jeopardized, often in the process of depicting lives on the brink of disaster. Where meaning is passive, only life-threatening or potentially humiliating circumstances are compelling.

Articulating the suspension of values is in itself suspenseful. The interplay between Andrews' often cryptic modal logic and say Confidence Trick is likely to be missed entirely if it is assumed that his poetics explain his poems and narrative. Andrews' poetics invite the most ambitious scale imaginable as a paradigm for the present. Confidence Trick by filling the exact space of its contextualization squeezes the utopian impulse out of the present picture altogether. This could be thought of as a "dialogue with the future," setting the stage for a kind of interplay yet to be developed.

Whatever experience I might partially penetrate I am also repelled by, my limitations, very real limitations, are kept in perspective by the repeated repulsion of these values from any circumstances I might imagine them to greater than, or to fully penetrate. There's an interplay of limitations involved in writing. Values derived from another history than that operated within are important as a means of reflection removed from the social reproduction of a particular received status. I can't imagine myself fully comprehending what Andrews is doing without losing this interplay.

The notion of totalizing as the expansion of a solitary contextual horizon is difficult to apply to my own experience. I try to explicate the compartmentalization of sheet metal work (what I do for an income), the exclusivity of this experience, so that the contingencies imposed at work do not contextualize all the other circumstances I enter. I want incompatible ways of knowing society to converge with me as one locus of that convergence; certain perceptions are suspended, as good as dead, and yet I do feel them despite their being incompatible with the particular context I've entered. What I then feel is an interplay of actual limitations, paradigmatic of a society within which social classes exist, and even multiply, as incompatible ways of viewing the world. This effort isn't schizoid. I'm aware of the suspension of values that's going on. The experience is sobering, and yet it can be treacherous in that this sobriety interferes with the euphoric sense of fully

comprehending the world before me, the hypnotic draw of feeling all that I can't immediately contend with being progressively eclipsed by the moment at hand. I'm not saying that this compelling focus is bad——at least in moderation——but as an ideal or national program it's horrific. The following is from an article called "Getting High On Doing A Tough Job / Work May Be Akin To Sex And Drugs," by Daniel Goleman (S. F. Chronicle 3/19/86). "One assembly-line worker in the Chicago research, for example, had a job in which he simply tightened a set of screws all day long. But after several years he was still experimenting with ways to shave a few seconds from his time, a challenge that kept him engrossed." This phenomenon is refered to as "flow."

There would be no point in criticizing American society as it actually exists. It is already being reproduced in contempt for the way in which it is actually constituted, in defiance of its own incompatible features, and this defiance is its unifying eros, its logocentric and phallocentric machinery for reifying partial worlds. The exclusive values of each atomized world is maintained in part by the simultaneous contextualization of accessible desire, made-for-the-public signifieds, the precious synthesis of disparate worlds, or at least an urgent gesture toward thoroughly accessible values.

* * *

*Praxis published as Tuumba 18 in 1978 is unlike anything else I've read by Bruce Andrews, constantly changing viewpoints and yet retaining a subtle familiarity from one line to the next, which gives it a fairly quiet and reflective tone. "The tissue of contradiction is pictured/ as a criss-cross/ she inadvertently omits/ on a windmill/ actually two-thirds."

——Michael Amnasan

BEACHCOMBING THROUGH WHIMSEY

SENSES OF RESPONSIBILITY by Charles Bernstein (Tuumba #20, 1979)

One of the fun things about reading Charles Bernstein's work is coming across all the echoes he laces his poems and books with; words, phrases, lines and chunks of poems surface in different works, appear backward in one poem, float out of the tangle of another, or get echoed or slightly modified somewhere else. It's hard to read just one of Bernstein's books at a time because one is always pointed to or reminded of another: for example, "Footlight Parade" (Controlling Interests) repeats phrases and words from "Stove's Out" (Stigma). Titles echo lines: "But Boxes Both Boats, Growing Tireder As The Day Amasses" (Resistance) modifies the line "But boxes both in, boated just the same" in "For Love Has Such A Spirit That If It Is Portrayed It Dies" (Controlling Interests). "The Taste Is What Counts," the final poem in Poetic Justice, contains phrases from earlier poems in the same book and almost reads as a coda. Also, the fifteenth section of "A Person Is Not An Entity Symbolic But The Divine Incarnate," published in the magazine Tyuoni in 1985, is a revision of "is like a" from Shade; a few words and lines have been left out. Sometimes Bernstein uses the work of other writers: "The Bean Field" in Shade is comprised of bits and pieces from "Sounds" and "Solitudes" in Thoreau's Walden.

The effect of these repetitions is to produce a sense of déjà vu and recognition whenever one opens a Bernstein book. If you're like me it's also the beginning of a lot of searching (research) ——you wind up going over all sorts of other poems, refamiliarizing yourself with earlier works or scouting through Thoreau, and the poems start to merge into a single body—— "the taste is what counts." A web or network of citations is set

up and this gives the work a geometric quality—establishing a dimension of reference and repetition; there are familiar signs —repetition (or is it Stein's insistence?) sets up syncopation and a measure is located—the work has a larger rhythm and pulses in ways that isolated poems can't.

The larger issue here is Bernstein's claim that "You're dealing in all cases with a material, language, that is in the most fundamental way 'found'"—and that's right—all language is citational by nature; language like any other signalling system or code is based on a notion of the repeatability of conventionally determined signs, which is what makes for its intelligibility. The recurrence of a word or a phrase or a line in some other context adds to or shades the possibilities for its use and meaning; a word might be defined as the sum of its uses. Repetition is at the base of all linguistic meaning. Perhaps most importantly, repeated lines, words and phrases stimulate the memory and thus heighten consciousness of their nature as citations.

Memory is very much at issue in Bernstein's Tuumba book Senses of Responsibility, and the kick-off poem, "As If The Trees by Their Very Roots Had Hold of Us," pulls a weird number by shooting vectors all over the place. It's a poem about how memories of the past and anticipations of the future keep us from living in the present—the self in the poem is one part bewildered memory and one part "Hope, which is, after all, no more than a splint of thought / Projected outward, 'looking to catch' somewhere..."; the mind is either lost in the past or anticipating the future, "Eternally buzzing over the time, / Unable to live in it...." Strangely enough, when I read this poem I had the distinct feeling I'd heard all this before; not only lines and words sounded familiar, but even the title rang a bell. After some research I found parts of the poem all over Bernstein's work. "As If The Trees," apparently, is the Ur-poem from which various pieces have been quarried and planted in other books; it was no doubt written before Shade was published. The echoes, both earlier and later,

determine a kind of referential matrix and account for the reader's sense of having been there before. The first place I found echoes was in "is like a" in Controlling Interests, which, though it's a later book, I'd read before Senses of Responsibility ——I remembered the piece because I'd spent such a long time trying to make something of it ("desiring production") before I realized that the lines make more conventional sense backwards:

> So really not visit a remember to strange
> A its always finally seems now which ago

etc. It's basically "As If The Trees" backwards:

> Strange to remember a visit, really not so
> Long ago, which now seems, finally, past. Always, it's a...

As "is like a" goes on it mangles the lines more, and the second half is a similar rewriting of the last and title poem of Senses of Responsibility——the piece in Controlling Interests does an alpha-omega number on the whole of the earlier book.

Later I found that "#23" in Shade is also taken from "As If The Trees"——it looks like Bernstein just arbitrarily picked words and phrases down the page, which is similar to the way "The Bean Field" reads——as if wherever his finger landed became the poem. And finally the title echoes the unattributed quote that kicks off "For--" in Shade:

> "as a tree is connected in its
> own roots so a person is
> connected in his/her own self"

So big deal. But indeed it was "Strange to remember a visit, really not so long ago"; there I was remembering and wondering along with the poet, "Eternally buzzing over the time, / Unable to live in it."

Hearing echoes, the reader shifts mental gears, projects

backwards and forwards, hovers around, through, and over the writing,

& then it's there——that
Point——whatever——which, now, while
It's happening seems to be constantly slipping away,
"Like the sand through your fingers in an old movie," until
You can only look back on it, & yet you're still there, staring
At your thoughts in the window of the fire you find yourself
[before.
("As If The Trees By Their Very Roots Had Hold Of Us")

Memories and the past creep into these poems in other ways as well——most forcefully in "Resistance," which cites parental admonitions——how words bend up kids for life:

As
a child, the task of growing
up——"come on now, stop this
crying"——...
..."why don't you think!"——"you
ought to have known better!"——
against her daily nagging. The
very words his mother used, focus
to crush...
...They often take the form
of "circular walls", he can
function with, I'm doing that
holds up, in an intellectual
way, disturbing inner problems.

"Disturbing inner problems" indeed. The self is the site of cites; it's created and formed and limited by language, from which it's as impossible to extradite oneself as from memory or the past. We're connected in our selves, and the roots are as deep as consciousness. Writing it down, becoming conscious of the problem, is one means of resistance, though there are problems:

So, more of these tracings, as if by some magic

> Of the phonetic properties of these squiggles.... Or
> Does that only mystify the "power" of the "presence" which
> Is, as well, a sort of postponement.
> ("As If The Trees...")

Writing is a postponement in the sense that it's a temporary limit beyond which one needs to constantly go. As Robert Duncan once said, "Responsibility is the ability to respond": keeping this ability open and exercised is the task of the writer and the reader. Bernstein uses the phrase "beachcomber through whimsey," an appropriate metaphor for the poet, who looks for clues along the sandy beach of the past:

> We've gone over this a thousand times; & here again, combing
> [that
> Same section of beach or inseam for that——I'm no
> Longer sure when or exactly where——"& yet" the peering,
> Unrewarding as it is, in terms of tangible results,
> Seems so necessary.
> ("As If The Trees...")

——Michael Golston

PLASMA / PARALLELES / "X" (Tuumba #21, 1979) and
COMPLETE THOUGHT (Tuumba #38, 1982) by Barrett Watten

In "The World in the Work" (Total Syntax), Barrett Watten proffers a brief 'explication de texte' of "Paralleles" (from Plasma / Paralleles / "X"). In this myth of his work, Watten positions its thematics and constructive principles as a mutually reinforcing "middle ground" that mediates between the writer's (and reader's) psychology, and the world in which

the work has its object status, a world renewed by the work.

I don't wish to dwell on details of exposition, but here the poet apostrophizes his work on a political model. Form with effect. A political position offers an alternative and also represents the projected future in which that alternative has become a paradigm. Its internal construction shows the mind to be at work towards such a goal, puts it into play, is progress. Within the relative (and intentional) closure of a world of literature, this model would seem to suggest, change is action. Such an equation enables us to assign a value to change. The development of literary method, e. g. in "The World in the Work" from Breton through Olson to certain language writers, is not a matter of repeated novelties, nor of avant gardism, nor of accidents of genius. Rather, it represents a continuing mediation of an art form between the world we experience and the one we seek. Examining a writer's method, we are now able to graph in it a response to the formal closure of our lives in history. A thought accounts for all.

This is a powerful position. Its merit is evident in clarifying the intentions of Watten's own work and in a lesser way the intentions of other writers. I say "a lesser way" because one's own spiritual garment inevitably fits oneself better than it does others. Most important, however, is the scale and seriousness with which Watten's position renders the relation of literature to life.

Of course, this position is constantly illustrated in Watten's work. But really there's something else I want to talk about more, which is more important to me in the work of this poet. When I first read Watten (Opera Works), I was struck by an unarticulated but explicit demand in the work, a demand made on the author in the guise of an address to the reader. Now it is easy to see this demand as foreshadowing the position under discussion. But there's more to it. At the time, I found the demand frustrating, undialectical, confrontational:

> The natural qualities of XYZ versus the occasional qualities. The anti-occasional qualifications recognized "natural" qualities, like a tape-recorder takes down speech. What I do now, for instance, while writing this, is no containment of natural qualities. Rather a possible ground spring for self's acts using any impetus which defines them. It's not any impetus, though; one which sets such and such off. (Opera Works / "March 20")

I well remember my initial arguments with this ahistorical sense of projective intentionality as a, the?, shaping characteristic of a new present in writing. An overly schematic heroicism (a la historicism, but ahistorical, a historical limbo that proceeds from the self self-defined) pissed me off. From the inside of my own intelligence, I felt angered by the intelligence of the work. It was so positional that I continually wanted to argue. It seemed language with which you had the option to agree or disagree, right? But I wasn't reading to have my options laid out, still less to choose one. In retrospect, the demand is made on the author, not the reader. If the reader so readily confronts it, perhaps this is because of an acuity in the work which positions it at the center of a more general demand which subjects many of us to its urgencies. From the start, the author is the hero of the work; and this is a problematic focus. The strength of it is naked, an open and unambiguous position being as well a vulnerable one. Not as a reader or critic, but as a poet I've I've often felt something frightening in relentlessness.

The unrelenting sense of method is a response to this demand, a way of dealing with it. Consider, in the light of the quotation above, the line "A telephone pole is an edited tree" from "Plasma." The same thematics oppose nature to artifice, nature vs. intention, containment of force to response to or with force. One could go on; perhaps you get the point. Also, the certainty of each passage. The later passage is much stronger, having understood the earlier one as it were which gropes for something without grasping it. But a psychological urgency is the same, reinforced in "Plasma" by the poetics of visual rhyme; all the energies of this relation between tree and

telephone pole are permitted to the reader once the methods of the language make them available. The vector of the line lets the reader make the demand: edited by whom? what's the transformation? to what goal? Questions which can be answered in thought, and to which other parts of the poem respond as well (viz. "The whole man is a concept, waking to sound").

I think of Plasma / Paralleles / "X" throughout as just such an attempt to formulate these demands as a poetic method, with an identity equally posed of method and history. Plasma is the public goo, the medium into which the fixed forms of received life devolve as present experience. Paralleles, with its faint echo of parables and even paralyze, is active response, mirroring a condition and taking it up; it contains a high level of individual frustration and the desire for achievement. X, the mark, each of us is one, is the result, the mind we take away from the present moment, the precipitate, entirely something to be deciphered, a problem as we are such.

I believe this relation of history to form, what's argued in Total Syntax, intimated in Opera Works, can be effortlessly cited off the surface of Plasma / Paralleles / "X":

> To make a city into a season is to wear sunglasses inside a volcano. ("Plasma")
>
> A telephone pole is an edited tree. ("Plasma")
>
> The voice isn't saying something, but turning into things. ("Plasma")
>
> *
>
> An angry red tractor tilts over the edge of black earth. The woman driver wants to be in the movies. The sky backs up 'in heavy frames. The film slows down and stops. ("Paralleles")
>
> The station maintains its output. White noise spreads from

static generators built with that in mind. ("Paralleles")

The examination is a design problem in three dimensions. The aspirant must publish his findings as well as enter into them. There will be no graduation address, only time passing. ("Paralleles")

*

Start anywhere. ("'X'")

Time passes. ("'X'")

Springs. Echoes of... ("'X'")

The car starts. Alternating down the street. ("'X'")

Topology of... A stepwise advance, progression against... A permanent grid. ("'X'")

Plasma paralleles x. The from from the title forward is highly propositonal: a statement is attempted, in a condition in which just to respond is difficult, the difficulty. And the demand for this statement is unconditional. One wants definition. There is tremendous room for fragmentation within the work, but its overall form will be propositional. Plasma / Paralleles / "X" is exciting. The demands of Watten's intentionality seemed impossible, unassimilable, as I read them in Opera Works, so radical was his conception of PROJECT as a demand an artist's mind makes of its own work-to-be. Yet, in Plasma / Paralleles / "X", the whole apparatus was placed in motion.

I still can't agree with it all or even necessarily feel I must agree with much; history is not method to all. The sense of an authorial hero, as often annoying (to me) as any other conception that takes up history in its will, is such outrageous impossibility that I have often had trouble seeing around the

arguments it engenders in order to respond to the work in ways more broadly based in my own sensibility than the stimulation of its brilliance which may be mirroring what? Yet if criticism of so positional a work should tend to argument with it, why not? Isn't it fun and useful to argue, especially with someone so smart? But when I see around my initial responses, when I let my insight curve past the propositional form to the demands emplacing it (viz. when I think about the demands on self in that original passage I quoted from Opera Works), I get involved with the work in other ways. It is easy and fun to argue with the positions; the dialogue with its motives is of deeper interest.

Complete Thought is a more ironic, ruminative work than Plasma / Paralleles / "X". Despite its title and the repetitive two line closures of the title piece, there is less demand for agreement, more the feeling of a collection of pieces, or not that but of time passing in the work of a poet. More a register of work than a collection of it. It may be a response to the ealier work, a tempering of it. There are echoes of the earlier syntax in "Universals" and "Relays," but the works, especially the latter, are very different in feeling (and I want to say, sensation). In "Relays" especially some of the demands (I would love to elucidate this term I am applying repeatedly to Watten's work, but can't——my use is intuitive and I'm not sure I'd continue using it if I came to know what I meant) are sloughed off and in many passages reflection escapes the irony of self-description to constitute a more open accretion of material not towards a position as in Plasma / Paralles / "X", but as an attempt to bridge some gap perhaps opened in position and sense the collegial mind. "All things begin in contradiction and end in likeness" ("Universals"). "Relays" is close to the flow of daily life, "These little stumbling blocks are the arguments of my fate."

"Artifacts" is the longest and most provocative, unusual of the pieces in Complete Thought. It is in multi-sentence numbered prose stanzas which develop from a daunting standoff with some sort of numb automatism ("...bleakness of remembered forms .... Rigidified people...talk to each other...there is only rock")

to a final "direct statement... the origin... of all tragic form .... Silence is the proliferation of multiple meanings... you are almost there." The poem ends with a quotation (uncited), "'Lenin dies; terrible frosts raging'," whose emotional universality is not ironic (again, the sense of social hero which is so important to Watten's aesthetic) and which is followed by a definitely ironic, even bitter donning of the social mantle: "By having a disease one attains professional credentials. Devices are motivated; anything else is a joke!" What stands out in the last sentence is the idea of motivation. Device (i.e. art device) without motivation is just joke (i.e. empty device). Motivation seems the precipitate of the poem, and what motivates it as it develops, the artifacts of the title, are lots of uncited quotes akin to the above gloss on Lenin. Quotations no one could recognize, but also quotations from works of contemporaries and seemingly from conversation with friends, seem to litter the landscape. Their composition is almost photographic, with the work attaining the even distance that is typical of photography, in which objects tend toward a design. This design element gives the piece the feeling of removal, otherworldliness, which is its motivation or leading feeling. A funny feeling, as of something that has stopped.

——Tom Mandel

THE INVENTION OF HUNGER by Rae Armantrout (Tuumba #22, 1979)

Red ink on tan cover, simple design, no cover graphic, Centaur type. It's a short book (12 pages of text) even by Tuumba standards, but here as in her other writing everything's worked to a precision that needs only a short space for maximum activity to occur. Few works, short works——no wasted effort

here. A moral economy, a precise seeing, suspicious of whatever might propose itself as fact, taking second looks at what the mind first presents. Definitions are proposed and reproposed:

An organised set of doctrines.

A network formed for the purpose of...

"All I want is you."

Accumulating, but not "adding up" to closure.

Boundaries, systems, and limits are noted and interrogated:

Discomfort marks the boundary.

One early symptom was the boundary.

Limits should be made clear, so that you can know what's really there, and can think how to go beyond them. She attempts to know how things work, and how they say they work——who says? And why do you say so? She questions frequently——"with relief?"——asking the mind what it thinks. Her writing wants to deflate or scrape away whatever might interpose itself——habit or deliberate mystification——and concerns itself with relation, responsibility, accuracy. That's why it's fragmented and various. "Which came first / the need or the system?" Look twice and ask again. "How did he get here?"

Orders, and clarities. Models angle in from a distance——"the great termite mounds serve / as air conditioners"——and are presented without further comment. The connections are obvious, or not; in any case they make you look.

How natural is natural history anyway?

The poems move in short lines to sharpen attention. Stopping and starting again, they mime the effect of a continual readjustment on the way to an accuracy that will itself be questioned. Statements accrete around a conjectural center, which may shift. Statement: Restatement: Question?—surrounding major concerns—this would be one basic unit. Not necessary (but possible?) to make it explicit? Let's make it explicit. But perhaps there are some things that cannot be approached directly—"the charmed verges of presence" (from Extremities)? But beware of mystification. Are you trying to fool me? Are you trying to put one over on me? Who are you trying to kid? "Demand for special treatment was an early symptom."

Quotes move in and out of the works, bringing in unattributed voices. Quotes from which a phrase or poem will sometimes begin. Quotes which themselves provide some ambiguity of emphasis: "'As soon as it became important / that free energy be chanelled.'"

There is often a sense here that the words are taken at some originary point, "far back in the head," taken just at the point of becoming articulable. Sudden clear perceptions structure themselves. This quickness, while actual, is not accidental. These works are not "natural" or "found," unmediated bursts of inspiration. Rather, eye and ear bring order here, relating the words in all directions:

Particular

figment

of flesh.

And I like what she sees ("spider on the cold expanse / of glass") and how she listens to the thought proceeding from it ("I'm not like that!").

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I am not often able to find poems about the family written with such grace and intelligence as Armantrout's——Zukofsky's domestic praises come to mind——stripped of sentiment and polemic, paying close attention to the adjustments and readjustments the self makes to itself and to this "son who's taken over the story."

"You Float" stands out from the rest of Armantrout's work; a sustained satiric blast against an unnamed "You" possibly male or female, fraction or fragment of self or deplored person or tendency, tracking a number of disguises through an insistent return to the syllable "You," which accumulates into an accusatory drone. Armantrout here avoids the boredom of so many "chant" structured poems, interfering with the march of the repeat and avoiding a too "sleek periodicity."

"Fiction" opposes to the narrative expectations aroused by its title a series of fragments organized around some central concerns. The strategies of "Fiction" are various and include 'verse'. The structure here is basically the same as in the longer poems, with the mini-narrative blocks functioning as individual lines or stanzas. One thing is proposed then another takes (its) place, all pointing to a center never baldly stated. They angle around it. Facets dance. They neither cancel out nor add up. Each points in its turn.

"Invention" as of course origin, birth, "furthering the story," making it up. The invention of "Fiction." Stories someone tells us——do they expect us to believe that? Can we? Do we want to? And what would that mean? Or stories we tell ourselves, the above questions all applying like mad. "We knew she would die for this was a film with the set trajectory of fiction." Fiction of the "strangely familiar" (strangely familial?). Numbness of a rote response versus seeing things clearly. "The idea was like a painted screen let down between himself and the particulars of danger." Various fictions, inventions, ways of keeping ourselves from ourselves, in which welter of possibilities a child or love seems a good place

to re-start. "A sense of self starts in the mouth and spreads slowly." Re-invention of the family, history, the self—— constantly beginning again. "The poor Vacuum!" Here we go again. "In the Bach fugue it was difficult to know which theme was the traveler with whom one should identify. One's self." You get a mind resisting or intending to resist whatever would take it away from a direct reading of the world, having constantly to reject the formulaic solutions tendered by others and by the self to the self: "Old 'after this.' Dear 'after this.'" Reject that comfort. Continue to imitate sanity. Each block proposing itself as the story, to add to, oppose to, the others, before and after. Overlapping tentatives. A ticket sold to distortion? No answers here, or no one answer here. Nothing at rest or finally finished. "Furthering the story."

——Marc Lecard

OBSERVATORY GARDENS by Ray DiPalma (Tuumba #24, 1979)

When Ray DiPalma, in this beautifully titled book, writes tip-top, he writes on adamant, but he may as oft scribble on the sands. The short line wants an indelible music to carry it forth, to convey a sense of impetus through syllable, both space and time implied in its ineluctible flux and pause. These same words may scar and score the mind to new imaginings, embrace beginnings, compass ends, betray the heart. In our time we've had Zukofsky and Creeley as Masters of the abrupt, unsettling, still hauntingly musical line. They are a difficult act to follow, but at his best DiPalma recalls that sharp struggle, to win an eye of the needle.

——Ronald Johnson

FLAT AND ROUND by Larry Eigner (Tuumba #25, 1980)

In Larry Eigner's poetry the senses dominate a world that's too big and varied for anything other than a piecemeal integration in the poem. There are hardly any sentences, and when they do occur they are not set off as such. Punctuation and capitalization are sporadic. The writing thus advances with an anti-grammatical alacrity, intuitively advancing with the addition of more and more words, organizational clarity depending on line breaks and spacing. Chunks of information float across the page in assymetrical patterns. Yet the poem is an emphatically verbal structuring of perception:

dream interrupted by a car
Where going what was I saing?
that room was in my mind o
now it is day

birds startle the window

air
is unseen

landscapes I've dreamt about
I've spent nights on the beach

gone off I on the back seat
the view upward, branches, wires, the tops of signs
little enough to be read

Descriptive and statemental gestures are subsumed into the poem by way of an eccentric yet recognizably speech based phrasing: the writing reads easily enough as a "rap," the abrupt divisions between phrases and the occasional instances of enjambment indicating hesitance and urgency respectively. But far from reigning in the poem from the full range of linguistic possibility, the consistently "natural" phrasing allows virtuoso turns a

less casual poetry might disallow (the first line of the poem quoted above, for instance). The poem can thus include anything the poet puzzles over, or might think to say——and ends when the subject (or the poet) is exausted.

Eigner's curiosity is never ending, and he finds value in everything. He listens to the radio every day, and dips into all manner of print. Yet only rarely does he resort to specialized vocabularies, and when esoteric information enters the writing it hardly ever parades itself as such. ("Up in the air," uncharacteristically long at three pages, is a notable exception; "venus...," a poem almost as allusive but far less obscure, is more representative of the brunt of Eigner's work.) The writing is as accessible as it is intelligent. Disjunct, but never incoherent:

Imagination heavy with
worn power

the wind tugging
leaves

from the florist's shop

some silence distanced

Reading habits, the powers of thought to make connections between any two statements, help hold the pieces together ——it's like a continuous soundtrack accompanying a sequence of disconnected images, except that these "frames" (or "shots") contain more than just description. Also, despite a reader's first or second impression, the writing relies on association as much or more than on assertion. It's the element <u>not</u> stated that gives coherence.

The movement of such a poem's attention is fundamentally anecdotal, though the anecdotes themselves are often obscure; freewheeling as Eigner's poetry may be ("tantalized in all

directions," as I have heard him say) its burden is to be graspable. Even when the writing is explicitly narrative and concerns itself with a movement through the world (remembered car trips with his family, imagined circumnavigations of the globe...) the primary consideration is the movement of the mind. We constantly strain to imagine larger contexts for the words ("Last day on earth" might be about astronauts, might be a simple trip by plane) and sometimes the task is too much for us. In this, Eigner's work recalls the enigmatic poetry I was given to read in grade school (Dickinson's "I like to see it lap the miles" is the only one that stuck) in which the subject is never stated outright. For a time, I believed that a poem had to be a riddle (and that the riddles were supposed to make me feel stupid). It wasn't until much later that I realized the world itself is the riddle——for Dickinson (and Eigner) no less than for myself. Above all, Eigner's poetry is a negotiation of reality, a struggle to integrate the scattered pieces of his experience, by force of thought and clarity of insight, by "picking and choosing" (as Marianne Moore once put it).

There are two distinct urges present in Flat and Round, though no single poem represents either urge absolutely. First of all, there's an attempt to transcribe thought, perception by perception——this is the work's anecdotal aspect. Reading Flat and Round, we feel that the poetry's elements are linked in the world, not just in the writing, by the poet's imagination (just as the moon and the island are linked in "Last day on earth"). But we are also aware that the poems grounded in experience might be (and are!) shot through with imagined particulars, that the present tense the poetry assumes is often fictional, and that hindsight can (and does) intervene between the moment of perception and the moment of writing. Secondly, there's an attempt to present the structure of thought, through a meaningful arrangement of signal details. Not that such a thing is possible——"structure of thought" is at best a metaphor, a way of asserting that Eigner's most oblique fragments aren't fragmentary at all. Sometimes, in fact, Eigner's subjective apercus are so succinct, the economy of expression is more impressive than the insight:

the rotary turns
the horizon
near and far

More words wouldn't enlarge the poem's scale——it's like a huge painting reduced to a slide, or better, a formula so ingenious application would be anti-climactic. (And if Basho's frog proves cause and effect, what laws or fallacies of perception do Eigner's poems verify?)

Flat and Round was originally prepared for publication in 1969, and stylistically it's typical of Eigner's writing in the 1960's, though unlike Eigner's other books Flat and Round is arranged thematically. The title refers to the earth, seen from a distance. (Several of the poems allude to airplane trips, a couple to space travel——still others to car trips. When not looking at the earth from above, the poet's sure enough gaping at the moon and stars from below.) Flat and Round means global consciousness——"w e l i v e i n t h e g r e a t w - o r l d," declares the opening poem, and another says, "we / are the world in the sky." (Still another has satellites bringing pictures back from Mars, so maybe it's galactic consciousness.) The other major theme is death, a private association between outer space (the heavens) and mortality ——one of the pieces just about says as much ("Association"); "Close up" and "tomorrow tonight may be the last" contain direct reference to death, other poems ("Last day on earth," "those planes were loud") refer to the subject obliquely. We are constantly aware of the fragility of life, and see it against the immensity of creation. (There's a poem in Another Time in Fragments that begins, "the knowledge of death, and now / the knowledge of stars," and other poems in other books make the same connection——i.e., "Don't get / too much / in those beautiful clouds" in Things Stirring Together Or Far Away. So the association is an abiding one in Eigner's writing.)

Since 1970 or so (and especially since moving to Berkeley in 1978) Eigner's poetry has become simpler and more deliberate.

Punctuation and enjambment have all but disappeared——lists now dominate. Less and less we get an unfolding narrative. More and more, incidents stacked up for their own sweet sakes, intuitive groupings of isolated words or short phrases. When the poems are still self-consciously spoken, the poet seems to be observing his own speech, as if it were a tree shaking in the wind (here one detects the possible influence of Robert Grenier, with whom Eigner has lived these last several years) and, yes, there's still an enjoyment taken in saying things strikingly, an old fashioned (?) idea of poetry brought boldly and unironically into the present:

u m p h m a n

you prove you can

shit

whenever you feel like it

The earlier work was "charged," and occasionally obscure ("like Dylan Thomas' stuff," Eigner has wisecracked). The newer work is clear and direct, unencumbered by extraneous muck like nothing else in contemporary poetry:

a b i g o b l o n g b o x

a goodwill truck

realizes space

whatever's inside

Charles Olson once defined history as "the practice of space in time"——a definition that helps explain the epic scale of Eigner's poetry. Minute occurences are recorded with an historian's sense of objectivity and proportion, with a writer's flair for figures of speech. In Flat and Round the poet's struggle to make sense of the world vividly demonstrates the historical

dimensions of the writing. But even in the later poetry (where struggle gives way to serenity) the work's historical character remains intact:

> Frequently I employ the expression history promiscuously with life. That's my point. A function of how a thing acts. There is a natural proper or characteristic action of anything. That is its function. As of a human life I say it is its history. It is the how. There can be no other. But there must be this one. It is. The point is, to drag it out. There it is. That is——history.
> (Charles Olson, The Special View of History)

The statement applies to Eigner's work as well as to Olson's. Also, defining history in terms of a life reminds us that size and scale operate independently of one another; as often as ambition exceeds capacity, modesty emphasizes it. The one can be as remarkable a virtue as the other:

> I'm cautious, and come into things by under-statement. Wary of exaggeration. Sotto Voce has resulted in the suppression of words. Don't like to begin with a big B, as if I was at the Beginning of all speech, or anything.... Oaks from small acorns. Forests of possibility. But they can't reach the stratosphere or leave the ground. In the stratosphere you get very stark claustrophobia.
> (from Larry Eigner's biographical statement in A Controversy of Poets)

One of the pieces in Flat and Round begins "complicated lighting" and ends "gauge of reason"——the movement is from an awareness of the environment, to an awareness of the writer's place in it; set within the strictures of sight, writing becomes a measure of the writer's capacity to think. Without those strictures, thought would lose its value, its ability to give scale to everything else. Without thought, the writing would be mere description.

——Benjamin Friedlander

TRIBUTE TO NERVOUS by Kit Robinson (Tuumba #26, 1980)

A method many have glimpsed in the overblown rhetoric of the Beats and the New York School finds its logical conclusion in Kit Robinson's concise but emphatically disconnected lyrics. The title poem, a tour de force, strips this sensibility down to essentials:

... tales

take

powder

pills

set sea

ordinarily

arbitrary

time of arrival

estimated as

The Channel

"The World's Greatest Assortment!"

ORANGE RICE

ATLANTIC OCEAN

The Novel...

The lines are oblique and follow one another by rapid tangent,

sometimes running together to form larger statements, other times not. Details pile up (including found language and allusions) but the poem never loses structural clarity——it's like a shopping list. Again and again, the writing betrays an undeniable enthusiasm for clutter, colour, and noise—— examples of the inescapability of real life——gestures that extend the boundaries of an often maddeningly wry rhetoric.

Robinson uses many techniques to cop to the constructedness of his writing's sentiments, and never sacrifices believability, largely because he keeps things simple and eschews the handy originality of slang and jargon. Lines like "moving back and forth / on stilted language" and "non-stop sympathetics" let a detached but far from subversive cleverness italicize the poet's nervous self-consciousness. Other lines are abstract and writerly by virtue of a specific but contextless description ("heat stroke on far wall," "TV over ice"). In such cases, signification occurs as an act of faith in the mind of the reader, almost as though meaning had been stripped away and then reapplied as an afterthought. The writing is also brisk and savvy:

> big situation they have
>
> going on out there
>
> seems to be dragging in
>
> quite a few heads
>
> not to say tails
>
> (from "COKE")

Generic obtuseness and parodies of shop talk——the white noise of language for language's sake——are nowhere discernible.

Here and there the writing advances by free association——as

when in "THE ONE" "train" turns into "training sites" and "street scene" becomes "something similarly seen"—but this doesn't mean that the writing is illogical, let alone nonsensical. Rather, a sporadically explicable logic—the logic of an internal monologue or fantasy, of thoughts that never get tested in conversation—animates and charms, leading to now humourous, now mournful insights:

looking up from

under your hat

and nothing is said

it's a minor pleasure

over a major pain

little enough

without much to do

about how to improve

hanging in on your

honor not hurt or

nervous after

all that

might be made light of

in light of fine error

(from "ITS A")

Which is straightforward and persuasive up to a point. But why "little enough" (if it's already noted as a "minor pleasure")? Or is it "little enough" for a "major pain"? And is "hanging in

on your / honor" to "be made light of" because it's useless ("without much to do / about how to improve"), or because the poet's "not hurt or / nervous"? And how many of these lines are supposed to be end-stopped? (Is it "not hurt or / nervous after / all that"[has happened], or "not hurt or / nervous after / all that might be made light of"? In other words, should we imagine a comma after "all that," or read right over the line break? And is the difference significant?) These and many another question come to mind when we look close——the gist of the poem is unmistakable, but the exact workings of its logic remain private.

In several of these pieces a half-denied melancholy dominates, complicating whatever statemental simplicity we might elsewise find:

THE ONE

Sunday up in

the room

it's a large room

in which I'm

alone w/a hun-

dred & some

odd people, an

empty room

pouring in

to the sun

in a dream

w/the lights on

backwards and one

being being many

if one is I am

not waiting for a train

training sites on

street scene

sense something similarly seen

somewhere un-

der some other sun

The "room," I take it, is a nightclub; and the "hun - / dred & some / odd people" are its audience. Yet the prevailing mood is one of loneliness. The anomie of "if one is I am / not waiting for a train" serves as an immediate, unanswerable reproof to the joyous collectivity of the "one / being being many," a reproof that tinges every other line with irony. And as befots a poem about collectivity that seems to derive from the isolation of a daydream ("a dream / w/the lights on"), irony soon gives way to doubt and emptiness. But irony isn't just a distancing device——it's also an analytical method, and without it we might never question the utopian satisfactions offered by the Sunday concert. Is "alone w/a hun- / dred & some / odd people" meant as a casual or a sardonic observation. Is the crowd alone with itself, or is the protagonist——named "'Kit'" in another poem——alienated in its midst? At first I believed the former was the case, now I'm not so sure. Not a trivial ambiguity, either, since its source is an inherent condition of subjectivity——a condition that unfailingly ruptures the cohesiveness of group experience——the need to be different, to fit in. Robinson's title amplifies this ambiguity——does "THE ONE" refer to the individual, or to the whole lot of us, the

group? The last three lines——a new twist on the old saw "there's nothing new under the sun"——obliquely, surreptitiously, suggest an answer. "Some other," the poem argues, is a subjective appraisal; "similar" gives the subjective its much needed ground. In other words, the one needs the other.

A different poem, "TURNED UP," reminds me of Robert Heinlein's The Puppet Masters. There's a scene in that novel that has the narrator chase his dad's secretary into a ladies room ——she's just lost her mind to alien parasites——and almost immediately the narrator gets knocked out. From then on the narration is sluggish. Details are observed but barely analyzed, delivered with a perfunctory, uncomprehending factualness. The narrator has become an operative for the parasites. And though he works incessantly——doesn't even bother to change his shoes, put on in a rush and a couple sizes too small——he never betrays any cognizance of the purpose of his work (i. e., the enslavement of the human race). He works efficiently. Estranged from that which is most familiar, calmly accepting the alien and its orders.

In "TURNED UP," having a job similarly expands, seizing control of the narrator's consciousness, becoming all-consuming yet alienating——a way of life. Conformity is the unstated subject:

TURNED UP

reasonably

opens window

cop car

closes, passes

well-to-do

nowhere to

be (STATUES) seen

green slopes up

to passing cloud

"Let's get together and..."

flame (NOMAD) door

comes off

to take the bite off

ALL KINDS OF

angles

make a world you

"find"

it is located in

blue areas

about X % of the time

and to even have

a continent first

one came to have

a look

then put

OFFICE

FOR RENT

up over head

when phone rings

and they've got work for you

The formal precision of Robinson's writing is astounding, and in "TURNED UP" this precision allows form to make its own statements about experience. The poem builds in seemingly equal increments of meaning——linguistic gestures, really, not assertions; and the lines——now enjambed, now end-stopped——use punctuation, capitalization, rhythmic closure, and a haiku-like brevity of statement to emphasize the distinctness of these gestures. Phrases thus seem detached from context even in context. "Blue areas," for instance, might be a euphemism for water, but refers with equal ease to depression, the blues. Other lines ("'Let's get together and...'") are souvenirs from conversation, or ("well-to-do") the debris of excess signification. As workaholics well know, there's a solace found only in detail.

"TURNED UP" is anecdotal the way déjà vu is anecdotal. Sentiment rather than meaning floods the mind, an experience of experience, a rush of deeply felt yet insignificant details impressing themselves on consciousness, with a totality that momentarily compensates for the partiality of memory, the brokenness of consciousness. In Tribute to Nervous, almost any poem can trigger this feeling, for the lines function as gestures as well as statements——tid-bits of meaning and deeply felt banalities——epiphanies embedded in an experience of experience——subject matter for déjà vu. But there's also a melancholy that comes across with the full weight of memory (partial or not) behind it——an emotional seriousness that makes this work "great" and not just merely "interesting."

——B. Friedlander

OAKLAND by Robert Grenier (Tuumba #27, 1980)

Robert Grenier is not as interested in the ordinary plodding conventional syntactical abyss relations of words, as in their other ways (sound, size, sight, site, scale, incantatory provenance) of coming into a relation or juxtaposition. Lordly and isolate, Furies perhaps even, on that score (that count); albeit umble to be allowed among things and creatures (creations) much hidden from the habituated eye (I, ear). One piece of Oakland reads entire

PTOLEMY

TUOLOMNE

—Tuolumne, where the stars are to be seen; Ptolemy, who saw them. That's the least interesting way to expose the connective tissue in that poem. Odd, that near-identity, the phonemic chain, one Amerindian, the other, Egyptian. The coincidence stays intriguing after the other meanings fulfil and disperse. As if to say "And that was what intrigued us in the first place"——the primary act of attention being, then, what endures. Unjust, accidental, because the superior persuasion. The winking sounds netted, centered, 'caused' to be revolved for a spell. Therefore, by someone; by some system, too.

A book called Oakland might suggest some guide to the unimaginable tourist, like those brochures presuming a common understanding concerning importance——the city hall, the lake, the museum, the joints, the stores: what's 'of interest'. And will be written in a language of imperious syntactic connection. Whereas Grenier's Oakland is site to this individual's——he lives there, lived——in his partiality interested. So I am, too. Sufficient registrations are gathered here to betoken his Utopia: a-hierarchical cognition, thinking aligned with perception to

catch and will what quick as a flash not quite gets blotted out by presumptions——exhaustion of value, meaning, motive.

So there is this city, Oakland, and it really exists, and the brochure has its uses too; I conjure it simply to indicate what Grenier's book isn't. Grenier's book tracks instances of a life that conjecturally could have happened 'anywhere'—— anywhere Grenier was. That these instances belong to Oakland is accidental in one sense (he didn't 'have' to live there) while being willed (the conditions of a life accepted and developed) in another. Grenier's Oakland bears a relation of identity/difference to Oakland, Calif., akin to that between Tuolumne/Ptolemy: none save sound, possibly, through which the weight of assertion sees.

Q: Where is it that you said you live?
A: Oakland.
Q: Oh, yes, to be sure, of course, aha, Oakland.
A: Stop defining me with your idiot assumptions prior to the experience of knowing what that place-name means when I use it!

Only of course the poet will not shout like that; instead, he'll embody his registrations and require that his interlocutor assimilate, grace of an art, said info. at a 'human' pace. Against which endeavor, we can set time-as-money, and the resulting thinning-out of information for speedy consumption. Posit a scale for such procedure, with the brochure at one end, and APR verse on that same side of a middle; Grenier's will be close to the other end, devoid of such unreal 'clarity' as grosses the NP while swelling the 'tide of human misery' through its inattentions. Grenier in this sense always writes square one. The integrity of the working tenders its passport in this language across all borders throughout, on the basis of what it shows.

Or bits of rhythm——'personal', confident instants. Instances of confidence, not talked about but instancing themselves. The

actualities materialize, so.

And this all did happen in Oakland. Where Stein grew up. These are not tender buttons. Other voices are allowed to be heard: "VOICES /// v o i c e s." Still

OAKLAND, second stab

"a common loneliness....it is not possible for thinking beings to come, by means of a series of negations [I read "negotiations"] or qualified assertions, through 'self-analysis' or confessional self-denunciation, to stasis, the 'truth' about anything....'If you've lost the rhythm, you just don't have anything'—R. C., OCT. 18, 1962, reading at Berkeley" (from Grenier's notes on Creeley, 1/14/70).

"poems think well.... its density of enacted sound...quite deflects any possibly dictionary...'meaning' it might have" (from Grenier's review of Hejinian's Redo in Jimmy & Lucy's House of "K" #4, 1985).

OAKLAND, part 3

I imagine Grenier mistrusting educated (however) syntax as the habituated, 'conservative' (politically, etc.) illusion-inducing overviewing mind-control imposed upon (colonizing) intelligence and one way to circumvent same seen to be quick takes, the tru-ER meaning delivered (tru-ER? Livelier?? OTH-er?) half-consciously or less by someone speaking his census-taking insistences [I enter carrying airlines satchel Grenier reads: "CLUB UNIVERSE"—"Before universe club you" my mouth says, prompted by RG's presence and our history]. Hence the bits by Amy, age 4, in earlier work, and sense of human speech as animal necessity as in (from Day at the Beach):

GOOD DOG

no woof no no

no woof no

with man barking at dog, dog 'saying' no to man——or guh ooh duh / duh aw guh: 'no' and 'yes' as reflections each of each—— and the presumption, persuaded by irony into emptying here, of that title. (The title is also saying, in the work of this half-Norwegian, "Goddag," goodday to you, the customary imposition upon a present of that set of expectations——open the door, ["Goddag, goddag" smiling and nodding] onto a scene of utter LOUDNESS and confusion, strife and immediacy.

If immediacy, then isn't writing the place, and why these place names at all, contradicting a poetic disdaining reification and redundancy? OAKLAND, DAY AT THE BEACH, CAMBRIDGE M'ASS——so broad, so general as to mean nothing, irony? That "my ass" says so, except it also says "Whose Cambridge, Robert Lowell, or mine or yours?" So these titles must say (I hear) "I was emplaced, where were you all that time, and if you still think there's a 'world' 'out there'...." CAMBRIDGE M'ASS arranged on its broadside sheet roughly to suggest map-shape of Boston & environs but no one-for-one correspondence of poem and neighborhood: too neat, that would be; when all's tucked in tight, no light, nor night.

Joyously hilarious: since language sinks in its concretions and becomes mechanical, and when humans act mechanical the critical observer (even of his own behavior) laughs. That's funny, too.

These two, book and broadside, very consistently carry forward Grenier's poetic in their poetry, a poetry that won't go away from other heads than mine either (and mine permanently affected by this man's having been/written so—— 'Grenier poems' composing/emerging from all sides: e. g.

boardroom deadwood, heard just the other day). So living's the livelier, for him.

1/3/86

I'm leaving the freeway in San Rafael when I hear this siren and think O shit, another speeding ticket. I see the other cars slowing down though, so maybe it's a fire or an ambulance. I start to pull over myself (to the left curb; it's a one-way street) when I hear this motorbike behind me. But it's riderless; just this empty bike rolling along and running up on the sidewalk and falling over with wheels spinning.

Everyone else has cleared out so I stop, get out to investigate. The engine's still running——and there's a package on the back with a piece of paper with an address written on it. So I get aboard the bike and set off to find the place. It's like the bike has a will of its own; all I have to do is sit on it and grip the handlebars to be taken there. By now I'm convinced I'm mixed up in something criminal and worry that I am erasing vital prints from the handlebars, but figure whoever was on it before probably wore gloves anyway, and does rubber retain prints?

It's a place like a kindergarten but the officer (he's not in uniform) tells me it's a temporary police station. He thanks me for bringing the bike and the package on the back, which he opens: it's an expensive stereo radio——and he tells me: "We're getting more and more of this sort of crime out here now, too, like in Miami. [I remember reading words to this effect in the paper a month or so back.] Meaning Wars. People import shipments of meaning [like Sentences] and there's a big market for that stuff here in Marin. As though people here didn't have enough to distract them already! The dude who rode this bike probably got offed by a rival gang. It's death to sell meaning below the going rate." He goes on to tell me that the stuff is highly addictive, and that on the street it's often adulterated, that the legislature will never legalize it for fear of losing

control over the electorate. All the time he's telling me this there's a bustle of people, teachers I suppose, and kids, and help (people who serve up the hot lunch) coming and going around me in this large room with tiny tables and chairs painted in bright primaries. It's like a school but it's also like some command post during a battle. I wonder whether I'll get an award. I haven't been asked to fill out any forms——no paperwork is being done; it's all highly irregular. This guy is too laid back to be a real cop, even in Marin.

He shakes my hand and asks one of his "men" to drive me back to my car. The person in question looks foreign to me, and doesn't speak much English. He says, "St. Paul?" I get into my car and drive on.

1/4/86

Had intended also to note rime in Grenier, or better, that each unit both is and is not hermetically sealed against the units before and after it (the following are all from two facing pages in Oakland): (A) I can only sing songs for so long (B) the song I'll play for you is your request song (C) IF I'M ILL // if I'm ill it's // ah ah ah ah all all illness (D) NOW // I know the // w-a-y to // r-e-a-c-h your // h-e-a-r-t (E) RKO/RCA // dash dash dash // sound more than anything // passes over dot dot // wave on the shore (F) DOST SKY DUST FROWN // im Winter wenn es schneet.

(D) distorts some words as a singer will, (E) suggests a record (F) 17th century lyric+Schubert song cycle; (C) can suggest song too, G's comic impatience (with redundancies) essentializing what's elsewhere drawn out, etc.

——David Bromige

CAMBRIDGE M'ASS by Robert Grenier (Tuumba Press, 1979.)

You can't read Cambridge M'ass in bed. Hell, you can't even read it sitting up in an armchair. It's not a book at all but an enormous black wallposter teeming with excitable white rectangles—maybe 300 of them.

Each rectangle derives its specific size and shape from the configuration of words it encloses. To those familiar with Grenier's writing the words will be recognizable Grenier confections: fragmented language, found language, phrases abruptly bitten from conversation, thoughts and poems and mental chatter that by their very brevity rivet attention on how the material words line up.

Laid out spatially and irregularly as these rectangles are, the poster's effect is of a grand simultaneity which undermines any attempt to read linear order into its component poems. This links it to another project of Grenier's called Sentences, a thick wad of several hundred flashcards winsomely packaged in a blue cloth Japanese box. With Sentences, the first time you spill or misplace one of its cards you realize how futile an effort it is to ascribe fixed or invariable order to the cards' "sentences." (Miles Davis in an interview gestured impatiently at an Alexander Calder mobile. Why if Calder can make sculpture like that can't I make music the way I make it.)

Cambridge M'ass works differently. Order is frozen into its poems, but this doesn't mean you can read them in any set order. Their very broken, asymmetrical arrangement across the poster forbids it. Taken together, the two projects pose a pretty irresistable critique of the book as a contrived object.

Not that anyone's going to stop writing books, but that you return to them with a heightened sense of how they function, especially in directing your reading along a single trajectory.

Some of this poster's rectangles make wry projectivist comment on how a spatial poetry such as this might get written or read.

one perception directly & further another perception

Which is how these rectangles operate, fanning out brokenly and taking you, reader, on a haphazard journey. Out of the extensive cluster of poem-pieces your eye selects a starting point, then ranges first one direction, then another, afoot among a citizenry composed of words. They all seem comfortingly domestic, but nonetheless mysterious—you can observe so little about their lives except in isolate glimpses.

there to piss and wash their hands

Various chits of speech pressed tightly together on the poster appear as if they may respond to one another, comment or heckle each other—but like the hectic array of people encountered on city streets, are far more likely to voice their own opinions or pursue their own self-involved thoughts. The result is a crowd's clammer of voices.

The title introduces you instantly to the citystreet's babble — words overheard, half-heard, mis-heard—where seemingly inviolable utterances, even placenames, are subject to unexpected disfigurement. Cambridge m'ass. It sets the tone for a poetics of everyday speech—not as one ruminates on it in solitude and writes it out, but as one hears it, on the run,

amid the shuffle....

At a distance, observed by candlelight, Cambridge M'ass transforms your wall into a leaping agitated mosaic of white on black. If you neglect this visual dimension you miss the reckless beauty of the thing. Beauty too in how the many separate roving individuals of a city fitfully organize themselves into a civic body, lending their hometown an indefinable but distinct savor.

Up close the poster ranges in a manner quite reminiscent of a streetmap, laid out in blocks. You can locate references to SF, Boston, NY—but this is Cambridge for sure, the witty, easygoing charm of Harvard Square and its surrounding neighborhoods.

Harvard University undoubtedly hovers nearby with its ready stock of poets and critics, but Grenier's Cambridge is an affair of the street, folksy and free of scholasticism. Think, for instance, what the proper response is to

ANYONE
up for
a second
walk around
the cemetary

It ain't criticism.

All Grenier's little squares work this way. Not much to say about them individually. They're too clean, too self-sufficient. It's their collectivity that counts. Though second time "around", when you happen on this particular "Anyone up

for..." question, a funny feeling creeps over you—as though this poster could itself be the cemetary. All the white rectangles are tiny headstones hewn with somebody's funerary verse, almost like the Greek anthology, secular and sad. An array of New Englanders are thrust into eternity, clad in the very thoughts and utterances they wore through life:

a carrot and that tomato

A DOLLAR

every
twenty
minutes

the blues

It is brave, clear-headed, elegiacal. Surely it owes something to that American resolve to get a city into a poem. Olson's Gloucester, Williams' Paterson, Kerouac's Lowell, Oppen's New York—all linger behind this, Grenier's, Cambridge.

Grenier, unlike his predecessors however, is not afraid to be slight. He has abandoned the heroism which fired the modernist temper. In its absence, he's focused an unprecedented intimacy. His city speaks for itself in a hundred thin little voices. No running commentary seems needed to justify them, no spokesman expressing their hidden desires—simply their own incandescent clamor.

What has not fully appeared in American city poems written until now is full acknowledgement of the city's broken, random, selfwilled texture. Even Paterson, for all its inclusion of overheard voices, of newspaper clippings and letters, keeps

swirling back into the unifying roar of a mythic Passaic River. But from our current standpoint it's all too clear that no single principle—economic, mythic, ethical, historic—can unify American civil impulses or explain the sprawl. Contemporary Gloucester's a good example. During the 1970's the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church bought up, piece by piece, a huge portion of the town's real estate—a rather staggering retort to Charles Olson's vision of Nation which he had hatched brooding over Gloucester.

Moonies? Swarming over Gondwannaland? Historical atlases of the future with fold-down transparent pages will have to account for it. Okay. I've been to Gloucester, and you can't see half the shit Olson was talking about. Our collective sense of history has if anything eroded since his time. I've been to Cambridge too, and it's a little bit like this poster of Grenier's. You hit the street and start walking. Nobody's there to guide you. Everyone's going somewhere else.

up

town

singing again

you enchantress

—Andrew Schelling

MORAFF'S VIEW OF NOTLEY'S VIEW OF WILLIAMS

DOCTOR WILLIAMS' HEIRESSES by Alice Notley
(Tuumba #28, 1980)

who did we fuck with when we were virgins when being was the best wine our spirits needed & in what libraries did we get ourselves pregnant with our own hearts, that urge to enlighten ourselves & the world, through merely singing, yet singing in accord with the world as it really is.

i lived in and attended school in Paterson, NJ but it wasn't until my junior year in high school that I had the good fortune to meet up with a teacher... same one who'd encouraged Ginsberg... who told me about William Carlos Williams and shared some of his work with this then fledgling poet. No one else had even mentioned his name. How distant I felt from libraries and wished that poetry would get up & take a hike through all the streets of all the cities; & she did, thanks firstly to Whitman and secondly though in this writer's opinion more forcefully, to ol doc Williams, who said (& meant it)

"no ideas but in things"

and of course he said a great deal more than that, saying it, I mean, by example.

it was this that opened the authentic american frontier.

alice notley talks of how Williams included the whole shebang in his poetry, the world of things as they are and so now we can do this without conflict. williams throughout his life was heavily involved with penetrating the mystery of woman and through that desire & his awareness of his need he realized

that in order to write the poem one must be the contents of the poem and so this actually is somewhat different from singling out as the whole thing of it that form is an extension of content. form can also be formless, as in meditation particularly but also particularly in things with the passing of time, most evident when we look at flowers. when we describe a flower in words our breath, which is formless, creates the Flower in time, in space, in knowledge & this is Music & this is instructive.

alice sez that whitman and dickinson were "half divine they could do anything they wanted to." for sure & one of the 'things' they did was give birth to William Carlos Williams & to Ezra Pound & later on to T. S. Eliot, who then went away & began his own lineage.

but thanks to the wonderfully ceaseless & precise fucking around with language as spoken which Williams did, seeing that language is formless, it is exactly the way we talk, Poetry took that wished-for hike through the streets and was last seen Everywhere, even on bus station walls & in subway cars & in schools. Even on radio. Even in trash heaps. Even in other gardens.

then of course, alice, being a woman & being a poet besides that biological-spiritual fact, tells us how williams' variable foot made tracks accessible to women as poets... "you could use him without sounding like another imitation williams poem" and "how could you not use him since he was the greatest one? But you could use him to sound entirely new if you were a woman."

alice said this and alice does this and as diPrima might say "no problem" kiddies.

.....moraff
28 december 1985

p/s/ i forgot to say but i do want to say that the book, notley's doctor williams' heiresses was beautifully printed & bound by Lyn Hejinian under the TUUMBA imprint. there is love in the making of this book as well as in its text. i feel personally grateful to Lyn for the work she has done for the rest of us.

—Barbara Moraff

DOCTOR WILLIAMS' HEIRESSES by Alice Notley

Kinship occurs among writers independently of blood ties. Although "influence" and "affinity" are hardly a substitute for the ritual inscription of DNA, permanent family trees may be traced on the basis of shared concerns.

The mysterious stuff of transmission is, however, hard to account for. One writer is said to "follow" another. Young poets are "taken" under parental wings. The old bequeath their "inheritance" and jealous siblings fight over the "estate." Critics come along later to assess lineage.

Some relations fall neatly into place. Alice Notley, for one, has got her genealogy figured. Doctor Williams' Heiresses, a branch of the family chronicle, was originally delivered as a lecture at 80 Langton Street in February 1980, and was published as Tuumba 28 four months later. Notley traces her family back five generations:

> Poe was the first one, he mated with a goddess. His children were Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman—out of wedlock with a goddess. Then Dickinson & Whitman mated—since they were half divine they could do anything they wanted to—& they had two sons, William Carlos Williams & Ezra Pound, & a third son T. S. Eliot who went to a faraway country and never came back. From out of the West came Gertrude Stein, the daughter of the guy who wrote the 800-page novel & thought maybe rightly that she was Shakespeare. Gertrude Stein & William Carlos Williams got married: their two legitimate children, Frank O'Hara & Philip Whalen, often dressed & acted like their uncle, Ezra Pound....

What happened to Pound's side of the family isn't recorded, but William Carlos Williams was, apparently, something of a rover. He fathered several illegitimate children (including Charles Olson), and their offspring, in turn, were exclusively male. Then there was a second wave of children who were female.

> These females could not understand how they came to be born—they saw no one among their parents and brothers who resembled them physically, for the goddesses their fathers mated with were evaporative non-parental types. As a matter of fact these females couldn't even believe that their fathers were their fathers. They came to indulge in a kind of ancestor worship—that is they each fell in love with a not too distant ancestor. One of them, Bernadette Mayer, fell in love with Gertrude Stein. And the one named Alice Notley fell in love with her grandfather, William Carlos Williams.

Notley's relationship to her grandfather is problematic. Doctor Williams' Heiresses documents, in part, the younger poet's efforts to reconcile herself to her elder. The trouble stems from Notley's disapproval of Williams' behavior towards women, particularly Flossie. Notley is faced with accommodating

and making allowances for attitudes and behaviors which, in progressive circles, are no longer tolerated.

While it may be easy for some readers to separate the poet from his or her poems, the two are connected perhaps more intimately than we often care to admit. When Notley's anger at Williams gets in the way of the work, her husband, Ted Berrigan, defends Williams by summarizing his poetic benefaction.

> What Williams did for you—he consolidated a lot of what you knew already, but he allowed you to be fast, perky, sassy, talky, all these different ways that had to do with talking, in one poem. He helped you to be as fast as you are. And to consolidate these voices that you were hearing in your head & in the house & on the street & put them in the same poem.

Notley's writing clearly owes a debt to Williams. Just as Spring and All combined the forms of poetry and prose, Doctor Williams' Heiresses includes not only Williams' poems and Notley's prose, but also transcripts of conversations, interviews, quotes, and even a letter from Bernadette Mayer—literally "all the voices" Notley's hearing from. Incidental details, personal history, stream of consciousness association all enter in. While Williams is the focus of the occasion, it's the body itself which gives the inclusions form.

> As a poet I study my physiology, I don't discourse on the evils of alcohol & drugs. I would give you in my poetry all the delight that my body might give your eyes & hands or that any lively body might—there are so many—as a poet I study my physiology. This is Alice speaking now, it's not my consciousness I study but my physiology. My blood & my breathing, my vision, my walk, the chapping of my lips, the greying of my hair, my flowers becoming less sticky more silky, the birds in my nests, etc. dirty jokes, a tiny car drives down my neck and over my shoulder.

The study of physiology is, of course, appropriate to the granddaughter of the poet-doctor. It is also applicable to an idea of speech and WCW's proposition of the variable foot. Says Notley:

> I am a tone of voice, warming, shifting, pausing, changing, including, asserting, exulting, including, including, turning & including. I break my lines where I do, as I'm being as various as my voice should be in our intimacy. I'd like there to be something as firm as you to push my voice into its best most natural place, that would really be measure.

Whoever the "you" is referred to above I haven't yet decided—— the reader, Williams, Flossie, or all three. Notley's shifting speakers are as hard to identify. New voices jump in at any moment. The poet speaks through many mouths with the youthful, carefree flexibility which characterizes much of her work.

Unfortunately, some readers find playfulness undesirable, almost as if the work were slighted through its tone, as if seriousness were the final measure of aesthetic quality. Women in particular have been dismissed for this trait. Notley confronts her childish voice:

> I don't mind having one. I don't mind being accused of having one. I don't feel a necessity of being a mature person in this world. I don't think too many poets really are, but men are very good at acting out the part. They've been brought up to have a good cover story, but they're all kids too——the male poets....

This might be one of Williams' secrets which Notley says she has "access to" along with "his diction" and "his ways of thinking." She's the female to his male, three generations later, shares his love for speech and flowers. The identification is so strong that Notley briefly assumes Williams' identity

when addressing Flossie. As a matter of fact, some of Notley's poems and prose approximate Williams to such an extent that I thought some of the Williams poems included in the book were Notley's——the resultant similarity, perhaps, of good poetic breeding.

Physical reproduction, as the natural corollary to literary kinship, receives a good deal of attention in the book. When Bernadette Mayer writes her "sister" (Notley), she's just about ready to give birth, and there are flashbacks to Notley's pregnancies as well. Mayer writes of Williams as the reliable doctor present at childbirth, gives an account of teaching Williams' poetry to her students, and thinks fondly of how her William Carlos Williams book fell apart from overuse.

> So this is my memoir of William Carlos Williams! I've always been very grateful for resuscitating the prose mixed with poetry form which is a form I like and seems like a good form to be in a hurry in. I like what he says about Yorkville and about having babies, oh god I hope I never have to be a literary critic to earn my livelihood....

The bias against "literary criticism" is one Notley and Mayer share, along with O'Hara, Berrigan and others. It gave me pause when reviewing the book——but one poet can write about another without resorting to "literary criticism" as Notley demonstrates in Doctor Williams' Heiresses.

> I want to say this only for me I think, I think whoever hears this knows it & knows all about you——I asked about love & Philip says Yes, love, & your great poem is about how it itself is being that & being handed as that flower to your wife & how it "gelds the bomb"——no fear of evil death war destruction or pregnancy childbirth——because this poem exists. I suspected then & know now that that's true. And because you had written so, I was able to write & love & live, I don't even ever hate you temporarily anymore,

Yours,

Alice.

—Dawn Kolokithas

ALOGON by Michael Palmer (Tuumba 30, 1980)

Alogon, used by Robert Smithson as the title of a polished steel sculpture, is from the Greek ἄλογος, literally "without speech," speechless. Later it came to mean "without reason, illogical, irrational, absurd." It refers to the loss of speech and speech disturbances in certain kinds of aphasia, and recalls Williams' stroke ("I stopped and turned with my mouth gaping open. What else could I do. Old Doc Williams from Rutherford will understand what I mean.") In quantities, it became the surd, which in phonetics refers to a voiceless sound in speech—what cannot be said. The τὰ ἄλογα were the brutes, other animals. In modern Greek ἄλογον is a horse, thus the drawing of a Lascaux horse on the cover and title page of the Tuumba edition—one of the oldest signs for "horse" (if horse is the name of an animal, what is the name of the word horse?). In the series of magical signs called runes, the sign whose name is horse is ᛘ ("Dear M"—"A horse is a creature without reason, so say the Greeks.") At about the same time that runes were being pulled out of Greek and Latin by the Goths, there was active a sect called the Alogians, who denied the divinity of the Logos, counter to John, closer to Jack (Spicer), in A Textbook of Poetry: "Disregard all other images as you disregard the parts of words in a poem. The Logos, crying to be healed from his

godhead. His dismay," and "No, now he is the Lowghost when He is pinned down to words." In Palmer, the critique and inquiry into the mythology of significance continues, in another tune and time, delayed completion of the full rhyme. Alogon is perhaps closest to A Book of Music—"Indefiniteness is an element of the true music. The grand concord of what does not stoop to definition." Alogon is no more "without logos" than Without Music was without music.

"Simplement parole et geste." It's as simple as that, contradictorily. Spoken word and gesture, "the physicality of the word as gesture," a dance, "a spiral for voices" in which even the errant accuracy of the Publisher's Weekly review of First Figure participates: "He is excruciating to follow," (where do you wish to go?) "lacking as he does even the slightest pretense to logic and reality." A more peevish Sancho Panza, sans negative capability, accurate also in his pronouncement: "The audience for this kind of poetry is small," as consequence of Zukofsky's: "I believe that desirable teaching assumes intelligence that is free to be attracted from any consideration of every day living to always another phase of existence. Poetry, as other object matter, is after all for interested people." (A Test of Poetry).

"Transparency of the Mirror" is a fuller selection, containing the beginning and the end. Alogon is the middle, the interior. Two very different books, each very different from the larger book (Notes for Echo Lake) into which they feed.

"All the questions are answered with their own words," if we read closely enough. Much of it becomes very direct. "The Project of Linear Inquiry" is just that. How does the line operate in a poem? What changes when a line "breaks" and what breaks it? "Seven Lines of Equal Length" is an investigation of quantity in language—the way a statement expands and contracts, takes up more or less time. "Alogon" explores the accumulation, distortion, and decay of sense, over time. But it is not these features that bring us back to the poetry, over and over again. It's not necessary to dissect the work. It is necessary to hear it.

Corresponding to Spicer's "Imagine this as lyric poetry," is Palmer's "The heart cannot be influenced directly." There are times, reading Palmer, when one reaches silence. Reading the words produces a silence. Perhaps it is the silence of that place invoked in one of the epigraphs to Notes for Echo Lake: "Big Sid Catlett Art Tatum Fats Navarro," where three of the greatest (impeccable rhythm, harmonic ingenuity, and classic balance) finally meet. "Ridiculous, how the space between three violins can threaten all our poetry."

The crisis in Spicer had to do with language and the heart. The crisis in Palmer has to do with language and the heart. "Social music" is what Miles Davis called jazz.

—David Levi Strauss

SMILE by Ted Greenwald (Tuumba #31, 1981)

Having heaved the ruling class overboard, the members of the working class set sail for the city of the future in Mayakovsky's Mystery Bouffe (1918). On the way, they pass through Hell. But the tortures of the damned don't impress them—they've already survived worse. Then they visit Heaven, which is pleasant enough, but ultimately dull. When finally they reached the city of the future, the tools come out from the gates of the city to greet them. The play ends with this utopian vision—technology at the service of the many.

Sixty-three years later, some citizens of an apparently classless society set out to discover the "fountain of youth,"

in Ted Greenwald's casual tale, Smile. After page one, the object of their quest is hardly mentioned. Instead, the group is entertained by a series of public officials, chambers of commerce, civic spokespersons, and country cousins who ply them with refreshments and bland assurances. Unlike Mayakovsky's tough workers, Greenwald's pilgrims are easy to please. Cursory gestures of amiability seem to satisfy them. The more restless, our narrator among them, though appreciative of every generic attention, press on to the final goal, their numbers dwindling as the satisfied majority remain behind at each rest-stop along the way.

The style of the piece is easy going and quirky, like a live wire unwinding after a power surge. Greenwald sketches scenes with loose analogical glee. ("...his eyes swept around the room like the hands of a clock looking for the right time..") ("...like a just-right day from the vantage of a chaise longue at just the right height of incline and just the right spot in sun and shade...")

The action is low-keyed, repetitious. Letters of introduction are proffered; welcoming speeches pronounced; food, drink, and accomodations dispensed; sights seen; leaves taken; and the road once more set out upon. All this occurs to the essentially passive group, forced onward only by a niggling doubt. And so the tale progresses through a series of more or less vacant frames.

Near the end, a fairytale frog and a shaggy group of grinning folk set the stage for the final frame: a Voice of God sequence.

> An eerie sound like a plastic top being carefully removed off a styrofoam cup of coffee drew our attention into the sky.

Giant letters in the sky spell out YOU ARE HERE, "a bunch of cloud-like puffy words...." The voice enjoins its listeners to enjoy themselves, and they, in turn, raise their voices in an engagingly faux-naif hymn of praise to presence.

Are they (we) credulous stooges, easy marks for the charms of the confidence man? How will we know when we really get what we want? It's not obvious where to pare away the ironic skepticism. Bitingly, the narrator satirizes the bureaucratic or bucolic manners of his hosts, all of whom seem engaged in some form of marketing. His response to the "final" offer, presence, is more complicated. You may not believe it, but you have to smile.

—Kit Robinson

ON THE BUSSES

THE BUSSES by Steve Benson (Tuumba #32, 1981)

I agreed to have some idea about July 1981, after which only some months passed before the picture got fogged over. And it isn't so much that anything was clear in the first place, but after I agreed, I had to settle on the oblivious picture I got. "I can always put a stamp on it and send it out of my life" I told myself well into 1982. San Francisco as a way of thinking was only a couple of exits away and at the rate I was traveling things were bound to clear up some. It's well enough to stand up and pay for a ticket, which I did, and virtually bought my way out.

With words I coupled some and thought and spread out the map. Roads will always connect different parts, so what's so wrong with relying totally on an abandoned sense of the world? Before I knew it I was well into the third part and the parts were less

and less connected. Chained to the fifth page for days I waited for the right moment to go into a sense I felt comfortable abandoning. I cut everything down to three syllables. I let the serious issues slop over into a dedicated effort to fuck off. The language, even when it began, rang true. By 1984 every effort to translate what was originally quite clear fell apart. Governing the smallest plaza was impossible, and the phrasing turned in on itself until a name that once had an ear fell mute. Peak rush hour freeway anyway meant something different than going nowhere fast.

Serious about getting there the trip starts with an edict and ends with an attitude. Before imagining the way The Busses writes its own map. No one hand is larger than another, and the whole problem (posed some fifteen sentences back) is ludicrous. Any single tract gets thwarted by the graphic confusion of the thing which is fine. The reader gets on the bus traveling sixty miles an hour and passes all kinds of signage. Only the parts stick out. This is some novel written on billboards, and only sometimes is a whole part on a whole billboard. The 'cash cows' become the 'work horses', the 'stars' remain 'stars', the 'dogs' become 'deadwood', and the problems remain problems. This is the perfect part to get stuck in.

January 1986

——Clifford Hunt

CATCHING THE BUSSES

THE BUSSES by Steve Benson (Tuumba #32, 1981)

If you take yourself too seriously, you might not like The Busses by Steve Benson. Not that the book's comic, but it relies on some presuppositions which a too sober reader might find annoying. First, you need to accept that hearing things said within earshot is just as much observation as watching two people say goodbye at a train station. Then, accept that syntax is a pliable compositional element ruled by what works (i. e. what, in a given place, means what happens to need saying). Not the only way to look at it perhaps, but these tenets seem to me to open the book up, let you find the phrases as they grab you and separate your chaff from the book's grain.

I'm not trying to say The Busses is difficult; it's demanding. A frame of ambient, out-of-context utterances around the thoughts of a self-conscious ("Do you think more than enough?") consciousness. The layout gives the syntax most of its flexibility: staggered columns often bumping into one another just as noise and thought (and you and other passengers) can when you're on a crowded bus. Or, as the book says "add the words/ anyway you see/ the resistance/ gather against them."

If Benson actually rode busses to compose this, they were probably like AC Transit's 51A or 15 lines—locals with long routes, a lot of stops and a passage through many neighborhoods. The book's subject matter ranges from the Socratic question of ideal form vis a vis thought to "advertising, the press/ talk around him, video/ speeches, community sings—."

—David I. Sheidlower

STATE LOUNGE by Alan Bernheimer (Tuumba #33, 1981)

"Material needs a life of fact / to make a spectacle of / one of these days." Alan Bernheimer's State Lounge is full of facts. However, the line between fact (dry, "objective," impersonal) and a personal experience of the world is almost erased in this book. An ironic, often funny tone intrudes a personality on the encyclopedic lines (e.g. "Why is grain elevated?"). Bernheimer's titles——not just in this book——often refer to a specific set of places: Particle Arms (a hotel), Cafe Isotope, and "Wave Train" ——public places, but ones where intimate things can happen.

He uses the word "weather" a lot, a subject which someone at a cafe or lounge might find easy to bring up. In 1981, many of these sentences must have seemed to be good examples of the "New Sentence" proposed by Ron Silliman 2 years earlier. Sometimes torqued, often contextless, referring to the work as a whole, the lines are essentially "small talk." Things said "to make a spectacle of/ one of these days." But the book manages to maintain its appeal; it is interesting in a way that a bore at a bar is not. Some of that can be attributed to Bernheimer's prosody: clever things said in a measured tone. More than that, the book insists that the reader keep an unanswerable question in mind: am I learning more about the speaker or about what's spoken ("The subject relieves the object of its knowledge" and "Or, the object has the subject by the tail"). This seems to do the trick.

——David I. Sheidlower

P-E-A-C-E by David Bromige (Tuumba #34, 1981)

Extracts from an interview between David Bromige and Barbara Weber.

David Bromige: It came to me earlier when we were talking that it's like there are 2 people, one of whom is very angry and the other watching finds that person's anger comic. Somehow both those people are me.

Reagan had just been elected president for the first time and greed was taking over the world!

The esthetic problem was how to write the piece that expressed the anger and at the same time contained it, framed it. A fake translation was one way to do it. You appoint a text to be master over you, a lot like The Inferno, where Dante's imagination of Virgil prevents him from stopping to gloat or to relish his anger.

I chose a Swedish text more or less arbitrarily—or actually it's sentimental, because I spent a year in Sweden and have a kind of sentiment for that year of my life.... I know the language quite well, but that was easy enough for me to ignore, and to come up with an incorrect translation. I could turn the dial from correct to incorrect. It was some memoir of lonely childhood and how certain poems found at that time were consolation.

Barbara Weber: Are the poems in P-E-A-C-E equivalents of those in the Swedish text?

DB: No... those are previous fake translations, from the Spanish and the Portugese, so it gave a different flavor. That way I'd have one tone for the verse and another for the prose.

BW: So it sounds like 2 different people writing.

DB: That's the hope because the commentator here isn't the one who wrote the poems.

BW: It sounds like a history of the world.

DB: It's meant to sound like an encyclopedia entry.

It's the terrible tragedy of history that I didn't want, you know, to feel terrible and tragic about. So I used these various distancing devices.

BW: It's wildly funny.

DB: Well you know how Pound rants away in those Hell Cantos, and they're comic, so I thought I could have some comic Hell Canto and know it.

BW: Who's this Art-Dave Brimbody?

DB: He's a character in the story. He came out of the words and the events of the story. The name—

BW: —is close to your name—

DB: Yes well it's arrived at via "Bromige" and "anybody" or "somebody" or "nobody," but also Arthur Rimbaud is in there.... I had a student who used to call Rimbaud "Rimbod" (and the closing events resemble somewhat the Paris Commune of 1871). And also just the idea of a body brimming over with joy and pleasure and having to live in this fuckin' society. It's not just self pity, everyone seems to be volunteering for the wringer, in this passage of history that we read about here.

There's a whole lot of funny names down through there: Matt Battenburg, Pearl Boehme, Millicent Wrongsong, Beach Stinson....

BW: Is Frinco Sifistran a place? San Francisco?

DB: Well I have to be careful with a text like this, one does, and not assume that there's a set of referents for which it stands. Just that I live near there, and feel involved with its—

BW: —near Stinson Beach too—

DB: Yeah, but it's also to sound like someone, oh, I dunno, kind of expensively educated. But Bill Vartnaw's take, that these are not targets but possibilities I try on for myself and then reject, makes the most sense.

BW: Tiffany, Lizard of Was?

DB: I dunno, that somehow takes me back to the SF I first met, when Tiffany lamps were, you know, so prized. And also, wasn't there someone called Tiffany, some heroine? "Breakfast at Tiffany's" was a movie about that time. Whatever those

would suggest—someone who's bright, and fashionable, and soon to be stuck in the past. Wizard of Oz, that's SF in the 60's. I hear much else besides—but these associations are constant, each time I think of it.

BW: Tin Lizzie? an old car but fashionable.

DB: Perhaps fashionable because old.

The title poem is an acrostic. S, H, A, L, O, M; E, I, R, E, N, E.... There's some Marxist encyclopedia that had, as I hoped it might, various instances of the term. The concept. And where it had been before it got to be our word peace.... Fridu is the Old German idea of peace, loyalty to the clan.... You don't get a whole lot of agreement about the term, through history.

BW: Pieces of peace.

DB: The word itself is like a soporific... so I thought "break up, wake up." It's not fake translation. It's very deliberate and plodding.

If there has to be a successful group there have to be people who are outside it.

BW: Which means there can't be any unity.

DB: U, N, I, T, Y. This is Oedipus [indicates page] killing Laertes. "Unimaginable crimes can break no rules." "Equality's the legal mask its absence wears." The inequality, the widening gap, between the haves and havenots: that to me is like the death of America. The word justice means something

entirely different if you have a million dollars. But people use the word all the time as though it meant the same.

I wanted to make clear that the economic temper of a time affects the art of the time. So however various the poems, still, you find some economic quote breaking in.

BW: It's not written for a general audience.

DB: I hope so. But that's the $64,000 question. How do you get people to relax, so they can find something there? The first thing is to not worry about getting all of it. That's what happens in life! ... With Pound, he was asking the impossible, I think he wanted every phrase of his big poem to be understood by a reader the way Pound understood it. At the same time he loaded it up with stuff from so many different systems that there's no way—

BW: —unless you had read everything (Pound had)—

DB: —even so you wouldn't be Ezra Pound, and there's a lot of private references in there too; a lot of biographical masking is causing that poem to get there. I really think it was an insane demand to the extent that that was Pound's demand... but in writing the poem he showed another way for poetry. That you can have a poetry that is say an unreliable system and still extract reliable information from it.

I think that where the poet doesn't impose specific meanings the reader can be sure that her meanings are her meanings. You're not being turned into a kind of adjunct of the poet. Though it's true of course that it's shaped, to be a kind of imitation world as all poems are. I think.

"They retreat to salute: literally, step backwards and point to their heads."

BW: That's just a riot!

DB: The method in this poem was to say the emperor has no clothes. Meaning is an agreement. I refuse them the communal meaning of this gesture, and I just record its literal shape.

BW: "The example is a careful person setting fire to his Honda in a park."

DB: It's not what you expect a careful person to do. But we're only careful 2/3rds of the time. "Here's a nice green space, let's set fire to my Honda." I don't mean it to be saying, "Everything is absurd," at all. I make it a test of any writing I do that my son could read it and profit from reading it. I'm not saying that he does, but it's there in my mind. Perhaps it keeps me from going overboard. More's the pity? To the extent that we want art to teach, and I'm not sure what that extent is, this is a kind of teaching, you know, you can meet a careful person but he's just as liable to set fire to his Honda in the park one night as a careless person. "Keep that in mind, my boy." I'm probably telling myself this, actually. [Too, an example is usually the extraordinary. Even when intended to exemplify the commonplace.]

BW: Niecesleeper?

DB: Someone who sleeps with his niece... a little corrupted.

BW [as DB hears it]: Niece-lapper?

DB: MY goodness!

BW [repeats]: Knee-slapper!

DB: O, knee-slapper!! [slaps face] that's the best part of talking to a reader...I never heard that.

BW: I keep taking the words and switching them around, taking them apart.

DB: Great. Don't you think you're encouraged to do that because there's no singular, no mono-meaning drawing attention away from the words? Attention is freed—

BW: —to play! And that's what I did.

DB: Which wouldn't be possible had I said [growlingly] "Oh Reagan has been elected and the aging chancellor is in charge" —that kind of rant would just put me in the world that I'm opposing, a monotonous world. This, through example, proposes another world. I offer a world of play where one can be responsible for the meanings one obtains. And that doesn't exist in these socialist realism texts. I feel like I'm a better socialist than the kind of socialists who write that socialist realism. But they think they're better socialists than I am.

BW: They wouldn't understand this.

DB: Well I don't see why they can't.

BW: Probably because they wouldn't want to.

DB: That would be my deduction. But they would have their dodges for ignoring it; that it's a kind of bourgeois decadence. O well. So anything else about this little jeu d'esprit?... I felt lucky with the titles here. "Up on Olympia": that's up on Oly. Drunk, but also, of course, with the gods.

BW: What's this fry and batter?

DB: I thought it would be fun to compare snow with batter. Get that wonderful odor that assails you when you walk down a city street into the woods and the snow and all that pristine, uh, inedibility.

I was reading by the way a book called Mimesis by Auerbach where he traces the representation of reality in our literature .... Given our reality and how I feel about it, um, really, I should write, I thought, a damaged text. On the other hand, that argument always fails at some point where the person writes this very boring poem and you say so and the person says, "Well, my life was very boring at that time." There's something missing there. I wanted to have an interesting text; but it is damaged, once by society, and again by me, will vs. inertia.

BW: But [this 'damaging'] also draws attention to itself. I keep saying "What?" a few lines later....

DB: Great, that's an effect I want to secure. [To challenge what Al Neilsen terms that habitual assumption of mimesis in common sense of that term: that the words supply what really happened. That one consumes this information passively, like potato chips. Somehow one isn't reaching one's hand into the package and one

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isn't then bringing that hand to one's mouth and one isn't moving one's jaw around them. [In newscast tones] "The aircraft strayed several hundred miles off course...." Strayed?! I thought these were high precision machines piloted by highly trained personnel! That's what I thought poems could be.

Nov. 1985

FADE TO PROMPT by John Mason (Tuumba #35, 1981)

That variations a reader experiences in John Mason's Fade to Prompt are similar to those a traveller might experience on a trip (on any given Greyhound route) across these United States. In configuration, Nebraska is to Rhode Island what the fourth page of this book (a list) is to the twenty-sixth (a dreamlike narrative). Page to page, the lines contract, expand, jiggle margins, make stanzas, make paragraphs, are sparse or plentiful. But although regularity of form is not the order of this work, its 'states' are united by English—not, incidentally, a homogeneous language because its accents differ. Where page one's "What a fortunate wisdom!" resonates with the sober joy of Basho, page six's "they were intimate it was very lovely and / embarrassing made me / want to put away the plastic beds" calls to mind the carefully/casually absurd amorousness of O'Hara. What these lines do have in common is a "big sky," an airiness, an American-ness (not in the sense of patriotism, surely one of the most loathsome of human distinctions, but in the sense of Mason's ironic and celebratory interplay with his national environment/mood).

Americana abounds—in the form of dialects ("'when i get

through he'll be smaller than my ass'"), culture-specific references ("dixie cup," "Gold Springs Ranch"), and shortened tall tales—this, my favorite:

> The government will give you a free buffalo.
> I was going to get five of them,
> to keep each other company,
> and keep them on a big piece of land
> with plenty of grass i was going
> to buy in the midwest, where there's
> plenty of cheap land. I wouldn't
> want to train them, so i'd wear
> a costume something like a beekee-
> per's when i wanted to get close
> to them, to feed them grass or
> something. Hopefully they would never
> charge at me. "None of them is bigger"
> i said to the visitor, slightly offended
> when he asked about the "bigger"
> one.

Funny line-breaks and tense-switching aside, this is pretty trad narrative, only one of the book's many modes. Simplicity does reign, though—no line is more syntactically contorted than the book's title. More often it's charming, observational, doing things like changing a weather prediction into "Twisty and mild, changing to feverish in the seventies," or hearing a tiny pun in a line like "Monk tags along, head buried in deep scowl." The anguished complexity of modern utterance (encapsulated in the Tuumba series) emerges here tempered by a resolute lightheartedness; the possible dourness of "I am cold, funloving, under a grey face" is overturned by its second adjective, and the complexity natural to collage is in this work on the level of overhearing many voices on a bus.

—Gordon

PLANE DEBRIS by Stephen Rodefer (Tuumba #36, 1981)

Let's look at Rodefer's notion of 'painted poetry'. Is this metaphorical or does he really want to see a convergence of the methods and materials of painting and poetry?

I think Plane Debris is in the spirit of the Pop Artists. It relates strongly to urban life, relies on the language of commerce, the overheard, tossed-off, all the verbal 'junk' left behind as the culture moves on. It strikes me as a kitchen-midden, circa 1979.

But there are definite instances of exalted language in the poem. Are these on equal status with, say, newspaper sentences, or overheard bits of speech?

I see the poem as having the texture of a Rauschenberg collage, 'combines' as he calls them, paintings with stuffed Angora goats, beds, photographs, screens of photographs, and the paint all swirled around between them. The paint, the traditional medium of art, is never any more important than the goat or bedspread. The 'exalted language' of Plane Debris strikes me as working the same way, being just another element along with the found language.

Still, there is a definite craft involved. It's like Masami Teraoka, who does prints that look just like traditional Japanese woodblocks—the 'floating world' period where all the elements were highly regulated—color schemes, proportions, subject matter—all this was handed down by decree—but in Teraoka you get women eating huge ice cream cones with long demonic tongues, and so on. Conventional form, but twisted with the effluvia of modern culture. Which turns the notion of collage upside down.

> Plane Debris doesn't let the materials create the form, it takes a set form (fifteen line stanzas) and fills them with unconventional subject matter.

Except in Teraoka the pictures read as traditional woodblocks, and it's only on closer look that you're startled by the french fries and ice cream. Plane Debris isn't a traditional poem——it doesn't read like Tennyson with fast food. I think Teraoka's and Rodefer's approaches are different. Rauschenberg said:

> Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. I try to act in the gap between the two.

I suppose he meant that art can only be found, or arranged, and can't actually be created. Neither art nor life come from a void, both are constructed out of things. The cynicism we'd both noted comes from Rodefer's awareness that art can't be made, it can only be manoevered.

> We have no art. We'll sell anything, complete with Slavonic feelings.

> Then let's look at the book itself a little closer. How does the poet carry himself in the world——is that something the book reveals? If it's all found language and collage the poet's going to be tough to locate. Or do you think not?

Well, I can see collage as a way for the artist to map out his position in the world, leave evidence of his whereabouts and actions. One time on Nightline I heard Rauschenberg tell Ted Koppel that he tries never to go too far from home looking for collage material. If he finds himself two blocks away he's gone too far. I can see Rodefer everywhere in Plane Debris, because I think he did stay close to home, letting the subjects come to him:

> Can you believe the Jehovah Witness came behind my house to find me?

The perspective of the writer, and the details of his life become primary material:

> I knew you as a chubby fucker,
> isolated from the avant-garde, making your way back to
> pictographs.

This isolation from the avant-garde is often an important part of the life-stories of artists, particularly those growing up in the 40's and 50's , like Rauschenberg, who never saw a painting until he was in his twenties, and then it was "The Blue Boy" and "Pinkie". Morton Feldman sees this stage as very important for what was to come:

> What was great about the fifties is that for one brief moment—maybe say, six weeks—nobody understood art.

This isolation, this lull, is what allowed a new start for the Abstract Expressionists and the first Pop Artists, allowed them to start on a new track, to make their way, as Rodefer says, 'back to pictographs', back to the rudiments of art.

Plane Debris describes the isolation of that time and also brings us up to the present. It gives evidence of the art world that has sprung up in the last 30 years, and the ensuing chaos:

> The FBI seizes Iran's de Koonings.

For the poet, the commercialization of the art world can only lead to frustration:

> Input for the haiku movement.
> No restrictions, but only quality work. No sex, violence,
> or far out poems.

This is found language , and shows how commerce disallows art. This would seem an impossible request to carry out (if it's not 'far out', is it a poem?) But the lines are also interesting themselves as poetry, having a Zen-like challenge to their request.

In Plane Debris the poet has written himself into stanzas of language that are not his, a mass-media banter with a continuous echo of Shakespeare, Crane, Creeley, and especially the voices of friends——friends who may be surprised to find their conversation and discarded lines crop up. But though the lines aren't always his, every quip is played with and twisted a little, until it carries Rodefer's voice. It is startling how little it takes for him to turn language——from nearly any source——his way. In this sense it really is a painterly poem, one that works the surface of language. Rodefer loves his materials, and is non-judgmental in his use of them. He has an eye for the potentially interesting in the abandoned or merely utilitarian, what we might consider not worth our art. Rodefer is quite happy with what's left behind, just as the collage artists were, and so writes a poem remarkable for the forgotten subtleties it has taken from casual speech. ("You kids, are the numbers getting smaller or bigger?") And if the art world is a tight place, confined by commerce, Rodefer thrives there:

> The only happiness
> is to be shut up in art. The only casualty, not escaping
> insufferable event

——Pat Reed and Andrew Schelling

OCKER MARGINALIA

OCKER by P. Inman (Tuumba #37, 1982)

Words as galleries, these while switching aesthetic compartments.

The main entity is the letter. Groups of letters act as "words." There are phrases of letters, something fully conveyed:

viewletsdomebottled

Syntax is process. Units of comprehension jar, thus gain strength because we cannot absorb them passively as we can a word we always see (no longer see). Taken apart language is reamalgamated, internally melding with our personal unconscious lexicography:

zorn
(zornmander)

Alignment makes it loose or tight. If a letter drops below the line is it the same word?

spe$_{a}$k

b$_{e}$am

Alignment of sound, concordance, discordance. The sex of sound

blot
(blothe)

and of letters. "X" is very powerful as are the stalks of "db"

only "x" is agressive whereas "db's" circular protrusions accentuate a slender, passive nature.

Rhythms placate. Breath creates internal order. Words will pause, advance, inhaling, exhaling. Thus language is non-isolating. Parentheses don't contain. They shield.

Like counterpoint echoing parts of words:

throatqh

Or intertwined melodic lines. "Speak" = "beam." They weigh the same, thus balance, one above, one below:

spe$_a$k's

w

t

dobb h r

x b$_e$am

Themes recur—"sit doption" slightly askew "sit)doption." The fugue progresses.

Groups of letters contract, tying you into them. Different syllabic energies:

dipthongs: "xamois"
double consonants: "bsidb"
internal pause: "name, id armb, jor"
contractions: "andn'ts"

Also:

rhythm: "name nimmer... gremes nail lime"

alliteration: "lenth/likenb thrill"
real words (which relax the tension of juxtaposed letters): "table pensed space"

I find this work very satisfying.

—Gail Sher

PERCENTAGE (Tuumba #23, 1979) and PROPERTY (Tuumba #39, 1982) by Carla Harryman

Mise en scène:

> The rowboat was caught in the mudflats. A few gulls padded around it. The mud fizzled. A grey mist was broken by a narrow sky. In the distance a solitary cathedral interfered with the sensuality of endlessness. The earth was small and even cozy, until, looking up at the beaming monstrosity, one recognized the meagerness of its claim on space. (—opening paragraph, Property)

A bemused narration sets the scene for Harryman's spectacle. Story moves the writing forward over the territory: a postmodern landscape. A vertiginous dynamic of scale is proposed.

All writing talks about itself. Harryman's speaks from a thoroughly contingent location. The writer is next to and in the world. Words come from within and without——from the body (the mouth) and the mind (thought); both are property(s). Thought is both received and original. The sister is next to

the uncle, the bride is carving up a proper name. The indoor/outdoor nature of experience (animals in structural relationships) prevails.

> I for one do not believe there is a fatal, eternal separation between one's thoughts, intentions, desires and one's words.
> (—"Sublimation," Vanishing Cab #6)

Though mainly prose, the writing of Percentage and Property is likely at any moment to jump straight into dialogue or snatches of verse skimmed off the flux of daily life. Its behavior is polymorphous. Its impulse isn't formal experimentation per se, but a push accurately to be as well as represent an hectic, various, ordering, and partial language. In other words, the attack doesn't isolate form, but zeros in on the flabbiness, irony, alienation and decay of habituated meaning received through form.

> Pam: Am I capable of enjoying a stability of verbal forms? No! I am not capable of understanding because I am a mouth!
> (—"Acting," Property)

The "complexity of the grounds" motivates the writing. Out of the mudflat of language, characters appear, exercising will and difference. We are, in Harryman's view, not a herd but "an ensemble of animals." They create, define, grapple, touch. "People" are equated with "words" and fill up the pages. Verbal forms are characters and as such engage in power relationships. Pam "eats" the proposition. The mouth, it turns out, is the stable form, having the capacity to speak and to enjoy. ("In a word jouissance!"—Julia Kristeva.)

> I was delighted when I managed to deprive those bewitched lines of meaning.
> (—"Epilogue," Property)

Intentionality is obstinate. "The Master Mind" calls derisively for the lackluster individual peering on Harryman's opening

scene in Property (all scenes) to "get off that rock——the mental picture of one's story and the task for a particular life." Statement is unequivocal, absolute, whether simply true or simply funny, or both. Though there's a tangible, much negotiated middle ground in the relationship of her characters to their own ideas or language (radical shifts defying ultimate resolution), it's never, even when ambivalent, a retreat from choice, not a marginalized or marginalizing move.

> D: Two positions: I always say I'm going home when I'm unsettled. I'm going in the right direction.
> (——"Percentage," Percentage)

A cult of private sentiment or the inflation of the individual voice is completely undermined in these books. Interiority and privacy are seen as static, closed systems. This stance has a political weight in the context of current writing, calling as it does for action, or at least acting, assuming a lively public and beseiging it. It's not a rejection of the subjectivity of the person, terrain endlessly claimed for "creative writing," but an assertion that subjectivity is interesting primarily as a response to the world, rather than a withdrawal from it. We are presented with the "sensuality of endlessness" as a social fact. Harryman considers thinking a social act, if not a social responsibility. Nobody owns thinking. This value is placed against a notion of ownership perpetrated by champions (owners) of the "writer's (individual, i.e. private) voice." In her gargantuan arena a private imagination (where "expression concludes existence") is indeed puny.

> Oversensitivity was wrong. She wrenched her mind from its wasteland of souvenirs.
> (——"Possession," Property)

If a person is an episode in psychological terms, she is ungovernable and it will happen. She is the teller of her own story but the story is linked and dependent on the stories of others. "We" are acting out aspects of a common drama through language, not just in the sense that we're using the same tools, but in the sense that it is language which makes the private public, makes the passion of the revolutionary

charge ("Come, you are a mad revolutionary..."). A certain hysteria excites the reader:

> ...The song is sung but where do we get the words compelling us to repeat it? My blood runs cold at the sight of death so I tell the story. If the wide obtuse inside is a yardstick in this sanctuary, perhaps the universe views the world like I see a two dollar bill abandoned in a cashbox. Kiss my ass.
>
> (—"Property," Property)

Because the work is cataclysmic and dialogic—the addressee is fully invoked, even bullied, if not always named—it asks directly for response, creates the gaping emptiness described in the opening scene of Property, a depleted landscape ready for action. This is what makes Harryman a fearsome practitioner: her demand is enormous and it will eat you up. Her characters are grand and take after her:

> "I don't intend," he said, "to imitate poetry but to be imitated by it."
> (—"Possession," Property)

The demand is suction, desire clearing space for its negotiation ("the period between the hyphen of marriage") a hot and public place:

> A robot adjusted her sea in the ornate theater. If this were merely an eidetic image why did she want to be nursed? Nothing stuck out.
> (—"Possession," Property)

Or, more accurately maybe, the demand is elastic, like a "fly-back" toy. It's neither abstract (except ironically as a comment on abstraction) nor theoretical (while it amuses itself with theory) though it manages to cover both grounds.

> In other words, if the overly constraining and reductive meaning of a language made up of universals causes us to suffer, the call of the unnamable, on the contrary,

issuing from those borders where signification vanishes, hurls us into the void of psychosis that appears henceforth as the solidary reverse of the universe saturated with interpretation, faith, or truth. Within that vise, our only chance to avoid being neither master nor slave of meaning lies in our ability to insure our mastery of it (through technique or knowledge) as well as our passage through it (through play or practice).
(—Julia Kristeva, Desire In Language)

Sir or Madame:

This may seem a bit quotidian

But we are willing to leave

The bedroom

In the ocean

If you think that is what we should do

In the bedroom

We don't know who we are talking to

Do you think this creates the vacuum necessary

To address the public?
(—"There Is Nothing Better Than A Theory," Moving Letters #7)

—Jean Day

RESEARCH INTERVIEW / WITH CLARK COOLIDGE

l. Would you discuss the research involved in Research? (*) Was there a plan?

l. The "research" that inspired this work was really Godard's use of that word. He says things like "If a movie did not succeed, that just means I have to do more research," and I like that spirit of "taking another look at it" (as he says on the Cavett show). Getting back to primary materials. Looking yet again at the initial stuff. As I recall, I had just finished a year of work on Mine, was in that phase of exaustion with such a long complex weave, wanted to get back, start over, etc. A cycle that seems to keep repeating over my work life. And at that point I saw Godard's Sauve Qui Peut... La Vie, which was so inspiring, gave my mind a kind of excited clarity I always get from Godard's works. Went back and saw it four more times on two successive nights. So, if there was a "plan" at all, it was to start again to write as clearly as possible, with simple sentences as base (a kind of "tonal center" for the work to relate back to at every point), thus those "to be" sentences at the beginning, and leave a little extra space around each line in order to pay as much attention as possible to the words. Trying to write slower than usual for me, thinking of that poem in Kerouac's Mexico City Blues where he says he deliberately left an hour between the lines, time enough to take a walk, say a prayer, etc. Of course it almost immediately got more complicated(!), but I tried to keep such patient attention throughout, no matter the limbs I sometimes found myself teetering out on. Each line a new start, though of course there come to be connections, run-ons, "themes" throughout. I read Research once in Buffalo and found it almost impossible to find the right amount of space/silence to leave between the lines, couldn't get my usual momentum going, so have not read it again. Curious that certain silences in the mind are

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not easily reproducible via voice in room in real time. A problem I'm still working on, actually.

2. How long did this piece take to make? Was it snowing as you wrote?

2. The work was written over two weeks, Jan 16 to 29, 1981. The period of it seemed exactly right, took its own time, etc. And indicated its own closure with that "tower above the town" image, where I'm sure I was thinking of Kafka's Castle, had a pretty precise visual image of that landscape during the writing there. Come to think of it, the same kind of strong ending-command occured in Mine with that Egyptian image at the end I couldn't get beyond, though I tried for a while. Curious that I ended up going to Egypt just four years later, though couldn't have foreseen(?) Also, just noticed that Research was written in same part of January we spent in Egypt, but that's probably irrelevant(?) I keep noticing these periodic connections though, like I discovered that Rilke was in Egypt during the same January weeks.

Yes, it was certainly snowing as I wrote, as it always does in January here. The first line is description of the scene out the window above my desk as I picked up the pen. That sense, as spoken above, re starting with the first material at hand. No choosing there, just go with it. Get the first sense-imprint into words, fast, and go.

3. I'm curious about the statements, questions, (lines) with the word "poetry" in them. These "pillow impressions" are magical observations, seem true ("poetry is a lesson...," "poetry is a substance..."). Are these your own words? How tied are they for you to the literal act of writing?

3. The lines about writing, poetry, pens, etc. are very much tied into my literal writing impulse. They are perhaps the strong thread in the work, as they had also been a strong thread through Mine. I always have moments, while writing, where I see a very clear image of myself sitting at desk in room writing,

like the Beckett image of the man in the room with nothing but a pen and paper and usually one window. In a way, Research is a kind of "treatise" on writing, or on poetry especially. Found myself making very declarative statements on same throughout the work, which interested me since at first I couldn't "back them up," didn't know where they came from, sometimes didn't even agree with them(!), which always interests me and makes me go on to see further what I say, what I think. A lot of this work has to do with what it is still possible to write at all——as I recall Philip Guston saying over & over again about the feeling among NYC painters in late-Forties early-Fifties ("Is it possible to make a picture at all??"). That basic. And then to find mayself making such baldface statements about Poetry, something I would never allow myself to do if I were sitting down to write an essay, say, on the art. So, I got fascinated that these things were coming, as if I were defining things I didn't even know I knew! The tone of the work seemed to allow or even generate such declaration, so I had to follow it on.

And, yes, all the words are mine, at least in the sense that there are no quotes or appropriations of consciously-recalled writings by others. Though, I sometimes wonder about this, in the sense that I'm sure we are always filtering things we've read through "bad memory" into present words. Apropos: recently David Levi-Strauss pointed out to me that one of the lines I had gathered from Bernadette's Studying Hunger Journals for publication in Michael Palmer's Code of Signals book was in fact word-for-word a quote from one of Zukofsky's essays! I didn't catch it, Bernadette didn't remember it, and Michael (who knows Zukofsky as well as anyone I know) didn't catch it either. David only realized it because he had just been reading the Zukofsky essay. Quite instructive, anyway.

4. How could there be no noise in poetry?

4. "How could there be no noise in poetry?" is one of those lines I was speaking of, that amazed me coming up so clearly as it did out of the work. The way I read it now (one possible way) is: thinking of the word "noise" in information-theory

manner as the scatter of random signals that block the clarity you presumably want to get to, I realized that that chance gathering has to be in poetry too. Thinking of Beckett's "mess," which he says now has to be "allowed in," too. And of course, literal noise, which has become part of musical composing procedure since the Fifties. And then the next line says "So to be, but what kind?"; like, I accept that, now what exactly will that be? Proceeding in one of those little logical links that keep hinging the work together. Assuming X, then what? etc. Probably residue of scientific rhetoric from the days when I thought I would be scientist(?) And another thought-connection here: Godard's statement that what he wanted was "the definitive by chance." This, of course, a big area we could go on about.

5. Would you mind articulating your responses to the work of Jean-Luc Godard and how it might possibly relate to your writing?

5. Well, Godard, yeah, one of my main sources over many years. That Tom Luddy retrospective of all Godard's works up to La Chinoise I got to see at Berkeley in 1968 was a major turn-on in my life. It's strange, and I can't really explain it, but I feel so strongly in synch with his movies, I can tell to the second how long he will continue a scene, when he will cut, much more so than with any other filmmaker. His films are like a parallel thought-process in my own mind, and I seem to be able to refer matters I'm thinking of to that "Godard Process," as Kerouac said he would run his thoughts through "that Cody thing" (how would Neal think of it, etc.). Additionally strange to me since of course, Godard being French, a language I don't speak, I must miss much of what he's saying. But it doesn't seem to matter. He has that clarity-by-chance (one way of putting it) that I find so useful. I find this in a notebook, written around the time of writing Research: "I swear Godard's image sequences have the motion or the rhythm or the weight or the gleam (or something!) of sentences." So, I feel him actually speaking to me. And, in a way, Research is a sort of homage to him, lots of stuff

filtered directly from seeing Sauve Qui Peut....

6. The tone here is often "axiomatic" (for want of a better word). Would you care to comment?

6. The "axiomatic," though I never thought of that word(!), tone comes from the desire to focus direct evidence in words, probably a generative impossibility? Dictionary says: "self-evident," "a scientific truth." So: Declare, accept that declaration as a truth, and then go on to see, without any preconceived knowledge of resultant, what can be generated by these separate insistences. This is getting too abstract(!), which I hope I avoided in the work.

October 1985

—Anne Waldman

A NOTE ATTACHED TO THE WATER SUPPLY

PROOF by Larry Price (Tuumba #42, 1982)

The work consists of two pieces, "Proof" and "Volume." "Proof" is shorter, more condensed and constrained, signalling its status as a kind of axiomatic, syllogistic ground or touchstone. But it is also "proof" as the stage a printed work goes through before becoming a "volume": the text is still being tested. The lines of both works are generally atomistic, dense, clipped, intercut with quotes, numbered phrases, lists, assorted splicings. The effect of these devices is to isolate within the sentence a

resisting element and to enliven it, to circle it with energy, to galvanize as in "Galvanize private ' single line' within impromptu noun community." Such communities in Proof "cohere by resistance"——the resistance of the words to each other, the resistance of the text to the reader. The "noun communities" are built from shards of the larger linguistic community (communities) surrounding it and which it re-presents in maniacal abridgement. But the mania of the book is its ability to dislodge a special vocabulary——aesthetic, scientific, political, commercial, bureaucratic, technical——irrevocably from its origin, so that those old contexts can only be heard as "splintery low voices."

The book is a self-reflexive instruction manual: "Insert screen," "Insert theory," "Invert car by diminishing wardrobe," "Itemize desert," "Repeat enamel foot." The instructions are supplemented by lists and outlines:

> A model because 1) for emphasis 2) 90° 3) represent 4) one as "grid," two as "a body of images" 5) planes construct other planes 6) incoherently 7) witness my press-on static 8) cans, trucks 9) define the frame as "vacuums."

A technical handbook to the comedies of language. Such writing "works by irritation": it offers comprehensiveness over comprehensibility. The noises of the work seem to exist beyond dissonance on a sound-plane of hilarious strangeness.

In "Proof" the clustered harshness of sound unfolds chiefly in single sentences. "Volume," which extends "Proof" spatially (from plane geometry to solid, say) or rather distends it, offers larger, more sustained blocks of dense, implacable sound and motion: these intertwined with "narrative descriptions" ("Back-slapping, big-drinking log, etc., beside two frail life-sized water's edges"), letter fragments ("Dear Noise ...it's a lovely night"; "Dear hothead description") and other wanton gestures toward fullness. Particularly noteworthy are the summaries or abridgements, reductions of phantom texts

to their elemental levels of resistance:

> Page One: A note attached to the water supply: species are credentials——four walls, top, bottom, the last occupant, etc. Page Two: Radio drama: the voices fuse, a reporter with a supposed to be perfect door, but those coated faces (portfolio compared to the "it's 8:05, 8:10, 8:15...") are nearly perpendicular. Page Three: Allowed to stand, allowed to "not" stand, "not" allowed "not" to stand, standing....
>
> l. REMIT: Film is big spaces. Water supply which records (surrounding continue: vertigo, independent passengers float, etc.). Part theory 2. PART world tirade. Mummy wrappings literally put things back. That's "3. ADMINISTRATION outward...."

In these passages the languages of the American "satellite brawl" mingle in dissipation, no doubt blameable on the water supply, which turns the banal "world trade" into a "tirade." This is not the scrambling of bureaucratic language but its reconstituting; here language set free to display its latent energies bristles with visceral sound and jerky "indelible speed." Price's unremitting method induces a kind of systematic intoxication (another "proof") and its concomitant effect, "vocabulary spinning in a glass brain."

The work "screens" the world: both as a blank, indifferent surface on which images gather to disperse and as the instrument of their selection: "On the screen, a screen," "A screen is one series of events," "Opaque screen," "An image is the ground for future screens," "The remedy for the copy is the screen." This last quote, which ends "Volume," can be read against the line which opens the book, "The room coheres by resistance." As the space of the book is defined by the pressures of resistances, internal, external, so its remedial method cannot be conceived to be a replication or mimetic copy of a given place, whether real or unreal; the method is rather the enactment of resistance: screening (in both senses).

The room cohering at the outset of "Proof" opens out to the "Endless room" which begins "Volume"; but this larger movement is not felt as especially vertiginous. The broad motions of the text are submerged in the local "riot... in the speech" where the anarchy of the word ("half word, half referential claw") generates a constant dizziness, embracing, repelling, relentlessly engaging.

—William Fuller

LINEAR C by Jean Day (Tuumba #43, 1983)

Jean Day's Linear C indicates by its title a new decipherment of an ancient script (following mock scientifically from the "real" Linear systems). There is simply no leaden methodology here, no revisionist's dourness—which is not to say that the commentary isn't arch, or that new terrain isn't staked out. The scenery is "Western" in both local and global senses; Americana saturates the poetry, with titles like "Ticonderoga" and "Gas" (certainly the American liquid par excellance). The vistas and frontiers of Linear C rise in ironical, confabulating bursts and asides, a Lewis and Clark vaudeville act: "We came to the landing place with buck knives and whale grease for the job. The garbage had yet to be put out." (from "Ticonderoga").

Jean Day's writing has about it what can only be called an 'updated antiquity'. She has derived a humorous, self-ironising mode of discourse that repeatedly harks back to a recent, if unhinged, bit of history. In the poem "W" this humor and historicity are both apparent: "Inside, he must have been

watching me, listening to Wozzeck in music class while the dull trees bloomed just beyond, and I thought on world trade." Humor predominates in these poems; many passages have the pacing of a stand-up comedian's delivery: "Try being a moorhen or Jane Austen. Think how it will look when you are really more." "'I don't mind suggesting in the least; my name is Pitch, I stick to what I say.'" This is the Slapstick Frontier, where "We sashayed through a creamy wilderness." Underlying this whole affair is the sentiment expressed in the poem "Program Notes": "Some mocking is in order...."

The 'centerpiece' of the book is a set of epigrammatic stanzas collectively titled "Simple History." Despite the title, these are not quite uncompounded accounts; one in particular seems to encapsulate the bent of Linear C: "The machine that replicates/ moment equations/ comes from the past/ to stand for me." The historiographical contours of Linear C (as in perhaps every discourse) comes "to stand for me," that is, to mediate identity, just as a 'carte blanche' given to an urban planner would become the 'identity' of a physical city. Still, such projects never seem to come off as planned—which seems to be the point of Linear C, of its humor and of the mayhem encountered along its by-ways. Writing like this reminds us that writing in general is a 'refurbishing'—which is synonymous to the project of the "romance" in its older sense—even the dissolution lurking behind the poem "Beverage Napkin," with its after-hours ambience, is conquered in the last line: "I recall your beverage napkin." There is a remainder which both passes into history (however 'tragic') and simultaneously becomes emblematic of it (a necessarily partial 'elevation'). Jean Day, (to quote the sociologist Michel de Certeau) is here "constructing an artifact, knowing that a model is judged not by the proofs advanced in support of it, but by the results it produces in interpretation...."

There is a certain engagement to these poems, expressed most succinctly in the wonderfully titled "I Don't Want to Die in a Spree." As in "Beverage Napkin" (and another poem, "Segment"), transactions between "I" and "You" take place as a sort of

'equilibria-by-barter': "If I ride in this or that/ vehicle, you have tools/ to deconstruct/ that chain. I personally/ will be doing the same, forming/ sheer sides for all/ my frinds' fit." (from "Segment".) This is the sense of Linear C: the simultaneity of 'making history' and being made by it.

——Michael Anderson

STEP WORK by Lynne Dreyer (Tuumba #44, 1983)

The work is arranged in sentences, paragraphs. The writing seems very constricted and tense, imagination is pinched between exacting units of language. Syntax is normative but meanings jangled, extended, retracted, pushed out of place... "Are the cows home? Are they surviving?" (*) Who knows if the cows are surviving, but I am concerned, I feel they ought to be surviving at the same time as sensing they are in deep trouble.

A sharp edged speech just the other side of sarcasm. "Crack out the old pictures, we love those." Conveying a kind of helplessness because in this life we do love those——spunk or flippancy quelled by realization. Oh fuck. "No urban witticisms here." "Record that into cliches," as the only option, the only reaction to stimulus, thought, creative impulse. So, it's bleak.

(*) All quotes are from Step Work.

Is there a nihilism inherent to current writing? No way out of writing in the way that the writing will be written. When the currency is wit, cleverness. "Are you explaining, making it clear, making it clever enough to them?" But that currency is completely defiled, useless, inflated to the point of zero. Questioning borders on coming up with nothing, language as being empty. "How many more plain images can you disguise as a muse?" "The three chords sound dissonant, like how much talking will go on until it becomes smooth and unnecessary." Tone of, if not despair, skepticism, which the form of the work contains, laughably, as if the work is ridiculing itself. Until writing becomes smooth and unnecessary. "More cynical notes on those who love children and dogs. They look like they'll explode."

Anything elevated (poetic in a traditional sense) is tied to something which makes it absurd. "They exquisitely try to pick their noses." Sentiment is clouded, deflated, denied worth. "Such a lovely time for fall to come," is immediately followed by "Such a raging time for fall to come." The mellow and sentimental is jerked back from the edge of easy poeticism, onto the plateau of the absurd, destruction by excess. "Swollen words way too pretty." A poetic flow is allowed, then beheaded: "Limitless, expansiveness, surfaceless, becoming a lot of small tiny movements, borrowing houses, an environment, which day it is or how muddled and smooth you want to say. Direct, cut short." As if directions to herself.

Writing (named) as subject enters the work several times, and these seem to me the most transparent, directly emotional moments. "Writing becomes distant and portraits of hosts crowd the space. The next page becomes as cornered and concerned as a studied artifact. Thoughts not towards anything but embodying a lot of writing." That writing cannot do anything but become "as cornered and concerned as a studied artifact" is the horror, the stone on the heart. The tight fabric of self consciousness stretched across the work.

But underneath this fabric the writing is questioning its own modes and beliefs. I don't think that the writer wholly believes in the currency of wit, the inevitability of playing out the same dull tone, or poem. This work would not have been approached at all, had Dreyer not had questions about the validity of the negativistic which runs so strongly through Step Work.

"Take the sea and describe its ridiculous glory!" is a more... poignant, honest, anguished, worthy undertaking (i.e. yes, do that!) because it is ridiculous, glory is ridiculous. Exceeding the poetic by exaggerating it.

The title implies a movement, a piecing together of what turns out to be progress. Stepping into something to be able to express it, take the questions and throw them up (?). Whatever. So you can go on.

—Jessica Grim

CRISIS

'meaning' does not conveniently
stop at the borders of the text.
—Ron Silliman

His acceleration of scale in the same way the comics do....

good John's Jack and Jane... Give me money... This is prose, this is poetry. (*)

Thinking is so consistently in terms of "O Poet, you should get a job" that 'job' is literalized. So a logical dreams a dream ... what schizophrenics call congenital reference... not structure but an art debt enforced structurally, exchange ordinarily the relation in which a reader and writer both lose... the constant state of writing instead of writing.

But there is an emotive availability that Seaton's text guarantees, a deliberate mishandling of present-time structures, holding history and the present apart and forcing a validity onto literature outside exchange value.

And if we distinguish between 'meaning' and 'significance' by specifying 'significance' as "meaning that takes effect in existence" (Ricoeur), then Seaton's work, by continually generating new meanings, puts extreme pressure on conditions, forcing change such that meaning can take effect, 'act' inherent in use... there's this access net... pen to keep your letters in space, not just paradigms for speech or "surplus pleasure... the reward for social reproduction of the system" (Jameson) but a reading in writing dying of examples and pulling subjectivity into the material base of the text. Content returns as practice ... fractures, the storehouse of frames erupting as the completely present means of production... the itinerary without the places ... my life became desolate, violent and painful bringing dreams a new stability.

If a language is a dialect having an army and a navy, then Seaton's text is civic ambivalence having an architecture of the

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(*) Italicized entries are from Crisis Intervention by Peter Seaton (Tuumba 45, 1983).

sentence: it reads, I mean; it writes, I read; I write, it means; it writes, I mean (and in which the text pushes itself towards a denotative whole... in their own interventions).

The characterization of the work in its own terms does cool the syntagmatic flux, giving crust to a world, but having back that world only to the degree it's re-displaced... refugee... designed for stamina and lust... a reading of these atomistic particulars is the locus of catastrophe or crime, where crime or crisis is the one option outside the social debt. 'The writer writes' equals the material text... the physically successful name initiates a quasi-terror displacing content from the particular to the general... an orgasm imported and anchored to itself — Freud → doctor, physical space → Space, dream → sleep, a mime of procedure inert travel... ground into fine vision. This dependence upon spectacle makes a debate of absence. It is finally the mutations that are explanatory... The birth of Freud needs Europe a social prosody that results from meaning in the text... We need problems... finite readers read, read, have read...Intention as the transport trailer for infinity is displaced into equally finite objects everything you have contiguously located in space but saving the disparity contradiction, language attempting the whole in a language of the many. The projection of agents, spies. The reader remains external, denied at the local level of the text... I then got stubborn for a statue in the compressions of private language the REM body that we live up to. Not only alive by its own motions, a book outside four walls but finding production displaced into object cathexes ..sometimes the idea of an equator turns the world...the 3-piece suit exemplifies itself as exemplary. But a text's unitary desire is cast, by language itself, into physical reasons words to predict what caught up with the reader.... Unity erodes, stemming a Cartesian holding pattern with the underside of language, projecting language (in the person of the reader) back into itself as uncertainty. The writing won't stop, the statue is in perpetual exodus, and reading is in pieces.

As such, Crisis Intervention is itself not fundamentally productive, but corrective, a bracketing, in fact, of the 'corrective' consensual practice of language. The materiality of language is foregrounded, and the text becomes a language, using language to construct itself, but in its negations, enlarging the terms of that language and so having effect in the world.... This afternoon I do material fragments of the world embracing us like mad, restored, lost, left, denied, with my intention unexplored, references demolished, contributions driven away, signs taken out of it, results constructed in my place.

—Larry Price

WHAT I SEE IN THE SILLIMAN PROJECT

The purpose of criticism is to wake the reader and the writer out of their complacency. Those who expect that any good poet should proceed by turning out a series of masterpieces, each similar to the last, only more developed in every way, are simply ignorant of the conditions under which the writer must work, quote unquote.

Start with the premise that this writing is an exciting and interesting text. What then? Coleridge (Anima Poetae, p. 127).

Exciting and interesting imply necessarily a reader as vibrator or meter. But there must be something more than the standard cant that the reader completes the text. That has always been the case with any reading, any text. Some texts offer more possibilities for completion. Nothing else is new.

It is better to be a lion of self-control than a mouse on the screen of semiotic excess. But celibacy is better than no sex at all.

Organic form is a metaphor, operating metonymically. All art may be said to have organic form since the event of the art is an act of duration begun and completed by two randomly disjunct but connected organisms, artist and reader. The art event has organic form, even when it is thought the art does not. And it is really the art event which we mean when we speak of a work of art; not its objectness, nor the intent of the artist, nor some undeniable, inviolate meaning, which it can never have. Significance is always mediated.

The logic is the same as that contained in Virgil Thompson's astute definition of American music: any music written by an American. Then, any form may be called organic when made and developed by an organism. So also is all writing ultimately autobgiographical (even lyric) since no matter what its referent or discourse, it stands in eventually for the person who made it, even while looking like itself. These things, like all designations, are always partial, since any thing by definition is apart.

Pound's writing can mean Fascism, as Olson's can mean ego, as Bob Perelman's can mean "liberal humanism." Yet Hitler, Churchill, and Eisenhower all painted fields and buildings. You get the picture, because you is what completes the picture. And the picture is always partial because it's yours.

Ron Silliman's writing thrives, then is in danger of getting stuck, on varying mathematics that threaten to become the theme of the writing. Creeley counts syllables, Silliman counts sentences (actually really only dots, in for instance "Carbon," all 7's and 3's, etc. etc. etc.). After you notice it for a second, it's of secondary interest. The threat doesn't materialize, thank the reader, who cannot exactly be bothered by all this counting.

Try reading this essay thus far in the voice of Carla Harryman or Gertrude Stein. What does that tell you?

Let me "hasten to emphasize" that Ron Silliman is among the most prolific and innovative writers staking a claim now. That is, mid 1980's, west coast of North America, USA, English language. There is much other of course, both to pay attention to and ignore, both here and elsewhere. But for the moment, here we are, cautious but expectant, with a few books (and a mushrooming "movement") by a writer who has already written impressive work. There is probably no American poet at work now with a greater scope or a more watchful gaze than Silliman's. His imagination works faster on his material than a critic (or a shredder) could chew it up. And the amazing thing about it is that no matter how energetically he manufactures, or amasses, his world, it becomes our own by the mere readiness of his pen, and by virtue of the gigantic embrace of this writing. In it the never-before-seen becomes immediately recognizable, which is its own small miracle, and that's about as much justification as any writer could require. But the contents of the haul are intermittently threatened by the agency that fronts it. The question is, at what point does the program delimit the vigor of the presentation?

Isn't it odd, for instance, to promulgate something called the New Sentence while at the same time contesting the "bureaucratization of writing into literature" ("Statement," Jimmy and Lucy's House of "K" #5)? The apparent ABC of the New Sentence: a) leave out the verbs; b) screw up the narrative line; c) devise a numerical format and "clumsiness" claim as method.

Understand in what follows if I seem to be exacting this writing more than praising it, it must be heard in a context of belief in its inherent value, or one wouldn't be bothering to question or confront the example at all. Difference is more useful than ambition or applause, and is actually a way of stating the basic

concerns of all writing. Besides, the issues raised, both in this writing and in Ron Silliman's, will not interest many beyond those already interested to a degree anyway. Where we are now is second takes.

And so, for all its obvious fascination, Tjanting (to take the magnum opus before the epic) creates its own dilemma just to the extent that it lacks form and direction. What it has instead is directive and format. It eschews distinction and steadfastly refuses to marshall its many forces with any plan but continuance. Perhaps that is all the age allows. Which may be the philosophical underpinning of this project. There is no goal, there is only going on (a la Beckett). There is no end, there is only stopping.

The only formal demarcations the work proposes are its eighteen paragraphs, each with the successive number of sentences of the first eighteen numbers of the Fibonacci Series (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, etc.), a program which mathematically builds on the past but, linguistically translated, creates only an illusion of that relation. Over half of these shapes, or figures, are gone by the 2nd of over 200 pages. The author tells us in the book's press release that he is using "the same structure visible in the coil of a mollusk shell." The last two paragraphs of Tjanting proceed then to account for 135 pages, well over 4000 of its sentences. Quite a couple of chambers at any rate (rather like the statistic of 2% of the people owning 98% of the property, said to be true of many "third world" countries). Before page 25 the first 14 paragraphs are gone, and we are well into this nautilus, moving along with the relentless method of its pile, with just enough scissors work every once in a while to prove the presence of an author: "Number of crosses it rooms to take the day," "All in a seconal," etcetera.

The work is isotropic, without variation. It is fractal, but there is no long shot. The style flirts with the stereotype of itself. Nothing can develop in it so much as endless self-reference and repeatedness. Instead of continuity, there

is only continuation. Because everything is equal, nothing is distinct; because no subordination is allowed, no emphasis is possible. In fact the writing in this system cannot be anything but impeccable, because no mistake can happen. So great is the inclusion and indulgence of occurent speech and its rearrangement, the writer literally does not have any way of knowing that a mistake may be what is being made. Indeed he seems to take pride in repeatedly allowing as much. The argument is, in our world this is the idea.

The danger is in being redundant and excessive: logocentric becomes, curiously, egocentric. The writing even begins to notice its own faults. "There is no content here, only dailiness." "Endless intimate detail ultimately bores." Finding no outlet but itself, the exhibition can begin to yellow in its own beer. Rather than awake from its dream, it simply gets on with the stream, ignoring the imperative which once it so startlingly confronted: "Awake, for nothing comes to the sleeper but a dream." (The last sentence of Ketjak.)

There is no pressure or breaking away possible when every turn is made habitual. The I eventually in this Alphabet could well be intravenous. (*) Reversal and deformation become so predictable, so regulated, so portable, that the style, striving for inclusion, at times becomes what it desires most to deny—— straight ahead assumption and use, the acquisition, production, and distribution of curios. What began as a linguistic "caravan of fellaheen" begins in the next movement to sound like an accretion of language that represents the ultimate presumption: to hear is to edit. When faced with this problem before a Smith Corona, the impulse to chuck things in the wastebasket and head for the magazine might take over. Innovation based on repetition

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(*) The first three sections of Silliman's Alphabet published as ABC (Tuumba #46, 1983).

is a kind of mind control. What is missing in this writing is interruption and rest——and a barbaric intuition for change. For without an astute impulse for exclusion, the alert ear will suffer from too much memory, too quick access to a Pentel or a Flair. What it lacks is what Nietszche termed "the strength to forget." Perhaps the most nagging question is how much the habits of any writing can set up into a solid determination of self-replication. Changing shape can't hide the attempt to duplicate the hit.

The notebook can be a stimulating tool, but if it does not both stimulate and implement, and instead is proposed as literal importance, it can be a numbing script. The examination should be "open book" and the book should be the totality of a world, but without synthesized notes and organized "mind" the dailiness will be little more than diaretic. In this way Tjanting lacks coherence without ever wanting it. The smokescreen has been thrown in Ketjak: "I want coherence." But it is "a bad pun," for there is little room to confuse lack here with desire. It is not that the author "cannot make it cohere." He chooses not to, artfully.

Charles Olson addressed himself elsewhere to these questions; that is, to narrative (which is really the metallurgy of most of Ron Silliman's effort) and to the huge gain to be had by squaring away at it now, "not as fiction but as RE-ENACTMENT." Taking it that way, he envisioned two possibilities:

> (1) what I call DOCUMENT simply to emphasize that the events alone do the work, that the narrator stays OUT, functions as pressure not as interpreting person, illuminates not by argument or "creativity" but by master of force... with the art to make his meanings clear by how he juxtaposes, correlates, and causes to interact whatever events and persons he chooses to set in motion...and he is, if he makes it, light from outside, the thing itself doing the casting of what shadows.
>
> (2) the exact opposite, the NARRATOR IN, the total IN to the above OUT... speculation as against the half-management, half interpretation, the narrator taking on himself the job of

> making clear by way of his own person that life is preoccupation with itself... to be——by his conjecture——so powerful inside that he makes it swing on him, his eye the eye of nature INSIDE (as is the same eye outside) a light-maker.

Of course this in an "Introduction to Robert Creeley," setting up Maximus as primary case. Yet the terms and the dialectic seem appropriate to present conditions——with, say, Ron Silliman and someone like Steve Benson the designated hitters. And the extent to which in Tjanting and parts of The Alphabet the author refuses an art of juxtaposition, correlation, and interaction, is the extent to which the mobility of these works will be curtailed, and the spectrum of their shadows, whirling so fast and precipitously, may make a single, whited wheel of spokes, rather than an illumination.

But the author's "gum wrappers in the gutter" ("Statement") is an echo of Williams' "doglime in the gutter," and the conclusion "It is the invisible which tells us most clearly who we are" (read, such gum-wrapper-type noticements) as obvious a riff on "No ideas but in things" as could be made. He 'notices' almost more than 'writes'. Materialism is the bottom line of this work, and that's indeed its credibility.

The question arises how to avoid redundancy——in environment, in work project, in personality, in art——and the answer that it is inevitable because inherent, however true, is still unsatisfactory.

But the great big virtue in all of Ron Silliman's writing in the last ten years is its relentless indication. It has just the effect of Shakespeare's

> riband, glass, pomander, brooch, table book, ballad, knife, tape, glove, shoe tie, bracelet, horn ring
>
> (Winter's Tale, IV, iv, 611, the longest scene in Shakespeare?)

—an endless, compassionate inventory of the world's ills and favors, as well as the kind of democratic levelling Barrett Watten has elsewhere indicated may be taken to be the project of "language centered" writing (in Sulfur and in his own Progress).

The project is akin to that of cataloging an overcollected archive with an entirely new system of library science, reader friendly but user proof. Late 20th century life in our city may be as readable from it as life in Dublin early in the century was from Ulysses. Touching then, perhaps, that along the way it shares the fault of its place of origin: over-production. But it is in a long line of national excess. A glutton for detail in an assembly line production could be Walt Whitman or it could be Lee Iococca. This country's importance is already over extended. Pound, Olson, Richard Diebenkorn, Philip Glass, countless other examples, indicate American art production in this century as a commoditization which has repeatedly confused advancement with inflation, development with alteration, creation with replication. Silliman is fortunately (or unfortunately) onto this question early.

The ultimate difficulty for a writer now is to be writing in a culture no longer interested in literacy. Then Ron Silliman's project will be heroic even while it suffers the consequences of the national decline. It will be an Iliad without the culture to learn from it, a catalogue not of how to but of what is. Which will be no Iliad at all, but an incredibly detailed picture of a Titanic notion (nation), resurrected from the deep at enormous effort. Or, if it fails, a literary crowd's Trimalchio's Feast, in a literary movement's gentrified avant garde, instituted soon for integral study. When is it time to take a sabbatical or sit out the program? When time to stop the platform you have set spinning around you and go around the world again, checking your assumptions?

The purpose of criticism is to sound early warnings. Though there may be nothing to be done about it, except to make the record, the village is already inundated by unknown generic

obscurity. In an eerie way, if you're at all "awake," though the writing is at almost every turn provocative and terrific, given the weight of its argument about where we live, it is, in a funny way, hardly worth reading. Better to be doing what it does.

Still and all it's a heady pleasure so full of rousing stuff, I don't think I would give it up. One simply longs to fill the need of a subject.

——Thomas White

MEN IN AIDA by David Melnick (Tuumba #47, 1983)

> "Disguises allow the desperate to escape, or to return as spies (phantom kings). But, inevitably, in comedy as in tragedy every eye is met by another and must voluntarily give up some part of its mastery or be denied it altogether. The world cannot be seized, cannot be rectified, by the invisible, characterless 'I'."
>
> ——David Melnick, "The Ought of Seeing" from Maps #5, 1973.

The parameters of Melnick's Men in Aida are strict. An unwavering transliteration of Book One of Homer's Iliad, it is a new poem set to the sound shape of the epic. Where Homer, for example, has:

Paida de moi loosaite peelane, ta d' apoyna dekhesde

which more or less means, "may you take the ransom and give me back my daughter," Melnick has:

> Pay Dad, am I loose! Ate a pill. Lent Ada a pen to deck his thigh.

The method of the project is thus familiar, for transliteration has been employed in projects which are canonic for our understanding of contemporary verse. Men in Aida will remind readers of the Zukofskys' Catullus translations, of the methods of Raymond Roussel, or even of Rauschenberg's "identical" drip paintings. Transliterative composition is not new; Ron Padgett's "Tone Arm," to take a poet very different from David Melnick, is a transliteration of (I believe) Apollinaire. The use of what I might call meta-mimesis (art imitating not life but other art) to make a new point is an accepted modernist procedure, formally an integral part of the modernist demonstration of art as a totalized ideology, a self-sufficient or at least enclosed way of seeing the world. A case in point is Rauschenberg's exhibiting two identical drip paintings. This act both called into question the claimed meaning of Abstract Expressionist techniques (casting doubt on the connection between an aesthetic and a world-significance which was central to AE's self-image and its project) and at the same time indicated potential new values for what were by then familiar aesthetic procedures, values of elaboration and gesture which Rauschenberg was to explore in other works without the same strict parameters.

But Melnick's use of the method is not similarly ironic.

The tone of Men in Aida is one of verbal, rhythmic, and sexual overflow, a bounding burble of homosexual careens and comment, silly, snide, and overwhelmingly satisfied. It is sort of like the Homeric heroes on their weekends off, shields and bucklers scattered on the sidelines, but still all over each other, bouncing off the meat in celebratory athletics. There is no yearning in the book, because desire is satisfied at every point, and all that is required is to get loose and give, as in the line above. I say "celebratory athletics" because of the technique of borrowing a sound shape dedicated to another goal and rededicating it to a related but contradictory energy. The relation between the

subjects of the Homeric epic and the Melnickean one is therefore hardly incidental but rather heroic in itself, where the action of the Tuumba replaces a victory dance with a rhuumba.

The poem's formal strategy—transliteration—directs the reader's attention to the Greek as signifier rather than signified. Yet the impulse behind the strategy is not formal. The goal is a personal and intimate writing.

> Skyey deck-sitter! Radar hoop anti-ray on us sail loose, ah!
> Lissome men ape prose, ape Eddie, Akron, Iona, an actor.
>
> (p. 21)

The formalities distance you from the intimacy in a way which is at once pleasing and strange. This effect is especially strong if one hears the poem read. The transliteration is so strict, often your hearing lapses back into Greek or more generally into an estrangement of foreign tongue. But reading it too, the verbal strangeness does not strike simply as the "new"—although the main attraction of this method in its previous uses has been the access it gives to new verbal patterning and therefore the chance for new meaning as well—rather, there is the elusive, shifting, and nifty relation to the original, the imitation of the original's physical scope and energy. Hence the importance of accurate transliteration and the occasional correlative sense of a lack of language, as if the work were written in other than words. In this sense, Men in Aida does stand in direct descent from the Zukofskys' Catullus translations, where the transliterative shape was meant to bend the ear as close as possible to the verbal values of the Latin text. Like Zukofsky's text, its publicness is the envelope for a very private work. Perhaps this is the significance of the repeated references to the author's friends in Men in Aida. Ron, Rae, and other names readers of this poetry will know make it into the pages:

> Atreides stain axe and Ron and ideas 'll kill you.
>
> (p. 1)

Hey doggy, men pay, Rae's sighin', Agnos sick, I hoity.

(p. 13)

Thus both of the characteristics by which I am most struck in the poem derive from (or reflect on) the queer relationship between the strict parameters and the insistantly personal/intimate subject matter. There is an enormous energy or freedom which suggests, especially in its sexual directness, that here is a writer who has come through into... if I say almost heroic stature is that too much a seduction of circumstance? But I mean it. Melnick is working inside the most defined strictures. The sound shape of a masterpiece is a social grid. Yet the penetration of the poem is thorough. It goes where it wishes as it wishes to. It is a satisfying work to read, and one projects (or I do, perhaps mistakenly) that satisfaction onto the author.

Curiously the other main impression is of something hidden. I'm thinking of a continuity with the author's other books, Eclogues and Pcoet. In the former, an autobiographical narrative of indefinite description but definite emotional scope, sits behind the surface of the text, a surface which is so magically moved in and out of focus that the reader never has much sense of what is happening, though certainly to the author, and a lightly oppressive (like stinging rain) ambient pain. Pcoet is non-language, non-words, in stanzas, with only an occasional glimmer of referent, glimmer of a global though globally private referent which determines the strategies of the book's nonsense verses.

As I write this it is May. In my backyard, I hear a mockingbird, by which I mean a strict method of self-expression which at the same time is one of self-protection, protective foliage of the voice. In Melnick's 20+ years of writing one repeatedly comes upon not the furtive but something shying away. There is something of the same in Men in Aida. Transliteration is also trance. The words of Homer as it were speak words of Melnick. How does choice locate itself, presentation locate itself in the

text. What one says:

> Hey, die, goose! Hammett toys a gun, ache kin. Out are Achilles.
> Dock crews as hetero nap far as atone as filly as they is.
> Thinner fellows Polly ace are rowin' up. P. O. in a pop-on town.
>
> (p. 15)

Here there is something more, and magically so, akin to a sharing of responsibility with the epic. Where does the poet hide his head? His head in a book, his head in the clouds. Rip Van Winkle dreaming of Trojan Wars. And all things come to those who write.

— Tom Mandel

MEN IN AIDA by David Melnick (Tuumba #47, 1983)

Men in Aida follows the Iliad faithfully, shattering Homer's Greek into a thousand monosyllabic fragments. Translation isn't particularly the aim——there's no contest, no long voyage by ship, no going into battle. And though many of the Greek words (mostly names) make it into Melnick's poem intact, their occurrence only shows how little the Iliad and Men in Aida have in common: "Tar says a small ape ate the oh pro on hot tea oyster.... / You come on us, Danaans, sit thee up, rope your son, a fine ace ass.... / Some pant on Donna all nude and Agamemnon nigh pace..." (p. 4). This may operate as a running commentary on the mythologized rapes and slaughters of the Iliad, but it's not a rendering of them ——it's not faithful to the original intention, as even the Zukofskys' Catullus often is. Men in Aida is, instead, a sensualist's epic,

a poem guided by impulses not found in the Iliad. Its characters are men and women, gods and heroes, but also fairies, apes, aunties, and pederasts. It is a giant hymn "to the physical glory of Life [...to] That round berry the world, with its sweetness... the world with its earthiness and juice; the old happy laughing world that forgets it must die" (Edith Sitwell, A Notebook on William Shakespeare).

He ball, low apple, low knee.
Ached a cruise, he is (nay!) us!
(p. 18)

Men in Aida is by turns rhapsodic, sarcastic, defensive, silly, and sexual. Colourful figures of speech abound—there's a slangy, tossed-off quality to a lot of it: "Phrase it, Huey! / ...I am a prose soak, I a piss sew." (p. 14). There is also an audacity (learned, perhaps, from Genet), and a melancholic abandon that shows itself in exaggerated giddiness:

So decent they o.k. my emotion.
Hey men, my prof Ron, a pacin' guy, cares in a rake's seine.
Eggs are oh, yummy....
Argue on, critic.
(p. 4)

Men in Aida often sounds like a compendium of folklore—oblique sayings derived from obscure sources, odd colloquialisms, and bits of unconventional wisdom: "Rat hair under pee!" (p. 14); "Is the lone doubt a tip o' ape?" (p. 5); "Toys Cindy cruises may gall you" (p. 19); "May tree peel lay up yr afro" (p. 24); "Tea on the tatters, summon a pro." (p. 3); "Pee owed a leg is ace." (p. 7). These phrases have bite—they're like the teeth of old saws. But Melnick's language has a wit and complexity rarely so concentrated in common speech. Consider this list:

back scuttle, bag, bake potatoes, ball, bang, behind, bend some ham, BF, bless, bore, broaden, brown, buff, bugger, bum a load, bump, butt-bang, charva, cochar, coger, cop, cornhole, coucher, culiar, dick, diddle, dig boy ass, do a brown, dork, dot the "I", drill, dry clean a rear, dry hump,

dust somebody off, flip one over, fork, fuse together, get into some ass, get some up there (where the air is rarefied), goose, go to press, greek, groove, hit the round brown, jog (jook, joog, jug), knock off a little, lay some pipe, lay the leg, make piggies, oscarize, pack some mud, paint the bucket, perve, plank somebody, play dump truck, pop it in (to the toaster), pound one's popo, powder somebody's cheeks, pull a boy, punk in the ass, push, put a hurtin' on an ass, rectify, ride the deck, roger a bud, rosquear, rump the cula, stir somebody's chocolate, surf, third way, thread somebody, tom-fuck, vegetable, wheel down, work somebody

(synonyms for fucking gathered from The Queen's Vernacular: A Gay Lexicon by Bruce Rodgers)

The onslaught of these words gives some sense of the experience of reading Men in Aida——captures the poem's humour, and vulgarity, and relentlessness——but the list is also one-dimensional, and Melnick's poem is not. Men in Aida may burlesque the mechanical aspects of the sex act, and the physical characteristics of aroused lovers, but there is also affection, and a social consciousness only dimly present in the slang (Men in Aida is above all a picture of a way of life).

Me now toy. 'Oh' cries me, skipt Ron & stem math theoio.
Tend to go loose. Opera ink eager as he pays in.
He met a Ron, a Yoko, in our gay Tell, loathe the pat trays.
Is tone a boy? Go men in gay. A moan, a lick, oh sandy ocean.
(p. 2)

Melnick's bawdy expressions, taken together, represent a range of attitudes about sex and social life: "keep it at a moo," "hose creasin'," "Horn 'em fair" (p. 2); "Pimple land," "boo loam," "a log on a moon," "a man to sin in," "rip a load o' men" (p. 5); "pull you nex' a breath o' men," "fake crayon," "Ate tea," "a curdly oaf" (p. 6); "a loo matter," "Hose hymen" (p. 13); "ate a panties" (p. 17); "at he I'd ham a panties hep onto" (p. 18)——the list could be much longer. And when the phrases are strung together to fill out a line, they take on the mellifluous sound of the Greek——the effect is kookily profound, antique and modern:

> Coo rid yeas all loco, he pay you the nest, he carry on.
> (p. 15)
>
> Air comb, a cone up any ass, up a cake, a mop, a lone mizzen.
> (p. 7)

That Melnick has disovered all this in the sound of Homer's Greek is amazing—what might have been a docile study turns out to be a libertarian gesture:

> Many a guy I seen, Paul lay Muddah, Papa way up pumpin'. Zeus Gary's Ocean on mate. A moo moan us. Ethiope, he ass.
> (p. 18)

"The right-thinking man shuts himself up in a voluntary prison and locks the doors, but his stubborn freedom makes him leave by the window" (Jean-Paul Sarte, Saint Genet). Freedom is the issue.

—B. Friedlander

FOR ERATO: THE MEANING OF LIFE by Fanny Howe (Tuumba #48, 1984)

I knew Erato was one of the muses but had forgotten which one. The American Heritage Dictionary identifies her as the muse of "lyric poetry and mime" deriving her name from "eran to

love, akin to eros, love." Everyman's Classical Dictionary doesn't give the mime and has "erotic poetry" for lyric. Erato's symbol is the lyre.

Fanny Howe's gift to Erato is two meditations on love: "Erratum," in this instance an error in love, in which an affair has ended; and "Childe Erato" which has as its text "Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor." That and androgyny (this figures in both meditations) and a parable "The kingdom of heaven is like a woman walking with a jar of flour...."

These meditations are in paragraphs of lyric prose that is often, but not always, compressed to aphorism. Simone Weil's "Belief in the existence of other human beings as such is love" could be this pamphlet's motto. But Howe's sentences never attain the closure that Simone Weil's do. Howe is after a structure that opens out ("Some souls think that all terrors stem from misunderstanding.") or opens into some mystery of pain, "Erratum", and identity, "Childe Erato." In her palpable the jar has a hole in it through which the flour disappears.

The pleasure, for this reader, in this pamphlet, comes in two ways. The first can be seen in Howe's similes: "The field was full of cows as restaurants are full of tables"; "But my breath broke down where the hills spread out like bread and pies on a bakery shelf." It is the angle of these that shoots through the work, if the point of the angle is seen as a sword's point drawing behind it a whoosh of fresh visual sensations. What this image means to impart is that Howe's angle of insight surprises as it makes for a few surprising connections. The second pleasure is in considering these connections——love, androgyny, pain, cruelty, neighbors, friends and children, rich and poor join and

pull apart in a landscape of roses and snow. Indeed red and white are this spring-green covered pamphlet's true colors.

—William Corbett

TO THE READER by Bob Perelman (Tuumba #49, 1984)

The title might imply a dialogue, but, given the disappearance (death?) of the author, perforce a dialogue which remains obstinately open-ended. Taken so, a phantasy of dialogue which resumes the ultimately formalist position whereby the ironic cowing out of the author incorporates the reader all the more effectively into a putative domain of freedom, surrogate for but more importantly representative of the political freedoms constitutively lacking in the appropriate sphere. This would be an estrangement that after a touching and even exultant exhibition of figure skating touches down again this side of the ideological horizon. But no stranger to estrangement, Perelman sidesteps in this volume the formalist impasse which comes to seem the one way street of modernist and postmodernist culture alike. The result is risk, not risk vis a vis the State Department, but at retaining the importance of chances taken with an embedded style. Failure of a certain kind becomes a value when what is in question is the fitness not so much of a proper language usage, but of the more general presuppositionary stances which gave it validity. Estrangement still operates on the assumption of a given discrete sphere of aesthetic practices, on, therefore, the predication of poetic justice upon the continued maintenance of the separation of powers. The rhetoric of discretion also allows the politicians certain discretionary powers, precisely because the aesthetic is there to mop up differences in the common lot. Where, however, the election of a former corporate

spokesman to presidential office is little more than the transient index of a profounder decay of the separation of powers and of the mutual discretion of institutional spheres, estrangement reveals itself through discomfort and, especially, its imitable reproducibility as style, to be the commodification of which it was already long the antithetical image. ("US: What a wonderful audience / To put up with all those dead people"—— "A History Lesson.") In the transformation from a need based representation of the economy to one based upon the promotion of desire as motor, the desire that the aesthetic work seduces "from the reader" comes palely to mimic the desire evoked by the advertising industry, while, more significantly, the general frame shifts from that given by an anarchically competitive civil society to the new industrial state. Estrangement being total, in that there are no longer proper places or even, arguably, proper names, aesthetic versions of estrangement are merely redundant. The project becomes that of translating the given dialect of estrangement into one that will capture the enormity of sourceless power without naturalizing it. The danger is to be "seduced by analogy," a danger which this text does not always escape, particularly in the domain of its almost trendy associations of military with sexual exhibitionism, an association whose self-evidence must by now surely be suspicious, given that the motor of that anxiety lies rather in the spectacle of an androgenization of the labour market which goes in time with the alienation of all alike from the autonomous engagement with power:

> First sentence: She is a woman who has read
> Powers of Desire. Second sentence:
> She is a man that has a job, no job, a car, no car,
> To drive, driving.

The poem referred to here ("Seduced by Analogy") though apparently fortuitous in its occasion, lies at the heart of the matter, poietic precisely in its attention (quite apropos of the technological obsession of the "culture industry") to its means of production that are also a constraint: "First sentence... Second sentence." The technological obsession does not in this instance become the occasion for a celebration of indiscrete

power, but rather for a double investigation of the constrained interpellation of individual subjects by technology and its ideological counter in the current hysterical attempts to personalize an apparatus of power by giving it a face with which to "face down the faceless forces of history." If the absence of a "third sentence" whith which this poem concludes calls the dialectic into suspicion—rightly, given the transformed political arena, wrongly, given the necessity of an anti-analogical procedure——it also opens the discourse to make To the Reader the preface to another possible political and poietical language still in the making.

3/4/86

——David Lloyd

BOB PERELMAN & DAVID LLOYD EXCHANGE RESPONSES:

BP: If your review said what I thought it said, I don't think you've quite read what To the Reader is saying. Pardon my defensiveness, but you say three things that make me want to defend the book. First, that I seem not to be using an embedded style, and that "failure of a certain sort becomes a value...." For me, failure (and success) in regard to writing implies a two step model: a heroic, or casual process to describe, evoke, form, or deform something. It doesn't matter whether one is speaking of abstract or representational works. Success/failure implies ends and means and instantly we're in the realm of the aesthetic, which I think we both agree is the holy sepulchre of ideology.

To look at "Seduced by Analogy" for a minute. A lot of the language there is patently incorrect, but I don't think I'm

courting failure. Rather, what I'm aiming for is the present. ESL (English as a Second Language) is a social fact. A lot of the people we're bombing or World-Banking are coming here where they then have to try to learn English. Language, when used, talks. I think the various political dimensions of the languages in "Seduced" are available to be heard. "I practice to live" is as equally a part of our environment as "We've got to nuke em, Henry." It seems to me that by approaching the present it's possible to escape the narcosis of a merely aesthetic reading. Of course, I can't stop anyone from reading aesthetically, but I think much of what I'm doing is missed that way.

The second point: your criticism of my "trendy associations of military with sexual exhibitionism." You claim that "androgenization of the labour market" is more the main issue. A weaker defense first: To the Reader is full of a highly insisted upon androgenization: "She is a woman who has read Powers of Desire. She is a man who has a job, no job" etc. Throughout, gender is burlesqued: "a man's large, erect penis and a woman's larger, more erect penis"; or it's taken with elephantine seriousness: "where once were vaginas like Bibles and penises like bookmarks...." But, beyond that, it is true that "Missile Envy"-like phrases occur. For instance, "We've got to nuke em, Henry," which is what Nixon in his cups would say to Kissinger. The fact that Nixon's——and Kennedy's, and Johnson's, and Reagan's——paranoid masculinity is symbolized by the military is obvious, very obvious. But not, apparently, obvious enough.

Last point: your last sentence. To call something a preface to another possibility seems to me like giving up and accepting a world of deferral, mumbling or mystification as the only options. No book can be a fully realized political or poetic language unless we live in utopia. But To the Reader does embody a poetics and is political. I don't want it to be situated in a narrative of development. Again, I think that's an aestheticized response.

DL: Third sentence. To the reader.

Get off,
You and all your options.

The condemned populace
Spills its guts in the aisles
Of Safeway. Rings of torture
Surround Toys R Us.

I can only hear it with a European ear. To what end, poets, in a phony war? What is the polylogic poem except the end of a poetry with ends upon us? Hence failure, since estrangement can no longer be charged with bringing the original to fluoresce again in the trivial. The end of poetry is at first the rigour of failure, terminating the outworn terms of voice and representation (accordingly, the vanity of citation, since it always invokes the presence of a singular sense in a representative moment of style, under review). But if voice and representation are already effaced in the political domain, what price a political poetry? Unless, maybe, the very inauthenticity of its predicament become the sign of a dialectical rewriting of what has been denatured implicitly.

Sounds like, could be,
But is anyone some one
Place? Help is on the way,
Loss and confusion.

BP: From your reply, I see that you're not using "failure" in the usual art-critical judgemental way, which is how I first took it. But I'm not sure about the accuracy of the progression you outline: the polylogic poem, the end of poetry, and failure, i.e., the termination of voice & representation.

Not that "voice," as it's usually used, isn't a boring fraud amounting to nothing more than brand recognition. But there are voices, people do say things, poems can be made out of

these things/voices. So, yes, the existence of voices, of a class society, means the end of "voice," the commodity masquerading as nature speaking. BUT, third sentence, dialectical if you will, the primary tension needn't be seen as existing between univocal (singular sense, Being, God, saying something) and polyvocal (babble, inauthenticity, self-conscious reflection/refraction into microcosmic verbal black hole).

Rather, the fact that words and phrases involve class conflict, (perhaps more accurately: the most carefully hermetic construction can't secede from history: a highly "apolitical" poem is political due to that very exclusion)——this doesn't have to imply that one can't make a statement. Even if its power to act and its power to bond are problematic.

So in "Statement," bottom of second page, I imagine in some fairly lush way (giant trees, dreams, sunlight), being a baby in Guatemala, waking up, being socialized, learning "exactly the same language" out of love and fascination; then, a matter of fact, Arbenz buying out United Fruit, using "exactly the same low figure United Fruit had given earlier as a base to calculate taxes," followed by the CIA intervening. The idea of "language" projects an identity between word and meaning which never occurs: the produced meaning can never be the received meaning. So "what price political poetry" indeed——values are at issue all the time. [Though I don't quite agree with the earlier part of your sentence: like I say, the political domain is bulging with voice(s) and representation(s).]

There is no "just price," nor any "representative moment of style," nor any singular sense, but I don't see why that makes citation vanity, any more than it makes writing vanity. A complex sum of ends (some of them The Ends) are being proposed for us at us by us every minute. This is simply the situation any writing starts from.

TUUMBA

The length (ranging from Silliman's 8 to Coolidge's 34 pages, while most average about 17) is an honorable and much frequented one in American poetry. The Waste Land seems to have set the precedent as much as any one poem——and remember, Eliot's notorious notes were added to bulk out the text to book-signature scale. His "Ariel Poems" were actually published as a Faber pamphlet, the same size as Tuumba. Most of the Cantos fall into Tuumba length sections. "A" 22 and 23 are each just the right size. So are the great mid-length Stevens poems, from "The Comedian as the Letter C" and "Man With the Blue Guitar" to "Credences of Summer," "Auroras of Autumn" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." Late Williams as well: "The Desert Music" or "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" could've been accomodated in chapbooks. Howl first appeared as a chapbook, and many among the Kelly-Eshleman-Rothenberg generation found the pamphlet size ideal for their forays into mid-length poems. Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" or any of his Three Poems; Spicer's "Book of Music" or "Lament for the Makers" (or, pushing the limits, The Holy Grail or Language); sections from Ronald Johnson's Ark or Robin Blaser's Image Nations; Irby's "Delius"; or any of the books of Dorn's Slinger: all would admirably contribute to the illustriousness of the chapbook as a poetic medium. Olson and Duncan probably wrote at that length more than anybody: consider "The Kingfishers," "In Cold Hell, In Thicket," "As the Dead Prey Upon Us," "Letter for Melville 1951," "Poem Beginning With a Line by Pindar," "Apprehensions," "Santa Cruz Propositions," "Circulations of the Song." The absence of a single committed chapbook series like Tuumba throughout the century has obscured the fact that this is the prime space, the common opened field, of American poetry, the fifteen or twenty page sustained effort.

Anyone can publish a book, but few can publish a credible

pamphlet. I mean this both of the publisher and the writer. Tuumba is clearly a model of high achievement for both parties. Since political pamphleteering seems to have faded as a viable mode of communication in our electronic media network, the pamphlet as a medium has fallen into the limited uses of the poetry world. But in that context it's an ideal shape and size. Far too many pamphlet-size manuscripts are artificially pumped up to book scale for the trade market (and the small presses, too), thereby discrediting the value of the book as a generous, amplified statement. The pamphlet (or chapbook, to use the preferred term) can benefit all the parties concerned——though in the commodities market of book publishing, this means clearly thought-out editorial standards and a consistent supply of publishable material. Lyn Hejinian supplied the former, and her Bay Area colleagues the latter, for the most part. One of the best reasons for issuing a poetry pamphlet is to circulate single works too long for most magazines to consider, and in this Tuumba particularly excelled.

Tuumba didn't start off this way. The first 14 titles are typical of most pamphlet series——which is to say, wildly disparate, unfocused, scattershot. With her own Gesualdo Hejinian suddenly took hold of a burgeoning local scene and rode it out to the end of the series four years later. My own introduction to Tuumba came about through Ken Irby, whose Archipelago was the fourth title. He gave a reading of that work at Intersection in San Francisco, sharing the bill with Ron Silliman. And appropriately it was Silliman's appearance in the Tuumba series with Sitting Up, Standing, Taking Steps (still a wonderful primer for his methods) that most clearly indicated the series' newfound focus——coinciding as it did with the publication of Ketjak, a book that put the whole issue of language poetry in practice (as opposed to theory) squarely on the map. A swift succession of titles by Andrews, Bernstein, Perelman and Watten indicated to anyone in the know that Tuumba was throwing in its lot with a particular nexus of publications and their contributors (the above four being an especially telling group, in that they represented between them the editorial hands behind L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E, Hills and This, respectively). It happened that this ideological

focus also brought the press some excellent material, so that the force of the newfound allegiance had the effect of making Tuumba appear as a kind of 'house organ' for "language poets" in general. I think this tends to belittle the perceptiveness of Hejinian's eye for the right material. It also obscures the fact that the strength of the series as it went along was primarily generated by its adherence to a local scene. Nearly all of the initial dozen or so titles were by poets from the east coast or outside the Bay Area. And while the series never became exlusively fixated on a local scene, the subsequent titles (after the 'conversion') are by poets actively associated with those in the Bay Area.

The extent to which "language poetry" became the big bogey of the 1970's is, more than anything, the registration of a shock in the ranks of disenfranchised poets across the land that here was a group, with a program, who had commandeered the technological resources of publication and distribution through grantsmanship. The persistence of this bogey has by now long been used as a stinkbomb to screen the fact that a core group of exceptionally talented poets (for one generation) appeared, broke bread, exchanged ideas, then went their separate ways. The specific group identity, however, maintains its threatening air——both through internal and external pressures. The situation has regrettably become one in which the interested reader, finding books by Silliman, Bernstein and Hejinian of interest, say, feels compelled to also read at least a dozen other poets. This does nothing but reinforce that old English department of the soul that hoodwinks people into vouching for their own inadequacies as they scramble off into irrelevant tasks. Let's face it: I can delight all I want in a. k. a. without ever having read a book by Greenwald, Benson, Harryman, Robinson and the other names that fill out the Tuumba list. The point of such an operation is to provide a functional context for further exploration along related lines——which Tuumba did very well——but the intrinsic value of it is in ensuring 'quality control'. If any given title in the series is readable, and furthermore if many are outstanding, it gives credibility to the publisher above all. It says nothing about a 'group' or a 'movement' unless enjoinderers to that end are printed on the books. The basic lineup of the Tuumba series in the end did consist of "language poets," but there was

never any inherent coercion to get the reader to subscribe to an ideology or commit to a party. I think this tends to be forgotten in all the fallout generated by the squabbles in and around the issue of the legitimacy of "language poetry" in the Bay Area and elsewhere.

Because Tuumba came out on a bi-monthly basis it had the advantage of documenting an ongoing scene. It now suffers the liability of that allegiance. Still, Tuumba is the authentic documentation of that milieu (along with The Figures—publisher of a dozen of the Tuumba authors)—much more so than the pages of Poetry Flash or Sagetrieb. The texts are presented without encumbrance, without didacticism (even without blurbs!), left to stand or fall on their own. Reasonable glimpses of work-in-progress became one of the reliable pleasures of the series. The pressures of maintaining a strict production schedule had its pitfalls. Some of the entries seem to be marking time. As I said initially, anybody can produce a book, few can manage a decent chapbook. This holds true especially for collections of miscellaneous poems. Most chapbook series never see anything as tight and cohesive as Rae Armantrout's The Invention of Hunger, a scant 12 pages, but with a sense of completeness and aptness poised at just that size. It can hardly be expected that all the Tuumba titles that drew together little batches of poems would have that cohesion. In the end, the more compelling entries are either longer works (Hejinian, Mandel, Silliman, Perelman, Benson, Rodefer, Coolidge, Dreyer, Melnick) or the few sets of short poems that seem particularly articulated as sets (Irby, Bernstein, Watten, Armantrout, Grenier, Palmer, and Perelman's To the Reader).

What of the enduring functions of the Tuumba titles? I think that in many instances the Tuumba titles are their authors' best and/or most approachable works. Both Silliman titles, for instance, are by virtue of their diminutive scale nearly perfect entries into the vast enterprises of Ketjak and Tjanting. Their size permits the reader to make approaches from many

conceptual directions without having the sense of being helplessly immersed in raw material. Bernstein's Senses of Responsibility, a spare 17 pages, nonetheless functioned at the time of its publication as the decisive announcement of a pertinent and singular poetic intelligence at work. The long lost reins of the Tennis Court Oath stagecoach are firmly grasped, in light of later Ashberry while Bernstein's own vocal largesse keeps angling through the fractures of the poems' interfaces. Perelman's a.k.a. was one of the most exciting Tuumba titles, being in many ways the most authentic "language poetry" in that the issues are present——and not just implied——uniformly in all parts, in this peculiarly warm and personable act of anonymity where the Hardy Boys meet Samuel Beckett for tea and tai ch'i. Watten's two chapbooks are commendable entries on their own terms, but they can be seen also as sources for some of the most disfiguring characteristics of so much "language poetry"——a numbing attachment to the present tense, a trait that is only annoying in Watten but becomes habitual and crippling in his many imitators filling the pages of poetry magazines in the 80's.

But, enough of this waddling piecemeal through the list of alluring titles. The final issue to be addressed is not what Tuumba achieved but what, given the format and resources, might it have accomplished. I think the excesses of the press were in too strict an adherence to its documentary aspects, the sense of chronicle, so that the charges of being merely a house organ for language poetry have some truth. To have opened it up beyond that, however, surely would have risked returning to the scattered (dis)array of the initial dozen titles. On the other hand, I think Hejinian's skills as an editor increased as Tuumba went along, and it's likely that she could have, if she'd wanted, had access to some texts excellent in their own right, but stimulating even within the language poetry context. Charles Stein's numerous sizeable poems in issues of Sulfur, Wch Way and Temblor would have augmented Tuumba's range considerably. Don Byrd's long poem The Great Dimestore Centenniel consists of seven sections, each of which would have benefited from early viewing in a context like Tuumba's. Why wasn't Ted Pearson's Coulomb's Law a Tuumba title? And conspicuously——even considering the

parameters of the 'language' context——where were Mac Low, Rosmarie Waldrop, Diane Ward, Alan Davies? Other names come to mind, too, as potential contributors: John Taggart, Gerald Burns, Gustaf Sobin, Duncan McNaughton, Ronald Johnson, Leslie Scalapino, Tom Raworth, Barbara Einzig, Michael Davidson, Christopher Dewdney.... The list trails off, invariably partial, and probably misleading. But the opportunity was real.

The issue at this point is that, given the demise of Tuumba (which is to say: given the absence of such a focused commitment to excellence in chapbook form) what detrimental consequences are there for the poetry world? First, more deserving work buried in little magazines, and second, a return to the misplaced emphasis on (often inflated and/or undeserving) books. Tuumba demonstrated most vividly the real need in poetry for fitting the poem to its most appropriate technological form. A hard achievement to follow. The challenge is there.

——Jed Rasula

SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY

Geometry of the personal. Topology of...A stepwise advance, progression against...A permanent grid. (23, 17) Roles, models, forms——with which social strata are portrayed. (4, 11)

Trapped with self meaning trapped with the whole of it all / "tyranny of distance" / and closing knotty concentric patterns / with

the presumption of pattern / confusion and otherwise. (21, 26, 8, 4, 9)

Writing inhabits. Surroundings get hooked. (19) The concentric lapping....cancellation, the concentric session. (11) Thought emerges from its all-inclusive wrapper. v i e w l e t s d o m e - b o t t l e d , wouldnt be tilt of alphabet——The geometry of clues. (5, 14, 23) An envelope informs the text. An explanation effaces words. (5)

...halting / fetch for salient / regulation. The plurality. (22) Sometimes the diversity is bearing a tension hardly imaginable more enlivened and personal than description permits, than definition allows, than limits can contain. (10) The body is the frame. It's "closures." Anything is possible. Language is a trap. (16, 19, 20, 26)

——words walled in / No ideal, for instance obstacle, to / Dammit limit (4) An organized set of doctrines. A network formed for the purpose of.... (12) The materials are proof. Books demand limits. (5) Authoritative / limit tolls survey / cumbrous omissions. (7) "And all this in order to understand the external influences that pressed the theme into a particular mold!" (20) outside as settled together / ...more exceptions——use / as consult the glaringly outside the public / may be regarded, settled / conventions. (7) on its nearer confines limit. (7)

A system, an argot. The code is outside the text, in the world (machines). (23, 5) Under the common / subject of the sign / whole, its history / often points here or / keys in the result. (7) concentrates of correction——Retrospective whole of money, matter, model. (6, 19) restricted rounds——a machine produces a fixed location for private meanings. (9, 5) ...and hectic counterclockwise imperatives aspire. (11) On the whole, conditions imposed upon them a serious flak. (7) mean something / all

together / Meaning the difference between sum and whole. (9, 22) I take to be normalized. (18) The point penetrates and the edge has a cutting edge. There is a boundary, mother—— The surrounding matter, the whole tamale. (5, 25) certain kinds of cohesion without confirmations of print in a plan. (6) But the circle is totalized before the eye can see it. (19)

comprehensive embodiment——synoptic view / the project of seeing things. (7, 3) In the new situation was considering the materials: I'm reminded of flashed frontiers. (7, 24) Anonymity yields proportion at the extremes. To be well informed is a matter requiring a cruder sensibility, i.e. not self-scrutiny. Vocabularies set up camp on a blurred, running, bloody map. Discomfort marks the boundary. Here belief in the system lost its place. (5, 20, 2, 12, 15)

However, he did venture during this period into the marges of the political in his poetry: A matter of small edgy matters drawing up the map. (15, 21) Envelope is my momentum. (19) Learn the language. More than this. Thus (we locate them on) a grid; this is symptomatic! (25, 23, 5) an entity at / large openings / ——now let me get a / read on that / big situation they have / going on out there / ... / while meanwhile's / what's hidden. (22, 26) What is the knowledge of too much information? (21) surpasses the capacities of language... / marxism / I see in practical relief / ...Measurement / means distance, and is political. (11, 18, 26, 16)

We live in explanatory times. (19) Explain. Self-perpetuate is "encircle frames." (17, 19) That fits, verbal sensible. That fits the whole's isolation, from names to contradiction, and passes for its processes, and leads to its results. (6) ...only a difference of outer voices. We hope to set the lengthy self complete, longer, alert, savouring through extension. (10) and expands——exceeds / A full understanding of extent / Extend it, force it out. (11, 21, 24) A sentence (here / We go again) whips

itself into a frenzy of obvious / Obliterated social life. (25) worn power. (9)

"I stand outside order and look in on its premises." (20) hammering at the increased sphere. (2) dramatically unties the knots / ... mucked up the entire truth which gives in advance the central principle of all useful reflection upon words. (4, 15) at once conserved and annulled inherited conceptual oppositions. The pack of lies is insulted. Things to know versus things to do. (15, 20, 23) is an overwhelming sense of responsibility. (18) What occurs are falling conventions, the label dispenser among them. (13) They blew the whole thing up and were presented with a fragment. (17) elated with the thought of transgression —I had to negotiate the world for a transgression, but everybody wants a cowboy with perpetual rules. (18, 6)

and all that I undreamt of... —Upon impossibility. (11) Thereby disputing the chimes of my lexicon. (1) I mean the imitation of exceptions in this nightmare / the world we will know / bending in that direction in order to predict. (6, 7, 11) Everything has to be reinvented——a re-feudalization. (21, 18) Differences can create a community! —to total literacy democracy. (5) Now, isn't that what all of this is about today? (24)

1. ABC. Ron Silliman.
2. a.k.a. Bob Perelman.
3. Alogon. Michael Palmer
4. The Busses. Steve Benson.
5. Complete Thought. Barrett Watten.
6. Crisis Intervention. Peter Seaton.
7. EncY. Tom Mandel.
8. Fade to Prompt. John Mason.
9. Flat and Round. Larry Eigner.
10. Gesualdo. Lyn Hejinian.
11. The Guard. Lyn Hejinian.

12. The Invention of Hunger. Rae Armantrout.
13. Linear C. Jean Day.
14. Ocker. P. Inman.
15. P-E-A-C-E. David Bromige.
16. Plane Debris. Stephen Rodefer.
17. Plasma/Paralleles/"X". Barrett Watten.
18. Praxis. Bruce Andrews.
19. Proof. Larry Price.
20. Property. Carla Harryman.
21. Research. Clark Coolidge.
22. Riddle Road. Kit Robinson.
23. Sitting Up, Standing, Taking Steps. Ron Silliman.
24. Step Work. Lynne Dreyer.
25. To the Reader. Bob Perelman.
26. Tribute to Nervous. Kit Robinson.

——Bruce Andrews
